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Brand Intimacy, Female Friendship and Digital Surveillance Networks

There are many ways in which intimacy can be mediated. For example, 'the confrontational talk show' hosted by Jeremy Kyle (ITV), the reality television programme *Wife Swap* (Channel 4), or the digital platform Facebook.[i] Friendships, familial connections, as well as sexual and romantic relationships, are enabled, exploited, and performed in various media. This expands the reach and use of so-called old and new media in a contemporary convergence culture, as well reconfiguring what it means to be in an intimate relation with another person.[ii] This article situates these mediated intimacies within the branded spaces of online culture. It examines the way that digital media harness, mine and infiltrate social networks and private relationships. More specifically it looks at online homosocial groups that primarily target, interpellate and mould a heteronormative demographic of women and girls. It examines digital platforms that are hosted or penetrated by corporations and their brands, such as Dove (owned by Unilever), babycentre.co.uk (owned by Johnson & Johnson) and Mumsnet (independently owned and funded by advertising). These sites are re-organized disciplinary industries whose instrumental apparatuses are devolved and spread among 'disaggregated sets of mechanisms and processes'.[iii] I argue that these websites harness the affectivity of female friendship conjoined with what Lauren Berlant terms 'intimate publics' in order to monitor women's sexualities.[iv]

Rather than being a top-down form of governance and discipline such as in the panopticon, control is devolved, shared and internalised among modalities of the policing gaze. Moreover, this policing is permeated by market values and the privileging of self-management in service to competitive subjectivities. Bodies are surveyed and controlled by groups of women, or what I call a *gynaeopticon* – a gendered, neoliberal variation on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon – where the many

women watch the many women. The feminine individual, who achieves value through the correct maintenance of sexuality, is captured by the interest of corporations and their shareholders. These branded spaces disseminate, perpetuate and realize their ideal of the entrepreneurial individual through, by, and on the bodies of women. Patriarchy is obfuscated in an affective popular culture where neoliberal logics configure the intimate lives of women, and where women are complicit in the regulation of normative femininities. For the purpose of this article, I understand neoliberalism to be a particularly aggressive period of dominant capitalism which privileges the individual over the collective and which opens up every area of life to exploitation for profit – and surveillance – thus limiting democratic restraints on corporate and financial freedoms, while governing citizens in other more intimate ways.[v]

Branding and the Gynaeopticon

Effective branding strategies form intimate relationships between the brand and consumers. Significantly they often harness the assemblage of friendship in order to create networks around, with and through brands. Friendship is assembled out of different affects, as well as other elements. This assemblage includes empathy, sympathy, generosity, thoughtfulness, attentiveness. As commercial texts selling the signifiers of friendship, they are an antidote to, as well as a symptom of, what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'liquid loving'. According to Bauman, market forces threaten togetherness, as people perceive each other in value-for-money terms. Other humans are recognized through a framework of exchange where they become objects of consumption; they calculate what can be offered in terms of pleasure or social capital.[vi] Brands are keen to counteract the isolation or fear that accompanies these changing dynamics of friendship by forging emotional and long-lasting ties known as 'the brand experience'. For example, Coca Cola's 2014 'Share a Coke' campaign; there is an eery and intimate familiarity when seeing the name of a friend go past on the bus.

These relationships are inevitably gendered. Brand consultant Collyn Ahart discusses a new phenomenon in fashion branding. She identifies a shift from 'I want to look like her' to 'I want to be friends with them'.[vii] Ahart perceives this change as positive because it represents a more authentic experience of heterosexual womanhood that

places friendship at the core of female subjectivity as opposed to the desire for male admiration. In some ways this counteracts the dreary images of thin, lone, individualised women that spearhead most promotional campaigns. Tropes of friendship are prevalent in, for example, Adidas' '#my girls' advertising campaign that depicts groups of passionate young women playing sports in different global contexts. Their different ethnicities and cultures (dependent on their geographical locations) are juxtaposed, but what connects them is the fun and intimacy that suffuses their sociality. Other examples of harnessing the visuals of female friendship to sell brands are the Weight Watchers 2013 spring campaign with Patsy Kensit and Penny Haslam. The television advert depicts 'Patsy and Penny' meeting in a coffee shop and chatting over the body-changing wonders of Weight Watchers. In addition, the 2014 Natwest campaign 'little thankyous' follows a mother and daughter shopping. M&C Saatchi describe this campaign as 'Flowers, a hug, a smile; there are lots of ways to say 'thank you'. It requires understanding, appreciation – it's a relationship thing'.[viii]

In my book *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood* (Palgrave 2014) I identify a range of 'girlfriend media' that promote the image of the white heterosexual able-bodied and thin girl-woman as normative. In addition, these media reproduce the social pleasures of belonging to an intimate group, while also displaying the female body for analysis and scrutiny. They are locations that induce pleasure and belonging, while also enacting surveillance and cruelty. I note the ambivalence located in their evocations of female sociality. In other words, these media texts both promote the intimacy of female networks and the pleasures of belonging to a 'we'. Simultaneously, however, they regulate their consumers around the body and sexuality by inducing feelings of shame and humiliation if they do not conform to the implicit templates of normativity.

In this way, these media texts exploit female friendship's complex type of affectivity that includes the 'ugly feelings'[ix] of betrayal, inferiority, envy, rivalry, competition – however fleeting. Terri Apter and Ruthellen Josselson examine the psychological impact of friendship in the lives and identity formations of girls in both the UK and the US. Their research is primarily concerned with able-bodied and heterosexual girls, 'across race and social class'.[x] Rather than focusing on the role of the mother or the

family in shaping feminine norms, they argue that codes of acceptable femininity 'are established anew in each generation' and consequently 'the power of friends to shape values is enormous'.[xi] This suggests that friends disseminate and negotiate much of the normative (and subversive) discourses that constitute a feminine skills set. Women and girls look to their peers to secure appropriate behaviour and looks. Apter and Josselson argue that women and girls search for what is feminine 'in the mirror' of her girlfriend's gaze. This can be confirming and comforting, but if 'she sees criticism or rejection, she can be struck with panic'.[xii] In addition, they suggest that female friendship can be 'a school of correction' where the rules about what is and is not acceptable are meted out.[xiii] Friends are punished and rewarded according to the rules of the clique.

The ethnographic and socio-psychological work of Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renolds explores the friendship groups of girls in east England and South Wales. The girls in their case studies are ethnically diverse and include working class and middle class participants. Ringrose and Renolds identify a 'range of 'normative cruelties' [that] inhere in the social and cultural processes of becoming a recognizable gendered subject'.[xiv] They demonstrate how girls employ cruelty in order to discipline feminine identities. Significantly, they demonstrate how these forms of control are linked to regulating sexuality: 'it is normative for girls to position themselves and others in sexual hierarchies, invoking regulative discourses around sexuality, appearance and behaviour in the private spaces of friendship groups as a mode of constructing idealised femininity'.[xv] I argue that these emotions created and experienced in childhood still resonate powerfully in media marketed to adult women.
Taking this affectivity of friendship into account, the 'gynaeopticon' can be a useful metaphor through which to understand the ways in which these media texts – and the digital sites I discuss below – are technologies of peer-driven surveillance.

To illustrate formations of power in a disciplinary society, Michel Foucault invokes Bentham's architectural design of the prison or panopticon. At the centre of the panopticon is a tower from where the supervisor can monitor the inmates in the cells. Permanently visible, the prisoners perform their lives, knowing that they are under constant surveillance. Instead of physical force, power is exerted through the prisoner being 'subjected to a field of visibility' from where it is impossible to hide. Foucault

argues that the subject not only submits to these constraints of power but, more importantly, spontaneously lives under the internalization of a constantly watching eye. That is, 'he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection' (Foucault, 1991, 202–203). The panopticon is also designed to experiment, mould and discipline people's behaviours. This disciplining practice is primarily enforced through the prisoner's submission to the watching eye that is willingly enacted.

In 'The Viewer Society' Thomas Mathieson extends the image of Foucault's panopticon to include the symbol of the synopticon. He argues that technology and mass media generally, but radio and television especially, have enabled an environment where instead of the 'few seeing the many', 'the many see the few'.[xvi] This is certainly the case in celebrity culture where consumers watch celebrities relentlessly put themselves up for scrutiny. The consumers' watching, however, takes place through the already internalized panoptical gaze and its technologies of control over the body. Indeed, beauty and lifestyle industries – as well as the promotional apparatus that support them – can be understood as specifically gendered panoptical industries that ensure the internalization of discipline through the ubiquitous perfected images of women.

The fragmentation of media audiences into niche markets and the evolution of a Web 2.0 world where women co-produce and participate in brand spreading, means that the image of synopticon and the panopticon needs development. In digital culture, the panopticon, the synopticon and the paradigm of the many women watching the many women, work in harmony. The internalized gaze is honed, perfected and given the opportunity to indulge through synoptic practices such as celebrity scrutiny. This is then devolved among gendered networks through which women can relate and express intimacy. In this gynaeopticon they all turn their eyes on each other in tightly bound networks where they gaze and are gazed upon.

Entrepreneurial Femininities and Self-branding

In this article I examine Mumsnet, babycentre.co.uk and Dove's marketing campaigns. I am particularly looking at the way that they intersect with branding strategies and how networks of women are enabled within their digital sites in order

to create relationships in and through the brands. Digital media owned or sponsored by corporations are segmented into the different stages of what Diane Negra call 'the postfeminist lifecycle'.[xvii] Platforms market themselves to specific postfeminist groups: tween, bride-to-be, mother-to-be, among other normative categories. Networks of women are created and mined to regulate and police the boundaries of the normative body; a body that speaks, reflects and mirrors its own becoming as entrepreneurial self-brand. They hone femininities that demonstrate, and profit from, having a competitive edge. In this way relationships forged in service to promotional femininity are strategic as they are in service to building a more distinctive brand.

Moreover, in media that enable and exploit female sociality the intersubjective gaze – or 'girlfriend gaze' – objectifies women's bodies, but it functions differently from the male gaze. Here, the straight male gaze is rendered inadequate or redundant and, instead, regimes of looking are promoted between women. The female body still remains at the centre of the gaze, but it is strategically subjected to analysis, calculation and control. In the hypervisible landscape of popular culture the body is recognized as the object of a woman's labour: it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy. Although it is glossed as 'me-time', managing the body is also the means by which women acquire and display their cultural capital. In this context, dependency on a man is represented as a high-risk scenario, whereas investing in the self – and especially one's body – is the pathway to self-actualization, coherency, and success. A collaborative enterprise between women, the gynaeopticon enables the mutual development of a hypervisible normativity. In these media women's bodies traffic among women.

Every moment can be effectively utilised in the becoming of the self-brand. The work of the neoliberal woman takes place in so-called leisure time, and across media platforms. In the convergence culture of the gynaeopticon, women's digital interactivity is mobilized as 'an ongoing, mundane regimen of self-empowerment'.[xviii] According to Alison Hearn self-branding 'involves the self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self'. Its goal is 'to produce cultural value and, potentially, material profit'.[xix] This cultural value is often sold as sexiness. This quality of sexiness is not necessarily in the service of attracting men because the goal

of the self-brand in a feminine promotional culture is to engage in an effective regime of self-marketing, and this marketing also seeks approbation from the girlfriend gaze. Indeed, the crafted look will be appreciated by other women because it is primarily them who can acknowledge the labour, creativity and money that has gone into its cultivation. Girls, women and brands' employees situate themselves in meshes of mutual looking, feedback and self-promotion as part of the essential structure of the practice of self-branding.[xx]

The desire for belonging in a promotional culture that configures normative femininities often means submitting oneself to regimes of looking by the girlfriend gaze. Indeed, that is one method of being accultured into an entrepreneurial subject. In this context, the feminine self is 'never finished with anything' as she is engaged in the 'perpetual training' of entrepreneurial citizenship.[xxi] Being seen to contribute to the process of self-transformation, as well as participating in its attendant policing networks, is crucial. As Meredith Jones argues '*becoming*', is characterized as 'more desirable than *being*'.[xxii] In other words, according to the promotional industries, it is not so much that one should be perfect, but that one should be labouring towards this as an aspiration. The media do not merely fetishise the flawless body, but promote and celebrate the continuous work that is put into struggling and consuming towards an ideal (an ideal that if attained, is only momentary). Under the girlfriend gaze what is rewarded and acclaimed is *striving* for perfection. Indeed those who are effortlessly perfect are bitchily vilified in the mainstream media as they do not evidence the success and necessity of the neoliberal work ethic.

Because the media that I look at in this article circulate primarily through a homosocial world of women it is less easy to be alienated from what is being sold; their power lies in the affectivity of their intimate social relations. Corporate sites harness humiliation around the body and sexuality, as well the means to manage oneself out of these affects. Emotions and different relationalities such as identification, jealousy and rivalry are encouraged in the context of promotional cultures as desirable and strategic forms of relating. After all, the feeling of envy – of wanting to be more like someone else – can be a coercive stimulus to spend.

Babycentre.co.uk

BabyCentre.co.uk is a parenting website offering advice, products and community forums from the 'actively trying' body through to the preschooler parent. On the way it addresses IVF, miscarriage, and traces the development of the foetus, giving advice on relationships, diet, body image, among others. It is owned by BabyCenter LLC which is based in San Francisco and manages the US sister site BabyCenter.com. BabyCenter LLC is owned by the corporation Johnson & Johnson. This is not made obvious on the website, which partly gains its revenue from advertising a plethora of brands targeting the preconceiving, infertile, miscarrying, pregnant, and postnatal body. However, if you sign up to weekly emails that track users' foetus' progress, a 'Johnson's Baby' logo is included at the top of the email with an archetypal pastel-enhanced image of mother and baby, bonding and happy. Corporate values as disseminated by Johnson & Johnson suffuse the visual content, the information pages, the interactive forums and the brand-friendliness of the website.

Intimacy marks the template for communication, and so users share information and private experiences through friendly discourse; hugs, kisses, and wishes of good luck are the norm. Because it is a site devoted to fertility it is intensely personal and woman-centred. The pervasive sense of female belonging that suffuses the taboo or publicly inappropriate subject of fertility deepens the intimate experience of the site. Typically intimate publics assume the shared experience of women who are in need of connection. This homogeneity understands heterosexuality, class aspiration, sexual attractiveness, and the privileging of female friendship as the norm. For example, there is a section on 'Mum Stories' where users blog about their experiences or topical issues. One blogger writes about 'Famous friends: celeb mums and their surprising bffs [best friend forever]' which is accompanied by red carpet photographs. The combination of celebrity, motherhood and friendship generates a particularly potent affect. Not only does it include the correct kind of meritocratic celebrity symbolizing class aspiration and consumption (as opposed to the pathologised kind which is discussed below) but infuses female friendship with a biological essentialism that is frequently associated with discourses of motherhood. The blogger writes, **'**Whether it's to commiserate, to celebrate or simply to vent, whether it's to share a play date at the crack of dawn or a bottle of wine when the day is finally over, motherhood is often made easier if you have a good friend to share it with.'[xxiii] This

cosy collectivity is one encouraged by the maintainers of the website and is employed, supported and mined by brands seeking trusting and loyal consumers.

In a digital culture that centres on motherhood as moral aspiration, these intimate publics are carefully monitored by the brands that host and enable them. Consequently, bloggers on babycentre.co.uk who post on 'Mum Stories' write on relatively innocuous subjects such baby names, celebrity, supportive male partners. Or if they do write, for example, on the lonely experience of being a single mother, the post will be interspersed with images of archetypal and positive images of mother and child. Presumably dispiriting writing will negatively affect the public perception of Johnson & Johnson, as well as the other corporations linked to the site. After all, businesses impose their own censorship especially in relation to politics, death and sex. They will encourage only that which will help them sell. As Astra Taylor argues, the internet is not a cultural democracy as some voices – those authorised by brands – are more powerful than others.[xxiv]

Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the content uploaded by the site, the bloggers and the community threads. Whereas the information pages and blogs are practical and positive, the threads – especially those addressing fertility problems or loss of an infant – are intensely distressing in their immediacy. Women post when they are experiencing miscarriage or during the trauma of bereavement. Other members of the community rally round and provide empathy, sympathy and support. These affects are exploited by the corporate nature of the site, and the intimacies forged are also fed into the branded cultures that permeate. In addition, the bloggers and the community users are involved in the emotional and unpaid labour on which Johnson & Johnson are dependent. The other brands being advertised also profit from the content, as well as Google which directs users to the site. Taylor maintains that media systems have always been shaped by consolidation, centralization and commercialism. However these are less visible in digital contexts and consequently are more pervasive. Indeed babycentre.co.uk veils its corporate sponsor by trading on sociability. As Taylor argues, relationships are mined, analyzed, monetized; users are the product being sold to advertisers. What is significant is that the content is not valuable (although it attracts other users – and their friends); instead it is the data that users offer up that is mined and sold on. Like the NHS hospital, these sites collect and

collate data. Unlike the enclosure of the hospital they do it often without the knowledge of the people themselves, and in service to the promotional industries.

These websites could be read as breaking down conventional myths of motherhood that function to keep women powerless and without relevant information.[xxv] After all, issues of fertility bring gender inequality into sharp relief and patriarchy can be acutely felt under these conditions, whether it is because of the denigration or commodification of the pregnant body, the stigma associated with fertility issues, or the inadequate provision of childcare and parental leave.[xxvi] Consequently these homosocial sites provide spaces of ostensible autonomy and agency for women. Nevertheless, these issues are never explicitly addressed as political. On the contrary, there is an emphasis on personal responsibility and thinking productively; the language is relentlessly positive – 'bundle of joy' and DH 'darling husband' are the accepted jargon. Even the lonely blogging single mother does not express anything approaching negativity in relation to her child or maternal responsibility; there is no ambivalence regarding the sanctity of motherhood even if women might be depressed.

For this reason rage at gender inequality and discrimination is subsumed under what Angela McRobbie identifies as the 'postfeminist masquerade'[xxvii] as they hone the feminine ideal of the 'pregnant beauty'. According to Imogen Tyler, being pregnant is no longer time out from adhering to the practices of normative feminine attractiveness. Instead, maternity is commodified under neoliberalism and the work of pregnancy must be reconfigured into an aesthetic 'project of self'.[xxviii]Indeed, the disciplinary technology of the pregnant beauty occludes the deep inequalities between women, as well as the tensions over childcare, welfare provision, and discrimination in the workplace. In the context of babycentre.co.uk this masquerade is experienced and shared. The regulatory power of female networks, as enabled by Johnson & Johnson, circumscribes political anger through the relentlessly positive and intimate social systems where emotional abjection is contained and monitored.

This site is ostensibly freely chosen. Rather than being a state-run institution like the hospital, it is promoted as an informative and pleasurable aid to fertility, pregnancy, and motherhood. However, the contemporary focus on entrepreneurial and informed femininity, combined with the assemblage of friendship, means that the entering of

such sites is not necessarily free. Babycentre.co.uk models and hones a specific mould of normative femininity and consequently it is a component in a much wider media ecology that promotes the entrepreneurial family. Rather than being freely chosen, it is an ideological constituent of the neoliberal control society.

Dove

As the state cuts back on public sector institutions including family services, so intimate relationships such as social networks and the family provide alternative forms of regulation. As McRobbie argues, 'the family steps forward to look after itself and to inculcate the right kinds of self-responsibility in its children while at the same time financially mopping up those costs which in the past would have been at least partially covered by the state'.[xxix] Neoconservative ideology dovetails with Tory 'family values', as well as brands' hyper-realities, enforcing a potent combination of moral control, which is then disseminated through various promotional strategies and media platforms. The intimate systems of control that traditionally structure the normative nuclear family are extended to include alternative forms of parenting. Indeed, the granting of rights to gay men and lesbians in the form of marriage and the adopting and having of children, while making real and significant differences to gay people's lives, as well as their children, is also a means to extend governance into intimate lives, especially those seen as threatening to patriarchal heteronormativity. The legitimating of same sex parenting is recognized in US sitcoms like *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009) and *The New Normal* (NBC 2012-) so that neoliberalism is able to capture the changing family in its dissemination of market logics (although homophobia and discrimination of gay parents is still alarmingly prevalent, depending on regional contexts). Moreover, the authority of alternative family formations is in theory tolerated as long as the values of entrepreneurialism, individualism and competitiveness permeate.

This section focuses on Dove's advertising and PR campaigns, particularly their 'Self-Esteem Fund'. Dove's US advertising campaigns as disseminated in the UK, and created by the advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather in association with the PR firm Edelman, have been perceptively critiqued as a form of 'commodity activism'.[xxx] In an attempt to differentiate their beauty products from their competitors in a saturated market, Dove has been rebranded through the logics of corporate social

responsibility. Appropriating a particular strand of postfeminist rhetoric and outreach work, Dove is transformed from a supermarket soap product into a brand committed to the social good of women and girls. Their campaigns include television and outdoor advertisements, viral sharing, digital participation, and international conventions. For example, in 2010 the Dove Movement for Self-Esteem was launched at the G(irls) 20 Summit, which mimicked the G20 Summit by inviting girls from the same G20 countries to talk about initiatives that could stimulate activism.[xxxi] It is not the only brand that has commodified activist language and tropes, entangling them in what Rosalind Gill identifies as a 'postfeminist sensibility'. [xxxii] Goldieblox, Always, Verizon, Pantene, Special K, among others, also expose and critique the mainstream denigration of femininity. Brand strategist, Douglas Holt, insists that brands must learn from countercultural movements in order to refresh and rejuvenate their brand experience.[xxxiii] In Holt's advertising campaign for Clear Blue Pregnancy tests, for example, he employed sex positive third wave feminist tropes.[xxxiv] Video advertising that commodifies activist tropes is a highly effective form of viral marketing that crosses political spectrums in its bid for authenticity.

Dove's marketing campaign aims to penetrate the intimate connections of female friendships and mother-daughter relationships in order to address poor self-image in women. This has the consequence of disseminating, not just trust and loyalty in the brand, but also in so-called corporate social responsibility. Dove's website (August 8 2014) has a section entitled 'Free Resources' where 'parents, teachers and mentors' are encouraged to participate in the 'Dove Self-Esteem Project'. However, the resources for parents exclusively depict images of mothers and their daughters. The website states: 'From starting a conversation with a girl in your life to leading self-esteem building workshops in classrooms or to even choosing to buy Dove products – there's plenty of ways to support this important mission'.[xxxv] The resources on their website comprise articles that tackle 'The impact of social media and body image: does social networking actually trigger body obsession in today's teenage girls?' and 'Supporting her unique personal style in the face of peer pressure to 'fit in''. Considering body image is a significant source of anxiety and depression in girls and women, the focus on this issue seems a laudable one. However, Dove is a logo that markets *beauty* products. Indeed, the resources available for mothers to share with their daughters include showing films marketing the Dove brand. Buying their

products, according to the website, is also a way to improve self-esteem. Like all marketing strategies, Dove creates a problem for its target audience. It then offers the solution. For example, Shea Butter will transmogrify you back into a girl as it 'leaves your skin extra soft, extra smooth and extra beautiful'[xxxvi] and Pro.Age Body Lotion 'may be pro.age but it still fights dullness' and 'will gradually improve skin'.[xxxvii]

The resources aimed at mothers promote a normative postfeminist beauty – cheerful, serene, confident.[xxxviii] By doing so, they reinforce the norm that a woman's value is accumulated from the way that she looks and behaves to other people; in particular her smiling luminosity.[xxxix] Dove's 'Mirrors Campaign', which is a component of its Self-Esteem Fund, promises that 'Dove's mission is to make beauty a source of confidence, not anxiety – because when a woman is feeling beautiful she's also feeling happy, confident and empowered.' This is linked into a participatory social media campaign using the platform Twitter: 'Find the nearest reflective surface, flash yourself a smile, and tell us – how do you feel when you look in the mirror? #SmileBack'.[xl] Adhering to these ideals means that consumers must accept personal responsibility for looking happy in a precarious, anxious and exploitative economic climate; they must put themselves forward as uplifting adverts for neoliberalism thus obfuscating the inequalities and stress that being dependent on market rationale inevitably engenders. Moreover, smiling and being nice are aspirational techniques in the neoliberal work place according to self-help books and corporate gurus like Sheryl Sandberg and others.[xli]

Dara Persis Murray cites Barbara Cruikshank who argues that '"Self-esteem is a technology of citizenship and selfgovernment for evaluating and acting upon ourselves so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to".[xlii] Consequently, 'audiences' compliance with the "real beauty" ideology allows Dove to distance itself from its cultural role as a producer of the dominant ideology by placing the responsibility for women's and girls' lack of self-esteem on themselves'.[xliii] In addition, mothers are harnessed as brand ambassadors inculcating the governing ideal of self-esteem on to their daughters. According to Dove:

> young girls replicate their mother's behaviours about beauty, confidence and self-esteem, so setting a positive example for them is essential for their body

> image as they grow up. 1 in 3 women said they feel anxious and hardly ever smile at themselves because of what they see in the mirror – and that's not something we want to pass on to the next generation.[xliv]

Again, Dove creates and exploits a problem – the dissemination of mothers' pathologies – before stepping in as the solution. In the Dove resource titled 'Teenage issues and social media problems – what teenage girls say themselves', which can be found on the website, the ambassador for the Self-Esteem Fund advises that 'if you're struggling with your own self-esteem, get help for yourself – because in addressing your issues, you'll ultimately be helping your daughter, too.'[xlv] Shame is a component of low self-esteem and this marketing strategy exposes and courts a mother's shame. It turns it against her and exposes her lack of value as a woman and parent. The sense of humiliation invoked by this marketing strategy is resolved through interacting with the Dove brand.

The intergenerational propagation of shame between women is explored by academic critics like Valerie Walkerdine (2011) and Susie Orbach (2009).[xlvi] Indeed, Orbach is on the advisory board for Dove's Self-Esteem Fund. In contrast to Orbach, Walkerdine executes a class analysis in her discussion of how a woman's experience of her body as culturally regulated is passed among women. Centring the class-based nature of Dove's advertising campaign is pertinent when situating it within the prism of the control society. Walkerdine argues that shame is passed down from mothers to daughters. Writing within the context of UK reality television, she maintains that provoking shame is an effective governmental tool because shame is already embodied in the female viewer. In particular, she focuses on working class women's experience, and notes that middle class women wield shame as a means to subjugate and distance themselves from working class women. This class dimension is a crucial one that Tyler also discusses in her analysis of the pregnant beauty. For Tyler, the pregnant beauty is a middle class and aspirational ideal that obfuscates socioeconomic inequalities that are deepening between women.

The Dove brand performs the middle class female expert through its advisory panel, which is comprised of psychologists (including Orbach), PR consultants, authors and filmmakers. The articles are written by these members as well as other professionals

who study the way that the promotional industries penetrate female connections. Utilising the moral discourse and the affects of 'good motherhood' the brand, as articulated by the persona of the middle class expert, infiltrates intimate relationships. The cosy collective of 'we' and 'us' draws the target audience of mothers into an intimate public with the brand and its experts. But this 'we' also harnesses the normative cruelty of class-based female relating when it blames mothers, not only for failing to 'smile back', but actively handing over this pathology to their daughters. The psychological regulation of daughters by mothers through the affect of shame is utilised by Dove in order cement loyal, trusting and intimate feelings in and on the brand from a young age, and hopefully throughout a lifetime. By doing so, Dove want their brand to be what brand consultant Kevin Roberts terms a 'love mark', and a traditional household brand.[xlvii]

The cynicism of these campaigns is accentuated by the fact that Dove products are manufactured by the Unilever Corporation which also owns Fair & Lovely (a skin whitening product), Axe deodrant (whose advertising campaigns overtly objectify women's bodies for the male gaze), and SlimFast (a weight loss brand). This directly contradicts Dove's apparent attempt to fight discrimination on basis of colour, ethnicity and body size. Nevertheless, in the incoherent logics of the control society, which seeks profit for shareholders above all, there is no contradiction. The advertising campaign conforms to the market rationale promoting competition, rivalry, and brand positioning rather than coherency or feminist liberation. There is no inconsistency in critiquing ideals of beauty and selling beauty products. Beauty is still central to the value of a woman, but Dove is enlarging what it means to be beautiful in order to capture a wider demographic; an essential strategy for a supermarket brand.

Mumsnet

Mumsnet is one of the UK's largest websites for parents. It hosts discussion forums for users to share peer-to-peer advice. Its slogan is 'by parents for parents'. Mumsnet is a pertinent example of a site that is suffused with the ambivalence of branded cultures, including the vocal co-participation of anonymous users and the corporate domination of digital spaces.[xlviii] Because of this, Mumsnet is a modulation rather than

an enclosure – it is open-ended, fluid, and penetrated by multiple friendships, personas, agendas, fictions, cries for help, personal experiences, political campaigns, trolls, promotional material and corporate partnerships. The topics posted range from rating breast expressers, to relationship problems, the bullying of children, pro-choice, domestic violence, overeating, to bereavement, among a proliferation of others. It is not owned by a large corporation. However, the site gains its revenue from advertising, whether these are the advertisements that bedeck its pages, corporate partnerships, the PR-sponsored blogs, or product reviews that partly constitute the content. Brands are crucial to the ways in which many of the users communicate. Indeed, Mumsnet works in partnership with the Dove Self-Esteem Fund and encourages users to post poems addressed to their daughters in order to help them raise their self-esteem in regards to body image. The contributors frequently reference brand names – including Dove – both in their reviews of (often high-end) goods and in the advice they offer to other women. There are also covert brand ambassadors employed to promote products among intimate networks in order to cement emotional and social relationships between products, people and corporations. The content is easily distributed among wider social networks as each page links to Facebook, Twitter, Googleplus. The advice offered, questions asked, emotions shared, threads created, are all unpaid affective labour in the service of Mumsnet and its sponsors, advertisers, search engines and applications.

Mumsnet mines the assemblage of female friendship. This could be in the form of 'The Friendship Bench' (posts looking for friends in the local area), the intimate and confessional threads, or the frequent discussions on friendship such as 'What to do about friends' violent toddler?' and 'How many friends do you have who you could call on in a crisis?'. I have searched Mumsnet when in panic over pregnancy/child-related issue. The affect I experienced is on the one hand comforting: 'I am not alone'. There is also the relief of being 'taken in hand'. Nevertheless, it is also deeply disconcerting as the advice is always conflicting, chaotic and sometimes bizarre in its lack of accountability. Everyone is an expert. Deleuze argues that in the societies of control we have become codes, regulated by internal mechanisms of access and mobility: 'We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become "*dividends,*" and masses, samples, data, markets, or "*banks*"'.[xlix] Mumsnet is a network of 'dividends' where users share data, spread

brands, and are interpellated into systems of brand promotion. The communities constructed in Mumsnet are often intensely personal and highly emotive, and these qualities are partly enabled because they are also fleshless and fleeting.

Antagonism and hostilities can break out between users (and not all of these are instigated by misogynist trolls or 'Fathers4Justice' both of whom are frequent commentators). This could be over controversial subjects like abortion, but also over the apparently common problem of not being able to open Dove handwash, or defining the smell of Dove's self-tanning lotion. In one more serious instance, a woman suffering from bereavement was regularly abusing other users and communities came together to discuss how to negotiate relationships on Mumsnet; what behaviours are allowed or tolerated when contributors are experiencing trauma?[l] In addition, because Mumsnet's primary content is generated by its users there are more possibilities for usurping marketing strategies. The positivity of babycentre.co.uk comes apart in these less monitored communities. Mumsnet has generated campaigns such as '#we believe you' (supporting women who have suffered from or who are suffering from sexual abuse) and '#letgirlsbegirls' (curbing the sexualisation of girls by toy and fashion manufacturers).

The neoliberal ideologies disseminated by babycentre.co.uk and Dove can be argued against and overtly feminist rhetoric articulated. This includes disagreement between the founders or people who are employed by Mumsnet, and the users. For example, in an article from the *Express* October 18 2012 with the headline 'Feminism is over… say women' one of the co-founders of Mumsnet, Siobhan Freegard is quoted as saying, 'Modern women feel traditional feminism is no longer working for them as it's aggressive, divisive and doesn't take into account their personal circumstances.' This is picked up by some 21 users of Mumset who critique Freegard's stance, stating 'I think that she's confusing traditional feminism with radical feminism' and ''Modern women feel...' - what load of crap. Like we all think the same. And it erases the women who actually are feminists.'[li] There are explicitly feminist boards and feminist voices throughout Mumsnet. In a July 2013 survey carried out by Mumsnet, which included 2000 users, a high percentage of respondents agreed that participating in Mumsnet had made them more sympathetic to feminism and to issues facing other women.[lii]

Of course, to identify as a feminist does not mean that one takes a stance against neoliberalism. Sandberg, Louise Mensch and other feminists who advocate for a marketised and individualized culture are testament to this. Indeed, the apparent open-endedness and participatory nature of the site, which includes the possibilities for divergent viewpoints or intense disagreement, obscures the neoliberal ideologies that permeate the site. Consequently, Mumsnet reflects Deleuze's framing of the corporation as 'a spirit, a gas':

> If the most idiotic television game shows are so successful, it's because they express the corporate situation with great precision. […] the corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within.[liii]

This metaphor reflects in part the affective experience of the site: intensely personal, contradictory, sometimes combative. Moreover, the site reveals the tensions invoked in a digital culture where corporations mine sociality while espousing co-participation. Corporate values flow through the Mumsnet, not only because of the marketing strategies that permeate it, but because the site structures and enables affects of rivalry, antagonism, competition, as well as friendliness, support, fun and belonging.

Yummy Mummies and Pramfaces

Mumsnet is stereotyped in the mainstream media as 'a gathering place for Guardian-reading yummy mummies'.[liv] And there is some truth to Mumsnet being a component of the media technologies that contribute to the family as entrepreneurial project. Jo Littler identifies the yummy mummy as coming into 'being through an increasing divide between rich and poor, serving to augment a White, thirtysomething position of privilege, shoring up its boundaries against the ''pramfaces'' perceived to be on the other side of the social divide'.[lv] Indeed, there are Mumsnet threads asking how to become a yummy mummy and less 'slummy' – a telling word in itself.[lvi] However, there are others who 'wonder if the concept of a 'yummy mummy' is a feminist issue, a class issue or just my issue' and profess 'to hate the phrase yummy mummy'.

Respondents insist: ‘To me it is definitely about class. It is also about the ability to take care of appearance’ and ‘the term is not sexist as it is a term that may be used by both men and women. On the other hand it is a term that can only ever apply to women, so it is a feminist issue - i.e. our problem.’[lvii] Moreover, the demographic of Mumsnet includes more regional, class and race variations than the mainstream media allow for.[lviii]

Although users do assert feminist arguments and protest against class-hatred, the site is primarily focused on honing, enabling and celebrating the entrepreneurial family. The logics of class-aspiration and normative femininities prevail and are fought over. This is ensured by the sponsors, advertisers, employees (even if they are simultaneously deconstructed by some of the users). Mumsnet is part of a portfolio of media options run by a neoliberal political economy. The mainstream media – and the niche markets it infiltrates and informs – court class hatred and prurience in order to fuel the corporate agenda and simultaneously destroy public sector services. This class-based strategy is frequently executed by positioning female figures as the moral index of the economy, either by disseminating overdetermined archetypes such as ‘pramfaces’ across media platforms to evidence what Tyler calls the ‘revolting subjects’ of the contemporary neoliberal landscape.[lix] Or by sneering at the figure of the yummy mummy who symbolises the overconsuming, status-driven middle classes (daddys are not harnessed to engender scorn).

The front page of *The Sun* on the 30th June 2014 pictured a nude and pregnant Josie Cunningham, with the tagline: ‘Forget Demi, here’s…Gimme More…Scrounger Josie Goes Nude’. A Twitter celebrity and pathologised media figure, Josie is caught up in the marketing strategies of the popular media that provoke and court prurience from their audiences. She hit the headlines for apparently having breast enhancement on the NHS and claiming that she would have an abortion in order to go on Big Brother. *The Sun’s* photoshoot abjectifies the working class fertile body by contrasting it with the celebration of Demi Moore’s famous pregnant celebrity photo shoot on the cover of Vanity Fair in the 1980s. *The Sun’s* Facebook page the same day was targeted by disgusted readers who resented seeing Josie on the front page. The female users called her ‘a disgraceful human bein’ [sic], ‘a vile creature’, a ‘MOOSE’, ‘proper minging’, ‘scrounger’, ‘societal leech’, ‘vile piece of subhuman garbage’, ‘tramp’, ‘ugly

munter', 'freeloader', 'ugly troll', to mention just some of their hostile comments. The women – or those with female pseudonyms – were particularly insistent on harnessing slut-shaming tactics and normative cruelties in calling Josie a bad mother and one exclaimed that she needed 'to have her legs taping 2gether'.[lx]

Misogyny and class-hatred dove tail in *The Sun's* audience's reactions to Josie who symbolises the 'failed femininity' of single working class motherhood.[lxi] Courting misogyny and class hatred, and then allowing this to be amplified across social media platforms, is a frequent and effective strategy in the mainstream media. What is pertinent here is that the audience's antagonistic reactions are then fed back into the mainstream, legitimating and giving context to vitriolic headlines and visuals. Josie comes to signify the vilified single mother as the tabloid press hone in on the fact that she does not apparently know the father of her child, that she smokes, and drinks Coke – 'a healthy breakfast for a woman who's six months pregnant', sneers a female *Mirror* journalist.[lxii] Overdetermined figures like Josie gain their force as they are repeated across different media; they are harnessed and displayed as part of a media ecology that aims to justify the dismantling of the NHS and the welfare state – those enclosures that obstruct the power of corporations in a neoliberal economy.

The users on Mumsnet are more diverse and less violent in their responses to Josie. This is partly due to the context in which the threads are posted. This is not a Facebook page, which arguably enables quicker and more hostile comments, but it is also not connected to *The Sun* brand, which deliberately provokes affects of class hatred. After all, although Mumsnet has its fair share of antagonisms, the comments are also moderated and can be removed. Moreover, the dominant voices of Mumsnet ensure - through homosocial governmentality - that a particular middle class rhetoric which although antagonistic is restrained and accords to agreed levels of respectability. There are a number of threads addressing Josie's controversial representations across media platforms. The responses range from 'dimwit'[lxiii] to 'that poor woman needs help and support'.[lxiv] The users distance themselves from what Josie is used as to represent in the media – the 'waste of neoliberalism'[lxv] – and their patronising dismissal of her is still, like the women on *The Sun* Facebook page, a form of shaming.

Threads like these, combined with the spreading of brands and conversations about striving to be more attractive, a better mother, a better consumer, a better wife, all reveal Mumsnet as modulating the entrepreneurial family. Another way that the site executes policing is through the privileging of personal restraint. Respectability, taste and self-management are key to the success of the neoliberal family. Overeating and weight loss threads are common, with women often posting that they feel out of control. In response, the other users on the thread will rally round to combat what they perceive as excessive behaviour, whether this is related to food or emotions. In this way Mumsnet is a site where women invite mutual surveillance, particularly when they experience this abject state. 'Out of control' is a telling phrase here, reflecting the neoliberal moral emphasis on personal responsibility and self-governance. There is a pervasive need to stay in control. Central to staying in control is hooking into networks of users who will perform the constraints of a peer-to-peer monitoring system. This value system is often visually indexed through food and the fear of the female fat body, which is itself associated with sexuality and excessive working class femininity. Within these contexts, abject emotions are released as affective labour.

Brands harness the assemblage of female friendship in a system of intimate surveillance and peer governance within the digital cultures of the control society. They embody Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's figure of the 'networker' who seeks strategic and profitable relationships which are time-bound and based on 'projects' rather than institutional, communitarian or biographical ties.[lxvi] In the context of the digital sites discussed here, this project is the normative feminine entrepreneurial self. Moreover, these homosocial spaces are suffused with the affectivity of female friendship as invoked by the promotional industries. These affects include 'ugly feelings' and contribute to a peer-to-peer regulation of female sexuality. Although Mumsnet is a space where feminist ideals can be articulated and alliances forged, these must occur in tension – or rather in tandem – with the ideological economies of branded cultures. Indeed, these spaces hone a neoliberal feminism which recognizes and acknowledges gender inequality but individualises the solution by turning inwards in order to self-monitor and invite mutual policing.

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