

**SKIN, CELEBRITY AND ONLINE
MEDIA:
AFFECT AND HUMOUR
ON GOSSIP BLOGS**

Anne Graefer
a9908728

*Thesis submitted towards the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Cultural Studies
in the School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University*

December 2013

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the affective and embodied ways in which representations of celebrity on gossip blogs generate ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness. To date, celebrity studies has largely focused on how celebrity representations shape cultural ideas about proper and improper forms of subjectivity through discursive or semiotic approaches. I extend these readings by drawing attention to the technological and affective specificities of celebrity representations on such gossip blogs as Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com. I do so by bringing feminist work on the politics of emotions into dialogue with key new materialist and phenomenologist thinkers. Using the concept of skin as a heuristic device to read these representations of celebrity allows me to think through the relations of affect, embodiment and technology that shape our meaning-making processes. Skin enables us to understand online representations not as fixed texts on the screen but as dynamic and sensuous interfaces that affect and are affected by that with which they come into contact. This thesis is comprised of three core chapters. The first focuses on the affective production of femininity in these gossip websites. Drawing on feminist theorisations of touch, I demonstrate how meaning is produced beyond the realm of visibility. The affective-discursive force of humour is a central concern throughout the thesis, but the second core chapter explores the role of humour in some depth in order to tease out how it serves the creation of queerness in these websites. The third main chapter examines some of the ways in which the technological affordances of online blogs influence the affective production of whiteness. The thesis places these gossip blogs within the context of neoliberal consumer culture in which the production and modulation of affect is vital for the creation of profit. Far from locating these online productions as mere products of market forces, however, I argue that they can move the reader in new critical directions, thereby challenging dominant ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness. This potentiality lies in the complex ways in which the humour and the affective force of these online representations move and touch the offline reading body.

This thesis is for my parents, Ingrid & Ulli.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the extraordinary support of friends, family and colleagues. I want to thank especially my two supervisors, Carolyn Pedwell and Stacy Gillis, whose academic advice, support and encouragement has helped me at every step along the way. I am lucky to have worked with such fantastic people. Special thanks also to my colleagues at the School of Arts and Cultures for providing such a supportive and friendly research environment. I also want to mention the members of the Gender Research Group whose work and conversations have taught me a great deal. I am particularly grateful to Emma Short for proofreading this thesis and to Rachel Oneill, Sara De Benedictis, Chloe Diamond-Lenow and Tracey Jensen for helping me with their enthusiasm, advice and friendship at different stages of this thesis. Much love also to Jonathan Liemann, Christina Chlapek and Charlotte Ralph whose good humour, generosity and endless patience kept me going during this long and often isolating writing process. My deepest gratitude and love go, as always, to my parents Ingrid and Ulli Graefer. Without their unconditional love, support and belief in me, none of this would have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Reading Celebrity Gossip Blogs through Skin: Why Skin, Why Now?	1
- Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com	10
- The Affective Quality of Celebrity Gossip Blogs	20
- Reading through Skin	26
- Outline of Thesis	34
CHAPTER ONE: Celebrity Studies, Affect Theory and Digital Cultures	39
- Representation, Meaning-Making and the Active Audience	40
- Celebrities as Animating Figurations	48
- Theorising Feelings, Emotions and Affect	57
- Digital Culture and Affect	68
- Conclusion	76
CHAPTER TWO: Not only Seeing but Feeling: The Affective Production of Femininity in Celebrity Gossip Blogs	78
- Shifting Gazes, Feelings and Cosmetic Surgery	82
- Confession, Empathy and Respectable Femininity	92
- Labia Skin, Disgust and Visibility	101
- Before/After Images, Photoshop and Anger	109
- Texture, Hyperlinks and Laughter	117
- Love/Hate Relationships, Skin Graffiti and Movement Online	125
- Conclusion	134
CHAPTER THREE: Queering Celebrity Skin: Animating Sexuality through Online Representations of Touch and Clothing	137
- Queer Touch, Gay Sensibility and Humour	141
- Feeling Comfortable, Queer Liberalism and Public Touching	146
- The Invisible Touch, Queer Pleasure and Affective Fabrics	153
- Wearing Sexuality: Sartorial Practices and Queerness	159
- Homonormativity, School Uniforms and 'Positive' Affect	168
- Conclusion	173
CHAPTER FOUR: White Stars and Orange Celebrities: The (Un)Doing of Whiteness Online	176
- Idealised Whiteness, Femininity, and Ridicule	179

- Intensification, Commenting and Renegotiation of Idealised Whiteness	190
- Race, Class and the Limits of Humour	197
- Fake-Tanned Skin, 'White Trash' and Affect	205
- Orange Celebrities and Contradictory Feelings	214
- Conclusion	219
CONCLUSION: Selling out Difference? Celebrity Gossip Blogs and Affective Labour	222
- Societies of Control, Affective Labour and Online Platforms	229
- Skin and Mapping Critical Difference Online	236
- Conclusion	242
BIBLIOGRAPHY	245

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: ‘It’s Dolly Time’ (Michael K., 2011a)	84
- Figure 2: ‘A Do And A Don’t’ (Michael K., 2009)	86-87
- Figure 3: ‘Alexa Ray Joel Gets A Nose Job’ (Hilton, 2010a)	93-94
- Figure 4: ‘So THIS Is Why We Haven’t Seen Much Of Heidi Montag Lately’ (Hilton, 2010b)	97
- Figure 5: ‘The Labiaplasty You Never Knew You Wanted [NSFW]’ (Coen, 2010b)	102
- Figure 6: ‘Why You Must See Unretouched Images, And Why You Must See Them Repeatedly’ (Coen, 2010c)	110
- Figure 7: ‘Photoshop Awards: Lady GaGa’s <i>Rolling Stone</i> Cover’ (Michael K., 2010a)	118
- Figure 8: ‘Dutch Boy’, hyperlink (Michael K., 2010a)	122
- Figure 9: ‘Cartman’, hyperlink (Michael K., 2010a)	122
- Figure 10: ‘Amy Winehouse Continues To Grace London With Her clASS’ (Hilton, 2010f)	126
- Figure 11: ‘Amy Winehouse’s Alma Mater To Pay Tribute To Her’ (Hilton, 2011a)	126
- Figure 12: ‘Wino Insults King Of Zulu’ (Hilton, 2010d)	127
- Figure 13: ‘Is Amy Winehouse Tying The Knot With Reg Travis?!’ (Hilton, 2011b)	127
- Figure 14: ‘Panty Creamers Of The Day: The VD Cast On <i>Entertainment Weekly</i> ’ (Michael K., 2012a)	142
- Figure 15: ‘Perez & GaGalicious!’ (Hilton, 2010e)	147-148
- Figure 16: ‘Why <i>Glee</i> ’s Brittany And Santana Are My Queer Icons’ (Alptraum, 2010)	154
- Figure 17: Mini-dialogue field in ‘Why <i>Glee</i> ’s Brittany And Santana Are My Queer Icons’ (Alptraum, 2010)	157
- Figure 18: ‘Two Boring Pretty People Broke Up’ (Michael K., 2011b)	161
- Figure 19: ‘Richard Simmons Serving You Dementia-Stricken Drag Queen As Poison Ivy’ (Michael K., 2012b)	163
- Figure 20: ‘Awww! Chris Colfer & Darren Criss Grace the Cover Of <i>Entertainment Weekly</i> ’ (Hilton, 2011c)	169
- Figure 21: ‘Fishsticks Paltrow Loves Hot Dog Buns, Hates Hot Dogs’ (Michael K., 2011c)	181
- Figure 22: ‘Straight Outta Her Private Sauna In Her Multi-Million Dollar London Townhouse’ (Michael K., 2011d)	185
- Figure 23: ‘William and Kate Have A Delightful Visit ... To Skid Row!’ (Hilton, 2011d)	195
- Figure 24: ‘Open Post: Hosted By Zac Efron’s Terracotta Face’ (Michael K., 2011f)	207
- Figure 25: ‘Two Orange Peas In A Blonde Weave Pod’ (Michael K., 2011g)	207
- Figure 26: ‘The L.A. County Court System's Brightest Star Returns To Her Stage!’ (Michael K., 2011h)	211
- Figure 27: ‘ <i>Jersey Shore</i> Season 5 Premieres January 5 th ’ (Hilton, 2011h)	214-215

Introduction

Reading Celebrity Gossip Blogs through Skin: Why Skin, Why Now?

In this thesis, I explore the embodied and affective ways in which online representations of celebrity on gossip websites generate and circulate ideas about gender, sexuality and race. Specifically, I elaborate how celebrity gossip blogs like Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com, which lampoon and ridicule celebrities through witty commenting or image manipulation, shape and reshape our ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness.¹ Celebrity gossip blogs are websites with frequently updated, short, often single-topic posts in which the blogger comments on a celebrity gossip story she/he read in print magazines or on other webpages. The single post consists of a headline followed by a captivating celebrity image (usually a paparazzi snapshot), the blogger's text and user comments. As it is characteristic for a blog format, the most recent post appears with a date stamp on the top of the webpage, usually below the title banner of the blog. Previous posts can be viewed by scrolling down or clicking on hyperlinks within the new blog post. Even though these blogs do not 'break' celebrity news but rather re-tell the story in their own style, their influence has increased over the last decade significantly: Blogs like Perezhilton.com or Jezebel.com are by now influential players in the production and consumption of celebrities and are serious competitors to more traditional forms of celebrity media like print magazines (Meyers, 2012). The production and distribution of a new gossip story is less time consuming and less

¹ 'Celebrity' functions in this thesis as an umbrella term that includes a variety of people who are celebrated – even if only momentarily – for different reasons (Rojek, 2001: 9-10). Celebrity means traditionally to be famous 'not by achieving great things, but by differentiating their own personality from those of their competitors in the public arena' (Boorstin, 1962: 65); or when his/her fame rests predominantly on the private life of the person as opposed to their performing work and skills (Geraghty, 2007: 99). I follow Su Holmes' definition of celebrities as 'people who enter into media representation to attain a degree of public visibility, whether this be film, television or music' (2005: 36).

expensive for blogs than for other more professionalised news media outlets. For instance, google alerts inform bloggers instantly about any new celebrity story that appears online (Meyers, 2012: 1030). Less constrained by journalistic standards like fact-checking, copy editing and in-house-deadlines, bloggers like Michael K. of Dlisted.com can publish their story within minutes. Photo agencies like Bauer-Griffin or Getty provide a constant flow of paparazzi images which can be downloaded, manipulated and published at any time. More professionalised blogs like Jezebel.com that are part of media conglomerates such as Gawker adhere to journalistic standards like fact- and spell-checking yet they are still much more flexible and fast paced than any print or TV format.

In trying to keep up with these blogs many print magazines have introduced online versions of their publication which can be easily accessed and offer interactive elements. Gossip blogs however have an aura of authenticity and witty criticism that cannot be copied by online formats of mainstream entertainment news media. Websites like people.com or hellomagazine.com are quickly identified by readers as part of the media industry which is often viewed as compliant with the regulations that celebrity producers prescribe. They are therefore perceived as deceiving while gossip blogs seem to reveal a story behind the story. Gossip bloggers do not simply repeat what celebrity producers and other entertainment news media prescribe but rather 'see-through' the celebrity image and re-tell the story from their own point of view. I suggest, that the ambiguous in-between position that the blogger inhabits adds symbolic value to the celebrity gossip blogs: On the one hand, the blogger is like us, an outsider to the media industry and therefore merely a consumer of gossip. Yet on the other hand, bloggers symbolise the sceptical reader who produces her or his own, independent reading of celebrities. Hence, blogs are not understood as simple 'infotainment' but as the result of a clever and industry-critical engagement with gossip. In this sense, bloggers, as witty

'producers' (Bird, 2011) who wholeheartedly embrace celebrity culture while at the same time deconstructing it through puns and jokes, create online texts which enable their reader a flattering position: Clearly, the reader has to share this well-informed and critical view in order to 'get the joke' and enjoy the post. This shows that gossip blogs produce the humorous and highly subjective online texts for media savvy readers who are sceptical of the glossy and glamorised images of celebrities. Celebrity gossip blog readers are much more interested in the everyday life of celebrities which includes first and foremost their failures and downfalls.

The three blogs that I am analysing in this thesis are produced in New York (Dlisted.com and Jezebel.com) and Los Angeles (Perez Hilton.com) and focus mainly on American or UK celebrities. Therefore they are mostly accessed from within the US, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Quantcast, 2013). These blogs attract mainly female audiences (with no children) who hold a college degree and they are more often accessed through computer browsers than mobile devices (Quantcast, 2013). This suggests that users check and re-check gossip blogs also during their work day for a little distraction and pleasure. Erin Meyers found out that celebrity gossip bloggers know about these reading habits and produce their content accordingly mainly between 9am-8pm and less so during the weekend (2010: 132). Furthermore, gossip blogs have a relatively young readership (between 18-34 years old) who earn more than the US average (over 51.000 US Dollars per year) (Quantcast, 2013).

The affluent readership as well as the celebrity centred content of these blogs attracts advertisers. Keith O'Brien head of social media activation at Horizon Media explains:

Advertisers like that these sites are highly visited by all types of people so it's possible to reach a wide audience, even if some are just coming for the schadenfreude and may not return until the next scandal. Everyone loves a

celebrity's fall from grace [and] it doesn't hurt that these sites get to write very specific headlines that easily catch the eye (O'Brien cited in Goodson, 2013).

As this comment shows celebrity gossip blogs might be accessed and read for free, yet in order to be profitable, they have to feature a lot of advertisement. Adverts appear not only directly under the blogs title banner where they catch the eye of the reader immediately but also next to particular blog posts and in between them. The main focus of the website layout might be on catchy headlines and intriguing celebrity photographs yet advertising spaces target readers throughout the well-known blog order of headline, image, text and user comments. Google's advertising software allows blogs such as Perezhilton.com and Dlisted.com to target specific readers by tracking the user's personal web-surfing trends: Websites that the user visited prior to the celebrity gossip blog reappear now in form of advertising throughout the blog. The online advertising strategies on these blogs become increasingly more sophisticated because advertising is the main revenue for celebrity gossip blogs: Between November 2012 and November 2013 Dlisted.com earned around 211.000 US Dollar through advertising. Jezebel.com made in the same time circa 424.000 US Dollar while Perezhilton.com leads with 503.000 US Dollar (Mustat, 2013). These numbers show that gossip blogs are deeply entangled within the capitalist logic of networked societies and provide a useful background for my analysis of the affective ways in which femininity, queerness, and whiteness are produced in celebrity gossip blogs.

Details about the readership of these blogs demonstrate which bodies gain pleasure from interacting with these websites and where the affects that these blogs produce travel. I focus on these humorous websites because their highly affective online celebrity representations, that aim to make the reading body laugh, are ideal sites for exploring how the complex relationships between affect, embodiment and technology inform our meaning-making process. Rather than situating these blogs as sites of banal

entertainment, I argue that they are illustrative of more general understandings about the complex ways in which power and resistance work today through affect and feelings.² Many have argued that celebrity representations shape cultural ideas about proper and improper forms of identity, and yet these same critics have not paid much attention to the material and affective specificities of the medium through which these representations are produced and mediated.³ Much of this work conceptualises celebrity representations as cultural texts or social signs whose effects and impacts on the ‘real’ world are elaborated through discursive or semiotic approaches.⁴ I argue that the ways in which humorous blogs such as Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com make meaning cannot be separated from their technological affordances and the different affects they engender. Hence, this thesis extends traditional textual readings of celebrity representations by paying close attention to the technological and affective qualities that produce, circulate and animate these celebrity representations in cyberspace.⁵ In his definition of cyberspace, David Bell hints towards the material and affective quality of

² I do not argue that power and resistance stand in opposition to each other. Taking on a Foucauldian understanding of power as productive, I see resistance as enabled through power and therefore part of power (Foucault, 1998). In this argument, however, I refer to power as dominant discourses and practices that pigeonhole identity and ways of knowing and feeling.

³ Graham Turner argues, for instance, that through new media our proximity to celebrities appears to have increased, and they play an ‘increasingly significant role in the process through which we construct our cultural identities’ (2006: 499). And Rebecca Tiger maintains that on blogs like Perezhilton.com ‘celebrity becomes a text through which bloggers and readers negotiate and reinvigorate the concepts “deviant” and “normal” through their discussions of celebrity (mis)behavior’ (2013: 189). Even though both scholars gesture towards qualities of new media such as interactivity and proximity, they do not explore how the sensuous and affective site of these changes.

⁴ Important in this context is Richard Dyer’s (1979) seminal work on stars, which argues that stars work like signs which are embedded within a semiotic system but need to be decoded by an active audience. In this decoding process, the audience is not entirely free, but rather is restricted by an ideological background. From Dyer’s perspective, stars work like ‘signs’ that define what kind of gendered, classed and raced identity and sexuality is intelligible at a particular historical moment.

⁵ The metaphor of cyberspace (coined by William Gibson in his science fiction novel ‘Neuromancer’, 1984) has been used for rethinking the relationship between the human body and the advanced technologies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. On the one hand, cyberspace was celebrated as a space in which new technologies could enable novel ways of living and feeling; a space for ‘consensual hallucination’ (1984: 12) in which technology enabled new visceral experiences and ideas and was as such not distant from the body but utterly intimate. As such, cyberspace seemed to dissolve the imagined boundaries between body/technology, feeling/mind and text/experience while providing a vocabulary for reconceptualising this new experience in potentially non-hierarchical and non-binary terms. More critical accounts highlighted that its representation as a ‘space’ marked cyberspace as a new (feminine) territory that is passively awaiting to be colonised by the rational (masculine) subject that reinscribes it with normative ideas and values turning it into a new site for commodification and profit. For a detailed discussion of these debates see Barbara Kennedy and David Bell (2000/2007) and Jenny Wolmark (1999).

it. According to Bell, cyberspace can be defined in terms of hardware, as the global network of computers that facilitates interaction between remote actors. It can also be described as the imagined space between computers in which people build new selves and new worlds, and it can be further understood as a space that enables particular experiences (Bell, 2000: 7). As such, Bell's definition shows that cyberspace is indeed an assemblage of hardware, software, images and ideas which enable through their criss-crossing and intersecting particular visceral and emotional experiences.⁶ Hence, if we aim to tease out how online celebrity representations produce ideas about gender, sexuality and race then we need to go beyond a traditional textual analysis.

In bringing feminist work on the politics of emotions into dialogue with scholarship on (new) media and digital cultures, I flesh out an interpretative framework that combines considerations of textual analysis, discourse and semiotics with those concerning the material and the sensory. Feminist scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2010) and Lauren Berlant (2004, 2011) illustrate in their work the social and political character of affect and emotions, and (new) media scholars such as Susanna Paasonen (2011) and Laura U. Marks (2000) enable us to account for the material and sensuous quality of media representations. Hence, even though this thesis is 'part of a move toward the sensory and the affective in studies of culture and media' (Paasonen, 2011: 8) it does not understand affect as pre-social, apolitical and outside of cultural investments.⁷ Rather affect is conceptualised here as an ambiguous, alternating force: on the one hand, it is understood as something that circulates along already defined lines of

⁶ David Bell's definition shows also that cyberspace encompasses so many different factors and actors that any meaningful statement about the social and cultural function of online representations needs to be limited to specific examples. This is why I refer in this thesis to very specific pockets of cyberspace, namely Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com.

⁷ Scholars like Brian Massumi (2002), who argue for the pre-social and pre-subjective character of affect, are critiqued by feminist scholars such as Clare Hemmings (2005), who illustrates in her work the limits of such claims. A similar argument is made by Imogen Tyler, who maintains that a 'post-political' understanding of affect deprives feminist media research of its potential to make valuable impact (Tyler et al., 2008: 83).

cultural discourses and practices.⁸ As such, representations are seen to build upon pre-existing embodied histories that convert into affect; this, in turn, shapes our understandings and responses towards it. My use of affect is informed by feminist, queer and critical race scholars who understand emotions, feelings and affects as culturally embedded, and who recognise their role in gendered, sexualised, racialised and classed political and social structures, while at the same time acknowledging that they are felt in specific bodies.⁹ However, on the other hand, affect cannot be completely controlled and it opens representations up to a productive ‘misreading’, which differs from the preferred reading. This means that I understand affect, feelings and emotions as shaped by cultural discourses and practices while realising that ‘affect is always the unpredictable element in a social encounter [...] [that] cannot be subject to regulation’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 49). As such, emotions are here not conceptualised as ‘affective lenses on “truth” or “reality”, but rather as one important (embodied) circuit through which power is felt, imagined, mediated, negotiated and/or contested’ (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012: 120). Such an ambivalent understanding of affect allows me to explore how affects can be manipulated while accounting for the surprising and contradictory feelings that are enabled through our contact with humorous celebrity online representations.¹⁰

Throughout this thesis, I explore the ways in which feelings and emotions work through humorous celebrity online representations to produce ideas about femininity,

⁸ I refer here specifically to Ahmed’s work on the politics of emotions (2004a, 2010) and Hemmings’s seminal essay *Invoking Affect* (2005). Both illustrate the socio-political and cultural character of affect, arguing that affect is not pre-social instincts but instead emerges through cultural discourses and practices. Ahmed argues that we commonly perceive feelings and emotions as natural and pre-social because their constructed nature is covered over.

⁹ Ahmed shows in her work how the dominant discourses of whiteness and heterosexuality shape particular structures of feelings, and how bodies that do not align themselves to those structures might feel pain and are understood to evoke anger, fear and pity in other bodies (2000, 2007a, 2007b). Berlant explores how feelings like compassion might be felt in particular bodies when they encounter other bodies, but suggests that this feeling is created through wider socio-political structures of power (Berlant, 2004). Ann Cvetkovich argues that bodies can feel depressed, but that these feelings of exhaustion and despair, which are felt individually, might be the consequence of a socio-political situation around us (2012a, 2012b).

¹⁰ I develop my understanding of affect and emotion in more detail in Chapter One.

queerness and race. I understand these gossip blogs as ‘affect-producing technologies’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 68) that are constitutive of what it means to be a socially intelligible subject in our ‘society of control’.¹¹ Key questions that guide this project are how the virtual contact, which these gossip blogs engender, shapes and reshapes how we feel about particular forms of femininity, queerness and whiteness, and if this affective contact can challenge dominant ‘offline’ discourses and the unequal subject positions they create. Through which methodology can we make the disruptive potential of these online spaces visible and palpable without glossing over the discourses that ‘stubbornly persist’ (Gill and Tyler, 2013: 80), such as racism, classism and sexism? How can we reconceptualise ‘contact’ in the context of cyberspace? How do technological and material specificities influence the affective quality of these online representations? In order to explore these questions I use skin as a heuristic device to read celebrity online representations. I understand skin not only as a bodily surface that can be decoded through the gaze, but also as the porous border or affective interface through which meaning is conceived through touching and feeling. In this sense skin invites us to think through not only how online celebrity representations make us feel, but also how it would feel to touch them. As such, the concept of skin draws attention to questions about emotions and feelings that these humorous celebrity representations engender within us and to the materiality and texture of online representations. As the affective interface through which we stay in contact with the world and make meaning out of it, skin allows me also to theorise the role of contact in our meaning-making processes. I not only explore the contact between the reading body and online celebrity representation on the screen, but also the connections between different elements on the screen that shape particular online celebrity representations. To put this another way,

¹¹ The ‘society of control’ is a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and marks a social formation in which subjects are no longer governed through a mechanism of enclosure and discipline, but rather through affect and a permanent mechanism of control (1992). I develop this in more detail in the last chapter of this thesis.

skin allows me to understand the relationship between the reading body and representation as affective and embodied because reading a blog implicates not only looking but also touching (the keyboard, the mouse, the screen with our finger) and feeling (I might be moved emotionally or viscerally by what I encounter online). The concept of skin enables me also to explore how the different elements and media formats (texts, still and moving images) connect to each other on screen. How text and image or hyperlink and image are connected to each other is crucial for our reading of them, because this influences how particular online celebrity representations materialise before us. Overall, through the concept of skin, I think through the relations of affect, embodiment and technology that shape our meaning-making processes.

I organise this thesis along the categories of femininity, queerness and whiteness because Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com lend themselves towards these critical lenses. This is mainly because representations of white female celebrities seem to dominate their content of all of the blogs. Furthermore, their gossip stories about celebrities are often linked to questions (and jokes) about their sexuality and how they disturb notions of heteronormativity. The gay subject positions of Michael K. and Perez Hilton, the bloggers of Dlisted.com and Perezhilton.com, and the lesbian or queer identity that some guest bloggers of Jezebel.com take on, motivated me to explore how queerness is constructed in these websites. Clearly, this organisation does not mean that I understand femininity, queerness and whiteness as categories that are separate from, or more important than, other axes of difference such as class or nationality. Rather, I understand these categories as constructed within and through each other. In the rest of this Introduction, I first describe the three celebrity gossip blogs that I explore in more detail. I then elaborate how these humorous gossip websites raise questions about affect, and subsequently I outline my affective methodology of 'reading through skin'. I conclude with an outline of this thesis that illustrates how my discussion will unfold.

Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com

Celebrity gossip blogs such as Perezhilton.com, Jezebel.com, LaineyGossip.com, Dlisted.com and TheSuperficial.com are often discussed as having an increasingly profound impact on the way that celebrities are mediated in contemporary media culture (Fairclough, 2008; Meyers, 2012).¹² With their interactive and dynamic qualities, celebrity gossip websites overcome the limitations of more traditional gossip sources such as the weekly print magazine. Their eye-catching websites provide endless choices for readers to browse, click, comment, tag or share, while reporting ‘the scandalous, glamorous and everyday behaviours of celebrities at such a frenetic pace that traditional celebrity gossip delivery mechanisms are struggling to compete’ (Fairclough, 2008: n.p.). Furthermore, celebrity gossip blogs do not simply report celebrity news, but rather they offer a subjective *commentary* on stories. In order to produce their blog content, bloggers engage with celebrity culture as an audience member by consuming that which the traditional celebrity media industry makes available. Out of this, they then produce their own reading of celebrity figures based upon their specific cultural or political orientations. These orientations often find expression via their use of humour, i.e. which

¹² I define Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com as blogs. However, it has become increasingly difficult to define the term ‘blog’. Whereas in the 1990s blogs would either take the form of ‘filter blogs’ (sites with links for news about the web) or ‘diary blogs’ (sites that reported the personal everyday life of the [often female] blogger), nowadays ‘the literature reveals ambiguity and a lack of clarity in the way these terms [blog and blogger] are being conceptualized and used’ (Garden, 2011: 484). For more information on the history of blogs see Ignacio Siles, 2011 and Jill Walker Rettberg, 2008). Blogs have spread into social network sites like Tumblr.com and Twitter.com which allow ‘microblogging’, and there has been a shift towards professionalisation in the blogosphere. Top sites that web traffic tracker Technorati.com detects, for instance, are all ‘highly professional, multiple-author ad supported newsrooms’ (Garden, 2011: 489). While Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com can be defined as websites owing to their professional production and their similarities to celebrity websites and print magazines in their layout and content, I position them as blogs. This is firstly because I understand blogs as ‘a type of website or web page which uses blog software such as WordPress to simplify the creation and maintenance of content’(Garden, 2011: 487). Dlisted.com and Perezhilton.com use WordPress, and Jezebel.com uses Gawker Media’s own, custom-made blog platform. Secondly, all three blogs contain the typical markers of weblogs, such as posts in reverse chronological order, blogrolls, comment systems, archives, and search functions. It is especially the interactive dynamic between blogger text and reader comment that is of central concern for my thesis, and some have argued that the interactive format provided by a comment-facility is the defining part of a blog (Garden, 2011: 494).

celebrity they mock, through what kind of humour and to what ends. Erin Meyers argues that readers find pleasure in, and are encouraged to return to the website by, the particular type of humour used by the blogger to enhance and extend the original celebrity gossip stories (2012: 1025). Hence humour functions in these blogs not only as an affective-discursive tool through which particular celebrity figures may be praised and celebrated or, alternatively, become excluded and othered, but also as a bonding device between the blogger and his/her readers, as well as amongst the readers themselves.

I chose Dlisted.com because I, as the researcher, was drawn to its witty and self-deprecating humour. Jezebel.com, I learnt early from friends and colleagues, was the blog that *should* resonate with me because of its allegedly feminist orientation. Perezhilton.com is one of the blogs I examine for this thesis because of its mainstream status and because of its high affective charge as ‘Hollywood’s most hated website’ (Perezhilton Media Kit, 2013). These different affective ties that connect me with these three blogs influence my reading of them. Rather than claiming to undertake an objective and detached reading of these online formations and their celebrity representations, my thesis follows a history of feminist work that sees the productivity of subjective affective reading.¹³ The concept of skin, as I argue in the next section in further depth, attunes us to the fact that one cannot read and understand outside of one’s own skin, which registers social location and embodied experiences. Furthermore, all three blogs seem, from different angles, to take a critical stance towards celebrity culture and the industry that produces and distributes stars while clearly being a part of this industry. Like the concept of skin, these blogs and their online celebrity

¹³ I refer here to feminist scholars like Lynne Pearce (1997), Isobel Armstrong (2000) and Elspeth Probyn(2005) who critique the ideal of the detached and disinterested reader. Probyn argues, for instance, that it is important to include the researching body in academic writing because paying attention to how the body feels and reacts gives the researcher important clues about how she/he relates to and understands what she/he researches.

representations seem to be inside and outside at the same time, which makes them interesting sites for exploring how power and resistance are entangled.

Perez Hilton.com is 'one of the most frequently visited, profitable and well-known celebrity gossip sites on the web' (Meyers, 2012: 1026). Initially launched in 2004, it was only three years later, in 2007, that Perez Hilton.com ranked among the top five most popular celebrity news sites. Blogging over eighty blog entries per day, it currently has around twelve million readers (Perez Hilton Media Kit, 2013).¹⁴ Perez Hilton.com appears to be an individually-authored blog, even though numerous rumours circulating on the internet, the immense workload incurred every day, and the significant use of 'we' in the narration of blog posts on Perez Hilton.com suggest that a team of ghost writers produces the website.¹⁵ Officially, however, Perez Hilton.com is owned and written by thirty-four year old blogger Perez Hilton (real name Mario Lavandeira), who is Cuban-American and openly gay.¹⁶ In this thesis, I position Perez Hilton.com as a 'homonormative' (Duggan, 2002) online space because it expresses (despite its camp sensibility) quite essentialist or normative ideas about the 'right' performance of femininity and sexuality. Celebrities who are openly gay and mimic heteronormative standards of gender identity and coupledness are deemed as more valuable than those who scramble these expectations. I explain this positioning in more detail in Chapter Three, but a number of factors have led to this placing, including Perez Hilton.com's affinity to identity-politics, visibility and assimilation (rather than

¹⁴ The frequency of Perez Hilton.com's traffic varies widely. Depending on the service used to provide numbers it varies from 1.2 million unique users to 2.22 million unique viewers a month. I use in this thesis the numbers that the websites themselves make available because those numbers are used to sell advertising.

¹⁵ Perez Hilton avoids declaring the number of staff he employs (or admitting that he employs ghost writers at all) because it is important that the blog stays closely linked to his personality in order for it to be successful.

¹⁶ Besides Perez Hilton.com, he owns spin-off websites such as Perezitos.com, a website for paparazzi-like photos of celebrities; Cocoperez.com, a website for fashion; Teddyperez.com named after his dog and dedicated to animal and baby photos; and Fitperez.com, a website for fitness. He also owns a record label, Perezious Music, and is (co)author of three books: *Perez Hilton's True Bloggywood Stories: The Glamorous Life of Beating, Cheating, and Overdosing* (2009); *Red Carpet Suicide: A Survival Guide on Keeping Up with the Hiltons* (2009); and *The Boy with Pink Hair* (2012).

performativity and deconstruction) which finds expression in its online writing.¹⁷ In former times, Perez Hilton.com used violent humour to ‘out’ celebrities that were rumoured to be gay. Blogger Perez Hilton repeatedly explained his motivation for this as follows:

It upsets me that people think what I’m doing is a bad thing [...] I know there is some controversy about outing people, but I also believe the only way we’re gonna have change is with visibility. And if I have to drag some people screaming out of the closet, then I will (Perez Hilton, interview with *Access Hollywood*, as cited in Grant, 2006).

Despite the fact that Hilton has since ceased this practice after been publicly criticised for outing people against their will (this has been criticised as a form of bullying), he continues to endorse in his online writing quite normative ideas about gender and sexuality. It is also noteworthy that, through his success and high public visibility, Perez Hilton has become a celebrity himself. In contrast to bloggers from Dlisted.com or Jezebel.com, he actively seeks a level of closeness to celebrities and the celebrity industry.¹⁸ However, this closeness compromises, I argue, not only the humorous take on celebrities for which the website was renowned in its early beginnings, but also Hilton’s ties to his audience. In 2011, he explained publicly that he would stop mocking celebrities on his website: ‘I am trying to be nice to everyone, even the ones who deserve a talking to like Lindsay Lohan. I am still critical and opinionated – sassy

¹⁷ Homonormative spaces like Perez Hilton.com promote ideas of ‘correct’ forms of sexual relationships and a stable sexual identity that should be made highly visible so that it can become politically and legally integrated into mainstream, i.e. the heteronormative system. Queer theory challenges such understandings of sexuality, and aims to go beyond merely lobbying for the respect and equal treatment of gays and lesbians: rather than assimilating to the heterosexual norm, queer theorists want to deconstruct the heteronormative system.

¹⁸ In contrast to Hilton, blogger Michael K. of Dlisted.com finds this closeness to celebrities problematic: ‘I used to get invited to parties and I don’t go anymore because I don’t want to meet someone and then feel like I can’t write about them. If I meet a celebrity that I’ve said shit about and they want to be friends with me, then that’s weird. They can sit on their side of the cafeteria and I’ll sit on mine’ (cited in Thompson, 2011).

without being nasty' (cited in Plunkett, 2011: n.p.).¹⁹ While this alteration in attitude is officially explained by Hilton as motivated by personal reasons, media critics argue that 'Hilton's makeover coincided with a shift towards the mainstream, which included the publication of a children's book, *The Boy With Pink Hair*, and a four-part television series, *Perez Hilton: Superfan*' (Plunkett, 2011: n.p.). Perezhilton.com can still be seen as a humorous celebrity gossip blog that can move readers in critical directions, but the social location of the main author means that it seems more compliant with dominant classed, raced and gendered discourses than Dlisted.com and Jezebel.com.

Jezebel.com is a multi-authored blog that is part of the Gawker Media group, which also runs thirteen other blogs. Gawker launched Jezebel.com in May 2007 to better target its female readership.²⁰ Labelled as a 'women's interest blog' that takes a purportedly feminist lens on celebrity culture, it is produced by a six-woman editorial board (Jessica Coen, Dodai Stewart, Tracie Egan Morrissey, Katie J.M. Baker, Lindy West, and Madeleine Davies), regular contributors (Jenna Sauers, Tracy Moore, Laura Beck, Doug Barry, and Anna Breslaw) and guest bloggers like Lux Alptraum, each of whom take turns writing posts on this frequently updated site. Most members of the editorial board have prior experience in the media, working for magazines such as *Glamour*, *In Style* and *Star*. Officially, it is this level of expertise that makes Jezebel.com an explicit alternative to traditional women's magazines. Anna Holmes, the former chief editor and founder of Jezebel.com explains: 'I felt disillusioned by [women's] magazines to a certain degree because they perpetuate this insecurity factory and present solutions to the insecurities they just created' (cited in Mascia, 2010: n.p.).

¹⁹ Hilton links his change to a rhetoric of health and purity. He said he stopped drinking alcohol and began seeing a therapist. He took up daily yoga, in part to build muscle under skin that lost elasticity after he lost nearly eighty pounds. Now he tweets what he calls 'Perezisms,' or feel-good musings ('I choose to be happy!!!') to inspire, and claims that '[w]hat's important for me is not being liked, but it is that people think I am no longer toxic to the world' (Holson, 2012: n.p.).

²⁰ According to Jennifer Mascia (2010), Jezebel.com's readership is 97 per cent female. My own research on Google Adplanner shows that the readership is 40 per cent male and 60 percent female, a result which is surprising considering the female-orientated content of the website. This suggests that the gendered lines between media for feminine audience groups or masculine groups are more blurred than production companies and marketers admit.

Jezebel.com positions itself expressively in opposition to such traditional forms of entertainment for women, and its tagline ‘Celebrity, Sex, Fashion For Women Without Airbrushing’ provides an immediate clue to its apparently industry-critical perspective it takes on celebrity culture. Even though Jezebel.com covers not only celebrity gossip but also a range of other political and popular culture issues, ‘celebrity content is among the most popular in terms of page views and number of reader comments, indicating there is an audience that wants an outlet for feminist approaches to celebrity culture’ (Meyers, 2012: 1035). Jezebel.com describes itself on its advertising webpage as follows:

Jezebel is dedicated to what contemporary women want to talk about. It brings you what the superficial glossies won’t: savvy pop culture, fashion truths, progressive advice, female heroes, entertainment realities, cultural criticism, and a healthier take on female aspiration. Unhesitatingly honest, Jezebel is changing women’s conversation. (Gawker Media Kit 2013)²¹

As this description shows, Jezebel.com can be located between a post-feminist celebration of consumerism and self-improvement on the one hand, and a commitment to so-called ‘second wave’ feminist values such as the empowerment of women through sisterly advice and a criticism of media images on the other.²² This ambiguous position results in Jezebel.com often being accused of appropriating feminism for the sake for profit. Emily Gould argues, for example, that Jezebel’s criticism of pop culture and ‘righteously indignant rage’ is merely ‘petty jealousy, cleverly marketed as feminism’ (2010: n.p.). She maintains that the media-experienced writers of Jezebel.com cleverly raise the traffic on the website by stoking readers’ insecurities – just in a different way (Ibid.). In a similar sense, online discussions show that Jezebel.com is often critiqued

²¹ During my work on this Ph.D., Gawker changed the advertising text for Jezebel.com. In an earlier version, potential readers (and consumers) were not described as ‘women’ but as ‘modern chicks’. This shows clearly Jezebel.com’s post-feminist orientation, which understands young women as readers of ‘chick-lit’ and viewers of ‘chick-flics’. For a critical feminist discussion of ‘chick-lit’, see Ros Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff (2006).

²² For an overview of second wave feminists critique on images of women, see Susan Bordo (1993), Molly Haskell (1973), Susie Orbach (1978) and Gayle Tuchman (1981).

for ‘buil[ding] a commentary empire based on post-feminist bullshit that tries (unsuccessfully) to reunite Western mass media with female empowerment’ (Sutton, 2011: n.p.). However, I argue for a more nuanced reading of Jezebel.com because its witty critiques of a racist, sexist and heterosexist celebrity culture not only create an online product for a niche market, but also illustrate the unequal power structures that shape celebrity culture and our everyday life.

As a group blog that encompasses a range of different writers, Jezebel.com is difficult to situate, and I am reluctant to label Jezebel.com as postfeminist because I understand postfeminism in Angela McRobbie’s (2009) terms. From her perspective, postfeminism is linked to the assumption that, in Western industrialised nations, women have won the battle, that gender equality has already been achieved and therefore no longer needs to be addressed. Jezebel.com does not subscribe to this myth regarding equality, but rather regularly points out how women become objectified and disadvantaged in a sexist, racist and homophobic Western society, which is reflected, they argue, in media representations. And yet Jezebel.com has an affinity to fashion, glamour and consumerism, while borrowing in many ways from second-wave feminist perspectives: there is a strong emphasis on political and social visibility, identity politics and a reliance on the media-effects model.²³ As such, I position Jezebel.com as ‘critically post-feminist’ as a means to address how the blog is feminist-aware (especially in its intersectional thinking and feminist critique on images of women) while not labelling itself as feminist (neither in the title nor in its self-description). With fifty to sixty posts published daily, Jezebel.com attracts about five million readers per month worldwide (Gawker Media Kit, 2013). As this figure shows, Jezebel.com is significantly smaller than Perezhilton.com but, like Perezhilton.com, it takes a humorous stance towards celebrity culture. As with Perezhilton.com and Dlisted.com,

²³ One of Jezebel.com’s central concerns is the influence of photoshopped images on young women, which they discuss regularly under the rubric ‘Photoshop of Horror’. I discuss this practice and its implications in more detail in Chapter Two.

readers can follow Jezebel.com on other social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook, yet the blog distinguishes itself from the other two blogs as it regulates who is permitted to comment and how:

This is our website, and we will moderate it as we see fit. Comments we love: 1. Clever and witty insights or retorts. We love your funny, so bring it. 2. Comments that reflect an interesting opinion that has yet to be presented. 3. Intelligent and thoughtful contributions to a discussion [...]. Arguing with editors regarding ‘censorship’ or the violation of ‘free speech’ is just silly, and it will almost certainly have some kind of consequence (Coen, 2010a).

This can be read as an expression of Jezebel.com’s commitment to a particular feminist orientation and notion of social responsibility, but it also helps the website to present itself as an exclusive community in which only a ‘clever’ target group is allowed to produce content.

Dlisted.com presents itself as a single-authored blog written by New Yorker blogger Michael K., who identifies himself as of Mexican, Chinese, English, and Danish descent and openly gay. Launched in 2005 as the D-List, the blog currently attracts about 190,000 unique visitors monthly within the US and is as such smaller than Jezebel.com or Perezhilton.com.²⁴ The blog publishes about eight entries daily, and, while Michael K. has admitted to receiving help with web design and programming, it seems that all the posts are written by him. In order to produce his blog, Michael K. consumes celebrity content that is available online or through mainstream media, but he also receives tip-offs from other bloggers and/or his readers, which he acknowledges in the respective blog entries. As in Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com, the website entries contain embedded videos from platforms such as YouTube, self-produced GIFs, and

²⁴ I retrieved this number from [compete.com](https://siteanalytics.compete.com/dlisted.com/) in July 2012(<https://siteanalytics.compete.com/dlisted.com/>). Unlike Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com, Dlisted.com does not host a media kit site with data. This suggests that Dlisted.com is less professionally orientated than the other two blogs.

hyperlinks to other webpages.²⁵ Like Perezhilton.com, Dlisted.com uses images that fall under the U.S. Copyright Fair Use Act (Title 17, U.S. Code.). This means that it publishes photographs and images that ‘are readily available in various places on the Internet and believed to be in public domain’(Dlisted.com, 2002: n.p.). However, considering the quality and quantity of celebrity images on these websites, it is likely that they also each purchase images from photo agencies such as WENN or Getty Images.²⁶ This illustrates that Dlisted.com works through similar means as the other websites I discuss, though on a smaller scale.

Dlisted.com’s tagline is ‘Be Very Afraid’, a warning that prepares the audience for the offensive and sometimes vulgar humour through which celebrities are mocked. Dlisted.com rejects normative journalistic regulations like objectivity, fact checking or even spell checking, and often celebrates notorious celebrities who are critiqued and ridiculed within mainstream media. Dlisted.com aggressively flaunts its ‘bad taste’ and its difference by celebrating the culturally low, and proudly describes itself as trash: ‘Having Tina Fey say she liked Dlisted in an interview was bizarre. Why would she be reading me? I’m trash. Sometimes I’m still like, “I don’t know if she really reads this, because this is kind of disgusting”’ (Michael K. in Thompson, 2011). Dlisted.com uses self-deprecating humour and biting irony in order to create a counterintuitive reading of celebrities that challenges the conventional morality and taste of the middle classes. Its comments on celebrity news are laden with sexual remarks, and its excessive use of sexual connotations not only violates existing standards about sexuality, but it also expresses Dlisted.com’s unapologetic politics that resist being fixed, and which seem to play with normative cultural values and judgements. With its focus on perversity, fantasy and irrationality, Dlisted.com challenges what Michael Warner has termed ‘the

²⁵GIF refers to ‘Graphics Interchange Format’. This is a bitmap image format that supports animations and allows images to move.

²⁶ Perez Hilton in particular has, in the past, appeared repeatedly in the news for being sued by photo agencies and photographers, who claim that the blogger uses their work without compensation.

regimes of the normal' (1991: 16) and goes 'gaga' (Halberstam, 2012) with our ideas about gender and sexuality. As such, I locate Dlisted.com as a queer online space that is not concerned with assimilation or integration, but rather aims to scramble the social absolutes that shape our everyday lives.

My positioning of these gossip blogs as homonormative, critically post-feminist and queer is not to suggest that they are homogenous and as such always already subverting or reinforcing dominant discourses. Rather, it should be seen as strategic, enabling me to clarify the ways in which particular categories and norms are employed in different ways within these blogs. Overall, the blogs I examine in this thesis inhabit an ambiguous position within the current neoliberal consumer culture: on the one hand, they can be read as operating at the margins of dominant norms.²⁷ They do not carry many signs of commercial collaboration with the celebrity industry, a fact which is highly valued by an audience that is become increasingly media literate and sceptical towards idealised representations of celebrities.²⁸ On the other hand, these blogs are still very much part of celebrity culture, and therefore part of a global economy which makes profit out of modulating affects, and of multiplying and distributing differences.²⁹ Throughout this thesis I aim to flesh out moments in which these blogs participate in innovative deployments of femininity, queerness and the deconstruction of whiteness

²⁷ Neoliberal consumer culture refers in this thesis to our current socio-cultural and political climate in which the capitalist logics of the market infiltrate not only the domain of politics, but nearly all social and personal relations. According to Foucault (2010) and later Nikolas Rose (2012) neoliberalism engenders a specific form of government – a so-called governmentality – where subjects govern themselves seemingly without pressure from outside. In the current neoliberal consumer culture the neoliberal subject controls and improves itself constantly, mostly through the 'right' kind of consumption. Since the forms of governmentality change over time, our contemporary neoliberal form of governmentality in the Western context can be seen as an expression of a 'society of control' (Deleuze 1992) where subjects govern themselves increasingly through affect and emotion.

²⁸ As I have suggested, Perezhilton.com represents an exception in this respect, as blogger Mario Lavandeira befriended many celebrities and became a celebrity himself. Furthermore, some blog posts serve solely to promote industry productions, such as TV shows, without any further comment from Perezhilton.com. Perez Hilton is, owing to his commercial success and the different brands and media outlets that he owns, an influential actor in the celebrity industry.

²⁹ In the Conclusion I discuss in more detail how the political economy of celebrity gossip blogs compromises their potential to create meaningful critical difference.

and through their humour render strange what usually passes unquestioned as right and normal.

The Affective Quality of Celebrity Gossip Blogs

As I have argued, I understand blogs such as Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com as affect-producing technologies that are invested in shaping our ideas about what it means to be a ‘proper’ social individual in the current society of control. Without doubt, affect and emotion have always been part of how we make meaning out of media: talk shows, soap operas, and dramas are all emotional products, but so too is serious programming such as news.³⁰ Celebrity gossip blogs, however, invite us to explore their affective content (the humorous online representations that aim to entertain the reader) as well as enabling us to investigate how affect (and as such the humour) can be transformed and modulated through virtual interaction and circulation. As such, these online formations not only raise question about the ways in which the visual content engenders feelings and emotions in the reader, but they ask also how their texture and materiality, or the movement of these online celebrity representations, shape and reshape our affective reactions towards them. I argue that these celebrity gossip blogs are affective because of their humorous quality. Through humour, online celebrity representation come alive and become palpable and experiential for the reader. It can be argued that humour *animates* these online celebrity representations, and I suggest that this is where their potential for creating critical difference lies: now they are alive, they have agency, thereby actively producing rather than merely re-presenting what already exists somewhere else. However, humour is often marginalised as that which cannot be

³⁰ Sean Redmond (2008) argues that talk-shows get their affective quality from practices like confession in which the celebrity body has to perform in carnal ways and according to discourses of therapy. Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine (2008) explore the affective quality of make-over television shows through analysing the workings of abjection and desire through which the feminine subject becomes rehabilitated or dismissed. Lilli Chouliaraki (2006) demonstrates how news shape through editing and representational patterns the ways in which viewers can feel empathy with representations of suffering on the screen.

taken seriously, as light-hearted entertainment that is unable to effectively challenge socio-political structures (Davies, 2011), or, perhaps worse, as a discursive practice that reiterates and patrols social and symbolic boundaries, keeping deviant people in their place and causing feelings of shame, anger and pain.³¹In the form of ridicule, humour can produce and display group identity and loyalty thereby upholding social and cultural conventions and cement social relations. This is particularly effective in the context of ‘control societies’ where borders seem extremely permeable and fragile, disseminating feelings of anxiety and insecurity. In her analysis of the television programme *Little Britain*, Deborah Finding (2010) argues that the performed humour, rather than being self-deprecating or apolitical, instead targets stereotyped Others. She maintains that, through this process of othering, the programme returns to sexist, homophobic, classed and racist sentiments, and argues that it is through irony that this return is made acceptable. Many scholars are aware of this dangerous potential of irony, and argue that the context for this kind of humour is one which is post-feminist, post-racial, postmodern, and in which the subject both knows and intentionally plays with the borders of good taste.³²Much of this critical work has helped to show that humour is not universally ‘good’ or ‘innocent’, but rather that aggression, belligerence and pain are an integral part of it.

Despite these negative associations, humour has also been understood as taboo breaking and transformative. For Jerry Palmer, humour can perform a temporary release from society’s rules, and can provide a space of rebellion: ‘[H]umour can be used to

³¹ Imogen Tyler (2008) argues that the social derision of figures like ‘the chav’ (embodied in the character of Vicky Pollard in the television show *Little Britain*) sustains classed hierarchies affectively. Michael Billig (2001) explores the links between humour and hatred and argues that racist jokes animate xenophobia and racism. Deborah Chambers (2009) illustrates, using the examples of *Roseanne* and *Designing Women*, how humour functions to perpetuate prejudice against working class and single women.

³² Ros Gill argues that irony can function in advertising to undermine feminist gains and argues that it allows advertisers to ‘present titillating and sexist images of women while suggesting that it was all a deliberate and knowing post-modern joke’ (2007: 110). Simon Weaver illustrates through his work on racist jokes how post-modernity enables a form of ‘liquid racism’, that is racism that is elusive because it is marked as irony (Weaver, 2011).

directly subvert well-established rules of behaviour by raising taboo topics that can remain on the agenda' (1994: 61). This subversive strategy functions only if the aesthetics and ethics of humour are recognised and the joke is understood and deemed as appropriate. Another way to theorise the transgressive potential of humour is through notions of the carnivalesque, which is a particular special type of communication that occurs across a variety of cultural sites, most notably in carnival itself. For Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), the popular tradition of carnival has the potential to suspend social hierarchies through mostly bodily and bawdy humour which finds expression in the celebration of bodily grotesqueness and excessiveness, fooling around and profanities. These markers of indecorum are strictly policed during 'normal' times, but during carnival they can be animated and enable comic reversals: For instance, when a jester might be crowned in place of a king and, as a result the authoritative voice of the dominant discourse momentarily loses its privilege. Even though this reversal of power is just momentary, carnivalesque humour enables here a space in which a genuine dialogue can emerge, which in turn creates the chance for a new perspective and a new order of things: 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people [...] It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part' (1984: 7). Hence, for Bakhtin, the subversive potential of the carnivalesque lies in the fact that its humour can break down social hierarchies and distances and enable as such an anti-discriminatory dialogue between all people for a better new world. It is easy to critique Bakhtin's account as universalist, utopian, and maybe even supportive of the system, but his account invites us also to think through what humour (and the laughter that it might provoke) can do if it is theorised as creating intimacy and belonging rather than distance and boundaries. Bakhtin writes for instance that

[l]aughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break it open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it.

Lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. (1981: 23)

Here, laughter (and the humour that provokes it) collapses distance. Laughter enables an ‘object [to] come up close’, where ‘one can finger it’, touch it and thereby, according to Bakhtin, modulate it. Bakhtin’s account might seem overly cheerful and positive in terms of the transgressive powers of laughter, but I find this notion useful nevertheless: it illustrates that laughter is not just a bodily reaction, but that it is tactile and can re-modulate that with which it comes into contact.

For Giseline Kuipers, humour is also crucial in the building of communities, because, she argues,

Sharing humor marks similarity – and similarity breeds closeness. The sharing of humor also unites people: the drawing of boundaries includes and connects, too.

Especially in literature, humor may unite readers across boundaries of time, language, and culture in rather unexpected ways. (2009: 219)

Like Bakhtin, though through a different approach, Kuipers’s analysis highlights the communal that can emerge through humour, and which in turn can create affective change in how we feel and relate to each other. Furthermore, feminist critics have argued that laughter – one possible reaction to humour – can confront gendered taboos, and produce spaces of outrageous pleasure and disruption within culture and language.³³

³³ Luce Irigaray understands feminine laughter as excess and asks: ‘Isn’t laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? *Isn’t the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning?* Perhaps woman, and the sexual relation, transcend it “first” in laughter?’ (1985b: 163; emphasis in original). Kathleen Rowe argues that women’s laughter shatters the symbolic authority of patriarchy. Women’s laughter, she writes, is both ‘terrible and wonderful’ (1995: 2). It expresses anger for the injustice of the law, and turns women into spectacles that are both illogical and threatening to men’s law. Also, Mary Russo (1988) understands unruly laughter as a feminist weapon. Unruly laughter makes a spectacle of women, and thereby challenges the century-old convention that women are supposed to be

Similarly, Elliot Oring (2008) argues that humour expressed in disaster jokes can be seen as rebellion against the discourses of mass-media. In this way, many have highlighted the affective connections and reactions humour can invoke, and how these can challenge dominant discourses and expectations.

I understand humour as an affective practice that can animate the readers of these celebrity gossip blogs in many different and contradictory ways. Humour can engender feelings of happiness, joy and amusement as well as shame, anger or frustration. Our encounter with a humorous online celebrity representation can make us laugh, make us feel pity with the ridiculed celebrity figure, or even bore us. Scholars like Suzanne Lockyer and Michael Pickering argue that questions such as ‘who has been chosen as the comic targets of ridicule and mockery and what lies behind these choices’ deserve our attention because they can tell us a great deal about the lines of division and social stratifications that run through a society or culture (2008: 813). I argue that our reactions to humour are not only descriptive in that they let us know where divisions lie, but that they are also performative: they can exacerbate or muffle stereotypes and practices of othering. Celebrity gossip blogs enable this affective and performative function of humour through their visual content and through their texture and materiality, or the movement of these online celebrity representations. The online celebrity representations on Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com make readers laugh not only through their satirical or ironic textual commenting, but also through their materiality and texture, i.e. the media format in which they materialise.

When considering the affective quality of these blogs and the online representations they mediate, it is thus necessary to think through how different media formats such as images, videos, GIFs, and texts have been put together, and how this criss-crossing shapes the affective quality of particular online representations. Jodi Dean

silent and unspectacular. It destroys with force the old structure to create the potential for something new to emerge.

argues that '[d]igitization erases the distinctions between visual, written, and acoustic media. It turns all data into numbers that can be stored, transmitted, copied, computed, and rearranged' (2010: 94). While she maintains that in cyberspace the material difference between these different media vanish, I suggest that even though all these media formats can be reduced to codes, they have different material qualities which touch the reader in different ways: a video touches the viewer differently than a still image because it appeals to different senses, draws on different somatic archives, and enables different experiences and activities. GIFs can have a particular comical quality because their materiality is determined through jerky movements and repetition. We perceive this differently than if we would read a repetitious text, for instance, because the GIF amends different bodily senses than reading written letters. I argue that online media like gossip blogs require us to take into account how different media formats intersect and meet on a blog thereby shaping the affective (humorous) quality of online representations. As I will show in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, this affective quality influences how we experience and make meaning out of the online celebrity representations before us.

The affective quality of an online celebrity representation is not only shaped by discourse (the blogger's text) or materiality (of a specific media format), but is also made and re-made through its circulation. I seek to show at various points throughout this thesis how the interaction of users with blogs changes the affective charge that the 'original' online celebrity representation had. Users can dispute or challenge the blogger's interpretation of a particular celebrity image, event or narrative through commenting or adding further images and GIFs to the original blog post. This process of commenting is not only mechanical (pressing keys), or economically productive, it is

also highly affective:³⁴ The user feels something when encountering the ‘original’ online celebrity representation, and this affective jolt motivates her/him to vent and/or express her feelings in a comment. Dean argues that every moment of interaction ‘accrues a tiny affective nugget’ (2010: 95) to the online representation, thereby changing not only how it materialises on the screen, but also how we feel about it and how we read it. I suggest that paying close attention to this touching and re-touching of online representations enabled through their circulation can give us useful insights regarding the ways in which celebrity gossip blogs can interrogate, scramble or shift our ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness. In this section, I have discussed how the technological specificities of blogs shape the affective quality of their online celebrity representations. These blogs combine different media formats, which have different material properties, and which, in turn, affect readers in different (embodied) ways. An analysis of how their online celebrity representations make and re-make our ideas about gender, sexuality and race needs to pay close attention to the ways in which these different media formats intersect, and with what possible effects and affects. Furthermore, I argue that the interactive and dynamic nature of blogs needs to be accounted for because online representations are moved and re-shaped through our interactions with them. In this sense, celebrity gossip blogs are a form of affective entertainment, by which intensities flow not only between the screen and the reader, but also between the different elements and media formats on the screen.³⁵

Reading through Skin

Reading online representations presents some methodological and theoretical challenges, because ‘the academic metaphor “to read” points towards the word, printed

³⁴ As many have argued, and as I will discuss in more depth in the last chapter of this thesis, the affective investment in celebrity culture and gossip keeps these blogs alive and economically productive.

³⁵ For a slightly different conceptualisation of affects that pass between bodies on the screen and between the viewer and the screen, see Skeggs and Wood (2012: 222).

page, book, and political economy of text-based modes of production and distribution,' and 'subsumes the unruly images under the rational sign of the text' (Hillis, 2009: 27). In this sense, using the term 'reading' to describe the analytical work done in interpreting online websites carries the danger of 'bypassing the differences between text and still and moving images, and threatens to gloss over the unstable and indiscrete nature of digital media that arises as a result of interactivity, manipulation and immediacy' (Paasonen, 2011: 13-14). Nevertheless, I refer to the practice of reading, because reading not only involves thought and evaluation, but, as many feminist scholars have shown, it is also a practice felt in and by the body.³⁶ As such, the term 'reading' allows me to avoid making 'analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be "experienced" as distinct realms of human "experiences"' (Ahmed, 2004a: 6). Determining whether something feels good or bad already 'involves a process of reading, in the very attribution of significance' (Ibid.). Hence any evaluation of whether a representation affects us in a pleasurable or disturbing manner involves a reading of this encounter. But what does it mean to 'read through skin'? Methodologically, it means a *thinking through* the skin. Thus skin is not only my object of analysis (the celebrity skin), it is also 'the site from which thinking takes place' (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001: 3). One cannot think outside of one's own skin, because it is through the skin that one has a position in and relation to the world – it structures our perception and our knowledge through feeling (Connor, 2004: Howes, 2005: 27-28). As such, a reading through skin can be seen to offer a critique of models that claim to examine representations through objectivity.³⁷ I use my own reading

³⁶ Ahmed argues that emotions cannot be separated from the body and that texts move the body through their emotionality (2004a: 12-13). In a similar vein, Isobel Armstrong maintains that affect emerges between text and reader and is inspired by the symbolic but cannot be determined by it. She argues that making sense and sensing in your body (the mental and the corporeal) cannot be separated when we interpret cultural texts that we encounter (2000: 117, 121). Lynne Pearce understands reading as an interactive and implicated process (1997: 11-15). Rather than situating text and reader in opposition, Pearce explores their interaction, which is shaped by a wide range of emotions.

³⁷ Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead point out that '[f]eminist theorists have played a crucial role in highlighting the significance of affect and emotion to critiques of positivism and the presumed role

experiences of these blogs to ground the analysis in a concrete skin – my own – as an intersection of the cultural and personal.³⁸ From my own located, trained, experienced embodiment, my affective reactions are enmeshed within ethical and socio-political concerns.

Furthermore, it is safe to say that skin lends itself, at least in the first moment, to a visual analysis. As the visible bodily surface, skin is often defined as a cover of the self, a fleshly envelope, or a canvas that passively waits to be made sense of through a distant gaze. In this understanding, skin acts as the visible signifier for a gendered, aged and raced identity, or as the bodily witness of our way of life and our past contact with the world (one might think here of scars, wrinkles or sun exposure). In psychoanalytical discourse, the quality of our skin is often seen as representing our ‘inner self’ – skin diseases can be read as material expressions of a troubled psyche, which finds expression on the bodily surface.³⁹ Furthermore, cultural practices such as tattooing, dieting, exercising, tanning or bleaching are seen as forms of self-expression that are then celebrated or pathologised, depending on the particular context. Skin is here the fleshly and passive canvas that can be remoulded and reshaped at will, thereby containing the truth about the subject that wears it. Skin is, in this understanding, the surface that can be decoded to reveal inner depth because it is understood as being meaningful rather than becoming meaningful through the particular gaze and through the particular discourses that encounter it.⁴⁰ From this perspective, the metaphor of skin

of objectivity in knowledge production. Through fleshing out the critical imbrications of location, embodiment and knowledge, these thinkers illustrate not only the impossibility of objective knowledge detached from embodied location, but also explore the potential for affect to provide different, and potentially transformative, ways of knowing’ (2012: 119). Reading through the skin follows this feminist tradition and is also concerned to point out possible ways of contesting and shifting traditional ideas of gender, sexuality and race.

³⁸ I am borrowing here directly from Katariina Kyrölä, who grounds her reading of *Fat Actress* ‘in a concrete body [...] as an intersection of the cultural and the personal’ (2010: 75).

³⁹ See, for instance, Helmut Beltraminelli and Peter Itin’s work on psychologically induced skin diseases (2007).

⁴⁰ For more on this, see Nikki Sullivan (2009), who argues that the construction of skin as a given truth that can be decoded through the expert’s eye is merely the effect of certain discursive practices.

enables us to analyse the celebrity online representations in these blogs from a number of different points of view. Skin transforms every visible surface into an object of investigation, and this is why I focus in this thesis on the skin of the celebrity body as represented in digital photographs, text, and videos – as well as how they all interact – on the screen.

In general, the concept of skin draws attention to three separate but overlapping aspects that remain largely unaddressed in more traditional semiotic and textual analyses. The first of these emerges from the commonplace observation that skin is not only a visible bodily surface that purportedly contains and represents our raced, gendered and aged identities, but also that it is a fleshy material that can be touched and felt. Translated into the realm of online media, skin invites us to explore how digital representations produce meaning not simply through texts and images, but also via their materiality and texture. Whereas in the context of linguistics and classic semiotics, texture is understood to mean ‘textuality’, that is, the property by which successive pieces of communication form a coherent text, texture here is used ‘to refer to the material qualities of surfaces and substances, experienced by touch and recognised by sight’ (Iqani, 2012: 329). In other words, the concept of skin invites us to ask how it would feel to touch the online celebrity representations that we encounter. The glossy and shiny, or grainy and blurry texture of an online image is created through various mechanical processes and procedures, and it influences how we understand the image. Mehita Iqani argues therefore that our meaning making processes are simultaneously visual and tactile:

Each text has been constructed from materials considered by a certain culture useful for making meaning. [...] Texture is tactile, but it also operates on the visual level. [...] By looking at a certain surface we can imagine how it will

probably feel to touch it, and the description of a surface by its phenomenological qualities becomes a simultaneously visual and tactile experience.(2012: 312-316)

From this perspective, texture is an important semiotic and sensory resource that significantly shapes the meaning of a representation. Reading through skin entails attending to the texture of an online representation. Secondly, employing skin as a heuristic device reminds us that it matters how online representations make us feel; the kind of emotions and affects that we might experience in our body when we encounter them. Sometimes skin seems to give away how we feel, for instance, when certain emotions find their expression on and in our skin, such as when we smile, blush or get goose bumps. Clearly, not all emotions are visible on the skin, but rather may be felt *within* the body. Yet, as Ahmed argues, emotions do not reside within objects or bodies, but instead circulate between them. For Ahmed, skin is central in any consideration of emotions, because skin as the in-between space – between the self and the world, between inside and outside – demonstrates how such apparently separate entities as social discourse and private feeling relate to and create each other through these relations. Furthermore, she argues that emotions shape the surface of bodies, maintaining that ‘it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the “I” and “we” are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others’ (2004a: 10). Dominant discourses, and the norms they produce, are saturated with particular emotions that make them appear morally right and natural, thereby concealing their constructed nature. These norms, and the particular emotions attached to them, function like pressure points that leave an impression on the bodily surface. Through repeated imprinting on the skin, the skin becomes shaped and the body contorted, orientating itself (seemingly naturally) towards certain objects and away from others. Hence a reading through skin draws attention to how online

representations make us feel while acknowledging that these feelings are, at least partly, the result of social norms that are repeatedly imprinted upon the bodily surface.⁴¹

As the porous and affective interface through which we stay in contact with the world, skin also allows me to theorise the role of connection in our meaning-making processes. Skin, as a permeable border, changes according to that with which it comes into contact: we tan when we are exposed to the sun, we sweat when exposed to heat, we get goose bumps when exposed to cold. Skin is, as such, mutable and shaped by what it connects with, as well as that with which it has previously been in contact. Within the context of online environments, this means that online celebrity representations only become meaningful through contact. Such processes include their contact with other blog elements such as other images or texts, as well as their contact with the viewing body in front of the screen. As I have discussed, online representations in celebrity gossip blogs create links amongst different texts, images and bodies. These links transform the online representation: Each new comment, tag or 'sharing' becomes a material part of this online representation, and subsequent readers take this new material into account as part of their experience of the online representation. Hence, applying the concept of skin to explore the dynamics of celebrity culture enables us to conceive of these online representations as material, sensuous and dynamic surfaces that *become* through their connection with other animate and inanimate bodies. These three aspects, texture (touch), emotion (feeling) and connection (contact) draw attention to questions concerning the tactility of digital representations (how would this image feel if I could touch it?) and their emotive productivity (how do they make me feel), while exploring how different media formats and elements (texts, images, videos, GIFs) touch in a particular blog post, as well as how this touching, and this cutting across, affects and is affected by the reading body. Furthermore, reading through skin conceptualises

⁴¹ This resonates in some respects with Kristeva's notion of abjection, (bodily) boundaries are here explained as both private (in that we feel them in and through our skin) and public (in that they emerge as a result of the repetition of certain socio-cultural practices and behaviours) (1982).

reading as an embodied and sensuous act of exchange: the reading body is touched by the material and dynamic online representations while touching these representations back by engaging with them, thereby shaping the meaning of representations, of that which apparently exists apart from us. The assumption of either a passive reader or a passive text that simply waits to be decoded by the gaze is thus replaced by a model of an affective and embodied interaction between the two. These three aspects also demonstrate the ways in which a reading through skin is an affective reading that allows us to think through creatively about possible intersections between two schools of thought: those who see affect as linked and overlapping with feeling and emotion, and as such as embedded within cultural discourse and ideology, and new media scholars who understand affect as a ‘force prior to and in excess of social and cultural inscription’ (Tyler et al., 2008: 87).⁴² The concept of skin is not a turn away from ideological critique, or a renunciation of the long history of feminist work on the politics of emotions.⁴³ Rather, it places these ideas in dialogue with the work of new materialists and phenomenologists, a body of scholarship which pays attention to the

⁴² I draw in this thesis mainly on Ahmed (2004a, 2010), Hemmings (2005) and Berlant (2011) as feminist scholars who, as discussed earlier, see affect as culturally and ideologically embedded. New media scholars who theorise affect as in excess of the social, subjective and political include, for instance, Laura U. Marks, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova and Steven Shaviro. They enable me to account for the technological and affective specificities of gossip blogs. Marks argues that different media, such as film or online websites, enable emotional or visceral responses that are not limited to sight, and maintains that ‘often meaning escapes the audiovisual registers altogether’ (2000: 129). The agency of new media to move the body beyond the realms of seeing and hearing (i.e. beyond traditional forms of representation) deserves our attention, according to Marks, because it is constitutive of our meaning-making. Parisi and Terranova theorise the affective quality of digital cultures through discourses of materialism and technoscience. They understand affect as a pre-individual force and intensity that changes the relationship between body and technology. Body and technology are, in their approach, not conceptualised as binary oppositions, but as interwoven with each other. Through the material-affective quality of technology, bodily capacities become increased and changed. In their understanding, new media has the capacity to open up alternative ways of being and feeling (2001). Shaviro theorises affect in the context of new cinema as a pre-subjective force or sensibility that cannot be represented (only emotion can be represented) and affects our current society. For him, ‘[f]ilms and music videos, like other media works, are machines for generating affect, and for capitalising upon, or extracting value from, this affect’ (2010: 2).

⁴³ The long history of feminist work on the politics of emotions is outlined by Megan Boler, who illustrates how, ‘in patriarchal culture, we learn emotional rules that help to maintain society’s particular hierarchies of gender, race and class’ (1999: xxi). Ten years earlier, Arlie Hochschild (1989) traced how the performance of emotions and ‘good’ feelings is used within the work life of stewardesses, and as such is part of an affective economy. In 1987, bell hook argued that racist discourses and politics are always already saturated with – and reinforced through – emotions such as fear, disgust and hate (1987).

material specificities of online environments, and understands digital culture as material and sensuous, with the ability to enable particular sensory, synaesthetic, and visceral experiences and knowledges through our encounter with technologies. As a material and affective interface that touches and is touched in ways that are (most of the time) beyond our control, skin draws attention to the sensory and the visceral. As such, a reading through skin accounts for affective intensities that sometimes escape discursive mastery, and opens representations up for productive misreadings, which depart from the 'preferred' reading.

Furthermore, rather than forcing all examples of humorous online representations into the same analytical framework, the heuristic device of skin allows me to move between different theoretical perspectives and modes of interpretation to produce a multifaceted understanding of the developments and directions taking place. In some parts, my approach resembles traditional semiotics or discourse analysis, because these methods are very suitable to fleshing out how structures of inequality translate into online media content. In other parts, however, I move closer to the representations, skin-tight, to tackle the affective appeal they engender, to explore their tensions, loose threads and little openings – the pores through which they breathe and change. My 'skin-tight' reading pays close attention to the ways in which my moving through and touching of the blog influences what I encounter and how I feel. It shows that reading a blog is a physical, multisensorial and affective experience in which my body and the blog interact and influence each other, thereby opening new ways of relating to each other and meaning-making. This shifting between perspectives is useful and strategic because it enables me to account for the dynamic, multimedial and interactive nature of gossip blogs. Online celebrity representations cannot be analysed like representations in magazines or on television *only* because this would gloss over their technological and material specificities. We can draw comparisons to some extent

(and this is why I use semiotics and discourses analysis), but we also need to develop approaches that account for their particularities and the specific visceral and affective experience that they can engender.

My shift in perspective is guided by my subjective encounter with the online representation (how I perceive it), but also by the ways in which it offers itself up to analysis. Reading through skin recognises that it matters how images lend themselves to our investigation. Depending on the materiality and texture of the image, we might use different ways of reading them – at times more distant (discourse or semiotic analysis) and at other times closer, skin-tight. This strategic shift between different ways of reading is evident within, as well as between, the individual chapters of this thesis. In this sense, a reading through skin aims to extend traditional textual approaches by inviting us to ask how the complex relations between affect, embodiment and technology can enable new ways of thinking and feeling.

Outline of Thesis

Chapter One provides an overview of the existing literatures on affect, new media and celebrity culture in cultural and media studies, in order to flesh out a theoretical framework for my reading through skin. I examine how feminist scholars have theorised the role of active audiences in processes of meaning-making, and highlight some of the problems encountered by recent approaches that promise to go *beyond* representation, but also what we can learn from them. This chapter locates my thesis within current critical conversations regarding emotion and new media, and sketches out my understanding of affective and sensuous meaning-making which is key to the analysis of my empirical material that I develop in the following chapters. In each of my core chapters, online celebrity representations are seen as dynamic, material and affective interfaces, which have relations with their immediate online surroundings as well as the viewing body. In subsequent chapters, I elaborate on the ways in which online celebrity

representations produce, circulate and transform affectively ideas concerning femininity, queerness and whiteness.

In Chapter Two, I explore how femininity is affectively produced and mediated through online representations of female celebrities. Without suggesting that the female sexed body and femininity are interchangeable, these examples illustrate most clearly how the border between proper and improper or respectable and non-respectable femininity is affectively negotiated and communicated within the blogs considered. In this chapter, I introduce, through empirical examples, my key argument that how we make meaning of online celebrity representations is it not only a matter of vision but is also shaped by touching and feeling. By focusing on beauty practices and technologies like cosmetic surgery and Photoshop which ‘improve’ the appearance of real or represented skin, I illustrate that skin can function as a site of normalisation; however, what normalisation means changes when the background shifts against which the celebrity skin is read. I illustrate this through blog posts about Dolly Parton and Jessica Lange on Dlisted.com, both of whom have undergone excessive cosmetic surgery. I argue in this chapter that the ways in which we read re-touched or re-done celebrity skin are more complex than feminist readings, which draw on the Foucauldian concept of the docile body, account for. I suggest, for instance, that through these practices and technologies the potential of skin to betray the gaze is exposed; thus how we read celebrity skin is not only based on what we see but also on what we expect to lie under the skin. I illustrate this through the example of contrasting representations of Heidi Montag and Alexa Ray Joel on Perezhilton.com. The heuristic device of skin enables me to explore how Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com aim to evoke particular feelings through their online writing and use of different media formats, thereby celebrating or othering certain femininities. Jezebel.com, for instance, uses videos and before/after images in order to make the affective force of their blog posts

even more palpable. As argued earlier, the concept of skin draws also attention to question about texture and touch. Using the example of a blog post about Lady Gaga's excessively Photoshopped skin, I illustrate how the texture of celebrity representations is a resource for meaning, and that blog reading is an embodied and affective practice. Overall, this chapter begins to trace the complex ways in which celebrity gossip blogs move their readers in affective and embodied ways through the use of technology, but also by reiterating discourses online which are already saturated with particular feelings.

In Chapter Three I continue to question the privileged position of vision by illustrating that it cannot be separated from other senses. Considering online discussions about television series such as *Vampires Diaries* and *Glee*, I illustrate how meaning-making is always already shaped through our prior experiences. Reading through the skin, in this respect, involves recognising that how we are affected by certain celebrity representations is dependent on our situated and located knowledge, which we gain not only through cognitive processes such as reason and intellect, but also through feeling and how these process are imbricated. In other words, through inhabiting our own skin we create knowledge (Howes, 2005). Focusing on affective tactics such as 'gay sensibility' and 'camp humour' in Dlisted.com, I explore some of the complex ways in which humour can function as an affective-discursive tool to move the reader, thereby altering what we see and how this is valued. Drawing on critiques of homonormativity, I read Perezhilton.com's online representations of queer or gay celebrities counter-intuitive, thereby revealing the ways in which their affective compliance with dominant discourses of heterosexuality can become intensified or muffled within these online spaces. Reading through skin here allows me not only to map cultural norms of sexuality literally on the skin (considering, for example, which parts of the skin count as sexual, or what kind of touch is sexual), but also to shed light on the artificial boundary that sets up heteronormativity and queerness as opposites. I discuss, for instance,

through the humorous online representations of Keira Knightley and Richard Simmons on Dlisted.com, how sartorial practices carried out on the skin shape our ideas about straight and queer identities, and how they can be challenged through online practices. Skin reveals how these imagined categories are both interwoven and shifting, and allows us to consider key questions such as why we feel closer to and more comfortable with some queer celebrity bodies than others, and how this can become contested.

Chapter Four explores the affective force of humorous online representations further through the critical lens of race. I explore the ways in which feelings such as anxiety, anger, shame, resentment, happiness, affection and enjoyment can be understood as part of the affective landscape upon which whiteness is built. Further, I consider how humour, as an affective-discursive tool, can move the body in front of the screen, thereby re-orientating us towards dominant ideas of whiteness. Analysing representations of celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Middleton and Prince William, I explore the affects that surround figures of 'idealised' whiteness. I also attend also to the feelings often associated with marginalised or demonised figures of whiteness such as 'white trash', and the 'chav', and how these affects animate the online representations of Lindsay Lohan and Zac Efron. Throughout this chapter, I pay particular attention to the technological possibilities that blogs provide, such as the opportunity dispute or resignify online representations through user comments. The contradictory and diverse comments I identify in some of these posts allow me trace the struggles that readers have with particular representations of whiteness, how they try to undermine this dominant system and where the limits of this endeavour lie. Exploring user comments also helps me to flesh out another key argument of this thesis: These comments show that affect is intertwined with cultural discourses and practices, and that it thus often reinforces pre-existing knowledges as it glosses over the constructed and relational nature of celebrity representations, and presents them as being either simply

good or bad. Yet affect also offers possible exit points – ways of reading and feeling that differ from dominant or preferred meanings. In this vein, reading through skin also demands that we account for emotional responses that do not conform to white, middle-class expectations, as my concluding discussion about the user comments on Perez Hilton.com about the cast members of *Jersey Shore* demonstrates.

In my Conclusion, I consider the wider implications of my analysis in the context of contemporary political dynamics. If my reading of online celebrity representations through skin has aimed to illustrate how humorous online celebrity representations can – owing to their affective force – shift our ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness, then this claim should also be valid when considering the complex workings of power in a society of control that manages difference through economic integration. After summarising the key points made in my core chapters, I explore how we might understand these online celebrity representations in the context of Deleuze's society of control and associated practices of affective labour. Drawing on the work of Julie Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim (2013), as well as Dean (2010), I flesh out how online media exploits the affective work of (blog) readers. With reference to J. Jack Halberstam (2012) and José Esteban Muñoz (2009) I then illustrate how my reading through skin has been productive in showing how the humorous online representations on Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perez Hilton.com can provide new ways of feeling and thinking in a time in which the affect and feeling have become fully integrated into the economic circuits of neoliberal consumer culture.

Chapter One

Celebrity Studies, Affect Theory and Digital Cultures

Through the concept of skin, this thesis investigates the ways in which our engagement with celebrity representations in humorous gossip blogs affectively produces ideas regarding femininity, queerness and whiteness. As such, it contributes to an established body of scholarly work concerned with the social function of celebrities, and to the analyses of media and cultural studies theorists who see the relationship between reader and text as unstable, dynamic and productive.⁴⁴ In order to develop my argument, I first provide an overview of audience research in media and cultural studies that understands audiences and readers as active producers of meaning, whereby producing meaning is a process shaped by cultural and historical location, experiences and emotions.⁴⁵ I then explore the ways in which scholars of celebrity studies have theorised the affective qualities of celebrity and their representations. While many authors focus on the role of discourse and ideology in the construction of celebrities, some also highlight the ways in which celebrities are affective figures that move us, grab our attention, hold our interest and evoke feelings of intimacy, desire and/or aversion. Scholars such as Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2010), Jo Littler (2004) and Sean Redmond (2008) argue that celebrities are deeply embedded within the cultural practices and processes of our increasingly ‘emotionalized society’ (Swan, 2008). New media formations such as reality television shows and therapy talk shows have their own affective qualities, and are used to establish an affective economy of intimacy and immediacy between audience and celebrity. Following this, I provide an overview of how affect has been

⁴⁴ The social function of celebrities is discussed in Dyer’s (1979) work, where he examines what type of role model or social type celebrities embody. Scholars like Marshall (1997) or Redmond and Su Holmes (2007) illustrate how celebrities exercise power in the sense that they represent the struggle over cultural ideas and values.

⁴⁵ I draw here mainly on feminist research such as Bobo’s (1988), Radway’s (1991) and Skeggs’ and Wood’s (2012), as feminists were long concerned with alternative ways of meaning-making. These works show the historical trajectory of feminist audience research.

theorised in media and cultural studies. My aim here is to highlight some key points that flesh out my understanding of affect as an alternating force: as embodied feelings and emotions that are culturally embedded, as well as disruptive intensities and forces that cannot be foreseen. In the subsequent section, I map out how digital culture has been reconceptualised through theories of affect as sensuous and material. Here I focus especially on aspects of new materialist theory, as well as on the work of Susanna Paasonen (2011), who brings into dialogue scholarship on new media and digital cultures, new materialisms, immaterial labour and social and cultural theoretical writings on the politics of emotion. My discussion about affect is organised in this way because it illustrates my understanding of affect – in this thesis I put the work on affect, feelings and emotions in social and cultural studies into dialogue with scholarship on digital culture and new media, and think creatively through their possible intersections.

Representation, Meaning-Making and the Active Audience

In this section, I examine how audience research moved historically from the passive over the active audience member/reader, to the audience-in-the-text. Cinema studies in the 1970s and 1980s was often informed by psychoanalytic approaches which seamlessly integrated the viewer into a certain audio-visual order.⁴⁶This rigid model was subsequently challenged by audience research on the so-called empirical spectator carried out by scholars in sociology and cultural studies.⁴⁷These scholars undertook ethnographic research, conducted through interviews and participant observations, in order to analyse the ways in which individuals or groups interpret and experience certain media events, and concluded that representations construct viewing positions as

⁴⁶ This psychoanalytically informed work has been well accounted for – see, for instance, Jackie Stacey (1994) and Suzanne Danuta Walters (1995). It is as such not my intention to dwell upon it extensively here. The core arguments of these approaches can be found in Laura Mulvey's seminal work, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), in which she argues that Hollywood cinema fixes women as objects to be looked at thereby enabling visual pleasure for men through voyeurism and fetishism.

⁴⁷ I refer here to specifically to Charlotte Brunsdon's and David Morley's (1978) seminal ethnographic studies of television viewers in Britain.

well as subjectivities and identities. Hence, work in audience studies extended the focus from the text itself to the ways in which that text is consumed, how the audience are active participants in the production of meaning, and how this process is placed within a set of power relations. The spectator or reader is here a social subject that is inscribed by various competing discursive formations (such as gender, class, race and sexuality) which shape and re-shape the meanings of the encountered text. In this sense, this work on the consumption of television challenged the deterministic model of the textual spectator employed in film studies. Feminist scholars have been particularly eager to challenge assumptions of the passive audience owing to a widespread tendency in scholarship to regard women as a particularly passive and helpless audience. Often regarded as 'women's genres', soap operas and romance narratives have been regarded as 'mindless nonsense' 'escapist rubbish' and 'the trashiest trash' (Stacey, 1994). A significant re-evaluation of popular pleasure and feminine reading is Janice Radway's work on women romance readers (1991). Challenging feminist readings which, inspired by the Frankfurter Schule, reduced popular culture to that which merely reproduces a dominant ideology, Radway shows— through analysing the perceptions of female readers— that these readers are not simply duped consumers of cultural commodities, and nor are they merely enjoying themselves 'innocently'. Readers of these novels saw themselves as involved in a social process with other women that often allowed them respite from domestic requirements. Reading was not only a way to escape, but also allowed them to glimpse ways of life unlike their own, and to question their assumptions and options. In their attempts to move beyond the limits of textual analysis and imputed spectator positions, feminist scholars such as Radway (1991), IenAng (1985), and later Joke Hermes (2006), were able to understand how women actually

engage with representations, and to thereby demonstrate how reading ‘against the grain’ can be enacted productively.⁴⁸

Dorothy Hobson’s work on *Crossroads* (1982) was one of the first feminist works in television studies to challenge cultural notions of the feminine viewer as passive and helplessly positioned to be filled with dominant meaning. Hobson highlights the active participation of *Crossroads* audiences, and argues that women do not enter into any viewing situation as neutral, empty vessels, waiting to be filled by the particular message emanating from the screen. Rather, women are enabled by complex histories, knowledges and interpretative skills that are all brought into play as they engage with particular kinds of images or texts. Hence, these readings of the programme extend far beyond the text itself, and depend upon knowledge and experiences that exist outside of the viewing situation. In Hobson’s study, this knowledge comes from their experiences of being women, mostly working class, whose lives are often divided by the entanglement of family and work, and who are constrained by economic pressures. Hence, meaning cannot merely be produced from the signifying practices within the text alone, or from an analysis of the spectator position constructed by it. Rather, meaning depends on a model of the audience that takes into account its shared cultural knowledges and historical contexts, which are shaped by class and gender (among other factors), and which produce diverse readings.

Jacqueline Bobo’s (1988) ethnographic study of the reception and interpretation of the film *The Color Purple* extends the critical work of feminist cultural critics by highlighting the importance of race *and* gender in the meaning-making process. She challenges the assumption of a white, male spectator in order to address the multiple identities that subjects might hold. Her study showed that the movie has a specific set of

⁴⁸ Ien Ang (1985) shows how soap operas like *Dallas* are consumed and enjoyed by women in a particular context. Over ten years later, Joke Hermes explores how the consumptions of glossies provide pleasure through forming a sense of community, and momentarily suspend social hierarchies by engendering an ‘imaginary sense of power over the rich and powerful’ (Hermes, 2006: 295).

meanings for African-American women. This is encapsulated by one of Bobo's interviewees:

When I went to the movie, I thought, here I am. I grew up looking at Elvis Presley kissing on all these white girls [...] And it wasn't that I had anything projected before me on the screen to really give me something that I could grow up to be like. Or even wanted to be [...] So when I got to the movie, the first thing I said was 'God, this is good acting'. And I liked that. I felt a lot of pride in my Black brother and sisters (1988: 102).

For the interviewee, the delight in the film arises out of her position as a black woman, long denied positive role models on the screen. Her social, cultural and historical position enables a positive reading of the film. Bobo's research illustrates as such that while mainstream ideology in *The Color Purple* attempted to portray black characters in a stereotypical racist way (as 'exotic' and 'uncivilised'), black female viewers 're-wrote' the text and were able to take something worthwhile and progressive from the film.

Other feminists have problematised the devaluation of popular texts by taking the workings of emotion and fantasy seriously, and attempting to understand audience attachments to particular dramatic forms. In an influential study, Ang demonstrates the diversity and contradictions inherent in women's readings of the television series *Dallas* (1985). Ang considers what female audiences recognise in *Dallas*, and how and why it is pleasurable for them, and concludes that attachments to the soap opera fiction are generated through 'emotional realism' – the characters seem real through their emotional structure, and viewers can recognise in them the interpersonal dramas of everyday life. She argues that the pleasure of popular culture for women lies in the 'flight' into a fictional fantasy world. This 'is not so much a denial of reality as playing with it. A game that enables one to place the limits of the fictional and the real under

discussion and make them fluid' (Ang, 1985: 49). This game, with its borders between the real and the virtual or the imaginative, becomes more pertinent when we consider the blurred boundaries between ordinary people and celebrities, and those new media formations that place the audience in the text.

With the development of new television formats such as reality television, make-over and talk-shows, and their emphasis on participation, proximity and interactivity, novel approaches to audience studies have become necessary. The once seemingly discrete categories of 'text' and 'audience' are now blurred and interwoven: the audience is not held at a distance, but rather is motivated to vote, to tweet, or to phone in. These levels of emotionality and interactivity have led a number of critics to argue that the audience is now 'in-the-text' (Holmes and Jermyn, 2003), that 'we are audience and performer at the same time' (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 57). Elements of indeterminacy and unpredictability are central to these formats, and it is these same elements that produce their affective texture: we are close, we watch, we judge, we vote, we are involved, we cringe away, we celebrate. Reality television is about immediacy, closeness and proximity, and it can be argued that the frame of mediation has transformed as a result of these changes, enabling a move from representation to presentation (Marshall, 2006), or from representation to intervention (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). As these considerations illustrate, new approaches to audience studies and the ways in which we make meaning need to attend to both the material and technological qualities, as well as their affective intensities.

As Beverly Skeggs and Helen Wood highlight, many scholars have theorised these new emotional media formats through the lens of neoliberal governmentality. These readings illustrate how media formations such as make-over shows and reality television, for example, interpellate and generate the subject that takes up the work of producing the self in the subject's own interest. In these readings the affective quality of

reality and make-over television inserts viewers into a system of neoliberal governance with an imperative to monitor, improve, motivate, transform and protect themselves in the name of freedom, enterprise and social responsibility. With its emphasis on surveillance and pedagogy, reality television operates here as the ultimate cultural technology in neoliberal self-governance (Andrejevic, 2003; Becker, 2006; McRobbie, 2009; Quellette, 2008). While neoliberal discourses and technological changes undoubtedly influence how we make meaning and might as well inform the production of such media, I nevertheless agree with Skeggs and Wood, who contest the smoothness of the governmentality approach that inserts the viewer unproblematically in one position. They argue that a governmentality approach cannot explain the contradictory feelings and reactions that such texts raise in some viewers and maintaining that

theories of governmentality do not wholly account for what has been seen as most radically suggestive of reality television – its emphasis upon immediacy, intimacy and indeterminacy. Reality television has been described as a genre involved more in ‘intervention’ than ‘representation’ [...], because of its emphasis upon affect and reaction over any determined meaning. (2012: 11)

Even though Skeggs and Wood are writing about reality television and not online media, their audience research is important for this project because they show, by using a multi-method approach composed of interviews, focus groups and ‘text-in-action’ viewing sessions, that viewers develop complex readings. Rather than inserting viewers into a specific position in which they are ‘taught’ neoliberal logics, Skeggs and Wood found that viewers frequently rejected the intended meaning. Instead, they took pleasure in questioning the position of ‘experts’, or sometimes enjoyed the ‘happiness’ that participants gave off despite their problems. Skeggs and Wood illustrate how affect complicates our ideas about what a text can do. Through text-in-action viewing sessions, they aimed to find the exact points at which participants engaged affectively

with the shown series: ‘they gasped, laughed, tutted, sighed, ‘ooh’ed and/or ‘aah’ed’ (Skeggs, Thumim & Wood, 2008: 17). These affective reactions were then channelled through the social position of the viewer, and reformulated so that the viewer could produce herself as a person of value in a way that resisted neoliberal logics. For instance, in their study about reality television programme *Wife Swap*, Skeggs and Wood show that, rather than following the neoliberal imperative to work as a mother, reality television enabled working-class mothers to enact a level of moral authority as stay at home mums. In their refusal to assume a position of aspiration and mobility in favour of giving time to children through more traditional modes of femininity, these working-class women actually resist this contemporary neoliberal pressure on women. Hence, owing to its affective qualities, Skeggs and Wood conceptualise reality television as an intervention rather than representation.

Affect as a ‘new’ research dimension has shifted the focus from meaning and representation to the body and on materiality. Scholars like Steve Shaviro (2010), Marco Abel (2009) and Richard Grusin (2010) use the work of Deleuze and Félix Guattari ([1980] 1987, [1991] 1994, [1972] 2004) and Brian Massumi (2002) to rethink the visceral and sensuous aspects of the media they have studied.⁴⁹ Despite their differences, all three scholars argue that media can produce meanings that cannot be grasped through the traditional concept of representation. Through their technological make-up, new media engender experiences that communicate meaning immediately (without mediation) through sensing rather than conscious interpreting. Grusing argues, for instance, that the images of Abu Ghraib evoke disgust and sickness in us, not because of their content but because the media practices through which they were produced are identical to our habitual use of media. Taking a picture is part of our

⁴⁹Shaviro argues that cinema’s images confront the viewer directly, without mediation, meaning that one is impressed and moved by the images unfolding and responds to them viscerally before interpreting them as symbols of any kind. Abel is also interested in the force of images to ‘produce effects *prior* to their inevitable narrativization, their eventual territorialization onto the plane of representation’ (2007: 10).

everyday life and we do it when something affects us in such a positive way that we want to remember it and share it later with friends and family in order to spread or reanimate the good feeling. The fact that this common media practice, which we connect with 'good' feelings, is now used to depict torture and horror provokes an affective contrast, which makes us feel sick. Grusin writes: 'what affected us even before we were cognizant of what we were seeing or how horrible it was [...] was our (perhaps unconscious) recognition that we use digital photos in the same way, to distribute our affective responses' (2010: 89). This example shows some of the ways in which affect can encourage us to theorise representations beyond the visible content and traditional understandings of representation. Scholars like Grusin, Shaviro and Abel investigate media with a focus on materiality, intensity and sensorial qualities, and advocate a shift away from approaches concerned primarily with ideology, meaning, and signification that reduce every image or object to texts. The problem with approaches 'after representation' (Thrift, 2007) that glorify the immediacy of affect while abandoning language, representation, discourse and ideology, is not only that they ignore generations of feminist scholarship that has articulated the significance of subjective and social experiences and feelings for processes of meaning making, but also that they try to establish a new ontology that stands outside of power.⁵⁰Paasonen argues convincingly that it is impossible to separate 'questions concerning the immediacy of affect and the visceral impact of images [from] the depicted, the symbolic, the mediated, and the representational' (2011: 10). This is because considerations about what a film or artwork *does* are necessarily shaped by that which it *signifies*: the representational practice that composes what is before us. However immediately and affectively cultural texts and images may touch us, we inevitably engage in acts of interpretation, especially when we make them our objects of study.

⁵⁰ For critiques of this situating of affect outside of culture, see Hemmings (2005) and Imogen Tyler et al. (2008).

Since online media such as gossip blogs *do* a lot of things, it would be misleading to reduce their online celebrity representations merely to the visual interface; but it is equally wrong (and impossible) to focus exclusively on their technical protocols and affordances, and the circuits of communication, affect and gut reactions they enable. Thus, I bring critique ‘after representation’ into dialogue with studies of representations.

In this section, I have explored how the study of representations and meaning-making has evolved in film and cultural studies along with the development of new media formats – from early psychoanalytical work on cinema, to ethnographic studies on film and television series, up to considerations of affect in new media formats like reality television and make-over shows. Even though my project is preoccupied with online media rather than television or film, the work considered above is valuable and salient because it highlights the importance of theorising active audiences that shape and reshape the meaning of representations. Blogs make active audiences highly visible and viable, and a reading through skin attunes us to the affective quality of online celebrity representations. In this sense, my project builds upon the above literature: it enables me to challenge the idea that humorous online celebrity representations only communicate one dominant meaning, and helps me to theorise how the active reader and the affects that these blogs produce might enable new ways of understanding femininity, queerness and whiteness.

Celebrities as Animating Figurations

In this section, I explore how celebrity studies has long been concerned with the ways in which celebrities touch us emotionally, grab our attention or hold our interest. Initial work on the social function of stars and celebrities took the form of structural readings, founded in psychoanalysis and sociology. Approaches informed by psychoanalysis focused on the feelings of desire and visual pleasure that the star evoked in the audience

through its positioning within a particular visual order. Sociological approaches, on the other hand, tended to understand stars as marketing devices or social role models – as a means for creating and organising audiences and disseminating stereotypes. Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) laid the ground work for post-structuralist star analysis within film studies. His approach combined semiotics and sociological aspects, and introduced the notion of the *star text* – the idea of the celebrity as text – that still shapes large parts of celebrity studies today. For Dyer, film stars perform ideological functions in the sense that their representations (or images) shape what kinds of identities and behaviours are intelligible for people at a particular moment in history: 'Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society' (1986: 17).⁵¹ From his perspective, stars work like signs, or as ideological symbols that must be examined in relation to historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts. They do not simply reflect a set of coherent meanings – rather, they embody multiple and sometimes even competing discourses of what it means to be a subject at a certain time. This contradiction 'within and between ideologies' (1979: 34) is crucial for the star image, because it invites the active audience to manage those gaps, or to read the star as embodying a 'subversive' or alternative ideological position. The premise that such star images are intertextual and contradictory opens up the possibility for divergent or oppositional readings by different audiences, but which are nevertheless still structured or limited by ideology:

From the perspective of ideology, analyses of stars [...] stress their structured polysemy, that is, the finite multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody and the attempt so to structure them that some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked or displaced. The concern of such textual analysis is then

⁵¹ By 'ideology', Dyer means here 'the set of ideas and representations in which people collectively make sense of the world and the society in which they live. [...] Ideology is specific to a particular culture at a particular moment in history' (1979: 2).

not to determine the correct meaning and affect, but rather to determine what meanings and affects can legitimately be read in them.(Dyer, 1979: 3)

As this suggests, stars can be read in different ways, and can engender different meanings and affects. However, Dyer also makes it clear that this ‘polysemy’ is not unlimited; rather ideology makes certain meanings or affects more likely than others. His analysis of the star as a cultural text is a useful starting point for this project, as it explores how stars can articulate ideas about personhood. Dyer highlights the economic and ideological structures that produce the star within particular historical conditions, while also allowing for the contingency and specificity of the meanings generated by a particular star in relation to their active audiences.⁵² He recognises stars as ‘significant nodal points of articulation between the social and the personal’ (Rojek, 2001: 16), and this makes Dyer’s work extremely relevant for a study of celebrity representations.

Readings of stars or celebrities as cultural texts offer crucial insights regarding the production and consumption of celebrities, and how celebrities can function as productive sites for the analysis of cultural shifts around gender, sexuality, class and race.⁵³ Many feminist readings of celebrities interrogate the ways in which their representations reinforce or disrupt gendered norms.⁵⁴ However, according to Graeme Turner, there is a tendency within celebrity studies to focus too much on celebrity as representation and celebrity as the effect of discourse, ignoring ‘the larger, more structural, political or theoretical issues’ (2010: 14). I agree with Turner in the sense that

⁵² Dyer makes this re-appropriation visible using the examples of Judy Garland by gay men (1986: 137-192), and Greta Garbo and Bette Davis by queer communities (1979: 58-59). He argues that these actresses expressed in their acting a kind of queer sensibility, which allowed queer audiences to read their performance as camp, as making the constructed nature of social roles visible. A deeper discussion about queer sensibility can be found in Chapter Four.

⁵³ For an analysis of the shifts in gender roles, see, for instance, Diane Negra and Su Holmes (2008), who explore the emergence of the female ‘trainwreck’ celebrity. Stephen Knadler (2005) examines the shifts around categories of race in his discussion of Jennifer Lopez. Kim Allen and Heather Mendick (2012) illustrate how young people draw upon class and gender distinctions that circulate within celebrity discourses in order to construct their own identities.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Milly William’s (2010) discussion of the ways in which discourses of class and gender become reinforced through the public derision of celebrities like Britney Spears and Kerry Katona. Deborah Ferreday (2008) explores how over the top performance of femininity in Burlesque dancing can be read as subversive, and Helen Shugart et al. (2005) argue that celebrities like Macy Gray or Gwen Stefani subvert with their spectacular performance of gendered norms.

questions of political economy and political forces must be integrated, and I address these in more detail in the last chapter of this thesis, but I do contest his argument that these approaches exclude each other. Careful readings of celebrity representations do not regard them as immaterial and separate from institutionalised structures of power, but rather as interwoven and conditioned by political, social and economic contexts and production processes. My affective reading of online celebrity representations through skin aims to contribute to this nuanced and critical study of representations.

Scholars such as Dyer (1979, 1986) and Stacey (1994) highlight the significance of feelings in our understandings of celebrities and what representations of them can do. For instance, in *Star Gazing*, Stacey analyses the intense emotional investment felt by female spectators towards Hollywood stars of the 1940s. Considering their emotions and feelings of adoration and worship, as well as the multiple pleasures they experience from watching these stars, or consuming their associated lifestyle goods, Stacey challenges the psychoanalytically informed work of early feminist film theorists, which traps the female spectator/consumer within a position of passivity and subordination. Pleasure, for the female spectator, is mostly absent in these approaches, or can only be conceptualised as the desire to be the passive object of masculine desire. Stacey summarises this as follows: '[w]ithin a Lacanian framework, [...] women's pleasure in Hollywood cinema, either through identification with the female protagonist, or otherwise, can only be conceived of as a sign of their complicity with their oppression under patriarchy' (1994: 133). By drawing attention to feeling, and therefore moving away from a strictly textual analysis, Stacey demonstrates that, rather than limiting the female spectator to one particular form of femininity, the affective connections between star and audience enable multiple ways of creating and negotiating femininity, thereby showing how a focus on emotions can enrich our understanding of celebrities, and how their representations work. Chris Rojek is also concerned with the affective connections

between celebrity and audience, highlighting the paradox that celebrities arouse feelings of belonging, intimacy, joy and affection, despite the fact that they are physically absent: ‘One peculiar tension in celebrity culture is that the arousal of strong emotion is attained despite the absence of direct, personal reciprocity’ (2001: 12). He argues that, through the decline of religion, along with family and kinship systems, celebrities replace through ‘para-social interaction’ the ‘real’ intimacy formerly provided by these institutions. ‘The term “para-social interaction”’, as Rojek explains, ‘is used to refer to relations of intimacy through the mass-media rather than direct experience and face-to-face meetings’ (2001: 52). There are clear limitations in his work such as the problematic separation between ‘real’ intimacy and so called ‘second-order’ intimacy – that is intimacy felt through representations rather than real people – and the fact that his reading of devoted fans is often overly structural. Still, I argue that his work is valuable to this project because it highlights the centrality of affect and emotions to the production and consumption of celebrity culture. His work also invites us to think through how feelings become even more diverse through online media formations such as humorous gossip blogs. If, as Rojek argues, celebrity adoration is affectively similar to religious acts like praying, then how can we make sense of the kinds of online trolling and celebrity bashing which we find on Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com?

Whereas Rojek investigates the affective relationship between celebrity and audience from the fan-perspective, others have examined this relationship by analysing the emotional ways in which celebrities now have to act. Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (2010), for example, explore how audiences can feel ‘betrayed’ by celebrities that are unknown to them. They suggest that, in a culture where people are literate in reading emotions and therapeutic discourses – as these practices are key for a (economically) successful identity – new forms of subjectivity and self-presentation are required (see

also: Swan, 2008). Celebrities have to meet the expectations of a media-savvy and emotionally literate audience in order to maintain their affective appeal and (economic) success. This means, for instance, that they have to be both intimate and 'real'. The idealised and remote cinema goddess that Dyer and Stacey analysed has therefore transformed into a celebrity that invites the audience to feel with him/her, a subject that is apparently accessible, open and confessional. As Jo Littler notes,

[t]here have always been gossip and scandals, interviews and confessions around celebrities. But unlike the 'heavenly bodies', perhaps, about whom nuggets of information are revealed through interviews, and who are subject to the usual barrage of scandalous gossip, we now have many stars who appear only too keen to tell us very early on in their careers about how they are unheavenly and how they have dirty emotional closets to clean out. (2004: 20)

Biressi and Nunn argue that, in order to successfully perform the emotional chain of suffering, regret and apology, and to overcome a perceived 'betrayal of public trust', the celebrity figure has to perform the right feelings at the right time. Drawing on the work of Arlie Hochschild (1983) and Berlant (2008), they illustrate that feelings or emotions are not a private, spontaneous matter, but rather that they shape a horizon of social expectations concerning how the morally and ethically respectful subject should feel, i.e. should communicate their feelings.⁵⁵ They maintain:

⁵⁵ Hochschild uses the example of stewardesses to discuss how feelings and emotions have to be controlled as part of an economy that thrives on 'good' feeling. Through this, she demonstrates how private feeling and public feeling interlink, and how both have to be managed (1983). Berlant examines the ways intimate publics such as 'women's culture' are constituted through and by affective connections. She illustrates, using the example of U.S. popular twentieth-century literature directed towards women, how these goods create through their sentimental messages an affective community that structures women's feeling and acting in similar ways. Through the consumption of this literature, women are hailed into feeling commonality – despite differently classed and raced positions – because they are apparently all looking for love and surviving the disappointments of failed love. The political implications of this are that women are made to believe that their primary mode of subjectivity is affective, which in turn directs them away from any feeling of political agency. Berlant thus reveals the ways in which sisterhood is constituted through a commodity culture that relies not on abstract ideas of womanhood, but instead upon shared feelings and fantasies (2008).

[T]he ready expression of emotion (properly moderated and directed) has become a yardstick for measuring the healthy (read 'successful') performance of the achieving subject in both public and private life. Hence, the celebrity figure performing emotion is at the high (visible) end of a spectrum of emotional conduct; conduct by which many of us are now expected to manage our public lives in order to demonstrate integrity, authenticity and personal commitment to our public role. (Nunn & Biressi, 2010: 54)

Biressi and Nunn's work is very relevant to my affective reading of celebrity online representations, as it illustrates the entanglement of celebrity culture with the current socio-economic framework, in which a turn to emotion is imperative for the distinction between 'proper' and 'improper' subjects.

In a similar vein, Redmond (2008) shows how new media formats – for example 'therapy talk shows' such as *Oprah* and one-to-one interviews – stage the celebrity as a highly emotional figure, allowing intimate confession, introspection and the representation of a better or improved self in front of the audience. Focusing on a neoliberal consumer culture, Littler (2004) explores how celebrity figures are today constructed according to tropes of intimacy, reflexivity and 'keeping it real' in order to maintain the paradoxes of 'contemporary "meritocratic" culture, in which new possibilities of social and cultural transition are produced alongside sharp inequalities of wealth and status' (2004: 8). To be recognised and felt as 'real', the celebrity has to create an intimacy with the audience. This is often secured when the celebrity demonstrates a kind of reflexivity about her/his current privileged position while making clear that she/he remembers how it was to be not famous: 'Cinderella now has to show that she can still remember that she started out in the kitchen' (Littler, 2004: 14). Rather than serving to challenge the rules of the neoliberal meritocracy, this emotional attachment and memory instead keeps them alive. By constructing fame as

both, desirable and attainable for ordinary people, everyone is thus placed in the ‘celebrity race’ (Rojek, 2001: 147), continuing the long history of the rags-to riches narrative. Furthermore, the grounded and self-reflexive celebrity that remembers the hard and economically deprived life before fame (i.e. the life on the block) produces, according to Littler,

a structure of feeling that uses its ‘appreciation’ for the block for entirely individualistic purposes, in order to justify enormous wealth and divest itself of any guilt, rather than to enter into a reciprocal relationship [with the block]. As such it sustains, furthers and deepens inequality rather than tackles it [...]. What more perfect image could there be for a company to use to sell, what more potent dream to buy than glamour which pretends to be democratic through-and-through? (2004: 14)

Littler thus illustrates how celebrity figures like Eminem or J-Lo (Jennifer Lopez), who claim to have lived on the block before they became famous, maintain the unequal power structures of neoliberal meritocracy by playing on such stories and the feelings that accompany them.

Another key point in discussions regarding celebrity culture and affect concerns the more recent ironic consumption of celebrities. Irony engenders a range of emotions like amusement, *schadenfreude* and pleasure, as well as feelings of distance, superiority and affection.⁵⁶ The celebrity gossip blogs that I read in this thesis can be seen as part of this new approach to celebrity culture. Here, celebrities are marketed to an audience that is extremely ‘wised-up’ to the rules of the celebrity game (Littler, 2004: 21). Joshua Gamson (2007) argues that, with the increasing visibility of the publicity machine behind celebrities in the later twentieth century, the celebrity industry posed a threat to

⁵⁶ Drawing on Joppe Boodt (1992) in her discussion of gossip magazines, Hermes writes that irony is used by subjects who feel sure about their cultural capital and want to distance themselves from low culture. It is therefore often accompanied by feelings of distinction and arrogance (Hermes, 2006: 304-305). Holdcroft, however, claims that irony does not necessarily involve a negative attitude and can be ‘playful and affectionate’ (1983: 496).

its own myth. He suggests that one way to oppose this risk was to invite the audience to increase their knowledge about celebrity production and to find the ‘real’ behind the ‘image’. Gamson argues that,

[b]y embracing the notion that celebrity images were artificial products and inviting readers to visit the real self behind those images, popular magazines partly defused the notion that celebrity was really derived from nothing but images. [...] The public discovers and makes famous certain people because it (with the help of the magazines) sees through the publicity-generated, artificial self to the real, deserving, special self. (2001: 270 cited in Holmes 2005: 25)

Gamson explains how the two separate but overlapping processes function to keep the celebrity myth alive. In the first, the industry itself makes publicity processes and celebrity production processes highly visible, the second establishes an ironic and mocking perspective on celebrity culture, and both processes offer the audience a flattering position of power. He explains that, ‘[t]hrough irony, these celebrity texts reposition their readers, enlightened about the falseness of celebrity, to “see the joke” and avoid the disruptive notion that there is nothing behind a fabricated, performed image but layers of other fabricated, performed images’ (2007: 153). This means that, even when articulated through ironic distance, such practices enable an audience to feel closer to the secret lives of celebrities. It is what might be called, following Michel Foucault, an ‘incitement to discourse’ (1998: 17) around celebrity intimacy. It is a discourse of critical and cynical distance about the celebrity-machine, and one that is predominantly channelled straight back into feeding this machine – to the reforming and the reselling of celebrity, rather than the dissolution of it (Littler, 2004: 22).⁵⁷ Irony is a defining element in the gossip blogs that I am reading in this thesis. Scholars such as

⁵⁷ A similar argument is made by Ros Gill (2007) and Angela McRobbie (2009) concerning irony and postfeminism. They argue that within a post-feminist media landscape, irony can function as a tool to invoke sexist and anti-feminist attitudes (disguised as a joke), thereby undermining the gains and continuance of feminism. Hence irony functions here not to deconstruct sexist ideas and notions, but rather to repackage and resell them to the audience.

Gamson and Littler put the ironic treatment of celebrities into an historical context and enable me to further explore its workings within our current neoliberal consumer culture.

As I have shown in this section, various approaches to celebrity culture explore the current affective production of celebrity representations through notions of intimacy, accessibility and irony, and provide useful insights into how subjects become interpellated and aligned through the emotional performance of celebrities. The constant call for more closeness and intimacy, and the effect that such emotionality has, is often explained through concepts of governmentality and neoliberalism. Whereas early work on the affective quality of stars understood affect as something that helps us to make different meanings (Stacey, 1994), later approaches, such as those of Rojek (2001), Biressi and Nunn (2010) and Littler (2004), recognise the role of affect as determined through ever-changing structures of power. While I do not object to the suggestion that affect travels along these lines of power and discourse, this thesis is also interested in the moments when affect surprises us and allows us to re-orientate ourselves towards traditional ideas of gender, sexuality and race. As Lawrence Grossberg notes, ‘affect is organized; it operates within and, at the same time, produces maps which direct our investments in and into the world’ (2006: 585). Affect can therefore create new ways of thinking, imagining and relating to realities that might not be visible through the lens of neoliberal governmentality. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the capacity of affect to do both – to reiterate oppressive structures while also disrupting old patterns – has been long theorised by scholars in cultural studies.

Theorising Feeling, Emotion and Affect

The precise meaning of affect is difficult to grasp. It originates from the Latin word *affectus*, meaning affect, passion, desire and emotion, words which were used

synonymously until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Berlant, 2004: 3-4). Through the ‘turn to affect’ within the last decade, affect, feelings and emotions have increasingly become ‘objects of scholarly inquiry’, and affect has taken on different meanings within this critical school of thought (Cvetkovich, 2012b: 133).⁵⁸ Since ‘the turn to affect’ often involved either *a turn away* from ideological critique (with its emphasis on discourse, representation and language) or *an extension* thereof, Tyler suggests that affect theory can be divided into two main schools of thought: one that refuses ideological critique and views affect as an a-political force and another strand that sees affect a political and socially embedded (Tyler et al., 2008: 87). As I will show, my use of affect does not signify a turn away from ideological critique but rather extends these approaches. Furthermore, affect is sometimes either used as ‘basically synonymous’ with emotion (Brennan 2004: 5-6), or alternatively as strictly separated from emotions. In the latter approach, emotions refer ‘to cultural and social expressions, whereas affects are of biological and physiological nature’ (Probyn, 2005:11).⁵⁹ Kristyn Gorton summarises:

‘[t]he nature and degree of difference between emotion and affect is often contested. Some argue that emotion refers to a sociological expression of feelings whereas affect is more firmly rooted in biology and in our physical response to

⁵⁸ Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (2007), Anna Gibbs (2010) and Anu Koivunen (2010) provide extensive accounts for ‘the turn to affect’. Scholars such as Cvetkovich (2012b) and Hemmings (2005) critique the rhetoric of an ‘affective turn’ because it presents affect as a novel category in feminist research when feelings and emotions have in fact long been centre stage in feminist critical enquiry. For Cvetkovich, the turn to affect is not new because movements like the ‘Public Feelings Project’ emerge out of the feminist mantra that ‘the personal is the political’ (2012b: 133). Feminist work on ‘emotional labour’, the role of affect in the maintenance of political and social structures of exclusion, as well as on media, such as film and television, and genres such as melodrama, have long been concerned with affective registers. For example, as argued earlier, Ang (1985) illustrates the affective quality of television on the series *Dallas*, Linda Williams (2001) shows that melodrama like *Uncle Tom Cabin* or *Gone with the Wind* shapes affectively the race relations in the U.S., and Christine Gledhill (1987) argues that melodrama shapes through emotions gender and heterosexual power structures.

⁵⁹ In her writing on shame, Probyn (2005) resists a clear split between biological affect and biographical emotion. Drawing on Silvan Tomkin’s notion of the unpredictability of affect and the fact that contradictory affects can stick together, Probyn argues that shame always also includes interest. She maintains further that feelings are not just registered consciously and can therefore be controlled, but they too are felt and enacted by our bodies that escape our control. Starting from a personal narrative she explores the social and political ramifications of shame arguing that shame has the capacity to disturb both personal and political norms.

feelings; others attempt to differentiate on the basis that emotion requires a subject while affect does not; and some ignore these distinctions altogether'. (2007: 334)

As Gorton shows, dividing lines between affect, emotion and feeling are difficult to draw. Taking into account these challenges and complexities, the aim of this section is to provide an overview of the ways in which key theorists in cultural studies have conceptualised affect, feeling and emotion (and their differences) in order to clarify my understanding of these terms and to explain how affect is used in my reading of celebrity gossip blogs.

Studies that understand affect as a pre-discursive intensity (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003), and as such strictly distinct from personal feeling and social emotions, are often motivated by a certain fatigue and dissatisfaction with structuralist and post-structuralist approaches that purportedly overstate the significance of language. From this perspective, (post)-structuralist approaches leave out considerations of materiality in their theorisation about the subject while putting it also in a position of 'social determinism' (Hemmings, 2005: 551). Scholars that understand affect as a-political and biological often draw on the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins in order to account for the unconscious (i.e. gut reactions) and the unexpected (i.e. that which seems to escape discourse) experiences that influence our life.⁶⁰ Tomkins understands affect as an automatic biological response to a stimulus, and that emotion comes into being through a process of interpreting these responses by applying 'scripts' based on past experiences and cultural knowledges. Elisabeth Wissinger explains:

⁶⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) is a good example for a theorist who draws on Tomkins in order to develop a new reading of social life. She draws on Tomkins distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' theory in order to show how reparative reading (which I explained earlier) emerges out of weak theory. Tomkins calls the ways in which we organise our affective experiences 'theory'. Seemingly paradoxical, 'strong theory' is not as effective as 'weak theory' because the former is overtly general and tautological (it always finds what it was paranoid about). 'Weak theory', however, means that we have developed affective mini-strategies that help us to survive even when we experience negative affects. In this sense, for Sedgwick, affect can provide alternatives to strong theory because it has the capacity to link us creatively to others, and because affect is innate to everyone it can be produced by everyone – not just dominant actors.

Tomkins understood affect in terms of specific physiological responses that then give rise to various effects, which may or may not translate into emotions. Affect therefore precedes emotions; affect is not conscious, but it has a dynamism, a sociality or social productivity. The effects of affect, however, are not predictable: affective change from passivity to activity, from inertia to motivation, for example, is not reducible to a single stimulus. (2007: 232)

Tomkins considered shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress, and disgust as the basic set of affects (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 5) which then become translated into emotion. Affect is unpredictable with regard to time (anger can evaporate within minutes or remain for a long time) and aim, as well as in what it can do: ‘the pleasure in hearing a piece of music can make me want to hear it repeatedly, listen to other music, or study to become a composer myself’ (Sedgwick, 2003: 19). Furthermore, an object is not fixed with one particular affect but can be associated with different affects: ‘There is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects. Positive affects has been invested in pain and every kind of human misery, and negative affect has been experienced as a consequence of pleasure and every kind of triumph of the human spirit’ (Tomkins cited in Sedgwick 2003: 19). In other words, there is no necessary logic in affect: what we experience as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ might change over time.

Furthermore, it can be said that positive affects such as joy suggest a movement towards the object, and negative affects such as disgust might suggest a moving away. However, paradoxically, this ‘negative affect may also entail desire to move towards the [disgusting] object’ (Ferreday, 2009: 31-32). Tomkins’s conceptualisation of affect is relevant to my own understanding of affect because it formulates it as dynamic and shifting. Particular affects might make certain movements or orientations more likely than others but they do not determine them. For instance, the ‘chav’ celebrity, which I

discuss in Chapter Four, might provoke disgust in the middle-class reader and motivate as such a moving away – paradoxically, though, readers are often drawn to these figures. I do, however, diverge from Tomkins in the sense that I do not separate strictly between affect, emotion and feeling in my thesis. Owing to the methods and objectives of my research, i.e. me reading online representations, it is not possible for me to clearly separate when a reaction is conscious or unconscious. I have to be conscious about my affective reactions, feelings and emotions, otherwise I cannot write about them. Other scholars that distinguish between affect and emotion draw on Deleuze’s conceptualisation of affect:

Deleuze proposes affect as distinct from emotion, as bodily meaning that pierces social interpretation, confounding its logic, and scrambling its expectations. Deleuze understands affect as describing the passage from one state to another, as an intensity characterized by an increase or decrease in power (Hemmings, 2005: 552).

As Clare Hemmings’ explanation suggests, Deleuze conceives affect as a pre-personal intensity that cuts across different human and non-human bodies (see also Deleuze, 1978). Key theorists that follow Deleuze’s conception of affect are Massumi (2002) and Grossberg (2006). Massumi understands affect as an intensity which is different from emotion because they ‘follow different logics and pertain to different orders’ (2002: 27). From his perspective, affect is a force *prior to* and *in excess* of social and cultural inscription (Tyler et al., 2008: 87). Affect here is a vital materiality, it is an asocial, pre-discursive and therefore pre-subjective intensity, whereas emotion is captured or tamed affect. For Massumi, emotion is the subjective expression and the sociolinguistic manifestations of an experience, i.e. affect (2002: 28). Emotions are ‘semantic fixations of the affective and the immediate, those social and cultural conventions that transform corporeal intensity to linguistic categories and meanings’ (Sundén, 2010a: 49).

Importantly, the transition from unconscious intensity to conscious symbolically embedded emotion leaves always an excess that cannot be grasped in language. Affect escapes not only language but also the confinement of the singular body whose vitality or potential for interaction it is.⁶¹ Such an understanding of affect makes clear why affect is so attractive to scholars like Abel, Grusin or Shaviro: it provides a tool and critical vocabulary to theorise feelings and meanings that we, at least in the first moment, cannot make sense of. My understanding of affect is not informed by Massumi, but it encompasses traces of Deleuze. This becomes apparent in, for instance, my discussions of Lady Gaga or Gwyneth Paltrow on Dlisted.com. In these moments, I tease out how humour – as an affective-discursive force – can grab us and re-orientate us away from traditional ideas and values.

Scholars that see affect and emotion as overlapping include Sianne Ngai, who argues that,

[a]t the end of the day, the difference between emotion and affect is still intended to solve the same basic and fundamentally descriptive problem it was coined in psychoanalytic practice to solve: that of distinguishing first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not (2005: 27).

Therefore Ngai uses emotion and affect interchangeably. Berlant challenges the strict distinction between bodily affect, personal feelings and social emotion by arguing that feeling compassion with someone who suffers might find resonance in our ‘hearts and tears,’ and might as such feel pre-social and bodily, but that feeling of compassion is deeply embedded in social hierarchies and social process of othering (2004: 4). She writes: ‘[i]n operation, compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is over

⁶¹Massumi has been widely criticised for discharging an entire history of feminist, queer and critical race critique that was (and is) sensitive to the political, social and economic structures of exclusion, and has developed counter-hegemonic strategies (Hemmings, 2005: 557-558; Tyler et al., 2008). His dualistic model of ‘liberating and mobilising’ affect versus ‘rigidifying’ meaning has also been criticised as ‘moralistic’ (Koivunen 2010: 24)

there' (Ibid.). However, she nevertheless still draws some distinction, as emotional attachments like optimism can cause a wide range of contrasting affects such as joy, outrage and anger, which may be felt as hurtful. She phrases this as the distinction between the structure of an emotion and its (variable) affective qualities. For her, affect is a relation, an attachment that shapes public feeling and, as a consequence, personal feeling. Cvetkovich uses affect in a general sense that encompasses feeling, emotion, impulses and desires and their historical social construction. Yet she prefers the term feeling 'because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as a bodily sensations and feelings and psychic and cognitive experiences' (2012: 4). Her description highlights the vernacular function of feeling as a concept that brings body and mind together, thereby disrupting the Cartesian body/mind split. Like scholars such as Isobel Armstrong (2000), who argue that sensing and making sense (body and mind) play together in the act of reading, Cvetkovich reads 'archives of feeling' to explore 'cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in their content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception' (2003: 7). Cvetkovich's work is valuable for this project because she theorises our engagement with cultural texts as affective, as something we feel, and she explores 'how affective experiences can provide the basis for new cultures' (Ibid.). Humour, for instance, is in her understanding an affect that can 'make room for another kind of story' (2003: 23) besides traumatic experiences. Her aim is to tease out how affect, which is for her always the foundation of public cultures, can be productive and enable new ways of thinking, even if it is associated with negative experiences such as trauma or depression.

Throughout this thesis, I draw on the work of Ahmed who also understands affect, emotion and feelings also as overlapping. Ahmed renders Massumi's strict distinction between affect and emotion problematic because she argues that they can be

separated analytically, but not as lived experience. No matter how immediate sensation appears, how unconscious it may be or how it might escape language, for Ahmed it is always mediated through our body and our skin, both of which have a cultural history. Hence, everything ‘we feel is tight to what we already know’ (Sundén, 2010: 51). Her critique of the conceptualisation of affect as something other than emotion leads her to primarily speak of emotion, but in a more elastic and composite way. From Ahmed’s perspective, feelings are not innate, but neither do they come from the outside. Rather, she understands them as coming into being through exchange, through circulation between bodies and signs. They are produced as ‘effects of circulation and interaction’ (2004a: 8). In her concept of ‘affective economies’, Ahmed draws on Marx’s theory of capital to develop a framework that illustrates the way in which affect ‘travels’ and accumulates value through circulation.⁶² She writes:

Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become. (Ahmed, 2004a: 45)

Yet this circulation of affect can also fix the objects of emotions. For instance, some figures have been associated with particular discourses and practices so often that certain meanings and affects have begun to stick to them. The particular figure or representation is then seen as *having* certain characteristics, as *being* good or bad, rather than *seeming* good or bad, owing both to the particular way in which we come into contact with the figure, and its own history of sticky associations (Ahmed, 2004b: 127-128; 2011). Affect sticks people, values and ideas together, sometimes so tightly that

⁶² The idea that emotions are innate – and as such by-products of evolutionary necessity, protecting humans from danger – is widespread within the fields of biology and anthropology. For instance, Paul Ekman (1993) argues, based on his study in Papua New Guinea, that there are six universal facial expressions that communicate our feelings: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise and disgust.

the object becomes what sticks to it: the stranger is not someone who elicits fear in me, the stranger is danger. Ahmed explains:

I have suggested that emotions, which respond to the proximity of others, do not respond the way that they do because of the inherent characteristics of others: we do not respond with love or hate because others are loveable or hateful. It is through affective encounters that objects and others are perceived as having attributes, which 'gives' the subject an identity that is apart from others. (2004a: 52-53)

Here, Ahmed demonstrates how feelings are socially and culturally constructed, how they travel, accumulate or 'stick' to certain bodies, but also how they conceal their constructed nature and appear natural, and authentic.

If we take seriously the notion that affect travels along normative discourses and practices, it becomes clear that emotions are linked to power relations and social hierarchies that endow others with meanings or value (Ahmed, 2004a: 4), and which can reify power inequalities. A number of feminist theorists explore the ways in which affect keeps systems of unequal power relations alive: Tyler asserts for instance that 'our disgust reactions [towards particular figures and media representations] are often revealing of wider social power relations (2008: 19). Similarly, Berlant explores how an optimistic attachment to the fantasy of a 'good life' is actually an obstacle to one's flourishing because it cannot be lived in times of 'ordinary crisis' and keeps our current precarious economic, social and political situation in place (2011). For Ahmed, a 'politics of emotion' involves an analysis of how 'emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination' (2004a: 12), how others become objects of our feelings, and how emotions stick to certain bodies more than others. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed explores how ideas which are culturally deemed as good, such as happiness, function to establish a shared horizon of social expectations that link bodies

together – I am only happy if you are happy – aligning them and directing them towards certain life choices and away from others. Through the figures of the feminist killjoy, the unhappy queer, the angry black woman, and the melancholic migrant, she critiques the notion that happiness is inherently a good thing by illustrating how happiness is used to justify social oppression, and the affective and moral work that subjects take on in order to fulfil the ‘happiness duty’:

Your unhappiness would threaten my happiness. If my happiness is dependent upon your happiness, then you have the power to determine my happiness. You might thus feel obliged to conceal your unhappiness in order to protect my happiness. *You have a duty to be happy for me.* (Ahmed, 2010: 91; emphasis in original)

Ahmed also demonstrates how objects, signs and bodies stick together through the promise of happiness, how ‘things become good, or acquire their value as good, insofar as they point towards happiness’ (2010: 26). Her work illustrates how humour can be seen as a shared orientation that defines – as I show in Chapter Four – what is good and tasteful and what is not.

Drawing on these various critical literatures, I understand affect as an ambiguous force. I do not strictly follow the intersection between pre-conscious affect, personal feeling and social emotion, but rather I see these categories as entangled and overlapping. I understand affect as an intensity or a force that shapes the relations between different animate and inanimate bodies but this intensity is not outside of cultural discourses and practices but rather part of it. In my understanding, following Ahmed, affect orientates bodies and objects in a certain way, towards – or away from – each other. It is the force that literally moves us in our bodies in ways that (sometimes) cannot be articulated in language by naming it or making sense of it. One might think here of the shiver down the spine or the gut feeling that we experience when

encountering an online representation. In this sense, affect points to the experience of intensities, to the way in which media images are felt through bodies, a feeling that seems inexplicable, even paradoxical, and might not be translatable into words. As this description already illustrates, for me, as for other feminist cultural theorists, affect and feeling are difficult to distinguish. I use emotion when I refer to specific emotive states such as anger, happiness or disgust. However, as Ahmed has shown, emotions are never simply in bodies but become through circulation and relation with our surrounding. Furthermore emotions are often accompanied by bodily feelings: disgust, for instance, is often linked to nausea. Hence emotion cannot be understood without the body and bodily feeling. Thus, although I am aware of the different connotations and dimensions affect, feeling and emotion have, I, like Cvetkovich, tend to use affect in a generic sense, rather than in the more specific Deleuzian sense in which affect is strictly different from emotion. In my analysis, affect is a category that can encompass feelings and emotions as well as gut reactions, impulses and sensory experiences. As such, my understanding of affect is not only informed by feminist scholars and the politics of emotions, but also draws on Deleuzian understandings of affect as ‘an ability to affect and be affected, [...] as a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act’ (Massumi, 1987: xvii). Throughout my core chapters, I explore how my encounters with humorous online representations affect me and are affected by me in sometimes surprising and contradictory ways. But a Deleuzian understanding of affect is especially productive for my considerations in the Conclusion: here I consider if online representations which emerge through different contacts of animate and in-animate bodies are merely products of a society of control, or if they can enable new ways of thinking and connecting with our surrounding. On the whole, my use of affect is mainly informed by feminist scholars who theorise affect as a

relation that shapes and is shaped through social contact. This relation can be felt in the individual body as a feeling or an emotion but it also shapes communities, societies and political structures by aligning bodies in the same way. And yet it also contains ideas about affect as a disruptive force and intensity that cannot be foreseen, and opens these online celebrity representations up for a new reading and understanding. In the next section, I explore this potential of affect in more detail when I elaborate how scholars in digital cultures have theorised affect.

Digital Culture and Affect

Digital culture has often been understood as ‘the virtual’: separate from, and opposed, to material reality, and to senses like touch and smell. This lack of physicality and geographical proximity is either celebrated, and seen as opening up new spaces of interaction and subversion, or regarded with scepticism and anxiety. Early cybertopian feminist writers such as Sherry Turkle, for instance, celebrate the absence of bodily markers in online spaces. Leaving the possibly flawed body with impeding physical markers such as gender and race behind, the individual online is a process considered to be ‘free floating’, and therefore full of creative agency (Turkle, 1995). As Vivian Sobchack suggests, according to these theorists, ‘man’s lived body [...] in all its material facticity, its situatedness, its finitude, and its limitations, seemed to have been transubstantiated through textualization into the infinite possibility, receptivity, literality, and irresponsibility of the “pure” sign’ (2004: 167). Dis-embodied cybertopian ideas have been critiqued by other feminist scholars who consider the privileged position of the mind online to be merely a reiteration of the violent mind/body dualism that has for so long excluded women from public life. Jenny Sundén writes for instance that ‘where “the meat” is left behind and disembodied consciousness released from its earthly groundings, the Cartesian separation of mind from body is no

longer a contradiction, a divide under threat, but re-articulated and fortified' (2001: 216). This argument has also been expressed earlier by Nancy Paterson, who argues that '[a]ccess to machinery and technology has been culturally sex-typed as masculine. In maintaining control over new technologies and by promoting and adhering to a technological world view, men have attempted to silence [women]' (1998: n.p.) A number of theorists challenge the radical separation between the imaginary and the 'real' through a post-structuralist lens. Through this approach, they illustrate how the body in front of the screen shapes the performance of the body on the screen. Rather than the body being left behind, they argue that the body instead gets 'translated' into cyberspace.⁶³ This happens either through the visual representation of the 'real' life body through images, webcams or video material, or through the discursive performance of users. Written texts seem to construct a gendered, sexualised and race body even if no visual cues are given, because users employ gendered, sexed and raced scripts and norms from the 'offline' world in order to create authenticity online, which needs to be recognised by other users and can then enable meaningful interaction. In other words, the body and the experience that we have made in this body shape our online performances.

The intermeshing of online performance and lived embodiment is also demonstrated by Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson in their study of weblog users:

[A] person can read or write a weblog only to the extent that she or he is bodily capable of doing so [...] reading and writing weblogs requires bodily discipline (the ability to orient, reach for, and grasp or accomplish a task) and a disciplined

⁶³ Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips (2007) challenge the notion that cyberspaces would create unproblematic spaces of belonging for queer identities by pointing out how oppressive online and offline practices are interwoven. Lisa Nakamura (2002) critiques cybertopian ideas about the unmarked body online in her investigation into how race becomes translated online. Furthermore, Niels van Doorn, Sally Wyatt and Liesbet van Zoonen (2008) argue that gender becomes translated through the textual performance online.

body (a body trained to read and write, to manipulate a keyboard, to use computers and access the Internet). (2004:166)

Thus, the rhetoric of cyberspace might be one of immateriality, but online practices are deeply influenced by the material conditions of the offline world. This becomes apparent when we think about the digital divide, which makes obvious that only some bodies have the material resources and equipment to go online and participate. But, as Langellier and Peterson illustrate, the materiality of cyberspace is also highlighted when we consider what kind of body sits in front of the screen. This body shapes the materiality of its online representation through his/her textual performance (or the modes of representations he/she chooses), thereby giving the online representation a texture, a particular *feel*. As this shows, cyberspace is shaped by our 'offline' lives and the experiences that we have gained there. Nevertheless, discussions about digital culture have historically been framed within a language of lack and loss. Rather than making 'real' sensuous experiences (i.e. those made in the 'offline' world), cyberspace is understood to simulate these experiences through means that can only be inadequate. Online environments thereby deprive us of the richness and synaesthesia of real feeling, replacing it with a bad copy. An example of these early accounts of cyberspace is shown in Clifford Stoll's assertion that

[much] of what happens over the networks is a metaphor – we chat without speaking, smile without grinning, and hug without touching [...]. How sad – to dwell in a metaphor without living experience. The only sensations are a glowing screen, the touch of a keyboard, and the sound of an occasional bleep. All synthetic. (1995: 43-44)

As this quotation shows, cyberspace was often conceived not only as dis-embodied, but in consequence also as dis-affected.

This idea of digital culture as void of sensuous experiences has been challenged by media and technology scholars who draw on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to rethink the connections between body and technology. Affect is not conceptualised here as personal, but rather as a force that cuts across and connects different bodies. Through notions of rhizomes, networks, assemblages and the virtual, ‘affect is in these approaches first and foremost devised as potentiality, as a positively charged category of futurity, change and (at least possible) freedom’ (Koivunen, 2010: 16). Even though such an understanding of affect might seem overtly celebratory of the possibilities of digital cultures, it is very productive because it allows us to understand digital culture as tactile and palpable, with the ability to enable experiences and knowledges that might escape traditional forms of representation. This Deleuzian-influenced school of thought in digital cultures is important for my project as I theorise digital culture as material and sensuous through the concept of skin. My claim is that online celebrity representations have a certain texture or feel which is produced not only through the body in front of the screen but also through particular technologies. This materiality might not be something that is accounted for in more traditional textual analysis or semiotics, but it is still important for our reading and understanding of online representations. Texture gives us an idea of how online celebrity representations might feel. This shapes our understanding of such representations not only through cognitive processes and conscious decoding, but also through the immediate cues and feelings we get through our encounter with them. Hence, cyberspace is sensuous even if online touching and feeling might be different from our offline touching and feeling.

Scholars that inspire my reading of online representations include Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova (2001) and Laura U. Marks (2002). Informed by new materialist critique and phenomenology, they draw attention to the affective intensities produced by encounters with digital images, as well as to the importance of the technological base

and make-up of media technologies, their material properties, programmability, operations, and logics of action that 'generate text and images rather than merely represent or reproduce what exists elsewhere' (Chun, 2004: 27; see also: Marks, 2002: 163). Parisi and Terranova draw on Massumi's conceptualisation of affect as pre-personal intensity to argue that digital images, in opposition to celluloid film, work through an affective immediacy that does not allow any distance that would be necessary for a controlling gaze:

Films that use digital effects overwhelm the spectator with their demand for a participation that is not so much about controlling as about being inundated by liquid images. Far from determining a relation between inside and outside, subject and object, digital effects tackle the mediatic interface between the body and the image (Parisi & Terranova, 2001: 122).

They argue that digital images 'convey the power of affect' rather than enabling distance through which affect can be filtered down to emotions, and as such become organised and limited. The possibility of digital media to affect the body directly illustrates for them the agency of materiality. Marks is more influenced by phenomenological approaches than new materialism, but she also argues for the immediacy that certain images, produced through particular technologies and camera angles, can enable. For her, images can have 'haptic' and 'optic' qualities. Even though the boundaries are often blurry, optic visuality privileges the representational power of the image, giving a sense of distance and mastery; haptic visuality tends to escape mediation and blurs the boundary between perceiver and object. Haptic images are encountered by the skin as well as the eyes, and thus encourage a 'bodily relation between the viewer and the image' (Marks, 2000: 164). For Marks, haptic visuality is concerned with the texture of an image. The haptic

invites a look that moves on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realizes what she or he is beholding. [...] While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. (Marks, 2000: 163)

As such, haptic images are experienced in a different way to optic images, and give rise to different resonances and feelings of intimacy. For haptic images, the viewer must bring his or her resources of memory and imagination to complete them. The haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image critically and affectively instead of being pulled into a predictable narrative. These images are full of tactile qualities, and blur the boundary between perceiver and object.

A number of scholars in media and digital culture have drawn on the large body of feminist and queer scholarship on politics of emotion – these include, for example, Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton in their work on online emotions (2013), and Adi Kuntsman and Athina Karatzogianni (2012a) in their collection on the ‘affective fabric’ of the digital, which illustrates how affective structures mediate between the actual and the digital virtual. Furthermore, in *Online Belongings* (2009), Debora Ferreday investigates the dynamics of fantasy, gender and affect in online settings, and analyses how feelings of belonging and affective attachment are produced and circulated in online communities and e-commerce websites. She draws on Tomkins’s understanding of affect and makes clear that the affective registers involved are not only ‘positive’, but that they also entail the circulation of hate, acts of mourning and sensations of disgust. In her work she follows Cvetkovich and charts the role of affect on websites. These scholars illustrate, even though through different conceptualisations of affect, the affective quality of cyberspace, and have helped me to develop my own affective reading of cyberspace. My affective reading through skin, however, is mostly inspired by the work of Paasonen (2007, 2010). Paasonen rethinks the relationship

between online pornography and the viewer's body as a sensuous and affective process, a reading that challenges notions of visual mastery without glossing over the structural power inequalities that shape online surroundings. Through the concept of 'affective resonance', she theorises affect as personal, human and social, but also as the sensory, synaesthetic, and visceral aspect of encountering images. Paasonen explores ideas of affective labour, as well as considerations of how 'experiences and articulations of affect attach people, objects, texts and values together and pull them apart' (2011: 22; see also: Ahmed, 2004a; 2010). Her multilayered use of affect is suitable for an investigation of online representations because online media might enable through technology new experiences and feelings, yet it is also shaped through offline power relations which influence the representational patterns online. From Paasonen's perspective, 'the internet is about mediation and representation but equally about communication and exchange, technical protocols and affordances, and affective, visceral gut reaction. It is not one thing or the other but an assemblage of factors and actors that cut through and build onto one another' (2011: 12). Importantly, Paasonen's affective reading of online pornography is open to the transformative and surprising elements enabled by new media technology, while also taking into account the history and genre of media:

New media can be made familiar (or domesticated) through analogies to previous media, and familiar forms of representation and interaction help to bridge differences in technological makeup (no matter how radical these may be). At the same time, these analogies have shortcomings in not allowing for differences in materiality and technological horizons of possibility. (2011: 102-103)

This illustrates how online formations like celebrity gossip blogs often invite us to draw comparisons to more traditional media formats. The digital photos of celebrities that the blogs I examine entail can be compared to photographs in print magazines, and the

videos that they have embedded can be compared to film or television. I agree with Paasonen that this can be helpful, because literature on more traditional media forms can inform online research, but that an overreliance on these comparisons masks the specificities of online media.

Paasonen's work is important for this thesis because it is specifically about online media, and allows for an analysis in which 'the material and the textual', the sensuous and sense, 'matter and meaning' flow into each other (2011: 25). Her notion of an 'discomforting commute', which travels between a distant, more structural reading and a close affective reading, allows me to understand online representations as affective formations with both material and semiotic qualities. Her work shows how circuits of money, patterns of representation and questions of genre structure online representations, without closing up the transformative and surprising experiences online porn can engender. It links the process of making sense to the level of being moved, and transformed, by whatever one interacts with. Paasonen's theorisations of online pornography influence my affective reading of humorous online representations of celebrities in many ways: not only do I draw on her definition of affect as feelings, emotions, sensations, gut reactions and intensities that might be at times more or less defined by cultural discourses, I also share with her the conviction that everyday genres that might be commonly categorised as low and of less cultural value are not as straightforward and uncomplicated as we might first presume. A close attention to surprising affects and reactions, as well as takings seriously the material and technological affordances of online media, takes us beyond repetitive readings of them and allows us to understand their potentialities better: What can they do *besides* reiterating and exacerbating norms that are already there?

In this section, I have shown how theorists have made use of affect to rethink the entanglement of embodiment, materiality and digital technology. These scholars inform

my analysis in which I use skin as a heuristic device to rethink the connections between affect, embodiment and technology in celebrity gossip blogs. Their focus on immediacy, gut reactions and fantasy, which are provoked through the encounter of technology and body, inspire my reading of these blogs, and give me a critical vocabulary to grasp these 'ethereal' experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how literatures about audience studies, celebrity culture, affect theory and digital culture inform my critical framework. I have shown that these different archives contain theorisations of affect which help to re-visit and re-think the methodologies and concepts in their particular field. I began by demonstrating how different media formats encourage different ways of theorising the meaning-making processes of audiences. By tracing how theorists in media and cultural studies have conceptualised meaning-making in film, television and new forms of television (e.g. reality television and make-over shows), I have illustrated how affect and emotion became an increasingly important aspect in the ways in which we theorise representations. I then explored how scholars have long investigated the affective quality of celebrities. By mapping affect in early psychoanalytically informed approaches, as well as in post-structuralist readings and in more recent discussions about the emotional performances of celebrities, I have highlighted that the affective relationship between celebrity and audience cannot be examined without the wider socio-political context in which they are embedded, or without the context of new media and technology through which their representations are produced. Reading this literature with a focus on affect brings to the fore how my project is not only informed by this trajectory, but also how it contributes to it. The contribution of my analysis lies in the way in which I read those humorous online celebrity representations through a

specific lens (skin) which brings two schools of thought into dialogue: theories of the politics of emotions and scholarship on digital cultures. In order to flesh out my use of affect, I delineated the different discussions in which feelings, emotions and affect have been framed in media and cultural studies. As I have shown, my use of affect is mainly informed by feminist work on the politics of emotion, but it also contains traces of a Deleuzian understanding of affect. The productivity of the later was highlighted through my examination of the affective quality of cyberspace. As I have illustrated, many scholars in digital culture understand affect as an intensity that shapes and re-shapes differently the human and non-human bodies that it encounters. Such a Deleuzian conceptualisation of affect as a precognitive sensory experience and relation to surroundings enables us to tease out the sensuous and material quality of online environments. Hence, I have demonstrated in this chapter that I understand affect, emotions and feelings as overlapping rather than distinct from each other. As such, I conceive affect as embodied, lived, and social, yet also as intensities and forces that inanimate objects like digital photographs or GIFs can perform, and which can push the body in unforeseen directions. Overall, this chapter has fleshed out a critical framework through which I develop my reading through the skin. In the next chapter, I begin with my empirical analysis. I illustrate how these theoretical considerations allow me to trace the complex ways in which celebrity gossip blogs move their readers in affective and embodied ways, thereby producing ideas about femininity.

Chapter Two

Not only Seeing but Feeling: The Affective Production of Femininity in Celebrity Gossip Blogs

Feminist scholars have often argued that skin, as the fleshly envelope of the ‘docile body’, has a special function in the communication and construction of femininity. Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen (2011) explore, for instance, how current narratives of the beauty industry concerning the ‘right’ skin colour (tanning/whitening) and the ‘proper’ skin shape (cosmetic surgery) for women normalise and control femininities.⁶⁴ This highlights that skin is not mere matter, but also a doing that comes to signify gender through different practices and discourses ranging from the medical and scientific to the aesthetic. In a similar vein, Ahmed and Stacey (2001) illustrate the ways in which femininity and skin become intertwined through cultural ideas not only about what feminine skin should look like, but also, and perhaps more importantly, what it should *feel* like. They argue that in our Western neoliberal consumer culture, feminine skin must be smooth, soft and tight without any markers of otherness such as wrinkles, cellulite or scars. Clearly, smooth and tight skin is often read as the external evidence of an inner self that constantly self-monitors and self-improves through the ‘right’ consumption of beauty products. What is noteworthy for my argument is that this kind of skin makes cultural ideals about femininity as young and tender not only visible but also palpable. To put another way: proper femininity is not only a matter of seeing, but

⁶⁴ Normalisation refers to a number of social discourses and practices through which ideas, behaviours and subjects come to be seen as normal or natural in everyday life. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991[1975]), Foucault develops the concept of normalisation in the context of disciplinary power, and argues that normalisation produces an idealised norms of conduct – for example, the way a soldier should stand, march, present arms, and so on, as defined in minute detail – according to which the subject is then rewarded or punished for conforming to or deviating from this ideal. The crucial point about normalisation is that these disciplinary regimes operate seemingly without external pressure and force. The ideal disciplinary individual has internalised the rules and conforms to them. Feminist theorists such as Bordo (1993) and Cressida Heyes (2007) use Foucault’s account of normalisation to reveal the forces through which the female subject is produced within a purportedly free, neoliberal consumer culture.

also a matter of feeling. Online celebrity representations of ‘proper’ femininity would have a particular feel if we could touch them. The capability of skin to highlight the importance of touch and feeling for our meaning-making is central to this chapter.

I begin by exploring how we read celebrity online representations not only through our gaze but through our skin. I draw attention to the complex ways in which representations on Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com touch us in embodied ways, thereby mediating ideas about femininity not only through seeing, but also through feeling. I investigate online representations of female celebrities whose skin is either cosmetically re-done through surgery or digitally re-touched through technologies like Photoshop.⁶⁵ More specifically, I elaborate how celebrities that have altered their skins through such technologies are understood in these gossip blogs. I focus on cosmetic surgery and Photoshop for two reasons: firstly, cosmetic surgery and Photoshop might be different technologies that work on different skins (cosmetic surgery works on the ‘real’ skin whereas Photoshop alters the represented skin), but they are both practices through which celebrity skin is commonly manipulated, and both practices therefore raise questions about authenticity and artificiality. Depending on whether these skin manipulations can pass in the public opinion as ‘natural looking’ and therefore authentic, or as ‘too excessive’ and therefore fake, the celebrity becomes positioned accordingly as either immaculate or monstrous. The second reason is that both beauty practices remind us that skin cannot be fully grasped through the gaze, but that it also has the potential to betray us or to be misread. They are therefore suitable starting points for rethinking and challenging the privileged position that visibility commonly holds in discussions about meaning-making.⁶⁶

⁶⁵I use Photoshop (Adobe Photoshop Software) here as an umbrella term to signify digital image manipulation, and to refer to a range of software such as MS Paint, GIMP or Cine Paint.

⁶⁶The privileged position of the sense of visibility is justified in the Western world through power binaries which align seeing with objectivity, distance and reason, whereas other senses, especially touching, are associated with closeness, intimacy, the blurring of borders and emotion. This binary

In my discussion of the production of femininity in celebrity gossip blogs, I argue that female celebrities are interpellated to inhabit what I call ‘iconic’ skin. In semiotics, iconic signs are visual signs that bear a certain resemblance or likeness to the object, person or event to which they refer (Peirce, 1991: 181-183). However, iconic skin does not resemble an original immaculate skin that we find in real life, because this immaculate skin is unachievable and, crucially, unsustainable. A celebrity might embody iconic skin momentarily, in a particular photograph or scene, through the help of make-up, or Photoshop and lighting techniques, but when the light changes or the body moves, this immaculate bodily surface can become wrinkled and imperfect. Nevertheless, I suggest that celebrity skin can be seen as iconic when it resembles shared cultural ideas about an ideal feminine skin, where this ideal is taken to mean skin that is immaculate, glowing, light and evenly toned. The qualities of iconic skin have mainly two functions: firstly, they make the celebrity highly marketable owing to the ability to effortlessly change from one role into the next, with no markers of otherness like scars, skin conditions or uneven skin tone to hinder this smooth transition. Iconic skin also increases the celebrity’s selling power. As Stacey (1994) demonstrates in her work on beauty products such as ‘Lux Toilet Soap’, and Kathy Peiss(1998) shows in her work on ‘Max Factor’, celebrities are often understood as influencing the consumer habits of women who desire to inhabit a skin like that of a celebrity. Ordinary women try to even out skin tone and correct other visible flaws on the skin with foundation and concealers, and in doing so they imitate celebrity skin presented to them ubiquitously through advertising, films, magazines and online media. Secondly, iconic skin reinforces hegemonic and therefore highly desirable ideals of femininity. It is understood as the external, highly visible signifier of inner qualities such as morality, purity and spirituality. As I show in Chapter Four, these positive connotations, and the

between seeing and touching is also gendered, with seeing associated with masculinity and touching with femininity.

feelings that are associated with them, are deeply connected to questions of race because iconic skin is often understood to be white skin. Yet, it is not only raced but also classed because iconic skin is the visible sign of privilege (Iqani, 2012: 322). Hence, when female celebrities carry iconic skin, they embody cultural fantasies of goodness, of whiteness and wealth.

In this chapter, I am not only concerned with celebrities that inhabit iconic skin, I also explore how celebrities that fail to carry this skin (through the ‘wrong’ use of cosmetic surgery and Photoshop) are affectively represented on Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com. I aim to extend a semiotic or visual analysis of these re-done and re-touched skins, by drawing attention to the multiple ways in which their skins are policed and ridiculed but also how they can become resignified and rehabilitated online. This means paying close attention to the technological tools and possibilities that both bloggers and users have and which can re-touch these online representations. I explore, for instance, how commenting, hyperlinks and image manipulation can re-signify celebrity skin by moving the blog reader in embodied and affective ways. Furthermore, I elaborate on questions about the texture and materiality of online celebrity representations: how would it feel to touch the represented celebrity skin? I argue that these are important questions that shape how ideas of femininity are affectively produced in celebrity gossip blogs. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on technologies of cosmetic surgery, and explore, by moving from surgery on publicly visible skin to surgery on hidden skin, how the three blogs read female celebrities that have made use of surgery in different ways. On Dlisted.com, for example, celebrities that try to embody the heteronormative norms of feminine skin too excessively are ridiculed, while grotesque skin can be celebrated for its potential to denaturalise gender. On Perezhilton.com, cosmetically altered skin needs to be publicly acknowledged or confessed to in order to flag respectable femininity, while on Jezebel.com proper

femininity inhabits natural and uncut skin. I discuss the assumptions upon which these ideas of proper and improper femininities are based, with a particular focus on the problematic nature/culture binary. In the second part of this chapter, I draw attention to the ways in which Photoshop is discussed in those blogs. Moving from subtly to extremely manipulated digital photographs, I examine how Photoshop is used to redraw the lines between proper and improper femininities. I discuss how questions of texture, materiality and affect influence our reading of these celebrity online representations. Overall, this chapter introduces my key argument that how we make meaning of online celebrity representations is it not only a matter of vision, of what we see in front of us on the screen, but it is also shaped by touching and feeling.

Shifting Gazes, Feelings and Cosmetic Surgery

Cosmetic surgery has a prominent place in the world of celebrities, as many owe their fame to their carefully staged and managed appearance.⁶⁷Celebrities that have gone too far in their use of cosmetic surgery might be the target of social derision, but going *too far* can also be a way to become a celebrity. People such as Jocelyn Wildenstein, for instance, owe their celebrity status purely to their grotesque and monstrous appearance, caused by an excessive use of cosmetic surgery. Wildenstein was a low-profile New York socialite before she became infamous for her excessive use of cosmetic surgery, which left her face too artificial for reality.⁶⁸Meredith Jones (2008) argues that celebrities who have made excessive use of cosmetic surgery have two functions: on the one hand, they represent a monstrous and abject femininity in their violation of the

⁶⁷Anne Anlin Cheng (2011) argues that skin, as the visible surface that we see in front of us, and the means by which we read gendered and racialised differences, is crucial for the formation of a celebrity figure. Virginia Blum argues that cosmetic surgery holds such a prominent place in celebrity culture because celebrities try to imitate through this practice their own screen image which has been altered by cameras and lighting (2003: 154).

⁶⁸According to Meredith Jones, '[n]one of [Wildenstein's] features are overly strange in themselves [...]. But together they form an aesthetic that is distanced from the mainstream' and make her appear monstrous (2008: 123). Furthermore, it needs to be highlighted that Wildenstein represents a different form of celebrity than, for instance, Dolly Parton. Yet, as I have argued in the Introduction I use celebrity as an umbrella term in this thesis to refer to very different kinds of public personas as celebrities.

borders of good taste, modesty and notions of naturalness through which Western ideas of idealised femininity are constructed. These women are perceived to have taken things ‘too far’, and are consequently now forced to inhabit deformed and grotesque skin, which is read as the external evidence of their inner turmoil. On the other hand, celebrities who have undergone excessive amounts of surgery function to rehabilitate other skins – for instance, those skins that have been altered through cosmetic surgery, but upon which the traces of this intervention are less obvious, and which appear more natural. In this sense, celebrities that inhabit abject skin enable other surgically enhanced celebrities to pass as natural, and thereby contribute to the progressive normalisation of cosmetic surgery.⁶⁹

I want to expand on Jones’s argument by suggesting that what makes certain femininities abject is not only a matter of the quality and quantity of cosmetic surgery, but rather that this is dependent on the background against which this skin is read. I use the term ‘background’ to connote the knowledge an audience already has about a celebrity figure (the star image) and the context within which the viewer of the celebrity representation speaks (in the example I am about to discuss, this is Dlisted.com). The tension created by the intersection of these two realms inevitably influences how, and with what affects, we view the representation. In the following example of singer Dolly Parton and actress Jessica Lange, two celebrities that have made excessive use of cosmetic surgery, I illustrate how their skins become read against different backgrounds – Dlisted.com uses a queer, celebratory gaze to read Parton’s skin, but then subsequently uses a heteronormative, disciplining gaze to read Lange’s. The difference

⁶⁹ Jones explains this process of normalisation in terms of weight loss practices: ‘Weight-loss dieting might at first seem like a forceful intervention into “normal” eating habits. Dieting can be seen as an expression of self-hatred and a hurtful subordination to patriarchal beauty standards. Yet, when measured against more radical intervention such as anorexia then dieting appears like a reasonable and self-responsible practice’ (2008: 112). She argues that the process of normalisation always requires a monstrous other against which it can be measured and judged as less radical.

between these readings highlights the way in which the gaze of a located and embodied subject or online space shifts depending on what it encounters.

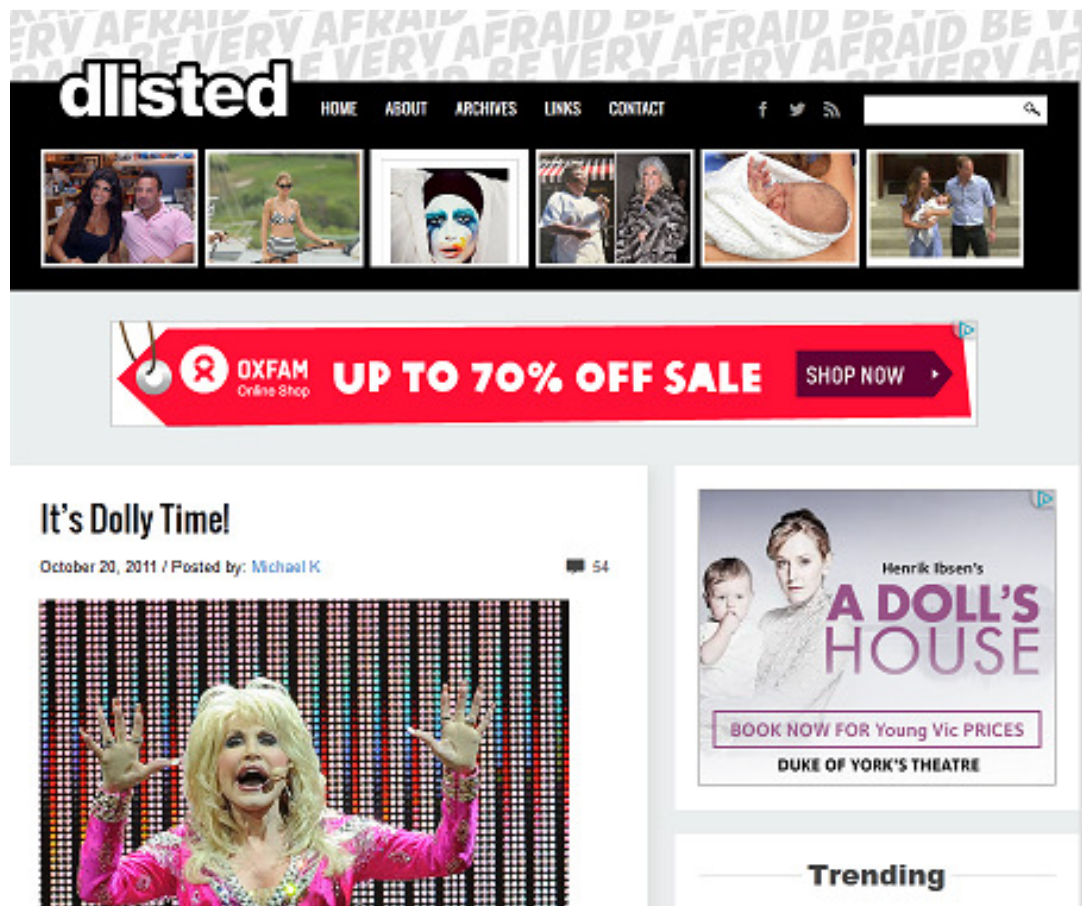


Figure 1: 'It's Dolly Time' (Michael K., 2011a)

Parton has had numerous cosmetic surgeries, including facelifts, upper and lower blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, fat transfer, Botox and Restylane injections, breast implants, and chemical peelings.⁷⁰ She is very open about these procedures and talks about them in interviews in a humorous and self-ironic way, which invites an ironic or queer reading of them. Yet, owing to the extent of her surgery, Parton's skin can also be read as excessive, and as a failed attempt to embody conventional feminine beauty. Her skin shows 'inappropriate extremes,' and thereby violates the border of good taste, class and graceful aging, all of which are of high importance for the successful performance of proper femininity in a neoliberal consumer culture (Jones, 2008: 116-119). Yet despite her grotesque skin, Parton is celebrated on Dlisted.com:

These pictures of Dolly spreading natural talent and sheer beauty to her fans at the Hard Rock Hotel in Hollywood, FL is for all you hating whores out there who are constantly spewing shit like *'But Michael, Helen Mirren and Meryl Streep are women of a certain age who are organically beautiful and aging with dignity.'* To which I say, aging with dignity is overrated! (Michael, 2011a; emphasis in original)

The ironic tone of this post is foregrounded through the way in which it highlights Parton's 'sheer beauty' whilst simultaneously contrasting this description with a less than charming photograph that depicts her as monstrous, with a wide open mouth and stretched-out arms (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the post can still be read as an homage to Parton, and as one which empowers aging femininities because 'aging with dignity is overrated'. The narrow boundaries of proper aging are now momentarily confounded by ironically installing a different aesthetic perception – Parton's 'sheer beauty'. Michael K.'s irony is not cynical, sarcastic or expressing a critical and negative attitude towards Parton and thereby limiting possible performances of femininity. Rather, it can be

⁷⁰ Blepharoplasty is cosmetic surgery on the eyelids, and rhinoplasty is cosmetic surgery on the nose.

understood as a form of irony which Pierre Fontanier (1977) describes as praising or flattering someone under the pretence of blaming or criticising. It can be seen as an asset of ‘camp humour’ (Babuscio, 1993), a kind of humour that grows out of a gay sensibility and will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. In this sense, irony is here playful and affectionate, pointing towards the idea that Parton’s overly altered skin merely represents a different understanding of feminine beauty, but one that is nevertheless also legitimate.

However, the negative tone of a 2009 Dlisted.com post about Jessica Lange illustrates that this alternative manner of aging is only deemed acceptable for certain celebrity figures:

Unless Jessica Lange is starring in an Oxygen movie based on the life of Jocelyn Wildenstein, she has no business wearing that face. [...] Humans don’t ripen like that. [...] Jessica needs to gaze at Jane Fonda some more. That’s what her face should look like! [...] And that plastic surgery comment doesn’t apply to Dolly. She’s a completely organic beauty. The Tennessee mountain air keeps her looking as fresh as baby’s breath. (Michael K., 2009)

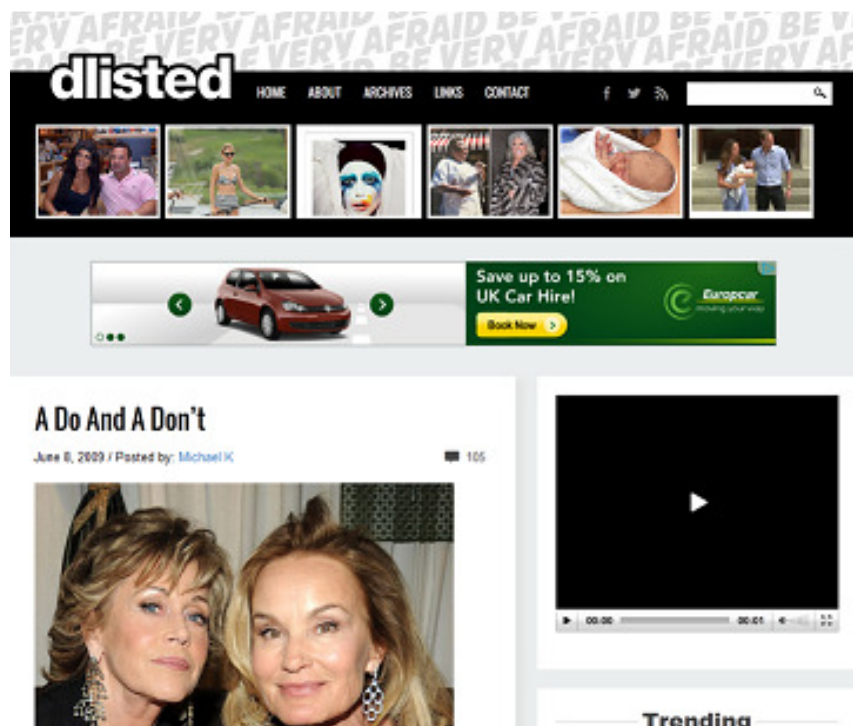




Figure 2: ‘A Do And A Don’t’ (Michael K., 2009)

In this instance, the ironic comment that ‘[Dolly] is a completely organic beauty’ can again be read in an affectionate way. Dlisted.com allows Parton to inhabit grotesque skin, but Lange, as a femininity that cannot pass as a queer icon and which merely seems to follow through her beauty practices heteronormative ideas about feminine appearance, is compared to women who ‘ripen’ properly and according to cultural standards, such as Jane Fonda. For Dlisted.com, Lange has ‘no business wearing that face,’ and her misuse of cosmetic surgery is policed while Parton’s excessive use is affectionately mocked and allowed. How might this different reading of overly altered skin be understood? Why does surgically altered feminine skin evoke such different affective responses? I now explore the two different backgrounds against which Parton’s and Lange’s skins are read, and demonstrate how these backgrounds enable two different femininities to emerge: one a subversive and, therefore, in the Dlisted.com context, proper femininity, and one an overly compliant and therefore failed femininity.

Dlisted.com understands subversive femininities as proper and compliant femininities as failed because, as I have argued in the Introduction to this thesis, it is a queer space which aims to scramble (hetero)normative notions. As such, it pursues a politics of the ‘counterintuitive’ (Halberstam, 2012: xiv) that finds pleasure and potential in subjectivities that disturb the often violent workings of the normative rather than finding them upsetting or annoying.

In this sense, Parton’s skin is celebrated on Dlisted.com because it is conceived as that which does not simply follow traditional forms of femininity. Rather, it is understood as a subversive act that disturbs traditional norms of femininity through over-performing them. I turn to Irigaray’s concept of mimesis in order to understand how the imitation of gendered norms can become a subversive act.⁷¹ Mimesis, from her perspective, is a form of resistance, in which women imperfectly imitate stereotypes of femininity in order to reveal such stereotypes and undermine them (1985b: 76).⁷² This resistance is necessary because, according to Irigaray, in the western phallogocentric system, the feminine (‘the mother’ or ‘the woman’, but especially her eroticism and her sexual organs) is made invisible (1985a; 1985b). The feminine exists only to support the one, masculine sex, but is itself never allowed to exist in its own right. The one sex, which is metonymically related with the one ‘of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper

⁷¹ Butler’s theory of performativity as repetitive acts that reinforce and create gender is similar to mimesis. Parodic performative acts such as drag are similar to Irigaray’s notion of mimesis because both strategies work through excessiveness and vision. Both strategies overdo the visual signifiers for femininity (for example big breasts, big lips and wrinkle-free skin) with such vicious, sarcastic excess so that the absurdity and constructed nature of these norms becomes visible, thereby blowing heteronormative structures and ideas about femininity apart (Shimizu, 2008). Both Butler and Irigaray view parodic repetition as a repetition with a difference and therefore potentially subversive. Yet Irigaray’s concept of mimesis differs from performativity because, for Butler, repetition is not aimed at creating ‘real’ femininity but rather to dismantle the fictional character of gender (1990: 137-138, 148). For Irigaray, mimesis is a strategic tool to carve a new language through which ‘real’ femininity can exist. Hence, whereas for Irigaray mimesis functions on a strategic level, for Butler it is constitutive of femininity (or gender).

⁷² Many are sceptical about the subversive potential of mimicry. Carol Anne Tyler argues, for instance, that it merely reinscribes white, middle-class femininity because the mimicked femininity is only a parody when measured against a normative style: ‘It is only from a middle-class point of view that Dolly Parton looks like a female impersonator’ (1991: 57). Kaja Silverman argues that mimicry entails the danger of a subject’s possible compliance with the assigned cultural image, thereby conflating the ‘I’ and the body image (1996: 205). I suggest, however, that the subversive potential of mimicry arises not from what is actually seen, but from its power to create suspicion that the image might be deceptive.

name, of the proper meaning', installs a visual economy in which only forms that are solid and unified can be recognised; by contrast, forms that are multiple and fluid (i.e. feminine) remain invisible (Irigaray, 1985b: 26). Because, according to Irigaray, the feminine cannot be represented in this phallogentric visual economy, it therefore has no choice but to assume the feminine role that had been historically assigned: the role of the mirror, the imitator/mimic. However, by taking this role on deliberately and unfaithfully, the feminine can then unmask, through excess and overdoing, the inner workings of a system that construct subjectivity in this way.

Why does Dlisted.com read Parton's skin not as one which has *gone too far*, but rather as an expression of resistance through mimesis which, in turn, shifts her from the position of abject femininity to that of the empowered and celebrated female performer? I argue that this is because her skin is read against a queer background. Parton's 'star image', together with Dlisted.com's own background (its overt queer politics) invites a queer gaze, and she is constructed as a gay icon. Hence, even though Parton's private reasons for cosmetic surgeries may indicate a serious attempt to enhance her feminine beauty, her skin is already placed in a camp context, with particular affects attached to it. This camp context associates her skin with parody, subversion, and the deconstruction of gendered and sexualised norms, all of which can cause anxiety, anger and frustration when perceived from a conservative background. Yet reading her skin as subversive can also give rise to such emotions as joy, delight and pleasure when approached from a position that is more critical towards gendered and sexualised norms. Hence, which emotions are produced depends entirely on the type of space in which Parton's skin is read. Dlisted.com can be regarded as a queer online space in the sense that it celebrates, through often quite vulgar humour, the non-normative appearances, qualities, behaviours and practices of celebrities, non-celebrities, animals or even inanimate objects. This does not mean that the label 'queer' confines Dlisted.com to

certain readings, but it does mean that it is more likely to offer some readings than others. It is likely that Dlisted.com associates women that disturb traditional notions of femininity with positive affects such as pleasure and enjoyment. Parton arrives on the blog with her status as a gay icon already in place. This combination makes it more likely that Dlisted.com will foreground Parton's subversive element rather than her compliance with stereotypical feminine beauty standards (after all, Parton enhances her breasts and not her stomach). Dlisted.com reads Parton's skin as mocking traditional notions of femininity and traditional aesthetic norms, and therefore celebrates it.

By contrast, Lange's surgically altered skin is not read by Dlisted.com as subversive mimesis. Rather, it is ridiculed as monstrous, as that which can be compared to 'others', such as Joycelyn Wildenstein. Lange's skin is not read through the queer gaze that would allow her appearance to be understood as a parody of the norms that society holds for aging women: rather, her excessive attempt to rejuvenate her skin is policed through a heteronormative disciplining gaze that presents her as an example of *failed* femininity. The queer gaze shifts to the heteronormative gaze because of the tension between Lange's background and Dlisted.com's background. Unlike Parton, Lange is not a gay icon, but rather represents heteronormative femininity, and is as such understood as desiring the straight male gaze. Dlisted.com adopts this lens when reading her skin, and compares her appearance with normative gendered aesthetics. Through this comparison, her skin is understood as ugly and other, a reading which saturates her performance of femininity with feelings of contempt and makes her the target of derision. As such, Lange represents a version of improper femininity that fails to successfully perform gendered beauty aesthetics. Even though Dlisted.com can be understood as a queer online space, different ways of looking are invoked to make sense of different celebrity skins. This illustrates, in turn, that even though Dlisted.com is written by a gay New Yorker of Asian, Mexican and Danish descent whose blog can be

positioned as queer because his online entries are often marked by an explicit rejection of ‘the mandates of cultural logics such as late capitalism, heteronormativity, and [...] white supremacy’ (Muñoz, 2009: 111), this online space is far from homogenous or unified. This queer blog is as such not always already subversive to dominant discourses about femininity, but has the potential to reinforce them as well.

My aim so far has been to demonstrate that overly cosmetically altered skin is not automatically the visible signifier of a negative femininity. I have illustrated how skin changes its meaning when the gaze is shifted through which celebrity skin is read. Parton’s skin is read through the queer gaze that sees her skin a performance of mimicry, while Lange’s skin is read through the heteronormative gaze that perceives her skin as a failed performance of femininity. Different gazes, in these examples, emerge through the affective relationships between the celebrity and the online space. This is not to say that these celebrities do not have specific affects and ways of reading them attached to them, but a reading *of* the skin asks from which position they are read and how dynamic and flexible this position is. Owing to its technological, interactive make-up, the blog is often understood as a dynamic background, and I have shown that this is also ideologically flexible depending on which celebrity figure it encounters. This has critical implications for my subsequent readings of how online celebrity representations affectively produce ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness because it illustrates that blogs are not structured by a fixed political and cultural orientation, but that they reform and adjust depending on which celebrity figure they encounter. In the next section, I argue that meaning-making is not only influenced by the context and the background against a celebrity skin is read, but that it is also shaped by the discursive affective act of confession, i.e. giving the inner reasons for this alteration.

Confession, Empathy and Respectable Femininity

It might make sense that celebrities who have overdone cosmetic surgery are mocked, as it is assumed that they have the expertise and the financial resources to achieve superior surgical results. Yet what remains to be understood is why celebrities who have apparently been successful in their use of cosmetic surgery – in that their altered skin embodies current Western standards of beauty according to race and class – are nevertheless ridiculed. In this section, I explore how Perez Hilton.com produces affectively proper and improper forms of femininity through the cosmetically altered skin of singer/songwriter Alexa Ray Joel and reality TV star Heidi Montag. As the daughter of singer Billy Joel and supermodel Christie Brinkley, Joel has an ‘ascribed’ celebrity status (Rojek, 2001: 17).⁷³ Mainstream media portrays her as well educated, talented and as an expert on style and fashion. Montag, on the other hand, has no inherited celebrity status, but became famous in 2004 through her appearance in *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County*, a former MTV reality television series. Rather than being famous for her talent, she is known for her radical publicity stunts, such as her extreme make-over in 2010 when Montag (then aged twenty-three) had ten cosmetic surgery procedures in one sitting. Despite the fact that both celebrities have undergone cosmetic surgery ‘successfully’, the results of which represent iconic ideals of feminine beauty, as both are slim, white, young, and even-featured, their skins are read differently: Perez Hilton.com posits Joel as a representation of respectable femininity, while locating Montag as symbolic of that abject femininity that is the target of violent humour and endless ridicule.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that understandings of what constitutes proper and improper femininity are not only based on the binary between monstrous and iconic skin, or between a ‘good’ surgical result and a ‘bad’ one. Rather, how we read skin

⁷³ An ascribed celebrity is someone who has, owing to lineage, biological descent or birthright, a pre-determined celebrity status.

depends upon the different backgrounds a blog provides and against which the celebrity figure is read. I develop this argument further by interrogating how confession works as an affective-discursive tool to install an intimate relationship between celebrity figure and reader. In this sense, a reading through skin suggests here that the different treatment of these celebrities is not necessarily based on what is visible *on* the skin, or what lies *under* the skin (their motives which they share with the public through the act of confession), but rather on the relation *between* skins. In other words, how we make meaning out of cosmetically-altered celebrity skin is not only shaped through the relations between blogger and celebrity figure or the skins of Montag and Joel, but also through the relation between the blog reader and the celebrity.

In the Perezhilton.com post ‘Alexa Ray Joel Gets A Nose Job’ (Hilton, 2010a), Joel is complimented for her openness about her nose job:

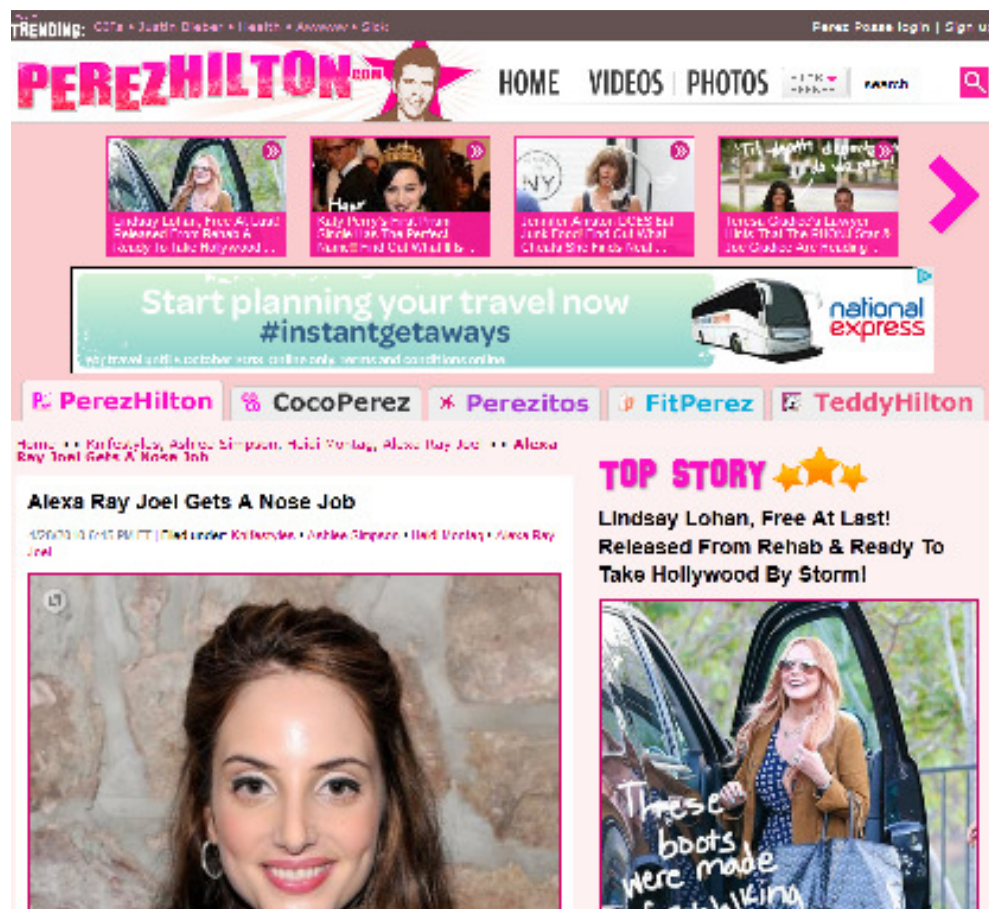




Figure 3: ‘Alexa Ray Joel Gets A Nose Job’ (Hilton, 2010a)

Alexa Ray Joel opted for a nose job earlier this month and she’s pretty pleased with the outcome. She explains: ‘I was thinking about getting this for years. [My nose] always bothered me a little bit. I was self-conscious of pictures taken from the side. To some people that’s vain, but at the end of the day, we all want to feel pretty.’ [...] It looks pretty good — and at least she was honest and upfront about it unlike SOME people! (Hilton, 2010a)

This passage implies that it is not her use of cosmetic surgery that distinguishes Joel from ‘SOME people,’ but rather her confession and the ‘honest’ reasons she gives for her surgery. Her confessional act highlights the emotions experienced within her old skin, such as insecurity, self-consciousness and distress, and openly acknowledges the pleasure and delight experienced within her new skin. Through the rhetorical pattern of confession, Joel’s cosmetically altered skin is now positively valued, as through the

techniques of cosmetic surgery, inner beauty and outer surface are brought into harmony.⁷⁴

Foucault reminds us that confession is a technology of modern governmentality, and as such one of the ‘numerous and diverse techniques for archiving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations’ (1998: 140). Even though Foucault speaks here in the context of sexuality, his points are useful to my discussion because they demonstrate precisely how, through the act of confession, through this ‘incitement into discourse’ (1998: 19), subjectivities with different levels of access to power become produced. Through the act of confession, one celebrity becomes rehabilitated and reintegrated as a proper subject of femininity, while another femininity becomes expelled, and the reader is placed in the authoritative position of judging whether or not the confession is real and honest, and therefore whether or not it can pass. I suggest, however, that confession is not only a matter of discourse but also of affect. From this perspective, confession is an affective-discursive tool that invites the audience to *feel* with the celebrity, to relate to her/him in an empathetic way. Through the performance of confession, the audience member is able to learn about the celebrity’s inner motives for undergoing cosmetic surgery, and can then compare these with those reasons given by other celebrities, but also with his/her own feelings. If the reasons the celebrity gives are felt as authentic and resonate with the reader’s own understandings, then confession can rehabilitate cosmetically-altered skin from associations with falsity, cheapness, and unrespectable femininity. A successful confession shifts the celebrity in question from the position of the vain subject – or that of the victim of patriarchal ideology who has undergone surgery for purely aesthetic reasons – to the status of a self-determined agent who has exercised the neoliberal right of self-improvement. Confession can also tame

⁷⁴ For further analysis of the rhetoric of expressing inner beauty through cosmetic surgery, see Virginia Blum (2003) and Jones (2008). Both authors argue that this is a convincing rhetoric, because it resonates with the rules of a neoliberal society in which the subject is interpellated to improve constantly. It is as such often used to excuse the use of cosmetic surgery.

cosmetic surgery's dangerous potential of going too far by presenting the celebrity as psychologically 'in control'. As feminist theorists have pointed out, cosmetic surgery can be seen as a tool for normalisation, but it also invokes normative anxieties about femininity owing to its potential to make the allegedly unruly, uncontrollable and disruptive nature of femininity highly visible.⁷⁵ Through medical, psychological and biological discourses, femininity has, been traditionally associated with the irrational mind and leaky bodies (Shildrick, 2002: 30). According to this understanding, the danger of exceeding the borders of the proper, and disrupting the controlled environment where everything is in its place, is apparently inherent to the female body, and this potential is enhanced through cosmetic surgery. Yet a successful confession can domesticate cosmetic surgery's uncanny potential because it presents the celebrity as the psychic unity of the clean and proper self.⁷⁶

In order to confirm this status of a controlled self, the act of confession must be convincing, meaning that the motives for the surgical procedure should be understood and *felt* as reasonable by the audience. Joel achieves this by directly referring to the differences between her and Montag: 'Would I do anything else to my body? No. It's not ten procedures like Heidi Montag. For me, that's a little extreme' (Hilton, 2010). Perez Hilton.com publishes this quotation in order to enable an empathetic relationship between his blog readers and the celebrity: her 'modest' reasons are pitted against the out-of-control behaviour of Montag and produce her as reasonable, ensuring that the audience member can relate to her. Confession serves here as an affective tool of

⁷⁵Many feminist scholars have drawn on Foucauldian concepts of the docile body, bio-power and micro-practices of the self to show how mainstream cosmetic surgery is situated within the disciplinary and normalising discursive regimes of Western culture (Balsamo, 1995; Bartky, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Morgan, 1991). However, they do not universally condemn cosmetic surgery as an oppressive method by which patriarchal culture oppresses women, a fact which is evident in their foregrounding of the subversive potential of cosmetic surgery in the work of artists such as Orlan. Some theorists also recognise the pleasure and delight that cosmetic surgery can bring to individual bodies who have suffered as a result of their pre-op appearance (Davis, 1995).

⁷⁶Kristeva (1982: 71) and Margrit Shildrick (2002: 55) show in their work – though through different approaches – how a clean and intact skin that envelops the individual is essential for our understanding of a 'proper' subject.

communication that creates a level of intimacy between the celebrity and the blog reader, not only because it makes surgically altered skin highly visible and interpellates the reader to judge, but also because it is seen as a route to engaging with their ‘authentic’ feelings.

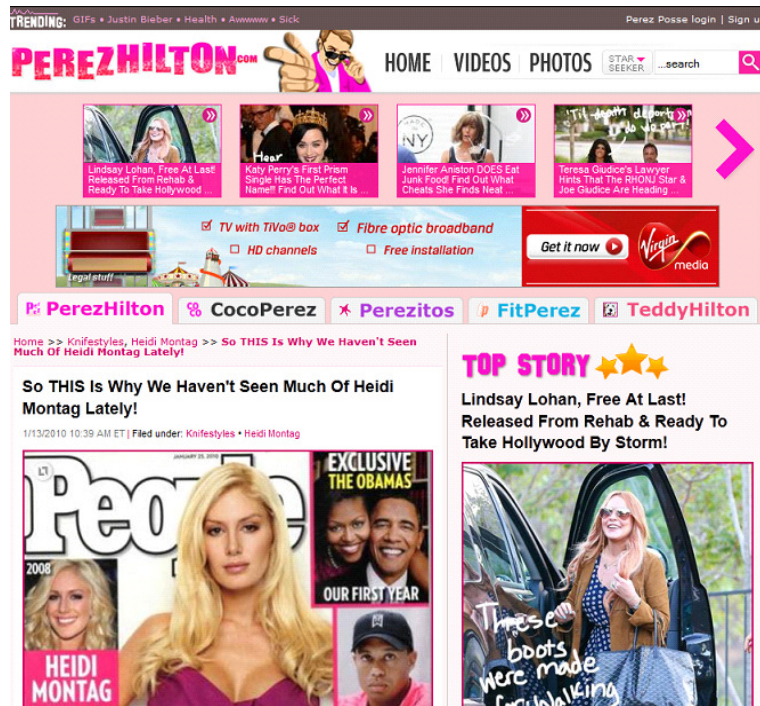


Figure 4: ‘So THIS Is Why We Haven’t Seen Much Of Heidi Montag Lately’ (Hilton, 2010b)

In stark contrast to these reactions to Joel's confession is the wide spread derision faced by Montag when she publicly confessed her cosmetic surgeries. On Perezhilton.com, Hilton remarked that 'We may have this generation's Jocelyn Wildenstein on our hands if she's not careful!' (Hilton, 2010c). Through this comparison, Perezhilton.com places Montag in proximity to a celebrity who has achieved her fame status through the excessive use of cosmetic surgery which left her appearance grotesque. Even though Montag's appearance remains outwardly controlled, Perezhilton.com implies in several posts that her inner self lacks in control, and hints repeatedly at a potential surgery junkie lurking beneath the surface. Furthermore, the media coverage concerning Montag's excessive cosmetic surgery session was not only accompanied by reports about her apparent near death experience during the operation, but also coincided with the promotional tour for her new album, ultimately marking her as publicity-seeking.

Despite the fact that Montag follows, in her public confession, the same rhetorical pattern of self-improvement as Joel in order to defend her altered skin – 'It's my body and I need to feel comfortable as a woman, as a person, and my inner beauty is always there and that's what's most important' (Hilton, 2010c) – her confession fails to convince. Like Joel, she highlights the way in which surgery merely brought to the outer surface what lay beneath, but her skin transformations, and especially her significant breast augmentation, are instead read as a publicity stunt, consequently positioning her as vulgar, pathological and tasteless. It could be argued that a reading of Montag's skin as abject, and as that which must be derided, is merely the result of the sheer number of operations she has undergone, and the way in which she subsequently sought publicity. I do not intend to deny that these factors contribute significantly to these negative readings of her skin. However, I suggest that the reasons for her production as an 'improper' femininity have more to do with her inability to affect the

audience and Perez Hilton in a way that makes them empathise with her inner motives and rehabilitate her skin. The reason for this failure lies, I suggest, in her apparent lack of respectability. Respectability as a concept that marks the morally right, tasteful and modest subject has become, over time, the property of white middle-class femininities (Skeggs, 1997: 99). These characteristics are associated with positive feelings: thus the distinction between respectable white middle-class femininity and the improper working-class subject is highly affective. Tyler (2008) and Stephanie Lawler (2005) argue that white working-class subjects are often framed within discourses of excess, lack of taste and pathology, thereby provoking disgust reactions from the white middle-class subject. Montag might not be a working-class subject in the traditional sense, but her 'white trash' reality TV star background puts her in a lower-classed position than that of stars belonging to the perceived Hollywood aristocracy, or of stars with demonstrable skills, such as the musical talents of Joel (Cobb, 2008; Tyler & Bennett, 2010: 379). As a celebrity, she might not lack material resources, but a lack of taste, knowledge, and the 'right ways of being and doing' (Bourdieu, cited in Lawler 2005: 433) mark her as an example of improper white femininity. Hence feelings of contempt, horror and disgust that saturate the poor white working-class become associated with so-called 'white trash' celebrities like Montag.

Montag's surgically-altered skin is, owing to her lack of respectability, not read as an act of self-determination, but rather as a failed attempt to perform this white middle-class act of self-improvement. This inability makes her a subject worth of derision: 'if working-class women can be rendered disgusting by disrespectability and excess, they have also been rendered comic or disgusting in their attempts to be respectable' (Lawler, 2005: 434-435). Humour works here as an affective-discursive tool that keeps the boundary between respectable white subjects like Joel and abject white femininities like Montag in place. Hence the affective relationship between

Montag and the audience, which is established through classed, raced and gendered discourses, but also through the comparison with respectable celebrities like Joel, makes her confession fail. Her skin is not read as an act of self-expression and agency, but rather as pathological and fake. The reaction of Perez Hilton.com to Montag's openness regarding her cosmetic alterations reveals that, while the confessional act may adhere to certain rhetorical patterns, it fails to touch the reader affectively in the right ways so that she/he would rehabilitate Montag's skin. This shows that confession is strongly dependent on the social position of the confessor. Celebrities who are regarded as respectable are able to confess successfully owing to the fact that an emotional proximity to them is not regarded as disturbing. We are happy to get 'skin tight' with them, relate to them, feel with them, and jump into their skin. Their motives are felt as true and authentic because the audience can empathise with them. Meanwhile, unrespectable femininity is framed in a narrative of addiction, lying and publicity seeking, and as such is saturated with affects such as disgust, contempt and horror, which make an enduring closeness unbearable.

In this section, I have shown that how we read represented celebrity skin is not only dependent on how the blogger himself reads it or the affective structure and cultural orientations that the blog articulates. Rather, how we make meaning out of cosmetically re-done celebrity skin depends on how it appears in comparison with other celebrity skins, and on the relationship between us and the celebrity figure. Are we moved empathetically by the confession? Can we relate to the celebrity's motives and judge them as true and authentic? As I have shown, Perez Hilton.com's online representation of Montag produces her affectively as inauthentic and fake, thereby connoting an abject femininity. To illustrate further how questions of authenticity and artificiality play out for the affective production of femininities, I focus in the next section on discussions about 'Labiaplasty' on Jezebel.com.

Labia Skin, Disgust and Visibility

In this chapter, I have explored the shifting, unstable nature of the boundaries between proper and improper femininities through a reading of surgically altered celebrity-skin that is publicly *visible*. In this section, I draw attention to a part of the skin that is normally *invisible* and hidden from the public gaze, yet which is nevertheless crucial in the cultural construction of femininity: labia skin. More precisely, I analyse how the trimming of labia skin for aesthetic reasons, through technologies such as Photoshop or cosmetic surgery, is mediated in Jezebel.com. In the blog post ‘The Labiaplasty You Never Wanted’ (Coen, 2010b) labiaplasty is represented through affects of disgust and nausea thereby constructing the uncut feminine subject as the proper subject, and the cut subject as improper.⁷⁷ It may initially seem unclear why the hidden skin of the labia is important to this discussion of the construction of femininity, when femininity is, as Susan Bordo (1993), Kathy Davis (1995) and Naomi Wolf (1991) argue, constructed in a gendered society through visible beauty. However, an interrogation of the ways in which the skin of the labia is read in such online debates is crucial as it demonstrates how femininity is commonly conflated with a specific sexed body. Labia lips are a primary marker of a female sexed body. They also signify female sexuality, which makes this part of the skin rich with symbolic meanings and cultural and psychoanalytic connotations. Making visible what must, according to cultural or socio-political norms, be hidden is often understood as a liberating and taboo-breaking practice. Margaret Schwartz discusses the paradoxical nature of celebrity ‘up-skirt’ paparazzi photos that display, apparently accidentally, the celebrity’s vulva or labia(2008). Schwartz argues that while this new visibility is celebrated within a post-feminist media landscape as empowering female sexuality, it actually works to reintegrate the feminine into a male economy of visibility. Schwartz is primarily concerned with the political economy of

⁷⁷ I do not discuss female circumcision, sex-change operations, or female genital cutting in a cross-cultural context here, as these are complex topics that need their own focused arguments. For more on these issues, see: Isabel Gunning, 1991 and Simone Weil Davis, 2002.

the media, but I follow her in her use of Irigaray to highlight how this new visibility carries the danger of disrupting the subversive potential of these female sexual organs that work on the registers of touch.

JEZEBEL
 NI LUCK
 TOP STORIES

The Labiaplasty You Never Knew You Wanted [NSFW]

Warning: The following video is ridiculously NSFW and NSFWS (not safe for weak stomachs, as there are graphic surgery scenes). But I've posted it at the bottom so you can still absorb this magical info without getting canned.

BY JESSICA COEN MAY 10, 2010 3:20 PM

Labiaplasty — not to be confused with vaginal rejuvenation or vaginoplasty — is an increasingly popular cosmetic procedure which typically involves trimming the labia majora or minora (though usually minora) to give your ladybits the look of a neat little package. Unlike vaginal rejuvenation, it does nothing to tighten the vaginal canal, and unless you're having a labiaplasty that involves the reduction of the clitoral hood, there aren't any sexual benefits to be had. Except for feeling that much more sexy, because nothing is sexier than a childlike vag.

The superficial magic of labiaplasty was explored by the recently-canceled Australian news show *Hungry Beast*; the journalists posit that there's connection between Australian decency laws regarding soft-core pornography magazines and the rise in women requesting the procedure (though it should be noted that the surgery is on the upswing in both hemispheres).

According to the Classification Board, which has the pleasure of enforcing these matters, unrestricted softcore mags are allowed to show frontal nudity, but "only discreet genital detail." In their words, "There should be no genital emphasis." That's pretty vague, and so softcore editors and publishers are playing it safe. Says one former editor, "The only acceptable vagina as far as the Classification Board is concerned is one that is 'neat and tidy' in their eyes. They basically consider labia minora too offensive for soft porn."

"Neat and tidy" — what the hell does that mean? There's a huge variety in the natural

Need a better job? We can help.

Enter keywords (e.g., nurse, sales etc.)

Enter location (city, postal code etc)

Find Jobs

monster.co.uk
 Good job we're here.

FOLLOWTHEWHITERABBIT
 THURSDAY, JAN 31, 2013

LATEST STORIES

Footage of Pussy Riot's cathedral protest—which landed them in jail—has been officially **banned** in Russia. Oh.

SEX 13,190
 Cleanliness Is Next to Manliness: Which Chores Will Get a Guy Laid?

DIRT BAG 3,225
 Spencer Pratt and Heidi Montag Are Doomsday Preppers, Spent Their Entire \$10 Million Fortune on Saltines and Butlers

LEGGINGS 2,792
 Leggings, Leggings Everywhere — and It's Just Going to Get Worse

MIDWEEK MADNESS 5,263
 This Week in Tabloids: Mary-Kate's Engaged to That French Dude Twice Her Age

Figure 5: ‘The Labiaplasty You Never Knew You Wanted [NSFW]’ (Coen, 2010b)

Jezebel.com’s post, ‘The Labiaplasty You Never Knew You Wanted [NSFW]’, does not refer explicitly to celebrity figures, but instead to representations of women in soft-porn magazines. These soft-porn representations seemingly work here in the same way as celebrity representations: as role models against which the self is measured. In this post, Jezebel.com refers to a report by the Australian news show *The Hungry Beast*, in which the connections between Australian decency laws, images in soft-porn magazines and cosmetic surgery on the labia are explored. Jezebel.com writes:

Labiaplasty— not to be confused with vaginal rejuvenation or vaginoplasty— is an increasingly popular cosmetic procedure which typically involves trimming the

labia majora or minora (though usually minora) to give your ladybits the look of a neat little package. (Coen, 2010b)

The visual aesthetics of ‘a neat little package’ are, according to the report, requested by the Australian Classification Board, which forces soft-porn magazines to erase protruding parts of the labia minora using Photoshop because the visible labia minora is considered to be ‘too offensive for soft porn’. Jezebel.com critiques this mutilated representation of sexual skin, and argues that it has damaging effects on women’s relationship to their bodies: ‘imagine the obvious effect this has on the women for whom these images are a part of their understanding of reality. [...] we [...] can’t completely discount the effects of porn when it comes to genital aesthetics’ (Coen, 2010b). The preferred reading of this post might suggest that Jezebel.com, as a feminist-aware celebrity gossip blog, is attempting to redefine or subvert the patriarchal norms that refuse to legitimate or approve any difference that visibly deviates from normative beauty standards.⁷⁸ In its argument, Jezebel.com follows, to an extent, the media effects theory, which implies that images within the media have a direct effect on the viewer and her/his self-perception, or that such images at least work as a cultural pressure that allows only a limited range of acceptable body shapes.⁷⁹ Following this logic, Jezebel.com displays in the post’s accompanying video a number of alternative images of labia skin to counterbalance the mainstream representations that reduce it to a ‘neat little package’. It makes this un(der)represented part of skin visible, in all its natural variety, by showing a range of differently shaped labia lips in a video and also in the confessional writing of the blogger: ‘I’ve got all kinds of business down there! I don’t look anything like those pictures!’ (Coen, 2010b). This can be seen as an empowering act, a certain kind of identity politics where the marker of femininity has to be made

⁷⁸ With ‘preferred’ reading I refer to a dominant reading of an online representation. Like the dominant reading, the preferred reading may not be the only way to make sense of online representations, but it is the most likely one.

⁷⁹ For a critique of the media effect theory that is based on the dichotomies of body/image, subject/object, see Coleman (2005).

visible (in all its variety) to gain social recognition, and to disrupt normative discourses and laws that harm women.

In this post, Jezebel.com aims to evoke feelings of disgust, nausea and unease towards the cutting of female skin. The first lines suggest that readers with weak stomachs might find the embedded video unpleasant: ‘Warning: The following video is ridiculously NSFW and NSFWS (not safe for weak stomachs, as there are graphic surgery scenes)’ (Coen 2010b). The representation of cutting skin is understood as unsettling, as it violates the intact borders of the self. This makes cutting labia skin, I suggest, an abject practice. Kristeva defines the abject as that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’, as that which ‘does not respect borders’ (1982: 4).⁸⁰ The abject transgresses borders which are deemed as necessary in our culture. The skin is, for instance, a necessary border for us because it gives us the impression of a clean and proper self that is autonomous and separate from its surrounding. Every fluid or process that makes us aware that this is a myth can be seen as an abject and needs to be expelled. Blood, vomit, urine, semen and pus are abject bodily fluids which violate bodily borders and provoke feelings such as nausea and disgust. I suggest that cutting, a practice that in no way respects bodily borders, can be seen as an abject act. Cutting produces also sensations of pain. Even if only represented on the screen the viewer associates cutting skin with pain thereby averting from it. Pain, as Ahmed argues, produces intensifications of feelings that are in turn perceived as boundaries of the surface (2004a). Pain affectively creates borders to which we do not want to get close. Cutting labia skin thereby becomes here the affective other, and a practice that we might physically turn away from (when we cover our eyes with hands or move away from the screen displaying the act). We also turn emotionally away from it, rejecting it as that which hurts, is an obstacle to well-being and therefore wrong.

⁸⁰ For critiques of Julia Kristeva’s account of abjection see for instance Judith Butler 1990: 125 and Imogen Tyler 2009, 2013: 27-35.

I maintain that Jezebel.com uses these affective connotations of cutting skin to trump the meanings and affective qualities already carried by labia lips. Labia lips may be hidden skin, but they are excessive and highly affective skin. The skin of the labia is excessive because it, quite literally, leaks out of the body and provides the orifice where menstrual blood and urine transgress the bodily boundaries. That it offers a testimony of the impossibility of the clean and proper body is precisely what marks labia skin as abject (Kristeva, 1982: 71). The two lips that are never completely closed or open confound, according to Irigaray, the phallogocentric logic of the one, where singular and closed-up forms prevail. Besides Kristeva and Irigaray, feminist scholars such as Barbara Creed (1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Margrit Shildrick (2002) demonstrate the ways in which gendered and racialised histories of medical, scientific and psychoanalytic discourses have historically tied female sexual organs to notions of 'lack', emptiness, danger, monstrosity, contagion and leakiness, and reveal how these notions in turn saturate this particular part of skin with affects of shame, guilt, disgust, horror and desire.⁸¹ In shifting these feelings of unease and disgust from the skin of the labia to the act of cutting this same skin, Jezebel.com enables a feminist reclamation of this skin. Yet it is important to evaluate critically how uncut labia skin, as that which can be seen in form of exceeding labia skin, limits the ways in which non-normative femininities can be understood. Shimizu Akiko explains that the politics of visibility cover over the fact that differences are not always visible. These politics are quite pervasive as they claim that through vision we can get access to the truth: if something looks normative then it is normative, if something looks deviant than it is deviant. This is, according to Akiko, a cultural consent that is flawed and makes us blind to real difference (2008: 3). Jezebel.com follows these cultural assumptions about visibility in

⁸¹ The horror associated with female sexual organs is best symbolised by the *vagina dentata*. The *vagina dentata* is a fantasised 'representation of the non-human status of woman as android, vampire or animal, the identification of female sexuality as voracious, insatiable, enigmatic, invisible and unknowable, cold, calculating, instrumental, castrator/decapitator of the male, dissimulatrix or fake, predatory, engulfing mother, preying on male weakness' (Grosz and Probyn, 1995: 293).

its reclamation of labia skin because it does not destabilise the one-to-one correspondence between visible gender performance and the 'truth' about the bodily self. Rather, it ignores the fact that subversive femininities might be outside the realm of visibility and yet still of matter. We might want to think here of a femme identities that (owing to their very feminine appearance) seem to reinforce traditional, heteronormative ideas about femininity while instead undermining them.

Irigaray offers a useful way of rethinking the problematic nature of visibility. According to her, what is missing in our phallogentric culture – which privileges sight, straight lines and unity – is an alternative tradition through which to think sexual identity; one that prioritises notions of fluidity, flow, and feminine touch over the masculine aesthetics of looking. She suggests that, within Western phallogentric logic, the visual is predominant.⁸² By contrast, she maintains that 'woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and that entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity' (1985b: 26). As such, invisibility, or non-visibility, is crucial to Irigaray's anti-foundational, feminist politics. She uses the example of 'two lips' to explain this subversive difference, suggesting that labia lips 'represent the horror of nothing to see' not because they are literally invisible, like the vagina, but because they are a matter of touch rather than visibility, and thereby escape the phallogentric logic of the one form: '[t]he one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning' (1985b: 26). By contrast, the labia are the origin of a subjectivity whose principle logic is sensual, the touch, the double. The labia lips blur the cultural boundaries between activity and passivity, because when two lips are touching it is impossible to 'distinguish what is

⁸² In *Speculum of The Other Woman* (1985b [1974]), but also in *The Sex Which Is Not One* (1985a), Irigaray demonstrates the link between Western philosophy, visibility and phallogentrism, and reveals that the discourse of knowledge, analysis, philosophy and reason has, as its principal sense, sight, and that its concern is the visible or the invisible. This link between phallogentrism and ocluarcentrism engenders a symbolism that emphasises unity, homogeneity, and a form that needs to be 'one' (Irigaray, 1985b: 26).

touching from what is touched' (Irigaray, 1985b: 26). Lynne Huffer (2011) argues that her understanding of the 'two lips' works as a conceptual tool to queer the binary thinking upon which Western understandings of unified gendered identity and sexual difference are based. Irigaray scrambles the ideas of linearity and dialectic through which we make sense of the world by showing that we need to focus on elements and practices that cannot be reintegrated into this system of thinking. Irigaray shows how visual representations cannot be truly subversive as they use the master's tools, visibility and language. Visibility always reintegrates the feminine into the phallogocentric order impeding real difference.

Irigaray's ideas about subversion and queering of what we perceive as natural and obvious in order to create real sexual difference demonstrate that, in making difference visible, certain oppressive ways of knowing, such as that employed by hierarchical binary thinking, remain untouched. For example, in the post I discuss here, Jezebel.com pitches uncut femininities against cut femininities, thereby tying proper femininity back to a specific bodily materiality. In making uncut labia lips the visible marker for untouched and therefore natural femininity, Jezebel.com not only reiterates femininity as a pre-discursive category, which inhabits a certain body, but also produces an abject other against which the former can be measured. Uncut labia skin becomes the signifier for untouched femininity, for femininity that is not limited through technology and patriarchal ideas concerning aesthetics, with the inevitable consequence that those who flaunt this visibility are either victims of these ideas, or normative identities that are compliant with the current cultural role of femininities. They are also transformed into the abject, as they make use of an abject practice that causes nausea to the viewer

and pain to the subject.⁸³ In this way, Jezebel.com uses oppressive ways of knowing to read certain feminine bodies as good and others as abject.

Another problem inherent in this post is that this other, the woman who undergoes labiaplasty, is spoken for but is cut off from speaking for herself. This silencing enables Jezebel.com to represent the cutting of labia skin as de-sexing proper and non-conformative femininity. Readers are made to feel that this activity is wrong through the suggestion that they may turn away in disgust from the video documenting the cutting. Through these techniques, Jezebel.com reinforces the understanding of a natural, visible body as one that is in harmony with our sense of who we are, implying that if we think there is something wrong with our body, it is our mind that should change. In the comments following the article, one user suggests ironically to another, who complains about the look of her labia lips and is considering labiaplasty, ‘here’s a much cheaper suggestion. Stop looking at it’ (TheToefTea, see: Coen 2010b). However, as Shimizu (2008) points out, there is no direct link between our imagined self and the visible bodily self. Technology and skin alterations are, on Jezebel.com, not seen as tools for becoming – instead, they are merely understood as ways in which femininity is limited. In this way, Jezebel.com limits the ways in which non-normative femininity can be imagined and lived.

Readings of the cutting of sexual skin as misogynist are easy to understand, as this practice quite literally erases female sexuality for the sake of normative beauty standards. Jezebel.com uses a number of strategies and media formats to affectively mediate its ideas about this seemingly harmful practice, a point which I will discuss in more detail in the next section. Yet, as I have shown through my discussion of Irigaray, it is important to acknowledge the foundations on which Jezebel.com’s claims regarding the uncut labia skin are built. I have illustrated that the privileging of visibility as a way

⁸³ In her affective reading of online pornography, Paasonen highlights the contagious quality of abject objects and practices. Those subjects that come too close to abject objects, or indulge in abject practices, become abject themselves (2011).

of empowering women has the problematic side effect of reiterating power binaries, and reinforcing the idea of a pre-discursive femininity. Jezebel.com's post hides the problematic ways of knowing on which these online representations are based, leading in turn to a situation in which non-normative femininities that are not recognised through vision are silenced within both hegemonic culture and feminist discourses. This example of how femininity is affectively produced on Jezebel.com is not based on celebrity figures as this kind of surgery is not (yet) publicly discussed by celebrities. Yet it fulfils in some respects the same function as my celebrity examples: it is part of popular culture and published on a celebrity gossip site where it functions as an affective interface through which cultural ideas and values about gender become played out. In the next section, I return to online celebrity representations and explore how ideas about a 'natural' femininity which should be visible to us are also key in discussions about Photoshop.

Before/After Images, Photoshop and Anger

Virginia Blum argues that celebrities shape our ideas about beauty to such an extent that we try to imitate their appearance on our own bodies. The wide circulation of celebrity representations has, she maintains, a powerful effect, particularly on a female audience that desires to inhabit celebrity-like skin. Today, Blum claims, we are no longer satisfied with plain skin, but rather we want to 'wear celebrity skin' to attract admiring looks (2003: 174). As I have discussed, celebrities improve their appearance through cosmetic surgery but their representations are usually improved through the use of Photoshop. Through this technology the digitally photographed skin can be transformed into an immaculate surface independent of what was 'really' in front of the lens. My concern here is not so much the retouched image itself, but rather the discourses surrounding Photoshop, and how these discourses affectively produce certain ideas

about femininity. A reading through the skin means here to attend to the complex ways in which digital images, blogger text and user comments work together to affectively create a rhetorical pattern which is seen as true and good. This rhetorical pattern then naturalises the artificial category of femininity as a visible truth.

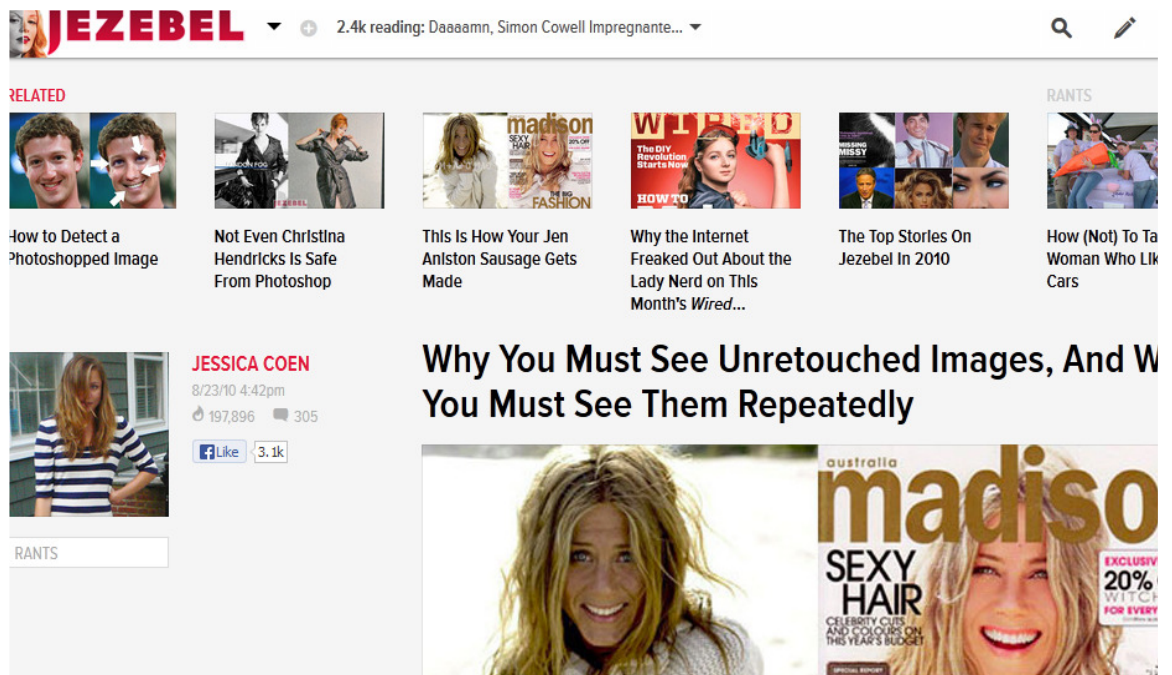


Figure 6: 'Why You Must See Unretouched Images, And Why You Must See Them Repeatedly' (Coen, 2010c)

A Jezebel.com post from August 2010 begins with two photographs of actress Jennifer Aniston from a photo shoot for *madison* magazine (Figure 6). In a generic before/after manner, the apparently untouched photograph is placed to the left of the after photograph, the Photoshopped cover image ‘adhering to a visual grammar where left-becomes-right’ (Jones, 2008: 16). Through this carefully constructed before/after collage, the degree of image manipulation is not an abstract concept that needs to be described to us, but rather it becomes concrete, something that we can experience immediately: we can see with our own eyes how strongly Aniston’s image has been manipulated. Experiencing the degree of image manipulation through our own bodily senses makes image manipulation a ‘truth’, and we might be compelled to follow Jezebel.com’s argument and scroll down to read the accompanying text:

There’s a reason we’re fighting to keep this unretouched image of Aniston on our website. [...] This is about the fucked-up imagery that is consistently and persistently gracing newsstands as the beauty standard to which we should all aspire. [...] [E]very day, a young woman somewhere sees one of these overly polished pictures for the first time...and has no idea that they’re not real. [...] What the girl does know is that the pictures show What Is Beautiful. She thinks they are reality. And maybe she doesn’t have someone in her life to point out that this is complete and utter bullshit. So we’ll do that, and we’ll do it over and over again just to make sure that *everyone* knows what’s up. (Coen, 2010c; emphasis in original)

Jezebel.com polices such Photoshopped photographs because of their allegedly negative consequences for women.⁸⁴ Many scholars argue that the circulation of such manipulated images of idealised femininity has a damaging effect on women because

⁸⁴ Susan Bordo (1993) argues, for instance, that digitally manipulated images increase the objectification of women owing to the way in which they reinforce the cultural role of women as highly visible surfaces.

they might take for real what is actually artificially produced through Photoshop, and this might in turn trigger bodily dissatisfaction, frustration and self-hatred.⁸⁵ In this sense, Jezebel.com can be seen to follow a tradition of feminist scholars who have analysed how images shape and discipline women's bodies.

The media cause-effect model upon which these arguments are often based provides a powerful rhetoric, resulting in the fact that these arguments have now gained the status of common sense. This model perceives the relationship between (women's) bodies and images as one that is linear and victimising, whereby images enforce normative ideas of beauty on the vulnerable body of the viewer.⁸⁶ The suggested solution to the problem of young women feeling unhappy with their bodies as a result of such images is, therefore, to increase the availability of more positive and 'realistic' images. Griselda Pollock explains how this binary emerged in feminist thinking:

While challenging social definitions of women's roles and spheres, feminists were also contesting socially accepted images of women [...] which were judged in a vocabulary of absolutes: right or wrong, good or bad, true or false, traditional or progressive, positive or objectifying. (1990: 203)

Jezebel.com unmistakably positions Photoshopped pictures as bad, wrong and false, and this particular post can be read as an attack on a male-dominated society in which women are pressured into adhering to fake, and therefore unachievable, standards of beauty. However, at this point it is useful to question the presuppositions upon which

⁸⁵Liz Frost (2001) analyses the pressure that women experience from such images, and how this results in eating disorders and self-hatred. Debra Gimlin (2002) discusses how women compare themselves to images and negotiate their own bodies through techniques such as dieting, work out and cosmetic surgery. In their empirical study, Sarah Grogan and Nicola Wainwright analyse photos in teen magazines, and argue that images in such magazines 'have powerful effects on their readers, serving to foster and maintain a "cult of femininity", supplying definitions of what it means to be a woman' (1996: 672).

⁸⁶Many scholars have criticised the media cause-effect model by highlighting its practical and theoretical shortcomings: David Gauntlett (1998) has illustrated through audience research that the relationship between audience and image is far from linear but shaped and reshaped through the specific context. Rebecca Coleman has highlighted, through the Deleuzian concept of 'becoming', that image and body are not two separate entities that then influence each other, but rather that they are constituted through and within each other (2009).

this understanding of images and bodies is based. Pollock (1990) draws attention to the problems with feminist critiques of 'images of women' suggesting that the term relies on an unhelpful, and ultimately unsustainable separation of 'women' and 'images', where women are treated as 'real' and images as 'representations' (Coleman 2009: 9). This same logic applies to Jezebel.com's blog post – the Photoshopped image is understood as the culturally produced object, while the before photograph presents the real skin, which becomes a metonymy for Aniston's real gendered self. The status as representation is occluded in the before picture.

The before photograph is therefore regarded as allowing access to the truth, the natural which re-presents what is real (or at least more real than the after photograph), while the other is portrayed as highly constructed and manipulated. These characterisations, I suggest, attach certain affects to the two different representations. In a different context, Pollock explains this affective charge:

This juxtaposition [of before and after photograph] prompts the viewer to make simple judgements about the two images, presented as exemplars of the good and the bad, the 'real' and the glamorized, the positive and the distorted. One image is claimed to be closer to the truth [...] as opposed to that of consumption and/or fantasy. The recognition that both images are densely rhetorical products of material, social, and aesthetic practices is suppressed. (1990: 204)

This passage demonstrates why the before photograph is associated with good feelings – it is understood as true because it simply re-presents what was really in front of the lens. It is as such a witness, an evidence of a certain reality, and something we can trust. The digitally re-touched cover photograph, on the other hand, is seen as false. Influenced by economic motivations and beauty standards of a male-dominated society, it becomes, through these discourses, something we encounter with scepticism and caution. In juxtaposing these two images and the different affective economies that

surround them, Jezebel.com aims to make the contrasts unequivocal in order to trigger anger and resentment towards a media landscape that portrays women in these unnatural skins. Yet it also plays on social anxieties that these practices might pass unrecognised, and that they have the potential to do harm without us noticing:

[W]hen we show you before-and-after shots of celebrities [w]e're not pulling some tabloidian 'see celebrities without makeup!' or 'look who has cellulite!' shtick. This is about the fucked-up imagery that is consistently and persistently gracing newsstands as the beauty standard to which we should all aspire. (Coen, 2010c)

Jezebel.com claims here not to engage in the scrutiny of images of women that creates feelings of *schadenfreude*, pleasure or enjoyment caused by sensationalism and voyeurism. Rather, Coen maintains that their aim is to inspire anger and dissatisfaction with the current situation. Scholars such as Ahmed have pointed out that anger is not necessarily a bad feeling *per se*, but that it can in fact be very productive for feminist politics owing to its capacity to introduce change and a re-orientations towards norms that have passed unnoticed (Ahmed, 2004a: 174-76). However, in the example of Aniston's photograph, I suggest that anger has a limiting, rather than empowering, function because it covers over how Jezebel.com participates through its criticism in the cultural scrutiny of image of women. Hence despite the fact that Jezebel.com might be motivated by a desire to counter patriarchal norms and practices, it implicitly reinforces them through scrutinising Aniston's photos, and reinforces cultural links between femininity, passivity and naturalness. Anger here limits the potential to imagine femininity outside of the normative frame of the natural woman. In relying on the media-effects-model, and on notions concerning the real that can be seen, Jezebel.com is unable to deconstruct femininity as a performative act that creates through repetition that which we perceive as natural and real. Through drawing on discourses that circulate

within society as true, or at least as not completely false, Jezebel.com can thereby invoke these negative affects towards Photoshopped images because they are already in place.

So far, Jezebel.com has produced, through the photo-collage and the accompanying text, a convincing rhetoric against Photoshop, linking proper femininity to un-retouched skin. And yet through their commenting function, blogs provide the possibility to add to the online content thereby changing its meaning. As some user comments show, Jezebel.com's reading of these photos is not accepted without some struggle:

[The] first image looks pretty manipulated (at least on the face) to make her look worse. (spiraloflife, see: Coen, 2010b)

How do we know that the "unretouched" images weren't altered to make her look worse? That's happened with countless celebs. (Rats, see: Coen, 2010b)

I've seen Ms. Aniston several times, day and night, here in los angeles [sic] and think that the before image isn't right. Something about it is funky, because she doesn't have the forehead wrinkles in person, wearing little to no makeup, let alone with photo make up on. She does smoke a lot and have some freckles, but either that lighting is terrible or something has been enhanced to make her look older (AnitaLoos, see: Coen, 2010b)

Here, users question the boundaries between real and fake that Jezebel.com presents as self-evident and unproblematic. Some readers are sceptical of the evidence, arguing that 'first image looks pretty manipulated' (spiraloflife). However, these readers are still preoccupied with establishing one photograph as 'real' (or more real), and thus remain within the framework of fake or real. As this post and the accompanying user comments show, the borders between fake and real might be unstable and shifting, but these

notions persist in the construction of femininity because of the values and affects attached to them.

In this section, I have shown how particular discourses and technological possibilities of the blog assist Jezebel.com in provoking anger against the after photograph, and in turn accumulate positive feelings around the un-retouched photograph, positing it as representative of the truth. The image comparison at the beginning of the blog post conveys Jezebel.com's message affectively to the reader as she/he sees with her/his own eyes how strongly these photos are manipulated. The text underneath these images serves to reinforce a rhetorical and affective structure that might be already in place through cultural discourses that are by now 'common knowledge'. Following this, Photoshopped images are 'bad' because they present what is fake and inauthentic as real. This scrambling of boundaries (which is also an intervention into the link between seeing and knowing) has can have negative consequence, for instance, making women feel bad about themselves. The Photoshopped image is as such often perceived as an obstacle for women's happiness and sticky with negative affects. I have shown that this understanding is based on a problematic real/fake binary which dismisses femininities that cannot pass as 'natural'. I argue in this thesis that celebrity online representations on gossip blogs can shift the affective connections which frame our ideas about good and bad femininities because they touch us in surprising new ways. Yet here I have shown where the limitations of this are: Aniston's photograph is represented online as an example of a patriarchal culture that forces its women, independent of their status, into unachievable beauty norms. The user comments seem to challenge such a reading but eventually reinforce the binary of fake and real which frames our understandings of femininity. I further elaborate on this in the next section, in which I explore how Dlisted.com produces ideas of improper femininity through hyperlinks that give the reader affective jolts. This

underlines my argument that digital culture has the ability to enable particular sensory, synaesthetic, and visceral experiences and knowledges which create our ideas about femininity.

Texture, Hyperlinks and Laughter

Photoshop has become a common practice to improve the looks of models and celebrities, leaving the photographed skin sometimes overtly polished and robot-like. These manipulating techniques can arrest our attention if the texture of a representation does not fulfil cultural expectations of how the represented thing or subject should feel or look like. If the texture is at odds with our cultural expectations, then we categorise the representations as fake and artificial. In this section, I explore a blog post on Dlisted.com that centres around an excessively Photoshopped photograph of Lady Gaga from the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine (Figure 7). This highly retouched image allows me to draw attention to the texture of digital images, and to consider it as an important semiotic and sensory resource that significantly shapes the meaning of a representation. I begin by undertaking a semiotic reading of the image, paying close attention to its texture.⁸⁷ I then explore how my body reacts and feels when I click the hyperlinks in the online comment which bring the original cover photo into contact with images of Cartman (a character from the animated TV series *South Park*) and Dutch Boy (the logo of an American paint company). I argue that the encounter with these hyperlinked images causes affective jolts in me which grab me, stick with me and change how I read the original cover photograph: Dlisted.com shifts my reading of this representation from edgy femininity to failed femininity. Highlighting my affective involvement in and bodily reactions to the blog post enables me to illustrate that blog

⁸⁷ In effecting a semiotic reading, I follow Barthes' classic two-step system of analysis, which first describes that which is seen (denotation), and then considers what ideas and values are communicated by this (connotation) (1972).

reading is an affective and embodied practice in which touching, feeling and making sense are intertwined.

The Photoshop Awards: Lady GaGa's Rolling Stone Cover

June 21, 2010 / Posted by: Michael K

139



1 Trick for a tiny belly

Women'sHealth



Cut down a bit of your belly every day by using this 1 weird old tip.

TIP



Trending

MOST DISCUSSED

MOST VIEWED POSTS



Open Post: Hosted By The Most Graceful And Classie...

[671] comments



Open Post: Hosted By The Royal Family Portraits

[551] comments



Figure 7: 'Photoshop Awards: Lady GaGa's Rolling Stone Cover' (Michael K., 2010a)

At first glance, the highly staged and manipulated nature of the above image seems clear. Its unconventional composition, which aims to grab the attention of the viewer through the display of extremities, mediates Lady Gaga's reputation as edgy femininity. Gaga's immaculately smooth and fair skin in the *Rolling Stone* cover

photograph evokes cultural associations of purity, radiance and divinity. Seemingly unaffected by aging, injuries and other lived experiences that commonly leave their traces on the skin, her skin is pure, untouched and heavenly, and thereby signifies not only idealised femininity, but also privilege and celebrity status. Gaga's pale and immaculate skin clashes with darker items such as her tattoo, the black sexually alluring underwear, and the phallic black and shiny machine guns. In a culture in which whiteness functions as the dominant but silent norm, these dark elements evoke associations with danger, (sexual) agency and aggression, and represent notions of traditional heterosexual masculinity.⁸⁸ Rather than the 'good' feelings that we associate with white immaculate skin, these black elements are sticky with 'negative' feelings, such as fear, giving the image a titillating quality. Nevertheless Gaga's extremely Photoshopped skin fuses these contradictory elements seamlessly together to a smooth surface. Even the machine guns blend into her skin, replacing the nurturing breast with the destructive machine.⁸⁹ I suggest that, in line with Gaga's contradictory celebrity image, this image communicates rather ambiguous meanings.⁹⁰ For Jack Halberstam (2012) the hybridity in her performances signifies a new sex and gender politics. In this sense, the image could be read as subverting traditional gender and sex norms. But it could also mean that she is reiterating them for the sake of profit. The image seems to hold both aspects in tension. From a scholarly perspective, I know that this image was carefully composed to signify edgy femininity but I do not *feel* this edginess. Rather the cover image evokes feelings of indifference and annoyance in me.

As the headline of the blog post suggests, Dlisted.com re-published this cover online not because of its content but because of the texture of the image, especially

⁸⁸ I elaborate upon the racial dimensions of celebrity skin in Chapter Four.

⁸⁹ Donna Haraway (1991: 151-153) sees the breaking down of three boundaries as significant for our networked and globalised postmodern world: the leaky boundaries between human and animal, between animal-human (organism) and machine, and between physical and non-physical.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the ambiguous nature of Gaga's celebrity status, see Viktor Corona (2011) and Richard J. Gray (2012).

Gaga's excessively smooth skin. Iqani argues that smooth surfaces are culturally connected with good feeling because smoothness is associated with high modernity, culture and beauty. In her discussion of female cover models on print magazines, she argues that smooth skin is not only a marker for 'sexy' femininity that reinforces the stereotype of women as soft and delicate, but it also operates to associate feminine bodies with commodities like new cars that can be possessed and used (2012: 323-324). Silky-skinned femininities are therefore often featured in magazines that have a straight male target group like the *Rolling Stone* magazine. From this perspective, Gaga's smooth naked skin seems to invite the male gaze, and turns her into a sexualised object.⁹¹ On the other hand, as Tyler (2001) maintains, naked skin can also frustrate the penetrating male gaze when technologies such as Photoshop make it so shiny and tight that it functions as a sort of mirror that reflects the gaze rather than absorbing it. She suggests that an overtly tight and shiny skin is paradoxically hyper-visible and yet invisible. In this sense, technologies like Photoshop turn Gaga's naked skin into an impermeable armour that not only connotes integrity, but also strength and invulnerability. Tyler's discussion allows us to read Gaga's cover photo and her exposed tight skin as signifying a new powerful femininity that is not defined by traditional markers such as softness and delicacy. Overall, these two models show not only the image content but also its texture which communicates tension: her skin can signify either traditional or subversive femininity.

Dlisted.com refuses to maintain the tension that the print image provides, and uses different technological and affective strategies to pin down its meaning to signify improper femininity. According to the blogger, the (mis)use of Photoshop turned Gaga's skin into an excessively tight, shiny and polished surface that surpassed cultural ideals of feminine skin, thereby transforming it into a marker of failed femininity. This

⁹¹ Moreover, Gaga 'wears' materials that are smooth and shiny – such as the machine guns and her red lipstick – which resonate with the sexualised symbolism of smooth skin.

is expressed in the headline in which the creator of this image is honoured ironically with the Photoshop Award. Furthermore the humorous comment beneath the image tries to move the reader affectively:

And here's a nekkid ass nekkid Lady CaCa on the cover of Rolling Stone looking like the Dutch Boy in drag as a porn version of Tank Girl. [...] And whoever ran this mess through the Photoshop machine needs to come up to the podium to accept their award for pasting Cartman's bare nalgas on Lady CaCa. (Michael K., 2010a; emphasis added)

The humorous tone of this extract ridicules the highly Photoshopped image of Gaga and might move the reading body in affective ways thereby performing a shift in how the reader will then perceive the cover shot: if the cover shot was earlier perceived as representing an edgy femininity, it might now tip into failed femininity. However, my focus here is not so much on the text, but rather on the affective work that is undertaken when readers click on the two hyperlinks incorporated within the text. The phrases 'Dutch boy' and 'Cartman's bare nalgas' (underlined in the above extract) are hyperlinks that connect the blog reader to two new images: the first depicting 'Dutch boy' and the other showing the naked bottom of Cartman.⁹²

⁹² Jodi Dean argues convincingly that '[a] problem specific to critical media theory is the turbulence of networked communications: that is, the rapidity of innovation, adoption, adaptation, and obsolescence. The object of one's theoretical focus and critical ire quickly changes or even vanishes' (2010: 1). In the case of the second hyperlink to Cartman's image exactly this has happened: at the time of writing-up, Cartman's image is no longer accessible through the link.



Figure 8: 'Dutch Boy', hyperlink
(Michael K., 2010a)



Figure 9: 'Cartman', hyperlink (Michael K., 2010a)

I suggest that it is through this surprising and unconventional encounter with these other images that the reading of Gaga's cover photographis changed. To make my argument, I refer here to my own personal reading experience of this blog post and the surprising affective reactions this reading has caused. I do not argue that what I have experienced is generally applicable, but it helps me to illustrate how celebrity gossip blogs can move us in concrete ways.

When I read this post for the first time and clicked on the hyperlinks, I had to laugh. Even though my body controlled the mouse click that led to the images showing up on my screen, and even though I was familiar with the appearances of Dutch Boy and Cartman, I was surprisingly moved when finally confronted with them. The encounter with these images made me laugh out loud. Unlike the original *Rolling Stone* cover photograph, which could not move me in any particular direction, the appearance of the hyperlinked images made my body react with laughter. Puzzled about my affective reaction to such a predictable and banal joke, I probed what made me laugh. Humour is often produced through incongruity when elements that seem contradictory are put together. Clearly Dlisted.com does this here when it compares Gaga's appearance with that of Dutch Boy or Cartman. And yet, as the semiotic analysis above

has shown, Gaga's cover image is full of contradictions that do not make me laugh. I suggest that humour is here provoked through the ways in which Dlisted.com mimics the tendencies of a post-modern celebrity culture to mix and match different elements in the creation of a new femininity, one which has the potential to raise interest and capture affective attention. Dlisted.com also plays with different surfaces and, like celebrity culture more generally, ironically embraces that which is highly commercialised, excessive, artificial, and of 'low' cultural status. However, Dlisted.com's mimicking of these strategies is humorous because it is carried out in the wrong context. Gaga's skin may typically be produced as artificial and even monstrous, always already embracing and integrating the other, but this is done in a very distinct style to create the desired effect of an edgy femininity: her clashing of femininity and masculine traits, of black and white, of machine and human emphasises her status as dangerous, unique and sexual. The pictures of Dutch Boy and Cartman, meanwhile, cannot be smoothly added to her skin because they have very different connotations and affects attached to them. The logo of a paint company, Dutch Boy suggests the amateurish and home-made, the improvised and DIY. The cartoon character Cartman connotes satire, vulgarity and obscenity. Rather than evoking feelings of curiosity and fascination like the Gaga cover image *should* do, their affective registers cluster around indifference (in Dutch Boy's case) or amusement (in Cartman's case). The clashing of these different semiotic and affective qualities causes humour and made me laugh. I suggest further that this cross-referencing and connecting of images enabled feelings which have changed how I read the cover photograph. Even though the links have lost their surprising affective force after some time, I still cannot look at Gaga's cover image the way I looked at it before. Rather than reading her representation as boring (while understanding that it should be exciting and edgy), I experience it now as funny, clearly marking a failed femininity, a femininity at which I can laugh. This is because the

affective jolts I felt when I first encountered the hyperlinked images are transformed now through the reiterations and revisitations to this blog's post and its hyperlinks. They have made this cover image sticky with Cartman and Dutch Boy, thereby shifting its meaning.

In this section, I have illustrated that blogs have specific material and technological affordances that enable particular sensory and visceral experiences which in turn have consequences for our meaning-making of the offline world, in this case the print cover photo. Through a semiotic analysis, I have shown the ambiguous nature of the original cover photo: refusing to provide a preferred reading as signifying either proper or improper femininity, the cover photo holds both elements in tension thereby producing the impression of an 'edgy' femininity. I have discussed how Dlisted.com produces ideas about improper femininity through humorous commenting, but particularly through hyperlinks. I have argued that this affective encounter, which is enabled through the blog's technological affordances, shifted how I read the cover photo from an image towards which I felt indifference (while acknowledging that it should move me as edgy) to an account of failed femininity, a femininity I can deride. Even though I referred explicitly to my own subjective readings experience in this section, and can as such be critiqued as partial and overtly biased, I argue that it is productive as it has shown that sensing and making sense (Armstrong, 2000: 117, 121) are always intertwined when we read online representations. This very personal example has also illustrated that it is not only me who moves through the blog (through clicking and scrolling), but that the blog also moves me. In this sense, the blog is a particular kind of actor with the power to affect me thereby changing how I think and feel about particular representations of femininity. In the next section, I illustrate how blogs shape and re-shape the meanings of celebrity online representations not only

through their direct intervention (hyperlinks or image manipulation), but also through the circulation of these representations.

Love/Hate Relationships, Skin Graffiti and Movement Online

‘Skin graffiti’ is a hallmark of Perezhilton.com. The blog mocks celebrities by drawing – with white ink using MS Paint – comments, penises, stick figure babies or devil horns on their digital photographs. Through this graffiti technique, the control of celebrity skin begins to slip away from both the autonomous subject that creates its own bodily surface through practices of tanning, tattooing or dieting, and from the entertainment industry that produces a carefully constructed star image. Skin becomes here a public surface onto which Perezhilton.com sprays its ideas and comments, thereby re-signifying the meaning of the celebrity figure independent of what the original paparazzi photo communicated. My aim in this section is twofold. Firstly, I demonstrate, through a comparison of similar images of Amy Winehouse that are inscribed by Perezhilton.com with seemingly contradictory meanings, that the meaning is not based on what is visible in the paparazzi photo but on how Perezhilton.com judges what seems to lie underneath the celebrity skin. The understanding of a celebrity as representing abject or respectable femininity is not necessarily dependent on what we see on the surface – a skin that is closed up, tight and even – but also on what we suspect might reside under that surface. Secondly, I illustrate how the concept of skin can be helpful when thinking about the limits of this graffiti technique that aims to fix meaning onto celebrity representations. Overall, this section contributes to my argument in this chapter that how we read online representations of femininity, or how we make skin meaningful, is not only a matter of vision, of what we see in front of us in the present moment, but is rather an affective assemblage of past background knowledges

concerning the bearer of that skin, our own experiences, and the feelings that travel between us and the representation.



Figure 10: 'Amy Winehouse Continues To Grace London With Her class' (Hilton, 2010f)



Figure 11: 'Amy Winehouse's Alma Mater To Pay Tribute To Her' (Hilton, 2011a)



Figure 12: 'Wino Insults King Of Zulu' (Hilton, 2010d)



Figure 13: 'Is Amy Winehouse Tying The Knot With Reg Travis?!' (Hilton, 2011b)

As these images show, abject and respectable femininity are not mutually exclusive categories fixed to certain celebrity figures – rather, they can be inhabited by the same skin. One celebrity can be both proper and improper. Dyer argues famously that much of the appeal of stars lies in their contradictory construction as ordinary while exceptional, famous and yet unhappy, pathetic and tragic (1979: 35). Winehouse is no exception to this rule: on the one hand reports about her self-destruction, addiction and disgrace tried to frame her in the public conscious as a failed femininity, while on the other hand, she stood for the myth of social and racial mobility, and was publicly

celebrated for her talent and passion.⁹³ This paradoxical construction produced Winehouse as a multilayered celebrity figure, with whom the audience could connect on a number of levels evoking such diverse affects such as adoration, empathy, pity or contempt. The capacity of Winehouse to arrest interest and evoke various affects made her a tabloid queen, and her ubiquitous representation made her the easy target of a very thorough public scrutiny. Through its use of skin graffiti, Perezhilton.com feeds into this public scrutiny by stigmatising Winehouse as an abject monster violating the borders of respectable femininity. The blog does so through depicting her skin as disrupted and leaky with excrements and bodily fluids (Figures 10 and 12), foregrounding a perceived incontinence and excess of bodily materiality. Owing to their transgression of bodily borders, leaky bodies represent the abject, and therefore have an uncanny effect on the viewer. In Figure 10, Winehouse's skin is disrupted through the depiction of excrement. For Kristeva (1982), faeces provoke disgust and horror – as something that threatens borders of the clean and proper body, they signify the abject. Tomkins argues further that it is through faeces, and the way in which parents recoil from them, that a child learns the primary negative affect of disgust. As such, faeces stand for what is, on a fundamental level, disgusting rather than volatile in terms of affect (Hemmings, 2005: 560). Through disrupting Winehouse's skin with depictions of excrement, Perezhilton.com others Winehouse affectively.

In Figure 12, Perezhilton.com uses graffiti to depict Winehouse's skin as leaky with an unidentifiable bodily fluid – seemingly saliva or semen – with an accompanying text that reads, 'in classic Wino style, Amy made a fool of herself' (Hilton, 2010d). Here, Winehouse is ridiculed for making a spectacle out of herself, and, as Mary Russo

⁹³ Winehouse's working-class background was often embraced as signifying a virtuous ordinariness and lack of pretentiousness. She blurred racial boundaries (a privilege that is often reserved for white bodies) in that she used blackness as a trope in both her music and stage persona: her white, emaciated body inhabited black female vocality, her performative postures invoked masculine gestures from hip hop culture, and her stage persona was firmly rooted in 1960s nostalgia, putting black masculine coolness (embodied by her three backing dancers/singers) in visual conversation with a run-down white female body. For further discussion of this, see Brooks (2010).

argues, ‘a woman, making a spectacle out of herself ha[s] [...] to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries’ (1988: 213). Bodily fluids are the ultimate sign of a loss of boundaries, as they defy a solid form and ‘attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside, to the perilous divisions between the body’s inside and its outside’ (Grosz, 1994: 193). This idea of fluids as something that, owing to their lack of form and control, disturb Western metaphysics is also a recurring theme in Irigaray’s work (1985a: 227-243; 1985b), in which she maintains that fluids are the defining point of the feminine other, and the reason why women are excluded from a phallogentric world order. According to Irigaray, fluids trigger fear and horror because they threaten the masculine order, which strives for unity and closed up, unified forms. Obviously, Hilton’s cartoonish skin drawings have a different quality/textuality to that of actual faeces, pus, semen or saliva, and consequently do not evoke the same feelings of disgust and horror. Yet I suggest that they still unequivocally mark Winehouse as abject because they draw on the affective history of real bodily fluids and excrements. However, instead of disgust they now provoke laughter. In this carnal address – making the body laugh – Perezhilton.com relies on the reader’s ability to recognise the connection between Winehouse’s excessive behaviour and symbols that signify excess. The drawings might be perceived as amateurish, yet they seem to contain a kernel of truth. Media representations of Winehouse became, over time, intertwined with notions of notoriety, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as shameless, out-of-control behaviour. Hence, when Hilton draws these signs of bodily excess on her skin, they are perceived as humorous owing to the fact that they exaggerate what we already ‘know’ and ‘expect’ of Winehouse. In this sense, Figures 10 and 12 underline the work of Kristy Fairclough (2008) and Erin Meyers (2010), both of whom argue that the purportedly subversive act of deconstructing a carefully crafted celebrity image through satirical skin graffiti can

simultaneously function to reconstruct new femininities with ‘even more rigid boundaries of prescribed femininity’ (Fairclough, 2008: n.p.). I have illustrated that this in an affective process because it draws on a history that connects fluids and excrements with the abject.

What is intriguing, however, is the way in which Hilton uses very similar photographs to accompany very different gossip-stories. Image 10 and 11 are paparazzi shots from the same evening. Their similarity suggests that they would most likely have been taken only a few seconds apart and yet one image (10) is marked with excrement, while the other (11) is adorned with a heart. The same can be said about the photographs in Figure 12 and 13. Both photographs show Winehouse with her fiancé Reg Travis at a restaurant, but in one Winehouse is caricatured with a beer bottle in her hand and saliva running out of her mouth, while the other is decorated with hearts. The difference between the ways in which these images are treated (Figures 10 and 12 contrasted with Figures 11 and 13) raises key questions concerning the reasons behind this affective turn, and demand an interrogation of why Winehouse’s femininity can be celebrated in certain online representations and denigrated in others. The answer to the problems raised by these apparently contradictory depictions may lie in the suggestion that neither the celebrity appearance nor the paparazzi photograph are here treated as surfaces that allow us access to the truth. Further, Perezhilton.com also confounds the linear timeline that is constructed around the celebrity figure by using old photographs for new gossip stories, and in doing so the photograph loses its authority and the photographed skin is merely an isolated surface that lacks any meaning in itself. Meaning emerges *only* through the inscription Perezhilton.com makes through the skin graffiti. The way in which the blogger judges what qualifies as respectable and abject femininity must, therefore, lie outside of the realm of what is visible in these photographs. The positive depictions of Winehouse in Figures 11 and 13 demonstrate

that Winehouse evokes affection either when she is discussed (posthumously) as talented and productive, or when she was upheld by the media (when she was alive) as embodying the promise of transformation and improvement. In Figure 11, Winehouse is affectionately remembered as a talented singer/songwriter who will be honoured by her former school. The posting ends with the words, 'She truly is missed by all' (Hilton, 2011a). In Figure 13, Hilton adorns the image with hearts as Winehouse is allegedly planning her wedding to the 'right' man, one who can keep her in line and tame her unproductive, out-of-control behaviour (Hilton, 2011b). The common ground for celebrating Winehouse, either because of her talent or her apparently healthy relationship, lies in the fact that these discourses and practices are seen as economically productive. Her talent made her, and those around her, hugely financially successful, and her image as a talented singer/songwriter can be used as a role model to keep newcomers motivated in their quests for fame and economic success. Her new healthy and heterosexual relationship will keep her productive (and maybe even re-productive) because the right man will keep her in control, will orient her towards the right things, and will prevent her from becoming a burden for society. Through the lens of governmentality this skin graffiti makes perfect sense: Perezhilton.com ridicules femininities that do not fulfil the imperative of self-improvement and it celebrates femininities when they submit to the values and ideas of a neo-liberal society.

A reading through the concept of skin expands such an explanation and draws attention to the fact that Perezhilton.com's policing of femininity might not be as successful and totalising as an approach through governmentality promises. This is because skin reminds us that a visible surface does not have meaning in itself, but becomes meaningful through the contact we have with it. Every new contact that the digital image has while it circulates online adds something to it thereby re-shaping its meanings. In other words, Perezhilton.com might add MS-Paint to the digital image,

thereby re-signifying its meaning to either symbolise proper or improper femininity (and the blogger does this independent of what the digital image signified before), but the process does not stop there. Rather, this digitally manipulated image circulates online, coming into contact with different readers. These readers encounter the manipulated image from different social locations and with their own personal experiences, which in turn shape how they re-interpret this image. They might not approve with her shaming, which in turn might motivate them to critically question Perezhilton.com's own agenda or the policing of women more generally. Readers might not experience Winehouse as abject or adorable simply because Perezhilton.com represents her as such. This is what Skeggs and Wood call 'looking through'. In these moments, readers/viewers look through the symbolic representation on the screen and find a different connection and evaluation of them (2012: 145). This different connection is often enabled through the reader's own personal experience or memories that allow a connection with the celebrity in new ways, different from the preferred reading. Readers might remember their own feelings or situations they have been in so that they can, for instance, emphasise with an 'abject' representation, thereby re-reading it as endearing or sympathetic. There is a gap between how something is meant to feel and how it feels to us, the individual reader in a particular moment. Perezhilton.com might have a privileged position in re-signifying the paparazzi photograph because the skin graffiti images are placed at the centre of the blog post. But just as the blogger did not care about the significations of the original photo, users might not care about Perezhilton.com's re-writing of them and over-write the manipulated image with their own 'affective ink', their memories and experiences.

In this section, I have demonstrated how Perezhilton.com polices and reconstructs femininities by drawing on the digital photographs of celebrities. Through a comparison of several images of Winehouse, I have illustrated that the traditional role

of photographs and the appearance of celebrities as surfaces that give access to the truth might be challenged on Perezhilton.com, but that the binary between abject and proper femininity is maintained. Even though both femininities can be assembled on the same skin, how that skin is made meaningful is based on traditional neoliberal discourses of the proper female subject that transforms and improves itself constantly to become more profitable. Hence, Winehouse's photographs were adorned with hearts when she 'improved', but were spoiled when her behaviour was deemed as culturally shameful and in need of change, and when she refused to change for the better. In this sense, Perezhilton.com reads femininity through a normative gaze and polices deviance from these neoliberal discourses through visual humour. And yet, as I have argued, this policing might have its limits as the meanings of a celebrity online representation do not end with Perezhilton.com's re-writing of it. Rather they continue to change through their online circulation and the different contacts they have.

Reading celebrity online representations through the concept of skin allows us to understand digital images of celebrities as surfaces that change their materiality and meaning through online circulation. Every new virtual contact, every comment, every tag or even every viewing adds something to the image, thereby changing the possible meanings that it can take on. More concretely, when the digital paparazzi photo came into contact with Perezhilton.com, the blogger added MS-Paint to it. Through this addition, Perezhilton.com tried to make the reading of this image not only visually univocal but also affectively: either by making us appalled and laugh (when fluids and excrements are drawn onto the photo) or by feeling endeared (when adorning it with hearts). And yet through its circulation and the different contacts that the manipulated image had, its meanings changed again because through every virtual contact this image had, the reader added another layer onto it. This layer might not be as visual as the graffiti, but memories and experiences are powerful affective forces that can reshape

meaning. As this example has shown, humorous celebrity gossip blogs re-shape the meaning of a celebrity representation not only through their direct engagement with it (in this case through the use of MS-Paint), but also through their circulation and the individual contacts they enable through this.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored some of the affective and embodied ways in which humorous celebrity gossip blogs produce ideas about femininity. Organised around the online discussions of cosmetic surgery and Photoshop, I have highlighted how Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com create boundaries between proper and improper forms of femininity through their (humorous) commenting, but also through technological possibilities which allow these blogs to integrate videos and hyperlinks or to manipulate images. These technological affordances shape not only how a celebrity representation manifests on our screen, but they influence also how the online representations can move us affectively. As I have shown, image comparisons or videos allow Jezebel.com to animate readers with anger and disgust towards artificial femininities. Hyperlinks on Dlisted.com can give the reader affective jolts which shift the celebrity representation of an edgy femininity into the realm of failed femininity, and image manipulation through skin graffiti on Perezhilton.com might try to fix the border between proper and improper forms of femininity through provoking endearment or laughter. All these examples have illustrated that blogs have particular technological possibilities that have the capacity to affect us thereby shaping our understandings of proper and improper femininity. This chapter has also shown, through the example of Dolly Parton and Jessica Lange, that blogs have particular cultural and political orientations that shape the background against which the celebrity figure is read. This background is not fixed and homogenous, but rather it changes depending on the

celebrity figure with which it in comes into contact. Hence, ideas about proper and improper femininity are not produced through what we see in front of us, but rather they become meaningful through the affective relations enabled through technology. More precisely, online representations of female celebrities come to signify proper or improper femininity only through the complex relations between the blog/blogger, other celebrities, and the individual reader. Through the example of Alexa Ray Joel and Heidi Montag, I have illustrated that even though both these celebrity skins are immaculate, only one is used to signify abject femininity. As I have argued, this is because of the affective relations between the skins (the celebrities and the readers). In this sense, reading representations through the skin reveals these as processes that constantly develop through different relationships between the images themselves, where these images are located (for example, on specific websites), and the embodied subject in front of the screen.

This chapter has unpacked what it can mean to read these blogs and their online representations through the skin. My reading of the selected blog posts, but especially my reading of the Gaga blog post on Dlisted.com, has shown that reading through skin tries to account for the affective forces of the online representations and the kinds of affective reactions and feelings they enable. These affective forces and embodied feelings are important, I suggest, because it is in these moments that online content comes to matter to us and has the potentiality to re-shape our ideas about femininity. In these moments, online content sticks out of the flow of online data and might enter into, punctuate and impact upon our life, thereby tweaking or exacerbating how we move through life and feel about identity categories such as femininity. In this sense a reading through skin is productive because it shows that femininity and especially idealised femininity might be tied to a specific appearance, and crucially how we feel about this appearance. As my discussion of these texts has shown, it matters for instance if

idealised appearance is perceived as authentic and natural and therefore good, or if perfect skin is perceived as fake and felt as annoying and boring. This chapter has shown, especially in the example of Amy Winehouse on Perezhilton.com, that celebrity online representations might follow specific representational patterns that aim to communicate certain meanings, but that the meaning of online representations cannot be narrowed down because the circulation opens always new ways up in which reading body and online representations can encounter each other. Through extending a more traditional textual analysis in which online representations might be seen as static and in isolation, I apply in this chapter a more flexible approach that is able to account for the diverse affective responses we experience when encountering a celebrity representation. However, a reading through the skin is not blind to the pre-existing gendered, classed and raced histories that shape our representations. Rather, it attempts to acknowledge these histories, while being open to recognitions of the potentially productive nature of mis-readings. This reading through the skin will be explored in more depth in the two following chapters, in which I analyse the ways in which queerness and whiteness are produced and circulated within celebrity gossip blogs.

Chapter Three

Queering Celebrity Skin: Animating Sexuality through Representations of Touch and Clothing

The sex life of stars has always been a vital part of celebrity gossip. Our intimate knowledge about divorces, affairs and sexual escapades reinforce the myth of the celebrity as ordinary (even they get divorced and/or betrayed) while also extraordinary (the quality and quantity of partners, their sexual antics). Through gossip, we feel close to the celebrity because we feel as if we are seeing behind the façade. This intimate ‘knowledge’ invites us not only to judge but also animates our fantasies (would we do the same; how must this feel?). I suggest that celebrities and their representations are deeply invested in the production of sexuality because their ubiquitous display of their family bliss or sexual transgressions has ‘consequences in terms of how people believe they can and should behave’ (Dyer, 1979: 8). As highly affective figures that invite us to feel the ups and downs of their love life, celebrities function as important sites through which ideas about sexuality – what passes as legitimate or sticks out as illegitimate sexuality –are constantly redefined, renegotiated and re-felt. In this chapter, I read Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com through skin in order to show how these sites affectively mediate and produce ideas about sexuality. More specifically, I am interested in how queerness, as expressions of sexuality that disturb heteronormativity, becomes produced. Queerness is a slippery term that resists any clear categorisation and definition. Michael Warner understands it as any kind of *doing* that challenges normativity in any respect (1991: 6).⁹⁴ For the purposes of my argument, queerness is understood as any practice and/or form of sexuality that deviates from ‘heteronormativity’, i.e. the dominant discourse of heterosexuality and the norms,

⁹⁴ While the word ‘queer’ was used as a derogatory term for effeminate men who engaged in deviant sexual conduct throughout much of the twentieth century, its appropriation by queer movements challenged the negativity of the term. Despite the fact that queer still signifies non-normative desires, behaviour, and identities, it now also connotes empowerment and an attack on the dominant, rigid, and implicitly violent sexual norms (Dyer, 2002a; Sullivan, 2003).

practices and values it prescribes.⁹⁵ Sexuality is a matter of sensing not only because it is often performed and recognised through the feeling and touching of the skin, but also because sexuality is saturated with morality and emotions. The way we feel about certain kinds of sexuality inevitably shapes which sexualities can be officially enjoyed and proclaimed, and which sexualities are regarded as shameful and embarrassing. Sexuality is often understood as a drive (libido) that emerges from the inner depth of the self, as a feeling that draws us towards certain bodies and away from others, thereby giving society and culture its ‘natural’ structure.⁹⁶As Ahmed (2007a) points out, such an understanding of the relationship between emotions and sexuality, however, effectively glosses over the socially constructed character of both.

Scholars such as Gayle Rubin (1993: 11), Adrienne Rich (1980: 648) and Sedgwick (1990) highlight the hierarchy of sexualities, in which a certain type of heterosexual relationship – white, middle-class, marital and monogamous – is promoted as the best, most respectable, and cherished sexual lifestyle, providing social currency and status. Ahmed argues that this particular privileged heterosexual relationship also provides affective value:

There is no doubt that it is hard to separate images of the good life from the historic privileging of heterosexual conduct, as expressed in romantic love and coupledness [...]. There is also no doubt that heterosexual happiness is overrepresented in public culture, often through an anxious repetition of threats and obstacles to its proper achievement. Heterosexual love becomes about the possibility of a happy ending; about what life is aimed towards, as being what give life direction or purpose.(2010: 90)

⁹⁵ I use the terms ‘heteronormativity’ as interchangeable with the notion of the dominant discourse of heterosexuality in this chapter. This is not to argue that they are the same, but rather to signal the narrowness of the norms and regulations that the dominant discourse of heterosexuality instils.

⁹⁶ Ahmed writes that ‘heterosexuality functions powerfully not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds: (hetero)norms are investments, which are “taken on” and “taken in” by subjects’ (2004a: 146-147).

According to this reading, heterosexuality provides the background or general orientation along which bodies are eager to align themselves, because it holds the promise of happiness, longevity and good feeling. As with many other ideals – such as the idealised femininity explored in Chapter Two, or the idealised whiteness I discuss in the following chapter – the ideal heterosexual relationship does not exist, and therefore cannot be lived or inhabited. However, owing to its positive affective appeal and its ‘promise of happiness’ (Ahmed, 2010), it nevertheless continues to function as a point of orientation. How can this dominant discourse, this orientation which marginalises, punishes and crushes bodies that violate these norms, be challenged? In early discussions, some argued that an increase in visibility, within mainstream media, of sexual identities or practices that deviate from the heterosexual script might challenge heterosexuality and the norms and rules it installs (Drukman, 1995). However, others maintain that these new representations are not disruptive, but that they are a successful strategy through which to market heteronormative values and lifestyles such as kinship, marriage and the nuclear family. In other words, heterosexuality functions as such a powerful dominant discourse that queer representations are re-sold for the hegemonic effect.⁹⁷

While such critiques are valid in directing us towards the limitations of visibility and queer representations, it is important to acknowledge that no power system is absolute, and that representations can take on multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings depending on who is watching, through which means, and in what context. Celebrity culture arguably lends itself to a queer reading, by which I mean a reading that diverts from the preferred reading through its emphasis on the artificial, the

⁹⁷ In her discussion of *Queer as Folk*, Sally Munt (2000) discusses how these representations of queerness are white, middle-class and able-bodied, which thereby feeds into normative ideas about how queerness should look like. Giovanni Porfido (2012) argues similarly that *Queer as Folk* reinforces ideas of queerness as a white, middle class consumer target group, and Jennifer Reed (2012) demonstrates how Ellen DeGeneres’s subversive potential became, over time, more and more flattened out in order to attract mainstream audiences.

performative and the constructed, and which challenges notions of naturalness, essence and truth. In celebrity culture, the constructed nature of personas has become so obvious that it is now rarely commented on. By their very nature, celebrities expose identity as a performance or a necessary fiction that works on the blurred boundaries between fiction and reality, between appearance and essence. Celebrity culture is, at least in part, a world in which artifice is a way of life, and celebrity gossip blogs – especially those written by bloggers that identify as gay and use exaggeration, parody and bitchiness in their writing – provide ideal entry points for an analysis of how queerness is affectively constructed within celebrity culture. Despite the fact that Dlisted.com and Perezhilton are both written by bloggers who identify as gay, their political and cultural orientations could not be more different. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Dlisted.com can be seen as a queer space, whereas Perezhilton.com can be read as a homonormative space. However, these online spaces are not homogenous ones in which everything represented is either queer or homonormative. In this chapter, I am concerned with how queerness is differently understood and represented in humorous celebrity gossip blogs, and how these representations affectively produce ideas about sexuality. This affective reading is enabled by a reading through skin, most obviously because (queer) sexuality is performed through touch. In the first part of this chapter, I focus on the ‘queer touch’, which can be imaginative, visible or invisible, but which can move the reader in concrete ways. The second part of this chapter focuses on the clothes of celebrities and how blogs comment on these. Clothes are here understood as a form of second skin that work as a signifier for class, gender and sexuality. I demonstrate that this tangible and consumable second skin is an important affective and semiotic resource for how queerness is produced and mediated in these online spaces. I conclude by illustrating how this chapter has added to my central argument that reading through skin allows us a more nuanced and complex understanding of how online representations touch us and

become meaningful, not only through their relations with each other, but also through their relationship with the reading body in front of the screen.

Queer Touch, Gay Sensibility and Humour

Scholars such as Vito Russo (1981), Jack Babuscio (1993) and Dyer (2002b) argue that gay audiences can possess a 'gay sensibility' that allows them to detect the (repressed) homosexual or homoerotic elements contained in media representations such as mainstream cinema. In a culture in which heterosexuality functions as the dominant discourse, this sensibility 'translate[s] silently what the world sees and what the actuality may be' (Russo, 1981: 92). This 'second sight', as gay sensibility is sometimes called, is rooted in the experiences that the gay reader has had living in a heterosexual world.⁹⁸ It is, as Babuscio argues, 'a perception of the world which is colored, shaped, directed, and defined by the fact of one's gayness'(1993: 19). Gay sensibility is a reading through skin in the sense that it functions as a filter through which representations can be read and re-created differently. This filter can, in turn, only be developed through living in a gay skin in heterosexual surroundings, and the bruises, injuries and pleasures that this brings with it. In this section, I explore how Dlisted.com challenges the privilege of the heterosexual gaze by humorously reading a cover image with gay sensibility. Through humour, and by leading the blog reader from the original photograph over the humorous comment and then on to the photomontage, Dlisted.com *verfremdet* (renders strange) a heterosexual reading of the cover image and encourages the reader to shift his/her gaze, and to see the homoerotic elements in the image. Finally, I reveal how feelings of amusement and laughter are evoked not because the queer reading is absurd, but rather because heteronormativity is here rendered strange so successfully.

⁹⁸Even though I write about 'a' gay sensibility, I am aware that this terminus is also contingent, changing depended on the individual gay reader and his multiple reading positions.

Panty Creamers Of The Day: The VD Cast On Entertainment Weekly

February 8, 2012 / Posted by: Michael K

42



I don't watch *Vampire Diaries*, because there's only so many vampire shows I need in my life and *True Blood* automatically wins out since it has a whole lot of ASKars nalgas, Joe Man Jello nipples and tang from Lafayette in it. But what I do need more in my life is almost naked pieces on the cover of magazines and [Entertainment Weekly](#) gave me that this week with an issue completely devoted to

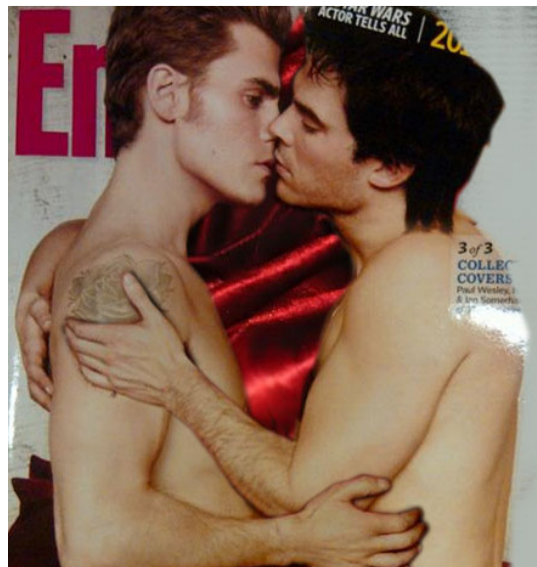


Figure 14: 'Panty Creamers Of The Day: The VD Cast On *Entertainment Weekly*' (Michael K., 2012a)

In the above post (Figure 14), blogger Michael K., who identifies as gay, fantasises that Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder are touching each other, thereby revealing to his readers the 'actual' meaning of this cover photograph. Following the

conventional strategy of reading blogs from top to bottom, the reader first encounters the headline, and then the original cover photograph from *Entertainment Weekly*. The headline ‘Panty Creamers of the Day’, which alludes to the sexual charge of the cover photograph, seems to confirm the heterosexual orientation along which the image is constructed. Both men in the image are white, muscular, and significantly bigger than the woman between them. As such, they represent traditional markers of heterosexual masculinity. Nina Dubrev’s body is white, small-framed and ‘protected’ by the big, muscular male bodies next to her, and in this way she symbolises the traditional heterosexual feminine woman. The characters seem engaged in a *ménage a trois*, but homosexual connotations are mitigated through the woman between the two shirtless men. Through this careful arrangement of bodies, the picture is sexually provocative (the heteronormative idea of the monogamous couple is disrupted), while keeping the heterosexual matrix intact and obscuring the homoerotic elements that are nevertheless at work here.⁹⁹ This heterosexual reading is then disrupted on Dlisted.com through the humorous comment beneath the photograph. The first sentence of the written comment seems to keep the male heterosexual gaze intact: ‘You can almost fap to the sexual tension on this cover’, but the second sentence makes visible the homoerotic elements in the photo that arouse the blogger:

Just look at that Paul Wesley, staring deep into Ian Somerhalder’s adam’s apple like he wants to suck the core out of it. I see how Paul’s hand has temporarily made a stop on Nina Dobrev’s stomach before eventually making its way to Somerhalder. I see how Ian is touching Nina’s face only so his elbow can hover near Paul’s fingers and feel the heat. (Michael K., 2012a)

⁹⁹ The heterosexual matrix is a conceptual framework developed by Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), and refers to the way in which the ‘unity’ of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality. The force of this practice is, through an exclusionary apparatus of production, to restrict the relative meanings of ‘heterosexuality’, ‘homosexuality’, and ‘bisexuality’, as well as the subversive sites of their convergence and resignification (1990: 47-102).

Here, the heterosexual reading of the cover photo is dismissed, and the image is re-read as depicting the desire of two men to touch each other. The woman in the middle is no longer the object of desire, but rather a hindrance that prevents the homosexual touch.

The gay sensibility that Dlisted.com reads in this cover photograph might not be visually represented (yet), but the homoerotic desire is, according to the author, so obvious and tangible that ‘Nina needs to quietly slip out’ (Michael K., 2012a). At this point, Dlisted.com’s queer reading causes amusement as it seems off-script, exaggerated, and more parodic of the tone of erotic novels – ‘Yes, I write a lot of low-grade soft core in my spare time’ (Michael K., 2012a) – than seriously communicating gay sensibility. Humour is here provoked by the purported incongruity between Dlisted.com’s queer reading and the actual visual representation. This strong incongruity makes the humour inclusive: rather than excluding readers that cannot read through gay sensibility, it speaks to straight as well as queer audiences. At this point, Dlisted.com’s gay sensibility can be regarded as ‘just fun’ or as expression of camp humour for queer audiences.¹⁰⁰ Through this inclusive humour, gay sensibility is here not a ‘ghetto sensibility’ (Russo, 1981) conceivable only for a particular group of readers, but a perspective that, while only in an ironic sense, everybody can take on. The blog reader who wants to follow Michael K.’s humorous narration therefore has to take on – even if only momentarily – a gay sensibility. Through humour, Dlisted.com makes gay sensibility the only possible lens through which this representation can be read. The photomontage that depicts Wesley and Somerhalden is introduced with the words ‘ONTD user enael read *everybody’s minds* and really made this cover (and fuck parts) pucker into tomorrow’ (Michael, 2012a; emphasis added). User enael apparently sees and then re-creates what ‘everybody’ is seeing when encountering the cover

¹⁰⁰Camp humour is affiliated with homosexual culture and aims to throw into question the naturalisation of gender, sex and sexuality. Through the use of exaggeration, over-doing and theatricality, and by celebrating the conventionally ‘unacceptable’ and vulgar, camp humour reveals ‘the absurdity of those roles that each of us is urged to play with such a deadly seriousness’ (Babuscio, 1993: 26).

photograph. In the photomontage, the actress in the middle is literally cut out so that the two men are now hugging each other and nearly kissing. This visual representation provokes amusement as it is unexpected, and precisely *not* what everybody saw when viewing the original image beforehand, as the dominant discourse of heterosexuality prevented such a reading. Now, however, with the photomontage visible in front of us, this queer reading seems reasonable, or at least no less likely than a straight reading. The more the reader's gaze travels between the 'before' (the original) and the 'after' image (the photomontage), the more obvious Dlisted.com's queer reading becomes. It may even seem that the woman was not cut out of the cover photo, but rather Photoshopped into it. The line between 'real' heterosexual representation and 'fake' homosexual representation thus becomes blurred, and this disorientation provokes laughter as it shows that the normalised tendency to read representations through a heterosexual lens is socially constructed, rather than natural. Dlisted.com achieves here temporarily what Halberstam aims to provoke with his work: rendering heterosexuality strange (2012: 11).¹⁰¹ This *Verfremdungseffekt* ('making strange effect') asks the spectator to re-evaluate the image, to reconsider something she/he had previously assumed to be normal, by momentarily making the image appear strange, odd or queer. However, this heterosexual orientation towards representations was nevertheless connected with feelings of security: it felt 'right' to the heterosexual reader. When this is disturbed, and the straight reader is disoriented, feelings of uncertainty and unease arise. In these moments, laughter serves to symbolically and affectively restore the lines that have been crossed.

Dyer (2002b) suggests that lesbian/gay culture is different only to the degree to which the erasure of the gap between representation and lived experience is less

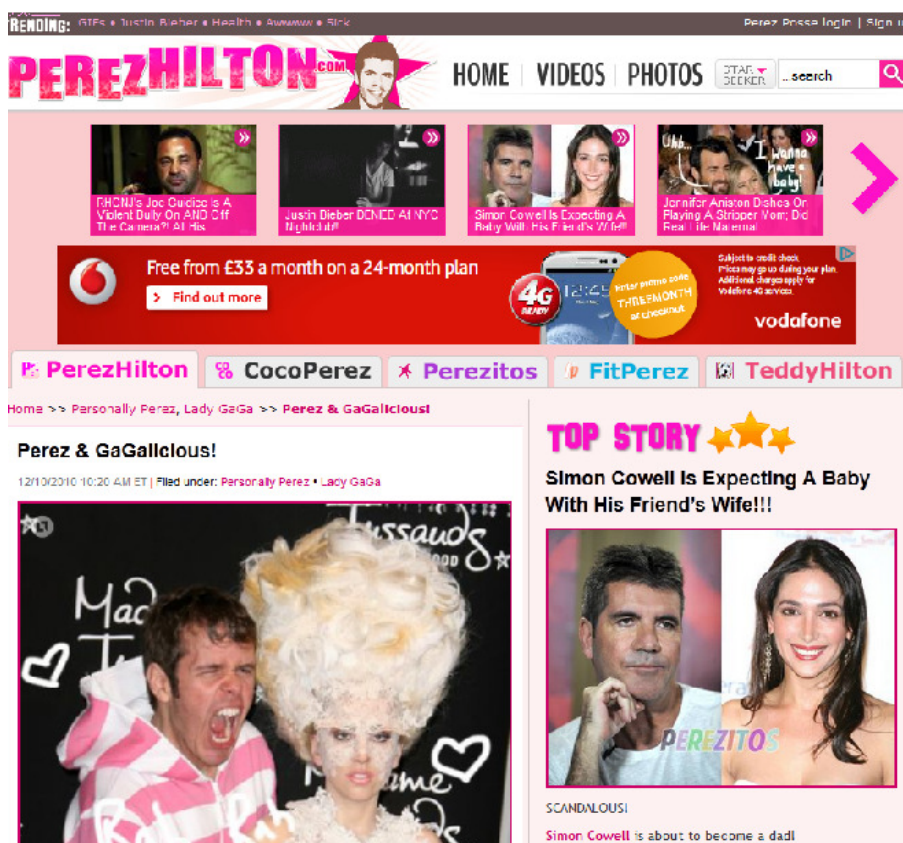
¹⁰¹ Halberstam writes that '[u]sing clips from *Desperate Housewives*, *The Sopranos*, *The Bachelor* and other TV shows, I would act like an anthropologist visiting a strange group of people engaged in odd sexual rituals, showing the class what heterosexuality looked like from the outside' (2012: 11).

naturalised than in heterosexuality. I do not intend to essentialise a ‘gay viewing position’ or a ‘gay gaze’ as if this were the *only* gaze through which *all* homosexual men experience representations. Rather, I want to argue that some people experience media representations as remarkably different from their own embodied experience. In this post, Dlisted.com re-enacts this experience for the straight audience by presenting gay sensibility as the only lens through which representations make sense. Through humour, and through the particular arrangement of the different elements of the blog post, Dlisted.com renders strange the heteronormative gaze thereby revealing its constructed nature. For Berthold Brecht (2000), collective recognition of the absurdity of otherwise naturalised bourgeois social conventions is the first stage in stimulating political mobilisation based upon a visceral awareness that such conventions need not rule human life— that things do not have to be this way. Heteronormativity is, as such, momentarily *verfremdet* (‘rendered strange’ or ‘defamiliarised’) and depending on the extent to which the reader opens up to the text, or the extent to which the text resonates with the reader’s own experience, it can enable change. In this sense, a reading through the concept of skin explores not only how bodies on the screen touch, but also how this on-screen touching moves the reading body, thereby pushing it in new critical directions.

Feeling Comfortable, Queer Liberalism and the Domesticated Queer Touch

Ahmed argues that heterosexuality can be seen as an orientation that shapes public spaces (2007a). Bodies that do not follow this heterosexual orientation feel uncomfortable and disorientated in these spaces because they cannot align themselves with this structure, but instead are excluded from it. In this section, I explore how ‘queer liberalism’ (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005) enables particular queer bodies to feel

comfortable within a culture that is narrowly heterosexually orientated.¹⁰² Feeling comfortable is here associated with being ‘out’, i.e. visible as gay and ‘proud’ of one’s gay identity rather than ashamed. While these feelings and attitudes may seem universally positive, I illustrate, through the example of a post about Lady Gaga, that these feelings can serve to reinforce the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, and help to hide the fact that these ‘out-loud-and-proud’ gestures are only do-able for particular raced, classed and gendered bodies. Using the example of a blog post about the unveiling of Lady Gaga’s wax figure at Madam Tussauds, in which blogger Perez Hilton touches her breast, I demonstrate the ways in which this seemingly subversive queer touch reinforces heterosexuality as the norm.



¹⁰² Within queer liberalism, particular gay and lesbian identities become rehabilitated and integrated into mainstream culture and national citizenship because this identity can function as a consumer citizen while disciplining and normalising queer bodies (Puar, 2005: 122).



Figure 15: ‘Perez & GaGalicious!’ (Hilton, 2010e)

The touch between Hilton and Gaga, shown in Figure 15, can be considered as queer because it mocks the vulgar and sexually offensive meaning this touch has in a heteronormative understanding. According to the heteronormative politics of intimacy, a man touching a women’s breast is seen as a sexual contact that should be carried out in private rather than in the public sphere. The highly parodic nature of Hilton’s gesture is not only proliferated through blog readers’ knowledge about his gay identity (any sexual intention towards Gaga is therefore apparently foreclosed), but also through his exaggerated and theatrical facial expression, in which his mouth is wide open. This touch can therefore be read as a camp act that aims to lay bare, through over-performing and theatricality, the misogynist structure of heterosexuality where femininity is equated with passivity (and is therefore touched) and masculinity is associated with activeness

(and does the touching). It can also be read as dismantling the arbitrary ways in which heteronormativity draws borders across our skin, determining which kind of touch is taboo within the public sphere. However, rather than reading this touch as a queer critique on representations and hegemonic discourses on gender and sexuality, I instead interpret this ‘out, loud and proud’ touch in the context of queer liberalism. Jasbir Puar argues that queer liberalism hints at an ‘unsettling but not entirely unexpected reconciliation of the radical convictions of queerness as a post-structuralist anti- and transidentity critique with the liberal demands of national subject formation’ (2005: 122). Through this reconciliation, queer no longer functions as a critique of social normalisations, but rather as a demarcation of a specific gay and lesbian identity that advocates the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness. Through liberal political norms as such marriage, custody, inheritance, and service in the military, this specific gay and lesbian identity is incorporated into heterosexual culture (Eng, 2010). Queer liberalism creates a normalised form of gay and lesbian identity that does not feel at odds with its heterosexually orientated surrounding, but rather comfortable within it. These subjects do not feel fear or pain caused by the hatred of a nonetheless homophobic culture, because they demonstrate, through consumption, marriage and conservatism, that they take part and enjoy such normative discourses and practices.

As the image accompanying the post shows, Perez Hilton does not feel restricted or scrutinised under the public gaze and the lenses of the paparazzi. Rather, he feels comfortable in the heterosexual structured public space, and presents the ideal gay subject of queer liberalism: a happy, ‘out, loud and proud’ gay identity. Such public performances of highly visible gay pride and happy queerness are demanded by queer liberalism because they provide visible evidence of a secular and gay-friendly America. However, feeling comfortable and feeling proud is only possible for Hilton because of his privileged position as a celebrity and his general compliance with heteronormative

standards and values. His whiteness, his American nationality, his wealth and his celebrity status as the 'queen of all media' make his queerness unproblematic and marketable.¹⁰³ His privileged social position allows him to represent gay pride as a self-transformative strategy that is open to everyone, thereby not only re-establishing the idea of the autonomous and intentionally motivated subject, but also glossing over structural power inequalities that limit access to that strategy. Queerness, as it is performed here through this highly visible touch, is not about shattering concepts of identity and subjectivity, but is rather about building one unambiguous identity and making it visible, thereby reaffirming the subject as the author of her/his self-transformation without taking into account to whom this strategy is available. Halberstam has highlighted that pride is deeply invested in the identity politics of white gay men, and that this has obscured more radical agendas. He maintains:

[...] it is white gay male shame that has proposed 'pride' as the appropriate remedy and that focuses its libidinal and other energies on simply rebuilding the self that shame dismantled rather than taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place. [...] The notion that social change can come about through adjustments to the self, through a focus on interiority without a concomitant attention to social, political, and economic relations, can be a disastrous tactic for queer studies and queer activism. (2005: 223-224)

The 'out, loud and proud' touch performed on Lady Gaga's wax figure provides a compelling fantasy of agency for the homonormative viewer, while simultaneously silencing questions concerning structural and institutional politics and inequalities of power

¹⁰³ While Hilton is of Latino decent, he performs a white identity through his political views and values. This means that non-white identities can become white (or whiten themselves) when they agree and support the white workings of power through their behaviour and political orientation while reducing their ethnical or racial heritage to an a-political folklore gimmick. Stephen Knadler explains this in more detail in his work on the celebrity figure of Jennifer Lopez (2005).

Furthermore, it is important to recognise the way in which Hilton domesticates the potentially subversive meanings that his touch can have. His touch is normalised because it conforms to the morality standards of bourgeois, liberal heterosexuality: it is empty of any sexual connotations because, as a woman, Gaga cannot be his object of desire.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the touch is not read as sexually offensive because Gaga herself is often understood as queer within mainstream culture. Her queerness is not based on her sexuality, but rather on her performances and costumes that, through their outrageousness and highly artificiality, undermine heteronormative rules and values regarding sexuality and gender.¹⁰⁵ Gaga is emblematic of the commodification of queerness as a lifestyle choice: owing to her white, slim, young and healthy body she can put queerness on and take it off like a costume. In such a liberalist understanding of queerness, both Hilton and Gaga can be seen as being part of a ‘queer community’, operating within the same discourses constituted by shared concepts of norms of communication. In other words, both are ‘in on the joke’, making fun of the rules of a heteronormative society. However, this seemingly transgressive act is carefully constructed around the moral standards of a white, heterosexual bourgeois, and this touch is only morally acceptable because of their mutual queerness. The touch is further domesticated through the text that accompanies the image: ‘Check us out! Fierce! Last night, we had the honor of unveiling the last addition to the Madame Tussaud's collection in Hollywood - Lady GaGa! [...] Check out more of the pics of us with our

¹⁰⁴ Even though Lady Gaga claims in interviews and through her performances and videos to be bisexual, she has never been publicly involved with a woman (Capulet, 2010: 298-299).

¹⁰⁵ Gaga’s queer status is secured through her performances, which seem to defy notions of essentialism, identity and originality: ‘[b]y refusing to acknowledge any identity behind the endlessly reproduced image of the artist and instead “reducing” her identity to clothes, masks and wigs, she constantly foregrounds the performative of (artistic) identity and gender performance’ (Horn, 2012: 88). This understanding of Gaga can certainly be critiqued. Scholars such as Shaviro (2010) and Skeggs (1997) point out that such surface performances are only possible for particular white and able-bodied identities.

(fake) wifey below! P.S. We just had to cop a feel! Ha’(Hilton, 2010e).¹⁰⁶ Hilton’s reference to Gaga as his ‘(fake) wifey’ takes on a double signification here: on the one hand it describes her artificiality – after all Hilton is touching a wax figure and not Gaga herself while, on the other hand, ‘fake’ is put in parentheses, and can as such also be erased from the sentence, and through this, Hilton explicitly mimics the heteronormative institution of marriage. Furthermore, he imitates clichés regarding straight, masculine behaviour when he writes ‘We just had to cop a feel!’ as a justification for him grabbing her breast. Again, this could be read as a camp tactic to dismantle the artificial character of heterosexual norms. However, as Butler observes, not all strategies that expose the naturalised character of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. Indeed, ‘[h]eterosexuality can augment its hegemony through its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies which reidealize heterosexual norms without calling them into question’ (Butler, 1993: 22). Considering the queer liberalist context in which I read this post, I argue that Hilton re-idealises, rather than denaturalises, the heterosexual framework. Through his domesticated queer touch, Hilton portrays the queer community as harmless, fun loving and not so different(after all Gaga is his ‘wifey’), and therefore as that which is easily integrated into the framework of heteronormativity.

If media representations are one of the main channels through which heterosexist and heteronormative values are diffused and queerness made invisible and excluded, then it is necessary to consider under which circumstance queerness is made visible and how the viewer participates in this process. The uncritical celebration of the visibility of gay pride prevents any enquiry into the ways in which (queer) sexuality intersects with other axes of difference and neoliberal frameworks, or, ultimately, for whom these practices are available. Through the lens of queer liberalism, I have shown that the

¹⁰⁶ Hilton’s use of ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ in the blog post is typical for his writing. It underlines his status as a ‘queen’ (the queen of all media) and can be seen as a camp move. It also hints towards Hilton’s self-understanding as part of the gay community, representing always more than just himself.

‘happy and proud’ queerness represented in this photograph and circulated online fails to threaten a (celebrity) culture in which the assemblages of heterosexuality, whiteness, nationality and neoliberalism create proper queer bodies and representations. Rather, Hilton’s touch is desexualised, normalised and depoliticised so that it can be easily consumed without discomfort. From this perspective, Perezhilton.com helps to sustain, through this blog post, queer liberalism and its social structures at the level of affect and affective networks. In the next section, I explore the affective quality of a queer touch that is not visually represented.

The Invisible Touch, Queer Pleasure and Affective Fabrics

Interactive technological platforms like online blogs do not create the active audience – rather, they make the active audience visible through the texts and images that readers leave online (Meyers, 2012). Consumers of all kinds of media content ‘take advantage of new media technologies that enable them to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content’ (Jenkins, 2008: 136). Hence, ‘active’ consumption becomes visible online in the form of comments, tags and blog entries, and shows that singular members of the audience engage differently and creatively with media representations.¹⁰⁷ In this section, I explore a posting in which guest blogger Lux Alptraum ‘takes advantage of new media technologies’, and publishes on Jezebel.com her reading of two characters from the American musical teen series *Glee*.¹⁰⁸ Alptraum, who identifies as queer, explains in this blog entry ‘Why Glee’s Brittany And Santana

¹⁰⁷ I use here the term ‘audience’ rather than ‘spectator’ because it is less psychoanalytically laden, and it highlights my concern with how actual individuals interpret and experience media representations rather than the subject positions constructed by the representation. Psychoanalytic scholars infer ‘spectator positions’ from their analysis of a text because they believe that the text itself situates women and men in universal and repeatable ways (Walters, 1995: 89-90). For a critique of a purely textual position of the spectator, see: Stacey (1994: 29).

¹⁰⁸ Jezebel.com uses often guest bloggers to write about special issues or to write about media and other events from an alternative, non-mainstream position. *Glee* revolves around the glee club members at the fictitious William McKinley High in Lima, Ohio. What makes *Glee* stand out among the broad range of contemporary Western teen series is its significant number of gay teenagers. For more on the representation of gay teenagers in *Glee*, see: Frederik Dhaenens (2012).

Are [Her] Queer Icons' (Alptraum, 2010).¹⁰⁹ My interest in this blog entry is twofold. Firstly, it intrigues me that even though Brittany and Santana's queer relationship is never visually represented, it is still strong enough to touch Alptraum in front of the (television)screen, engendering within her feelings of pleasure, belonging and empowerment and motivating her to share her reading of them online. This connection between non-visibility and affect challenges the privileged position of vision as the only or primary sense through which a queering of heteronormativity can occur. Secondly, this post shows how a reading in which the viewer of the television shows fills in the gaps with her own ideas and desires materialises online as an 'affective fabric', thereby producing rather than representing ideas about queerness through feeling.



Figure 16: 'Why *Glee*'s Brittany And Santana Are My Queer Icons' (Alptraum, 2010)

At the time when Alptraum wrote her blog entry on Jezebel.com, Brittany and Santana's queer relationship had not been visually represented in *Glee*; it had only been insinuated through gestures and utterances. This lack of visibility arguably prevents

¹⁰⁹ The two characters from *Glee* might not be celebrities in the traditional sense (they are two characters on a television show and not star personae), yet they have some of the same qualities as celebrities: their representations are highly visible and invoke people to engage with them affectively and to negotiate through them questions about identity and value.

their queer desire from being objectified or misrepresented as ‘lesbian chic’. It also saves this un-labelled relationship from being turned into a visual spectacle, and impedes the assimilationist move within mainstream media to render one butch and the other femme.¹¹⁰ Yet this invisible queer connection is strong enough to affectively move guest blogger Alptraum, who writes euphorically about how representations of Brittany and Santana’s sexual encounters evoke in her feelings of belonging, empowerment and pleasure:

I’ve never really had any TV characters I could identify with, who seemed to represent my personal experience of sexuality. But then I discovered Brittany and Santana on Glee. To be honest, I didn’t feel an immediate kinship with the two Cheerios. Unlike the ubergay Kurt, their queer nature wasn’t telegraphed from episode 1. In fact, it wasn’t even until halfway through Glee’s first season that the first hint of queerness was even mentioned. But as the characters got more and more fleshed out through the second half of season I started to find myself drawn to the two of them and their unconventional – yet, for me, totally relatable – relationship. (Alptraum, 2010)

In her post, Alptraum describes a representation of queerness that develops slowly, rather than one which forces itself upon the viewer like the ‘ubergay Kurt’. It is notable here that the lack of visual representation does not erase queer sexuality, as proponents of gay visibility might argue. Rather, it is precisely the palpable sexuality between Brittany and Santana that is highlighted in this post, and named as the reason for Alptraum’s excitement. The blogger describes how she became increasingly ‘drawn to’ the two girls when the queer sexual connotations became clearer (yet still not visually represented). This connecting and opening up to other queer bodies happens across the

¹¹⁰ For more on how mainstream cinema appropriates the lesbian identities by rendering one butch and the other femme, see Weiss (1992) or Barale (1991). Barale argues that the visual display of sex/gender positioning is often completed by a difference in hair colour: blonde for the femme and dark hair for the butch. Even though Brittany and Santana visually embody these oppositions (Brittany is white with blond hair while Santana is Latina), they do not reiterate this binary construction.

seemingly separate spheres of representation and reality, and thereby shows the extent to which this boundary is blurred. The post details the way in which she gradually felt a connection with the characters, because Brittany and Santana's sexual encounters seem to resonate with her own lived and felt sexuality – these bodies from purportedly separate spheres belong together through the virtue of their difference to the heterosexual norm. This felt connection engenders feelings of excitement and belonging that bring these bodies, real and imagined, closer together, thereby increasing the ability of the real body to feel empowered, to feel comfortable in her own skin.


Not only does Alptraum's post illustrate how queerness emerges through imagination and feeling in addition to what is visually represented, but it also illustrates the ways in which representations of queer/lesbian desire take on different meanings when read through a female queer gaze rather than through the straight male gaze.¹¹¹Through Alptraum's lived experience and her queer gaze, she can identify with the two characters, and this identification is experienced as empowering:


Brittany and Santana probably aren't lesbians – their numerous dalliances with boys make that pretty clear – but they're definitely not straight. Maybe you'd call it bisexual, maybe you'd call it heteroflexible, maybe you'd call it bicurious: whatever they are, it's definitely a bit queer. And as a girl who's been attracted to men, women, and everything in between, it's thrilling to see this sort of sexual fluidity represented on one of the most popular shows on television.(Alptraum, 2010)


¹¹¹I am not implying a universality of reception amongst queer and lesbian viewers, and am not framing the queer female gaze as an essential category that defines itself against the male heterosexual gaze and vice versa. Rather, I use it, strategically, in order to express a particular investment and viewing context that differs from the male straight gaze. Gay and lesbian theorists have also made significant contributions to the 'rereading' of film spectatorship. Andrea Weiss (1991), and Patricia White (1991), among others, suggest that lesbian spectatorial desire challenges the traditional heterosexist paradigm, creating a dynamic of desire outside of previously theorised notions of spectatorship. If lesbian spectators are outside of the traditional heterosexual system of desire, then they pose a significant threat to previous theories of spectatorship.


The ‘thrilling’ feeling that Alptraum describes here when encountering representations that portray sexual fluidity, and the rejection of any kind of (sexual) categorisation, is not shared by her friends. The blogger writes ‘my designation of Brittany and Santana as queer icons has met with some derision: their relationship is played for laughs, I’ve been told. They’re just straight girls making out for male attention. They’re not *really* queer’ (Alptraum, 2010; emphasis in original.) And yet Alptraum clearly read them as queer, as figures that manage to be sustained at the fringes, avoiding the complete assimilation and pinning down that often characterises more explicit visual representations with mainstream media.

3 participants ✕

 **CurtCole** ▶ Lux Alptraum ★ 🗨
They're my favorite characters on the show, both of them subvert traditional stereotypes of bisexuality in a subtle and often humorous ways. 10/01/10 10:18am

 **counter-clockwise** ▶ CurtCole ★ 🗨
@CurtCole: And they're pretty.
Just thought I'd mention that... 10/01/10 10:46am

 **Ipomoea** ▶ counter-clockwise ★ 🗨
@clockwise - counter: 'shipper! 10/01/10 11:14am

 **counter-clockwise** ▶ Ipomoea ★ 🗨

@Ipomoea: What? Sorry, I can't hear you over all the loveliness! 10/01/10 12:03pm

Figure 17: Mini-dialogue field in ‘Why Glee’s Brittany And Santana Are My Queer Icons’(Alptraum, 2010)

Alptraum communicates this experience and her queer re-reading of the characters online on Jezebel.com. Her affective reading that emerged at the intersections of television and lived reality is now online, turned into a text as part of a blog, visible on a shifting screen. This text circulates as a ‘packet of data’ connecting different people, readers like me who stop their online browsing and engage with the blog post. Alptraum’s post is not just a flat text on the distant screen but an ‘affective fabric’ which we grab and model through our touch with the cursor. It affects readers who feel compelled to comment, and some of these comments open up their own mini-dialogue field (Figure 17). For instance, user CurtCole writes in response to Alptraum’s post: ‘They’re my favorite characters on the show, both of them subvert traditional stereotypes of bisexuality in a subtle and often humorous ways’. This comment in turn motivates other readers to react to CurtCole’s message either by commenting or by adding a GIF (see Figure 17). All added elements in this mini-dialogue field celebrate Brittany and Santana as representations of a fluid sexual identity, as queer. Through this repetitive touching and adding content online, Brittany and Samantha’s queerness becomes more and more visible and palpable. Dean writes that particular posts in blogs come to matter only when they accrue their affective force through, for instance, virtual touching: ‘[e]very little tweet or comment, every forwarded image or petition, accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in’ (2010: 95). This illustrates that the blog post about Brittany and Santana *matters* in the constant stream of online content only because it is picked up on, commented on and extended with images. Questions about if and how online posts/representations come to matter are always already connected with questions about what they can mean *and* what they can do. I argue that through the numerous different engagements with the blog post, the affective fabric of the original blog post becomes thicker, thereby fixing (maybe only

momentarily) Brittany and Santana's representations of queerness. Ironically, these online practices and affective involvements are fixing what Alptraum so euphorically described as unstable and fluid. However, perhaps more importantly, this example also shows that celebrity gossip blogs like Jezebel.com can create ideas about queerness rather than merely representing what exists in this form already elsewhere.

In this section, I have argued that how queerness becomes produced is not necessarily a matter of visual expressiveness. Rather, it is created affectively through the ways in which the viewer – with her specific experiences and history – and the representations touch each other. Alptraum is differently orientated towards these representations than, for instance, a straight male viewer might be. She feels connected and similar to these characters, and this in turn evokes in her feelings of belonging and pleasure. I have explored how her reading is translated online. Conceptualising her blog post as an affective fabric which users grab and re-work illustrates how online spaces like celebrity gossip blogs can be seen as skins on which different actors and mediate formats meet, thereby producing through their dynamic and interactive practices ideas about queerness. In the next section, I shift my attention away from touch towards clothing, and explore how ideas about sexuality become produced online when gossip blogs discuss the sartorial practices of celebrities.

Wearing Sexuality: Sartorial Practices and Queerness

Scholars have rightly argued that clothes are a tangible and concrete texture that makes and communicates meaning (Iqani, 2012; Owyong, 2009). Like a second skin, clothes protect our bodies from external influences like sun exposure or cold, and like a second skin, clothes are only superficial but they read, enact, and create power relations between people. However, unlike skin, clothes are not understood as a matter of nature or being. Dressing up or wearing something is a form of consciousness; it is never

natural, but always acquired. As such, in Western consumer culture, clothing is a medium through which we express our individuality and identity. Fashionable and stylish attire is valued as an expression of individualism, class and good taste, and clothes are signifiers that give us clues about the gendered, classed and sexualised self of the individual. Clothing is in close affinity with discussions of gender construction, performance, and enactment, and thereby functions as a cultural code that enables an identification *of* the other, but also identification *with* the other.¹¹² In this section, I explore the ways in which Dlisted.com comments on the clothing of celebrities. I argue that the humorous comments on celebrities' outfits reveal which sexuality or sexual practices are valued by the blogger and which are critiqued. I illustrate the ways in which, through humour, Dlisted.com develops an elaborate web of subversive gestures that undermines the normalising discourses and practices of heterosexuality, and celebrates the outlandish, the failed and that which refuses the logic of the normal.

It is a recurrent strategy on Dlisted.com to mock celebrity couples that try to express, through matching outfits, their monogamous, middle- or upper-class, and therefore happy relationship.¹¹³ In a post from January 2011, Dlisted.com comments humorously on the break-up between actors Keira Knightley and Rupert Friend: '[b]ecause coordinating outfits with your piece gets exhausting after a while, Keira Knightley and her boyfriend of 5 years Rupert Friend have stuffed the pieces of their relationship into a GLAD bag and thrown it on the back of a truck heading for the nearest dumpster' (Michael, 2011b).

¹¹² Accounting for the potential of clothes to be seen an access to the sexuality of a subject, Dyer explains the significance clothing and fashion had for gay men: 'Fashion and the other style trades gave us a space to exercise a skill we have had to be very good at, namely, presentation. Surviving as a queer meant mastering appearances, knowing how to manipulate clothes, mannerisms and lifestyle so as to be able to pass for straight and also to signal that we weren't' (2002a: 63).

¹¹³ Dlisted.com ridicules both queer and straight couples for this practice. See, for instance, a post about actor Neil Patrick Harris and his partner David Burtka from a photo shoot for *People Magazine* (Michael K., 2010b).

Two Boring Pretty People Broke Up

January 13, 2011 / Posted by: [Michael K](#)

68



Figure 18: ‘Two Boring Pretty People Broke Up’ (Michael K., 2011b)

Before I explain why Dlisted.com’s ridiculing of the ‘coordinat[ed] outfits’ is important in the deconstruction of heteronormativity, it is necessary to clarify some of the semantics of matching outfits. Like uniforms, matching outfits can symbolise, for instance, belonging to a group – different bodies come to look alike, their individuality is played down while their similarity and togetherness is highlighted. In the world of celebrities, the semantics of matching outfits is often used to symbolise the coherence of a band, but there is also a trend of celebrity couples dressing alike to demonstrate their togetherness in a highly visible manner. Through their similarity, matching clothes produce the couple as an entity, as a social ‘one’. Within the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, notions of ‘unity’ and ‘twos’ that become ‘ones’ have historically been

ascribed, by social conventions and institutions like the church, medicine and the law, to monogamous heterosexual couples. In a neoliberal climate, ideas concerning monogamy, coupledness, the nuclear family and belonging are extended to encompass particular queer bodies, and clothing is one way of demonstrating and embodying this belonging on and through their skin.

By mocking the practice of demonstrating togetherness through ‘tasteful’ matching outfits that celebrity couples wear, Dlisted.com humorously draws attention to the fact that monogamous coupledness, as the privileged space within which sexuality can take place, is a performance that not only requires careful scrutiny and labour, but also one that only privileged bodies (with money) can enact. In the above post, clothes stand not for an expression of individuality, but rather as an expression of belonging together with, in this case, a differently gendered person. Sexual desire is here not only felt in the body, but also felt on and expressed through the skin. Through clothes, the normative fantasy of a relationship where two become one is tangible and consumable. Dlisted.com illustrates that the monogamous couple, which Hollywood tries so eagerly to naturalise by representing it as normal and as a source of happiness, is a performance that needs to be artificially maintained and requires hard work: ‘coordinating outfits with your piece gets exhausting after a while’. Dlisted.com reduces the relationship to pieces of clothing that are not only put on for a good performance, but that can also be stuffed in a bag and thrown away. Relationships are, in this reading, only skin deep, a surface appearance rather than some essential truth. Through this humorous reading of Knightley and Friend’s relationship, Dlisted.com disrupts the myth that Hollywood tries to create around coupledness as the only route to happiness.

Rather than celebrating a dress code that reinforces the dominant discourse of heterosexuality and its privileged expression in the form of the monogamous couple, Dlisted.com hails celebrities that queer, through their excessive outfits, normative

understandings of gender-appropriate and tasteful attire. In this section, I use a post about fitness icon Richard Simmons to demonstrate the ways in which Dlisted.com's humorous treatment of celebrities whose style disrupts normative sex/gender expectations can be understood as more than malicious mocking. Instead, I reconsider the politics of queer humour, and suggest that this post can touch the reader affectively, thereby enabling a counter-hegemonic discourse for critiques of gender and sex roles.

Richard Simmons Serving You Dementia-Stricken Drag Queen As Poison Ivy

August 11, 2012 / Posted by:

112



Figure 19: 'Richard Simmons Serving You Dementia-Stricken Drag Queen As Poison Ivy' (Michael K., 2012b)

I LURVE this crazy old lady. [...] Mother Nature and Uma Thurman can punch out early, because Richard Simmons' Poison Ivy poses are burning Beverly Hills

to the GROUND. He even accessorized with butterflies like a true woodland diva does it.

Auntie Richie blends so well into those bushes with his costume camouflage magic. Imagine you're going down to the shrubs to get a blowie (old gays still do this – we call them cock zombies), and THAT pops out at you with a 'HEELLLOOOO BATMAN!' and offering to pull down his tights? Scared straight!

And he has so many faces and emotions. He's giving you 'Am I at the right bus stop?' 'Ooh, is that the Gallagher's new poolboy?' 'Thinking about the nighttime.' and 'A locked ward don't mean SHIT to POISON IVY.' Never change, Richard.

Check out more pics of the utterly flawless Richard Simmons and his green finery. (Michael K., 2012b)

As the image of Simmons in this post (Figure 19) shows, it is the feminised, bizarre clothing that marks him as not a proper – i.e. masculine and heterosexual – man. The image is out of context and thus Simmons seems to wear this outfit without any special reason, such as a costume party. This marks him, through a heteronormative gaze, as opposed to dominant ideas of masculinity and as a pathologised form of gendered subjectivity. At first, the humorous comment that accompanies the image might seem offensive – blogger Michael K. refers to Simmons in the headline as a 'Dementia-Stricken Poison Ivy Drag Queen', and he jokes about his potential to 'scare' people 'straight'. Yet I suggest that this post cannot be reduced to merely othering the flamboyant celebrity, but that rather what resonates here is a humorous camp reading of Simmons's outfit that reveals to the reader, in a highly affective way (by making us laugh), that all gender and sex roles are artificial constructs.

The root of camp humour is in a relationship between 'queens and their circumstances' (Medhurst, 1997: 276). It is, as such, a type of humour that emerges out

of the queers' experiences and perceptions, and functions as 'a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity' (Babuscio, 1993: 27). Camp humour takes the form of biting irony, self-deprecating jokes and bitter wit because it digests feelings such as fear and pain that a hostile environment evokes in those who do not embody heterosexual norms. Camp humour is difficult to grasp for 'outsiders', which means in this context all identities that are not gay white men. This illustrates that, in discussions about camp humour, 'queer' and 'gay' are often problematically conflated.¹¹⁴ Because camp humour has such an 'insider' function, it appears cynical and malicious while actually being affectionate. This is reflected in Dlisted.com's statement: 'I LURVE this crazy old lady' (Michael K., 2012b). The deprecating description as 'crazy' reflects the outsider's view of Simmons, while 'I LURVE' signals the feelings of love and appreciation towards him. Dlisted.com is not laughing at Simmons – rather, it celebrates the shameless flaunting of a flamboyant aesthetic, the highly staged and artificial nature of his outfit. Arguing for the benign nature of camp (humour), Susan Sontag writes:

Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation – not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it's not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.) Camp taste doesn't propose that it is in bad taste to be serious; it doesn't sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures.(1966: 291)

Simmons' 'passionate failure', which he carries on his skin in the form of an eccentric dress made of artificial leaves, is, on Dlisted.com, not understood as a failure to succeed in the performance of normative categories, but rather as a failure to participate in a

¹¹⁴ While scholars such as Pamela Robertson (1996) argue that camp can also convert to a feminist politics in that it highlight the performative nature of gender and sex roles, Andy Medhurst insists that camp is the exclusive property of gay men. Women or straight men, it seems, have no claims to the sensibility of camp. Indeed Medhurst concludes with the remark that camp is 'ours, all ours, just ours, and the time has come to bring it back home' (1997: 291).

system of valuation that is predicated on conformity. Simmons fails in a system where validation is only given to male sexed bodies that behave and dress in a straight masculine way. Critics such as Muñoz and Halberstam have both argued that failure can be read as a form of resistance. The ‘modality of being off script, off page [...] is not so much a failure to succeed as it is a failure to participate in a system of validation that is predicated on exploitation and conformity’ (Muñoz, 2009: 174). According to Halberstam, failure, rather than symbolising that people cannot rule themselves, can be understood as a commitment to refuse the logic of rule, be it colonial, capitalist, feudal, or neoliberal (2012: 133-134). Dlisted.com recognises this potential in Simmons, and declares him, as such, ‘utterly flawless’.

Dlisted.com’s frenetic hailing of Simmons’s queer outfit does not only glorify what the normative and the mainstream would abject.¹¹⁵ Rather, Dlisted.com’s humorous celebration of the highly artificial and queer can be understood as an attack on the dominant discourse of heterosexuality that shapes our ideas of masculinity and femininity.¹¹⁶ This attack works affectively in that Dlisted.com’s camp humour produces new ways of relating to each other (bodies that are perceived to represent ‘normal’ and ‘deviant’ sexualities). This queer reading of Simmons is inclusive, rather than being exclusively for a particular readership. It acknowledges on the one hand how Simmons’s outfit must appear to the sober straight gaze, i.e. ‘crazy’, and as something a ‘dementia stricken drag queen’ would wear. However, the humorous tone also allows Dlisted.com to express feelings of affection and love for Simmons because of his uniqueness, a uniqueness based on mutation, perversion and deviance from the norm.

¹¹⁵ Even though celebrity culture can be seen as camp because it praises style over content, celebrates the play with surfaces, and realises that performance is everything, figures like Simmons would typically be rejected, made fun of, or at most be used as ‘freaks’ to sell something.

¹¹⁶ I use the word ‘attack’ here in order to highlight the political and cultural seriousness of Dlisted.com’s project. Camp humour is characterised as being funny while being deadly serious. As a character in a Christopher Isherwood novel remarks: ‘You can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously; you’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it. You’re expressing what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance’ (2012 [1984]: 125). If we take this definition of camp humour seriously, then we can conclude that joking about Simmons’s outfit has some serious significance for Dlisted.com.

‘Never change, Richard’, Dlisted.com advises Simmons, thereby pledging alliance to him and reminding him not to become absorbed into the mainstream. Through this kind of humour, Dlisted.com bridges the gap between those who have not yet come into contact with or felt the politically subversive power of camp practices like drag, and those who are camp savvy and know about the multiple potentialities and functions of this practice. Dlisted.com’s camp banter is inclusive and imaginative, (theoretically) including everyone in the joke. The reader is, for instance, invited to ‘imagine [...] going down to the shrubs to get a blowie’ (Michael K., 2012b). Dlisted.com does not care about the sexed body or the sexual orientation that the reader might inhabit – rather, every reader is invited to take on the position of an old gay male, so-called ‘cock zombies’. Through this ‘going gaga’ (Halberstam, 2012), being offensive yet affectionate, dismissive yet supportive, and blind towards gender and sex distinctions and yet celebrating difference, Dlisted.com invites its readers not only to imagine a different social, cultural and sexual position, but also a different view, where deviation from the norm becomes that which is beautiful and flawless, rather than the ability to fit in perfectly.

Jonathan Gray argues that comedy and humour are transformative and transgresssive because they invite ‘at least some degree of critical intersexuality, for when we laugh, we acknowledge having moved with the joke to other territory, and having been treated to an alternative view of that territory’ (2006: 105). Through its camp humour, Dlisted.com enables an alternative view of a seemingly known territory: we might laugh about Simmons, but we can also appreciate him for illustrating that gender and sexual orientation is a performance, a question of style and aesthetics. Why is his outfit more ridiculous than those of Rihanna or Lady Gaga? Muñoz argues that we need to create utopias for the purpose of imagining a future that is unimaginable in normative and straight time (2009: 178). I suggest that Dlisted.com accomplishes this

through its camp and vulgar celebration of the queerly dressed. In this online space, transgressions are encouraged and enjoyed, transgressions and vulgarities that cannot find expression in more conventional media representations. As such, Dlisted.com enables the reader to – at least momentarily – imagine a different reality, to make detours around the usual, and to distort the everyday ideologies that are regarded as common sense or true. In the next section, I explore how ideas about happy relationships become affectively reinforced on Perezhilton.com, and how this affective intensification contributes to the dominant discourse of heterosexuality.

Homonormativity, School Uniforms and ‘Positive’ Affect

In their arguments against gay marriage, Butler and Halberstam maintain that this heteronormative institution does not disrupt the violent normativity that distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate lives and sexualities, but rather reinforces it and extends it to new territory. Rather than the hierarchy resting on a distinction between gay and straight, it becomes displaced onto a new distinction between more and less legitimate queer relationships (Butler, 2002: 18; Halberstam, 2012: 100). With this argument, they illustrate the problems that emerge when gay activism dovetails with neoliberal politics, a movement that Lisa Duggan (2002) has called ‘new homonormativity’.¹¹⁷ New homonormativity describes the enactment of queer subjectivities that participate in, or desire to participate in, institutions and practices of heterosexuality. As such, homonormativity is a politics that does not ‘contest heteronormative assumptions and institutions’ (2002: 51), but is rather one which sustains these normalising practices through aligning the queer and straight through their private acts of consumption and domestication. Perezhilton.com’s post from November 2011 about the *Entertainment Weekly* cover photograph of *Glee*’s gay

¹¹⁷ See also Puar for a discussion of ‘homonationalism’ in which she builds on Lisa Duggan’s work and explores how the figure of the homonational functions to further other and animate the figure of the terrorist (2008).

characters Blaine Anderson and Kurt Hummel is a salient example of the blog's contribution to homonormativity. Homonormativity can also be understood as a 'the mainstreaming of gay culture [...] focused on the embrace of white heterosexual and nationalist norms and the turn from a politics of freedom to a politics of consumption and assimilation' (Love, 2008: 53). For Heather Love, homonormativity is increasingly underpinned with notions of happiness. She argues further: 'In the era of gay normalization, gays and lesbians not only have to be like every else (get married, raise kids, mow the grass, etc.), they have to look and feel good doing it' (2008: 54).

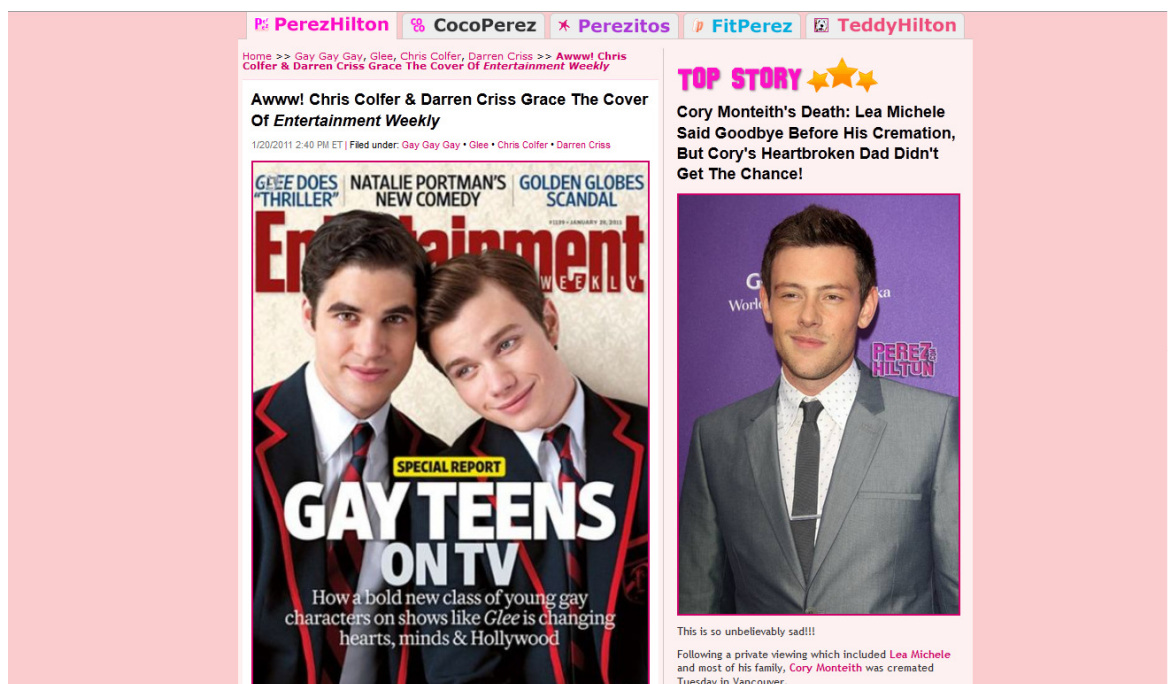


Figure 20: 'Awww! Chris Colfer & Darren Criss Grace the Cover Of *Entertainment Weekly*' (Hilton, 2011c)

For gay teenagers, homonormativity may provide a narrow space within the heterosexual matrix in which they can feel secure and accepted. Kim Hackford-Peer (2010) argues that teenagers adopt a homonormative identity, meaning here a fixed sexual identity in which they conform to gender norms, to reduce the risk of being harassed. Homonormativity thus seems to provide a secure space where the gay teenager can find happiness and confidence. This is semiotically represented within the

cover photograph, which shows two white, conventionally attractive young men, dressed in their school uniforms. Their close relationship is represented through the similarity of their school uniform, which marks them as sharing the same educational background. It also marks them as respectable young teenagers that dress according to gender norms: they wear the masculine school uniform which makes them – at least visually – undistinguishable from their fellow students. They are therefore assimilated into the masculine traditional dress code.¹¹⁸ They are both smiling, and Chris Colfer leans towards Darren Criss, resting his head on Criss'. Young gay sexuality is here represented as respectable, tender, and non-threatening to straight gender norms.

Perezhilton.com's comment on this cover photo is positive and affirming. Under the headline 'Awww! Chris Colfer & Darren Criss Grace The Cover Of *Entertainment Weekly*', the blogger writes:

This is so special, we're actually tearing up a bit.

This week's Entertainment Weekly cover boys are none other than *Glee*'s Darren Criss and Chris Colfer. Dressed in their Warbler garbs, the boys are the talk of the town, as well as the highlight of this issue celebrating gay teen characters on TV.

Aren't they adorable? Don't U just love them? (Hilton, 2011c)

Both headline and comment are very affective. As an expression of delight in the headline of this post, 'Awww' signals Perezhilton.com's positive orientation towards the public appearance of Criss and Colfer. The comment '[w]e are tearing up a bit' humorously alludes to the fact that the blogger(s) are/is seriously moved by such a highly visible performance of gay teenage coupledness. According to Perezhilton.com, they are the 'highlight of this issue celebrating gay teen characters on TV'. In this

¹¹⁸ The revalorisation of the masculine gay man and the feminine gay woman was initially a response to the essentialist and widespread assumption that gender and sexuality are inextricably linked, and that gay men are, by definition, feminine and gay women masculine. However, notwithstanding the necessity for deconstructing and dismantling the binary and gendered approach to sexuality, it has benefited the assimilationist project that typifies homonormativity. Gay men and women acting in gender-appropriate ways are less of a threat to the heterosexual matrix, since the reification of traditional gender roles supports the superiority of patriarchal masculinity.

sentence, two statements are made: firstly that public visibility of gay teenagers through television representations is good, and secondly that this particular kind of representation of gay coupledness is the best possible form in which this can be presented. My point here is not to argue that mainstream media representations of gay teenagers are always already flawed – rather, I want to highlight the problematic assumptions upon which Perez Hilton.com’s celebratory tone is based. Perez Hilton.com celebrates a form of gay teenage coupledness in which both partners represent a clear-cut and fixed sexual identity. Both are (in the television show) openly gay, but both obey the gender norms of heterosexuality, according to which boys (the male sexed body) dress in a masculine way. The idea of sexuality as a dynamic process, something that emerges and is shaped through the different contacts and experiences we have, is here repudiated for the sake of a rigid and unified sexual identity that can be labelled, controlled, and policed. This homonormative understanding of sexuality does not challenge the heterosexual matrix, but rather represents a variation that is easily integrated into heteronormative society. The other problematic aspect of this particular post on Perez Hilton.com is its valorisation of the teen that succeeds at coming out in public over those who stay – for different reasons – ‘in the closet’. As Diana Fuss reminds us, coming out as gay does not challenge the heteronormative discourse *per se* (1991). Rather, it creates hierarchies between the ‘out and loud’ teenagers and those that stay in the closet. In this hierarchy, the normalised gay identity (gender conformist, monogamous, consumer citizen) is preferable to the queer teenager that cannot be easily defined by a label. Through the use of rhetorical questions like ‘Aren’t they adorable’, Perez Hilton.com tries to elicit a positive response from the blog reader, so that everyone is positively oriented towards this ‘healthy’ and good-looking version of gay teenage romance. In this sense, Perez Hilton.com attempts to create an uplifting momentum for gay teenagers, and to counter those notions of unhappiness, loneliness, injury, and fear

of verbal or physical abuse that resonate within many debates surrounding and representations of gay teens. However, this praise for a particular kind of visibility and outing installs a moral hierarchy that privileges the highly visible gay teen (in the television show, the print cover and online) over the closeted one, while glossing over the ways in which visibility grants a heteronormative society the power to control sexual deviancy. As such, it contributes affectively to a discourse that installs homonormative coupledness as the only way to happiness.

In this section I have illustrated how Perez Hilton.com narrows queerness down to homonormativity by re-publishing and celebrating the cover photo of Criss and Colfer online with an uplifting and supportive comment. The visibility of their gay romance and harmony, which is expressed through their body language and the matching outfits, should – according to Perez Hilton.com – move the reader in affective ways, evoking feelings of endearment, sympathy and joy. In a similar way to the discussion about Brittany and Santana on Jezebel.com, television characters and their representations are here used to connect abstract ideas about specific forms of non-heteronormativity with visible public figures.¹¹⁹ These highly visible figures are necessary because through their representation they can animate these terms with feelings so that they can be experienced by the readers/viewers. Celebrity gossip blogs remediate these celebrity representations, coloured by their own cultural and political orientation. As I argued in the Introduction, I position Perez Hilton.com as a homonormative online space. The blog functions here to intensify the positive experience of homonormativity for blog readers by using the public affection these

¹¹⁹ There is a slight difference between Brittany's and Santana's representations on Jezebel.com and Perez Hilton.com's representations of Criss and Colfer because the girls are referred to with their character's name while the boys are named by their real life names. The reason for this does not lie in the 'real-life' sexuality of these actors: only Criss identifies himself as gay while Colfer, Heather Morris (Brittany) and Naya Rivera (Santana) identify themselves as straight. Rather, I suggest that it hints towards the different ends these posts are used: in Jezebel.com staying within the realm of fiction gestures towards a space outside of the 'reality', an alternative place. In Perez Hilton.com the representations of the gay teenagers are mobilised to enable an identity politics in reality – the here and now. This is why Perez Hilton.com refers to their real names.

characters already have (and their social visibility) and re-enforcing through its own affective language.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated how Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com affectively mediate meanings of queerness. Since queerness resists any clear definition, I have located it in those moments where heteronormativity is challenged, and in blog entries where non-heterosexual relationships are represented. Unlike the previous chapter on femininity, or the following chapter on whiteness, queerness (or sexuality) is not commonly understood to be readable on the skin in the way that gender and race are. Rather, sexuality is understood to be recognisable through the ways in which we touch or dress our skin. Hence, the concept of skin invited me to approach the subject of sexuality through online representations in which bloggers and/or users comment on the ways in which celebrities touch or dress. My aim in this chapter has been to highlight how the concept of skin can help us to make visible (and palpable) the affective ways in which humorous celebrity gossip blogs can enable a queering of the dominant discourse of heterosexuality, while also pointing out where the limits of these practices are. I have fleshed out moments in which posts on Dlisted.com or Jezebel.com can be read as challenging dominant discourses of heterosexuality: Dlisted.com's mocking of Keira Knightley and Rupert Friend illustrated affectively the constructed nature of heterosexuality and Alptraum's blog post on Jezebel.com demonstrated that queer representations do not have to be explicitly and visibly represented in order to move and touch the viewer in empowering and pleasurable ways. Reading online representations on Perezhilton.com through skin illustrated how humorous celebrity gossip blogs can also limit the ways in which queerness can be thought and understood. I have illustrated how online representations that initially seem to queer heteronormativity, actually

reinforce these norms by building upon the logic, values and feelings of dominant classed, raced, gendered and sexualised discourses.

Overall, this chapter has built on the discussions in Chapter Two, and has extended my critique of visibility as the primary sense through which we make meaning. By reading these online representations of queerness through the skin rather than the eye, I have highlighted that what we see and how we read an online representation is necessarily shaped by our embodied experience and the feelings and memories we have made in our skins. With this archive of feelings and experiences that we possess, representations are not only cognitively decoded but also sensuously produced in the body of the reader. This is why our individual reading of a celebrity representation might be quite different from the intended meaning of the celebrity him/herself, the blogger or the television series producers. Owing to their multimediality and interactivity, blogs can be suitable vehicles to express and communicate this unique reading of celebrity representations to others. As I have argued, Dlisted.com's humorous re-reading of the *Entertainment Weekly* cover photograph and subsequent integrated photomontage can engender a *Verfremdungseffekt* ('making strange effect') which enables readers to think critically about the established rules and norms of heterosexuality. Alptraum's guest blogging on Jezebel.com illustrated how a blog can provide a space in which these queer fantasies and ideas became played out and manifested on affective fabrics. This is not to argue that we can read whatever we want; after all, these representations are embedded within historical and cultural circuits of power, and are shaped by gendered, classed and raced histories. Yet this chapter has shown that, through their affective charge and their technological affordances such as commenting on image manipulation, celebrity gossip blogs enable pockets where the 'object' of heteronormativity is drawn 'into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside

out, peer at it from above and below, break it open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it. Lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it' (Bakhtin, 1981: 23). Through their affectively charged online celebrity representations, the discourses and practices of heteronormativity become constantly re-touched, re-formulated and experimented with. Reading through the skin pays close attention to the different ways in which such experimenting can unfold.

Chapter Four

White Stars and Orange Celebrities: The (Un)Doing of Whiteness Online

Skin has long been understood as the primary signifier of race, where the bodily surface allegedly reveals the racial ‘truth’ about an individual, a truth read through the gaze of the other. However, the way in which we read skin, and skin colour, is one that is shaped by historical and cultural discourses and practices which prompt us to look for and produce differences – for example between ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ skin.¹²⁰ Yet difference is only meaningful when it can be measured against a norm. Usually, the more something deviates from the norm, the lower its value is understood to be. As many have shown, in Western cultures, whiteness serves as the ideological background, as the ubiquitous norm against which every other difference can be read.¹²¹ This interpretation illustrates that the concept of whiteness concerns not only white skin (even though bodies that inhabit certain types of white skin are seen as representatives of whiteness), but that it also penetrates below surface appearance and can be seen as a system, a network of power relations, or ‘a point from which the world unfolds’ (Ahmed, 2007b: 154). In other words, whiteness forms our perception and shapes the way in which we become orientated towards certain things and averted from others. Whiteness has, like all raced identities, no valid foundation in biology or anthropology, and yet this does not prevent it from congealing as a social identity.¹²² Scholars such as Peggy McIntosh (1988) argue that whiteness creates an identity that allows privileged

¹²⁰ I am aware of the problematic use of the term ‘non-white’ because it always already implies a hierarchy and defines a group through its negativity. Negativity understands the group ‘non-white’ as lacking, where this lack constitutes their identity. However, I refer to non-white in this specific context to make my argument, looking for differences between A and not-A, clearer.

¹²¹ Dyer writes in this context that ‘[t]he assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off from saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture’ (1997: 2), and Vron Ware and Les Back argue that ‘whiteness is brought into being as a normative structure’ which implicates a racial domination which makes every deviation ‘other’ (2002: 13).

¹²² For analysis of the missing basis of race in biology and anthropology, see: Lipsitz (2006), Markus & Moya (2010: 1-102), Winant (2000: 172) and Rattansi (2007: 74-75).

access to wealth, prestige and opportunity. However, whiteness intersects with many other axes of difference such as class, nation, gender and sexuality, and as such is not a monolithic category, but rather one that consists of many different forms and shapes. Some forms of whiteness have more values than others. This inner hierarchy becomes recognisable when we think about the differences between idealised whiteness, in the form of the ‘English Rose’ and ‘unrespectable’ working class whiteness, often labelled as ‘white trash’ (US) or ‘chav’ (UK). Acknowledging the differences and hierarchies within the category of whiteness, Dyer (1997) and Sean Redmond (2007) focus on the potent relationship between celebrity representations and whiteness, and Redmond argues that ‘when idealized whiteness and stardom come together, an extraordinarily powerful representation emerges that ontologically privileges and secures this form of whiteness (white stardom) as the highest ideal available to man/women’ (2007: 263). For both, this influential meaning arises as a result of the Western socio-historical construction of whiteness as a signifier for purity, demeanour, self-control and beauty, upon which these celebrity representations of idealised whiteness are built. This discursive construction is synthesised within representations that are, in turn, constitutive and generative of our perception of the world. Their work demonstrates how such representations are produced within an ideology of whiteness, and function to reinforce it.

While these approaches to representations of whiteness acknowledge the complex interrelations of texts and meanings, their emphasis on discourse and language has been often understood as unsuitable to grasp the surprises in the encounter with texts that stem from visceral or material forces. This chapter fleshes out the ways in which feelings such as anxiety, anger, shame, resentment, laughter, affection and enjoyment are all part of the affective landscape upon which whiteness is built, and how humour can move us as an discursive-affective tool, thereby shifting affects that

constitute whiteness in relation to its imaginary racialised others, and saturating representations of whiteness. As in the previous chapters, humour is used as a lens for illuminating the interpretive-affective dimensions of these representations. I do not suggest that the unstable efficacy of humour and irony are powerful enough to invert or subvert historically rooted hierarchies of injustice immediately or permanently. However, if the very power of whiteness is enabled, as Dyer argues, by the fact that its borders are unclear and its status is unstable, then this shaky ground is also the plateau on which resistance and resignification can take place (1997: 19-20). Whiteness, and what counts as 'proper' and 'improper' whiteness, becomes intelligible and lived through repetitive acts and affects. Practices of humour and irony allow us to repeat differently, enabling whiteness to be 're-felt'. This affective approach to whiteness further develops my argument concerning the way in which skin can be used as a useful heuristic device for reading online representations. I have illustrated in the previous chapters how skin as the fleshy material that can be touched, and which connects us with the world, is rethought in these blogs. I have shown that the concept of skin invites us to consider the textures of the online images and the ways in which different texts and actors meet online (Chapter Two). I have explored how experiences and the embodied position of the blogger shapes what we see and how we make meaning (Chapter Three). I now focus in this chapter on the particular ways in which humour touches us affectively. Clearly, the affective force of humour has been central in all these chapters, but in this chapter I tease out specifically those surprising encounters within online texts.

My aim is to explore how the meaning of whiteness is affectively mediated and employed in celebrity gossip blogs, and how it can take on different significations through humour. In particular, I analyse the affective ways in which the figures of idealised whiteness and white trash become animated within Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com

and Perez Hilton.com. In the first part of this chapter, I demonstrate how idealised whiteness is not only constructed through discourses of class, race, nation and gender, but also through its proximity to ‘happy’ objects and ‘good’ habits that, in turn, saturate it with positive affects (Ahmed, 2010). I then highlight how humour and irony function to disturb this positive affective economy, which gives high value to idealised whiteness. The second part of the chapter explores the affective value of fake-tanned skin and its connection to ‘white trash’ or ‘chav’ figures. I end the chapter with an examination of the user comments on Perez Hilton.com about the orange cast members of *Jersey Shore*. These comments reveal that affect complicates a structural reading that assumes a straightforward relationship between gendered, classed and raced discourses and the social positioning of the viewer. Overall, I argue that, although the humorous representations and discussions of celebrities in these online spaces are undoubtedly part of a media industry that produces difference for the purpose of commodification, they nonetheless offer the potential for a certain shifting and re-signification of how we feel and understand whiteness. An affective reading of these online representations makes visible not only how feelings and affects allow whiteness to retain its privileged status, but also how they deconstruct these privileged spaces.

Idealised Whiteness, Femininity, and Ridicule

The figure of the ‘English Rose’ is understood as the most valued form of idealised whiteness. Constructed along the lines of social class, gender, age, sexuality and nationality, and personal attributes such as skin tone, hair colour, face, physique and polite manners, this extraordinary embodiment of idealised whiteness is culturally understood as good and as something to which we aspire (Redmond, 2007: 263-270). Dyer (1997) and Redmond (2007) have analysed the ways in which representations of idealised whiteness become discursively constructed to maintain an ideology of

whiteness. Yet even though these representations can be invested with intentions and functions, they do not dictate or determine all the ways in which we encounter and experience them. In this section, I analyse the role of affect in the mediation of idealised whiteness. More specifically, I explore the ways in which, through their use of humour, celebrity online representations on Dlisted.com challenge traditional meanings of idealised female whiteness as a signifier of purity, moral goodness, and aesthetic superiority. Drawing on the work of Ahmed (2000, 2004a, 2010) and Tyler (2008, 2010), my argument is based on the assumption that cultural objects – in this case celebrities – are always already saturated with affects, affects which are not innate to them, but which instead emerge through interaction, accumulating their affective intensity and value through circulation. Celebrities thereby become sticky with certain affects as a result of the particular ways in which they are repeatedly represented in cultural discourses and media.¹²³ An example of this is Gwyneth Paltrow, who is often understood to embody idealised whiteness not only because she is enveloped by white, immaculate skin, but also because she is discursively placed in proximity to objects and values which are culturally judged as good. Diane Negra writes that she is often represented by mainstream media as ‘the remote and graceful cinema goddess’ who stands in stark contrast to such ‘overexposed tabloid “trash” [as] Britney Spears, Kerry Katona and Paris Hilton’ (2008: n.p.). She argues further that Paltrow is celebrated in magazines and talk-shows, where she functions as ‘a yardstick for measuring style, glamour, taste and etiquette and testing public beliefs about morality, intimacy, parenthood and wealth’ (Negra, 2008: n.p.). Positive affects thus bind Paltrow and the concept of idealised whiteness together. However, I argue that when Dlisted.com ridicules idealised white femininities such as that of Paltrow, this humorous mediation provokes quite different affective responses (resentment and derision) than the

¹²³ For more on this, see Ahmed’s discussion of, for instance, the figure of the asylum seeker and ‘stranger danger’ (2004b).

responses aimed at by mainstream media representations (affection and admiration).¹²⁴ I suggest that this affective turn consequently shifts the way in which idealised whiteness is experienced and valued by the reader.

Michael K. of Dlisted.com regularly pokes fun at Paltrow's image as the perfect white subject, delighting in pointing out the flaws and cracks in the construction of this image. One blog post, concerning the release of Paltrow's recipe book, exemplifies the tone of parody and humour through which Dlisted.com mocks Paltrow's status.

Fishsticks Paltrow Loves Hot Dog Buns, Hates Hot Dogs

April 8, 2011 / Posted by: Michael K

255

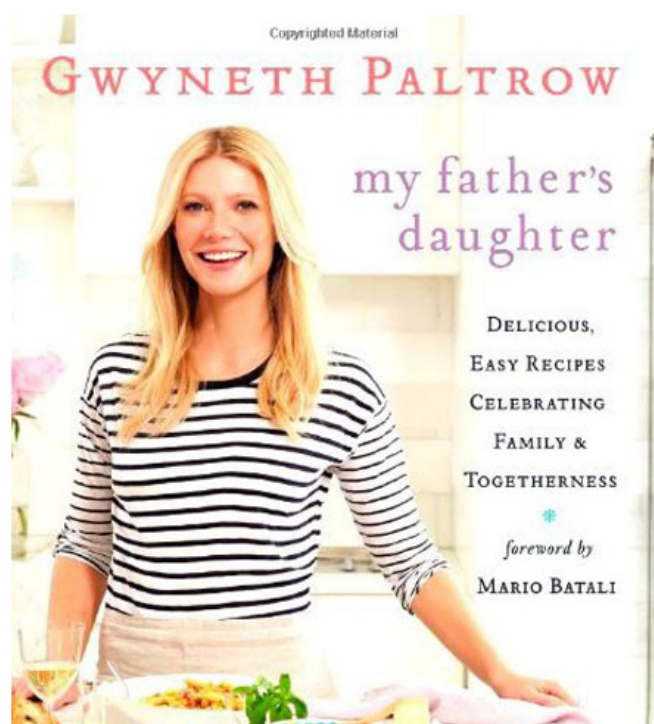


Figure 21: 'Fishsticks Paltrow Loves Hot Dog Buns, Hates Hot Dogs' (Michael K., 2011c)

¹²⁴ I write here that media, and as such also bloggers, often aim to evoke particular emotions. This is not to suggest that just because they intend to produce certain affective reactions, that they therefore do so. After all, I understand affect and the emotions it produces as uncontrollable. And yet certain discourses and images are 'sticky' with affect, which means that their citation in media is likely to evoke particular affects.

Now [sic], I haven't read Fishsticks Paltrow's Ode To My Perfect Life (No Poores Allowed), because I can feel bad about my diet for free by calling my mother up and telling her what I had for lunch. But Eater must've been behind on their eye rolling exercise for the week, because they dipped their retinas into the imported copper pot of naive pretentiousness and pulled out the best (see: worst) quotes. [...] GP 'One evening when I had my wood-burning stove going I realized I hadn't thought of dessert.' Me: That one is from the chapter titled: '*Being a rich white lady is hard.*' (Michael K., 2011c; emphasis in original)

Paltrow's book underlines her star image, as a celebrity who embodies idealised whiteness. Both her whiteness and the recipe book itself are constructed along the lines of stereotypical gender roles. Paltrow presents herself as a responsible, caring mother, who has written a book composed of vegetarian recipes (all prepared with organic ingredients), which, as the front cover proclaims, are designed for 'family and togetherness'. Not only does this representation repeat the current neoliberal myth of the successful 'yummy mummy' (a woman who is economically successful while being a physically attractive mother and housewife), but it also uses 'happy objects' such as 'family' and 'togetherness' to endow Paltrow with positive affect.¹²⁵ Her whiteness, in accordance with the cultural script, is also classed. Her upper-class status is mediated through the knowledge that readers already have about Paltrow, but also through the

¹²⁵ Ros Gill (2008), Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine (2008) have argued that this kind of femininity is very much in tune with, and constructed through, neoliberalism and post-feminism. They argue that women, and especially young, middle-class women, are useful subjects for neoliberalism because they provide, owing to their education, not only productive value for the market, but also follow willingly the rule of neoliberalism of constant self-improvement. This means that, in a socio-political climate where every aspect of life is measured by and integrated into the logic of economy, they function not only as productive workers but also as productive carers, mothers and housewives. One might argue that the expression 'togetherness' was chosen in order to appeal to the consumer target group of the queer or single community. Ahmed (2010) argues convincingly that the queer subject is historically positioned as an 'unhappy' object. However, as the work of David Eng (2010) demonstrates, some queer subjects can become integrated into mainstream discourses. It might therefore be worth considering if queer unhappy objects can become happy objects through commercialism and consumption.

type of food (expensive and organic) she consumes, and the ways in which she prepares it (in a wood-burning oven).¹²⁶

Scholars have often discussed how the construction of race is always already gendered and classed, but I also want to highlight how this construction can be used to *deconstruct* the positive affects which surround idealised whiteness.¹²⁷ The affective manner in which Dlisted.com portrays the public relations strategy for this book shifts Paltrow's status from idealised whiteness to the abject, thereby disturbing the feel-good myth about whiteness. In the post discussed above, Paltrow is portrayed as the body which makes other bodies 'roll their eyes', her privileged lifestyle is not only the effect of the inclusion of 'happy objects' but also the result of exclusion ('no poors allowed'), and her happiness and economic success are predicated on making other people feel bad ('I can feel bad for free by calling up my mother'). Through humour, Dlisted.com makes visible what is usually left unsaid, and yet at the same time, the basis for what is said: things we feel and judge as good are always the result of violent repression of things we consider bad.

The problem with whiteness – and idealised whiteness in particular – is that it is a social construct and performance that requires labour and careful self-scrutiny. Dyer suggests that '[w]hiteness as an ideal can never be attained, not only because white skin can never be hue white, but because ideally white is absence: to be really, absolutely white is to be nothing' (1997: 78). Whiteness thus carries with it the danger of its own annihilation if it is embraced too excessively. Redmond observes that '[i]dealized white stars who are too saintly, too pure, too exterior, become too unattainable, too much of

¹²⁶ For analysis of the construction of race through 'foodways', see Bailey (2007) and Negra (2002). Cathryn Bailey (2007) argues that proper whiteness relies crucially on regimes of bodily discipline and the suppression of appetite while at the same time fetishising food: food has to be healthy, ethnically diverse (signifying the consumption of the other in a non-threatening manner for the construction of whiteness with a 'little' difference) and ethical, that is vegetarian and/or organic.

¹²⁷ Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins discuss how race, class and gender are 'interlocking systems of societal relationships' (1998: xi) rather than separate entities that shapes the individuals life. Stuart Hall argues that race, class and gender articulate one another, meaning that systems of oppression function by intersecting these categories. Race is not a monolithic category, but intersects with issues of class and gender (Hall, 1997).

“not from this world” for adoring fans to get a proper hold of/on’ (2007: 268). In other words, if stars and/or celebrities appear too out of touch with the ‘real’ world, and the struggles, injuries and feelings that living and moving through it encompasses, then the audience member, reader or fan cannot relate to the celebrity. The balance between extraordinariness and ordinariness on which stars are built is skewed, damaging the celebrity status of the ‘too saintly’ figure. Hence, idealised stars such as Paltrow must represent themselves as ordinary and earthly in order to retain their affective appeal for their audience.¹²⁸ I argue that Dlisted.com challenges the notion of goodness in idealised whiteness by highlighting, with humour and irony, cracks and gaps in the performance of whiteness. Paltrow’s attempt to represent herself as not *too* white is humorously disrupted in the Dlisted.com post, ‘Straight Outta Her Private Sauna In Her Multi-Million Dollar London Townhouse’ (Michael K., 2011d), which includes an embedded video of Paltrow rapping on *The Graham Norton Show*. The video is accompanied by a derisive comment and a moving image (GIF) of rapper Ice Cube and actor Chris Tucker, in which they seem to jerk away in horror from something they have witnessed (Figure 22). The combination of video, text and GIF in this post illustrates how the affective quality of idealised whiteness can be shifted from affection to derision and contempt not only through humorous discourse, but also through the strategic use of different media forms.

¹²⁸ Dlisted.com ridicules Paltrow’s uber-whiteness regularly through the nickname ‘Fishsticks Paltrow’ because, as blogger Michael K. explains, she is ‘cold, much too thin and overly white breaded’ (Michael K., 2011e). This nickname points not only to the fact that her whiteness is excessive (she is ‘too thin and overly white breaded’), but it is also affective: she is perceived as cold, stiff and unable to show emotions.

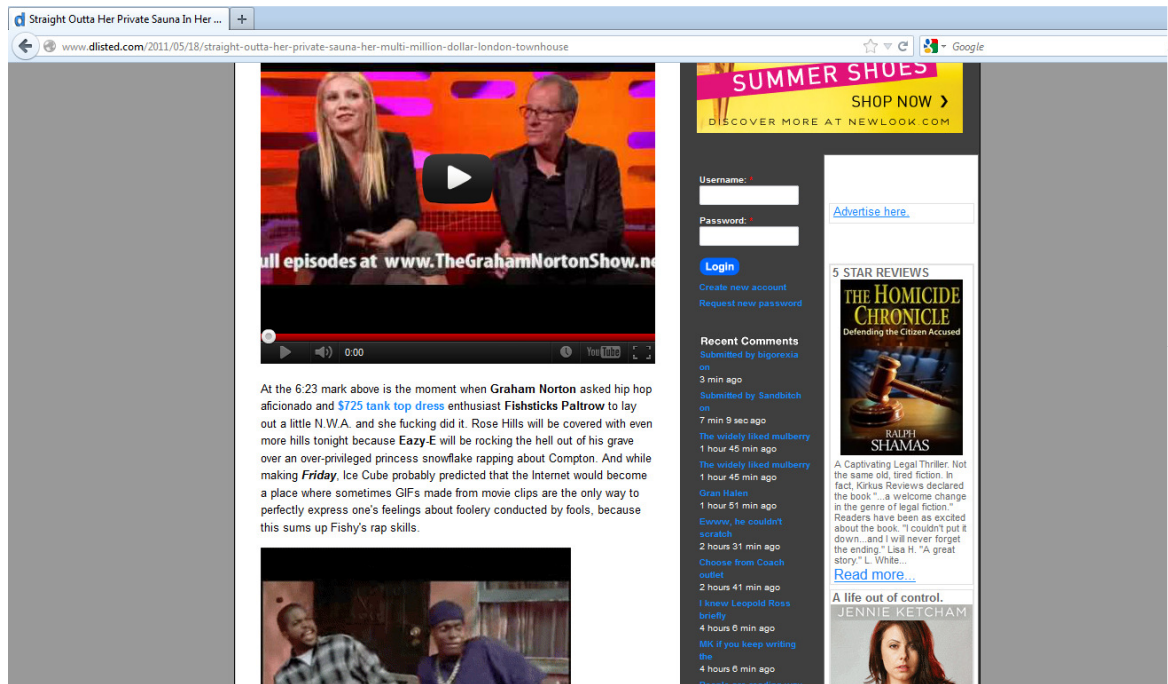


Figure 22: ‘Straight Outta Her Private Sauna In Her Multi-Million Dollar London Townhouse’ (Michael K., 2011d)

The video shows Paltrow rapping an N.W.A. song, and speaks to the so-called ‘post-racial’ attitude that American media and popular culture is so keen to promote.¹²⁹ Reflecting the neoliberal ideas of meritocracy and individualism, this media culture is considered to be a colour-blind space in which only the skills, talent and charisma of the individual count, rather than one’s skin colour and the structural inequalities and possibilities of access that result from this. According to the logic of colour-blindness, Paltrow is not only entitled to take on, even though only momentarily and ironically, a stereotypically black, masculine performance that requires a level of authenticity, but she is also cheered for doing so by the smiling talk show host, her fellow talk show guests (who mime the sound of police sirens in the background) and the applauding audience. As a light-hearted, mainstream-camp media product, *The*

¹²⁹ Laura Gray-Rosendale et al. use the example of Lady Gaga to discuss the American post-racial landscape which obscures the fact that ‘Gaga’s whiteness enables her to “play” Other, appropriating signs of Otherness to her own ends’ (2012: 222). Robyn Wiegman argues that media representations like *Forrest Gump*, as the good and colour-blind white guy, express and reinforce ideas of America as post-racial (1999).

Graham Norton Show is emblematic of a socio-cultural climate in which structural inequalities linked to sexuality, race and/or class are regarded as problems of the past, and are glossed over for the sake of entertainment. As such, it provides the ideal space for Paltrow's performance. In presenting herself as a fan of N.W.A., and therefore as literate in the subculture of black gangster rap, Paltrow not only constructs herself as 'white with a little difference' (Traber, 2007), but also reinforces the cliché of gangster rap as inherently black, dangerous and other. Dlisted.com publishes this video, but disrupts the affective quality of Paltrow's performance of whiteness through different strategies, one of which is the comment that accompanies the clip:

At the 6:23 mark above is the moment when Graham Norton asked hip hop aficionado and \$725 tank top dress enthusiast Fishsticks Paltrow to lay out a little N.W.A. and she fucking did it. Rose Hills will be covered with even more hills tonight because Eazy-E will be rocking the hell out of his grave over an over-privileged princess snowflake rapping about Compton. (Michael K., 2011d)

The discursive foundation of the humour is the incongruity that arises when race and class stereotypes are pitted against each other. The 'overprivileged princess snowflake' who buys '\$725 tank tops' slips into the stereotypically black space of gangster rap, and the 'Multi-Million Dollar London Townhouse' clashes with the reference to the economically deprived, inner-city 'Compton'. Stereotypes of both white and black culture are juxtaposed here to make the reader laugh, but also to position Paltrow unambiguously in one space – that of the 'rich white lady'. Through the use of hyperbole in its allusions to the '\$725 tank tops', and through its invocation of fairytale and make-believe in its description of Paltrow as 'princess snowflake', Dlisted.com not only gestures towards the fact that she is very privileged and as such positioned as out of touch with the real world, but also clearly demarcates Paltrow's space as the space of the other. Any attempt by Paltrow to transgress her own privileged space by slipping

into the space of rap is perceived as an illegitimate crossing of borders. The comment 'Eazy-E will be rocking the hell out of his grave' (Michael K., 2011d) evokes amusement precisely because it figuratively epitomises this fundamental violation of borders. Paltrow's whiteness is no longer a privilege that allows her to travel unimpeded through different spaces – rather, she is now the other, restricted to her deluded 'rich white lady' space. She is understood as out-of-place and abject in the realm of rap – in this instance, her hyper-white performance and her white skin restrict her.

It is not only humorous discourse that is employed by Dlisted.com to make the reader *feel* how wrong Paltrow's transgression is. The GIF at the end of the aforementioned blog post is composed of frames from the movie *Friday* (1995). In this GIF, actor Chris Tucker and Ice Cube, a former member of the rap group N.W.A., cringe away from something they have seen. Juxtaposed with the text above, the image marks Paltrow as a horrifying monster that inspires loathing in those who encounter her rapping. As a consequence of this, Paltrow's idealised whiteness, which is normally understood as something towards which we turn admiringly, is now portrayed as something from which we violently turn away. Tucker and (especially) Ice Cube function here not only as authorities who have the expertise on who can and who cannot rap, but, more importantly, they represent in *Friday*, the film from which the GIF is taken, a non-threatening, light-hearted and laid-back black masculinity with which the audience can identify. They therefore function here as mediators between a number of different socio-cultural spaces that all respond to Paltrow's rap performance with disgust and rejection. This disgust and rejection is not discursively expressed, but is rather conveyed through the movement of their bodies and facial expressions in the moving image. This movement mediates negative feelings in ways that cannot be expressed in words, but which can only be known and understood through the body. The reader, already negatively orientated towards Paltrow as result of the derisive tone

of the written blog post, and aligned to the mediators Tucker and Ice Cube, is now invited to *feel with them* their bodily reaction. The moving picture blurs the boundary between bodies (those on the screen and those in front of the screen) through ‘kinaesthetic empathy’ (Laukkanen, 2010) – that is, the feeling of sensations in one’s body that are similar to those watched on the screen. This entanglement of sensation and perception occurs as a result of the so-called ‘somatic archives’ (Paasonen, 2011: 202) that bodies collect through their lived experiences and sensations, which allow bodies to relate to other bodies through their memories of which particular feelings are connected with particular movements. The affective and embodied feedback loops between onscreen bodies and off screen body has often been theorised in gamer culture. Martti Lahti argues, for instance, that videogames ‘tie the body into a cybernetic loop with the computer, where its affective thrills can spill over into the player’s space’ (2003: 163) and describes in his work how new technologies can make the virtual body and the real body complementary rather than mutually exclusive realms. Jenny Sundén writes in a similar vein about her experiences with *World of Warcraft*:

When I move around and play my green-haired female troll character, these movements and experiences do things to my body, to how I move and feel. When she jumps, something in me jumps with her. When she laughs her pre-programmed rough troll laughter, it has resonance in me, in my body, in my own laughter. (2010: 50)

Hence, movements of bodies on the screen can call forth affective responses in one’s own body, particularly when ‘sensations, textures, and motions [...] have been previously experienced’ (Paasonen, 2011: 202). In accordance with the actions of Tucker and Ice Cube in this GIF, the audience are invited to move away from Paltrow’s performance of whiteness. On the one hand, this GIF is hyperbolic. Yet on the other hand, it encapsulates and effectively conveys the implied meaning of the accompanying

text – that whiteness, even when it tries to stage itself as anti-racist and colour-blind, is not universally good, but can in fact be ridiculous and grotesque.

Through the example of Paltrow, I have suggested that idealised whiteness is given meaning not only through discourse, but also through affects that link it to traditionally happy objects such as marriage, family, wealth and adoration. I have also demonstrated the ways in which Dlisted.com disturbs, through humour, the affective economy through which Paltrow, whiteness, and positive feelings become connected. Ahmed argues that articulations of affect are explanations of sensations through which objects are given shape and value and are made sense of (2004a). Hence, this disturbance – the shift from affects of adoration and sympathy to those of contempt and defiance – gives new meaning to idealised whiteness. This change is premised on the assumption that meanings are unstable and can be experienced differently, but the humorous representations of Paltrow are only successful in this affective shifting when they resonate with the reader's own experiences and socio-political views. In other words, an online community is only touched or moved by the texts and images because they are already orientated towards those things they need to be close to in order for the humour to work. In this example, certain readers might already be critical towards certain forms of whiteness and how their status becomes maintained and reinforced within mainstream media. Because this practice is limited to a certain context within a certain community, it can be critiqued as marginal and ineffective. However, even though these critiques are valid, I maintain that these examples nevertheless show that humour is an affective mode through which we can learn how to orientate ourselves differently towards happy objects such as idealised whiteness.

Intensification, Commenting and Renegotiation of Idealised Whiteness

The Perez Hilton.com blog post, 'William And Kate Have A Delightful Visit...To Skid Row!' (Hilton, 2011d) initially appears to stand in contrast to Dlisted.com's posts about Paltrow. This is because idealised whiteness, here embodied through the celebrity figures of Prince William and Kate Middleton, is allegedly celebrated rather than ridiculed. Perez Hilton.com writes:

Kind of hard to believe, but their visit was a huge success! Last week, we learned that William & Kate had plans to visit downtown Los Angeles' Skid Row, which is the homeless capital with over 4,000 people crammed in a 50-square block area living in dirty tents and cardboard boxes. We had heard that they were planning on painting and making ceramics with impoverished children at the Inner-City Arts academy...but we were still a bit nervous for them. Fortunately, everything turned out fine, and William & Kate got along wonderfully with the kids! (Hilton, 2011d)

By highlighting the positive outcome of William and Kate's visit to the Inner-City Arts academy where they spend time with impoverished children, Perez Hilton.com seems to reinforce traditional racialised images in which the white empathetic subject helps the victimised other. Before complicating this literal reading of the post, it is important to keep in mind that celebrity personae William and Kate arrive in this narrative already as affective figurations. As Paasonen (2011) points out, traditional studies of representation analyse the meaning of the things depicted on the screen by taking their historical and social background into account. Historical discourses and practices are as such understood as essential for our reading of the current representation in front of us. Tyler and Bruce Bennett (2010) argue convincingly that not only do histories of gender, class and race structure such examples discursively, but that these histories also underpin the affective mediation of representations. In other words, history does not

only shape the meaning of the image but also the feelings and emotions we experience when encountering them. Hence, William's aristocratic and Kate's upper middle-class background, their heteronormative sexuality, their immaculate appearance and their remote and graceful behaviour which adheres to traditional gender stereotypes, all not only discursively construct them as idealised white subjects, but also animate them with positive affect. Their status as a newly-married couple symbolises a form of heterosexuality that is valued as good: it is a monogamous relationship involving matrimony and procreation, which are sanctioned by the church and the state. This relationship is therefore in close proximity to such affective values as natural, healthy and holy.¹³⁰ Furthermore, their heterosexual marriage supports the notion that white tradition, in this case royalty, has a future. This romanticised view of white tradition and royalty, underpinned by the spectacle of William and Kate's wedding in 2011, works to gloss over a violent history of colonialism and turns royalty into a happy object that evokes affects of security and belonging.¹³¹ William and Kate are, as such, already strongly charged affective figures who connote a number of positive values and meanings in a social setting in which, according to Ahmed (2007b), whiteness is the point of orientation and the point from which the world unfolds. Hence, even though race is not explicitly mentioned in the text, we make meaning of their representations against a background of a white history. Their extraordinary state of being, in a white world, constructs them as figures towards whom we turn with positive affect.

My key concern here is to demonstrate how the positive affective economy surrounding William and Kate shifts into negative affects. An analysis of the reader comments beneath the blog post shows that some react with anger, frustration and resentment over the positive opinions expressed by Perez Hilton.com towards the couple:

¹³⁰ For more on the distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' sex, see Gayle Rubin (1993), Michael Warner (2000: 1-5), Don Kulick and Margaret Willson (1995: 208).

¹³¹ Ahmed argues, with reference to Fanon, that colonialism makes the world 'white', and that this white world is then inherited, and is therefore already a given before the individual 'arrives' (2007b: 153).

‘You’re such an ignorant tool.’ (adg100, see: Hilton, 2011d)

‘The royal assholes are disgusting.’ (idon’tbelieveyou, see: Hilton, 2011d)

‘[...] THESE 2 PRICKS SHOULD TRY LIVING THERE FOR A YEAR. BET IT WONT BE THAT MUCH “FUN”. NEXT.’ (xcalibur, see: Hilton, 2011d)

The first comment is directed toward blogger Hilton, insulting him for his ‘ignorance’ because he apparently cannot see through William and Kate’s performance. The negative affective responses to William and Kate’s representation in the following two comments might initially seem surprising, and at odds with the positive affective economy of idealised whiteness. In reference to Lynne Pearce’s notion of ‘implicated reading’ and Sedgwick’s ‘reparative reading’, Paasonen maintains that the relationship between the text and the reader is full of surprises, observing that reading is ‘an interactive activity that includes a wide range of emotions and is far less certain in its outcomes’ (2007: 45). In this sense, while Perezhilton.com may cite practices and discourses that construct Kate and William as figurations of idealised whiteness, this by no means guarantees that all readers will experience the same positive affective response towards them. I argue that Hilton’s post on William and Kate can be seen as an intensified mediation of whiteness, one which offers ‘exit points’ to a different affective economy. I use the adjective ‘intensified’ here to draw attention to the capacity of a text to convey different ideas through quantity, and through exaggeration. Alterations in tone change the intensities of how we experience a text and how it affects us. As Sobchack argues, affective encounters, the feelings of being touched by a text or an image, depend on the substance and texture of that text (2004: 65). Perezhilton.com uses a variety of strategies to make the connotations of its text as overloaded as possible, in order to problematise a straightforward reading. There are a number of stylistic devices traditionally used in the portrayal of idealised whiteness that Hilton inflates in order to provoke an affective reaction. For example, mainstream gossip

magazines tend to use an overtly cheerful tone when celebrities act in a way which is generally perceived as good, such as falling in love, living a healthy and drug-free lifestyle, undertaking charity work, or raising awareness of important social or political issues. In this post Perezhilton.com mimics this overly cheerful tone ('We are SO happy that their Skid Row visit went so well!'), but then contrasts this with an underdeveloped writing style through the repetitive use of direct speech: 'William playfully said the following [...] And then here's what William said to Kate when the turtle was finished [...] And here's what William had to say before they left for the day' (Hilton, 2011d). This juxtaposition of overtly cheerful tone and underdeveloped writing style – the repetitive and excessive use of direct speech mimicking the rhythm of poor language – signals to the reader that this text is too compliant, and therefore implies a lack of credibility and quality. This can be off-putting for some readers, who then react with frustration and anger.¹³²

The other tactic used by Hilton to inspire a strong affective reaction in the reader is the textual and visual creation of two clearly contrasting sets of identities in this post. Whiteness is traditionally constructed against a background of representations of the Other (Dyer, 1997; Lipsitz, 2006). On Perezhilton.com, this binary opposition is foregrounded in the headline: 'William And Kate Have A Delightful Visit...To Skid Row!' (Hilton, 2011d). The humour is here based on the juxtaposition of 'delightful' and 'Skid Row', two terms that seemingly do not belong together. 'Skid Row' is perceived as a space of poverty, social struggle and a general lack of good things such as education, security and happy families, clearly marking it as 'not delightful'. 'Delightful' might invoke connotations of upper-class-language, and is meaningful in

¹³² The bloggers of Perezhilton.com are professional bloggers who aim to write in a uniform style so that Perezhilton.com still gives the impression of being written by one person only. It can be argued that the writers use a poor writing style strategically to elicit reactions (which then in turn pay off as so-called 'page hits' when the reader becomes a writer by typing in their responses. Every stroke on the keyboard is a 'hit', which can then be sold to advertisers). This, however, does not restrict the blog's potential to push affects and discourses that deconstruct the imaginary picture of idealised whiteness as something to which aspire.

proximity to William and Kate because they embody idealised whiteness, which is valued as good. Following the logic of two contrasting identity sets, one identity is given a full and rich interior perspective, while the other – the identity belonging to the inhabitants of Skid Row – is portrayed as homogenous and one-dimensional. The post describes extensively how William and Kate experience this event, what they say, and even the jokes they make, yet the voices of the children they visit are silenced. The concluding comment, ‘[s]ounds like it was definitely a meaningful experience for William, Kate, and all of those kids!’ (Hilton, 2011d) again places the emphasis on William and Kate’s experience, thus reiterating their status as privileged. Further, the throwaway description ‘those kids’ positions the marginalised group as monolithic and unspecific.¹³³The picture accompanying the post discussed above (Figure 23) follows this binary construction of identity sets, and ties into well-known figures of the celebrity charity worker and the traditional idea of the ‘white enabler’. It centres on the white-skinned persons (William and Kate), who stand out from the mass of smaller, dark skinned, uniformly-dressed children.

¹³³ This may also respond to the work of bell hooks (1989) and Audre Lorde (1984), both of whom demonstrate how feeling bad about racism or white privilege can function as a form of self-centeredness, which returns the white subject ‘back into’ itself, as the one whose feelings matter.

PerezHilton CocoPerez Perezitos FitPerez TeddyHilton

Home >> Royals Royce, Inspiration, Kate Middleton >> William And Kate Have A Delightful Visit...To Skid Row!

William And Kate Have A Delightful Visit...To Skid Row!

7/11/2011 10:20 AM ET | Filed under: Royals Royce • Inspiration • Kate Middleton



Kind of hard to believe, but their visit was a huge success!

Last week, we learned that **William & Kate** had plans to visit downtown Los Angeles' **Skid Row**, which is the homeless capital with over 4,000 people crammed in a 50-square block area living in dirty tents and cardboard boxes.

We had heard that they were planning on painting and making ceramics with impoverished children at the Inner-City **Arts** academy...but we were still a bit nervous for them.

Fortunately, everything turned out fine, and William & Kate got along wonderfully with the kids!

While crafting a turtle with some of the kids, William playfully said the following:

"Should we make it a smiley tortoise? A happy one? A crazy tortoise? Should we name it Harry?"

"Have you ever seen Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? No? It's

TOP STORY

Simon Cowell Is Expecting A Baby With His Friend's Wife!!!



SCANDALOUS!

Simon Cowell is about to become a dad!

The only catch is that the woman carrying his seed is socialite Lauren Silverman, who is **MARRIED** to Cowell's good friend Andrew Silverman.

[Read more »](#)

[Image via PNP/WENN.]

Like 59

Advertising info

The Hottest Stories Right Now!

Kim Kardashian Plans To Go Public Before Kylie Jenner's Sweet Sixteen! [\[CLICK HERE\]](#) Nick J...



Figure 23: 'William and Kate Have A Delightful Visit ... To Skid Row!' (Hilton, 2011d)

William and Kate smile and lean down towards the children, embodying through these gestures historically and culturally rooted images of the active, sympathetic enabler. The composition of this picture rests on a semantic consensus that puts the donor in an empowered, morally good and active position, while the receiver remains in the position

of object.¹³⁴ Through these three strategies (an overtly cheerful tone, an underdeveloped writing style and binary constructions), Perez Hilton.com intensifies the experience of representations of idealised whiteness to a point where it becomes overbearing and ‘too thick’ (as user ‘allboutit’ comments, see Hilton, 2011d) for some users. Those readers who perceive this highly stylised portrayal of the event as disturbing engage, in their comments, with notions of social inequality, white privilege, celebrity image production, and Hilton’s own political views to express a different range of affects: ‘why would you be nervous for someone to visit skid row and an art center for children? seems quite judgmental and rude for someone who wants equality for all...’ (justme2244, see: Hilton, 2011d). Such comments illustrate that the complex connection between reader and representation is not only dependent on how the reader is embedded in his or her offline context, but also on the locations of both the blogger and of the celebrity figure being represented.

Reading is always already an act of proximity and intimacy premised on the reader’s willingness to engage with the text, to either orient oneself towards the text, or to detach oneself from it (Paasonen, 2011: 144; Sedgwick, 2003: 123-146). Celebrity-gossip texts can provide a particular feeling of intimacy as the reader is given the impression that they are encountering the real and authentic person behind the star image.¹³⁵ This gives the reader the illusion that they know and understand the reasons and motives behind a celebrity’s behaviour, reasons that they then compare with her

¹³⁴ Berlant (2004) has illustrated how representations of suffering can reiterate, rather than challenge, unequal power relations. Following the paradigm of orientalism, which centres on ethnocentrism and the colonial other, these representations, often used for charity work, can be understood as informed by Western discourses that construct the white subject as the active and altruistic enabler who aids the passive and helpless other. This, in turn, reiterates hierarchies of economic and political power and re-positions the receiver of charity work as a monolithic subject who needs to be spoken for instead of self-represented. Danielle Endres and Mary Gould found that unequal power relations became reinforced when white students were undertaking charity work with immigrants and refugees from Burma, Liberia, Somalia and Sudan. They argue that ‘service learning was a significant factor in the way our students upheld conventions of White privilege because it allowed them to approach working with underserved and underresourced community members as privileged Whites who were providing charity, instead of acting as students and allies’ (Endres and Gould, 2009: 419)

¹³⁵ Richard Schickel argues that gossip media provides an ‘illusion of intimacy’ between the audience and the celebrity (1986).

own experience. Depending on the context of the representation and the audience's prior knowledge of the celebrity persona, reader and text touch each other (Meyers, 2005: 894). This touch structures the way in which we make sense of and perceive the representation in front of us. However, this process is neither absolute nor purely discursive.¹³⁶ It is, as Dyer argues, unstable and affective: 'audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image and meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions that work for them' (1986: 5). In other words, how we understand representations of idealised whiteness may be constituted by dominant discourses and affective economies, but it is not wholly determined by it. Hilton uses his 'citational' writing style to reiterate, in an exaggerated manner, the central discourses and affective responses that construct idealised whiteness within mainstream media gossip, thus creating a space in which to perform a different affective economy concerning idealised whiteness.

Race, Class and the Limits of Humour

In a post from April 2011, Jezebel.com introduces its readers to a humorous Twitter account called 'WhiteGirlProblems', which ridicules the purported problems of wealthy, young, white girls that are currently represented across different media such as reality television, magazines and new media.¹³⁷ The post on Jezebel.com reads:

The writers, brothers David and Tanner Cohen and friend Lara Schoenhals, who tweet under the persona of 'bored and obnoxious socialite' Babe Walker, say they conceived of the idea in the same way that any good idea is conceived: by

¹³⁶ Marshall maintains that the stars, public performances, and the media coverage of their private lives 'ensure that whatever intimacy is permitted between the audience and the star is purely on the discursive level' (1997: 90).

¹³⁷ The use of new media formats such as Twitter is crucial for these socialites because part of their celebrity status is based on their sheer ubiquity across different media. In this way, it can be seen as ironic that 'WhiteGirlProblems' utilises the medium of Twitter to ridicule them.

drinking heavily. [...] ‘We kept identifying things as white girl problems,’ Tanner said. ‘It was a hit amongst our friends’. [...] ‘Everyone has seen that girl on TV like the Kardashians or Carrie Bradshaw, who have all this drama,’ says Schoenhals. ‘Everyone’s like, “There’s nothing to be complaining about, your life is amazing”’. (Moore, 2011)

Babe Walker might not qualify as a celebrity in the traditional sense, as she is fictional, and as such does not possess that split between star image and real persona that determines, according to many, the affective quality and relation between celebrities and audience (Dyer, 1979, 1986; Gamson, 1994; Schickel, 1986). I suggest, however, that it is precisely this fictional nature that constructs her as the ideal affective figure through which ideas, norms and values about whiteness are negotiated. Behind her image is not one person but three, each of whom regard their ideas about whiteness as funny and worth publishing. Walker’s tweets are thereby perceived as authentic. Readers compare the ideas expressed through the online performance of a white, upper-class femininity with their own personal experiences, and are differently moved by the humorous content of the tweets. A look at the reader comments beneath the blog post reveals that the majority of Jezebel.com readers distance themselves from this kind of humour: instead of engendering positive affects like amusement and joy, ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ provokes anger and resentment in this particular demographic. They critique the Twitter account for equating whiteness with wealth, and argue that this merely reinforces stereotypes, rather than deconstructing them:

Right, because they couldn’t have called it ‘Rich Girl Problem’ or ‘High Class Problems’? Instead, they utilize their [the authors] privileged position to assert a double stereotype wherein women of color couldn’t possibly be rich enough or ‘cultured’ enough to inhabit the social strata and tax bracket assumed to utter such nonsense. (ZoraJD, see: Moore, 2011)

Parts of this critique can be seen as justified, in so far as this parody of whiteness is exclusively linked to femininity, and carries the danger of reiterating ‘white narcissism’ rather than deconstructing whiteness as a site of privilege. This means that subjects who feel touched by these humorous tweets are encouraged to feel good about their lived whiteness, because – as opposed to those white subjects who are oblivious to their advantaged status and therefore do not get the joke – they (at least) recognise their own privileged position.¹³⁸ I suggest, however, that these readers do not recognise the polysemic meaning of this racial humour, and therefore do not appreciate the potential within this satire to disturb the power that resides in ‘the discursive space of “white”’ (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 291). Humour can disrupt dominant discourses like whiteness by expressing that which has been silenced.

The ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ tweets could also be read as challenging whiteness through reversing ‘the gaze from racism as site of victimization toward whiteness as site of privilege’ (Ringrose, 2007: 325). By shedding light on a specific type of privileged existence, that of the so-called ‘it girls’ who live in the public eye, and to whom young people are told to aspire by mainstream media productions, ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ can be understood to be unmasking the absurdity of a racialised system in which certain bodies, often represented as inhabiting an immaculate white skin, seem to float carefree through space.¹³⁹ This leads to such invented problems like ‘I hate my horse’, or ‘My fat friends always make me go to brunch and my skinny friends always make me go to

¹³⁸ Ahmed argues that shame and disgust about racism are problematic, as the expression of shame can be understood as sufficient to achieve an anti-racist future: ‘[t]he declaration of such an identity is not in my view an anti-racist action. Indeed, it sustains the narcissism of whiteness and allows whiteness studies to make white subjects feel good about themselves, by feeling good about “their” antiracism’ (2004c: n.p.). Ahmed is focusing specifically on feelings of shame and disgust here, but I suggest that self-irony of the white subject can be seen to function in a similar way.

¹³⁹ This is because, as Ahmed argues, spaces take on the shape of the skins that inhabit them. Since, in Western consumer cultures, most spaces are colonised by the rules and norms of whiteness, bodies that inhabit what is perceived as white skin blend into these spaces, and do not stand out like non-white bodies. These spaces and white skin blend seamlessly into each other, so that spaces can be seen as an expansion of their skin. This means not only that the space of their possibilities becomes enlarged, but also that their skin does not get bruised or sore from clashing against a wall of formal and informal racism (Ahmed, 2007b; 2011).

yoga' (Moore, 2011). These problems might first provoke laughter or amusement because they are seen as absurd. Walker has problems that most of the readers cannot relate to: from her perspective a horse that hates her is a problem, from other people's perspective a horse (however hateful) is a sign of privilege and therefore the problem cannot be that serious. Indeed it is a laughable problem. I suggest that these satirical twitter messages not only make the figure of Walker a target of social derision, but their humorous potential unfolds in the moment when readers recognise themselves in these messages. The reader might not be as privileged as Walker – after all, some of her tweets have to be full of hyperbole and exaggeration in order to be marked as humorous – but I suggest that some of them still invite the reader to recognise herself/himself in the situations (for instance the tweet about brunch and yoga). By recognising the similarities between Walker and herself/himself, the reader can recognise how ridiculous it is to moan about problems that only ever emerge through their own (however shaped) privileged position. In this sense 'WhiteGirlProblems' has the potential to dismantle white privilege by confronting the reader affectively, through humour, with his/her own privileged position.

But why does the humour of 'WhiteGirlProblems' not work for some Jezebel.com readers, and why do these readers view this satirical Twitter account as reinforcing, rather than challenging, the position of idealised whiteness? I want to explore these questions by reading these comments of Jezebel.com readers through the skin. Reading through the skin here means exploring how living in a neoliberal consumer culture shapes the ways in which we understand and feel towards whiteness. How we feel about certain ideas of whiteness, and what we perceive as funny or problematic, is imbued with neoliberal discourses and practices, as well as the way in which we have lived this environment in our own skin. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to take the lived experiences of any individual reader into account, but the

comments suggest that these readers perceive racism as wrong, and that they are engaging eloquently in an anti-racist discourse, while arguing that class is the real and unaddressed vector of difference. I show here that this seemingly anti-racist discourse resonates in a dangerously successful way with the neoliberal project.

The critical comments on Jezebel.com regarding ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ demonstrate a strong emotional repudiation of racial stereotypes that conflate race with class:

I’m equally bothered with the name, and I agree with your reasoning and want to add that it also reinforces the stereotype that equates ‘whiteness’ with financial stability, which ignores the reality of poverty. [...] Reinforcing these stereotypes [...] contributes to people voting against their interests economically and politically (RayBradbury’s_ElephantMonastery, see: Moore, 2011).

Following this comment, neither the white nor the black subject should be limited to a social stereotype, as such stereotypes do not represent reality and are understood as contributing to the continuation of an unjust system. Yet the paradox here is that, even though these readers condemn stereotypes, users rely on racial labels to make their own social critique as the following discussion shows. Here they discuss how white and black children are differently affected by poverty:

‘[...] A much bigger proportion of blacks and Hispanics [sic] population are poorer than whites’(Cookie monstress, see: Moore, 2011).

‘[...] a black child is more likely to live in poverty than a white child’ (Kitkat, see: Moore, 2011).

These comments illustrate the readers’ acknowledgement of the fact that racial minorities are more likely to live in poverty, but they disavow the stereotype that white people are (economically) privileged. This paradox demonstrates that users possess, on the one hand, repertoires of knowledge about a system of whiteness, racism and

structural inequalities, but on the other hand are capable of repudiating an identity that is determined in important ways through these racialised structural forces. Howard Winant (2004) explains this schizophrenic position of the new liberal white subject. He argues that, owing to the post-civil rights movements in the 1960s, whites still profit from the legacy of white supremacy, but suggests that they are also ‘subject to the moral and political challenges posed to that inheritance by the partial but real successes of the black movement’ (2004: 4). This ambiguous position, between privilege and equality, colour consciousness and colour blindness, is what Winant calls ‘white racial dualism’. This dualist position is ‘uncomfortable’ for certain white subjects because they enjoy (and want to continue enjoying) the privileges that whiteness enables them, while still feeling guilty about them.

In an effort to overcome this paradoxical positioning and the messy feelings that are connected to it, subjects attempt to leave race behind and focus on other axes of difference such as class. Some users suggest that the blog should be called ‘rich girl problems’ or ‘high class problems’. The use of class-based criteria instead of race for the achievement of social and political equality is a typical trace of neoliberalism: class you can escape when you climb the social ladder but race seems to be stuck on your skin. In a logic where the flexibility of the individual is important, ‘stubborn’ issues like race become understood as tools that hold individuals back.

I’m not suggesting that we live in some sort of post-racial society, but that poverty affects us all, regardless of race. But uneducated and semi-educated whites have been fed the same line as everyone else, that white people have financial privilege, and so they vote with upper class interests and this damages our society and economy, and further divides us racially. We have to take the focus off of race. (RayBradbury’s_ElephantMonastery, see: Moore, 2011)

By taking the focus ‘off [...] race’ and concentrating instead on class, the uneven distribution of wealth, racial hostility, segregation and discrimination are seemingly expected to vanish automatically. People like the ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ authors, who refuse to let go of race, but who rather make it hyper visible, become perceived as hindrance to the neoliberal post-racial project:

The upper class of this country that controls the vast majority of the wealth and information will *continue to use the media to play up racial stereotypes* and divisions, because as long as we are focused those things that divide us, like race, we fail to take advantage of our commonality as a citizenship that is being robbed of its rights and protections. [...] Not to mention that we have such a diverse society, race lines are becoming weaker and weaker.

(RayBradbury’s_ElephantMonastery, see: Moore, 2011; emphasis added)

These comments show this reader acknowledging intersectionality,¹⁴⁰ while also undermining it. He/she fails to recognise that, given that relationships of power intersect, how we inhabit any given category depends upon how we inhabit others (Lorde, 1984: 114-123). Instead, class and race are here portrayed as separate identities that can be dissolved independently, with one being more important than the other.

Some have critically examined the consequences of leaving race behind. Alana Lentin argues, for instance, that

The problematisation of race put forward by anti-racist activists and scholars has been hampered by a post-racial agenda that participates in relativizing the experience of racism, consequently assisting in perpetuating it. [...] The declared

¹⁴⁰ I use the term intersectionality in the same sense as Kimberlé Chrenshaw(1991), Avtar Brah et al. (1999) and Suki Ali (2003): as a critique of the single-axis framework that has dominated some feminist theory and antiracist politics. Single-axis framework means here that one form of oppression is privileged over another, for example, privileging experiences of gender oppression over other axes such as race and sexuality. Intersectionality shows that identities and subjectivities are (re)produced through complex imbrications of gender, race, class, sexuality, national, ability, religion and culture.

commitment to racial equality acts as a means of shutting down anti-racist critique. (2011: 160)¹⁴¹

Within a neoliberal climate, the notion of leaving race behind often means silencing race, to regard it as something from the past or as that which sticks to the uneducated and ignorant.¹⁴² It glosses over the fact that, ‘whether or not race is named, refusing the *language* of race does not mean avoiding acting in ways that produce racialised inequalities’ (Lentin, 2011: 161; emphasis in original). It is not surprising that, in times of economic instability, poverty, and social cuts, a heightened interest in class is apparent. This interest is useful and necessary in order to tackle the problem that a neoliberal system has created. Yet it should not lead to the marginalisation of other differences such as race. In a neoliberal climate, those who bring up the issue of race are seen as troublemakers. Those who make race highly visible – such as the authors of ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ who parody the hyper-privileged position of white girls – are understood to be creating, rather than describing, a problem. It is for this reason, I suggest, that readers of Jezebel.com understand these tweets as provoking racism, rather than as a humorous disruption. Despite the fact that the tweets can easily be read as an anti-racist critique (after all, they are making fun of whiteness), these readers react with contempt and anger towards the ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ tweets, and regard them as thwarting the happy future that a focus on class issues could provide.

In this section, I have used the example of user comments on Jezebel.com to explore how an anti-racist attitude can problematically resonate with neoconservative politics. In a neoliberal climate, anti-racism is perceived as good, and racism understood

¹⁴¹ Ahmed argues that, not only does equality mean that everybody is equally responsible for making this a fairer society, but also that everybody is marginalised and discriminated. This allows also the white subject to claim attention for discrimination, and silences the non-white subject (2004c). Jon Kraszewski demonstrates how mixed-race reality stars are used in the U.S.A. as the visible evidence of a diverse and open-minded society, where discrimination is no longer based on race but on individual problems (2010).

¹⁴² For more on this, see, for instance, Stephanie Lawler’s discussion of ‘white trash’ or ‘chav’ identities (2005).

as something that belongs to the past, to the ignorant and to ‘the haters’. By labelling the authors of ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ as racist because of their satirical conflation of race and class, users (unwillingly) subscribe to a politics of one axes of difference, privileging class over race. This rhetoric is popular within neoconservative politics, and is based on the belief that class is a much more mutable category than race: you can move up in society, but you cannot leave your skin behind. Reading through skin meant here to attend to the ways in which our surrounding shapes and can intensify what we perceive as ‘good’ and what we perceive as ‘bad’ and ‘damaging’. Jezebel.com is an online surrounding that defines itself as a critical online space in which racism is seen as bad. Therefore users are only allowed to comment if their contribution is anti-racist. Even though this is clearly a positive regulation of online content, I have argued that these ‘good’ comments leave their own discursive strategies and assumptions unquestioned. I have shown that the online environment in which they engage with the Twitter messages as well as the neoliberal climate which surrounds readers intensify negative feelings towards the authors of ‘WhiteGirlProblems’ thereby closing channels of debate that might challenge traditional ideas about whiteness, while at the same time veiling the ways in which anti-racist discourses can reinforce the current system of whiteness.

Fake-Tanned Skin, ‘White Trash’ and Affect

Recent discussions in gossip magazines have displayed a fascination with the ‘orange skin’ of certain celebrities. Geared to reveal the imperfections of the star image, these discussions ridicule celebrities’ over- and misuse of fake tanning practices, and scrutinise their skin for traces of orange. In its most usual sense, fake tanning refers to the application of chemicals to the skin to deliver a tanned complexion without

ultraviolet exposure.¹⁴³ Properly tanned skin is, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, through classed, raced and gendered histories, constructed as a marker of beauty, wealth and health that evokes the semantics of holiday and leisure time. It is as such commonly understood as good, as something for which we strive.¹⁴⁴ However, tanning is not a monolithic or singular practice that allows us to draw a straightforward binary between the good tanned subject and the bad pale subject. Rather, it is a complex assemblage of different practices, discourses and affects, which construct some tanning practices as good and tasteful, while others are perceived as bad and excessive. Skin can become darkened through natural or artificial methods (some of them more complex, expensive and time-consuming than others), which in turn result in different skin hues.¹⁴⁵ Skin tone, which can range from lightly bronzed to dark orange, is pivotal when we examine how tanned skin is read. Skin tone can reveal whether or not the body became tanned through the ‘right’ technique and the ‘right’ consumption of tanning practices. This, in turn, is understood to expose the truth about the subject inhabiting the tanned skin: responsible subjects are controlled in their tanning practices and tan in a ‘safe’ way (Ahmed, 1998: 58). The skin tone seems to reflect as such some inner qualities about the tanned subject.

In this section, I explore how discourses of excessiveness and lack of taste place ‘orange’ skin in proximity to so-called ‘white trash’ or ‘chav’ figures online. The constant repetition of these discourses accumulates particular affects, and this in turn

¹⁴³ The popularity of sunless tanning has risen since the 1960s, after links were made by health authorities between exposure to the sun, and other sun tanning methods, such as sunbeds or tanning beds, and the incidence of skin cancer (Rogers, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ Until the early twentieth century, suntanned skin was associated with outdoor labourers, whereas fair skin was associated with wealth and was therefore viewed as desirable. The suntan did not become popular until the 1920s, when Coco Chanel integrated a tanned appearance with her clothing designs as a new fashion statement. Tanned skin then became seen as a marker of privilege, and was associated with the affluent white subject who could afford to travel to exotic places and who had enough leisure time to tan in the sun. Through these racialised and classed discourses, the suntan became indicative of good health, beauty, wealth, and prestige (Dyer, 1997; Kenway & Bullen, 2011; Mahler, Beckerley, & Vogel, 2010; Rogers, 2005), and was connected with such positive affects as enjoyment, delight and happiness. In other words, inhabiting tanned skin meant inhabiting the good life.

¹⁴⁵ For more on this, see Cindy Rogers’ discussion of spray-on tanning (2005).

results in a metonymic slide which unequivocally equates the bearer of orange skin with ‘white trash’.¹⁴⁶ Through this, orange skin becomes perceived not only as a bad tanning practice, but also as an effective tool to ridicule celebrity figures who do not represent the idealised standard of white bronzed skin, as the following examples of ZacEfron, Lindsay Lohan and Victoria Gotti show.

Open Post: Hosted By Zac Efron’s Terracotta Face

February 23, 2011 / Posted by: Michael K



Figure 24: ‘Open Post: Hosted By Zac Efron’s Terracotta Face’(Michael K., 2011f)

Two Orange Peas In A Blonde Weave Pod

April 12, 2011 / Posted by: Michael K



Figure 25: ‘Two Orange Peas In A Blonde Weave Pod’ (Michael K., 2011g)

The humour in the headlines used by Dlisted.com to accompany the pictures of Zac Efron and of Lindsay Lohan and Victoria Gotti is based on the cultural meaning that fake-tanned or orange skin has gained. It is understood to be ugly and tasteless, and stands in stark contrast to the image of celebrity as the embodiment of current beauty norms (Blum, 2003: 55). But celebrities are also the visible surface upon which new beauty trends and skin practices are played out, and thus always already bear the danger

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed explains the sticky relations between signs and words in many of her works (2004a, 2004b, 2011). One example would be the association of the asylum seeker with the terrorist (2004b: 134).

of 'doing it wrong'. As many have shown, some skin practices are read as signs of self-improvement while others trigger scepticism and ridicule (Davis, 2003; Dyer, 1997; Kenway & Bullen, 2011; Peiss, 1998). For instance, working-class tanning practices are often read as an attempt to 'pass' as an affluent white middle-class subject with the help of fake tan. Ironically, it is precisely tanned, orange skin tone which hinders a smooth transition across class barriers, and which serves as a source of mockery. Derision works here to create and maintain social barriers between the improper white working-class subject and the proper white middle-class subject. Laughter affectively produces a circle of subjects who are 'in' on the joke (white middle-class subjects who understand the link between proper tanning and class) and those who are 'outside' and laughed at (because they do not have the right knowledge): '[Laughter] creates a distance between "them" and "us," asserting moral judgments and a superior class position' (Tyler, 2008: 23). Citing Winfried Menninghaus (2003), Tyler maintains further that laughter is – like disgust – an affective bodily reaction that aims to expel that which is seen as the abject, the polluted, the improper. Orange-skinned working-class subjects are considered to be out of place in the realm of proper whiteness. They might not be perceived as race traitors, like the black subject who bleaches her or his skin, but they are seen as class traitors: they attempt to slip from one class to the other unnoticed, and thereby threaten the borders of proper whiteness. Poking fun at them can therefore be seen as a technique to repress these subjects.

Even though celebrities like Efron and Lohan might not be considered working-class in a traditional sense, within an 'increasingly hierarchised celebrity culture' (Tyler & Bennett, 2010: 379) their orange skin tone functions to mark them as 'white trash' or 'chavvy'. 'White trash' can be understood as a derogatory term that marks certain white bodies as ill-fitting and other to the rest of proper whiteness (Hartigan, 1997; Newitz & Wray, 1997). This category is historically and culturally constructed as a form of 'dirty'

whiteness, polluted through poverty and a lack of ideal ‘white’ qualities such as respect, honour, demeanour, morality, beauty, and the ability to keep a job and to consume the right goods. In this sense, even though the term ‘white trash’ is directed towards white-skinned people, it is their purported lack of self-control, excessiveness and bad habits which marginalise this group of people as ‘not quite white’ (Nayak, 2007).¹⁴⁷ ‘White trash’ is therefore a slippery term: rather than referring to a static list of character or class traits and bodily features, it can be applied to everybody who *exceeds* the class and racial etiquettes that proper whiteness requires (Hartigan, 1997). The notion of excess is important here, because it is the excessive use of tanning practices and products that is understood as the cause of orange skin. Orange skin is excessive skin in the sense that it is overly tanned, thereby violating the borders of good taste which are constitutive of proper whiteness. By contrast, the proper white subject is controlled in its desire to darken its skin. It regulates its desire to be tanned through reason, which makes its tanning an acceptable and positive habit. Thus, celebrities are understood as ‘white trash’ when they inhabit orange skin, and despite the significant amounts of time and money they spend on beauty regimes, their orange skin becomes the visible signifier of their excessive, abject white nature and their lack of good taste.

The images of Efron, Lohan and Gotti are ridiculed by Dlisted.com because these celebrities seem to misperceive the meaning of their orange skin: they do not recognise that their skin tone makes them grotesque rather than beautiful. This positive feeling towards something that is commonly understood as bad and tasteless positions these celebrities as other in an affective way: they are ‘othered’ not only through what they do or say but rather through what they *feel* when they encounter or inhabit orange skin. Ahmed argues that the objects we encounter are not neutral, but that they enter our

¹⁴⁷ There are also discussions that describe ‘white trash’ subjects as *too* white, as excessively white, because they embody white racism which is, at least on the level of lip service, officially condemned in a multicultural society that celebrates ‘difference within sameness’ (Haylett, 2001, cited in Lawler, 2005: 437)

sphere with affective value already in place (2010: 34). Hence, objects that are considered good or tasteful are inherited within a specific culture and society. Taste and preferences are, as Bourdieu (2010) argues, deeply entangled within class, and function to represent one's social status while distancing oneself from a lower class. However, taste is an affective category, as we have to *experience* or *feel* these objects (which are socially and culturally understood as tasteful) as pleasurable and good. Hence, as Skeggs suggests, 'what counts as tasteful is experienced as enjoyable by those with good taste' (cited in Ahmed, 2010: 34). Tasteful (white, middle-class) subjects are then affected by the right object in the right way.¹⁴⁸ Orange skin, however, connotes a lack of taste because it violates the borders of white decorum through its excessiveness. Bodies that are oriented towards orange skin and/or inhabit it can therefore be understood as being affected by the wrong object in the wrong way. They are perceived as 'affect aliens' (Ahmed, 2010), because orange skin does not evoke the same negative affective responses in them as it does in the proper white subject. On the contrary, they seem to like it and to perceive it as beautiful, which marks them as the affective other.

Owing to their alleged 'white trash' background, some celebrity skins (like Lohan's) are more carefully scrutinised by the media than others. In a post from 23 June 2011 about Lohan's court hearing in Los Angeles, Dlisted.com published a picture of her badly spray-tanned hand, accompanied by the following text:

[...] LiLo accessorized her business casual outfit with a cokehead tan. You know, a cokehead tan is when you have them spray everything but your hands so that when you use your finger to scoop up the bad shit powder, you won't get any of that nasty tan sludge up your nostrils. Tanned coke is gross. (Michael K., 2011h)

¹⁴⁸ For more on the connection between taste and identity construction, see Skeggs (1997).

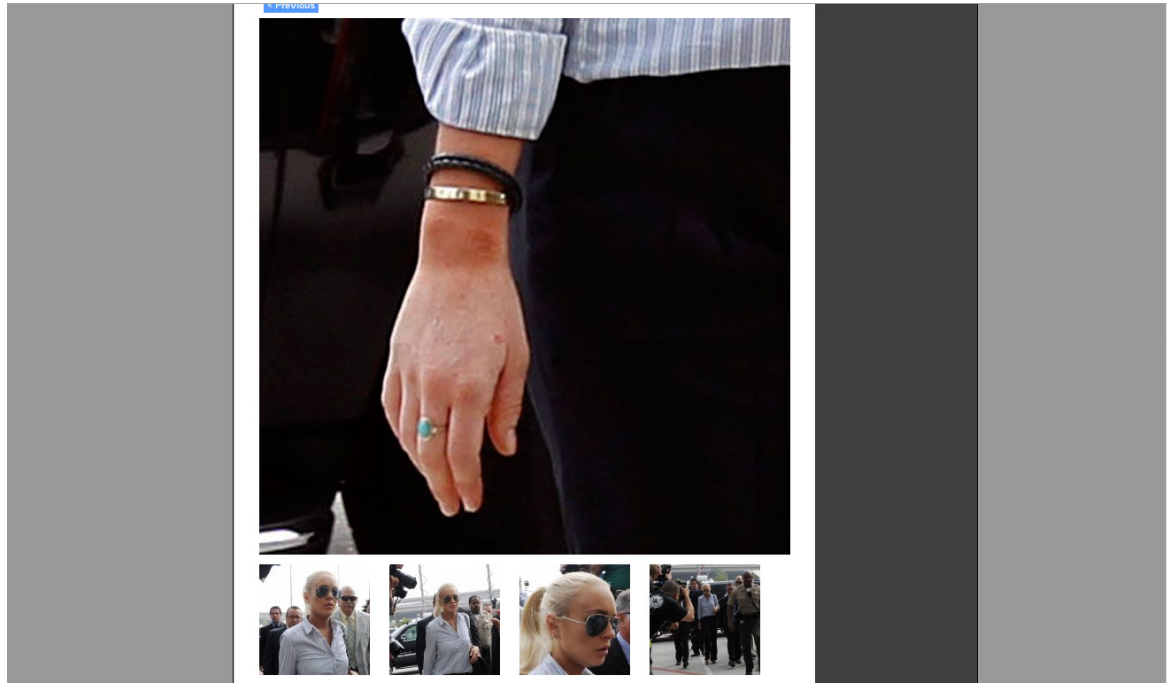


Figure 26: ‘The L.A. County Court System's Brightest Star Returns To Her Stage!’ (Michael K., 2011h)

This photograph, which appears on the blog entry in a ‘thumbnail image’,¹⁴⁹ shows clearly how new media productions underpin the inspection and careful scrutiny of the female celebrity body.¹⁵⁰ The close-up of Lohan’s hand is featured on Dlisted.com because, on this part of her skin, her failed performance of proper white femininity is apparently hyper-visible. As discussed in Chapter Two, proper femininity is historically tied to middle- or upper-class whiteness, and becomes embodied through a smooth, immaculate bodily surface and an even skin tone.¹⁵¹ Female celebrities are particularly interpellated to inhabit this kind of iconic skin, which shows no traces of otherness like

¹⁴⁹ A thumbnail image is a small graphics file about ‘the size of a thumbnail’, usually accompanying an article or blog entry with one main picture. Thumbnail images are created from standard size images and are often clickable, resulting in a larger image to load at the user’s discretion.

¹⁵⁰ For further discussion of the significance of the body in the construction of the female celebrity in Western consumer culture, see David Marshall (1997: 266-7).

¹⁵¹ Femininity and whiteness are intimately interlinked through class. In reference to Maxine Leeds Craig (2006), Pedwell notes that late nineteenth-century ‘racist and classist aesthetics [...] portrayed black and working-class female bodies as grotesque, ugly and licentious *against* constructions of white, middle- and upper-class female bodies as classical, beautiful and virtuous’ (2008: 97; emphasis in original). Skeggs (1997), Carole Anne Tyler (2003) and Tyler and Bennett (2010) have argued that working-class women have often aspired to embody white, middle class femininity as it symbolises cultural capital and social mobility. However, their failed attempt to ‘do femininity’ properly has often been ridiculed as a ‘class drag act’.

skin irregularities, cellulite, spots and stretch marks. Lohan's cracked skin (the pale hand versus the spray tanned arm) violates this cultural script by displaying her uneven skin tone. Hence, her crime is not the use of fake tan (or the wrong use of it), but rather her failure to hide it.

As a celebrity, Lohan is aware of the public scrutiny of her body, and despite the fact that she is making a public appearance before court, she still refuses to pull down her sleeve, and adorns her hand with a ring and bracelets. This could be read, I suggest, as a sign that she wants to draw attention to this part of her body. In making her hybrid otherness (she inhabits two skins) publicly visible, Lohan can be read as sabotaging the current public image of respectable, white femininity. As Jones (2008) argues in relation to cosmetic surgery, it is common knowledge in our current neoliberal consumer-culture that beauty practices like spray tanning are conducted, and they can be even necessary for the integration and normalisation of white femininity. These practices allow white feminine subjects to reinvent themselves as 'white with a difference', as exotic, wealthy and healthy (Baumann, 2008; Dyer, 1997). The transition from pale to bronzed skin can be gradual but should be holistic, integrating the entire visible bodily surface rather than only parts of it. If the transition is too visible because it only happens partially, then the self-improving subject remains in the stage of transition and becomes a 'special agen[t] of an abject, hybrid otherness' (Jones, 2008: 107). In other words, by arresting the process of her transition from pale skin to orange skin rather than completing it and by making this unfinished process highly visible, Lohan is marked as the abject other, neither pale nor orange but rather the in-between. Lohan makes her artificial construction publicly recognisable, and this can be read as a subversive statement. However, a different reading of this online representation is also possible. As many have shown, cracked skin has, in Western culture, an uncanny effect, as it reminds us of the instability of our bodily borders which in turn threatens our ideas

about individuality and the 'I' (Creed, 1993; Kristeva, 1984; Shildrick, 2002). Cracked skin, or two skins meeting on one body, disrupts the symbolic order where one individual is enveloped by one skin only, and often engenders disgust, loathing and laughter. As these affects are understandable and potentially widely experienced, it is arguably difficult to conceive why a celebrity would want to draw attention to something that causes such negative affects. In the Dlisted.com post, this irrational behaviour is framed within the context of other media coverage, which often portrays Lohan as an unstable, drug-addicted celebrity who is unintelligent, passive, and not in control of her own star image production. Hence, her intersected skin is read through her 'white trash' background, and is understood as mirroring her dysfunctional personality.

As these examples demonstrate, orange skin is publicly perceived as a failed performance of proper whiteness. It is understood as the visible evidence of the subject's excessiveness and lack of taste, and places 'orange skin' in proximity to so-called 'white trash' or 'chav' figures. I have shown that the metonym between orange skin and white trash is enabled through emotions and feelings which in turn grow out of the history of raced and classed discourses and our current ideas about the proper neoliberal subject (a subject that acts responsible and self-improves rather than diminishing its own value through wrong beauty practices). Online spaces like Dlisted.com repeat this mocking of orange-skinned celebrities mainly through humorous commenting but also by providing the visual 'evidence' of their beauty *faux pas*. In this sense, celebrity gossip blogs like Dlisted.com exacerbate the intensity of negative feelings which fix orange-skinned celebrities and white working-class subjects as disgusting and worth of social derision. Nevertheless, I suggest that celebrity gossip blogs have also the potential to move us in critical directions rather than always already reiterating unequal power structures and their affective economies. I will explore in the

next section how representations of orange-skinned celebrities can not only evoke feelings of contempt and disgust, but also positive emotions such as affection and love.

Orange Celebrities and Contradictory Feelings

Thus far, I have shown that particular discourses are saturated with certain affects, and have sought to illustrate some of the specific ways in which discourse and affect are intertwined. And yet my reading of the affective production of whiteness through celebrity representations is also based on the assumption that affects cannot be fully controlled. Indeed, one can be intrigued, touched and moved by a representation in ways that contradict, or at least complicate, a structural reading of affect. Owing to the fact that readers can leave comments on blogs, these sites can therefore aid an understanding of how audience members are differently affected by particular celebrity representations. In order to illustrate how orange celebrities not only engender feelings of contempt and disgust but also of affection and pleasure, I focus in this section on reader comments on Perezhilton.com concerning the semi-scripted MTV reality show *Jersey Shore*.

TRENDING: Funny • Ian Somerhalder • Nina Dobrev • VMAS • One Direction Perez Posse login | Sign up

PEREZHILTON.COM HOME VIDEOS PHOTOS STAR SEEKER ...search

Kanye West Is A Total SoFie As A Dad According To Kris Jenner! Watch HERE!
North West's Photo Debut! Who Does She Look Like More: Kim Or Kanye?
Kanye West Regrets His "Drunk" Bombardment Of Taylor Swift At The MTV ...
Kanye Shows Off North West! Watch The BIG Moment On Kris HERE!

1 Tip of a flat belly: Cut down a bit of your belly every day by using this 1 weird old tip. *Women'sHealth*

PerezHilton CocoPerez Perezitos FitPerez TeddyHilton

Home >> MTV, Snooki, Reality TV >> **Jersey Shore Season 5 Premieres January 5th**
11/02/2011 9:15 PM ET | Filed under: MTV • Snooki • Reality TV

TOP STORY ★★★★★
Kanye West Reveals First Pic Of North West On Kris! See It HERE!!!

we're Back!

She's beautiful!



Figure 27: 'Jersey Shore Season 5 Premieres January 5th' (Hilton, 2011h)

This series features eight young Americans of Italian descent (self-proclaimed 'guidos' and 'guidettes') in scenes of excessive drinking, partying, sexual promiscuity and misogynistic behaviour. Primarily occupied with tanning and shaping their bodies according to so-called 'white trash' beauty standards, the cast members represent improper whiteness through their orange skin, but also through their apparent ignorance, irresponsibility and lack of talent. Read through a white, middle-class gaze, *Jersey Shore* can, as such, be seen as affectively engaged in the (re)production of 'white trash' or 'chav' figures. By following specific conventions of representations, *Jersey Shore* aims to provoke negative affects that grab and shock the viewing body. Drawing on Ahmed's notion of 'affective economies' (2004: 44-49), Tyler (2008) illustrates how the figure of the 'chav', which already evokes feelings of class disgust, can further accumulate these emotions by moving through different media sites. Owing to the programme's popularity, discussions and representations of *Jersey Shore* travel through numerous media, and accrete negative feelings concerning representations of 'white

trash'. This affective value then sticks to *Jersey Shore* and its characters, and is repeated online in the Perez Hilton.com user comments. A brief examination of a selection of these comments confirms this:

'Well America, you've only got yourself to blame for making these talentless, ugly losers rich and famous!' (xtinainthecity, see: Hilton, 2011e)

'The news about Snooky on media is enough to trigger my gag reflex.'
(mitri2010, see: Hilton, 2011e)

'Disgusting...humanity is in big trouble because most young people act like this now...I have never been more for birth control and abortions than now after watching this.' (andydo, see: Hilton, 2011f)

Despite the fact that the posts about the series on Perez Hilton.com are themselves relatively neutral, the show is so strongly laden with affect that some users nevertheless feel compelled to express their disgust and anger in comments. Users go as far as to invoke discourses concerning ignorance, nation and eugenics to mark the *Jersey Shore* cast as the ultimate other against which the proper self – that which has internalised the cultural achievements of whiteness, such as refinement, reliability, intelligence and diligence – can be measured.

From the perspective of a white middle-class gaze, *Jersey Shore* thrives on notions of disgust, contempt and resentment, which are knowingly sought out, evoked, provoked, and formulated through the actions and appearances of the cast members. However, as a number of user comments on Perez Hilton.com demonstrate, this programme nevertheless encourages shared pleasure, and provokes positive affects of delight, enjoyment and affection:

'loveittt !!!!snooks never fails to get me laughing...'
(dancin_dg, see: Hilton, 2009)

'Snooki is mahgurlllll' (petey plastic, see: Hilton, 2009)

‘Snooki is fuckin’ adorable!!’ (POPSCIDICTATOR, see: Hilton, 2011f)

‘Love snookie and pauly d, funniest people in the house!’ (Shivers, see: Hilton, 2011f)

The comments indicate that it is Snooki’s character in particular that evokes positive feelings. The representation of working-class femininity is sometimes read through the lens of female empowerment and authenticity, and engenders affection from the viewer. Using the celebrity figure of Kerry Katona as an example, Tyler and Bennett demonstrate the ways in which abject celebrity representations can earn positive value either through “‘the carnivalesque’: a ritualised interval in which class hierarchies are reversed temporarily and an anti-classical counter-aesthetic briefly emerges’, or when the figure is read as a ‘respectable working-class character marked by tenacity and lack of pretention’ (2010: 383). These two strategies enable the ‘disgusting’ working-class celebrity to become endearing and loveable for the middle-class audience. I want to extend these analyses by drawing attention to the ambiguous nature of affect. Skeggs and Wood (2012) argue that viewing positions are more ambivalent than traditional audience studies account for. In their empirical research, they claim that middle-class women, for instance, feel anger and frustration, as well as empathy and care, for the participants of reality television programs, depending on which feature of the participant is in focus. This ambivalent and unstable affective relation to working-class representations enables viewers to subvert or refuse the viewing position of rejection and contempt into which they are apparently discursively hailed. This illustrates that affect is not determined through a straightforward relationship between gendered, classed, and raced discourses on which the representation is built, and the social positioning of the viewer. Rather, we connect in much more complex affective ways with representations. Paasonen suggests in this vein that it is often impossible to predict what will resonate with or fascinate us – certain images stick, intrigue us and encourage

a further re-viewing, re-visiting or re-posting, and we are unable to explain why (2011: 182). As she experienced through her own reading experience of online pornography, some (online) representations touch us in ways that cannot be explained by logic.

In this sense, even though *Jersey Shore*, as its representation of improper whiteness, is apparently ‘disgusting’ (Hilton, 2011f), viewers find different ways to affectively engage with the programme. *Jersey Shore* is a light-hearted reality television programme full of parody and self-ironic moments that allow the viewer to read the crossing of borders of good taste and demeanour as playful and non-threatening. We can see this feeling of irony reflected in user comments online, for instance when they mimic the *Jersey Shore* slang: ‘Snooki is mahgurlllll’ (Hilton, 2009). This is not to say that the feelings expressed in this manner are less real than other emotions, but I see them as discursive-affective expressions that symbolise the alignment with the orange-skinned *Jersey Shore* cast. This alignment is not necessarily enabled through identification, or through the recognition of similarity with the viewer’s own embodied social position – rather, it is also possible through the humorous quality of the text. The parodic and humorous nature of the TV series *Jersey Shore* invites the viewer to shift the ‘controlling and pervasive nature of the middle-class gaze’, which ‘encourages a preferred reading by the audience in terms of classed identities, thus (re)producing symbolic violence through viewer affects’ (Lyle, 2008: 322), to a more self-reflective and self-ironic one. Through humour, the viewer can distance him/herself (momentarily) from his/her own social positioning. This distance enables a new gaze that makes clear that both orange and ideally-bronzed skin tones are forms of aestheticisation, and that the categorisation into right or wrong skin tone is only valid from a white, middle-class perspective. Through this new, distant gaze, the viewer can relate differently to the orange-skinned cast members – the wrong skin tone can, for instance, be seen as much more subversive and rebellious than the idealised bronzed

skin because it does not satisfy white, bourgeois middle-class demands.

Overall, the expressions of positive feelings towards the orange-skinned cast members of *Jersey Shore* visible on Perezhilton.com invite us to understand affect not simply as a structural by-product of gendered, classed and raced discourses, but as an unpredictable force that can grab us, distance us from ourselves, and enable us to relate to others in new ways. The positive user comments on Perezhilton.com thereby challenge readings that attempt to restrict 'white trash' representations to one range of affective reaction, to that of contempt and disgust. Online environments like Perezhilton.com allow readers/viewers to illustrate through their commenting some of the different ways in which they make sense out of media representations they might have seen elsewhere, on television or print magazines. Online media like gossip blogs are important tools, which shape and re-shape through their interactive and affective nature the meaning of these 'white trash' figures.

Conclusion

Whiteness maintains its privileged status through ever-changing representations, which constantly shift and adapt to new trends, technologies and socio-political frameworks. Celebrities play a crucial role in this process as they embody and perform diverse types of whiteness, which then become publicly discussed, evaluated, negotiated and reappropriated. If we are to understand the workings of these processes better, we first need to investigate the patterns of feelings that generate and animate these representations. While these affective structures may often reinforce pre-existing knowledges in that they gloss over the constructed and relational nature of celebrity representations (and present them as simply *being* good or bad), they also always offer possible exit points – ways of reading and feeling them differently from the dominant

meaning. I have demonstrated in this chapter how celebrity online representations of idealised whiteness not only engender feelings of adoration and affection, but also have the capacity to make us laugh, or to provoke anger and frustration when accompanied by humour and parody. The mediation of these white-skinned celebrity representations through sites such as Dlisted.com and Perezhilton.com can intervene in affective economies of whiteness, thus transforming their meaning. The transformation of idealised whiteness through affect, to which I gesture in the first section of this chapter, is of course partial – for example, the humorous representations of Paltrow are only successful in this affective shift when they resonate with the reader’s own experiences and socio-political views. With this example, the reader might already be critical towards certain forms of whiteness, as well as towards how their status becomes maintained and reinforced within mainstream media. This practice is limited to a certain context within a certain community, and can therefore be critiqued as marginal and ineffective. While such critiques are valid, I maintain that this example nevertheless reveals the ways in which dominant systems like whiteness can be challenged through humour. Through this affective mode, we can learn to orientate ourselves differently towards happy objects, such as idealised whiteness.

As my consideration of the reaction to the orange skin of celebrities illustrates, badly fake-tanned skin evokes affects of disgust and resentment because it becomes, through discourses of ‘lack of taste’ and excessiveness, metonymical with improper whiteness. However, an affective reading through skin demands that we also account for emotional responses that do not conform to white, middle-class expectations. We need to account for those surprising and non-compliant affective responses because these feelings can be potential sites of transformative potentiality, a place from which we can reimagine and deconstruct whiteness. Affect matters in important and novel ways, and theorising it can provide us with crucial frameworks that we can use to understand the

connection between new media, celebrity and whiteness. Reading through skin attunes us to the affective quality of online representations because it draws attention to the ways in which these celebrity representations make us feel. By this, I do not only mean those feelings that work through representations to keep dominant systems like whiteness in its place, but also those that grab us unexpectedly and might as such offer a way to explore possible sites for transformation. Skin and affect must be part of our theorisation of celebrity culture – especially in the context of new media – because they offer critical tools for exploring the complex mixture of commodification and transformative potentiality that shapes current celebrity representations.

Conclusion

Selling Out Difference?

Celebrity Gossip Blogs and Affective Labour

Throughout this thesis, I have used skin as a heuristic device to illustrate the affective and sensuous relations through which we make meaning, arguing that humorous online celebrity representations touch us in sometimes unforeseen, complex and embodied ways, thereby shifting our ideas about gender, sexuality and race. Even though I have made clear that this shifting does not necessarily mean deconstructing – rather, it can mean reinforcing dominant discourses, or even reinventing new borders and mechanisms of exclusion – my writing has nonetheless been guided by the desire to point out possible ‘lines of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In other words, I have aimed to point out moments in which the affective force of online representations might not only exacerbate dominant discourses and emotions, but also enable new ways of thinking and feeling about gender, sexuality and race and the power relations in which they are embedded and through which they become mobilised. The heuristic device of skin has helped me to show the tensions, cracks and gaps that these humorous online celebrity representations afford and that might otherwise pass unnoticed. Applying the concept of skin to the analysis of celebrity culture has enabled me to illustrate that online representations can be understood as skins in the sense that they are porous and provide cracks and gaps which allow them breathe, and through which they remain in contact with the world and the changes that occur in it over time. As such, my focus on skin has highlighted that online celebrity representations are not immune to their surroundings and interpretations; rather they are affected and infected by them. They reconfigure themselves according to the touch of history, materiality, personality, method, intention, politics and culture of any given interpretation. As a result, attention

to skin has revealed not only the power of the active reader but also the agency and dynamic of online celebrity representations.

In this conclusion, I want to explore some of the wider implications of my analysis in the context of contemporary political dynamics. More precisely, I want to think through more critically if and how humorous online representations in celebrity gossip blogs can create critical difference in a ‘society of control’ (Deleuze, 1992) where the economic circuits are already fully invested in affect.¹⁵² In such a social formation, affect cannot be thought of as outside or even subversive to power, but rather it becomes a vehicle of power through commercial exploitation. These questions are important because the political economy of online media platforms like gossip blogs shapes their content, as well as our paths of interaction with it, in significant ways. As such, questions about the economic network of new media cannot be sidelined when we examine the ways in which they produce meaning and with what social and cultural consequences. As I mentioned in the Introduction, celebrity gossip blogs can be seen as part of an economy which modulates affect for the sake of profit. Thus the pressing question is if and how these humorous online representations can create alternative ways of thinking, feeling and living if they are embedded in an economy that thrives on affect?¹⁵³ If social and political change starts with feeling differently, as Hemmings argues (2012: 150), then what kind of power is afforded to these humorous online

¹⁵²By critical difference, I refer to ways of thinking, feeling and living that do not reiterate dominant discourses, practices and feeling structures but provide alternatives to these modes. In this sense critical difference is, similar to ‘lines of flight’, any form of creative escape from the standardisation, oppression, and stratification of society and culture. Critical difference is a difference that really matters to us because it provides instances of thinking and acting ‘outside of the box’, with a greater understanding of what the box is, how it works, and how we can break it open and perhaps transform it for the better.

¹⁵³ An economy that thrives on affect can refer to a number of developments in late capitalism. It means, for instance, that products which are virtually the same – they have the same quality and function – are sold because of their affective charge: through identity branding these products are laden with images, ideas and feelings that set them apart from other products in their range and motivate the consumer to buy. This idea is not entirely new but developed through marketing and advertising over time. An economy that thrives on affect refers also to a post-industrial economy that makes profit not from producing and selling actual material goods, but rather from so-called immaterial goods such as services, communication and information. The Internet plays an important role in this kind of economy because it changed the ways of communication and exchange while collecting data and information.

representations, and the feelings they circulate? How much influence do they have within a society of control in which the incessant commodification of difference has seemingly compromised the capacity for political and social change? In order to unpack these questions, I first summarise the key findings of my core chapters in order to flesh out what reading online representations through the skin means, and how it can be productive. I then explore how we might understand these affective online representations in the context of a society of control and the commodification of affect. Juxtaposing debates about affect within critiques of a society of control with writings about affect within queer scholarship (Halberstam, 2012 and Muñoz, 2009) I support and extend my argument that humorous celebrity gossip blogs can be seen as spaces of affective movement with the potential to create new ways of thinking and feeling.

This thesis has explored how femininity, queerness and whiteness are affectively produced and mediated in Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com. In my three core chapters, I have argued that normative ideas about gender, sexuality and race are not only discursively produced with material effects on bodies that do not align themselves along these rules and norms, but that they are also emotionally mediated, created and maintained. The complex fabric of feelings adoration, sympathy, anger, contempt and *schadenfreude* emerges through our physical and intellectual interactions with these blogs; blogs and their humorous celebrity online representations draw on politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004a) that are already in place, but they can give also rise to affective jolts that might interrupt these historical patterns. I have explored in all these chapters how humour is used as a particular affective-discursive strategy that can challenge and/or reinforce stereotypes through the complex and sometimes contradictory feelings that it can engender. I have also examined in each chapter how the technological affordances of online blogs – their capacity to link to other texts and images, or to include videos and GIFs, and the possibility to comment and dispute –

influences our meaning-making processes. In this regard, the three core chapters do not work in a linear way to build my argument, but rather they work in a web-like fashion, reinforcing my argument for a reading through skin from different perspectives. On the whole, they illustrate how the concept of skin encourages us to think through the emotional, technological and embodied nature of online celebrity representations.

In Chapter Two, I explored the ways in which ideas about proper and improper femininities are affectively mediated and produced in these celebrity gossip blogs. By reading blog entries about cosmetic surgery and Photoshop through skin, I introduced one of my key arguments: online representations become meaningful to us not only through what we see (the represented celebrity skin), but also through affects that accompany these online representations. I highlighted the potential of skin to betray the gaze, and I illustrated how traditional feminist discussions about representations and cosmetic surgery can be critiqued. This is not only because they rely, at times problematically, on a media-effects model and reinforce binaries such as representation and reality, naturalness and artificiality, agency and structure, but also because they strengthen the idea that vision can give us access to truth. With the help of the work of feminist scholars such as Irigaray (1985a) and Shildrick (2002), which foregrounds the importance of touch for meaning-making, I argued that how we understand humorous online celebrity representations depends not only on what we see in front of us, but also on what we suspect to lie beneath the surface or how we expect this surface to feel. The concept of skin encourages us to explore such questions about the materiality and texture of online representations. This chapter demonstrated that meaning is not simply a matter of vision, of what we see in the present moment. Rather, it is shaped by our own memories and experiences, the feelings that travel between us and the particular online representation, as well as the feelings that emerge between the celebrity representations on the screen. Overall, the concept of skin encouraged us in this chapter to challenge the

primacy of visibility in reading-processes, and to foreground the role of texture, touch and relationality in these online representations.

In Chapter Three, I challenged the privileged role of vision in meaning-making processes further by exploring how queerness is affectively mediated through online celebrity representations. Sexuality and queerness are not commonly understood to be directly inscribed on our bodily surface in the way that gender and race are. Rather, sexuality is signalled indirectly through the skin. It finds expression in the ways in which we touch each other, or in the kind of clothes we wear as a form of second skin. By focusing on posts that show celebrities touching or blog entries that comment on their sartorial practices, I illustrated how affective strategies such as camp humour and a particular gay sensibility work to challenge the objectivity and self-evidence of celebrity representation. I demonstrated how these strategies can produce meanings that deviate from the dominant reading induced through a heterosexual gaze, and I paid close attention to the ways in which (camp) humour works in these instances. Focusing on queer critiques of homonormativity, I challenged the new visibility of queerness and unpacked 'happy' (Ahmed, 2010) representations of queerness. Reading through the skin here meant teasing out how the embodied position of the blogger/reader influences the affective production of queerness. This is because the embodied position of the blogger shapes how he/she reads celebrity representations that she/he found elsewhere (on television or a print magazine cover) and the kind of humour that he/she uses to represent them online. I also highlighted how blogs provide technological possibilities such as text and image-manipulation that make the 'queer gaze' of the blogger highly visible and palpable for their readers. This makes clear that celebrity gossip blogs do not function as passive vehicles which communicate the blogger's humorous take on a celebrity representation, but that they have agency. Their technology moves readers who engage with them in diverse ways, thereby creating a space where (new) ideas

about sexuality, or how we judge and value particular forms of sexuality, are affectively (re)negotiated.

In Chapter Four, I further elaborated upon my argument that making sense of online celebrity representations is afforded through affective and embodied processes aided by technology. I did this by examining how whiteness is affectively produced through our interactions with blogs. Whiteness is commonly understood as a marker that is embodied through our skin tone, but I drew on feminist and critical race scholars who challenge this view to argue that different forms of whiteness emerge through the diverse ways in which historical discourses about gender, nation, class and race intersect. These scholars also highlight the affective dimensions of different forms of whiteness. Structured through the figures of idealised whiteness and the ‘celebrity chav’, I explored the affective landscape upon which different forms of celebrity whiteness are built, and how humour – produced through digital texts or images – can disrupt affective economies that keep those different forms of whiteness in their social place. In this chapter, I paid close attention to the technological possibilities of gossip blogs. The ways in which these online platforms can assemble different media formats (images, texts and videos) into an online celebrity representation influence how an online representation manifests on our screen and how we make meaning of it. As I illustrated using the example of a blog post with a GIF, meaning can be communicated in non-verbal ways through bodily feeling. Technology also shapes the ways in which we can interact with online representations, and this in turn influences how online celebrity representations can be re-worked and re-signified. My discussion of user comments emphasised how feelings of disgust and contempt can be knowingly provoked by the blogger when she/he is drawing on discourses and representations that are already saturated with particular affects. Yet I also illustrated the uncontrollable character of affect in this chapter. Through the example of user comments on the

television show *Jersey Shore*, I demonstrated how blogs can function as a vehicle to vent and express these affective reactions that might not always correspond to cultural (white, middle-class) expectations. Reading through skin draws attention to these individual and surprising affective reactions that online celebrity representations of whiteness engender, and provides as such a valuable tool through which we can explore the affective foundations and cracks upon which whiteness is built and shifts.

As the material of my core chapters illustrates, the heuristic device of skin allows me to think through the relations of affect, embodiment and technology that produce online representations. Skin shows that it matters how online representations *feel* and how they make us *feel*. As such, reading online representations through the skin combines a close textual analysis with considerations of the materiality, texture and affectivity of online representations. It is an affective reading that recognises the theoretical, ideological, but also personal underpinnings that orient, regulate, and shape the ways in which representations are selected, analysed and rewritten through the act of analysis. Thus, it does not claim objectivity, completeness and closure, but rather sees the reading of humorous celebrity gossip blogs as an embodied, interactive activity that includes a wide range of emotions and connections between different actors (for instance, the blogger, the celebrity figure and the reader) and factors (technological protocols, patterns of representations, flows of money and labour). Skin is not only the fleshly witness of our life, but also the ground on which new contacts and experiences are made. If we understand celebrity online representations as skins, then we recognise that they are not immaterial but they have a history that is shaped through many non-human and human bodies: first there is the 'real' celebrity body that is captured through the paparazzi camera and transformed into electronic data which is stored, manipulated and circulated on different devices, computers and screens. At some point this data package is encountered by the blogger who is affected by it, chooses it out of many

other data packages and creates, through different technological processes, a blog post out of it. Then this representation circulates online in its new form, making contact with different readers who reshape it again through commenting, tagging or sharing thereby accumulating or transforming its affective charge. As this illustrates, the heuristic device of skin attunes me not only to the reading body (how it is touched and affected by the online celebrity representations), but it allows me also to understand online celebrity representations as active, material and affective surfaces that are constantly reshaped through the contact with different human and non-human bodies. The question that has concerned me in this thesis was how this transformation of affect happens and if it can enable us to re-orientate ourselves anew towards traditional ideas about gender, sexuality and race, thereby changing the power relations that mobilise them. In the next section, I illustrate where the limitations of such a hope lie when I discuss how celebrity gossip blogs related to societies of control and its affective labour.

Societies of Control, Affective Labour and Online Platforms

I now want to explore how my interpretation of online celebrity representations as material and affective interfaces that can shift our ideas about gender, sexuality and race can be understood in the context of the society of control. Many see affect as a dominant modality of power in the contemporary social formation referred to as the society of control, which develops out of Foucault's 'disciplinary society' (1991).¹⁵⁴ Whereas the disciplinary society normalised and governed its subject through mechanisms of enclosure (the school, the university, the factory, the barracks, the family and the church; and by deviance also mechanisms of exclusion like the prison or the psychiatry) and worked mainly on the body, societies of control work through

¹⁵⁴ Foucault has located the disciplinary society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, and they reach their height at the outset of the twentieth. The control society develops after World War II, 'at the far edge of modernity and opens towards the postmodern' (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 23)

dynamic networks and govern through the soul. This means that power no longer works through physical cohesion (like in the society of sovereignty) or institutions that discipline the body (like in the disciplinary society), but rather by modulating the affects and feelings of 'dividuals' through permanent control and instant communication.¹⁵⁵ Tom Holter and Mark Terkessidis (1996) argue that these new mechanism of power dissolve the clear division between power and resistance, and that questions about the subversive potential of formations in media and popular culture therefore have to be carefully explored in the context of the society of control.¹⁵⁶ In this social formation, 'resistances are no longer marginal but active in the centre of a society' (Hardt and Negri, 2001: 25). Hence the society of control allows us to think through how (online) media representations might seem subversive, but are in fact part of mainstream industry, a mainstream that Holter and Terkessidis aptly call the '*Mainstream der Minderheiten*' (mainstream of minorities) (1996). Purportedly subversive and resistive representations and youth movements are part of the mainstream because – in a society of control – difference is no longer something that needs to be flattened out (because it might be dangerous to the system), but rather it is recognised as something that can produce economic profit and needs therefore to be integrated. Through the example of a post about Perez Hilton and Lady Gaga's wax figure, I have shown how this online representation might at first sight seem subversive but actually functions to integrate particular gay and lesbian identities into a heteronormative system.

Shane Gunster illustrates further how quickly and efficiently new differences are integrated into the mainstream through commodification:

While this is most evident in the rapid integration of subcultural styles into the fashion and entertainment industries, even activities that are explicitly

¹⁵⁵Deleuze argues that, through the shift from disciplinary society to society of control, the binary individual/masses dissolved, leaving the dividual, which consist of samples, data and banks.

¹⁵⁶For a detailed discussion of the society of control, see: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) or David Savat (2012).

anticapitalist are not immune: witness, for example, the rapid translation of protests against corporate globalization in Seattle, Quebec City, and Genoa into a Sony video game titled 'State of Emergency' that invites you to run amok as an anti globalization anarchist. (2005: 202)

Societies of control have made capitalism, which was formerly restricted to the factory, the main logic of the system. As Gunster's example shows, this means that the subversive potential of difference is now managed and tamed by capturing it through the logic of capitalism. From this perspective, it is clear how celebrity gossip blogs like Jezebel.com that seem to contest the mainstream portrayal of women may not perform any meaningful critique, but rather feed into an industry that is based on the consumption of celebrities. In other words, Jezebel.com's critique of the use of Photoshop for a cover image of Jennifer Aniston, for example, is now not read as a subversive act that challenges the dominant structures of the system, but rather as a tricky marketing strategy that produces content for a niche market: feminist-aware women who enjoy celebrity culture.

Thinking through whether and how humorous online celebrity representations can create critical difference raises also questions about affective labour. Affective labour is work that is carried out to produce or modify emotions and feelings in other people. Hardt argues that societies of control are characterised by a predominance of immaterial (i.e. affective) labour because industrial production moved from the second sector that produces material goods to the third sector that produces immaterial goods such as communication, services and entertainment (1999). Clearly, affective labour, and the values that it produces, is not itself new – feminists have long theorised the economic and social value of caring and nurturing labour and maternal activities.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Diane Elson argues that an understanding of economy merely as the sphere of production is incomplete, and blends out the sphere of reproduction which consists of women's unpaid domestic and caring work which is essential for the social reproduction of labour power (1998). Similarly, Nancy Folbre argues that market economies are sustained by caring and nurturing activities that she associates

What is new, however, is the extent to which this affective or immaterial labour is now directly productive of capital, and the extent to which this has become generalised through wide sectors of the economy.¹⁵⁸ Throughout the service industries, from fast-food services, to providers of financial services, to online platforms, the affective labour produced through communication and human interaction is a key element in contemporary capitalism because it functions to make people feel good about their consumer choices, and because they can elicit feelings of ease, excitement and passion. Thus celebrity gossip blogs are a vital part of the capitalism of societies of control because these online formations regulate, through virtual contact, the feelings and affects of their readers.

Furthermore, societies of control contrive to capitalise on intellectual and affective activities that have formerly been coded as gendered and private (Wissinger, 2007: 234). From this perspective, private activities like reading a blog or engaging with social networking portals become new sites for capitalist valorisation. Julie Ann Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim (2013) illustrate the workings of this new affective labour using the example of the online platform 'Pinterest'. They show how the production and consumption of online content is as a 'form of affective labor, and the fruits of this labor are valuable to both [users] and marketers' (2013: n.p.). Pinning something on Pinterest

with the heart (2002). She argues that both the monetised values exchanged by the invisible hand of the market and the non-monetised values generated and distributed by the invisible heart of care must be included in the realm of economy (2002: 231). Wendy Brown argues that the invisibility and misrecognition of women's care work and domestic labor is axiomatic to liberal capitalism (1995). Confined to the realm of private life and family, women's affective work, though crucial for the economy, is represented as natural, as the 'anchor' for civil society and public life, and as the 'seat of moral restraint in an immoral world' (1995: 147) but not recognised as work. Amy Wharton and Rebecca Erickson explore, through analysis of married or cohabitant female hospital workers, the links between emotions and work and affective labour in the family (1995). For more on the link between 'good' mother and 'good' worker, see also Martina Klett-Davis (2007) For a transnational account of the paid and unpaid chain of care work, see Arlie Russel Hochschild(2000).

¹⁵⁸ As early as 1983, Hochschild used the term 'emotional labor' to refer to the labour that is required by an employee to regulate their own feelings (such as anger or envy) in order to give customers a good feeling: 'The flight attendant does physical labor when she pushes heavy meal carts through the aisles, and she does mental work when she prepares for and actually organizes emergency landings and evacuations. But in the course of doing this physical and mental labor she is also doing something more, something I define as emotional labor. This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others – in this case being cared for in a convivial and safe place'(Hochschild, 1983: 7).

is work in the traditional sense because it is often the female user undertaking the job of an online editor: she has to take time out of her daily routine to choose an object or subject that she wants to write about online. She then needs material resources like a computer and a good working internet connection so that her post can appear online, and she undertakes creative work in thinking about how to represent it online. It is also affective labour in the sense that it produces and manipulates feelings: the user might feel happy and satisfied to see her post online, but she is also trying to affect other users with her work. Corporations behind the network benefit from this free labour that creates their online content, and exploit it by gathering the users' data, which in turn can be sold to marketers. Clearly, celebrity gossip blogs work in a similar fashion, except that their ways of collecting data for advertisers are at times even more cunning: Perez Hilton.com, for instance, links celebrity images to online shops in which a similar outfit, jewellery or make-up can be bought. This is how the powerful and profitable nexus between celebrity culture and consumption is in these gossip blogs exacerbated through online technologies. Wilson and Chivers Yochim's acknowledge that online platforms like Pinterest can create 'good' feelings by making individual users happy for a moment, or that they can enable what they call 'pockets' (moments in which our contact with online content can make a difference to our everyday life). Still, in the larger picture, they argue that these positive affects feed into an economic system that constantly works to exploit the most vulnerable of society thereby making 'real' positive feelings like social security, stability and safety unachievable for many. In this sense, Wilson and Chivers Yochim's work illustrates how online platforms like gossip blogs might indeed enable through their affective charge some kind of change (pockets), but that they also reinforce what they apparently undermine through their humour, unequal power structures of an economic system which privileges white, middle-class subjects and their nuclear families.

Dean is even more pessimistic about the critical difference that online media formations like blogs can enable. She argues that

contemporary communications media capture their users in intensive and extensive networks of enjoyment, production, and surveillance. My term for this formation is communicative capitalism. Just as industrial capitalism relied on the exploitation of labor, so does communicative capitalism rely on the exploitation of communication. (Dean, 2010: 3-4)

Communicative capitalism increasingly relies on contribution for value production, for it is user contribution that keeps communication flowing and networks pulsing with new data to mine and exploit. For Dean, this data-overstimulation has two effects: firstly it makes communication meaningless, because in these online environments content is replaced with affect. Grabbing attention but not arresting it for too long, jumping quickly from one data package to the next – this is, according to Dean, the rhythm of communicative capitalism. Secondly, this data-overstimulation prevents the formation of meaningful difference because communication is cut into fragments and small bits that can be easily consumed and enjoyed but that, in the stream of multiple, circulating contributions, tend to resist recombination into longer, more demanding theories. Hence, when Dlisted.com ridicules Lady Gaga's *Rolling Stone* cover photo, possibly in order to critique a celebrity industry that desperately tries to sell difference, this act can be seen as just one tiny data packet that, rather than creating critical difference, simply feeds seamlessly into communicative capitalism. In a similar way to Holter's and Terkessidis' 'mainstream of the minorities', communicative capitalism 'captures critique and resistance, [by] formatting them as contributions to the circuits in which it thrives'(Dean, 2010: 2).¹⁵⁹ From this perspective, gossip blogs like Dlisted.com,

¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Richard Grusin writes that in societies of control, capitalism is no longer preoccupied with material goods, but rather exploits the intellectual and affective labour that subjects perform in digital networks. In these networks, he argues, 'people and things function actively together to create or invent new forms of mediation [and control]' (76-77), which in turn strengthen the capitalist

Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com function to produce and mediate affect, but these intensities cannot create lines of flight which enable us to understand gender, sexuality and race in alternate ways, outside of the logic of capitalism. Rather, these affective intensities weave us deeper into the web of communicative capitalism. As Dean's writing about blogs and micro-blogs such as Twitter illustrates, the attachment, detachment, and reattachment of affect becomes ever more rapid and might end in an apathetic 'whatever' attitude toward all meaningful discourse (Dean, 2010: 61-91). Hence, even though affect is exuberant online, it seemingly cannot engender new ways of thinking, feeling and living. Humorous celebrity gossip blogs, which, as I have argued, can be seen as affect producing machines, are from this perspective void of any transformative power. Our encounter with them might give us affective jolts, but, like a small injury to our skin, this imprint vanishes over time.

For Hardt, however, the commercialisation of affect does not mean that affect is without any disruptive potential. On the contrary, he argues that, 'given the role of affective labor as one of the strongest links in the chain of capitalist postmodernization, its potential for subversion and autonomous constitution is all the greater' (Hardt, 1999: 90). The subversive potential of affective labour can be explained through Hardt's understanding of affect. Following a Spinozist-Deleuzian legacy, he conceives affect as an autonomous force that has the power to act in excess of the current system. From this perspective, affective labour engenders creative forces that might serve capitalism, but these forces also work outside of capitalism and enable new subjectivities. If affect, and for that matter affective labour, has the potential to bring about change and create real difference, then the question is where and how this potential is apparent and palpable. In order to unpack this question, I turn to queer scholars who have, in part, informed my

system. In this sense, he argues, like Dean, that through their media practices users take part in the creation of their own suppression.

analysis in the core chapters, especially those instances in which I aimed to gesture towards possible ‘lines of flight’.

Skin and Mapping Critical Difference Online

In the previous section, I explored how seemingly subversive online celebrity representations and their online platforms reinforce the capitalist logic of the society of control. Regarding strategies of possible resistance, Deleuze, who labels the mole as the animal of the disciplinary society and the serpent as the animal of the control society, writes that ‘[t]he coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill’ (1992: 7). To put it in another way, societies of control require more complex strategies of subversion than disciplinary societies. In this section, I flesh out how my reading of celebrity gossip blogs through skin contributes to a critical school of thought that aims to detect possible forms of subversion in times of the serpent. The concept of skin illustrates that reading blogs is a physical and multi-sensorial experience – the ways in which we navigate the cursor or how we touch the screen influence that with which we come into contact and what we can experience. In this sense, the heuristic device of skin has enabled me to think through the intimate connection between touching, moving and feeling. I have argued that through this moving and touching, ideas about femininity, queerness and whiteness can be tweaked and revised, thereby shifting the ways in which we live and feel these embodied processes and identity categories. Clearly, these shifts and affective conversions happen only on a small-scale but, as queer theorists like Halberstam (2012) and Muñoz (2009) argue, we need to sharpen our gaze in order to detect these barely noticeable movements, because they might hold blueprints for alternative ways of living.¹⁶⁰ Halberstam argues, for instance,

¹⁶⁰ Ahmed refers to affective points of conversion as moments when the affective economy around a subject or object changed. For Ahmed, these conversions from good to bad, or from excitement to anxiety do not happen simply as object circulate, but they can happen. She writes: “‘happy objects’ can

that the current socio-political dynamics might indeed aim to include particular formerly excluded bodies into the framework of the normal in order to stabilise its racist, classist and sexist regime.¹⁶¹ Yet if we shift our gaze slightly, we can see that this movement can also challenge current structures of power: for instance, the inclusion of particular transgender and transsexual bodies has strengthened the system of the ‘normal’, but it has also changed the ways in which we understand heterosexuality and can as such contribute to its dissolution (Halberstam, 2012: 81). In Chapter Four, I argued that celebrity culture (and as such celebrity gossip blogs) plays a crucial role in the preservation of whiteness as a dominant norm because it constantly invents new versions of whiteness, thereby keeping it flexible. But this dynamic can also serve to disrupt whiteness’ privileged position: through the example of a blog post on Jezebel.com about the satirical Twitter celebrity Babe Walker, I demonstrated how her Twitter account, ‘WhiteGirlProblems’, not only contributes to the increasing flexibility of whiteness and its privileges (like many Jezebel.com users argued), but also takes part in its deconstruction. The concept of skin made this subversive potential palpable because it sharpened my gaze (and my body) for the affective workings of humour, which can re-orientate us towards traditional ideas that usually pass unnoticed.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that our interactions with technology and celebrity culture can enable affective processes which can, in turn, challenge traditional ideas about gender, sexuality and race and inform alternative imaginaries. The challenge of such a claim is that it is based on intuitions, feelings and affects that are hard to ‘prove’ because they seem to escape our normal critical framework which aims to make visible how representations or cultural formations reinforce dominant discourses and

become “unhappy” over time, in the contingency of what happens, which is not to say that their happiness no longer persists as an impression, available as memory’ (2010: 44-45).

¹⁶¹ The consequences of the inclusion of formerly excluded bodies is also theorised by Duggan and her concept of homonormativity (2002), and Puar on the figure of the homonational (2005).

practices.¹⁶² In bringing feminist politics of emotions (Ahmed, 2004, 2010) into dialogue with scholarship on digital cultures (Paasonen, 2011), I have aimed to develop a framework that shows not only how feelings and emotions circulate online in order to reiterate and exacerbate dominant discourses about femininity, queerness and whiteness, but also how humorous online celebrity representations can change the affective structure that surround a particular celebrity figure. I have suggested that, in these moments of affective conversation, the subversive potential of gossip blogs and their humorous celebrity representations becomes visible and palpable. I have used skin as a heuristic device to read those online representations because it allowed me to not only to analyse what is – what we see in front of us – but, more importantly, the complex material and affective connections through which these representations *become* and shift. Skin attunes us to the ways in which our interaction with blogs and their online representations change how we feel about them and, in turn, how we make meaning out of them. Whereas Chapter Two was mainly preoccupied with fleshing out the limitations of blogs to create any meaningful difference in our understanding of femininity, I have demonstrated through several examples in Chapters Three and Four how humorous online celebrity representations can create critical difference. For example, in Chapter Three I showed how Dlisted.com renders heteronormativity strange by commenting on the sartorial practices of Keira Knightley, Rupert Friend and Richard Simmons. In Chapter Four, I illustrated in my discussions of blog posts about ‘perfectly’ white Gwyneth Paltrow and the orange-skinned cast members of *Jersey Shore* how humorous online celebrity representations and their user comments can affectively shift our ideas about whiteness.

¹⁶² This problem can be understood in the context of Sedgwick’s work, in which she famously argues that academic research is shaped by a ‘paranoid’ reading, i.e. a reading that is contagious and anticipatory, preoccupied with pointing out the oppressive structures. She argues that we need to focus on developing ‘reparative’ readings, i.e. queer readings that illustrate alternative understandings (2003). According to Sedgwick, there is a lack in contemporary theoretical vocabularies to discuss the value of reparative reading.

My reading through skin that aims to flesh out moments of affective surprise, disruption, resignification and re-orientation may well be critiqued as highly subjective and futile, since the affective shifts that it highlights seem marginal. Yet, as scholars like Muñoz argue, these affective practices only seem inefficient because normative culture and the methodologies that it advocates elide and discount them (2009). Muñoz is also eager to develop a lens that can make visible the affective ways in which minorities negotiate dominant discourses and practices. For him, the queer performances of artists such as Kevin Aviance and Dynasty Handbag work on, with, and against hegemonic structures because these performances reject the impasse of the present (a present that I understood as a society of control), and enable audiences to experience what a ‘better’ world would feel like. More importantly, according to Muñoz, the energy and the promises of these queer performances can live on after the show has ended, thereby making a real difference to their lives. I agree with Muñoz’s tentative arguments, but my analysis of blog posts in Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perez Hilton.com have also considered the role of technology in enabling a lasting difference, by which I mean a difference that we can also feel offline. Through my discussion of blog posts about Lady Gaga in Chapter Two, as well as Ian Somerhaldeen and Paul Wesley in Chapter Three, I have shown how technologies like Photoshop and the technological possibilities of the blog (linking to or including content from other websites) determine the *feel* of a representation and might permanently reshape how we read particular representations of gender and sexuality. Overall, I suggest that the concept of skin is a suitable tool for sketching out the affective complexities of online celebrity representations. Skin has provided me with a lens which makes visible how the affects that these representations circulate align us or avert us from ‘affective economies’ (Ahmed, 2004a) that are already in place.

In this sense, these humorous online celebrity representations are not merely sites of banal entertainment but rather they can also be seen as an expression of social and political critique. As I demonstrated in my discussion of a post about Kate Middleton and Prince William on Perezhilton.com, this overtly cheerful online representation touched some Perezhilton.com readers so intensely that they had to vent their feelings of contempt in commenting, thereby contesting and critiquing traditional forms of privilege. I suggest that in these moments humorous online celebrity representations serve as a platform to express populist rage and affectively undertake with this a form of social and political critique. Such forms of critique are arguably inefficient, however, because laughing about a satirical online representations or writing a comment under a blog post cannot change the world. Yet I argue that we can also see these affect-laden online expressions as a cacophony of tiny subversive gestures which deserve our attention because they are snippets of more prevalent public feelings. I suggest further, however, that there is a more sturdy potential for resistance in their ability to render strange what we accept as ‘common sense’. I have discussed this especially in Chapters Three and Four, in which I highlighted some of the ways in which the affective-discursive power of humour. As Gray maintains, humour has ‘at least the potential to reevaluate the seemingly flawless logic of many instance of hegemonic “common sense”’ (2006: 105), and I would add that its affective jolts can also move us, thereby shifting how we orientate us towards the world.¹⁶³ From this perspective, gossip blogs can be seen as small pockets of resistance or disobedience because they (sometimes) scramble, in a playful way, our traditional categories of good and bad, proper and improper. Through non-sense and humour (and the myriad affects that this engenders), these online celebrity representations defamiliarise values and

¹⁶³Gray makes this statement in relation to comedy. I still refer to him here because the subversive potential of comedy lies, in Gray’s understanding, in its humour.

ideas that we have been taught we should cherish. This *Verfremdungseffekt* can then serve to demolish old patterns of living and feeling.

Halberstam and Muñoz support my argument because they maintain – though through different theorisation – that in our socio-political climate, in which cultural and political difference becomes quickly integrated into the dominant system, and in which capitalism presents itself as the only valid logic, political critique might manifest itself in new forms. Rather than necessarily materialising in the form of demonstrations, petitions or strikes, it might masquerade ‘as naïve nonsense [while] actually participat[ing] in big and meaningful forms of critique’ (Halberstam, 2012: xxv). Hence, political action and social critique do not have to take the form of a ‘fixed counterdiscourse of resistance’ (Muñoz, 2009: 177), but rather it can find expression in the form of art of the so-called failed, in stickers, music videos or – as in my case – in humorous online representations that might seem marginal and ephemeral, but which affect the reader, stick to her/him and might influence how she/he moves through life.¹⁶⁴ From this perspective, social and political change, engendered through what I have called critical difference, is still possible and happens all around us, but these new processes need to be theorised in order to develop their potential. My reading through skin has aimed to do this by thinking through how the humorous and non-sense online representations of celebrities might bring about change, while recognising those unequal power structures that stubbornly persist.

¹⁶⁴ Muñoz argues that the practices, ideas and values of the so-called failed, i.e. queer, have the potentiality to go beyond the present reality and envision radical alternatives. This is because these non-mastered aesthetic practices contain in their affective quality, their cynicism, depression and bitchiness, the potential for new modes of relating to each other; a belonging together in dissidence and difference (2009). James Scott calls these effective forms of resistance and disobedience the ‘weapons of the weak’ (1987).

Conclusion

Celebrity gossip blogs are not simply an expression of a society of control, but they can also be read as contributing to their maintenance. From this perspective, their online celebrity representations grab the attention of readers, and might motivate them to laugh, to cringe with disgust, and to react with anger or annoyance. Some of these blog posts are received with indifference, but even this reaction can be seen as part and parcel of the affective economy of gossip blogs because it motivates the user to scrawl further through the content looking for something to arrest her/his attention. Blogs like Dlisted.com, Jezebel.com and Perezhilton.com exploit the affective labour of their users when they click, tag and comment by selling this data to marketers. From this perspective, the mocking and ridiculing of the privileged (the celebrities) functions as a new way to target a niche market of celebrity consumption rather than enabling social and political critique. Furthermore, celebrities can be read as the incarnation of the ideal citizen of a society of control – they propagate ideas of individualism, self-control and constant transformation while cleverly benefitting from the economic productivity of emotions and affect. Celebrities no longer only embody the rags-to riches myth (enabled through hard work or charisma). Rather, in a society of control celebrity status is understood as the result of clever marketing (which implies an increasingly highly personalised visibility on social network sites and online media) and the right connections. Most importantly, however, fame is understood as unstable and fleeting, as something the celebrity constantly has to work on. In a society of control, the celebrity *is* no longer a celebrity but constantly has to *become* a celebrity and monitor and control that she/he is still relevant. Stasis is the death of the celebrity, and this is why gossip blogs are such a vital part of current celebrity culture. Through these networks (through which celebrity representations permanently circulate) every ordinary move like walking the dog and going shopping becomes news that floats as a package of data

through cyberspace and punctuates our daily lives when it flashes up on our computer or cell phone screens. Hence, as I have illustrated in this chapter, concepts like the society of control and affective labour enable us to think through how these gossip blogs relate to wider political dynamics, and how this interwovenness compromises their potential to create critical difference.

But this Conclusion has also shown how the concept of skin can be productive in fleshing out the cracks and gaps through which these humorous online celebrity representations can produce critical difference. This thesis has shown how skin, as a heuristic device, can help us to see and feel the tiny shifts and movements that online celebrity representations can engender. The concept of skin enables a reading ‘against the grain’ or a ‘reparative’ reading in the sense that it aims to explore not just the manipulative, but also the inventive potential of humorous celebrity representations. Whereas the examples of Jessica Lange, Heidi Montag and Jennifer Aniston in Chapter Two about the affective production of femininity mainly outlined the limiting potentials that these humorous online celebrity representations have, Chapters Three and Four demonstrated, through the examples of Ian Somerhalden, Richard Simmons, Keira Knightley and Gwyneth Paltrow how these online celebrity representations can orientate us in new ways towards ideas of heterosexuality and whiteness. The heuristic device of skin draws attention to the creative potentialities that are enabled through our affective encounters and interactions with these online representations. As the sensuous cover that envelops our body (Shildrick, 2002), skin makes clear that it matters how online representations feel. And as the porous interface that is permanently transgressed (Kristeva, 1982) and that connects us with our environment, skin allowed me to theorise connection itself. How do the different elements on the screen connect? How are these online representations (assembled through different bodies and media formats) connecting with me – the body in front of the screen – and how is this connection not

only shaped by what I see in front of me in the present moment, but also by my history and prior experiences? Furthermore, the heuristic device of skin provided me with a flexible interpretative framework that allowed me to explore online celebrity representations in an original way. Depending on the ways in which a particular online celebrity representation lent itself to analysis, I was able to shift my object of investigation as well as my approach to it. This methodological flexibility allowed me to foreground the most pertinent and salient aspects of my dynamic and fast-changing online examples, whilst enabling me to stay open to their surprising forces and startling affective moments which make their subversive potential palpable. In this sense, the concept of skin helped me to flesh out some the complex ways in which humorous online celebrity representations move us, and to theorise how new media formations like gossip blogs can produce, through their affective force, a critical difference in our everyday life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, M. (2009). *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema and Critique After Representation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage.
- Ahmed, S. (1998). Animated Borders: Skin, Colour and Tanning. In Margrit Shildrick & J. Price (Eds.), *Vital Signs: Feminist Reconfigurations of the Bio/Logical Body*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, pp. 45-66.
- Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2004a). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2004b). Affective Economies. *Social Text*, 22(2), 117–139.
- Ahmed, S. (2004c). Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism. *borderlands e-journal*. Retrieved November 15, 2011, from http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm
- Ahmed, S. (2007a). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2007b). A Phenomenology of Whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 149–168.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2011). Problematic Proximities: Or Why Critiques of Gay Imperialism Matter. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19(2), 119–132.
- Ahmed, S., & Stacey, J. (2001). *Thinking Through the Skin*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ali, S. (2003). *Mixed-race, Post-race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices*. Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers.
- Allen, K., & Mendick, H. (2012). Young People's Uses of Celebrity: Class, Gender and "Improper" Celebrity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1–17.
- Alptraum, L. (2010). Why Glee's Brittany And Santana Are My Queer Icons. *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved October 19, 2012, from <http://jezebel.com/5652429>
- Andersen, M. L., & Collins, P. H. (1998). *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*. Stamford: Wadsworth Publishing Co Inc.

- Andrejevic, M. (2003). *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield .
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Armstrong, I. (2000). *The Radical Aesthetic*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Babuscio, J. (1993). Camp & Gay Sensibility. In D. Bergman (Ed.), *Camp Grounds. Style and Homosexuality*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 19-37.
- Bailey, C. (2007). We Are What We Eat : Feminist Vegetarianism and the Reproduction of Racial Identity. *Spring*, 22(2), 39–59.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Rabelais and His World*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bakhtin, M. M., Holquist, M., & Emerson, C. (1981). *Dialogic Imagination*. M. Holquist(Ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Balsamo, A. (1995). *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barale, M. A. (1991). Below the Belt: (Un)covering "The Well of Lonliness". In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, pp: 235-259.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Cape.
- Bartky, S. L. (1991). *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Baumann, S. (2008). The Moral Underpinnings of Beauty: A Meaning-Based Explanation for Light and Dark Complexions in Advertising. *Poetics*, 36, 2–23.
- Becker, R. (2006). Help is on the Way! Supernanny, Nanny 911 and the Neo-Liberal Politics of the Family. In D. Heller (Ed.), *The Great American Makeover: Television, History, Nation*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 175-192.
- Bell, D. (2000). Cybercultures Reader. A User's Guide. In B. M. Kennedy & D. Bell (Eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp: 1-13.
- Beltraminelli, H., & Itin, P. (2007). Skin and Psyche – From the Surface to the Depth of the Inner World. *Journal der Deutschen Dermatologischen Gesellschaft*, 6(1), 8–14.
- Berlant, L. (Ed.) (2004). *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Berlant, L. (2008). *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

- Billig, M. (2001). Humour and Hatred: The Racist Jokes of the Ku Klux Klan. *Discourse & Society*, 12(3), 267–289.
- Bird, S. E. (2011). Are we all producers now? *Cultural Studies*. 25 (4–5), 502–516.
- Blum, V. L. (2003). *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*. Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press.
- Bobo, J. (1988). The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers. In E. D. Pribram (Ed.), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*. London: Verso, pp. 90–109.
- Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*. London: Routledge.
- Boorstin, D. (1962). *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. London: Penguin.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Brah, A., Hickman, M. J., & Ghail, M. M. (1999). *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Brecht, B. (2000). *Brecht on Film and Radio*. (M. D. Silberman, Ed.). New York: Verso Books.
- Brennan, T. (2004). *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Brooks, D. A. (2010). “This Voice which is not One”: Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)face *Culture, Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20(1), 37–60.
- Brown, W. (1995). *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brunsdon, C., & Morley, D. (1978). *Everyday Television: “Nationwide”*. London: British Film Institute.
- Butler, J. (2002). Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual? *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13(1), 14–44.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). Critically Queer. *GLQ*, 1, 17–32.
- Capulet, I. (2010). With Reps Like These: Bisexuality and Celebrity Status. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(3), 294–308.

- Chambers, D. (2009). Comedies of Sexual Morality and Female Singlehood. In Sharon Lockyer & M. Pickering (Eds.), *Beyond a Joke*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 164-182.
- Cheng, A. A. (2011). Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 126(4), 1022–1042.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. London: Sage.
- Chun, W. H. K. (2004). On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge. *Grey Room*, 18, 26–51.
- Clough, P. T., & Halley, J. (Eds.) (2007). *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Cobb, S. (2008). Mother of the Year. Kathy Hilton, Lynne Spears, Dina Lohan and Bad Celebrity Motherhood. *Genders OnLine Journal*. Retrieved February 23, 2013, from http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_cobb.html
- Coen, J. (2010a). Commenting On Jezebel: Rules Of The Road. *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved January 20, 2013, from <http://jezebel.com/5621055/a-friendly-note-on-commenting>
- Coen, J. (2010b). The Labiaplasty You Never Knew You Wanted [NSFW]. *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved January 16, 2012, from [http://jezebel.com/5535356/the-labiaplasty-you-never-knew-you-wanted-\[nsfw\]](http://jezebel.com/5535356/the-labiaplasty-you-never-knew-you-wanted-[nsfw])
- Coen, J. (2010c). Why You Must See Unretouched Images, and Why You Must See Them Repeatedly. *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved March 07, 2012, from <http://jezebel.com/5619903/why-you-must-see-unretouched-images-and-why-you-must-see-them-repeatedly>
- Coleman, R. (2009). *The Becoming of Bodies: Girls, Images, Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Connor, S. (2004). *The Book of Skin*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Corona, V. (2011). Memory, Monsters, and Lady Gaga. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(2), 1–20.
- Craig, M. L. (2006). Race, Beauty, and the Tangled Knot of a Guilty Pleasure. *Feminist Theory*, 7(2), 159-177.
- Creed, B. (1993). *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2012a). *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Cvetkovich, A. (2012b). Depression is Ordinary: Public feelings and Saidiya Hartman's Lose Your Mother. *Feminist Theory*, 13(2), 131–146.
- Davies, C. (2011). *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Davis, K. (1995). *Reshaping the Female Body: Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, K. (2003). Surgical Passing. *Feminist Theory*, 4(1), 73–92.
- Dean, J. (2010). *Blog Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Deleuze, E., & Deleuze, J. (1978). Gilles Deleuze: Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza's Concept of Affect. Retrieved October 8, 2012, from http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/deleuze_spinoza_affect.pdf
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the Societies of Control. *October*, 59, 3–7.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is Philosophy?* New York: Verso Books.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.
- Dhaenens, F. (2012). Teenage Queerness: Negotiating Heteronormativity in the Representation of Gay Teenagers in Glee. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-4, 1–14.
- Dlisted.com. (2002). Copyright Information. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 21, 2013, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/8472>
- Doorn, N. Van, Wyatt, S., & Zoonen, L. Van. (2008). A Body of Text: Revisiting Textual Performances of Gender and Sexuality on the Internet. *Feminist Media Studies*, 8(4), 357–374.
- Drukman, S. (1995). The Gay Gaze, or Why I Want My MTV. In P. Burston & C. Rochardson (Eds.), *A Queer Romance. Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 81–95.
- Duggan, L. (2002). The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, p. 440.
- Dyer, R. (1979). *Stars*. London: BFI Publishing.
- Dyer, R. (1986). *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (1997). *White*. New York: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (2002a). *The Culture of Queers*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Dyer, R. (2002b). *Now You See It*. London: Routledge.
- Ekman. (1993). Facial Expression and Emotion. *American Psychologist*. Retrieved September 13, 2012, from http://www.radford.edu/~jaspelme/_private/gradsoc_articles/facial_expressions/Ekman_1993_Am_psych.pdf
- Elson, D. (1998). The Economic, the Political and the Domestic: Business, States and Households in the Organisation of Production. *New Political Economy*, 3(2), 189–208.
- Endres, D., & Gould, M. (2009). “I Am Also in the Position to Use My Whiteness to Help Them Out”: The Communication of Whiteness in Service Learning. *Western Journal of Communication*, 73(4), 418–436.
- Eng, D. L. (2010). *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Eng, David, Halberstam, J., & Muñoz, E. (2005). What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now? *Social Text*, 23, 1–18.
- Fairclough, K. (2008). Fame is a Losing Game: Celebrity Gossip Blogging, Bitch Culture and Postfeminism. *Genders Online Journal*. Retrieved February 21, 2012, from http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_fairclough.html
- Ferreday, D. (2008). “Showing the girl”: The New Burlesque. *Feminist Theory*, 9(47), 47–65.
- Ferreday, D. (2009). *Online Belongings: Fantasy, Affect and Web Communities*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Finding, D. (2010). Figuring Gender and Sexuality in Little Britain. In S. Lockyer (Ed.), *Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television*. London: I B Tauris.
- Folbre, N. (2002). *Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*. New York & London: New Press.
- Fontanier, P. (1977). *Les Figures du Discours*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge Vol. 1*. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (2010). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Friday: A lot can go down between Thursday and Saturday*. Dir. F. Gary Gray. New Line Cinema, 1995. Film.

- Frost, L. (2001). *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fuss, D. (1991). Inside/Out. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out. Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, pp: 1-10.
- Gamson, J. (1994). *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gamson, J. (2007). The Assembly Line of Greatness: Celebrity in Twentieth-Century America. In S. Redmond & S. Holmes (Eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity. A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 141–156.
- Garde-Hansen, J., & Gorton, K. (2013). *Emotion Online: Theorising Affect on the Internet*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garden, M. (2011). Defining blog: A fool's errand or a necessary undertaking. *Journalism*, 13(4), 483–499.
- Gauntlett, D. (1998). Ten Things Wrong with the “Effects Model.” In R. Dickinson, O. Linne, & R. Harindranath (Eds.), *Approaches to Audiences: A Reader*. London: Arnold, pp. 120–131.
- Gawker Media Kit. (2013). Gawker Media - Jezebel. *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2013, from <http://advertising.gawker.com/jezebel/>
- Geraghty, C. (2007). Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance. In S. Redmond & S. Holmes (Eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity. A Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 98-111.
- Gibbs, A. (2010). Disaffected. *Continuum : Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 16(3), 335–341.
- Gibson, W. ([1984] 1995). *Neuromancer*. London: Harper Voyager.
- Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gill, R. (2008). Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times. *Subjectivity*, 25(1), 432–445.
- Gill, R., & Herdieckerhoff, E. (2006). Rewriting the Romance: New Femininities in Chick-Lit? *LSE Research Online*. Retrieved August 16, 2011, from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2514/1/Rewritingtherom.pdf>
- Gill, R., & Tyler, I. (2013). Postcolonial Girl. Mediated Intimacy and Migrant Audibility. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 15(1), 78–94.
- Gimlin, D. L. (2002). *Body Work: Beauty and Self-image in American Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Gledhill, C. (1987). *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: Routledge.
- Goodson, S. (2013). The 30 Most Popular Celebrity Gossip Sites And Why Big Brands Love Them. *Forbes.com*. Retrieved December 03, 2013, from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/marketshare/2013/05/24/the-30-most-popular-celebrity-gossip-sites-and-why-big-brands-love-them/>
- Gorton, K. (2007). Theorizing Emotion and Affect: Feminist Engagements. *Feminist Theory*, 8(3), 333–348.
- Gould, E. (2010). How Feminist Blogs like Jezebel gin up Page Views. *SlateMagazine.com*. Retrieved January 20, 2013, from http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2010/07/outrage_world.html
- Grant, J. (2006). Perez Hilton's Gay Witch Hunt. *Salon.com*. Retrieved January 18, 2013, from http://www.salon.com/2006/12/15/hilton_2/
- Gray, J. (2006). *Watching with The Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality*. New York: Routledge.
- Gray, R. J. (Ed.) (2012). *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga: Critical Essays*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.
- Gray-Rosendale, L., Capaldo, S., Craig, S., & Davalos, E. (2012). Whiteness and the Politics of "Post-Racial" America. In R. J. Gray (Ed.), *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga: Critical Essays*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co Inc, pp. 218-235.
- Grossberg, L. (2006). In There A Fan In The House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom. In P. D. Marshall (Ed.), *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 581–591.
- Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Grosz, E., & Probyn, E. (Eds.) (1995). *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Grusin, R. (2010). *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gunning, I. (1991). Arrogant Perception, World-Travelling and Multicultural Feminism: The Case of Female Genital Surgeries. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 23, 189–243.
- Gunster, S. (2005). "All about Nothing": Difference, Affect, and Seinfeld. *Television & New Media*, 6(2), 200–223.
- Hackford-Peer, K. (2010). In the Name of Safety: Discursive Positionings of Queer Youth. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 29(6), 541–556.

- Halberstam, J. (2005). Shame and White Gay Masculinity. *Social Text*, 23(3-4), 219–233.
- Halberstam, J. J. (2012). *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (p. 408). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Hardt, M. (1999). Affective Labor. *Boundary 2*, 26(2), 89–100.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2001). *Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Hartigan, J. (1997). Unpopular Culture: The Case of “White Trash.” *Cultural Studies*, 11(2), 316–343.
- Haskell, M. (1973). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hemmings, C. (2005). Invoking Affect. *Cultural Studies*, 19(5), 548–567.
- Hermes, J. (2006). Reading Gossip Magazines: The Imagined Communities of “Gossip” and “Camp.” In P. D. Marshall (Ed.), *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 291–311.
- Heyes, C. J. (2007). Cosmetic Surgery And The Televisual Makeover. *Feminist Media Studies*, 7(1), 17–32.
- Hillis, K. (2009). *Online a Lot of the Time: Ritual, Fetish, Sign*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hilton, P. (2009). Jersey Shore Dominates in the Ratings! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/?p=80313&cp=1>
- Hilton, P. (2010a). Alexa Ray Joel Gets a Nose Job. *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 06, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2010-04-28-alexa-ray-joel-gets-a-nose-job/#comments>
- Hilton, P. (2010b). So THIS Is Why We Haven’t Seen Much Of Heidi Montag Lately! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved May 06, 2013, from <http://perezhilton.com/2010-01-13-so-this-is-why-we-havent-seen-much-of-heidi-montag-lately#.UYde88pvDtU>
- Hilton, P. (2010c). Spencer Speaks Now! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 09, 2012, from http://perezhilton.com/2010-01-23-spencer-speaks-now#.Twrj6_IwA4k
- Hilton, P. (2010d). Wino Insults King of Zulu! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2010-08-06-wino-insults-king-of-zulu#respond>

- Hilton, P. (2010e). Perez & GaGalicious! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved October 10, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2010-12-10-perez-unveiling-new-lady-gaga-figure-hollywood-madame-tussands#.UHWNVVHUSKI>
- Hilton, P. (2010f). Amy Winehouse Continues to Grace London with her cLASS! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2010-08-26-amy-winehouse-continues-to-grace-london-with-her-class#respond>
- Hilton, P. (2011a). Amy Winehouse's Alma Mater To Pay Tribute to Her. *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-09-28-amy-winehouse-school-tribute-brit-school-adele-leona-lewis#respond>
- Hilton, P. (2011b). Is Amy Winehouse Tying the Knot With Reg Traviss?! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-04-04-amy-winehouse-getting-engaged-to-reg-traviss#.T1XSPvXICLJ>
- Hilton, P. (2011c). Awww! Chris Colfer & Darren Criss Grace The Cover Of Entertainment Weekly. *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved November 13, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-01-20-chris-colfer-darren-criss-grace-the-cover-of-entertainment-weekly#.UKJQAYbUSKI>
- Hilton, P. (2011d). William and Kate have a Delightful Visit...to Skid Row! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-07-11-william-and-kate-have-a-delightful-visit-to-skid-row#.TwWUzvLEmuI>
- Hilton, P. (2011e). First Official Pic from Jersey Shore Season 4 in Italy. *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-07-11-first-official-promo-pic-from-jersey-shore-season-4-in-italy#.TwWd2fLEmuI>
- Hilton, P. (2011f). Holy (Sh*t)Meatballs! The New Trailer for the Jersey Shore is Intense! *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://perezhilton.com/2011-08-04-new-trailer-jersey-shore-season-four-italy#.TwWnSvLEmuI>
- Hilton, P. (2011g). Jersey Shore Season 5 Premieres January 5th. *Perezhilton.com*. Retrieved May 06, 2013, from http://perezhilton.com/2011-11-02-jersey-shore-season-5-premieres-january-5th#.UYd_x8pvDtU
- Hobson, D. (1982). *"Crossroads": The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2000). Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value. In W. Hutton & A. Giddens (Eds.), *On the Edge*. London: Vintage, pp. 130–146.
- Holert, T., & Terkessidis, M. (Eds.) (1996). *Mainstream der Minderheiten*. Berlin: ID Verlag.

- Holmes, S. (2005). "Off-guard, Unkempt, Unready"?: Deconstructing Contemporary Celebrity in heat Magazine. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 19(1), 21–38.
- Holmes, S., & Jermyn, D. (2003). *Understanding Reality Television*. London: Routledge.
- Holson, L. M. (2012). Perez Hilton Pursues Redemption. *NewYorkTimes.com*. Retrieved January 18, 2013, from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/18/fashion/perez-hilton-pursues-redemption.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- hooks, b. (1987). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: Pluto Press.
- hooks, b. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press.
- Horn, K. (2012). Follow the Glitter Way: Lady Gaga and Camp. In R. J. Gray (Ed.), *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga: Critical Essays*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., pp: 85-107.
- Howes, D. (2005). Skinscapes. Embodiment, Culture, and Environment. In C. Classen (Ed.), *The Book of Touch*. Oxford & New York: Berg, pp: 27-40.
- Huffer, L. (2011). Are the Lips A Grave ? *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17(4), 517–542.
- Iqani, M. (2012). Smooth Bodywork : The Role of Texture in Images of Cars and Women on Consumer Magazine Covers (December), 37–41.
- Irigaray, L. (1985a). *This Sex Which is Not One*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1985b). *Speculum of the Other Woman*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Isherwood, C. (2012). *The World in the Evening*. New York: Vintage Classics.
- Jenkins, H. (2008). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jones, M. (2008). *Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery*. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Karatzogianni, A., & Kuntsman, A. (2012). *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kennedy, B. M., & Bell, D. (2000). *The Cybercultures Reader*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Kenway, J., & Bullen, E. (2011). Skin Pedagogies and Abject Bodies. *Sport, Education and Society*, 16(3), 279–294.

- Klett-Davies, M. (2007). *Going it Alone?: Lone Motherhood in Late Modernity*. London: Ashgate.
- Knadler, S. (2005). "Blanca from the Block". Whiteness and the Transnational Latina Body. *Genders OnLine Journal*. Retrieved July 22, 2012, from http://www.genders.org/g41/g41_knadler.html
- Koivunen, A. (2010). An Affective Turn? Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory. In M. Liljeström & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 8-29.
- Kraszewski, J. (2010). Multiracialism on The Real World and the Reconfiguration of Politics in MTV's Brand During the 2000s. *Popular Communication*, 8(2), 132–146.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kuipers, G. (2009). Humor Styles and Symbolic Boundaries. *Journal of Literary Theory*, 3(2), 219–241.
- Kulick, D., & Willson, M. (1995). *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London: Routledge.
- Kyrölä, K. (2010). Expanding Laughter: Affective Viewing, Body Image Incongruity and "Fat Actress." In M. Liljeström & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings. Disturbing Differences*. London & New York: Routledge, pp: 72-85.
- Lahti, M. (2003). As We Become Machines: Corporealized Pleasures in Video Games. In M. J. P. Wolf & B. Perron (Eds.), *The Video Game Theory Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 157–70.
- Langellier, K., & Peterson, E. (2004). *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Laukkanen, A. (2010). Hips Don't Lie? Affective and Kinaesthetic Dance Ethnography. In M. Liljeström & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 126-140.
- Lawler, S. (2005). Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities. *The Sociological Review*, 53(3), 429–446.
- Lentin, A. (2011). What Happens to Anti-Racism When We Are Post Race? *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19(2), 159–168.
- Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (p. 304). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Littler, J. (2004). Making fame ordinary. Intimacy, Reflexivity and "Keeping it Real". *Mediactive*. Retrieved August 08, 2012, from <http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/mediactive/archive/Mediactive2.pdf>

- Lockyer, Suzanne, & Pickering, M. (2008). You must be Joking: The Sociological Critique of Humour and Comic Media. *Sociology Compass*, 2(3), 808–820.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg: Crossing Press.
- Love, H. (2008). Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence. *New Formations*, 68, 52–66.
- Lyle, S. (2008). (Mis)recognition and the Middle-Class/Bourgeois Gaze: A Case Study of Wife Swap. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5(4), 319–330.
- Mahler, H. I. M., Beckerley, S. E., & Vogel, M. T. (2010). Effects of Media Images on Attitudes Toward Tanning. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 32(2), 118–127.
- Marks, L. U. (2000). *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Marks, L. U. (2002). *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Markus, H. R., & Moya, P. M. L. (Eds.). (2010). *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Marshall, P. D. (1997). *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marshall, P. D. (2006). New Media - New Self. The Changing Power of Celebrity. In P. D. Marshall (Ed.), *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 634–645.
- Mascia, J. (2010). The Blog Jezebel Is Not Afraid to Pick a Fight. *NewYorkTimes.com*. Retrieved January 20, 2013, from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/12/business/media/12jezebel.html?_r=0
- Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- McIntosh, P. (1988). White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. Retrieved November 20, 2011, from <http://www.library.wisc.edu/EDVRC/docs/public/pdfs/LIReadings/InvisibleKnapsack.pdf>
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.
- Medhurst, A. (1997). Camp. In A. Medhurst & S. R. Munt (Eds.), *Lesbian and Gay Studies. A Critical Introduction*. London & Washington: Cassell, pp. 274–294.
- Menninghaus, W. (2003). *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*. New York: State University of New York Press.

- Meyers, E. (2005). "Can You Handle My Truth?": Authenticity and the Celebrity Star Image. *Star*, 42(5), 890–907.
- Meyers, E. A. (2010). *Gossip Talk and Online Community: Celebrity Gossip Blogs and Their Audiences*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Meyers, E. A. (2012). "Blogs Give Regular People the Chance to Talk Back": Rethinking "Professional" Media Hierarchies in New Media. *New Media & Society*, 14(6), 1022–1038.
- Michael K. (2009). A Do And A Don't. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 06, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/32425>
- Michael, K. (2010a). The Photoshop Awards: Lady GaGa's Rolling Stone Cover. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 26, 2012, from <http://dlisted.com/node/37740>
- Michael K. (2010b). Double The Awwwwws. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved October 31, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/40210>
- Michael K. (2011a). It's Dolly Time! *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/2011/10/20/its-dolly-time>
- Michael K. (2011b). Two Boring Pretty People Broke Up. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved October 31, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/40396>
- Michael, K. (2011c). Fishsticks Paltrow Loves Hot Dog Buns, Hates Hot Dogs. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved November 13, 2011, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/41507>
- Michael K. (2011d). Straight Outta Her Private Sauna In Her Multi-Million Dollar London Townhouse. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/2011/05/18/straight-outta-her-private-sauna-her-multi-million-dollar-london-townhouse>
- Michael, K. (2011e). Fishsticks Eats Fishsticks! *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://dlisted.com/node/41618?page=1>
- Michael, K. (2011f). Open Post: Hosted By Zac Efron's Terracotta Face. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved May 06, 2013, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/40944>
- Michael, K. (2011g). Two Orange Peas In A Blonde Weave Pod. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved May 06, 2013, from <http://www.dlisted.com/node/41561>
- Michael K. (2011h). The L.A. County Court System's Brightest Star Returns To Her Stage! *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/2011/06/23/lindsay-lohan-goes-back-to-court>
- Michael K. (2012a). Panty Creamers of the Day: The VD Cast On Entertainment Weekly. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved October 10, 2012, from <http://www.dlisted.com/taxonomy/term/60?page=2>

- Michael K. (2012b). Richard Simmons Serving You Dementia-Stricken Drag Queen As Poison Ivy. *Dlisted.com*. Retrieved October 31, 2012, from <http://dlisted.com/2012/08/11-0>
- Moore, L. (2011). The Three People behind “White Girl Problems.” *Jezebel.com*. Retrieved January 05, 2012, from <http://jezebel.com/5788415/the-three-people-behind-white-girl-problems-twitter>
- Morgan, K. P. (1991). Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women’s Bodies. *Hypatia*, 6(3), 25–53.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.
- Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Munt, S. R. (2000). Shame / Pride Dichotomies in Queer As Folk. *Textual Practice*, 14(3), 37–41.
- Mustat (2013). *Mustat.com*. Retrieved December 03, 2013, from <http://www.mustat.com/dlisted.com>, <http://www.mustat.com/jezebel.com>, <http://www.mustat.com/perezhilton.com>
- Nakamura, L. (2002). *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. New York: Routledge.
- Nakayama, T. and Krizek, R. (1995). Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81(3), 291–309.
- Nayak, A. (2007). Critical Whiteness Studies. *Sociology The Journal Of The British Sociological Association*, 2, 737–755.
- Negra, D. (2002). Ethnic Food Fetishism, Whiteness, and Nostalgia in Recent Film and Television. *The Velvet Light Trap*, 50, 62–76.
- Negra, D. (2008). The Feminisation of Crisis Celebrity. Retrieved November 13, 2011, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jul/09/celebrity.women>
- Negra, D., & Holmes, S. (2008). Going cheap? Female Celebrity in Reality, Tabloid and Scandal Genres: Introduction. *Genders Online Journal*. Retrieved February 24, 2012, from http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_negraholmes.html
- Newitz, A., & Wray, M. (1997). *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Ngai, S. (2005). *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nunn, H., & Biressi, A. (2010). “A Trust Betrayed”: Celebrity and the Work of Emotion. *Celebrity Studies*, 1(1), 49–64.
- Orbach, S. (1978). *Fat Is A Feminist Issue*. Feltham: Hamlyn.

- Oring, E. (2008). *Engaging Humor*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- O’Riordan, K., & Phillips, D. J. (2007). *Queer Online: Media Technology and Sexuality*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Owyong, Y. S. M. (2009). Clothing semiotics and the social construction of power relations. *Social Semiotics*, 19(2), 191–211.
- Paasonen, S. (2007). Strange bedfellows. *Feminist Theory*, 8(1), 43–57.
- Paasonen, S. (2011). *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. Cambridge & London: MIT Press.
- Palmer, J. (1994). *Taking Humour Seriously*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Parisi, L., & Terranova, T. (2001). A Matter of Affect: Digital Images and the Cybernetic Re-Wiring of Vision. *Parallax*, 7(4), 122–127.
- Paterson, N. (1998). Cyberfeminism. *vacuumwoman*. Retrieved January 24, 2013 from <http://www.vacuumwoman.com/CyberFeminism/cf.txt>
- Pearce, L. (1997). *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Pedwell, C. (2008). Weaving Relational Webs. *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), 87–101.
- Pedwell, C., & Whitehead, A. (2012). Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory*, 13(2), 115–129.
- Peirce, C. S. (1991). *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Peiss, K. (1998). *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Perez Hilton Media Kit. (2013). *Perez Hilton.com*. Retrieved March 06, 2013, from <http://perez Hilton.com/mediakit/US/index.php?from=footer>
- Plunkett, J. (2011). Perez Hilton Interview: ‘I’m Sassy, without being Nasty’. *Guardian.co.uk*. Retrieved January 18, 2013, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/dec/04/perez-hilton-interview-itv2-show>
- Pollock, G. (1990). Missing Women. Rethinking Early Thoughts on Images of Women. In C. Squiers (Ed.), *The Critical Image. Essays on Contemporary Photography*. Seattle: Bay Press, pp. 202–219.
- Porfido, G. (2012). Queer As Folk and the Spectacularization of Gay Identity. In T. Peele (Ed.), *Queer Popular Culture. Literature, Media, Film, and Television*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 57-71.
- Probyn, E. (2005). *Blush: Faces of Shame*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Puar, J. K. (2005). Queer Times, Queer Assemblages. *Social Text*, 23(3-4 84-85), 121–139.
- Puar, Jasbir K. (2008). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Quantcast (2013). *Quantcast.com*. Retrieved December 03, 2013.
- Quellette, L. (2008). “Take Responsibility for Yourself” Judge Judy and the Neo-liberal Citizen. In S. Murray & L. Ouellette (Eds.), *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Radway, J. A. (1991). *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Rattansi, A. (2007). *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Redmond, S. (2007). The Whiteness of Stars: Looking at Kate Winslet’s Unruly White Body. In S. Redmond & S. Holmes (Eds.), *Stardom and Celebrity. A Reader*. London: Sage, pp: 263–275.
- Redmond, S. (2008). Pieces of Me: Celebrity Confessional Carnality. *Social Semiotics*, 18(2), 149–161.
- Redmond, S., & Holmes, S. (2007). *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*. London & New York: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Reed, J. (2012). The Three Phases of Ellen: From Queer To Gay To Postgay. In T. Peele (Ed.), *Queer Popular Culture. Literature, Media, Film, and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 9–25.
- Rettberg, J. W. (2008). *Blogging*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence. *Signs*, 5(4), 631–660.
- Ringrose, J. (2007). Rethinking White Resistance: Exploring the Discursive Practices and Psychological Negotiations of “Whiteness” in Feminist, Anti-racist Education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10(3), 323–344.
- Ringrose, J., & Walkerdine, V. (2008). Regulating The Abject. *Feminist Media Studies*, 8(3), 227–246.
- Robertson, P. (1996). *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*. London: I.B.Tauris.
- Rogers, C. J. (2005). Spray-on Tanning. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal / The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic surgery*, 25(4), 413–5.
- Rojek, C. (2001). *Celebrity*. London: Reaktion Books.

- Rose, N. (2012). *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Rowe, K. (1995). *The Unruly Woman: Gender and Genres of Laughter*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Rubin, G. (1993). Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 3–44.
- Russo, M. (1988). Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory. In T. de Laurentis (Ed.), *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, pp. 237-256 .
- Russo, V. (1981). *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. New York: Harper Paperbacks.
- Savat, D. (2012). *Uncoding the Digital: Technology, Subjectivity and Action in the Control Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schickel, R. (1986). *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity*. New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp.
- Schwartz, M. (2008). The Horror Of Something To See. *Genders OnLine Journal*, 48. Retrieved January 9, 2011, from http://www.genders.org/g48/g48_schwartz.html
- Scott, J. C. (1987). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K., & Frank, A. (Eds.) (1995). *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Shaviro, S. (2010). Post-Cinematic Affect : On Grace Jones , Boarding Gate and Southland Tales. *Film-Philosophy Journal*, 14(1), 1–102.
- Shildrick, Margit. (2002). *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. London: Sage Publications.
- Shimizu, A. (2008). *Lying Bodies. Survival and Subversion in the Field of Vision*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Shugart, H. A., Waggoner, C. E., & Hallstein, D. L. O. (2005). A Bit Much: Spectacle as Discursive Resistance. *Feminist Media Studies*, 5(1), 65-81.
- Siles, I. (2011). The Rise of Blogging: Articulation as a Dynamic of Technological Stabilization. *New Media & Society*, 14(5), 781–797.

- Silverman, K. (1996). *The Threshold of the Visible World*. London: Routledge.
- Skeggs, B., Thumim, N., & Wood, H. (2008). "Oh goodness, I am watching reality TV": How methods make class in audience research. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(1), 5–24.
- Skeggs, Beverley, & Wood, H. (2012). *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Skeggs, Beverly. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London & New York: Sage.
- Sobchack, V. (2004). *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Sontag, S. (1966). Notes on "Camp." In S. Sontag (Ed.), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Picador, pp. 275–293.
- Stacey, J. (1994). *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Stoll, C. (1995). *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sullivan, N. (2009). The Somatechnics of Bodily Inscription : Tattooing. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 10, 129–141.
- Sundén, J. (2001). What Happened to Difference in Cyberspace ? The (Re) turn of the She-Cyborg. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1(2), 215-232.
- Sundén, J. (2010). A Sense of Play. Affect, Emotion and Embodiement in "World of Warcraft." In M. Liljeström & S. Paasonen (Eds.), *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings. Disturbing Differences*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 45–58.
- Swan, E. (2008). "You Make Me Feel like a Woman": Therapeutic Cultures and the Contagion of Femininity. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 15(1), 88–107.
- Thompson, E. (2011). Gossip Boys. *PaperMag.com*. Retrieved January 21, 2013, from http://www.papermag.com/arts_and_style/2011/05/gossip-boys-michael-k-jared-eng.php
- Thrift, N. (2007). *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. New York: Routledge.
- Tiger, R. (2013). Perez Hilton and the Celebrity Body. *Humanity & Society*, 37(2), 189–191.
- Traber, D. (2007). *Whiteness, Otherness and the Individualism Paradox from Huck to Punk*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Tuchman, G. (1981). The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media. In S. Cohen & J. Young (Eds.), *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*. London: Constable, pp. 169-185.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turner, G. (2006). Celebrity, the Tabloid and the Democratic Public Sphere. In P. D. Marshall (Ed.), *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York & London: Routledge, pp: 487-501.
- Turner, G. (2010). Approaching celebrity studies. *Celebrity Studies*, 1(1), 11–20.
- Tyler, C. A. (1991). Boys Will be Girls: The Politics of Gay Drag. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. London: Routledge, pp: 32-71.
- Tyler, C.A. (2003). *Female Impersonation*. London: Routledge.
- Tyler, I. (2001). Skin-tight: Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity. In S. Ahmed & J. Stacey (Eds.), *Thinking Through the Skin*. New York: Routledge, pp. 69-85.
- Tyler, I. (2008). “Chav Mum Chav Scum”. Class Disgust in Contemporary Britain. *Feminist Media Studies*, 8(1), 17–34.
- Tyler, I. (2009). Against Abjection. *Feminist Theory*, 10(1), 77–98.
- Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. London & New York: Zed Books.
- Tyler, I., & Bennett, B. (2010). “Celebrity Chav”: Fame, Femininity and Social Class. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13(3), 375–393.
- Tyler, I., Coleman, R., & Ferreday, D. (2008). Commentary And Criticism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 8(1), 85–99.
- Walters, S. D. (1995). *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory*. University of California Press.
- Ware, V., & Back, L. (2002). *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics and Culture*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Warner, M. (1991). Introduction : Fear of a Queer Planet. *Social Text*, 29, 3–17.
- Warner, M. (2000). *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weaver, S. (2011). *The Rhetoric of Racist Humour*. London: Ashgate.
- Weil Davis, S. (2002). Loose Lips Sink Ships. *Feminist Studies*, 28(1), 7–35.

- Weiss, A. (1991). "A Queer Feeling When I look At You" - Hollywood Stars and Lesbian Spectatorship in the 1930s. In C. Gledhill (Ed.), *Stardom: Industry and Desire*. London: Routledge, pp: 293-299.
- Wharton, A. S., & Erickson, R. J. (1995). The Consequences of Caring: Exploring the Links Between Women's Job and Family Emotion Work. *Sociological Quarterly*, 36, 273–296.
- White, P. (1991). Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: The Haunting. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out. Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York & London: Routledge, pp: 142-172.
- Wiegman, R. (1999). Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity. *Boundary*, 26(3), 115–150.
- Williams, L. (2001). *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Williamson, M. (2010). Female Celebrities and The Media: The Gendered Denigration of The "Ordinary" Celebrity. *Celebrity Studies*, 1(1), 118–120.
- Wilson, J. A., & Chivers Yochim, E. (2013). Pinning Happiness: Affect, Social Media, and Women's Work. In E. Levine (Ed.), *Feeling Feminine: Popular Media for Women in the Early 21st Century*. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Winant, H. (2000). Race and Race Theory. *Annual Reviews in Sociology*, 26, 169–185.
- Winant, H. (2004). Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary U.S. Racial Politics. In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. P. Pruitt, & A. Burns (Eds.), *Off White. Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance*. New York & London: Routledge, pp: 3-17.
- Wissinger, E. (2007). Always on Display: Affective Production in the Modeling Industry. In P. Clough Ticineto & J. Halley (Eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 231-261.
- Wolf, N. (1991). *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. London: Vintage.
- Wolmark, J. (1999). *Cybersexualities: A Reader in Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.