

# Emotional Labour: Immanence and Morality on Reality TV

Gender Studies, Stockholm University. Paper given to Bergen Women's Studies 2007

# Project: Making Class and Self Through Televised Ethical Scenarios

- ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme: from April
- 2005- September 2007 as part of the Identities programme
- Researchers: Beverley Skeggs, Helen Wood, Nancy Thumim

# Impetus; General New Moral Economies

Proliferation of programming (political economy of TV, spectacular emphasis)

- Affects of disgust, derision and contempt attached to the working class (hate legitimated in law : see Garland, and social policy, e.g ASBOS)
- 3 figures of national threat figured differently: young Muslim man (fear, threat, inner threat, respectable); asylum seeker (waste, inhuman, external); WWC (waste, ativistic, internal, non-respectable).
- Extension of TV porn, eg, ethnographic display of working class as the ‘constitutive limits to propriety’ in Ibiza Uncovered and Clup Reps etc.
- Alongside emphasis on self as project on which to be worked: 1) extension of modes of behaviour modification and various ‘grammars of conduct’
- Emphasis on techniques incited premised on ‘telling, performing, dramatising the self’ (Wood, H. & B. Skeggs (2004) ‘Notes on Ethical(Wood, H. & B. Skeggs (2004) ‘Notes on Ethical Scenarios of Self on British Reality TV’ Feminist Media Studies 4 (2).

# Theoretical Frame: Moral Economies of Personhood

Development of the bourgeois self as the norm (across different sites) and its accompanying theories (all premised on exchange-value and investment in the future) (see Class, Self, Culture) Cultural capital textured by affect and emotional performance.

Good personhood is known and evaluated through self-labour:

1. Present contract for the future
2. The authenticity of the performance
3. Metonymic morality
4. Affective figuring
5. Political rhetoric/symbolic evaluation/theories that identify/legitimate the modern/flexible/mobile/good self.
6. These enable value to be attached to different bodies through an evaluation of the performance (but subject positions restricted)

# Different Political Temporalities For Different Classes

Liberalisms: regulation (malthus) correctional (scottish moralists) and maternal-directed for social reproduction property owning persons (macpherson) sovereign subjects (abercrombie et al.)

Or both: macintyre – as both the object of improvement and the subject that does the improving.... All offer

1. Different relation to subject formation
2. To forms of citizenship
3. Require different performances of different types of labour in order that the proper subject can be recognised/rewarded/reformed/regulated or be responsible..
4. Neo-liberalism not available to all 5. More like 'old liberalism' as identified by marx (C900-3) whereby all liberal law hostile to labour(ers); the 'voluntary criminal as those who will not adopt to new conditions'

# Malthus: Wife Swap Abject/Affective Example: Lizzie Bardsley

- Lizzie v Emma from series 1 (format swap houses and families for 2 weeks. In the second week the rules are changed by the 'new wife')
- Have advertised since for another 'Lizzie Bardsley' (from MY Space: Lizzie Bardsley's Details

Status: Divorced

Orientation: Straight

Hometown: Rochdale

Body type: 5' 2" / Some extra baggage

Religion: Catholic

Smoke/ Drink: Yes / Yes

Children: Proud parent

Occupation: Scrounger

Income: \$250,000 and Higher)

- Now into series 4. up to 7 m viewers. Levels at 3 m. Wife Swap mutations- Wife Swap: the Aftermath, Wife Swap US, Village Swaps, Holiday Showdown, etc.

Peter Mandelson (then a man of some significance in the Blair government, an architect of New Labour, twice sacked, now EU commissioner), in his lecture to the Fabian Society to launch the Social Exclusion Unit. We are people who are used to being represented as problematic. We are the long-term, benefit-claiming, working-class poor, living through another period of cultural contempt. We are losers, no hopers, low life, scroungers. Our culture is yob culture. The importance of welfare provisions to our lives has been denigrated and turned against us: we are welfare dependent and our problems won't be solved by giving us higher benefits. We are perverse in our failure to succeed, dragging our feet over social change, wanting the old jobs back, still having babies instead of careers, stuck in outdated class and gender moulds. We are the 'challenge' that stands out above all others, the 'greatest social crisis of our times. (Mandelson 1997)

# To Return to the Research Project: 4 Methods

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Text and inter-text analysis of 10 programme series chosen from 42 to represent range of sub-genres, internet and magazines extra- textual studied (see one week in Nov slide). Sociological thematics and narrative devices identified from text. (papers: legality 'it's sad')

Difficulty in chasing a highly dynamic developing object that travels trans-nationally (Columbia, Iran, Finland). Also keeping track of the inter-text via celebrity and notoriety and national scandal (e.g. Jade)

## **3 stages of different empirical methods:**

1. sociological interviews to locate, taste, education and background, media use;
2. development of Wood's Text-in-Action to the Affective Textual Encounter (ATE)
3. 3.5 focus groups (Addington split into 2)
4. Generated analysis and issues from each stage which informed next.
5. Participants led us to methodological development...

| Primary Features        | Abject | Swaps | Passing Disguise | Challenges | Competition | Physical Make-over | Expert observation                 | Life overhaul |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Work                    | HR,    |       | FI               | A,<br>FI   | A           |                    |                                    | GNL           |
| Money                   |        |       |                  | GNL        |             | BMD                |                                    |               |
| Holidays /Travel        | IU     | HS    |                  | BB         |             |                    |                                    | GUG           |
| Homes                   |        |       |                  | DHA<br>GNL |             | HB                 |                                    | NPF           |
| Food & Health           |        |       |                  |            |             |                    | YWE<br>HKK                         |               |
| Hygiene                 |        |       |                  |            |             | TPW                | HCH                                |               |
| Families /Relationships |        | HS WS |                  | DSS        |             | WRR,<br>BMD        | SN, FC,<br>DMDM<br>MEO<br>LA<br>N9 |               |
| Sex                     |        |       |                  |            |             |                    | SEX,                               |               |
| Appearance              |        |       | FI, PIS          | FI         | PIS         | TYY<br>EM, WNT     |                                    |               |
| Manners                 |        | HS    | FI, PIS          | FI         | PIS WBS     | WBS                |                                    |               |
| Explicit Class Mobility |        |       | WBS<br>MFL       |            |             |                    | LL,                                |               |

# Methods Make Class

- Significant changes in public culture made access problematic for WC (disinterest, suspicion, research fatigue) – MC easy (willingness but busy).
- Payment as WC incitement/MC immoral.
- Interviews: WC white and black groups defensive, MC group needed knowledge/aims of project, Asian group unsure of status (state agents?)
- TIA: WC groups incredulity, MC rules of engagement. When we thought it failed proved highly successful at methodological development (Affective Textual Encounter)
- Focus groups: different class/race performances.

# Participants

4 different groups of 10 women. Organised by area, accessed by family and friendship networks:

- **Addington:** 10 White working-class (5/5 not /mothers), ages 18-72, caring professionals or full-time mothers.
- **Brockley:** 6 Black British working-class, 3 white working-class, 1 Maltese (only one not a mother 26-68). Public sector, service sector workers.
- **Clapham:** Southern and British Asian, Asian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, settled and recently arrived; trans-national class differences, (3/7 not/mothers) ages 18-45. 3 professional, full-time mothers, student.
- **Forest Hill:** 7 white, 3 self-defined as mixed race, middle-class (7/3 not/mothers), ages 30-57. Professional arts/education/media. (used Bourdieu, Skeggs, Commission for Racial Equality quality and self- definitions to organise categorisations)

# Gendered and Classed Labour

Labour as the means by which the social reproduction of the labour force occurs

But also shift to service economy:

- Increased significance of immaterial/emotional/affective labour
- Care, femininity and sexuality become formal/direct means of extracting surplus value
- But which body performs important: some gendered/classed bodies incapable (good mothers/bad mothers – classed); men rewarded for femininity.
- Labour becomes moral: some rendered incapable/useless of any form of labour (moral high ground re-drawn – or is it?)

# Performance of Emotional Labour on Reality Television

- Range of techniques to incite emotional tension (eg swaps, competition)
- Dramatic techniques incite tension textured by the elaboration of affect/emotion (eg. Long shot/close up/confession to camera)
- The centring on domestic and/or relationships means all structured through emotional display (range of required expression and containment).
- Range of subject positions offered: abject, inadequate, hopeless, hopeful, trying, investing...(all linked to display of labour (E/D/LF), performance (the how), affective texturing.

# Performance of Emotional Labour on Reality Television

## continued...

- Different types of labour offered and assessed –not based on time but intensity and TYPE (of performer as well as performance)
- Increased performance knowledge of participants of manipulation of technologies (part of the audience pleasure in 'catching out', watching who can 'stay real':
- Vik: The ones you can tell like what was it... you said before when they're acting, you can see when they're acting for the camera and you can see the other ones that ain't, that are just getting on with it. (Addinton, interview)
- (nb: Illouz: emotional value as a form of exploitation and surplus value)

# But...Recognition of Labour Performed

- The attempt to generate an economy of personhood through the attribution of moral value, often fails. Instead labour is assessed immanently (not as a representation)

It's also because they can't be bothered. Remember how much hard work it is to look good all the time? (Nicola Addington, ATE)

**Michelle 2:** But then she works so why shouldn't she have all of that you know...She said she does the housework like in the morning till he gets up.

**Sharon:** He doesn't like working does he?

**Ruby:** He does nothing, but vegetate in a massive bowl of porridge. Oh he's nasty.(Brockley, FG, ATE) Throughout the research they all make connections to their lives, their labour, their relationships, the limits, the hope, the investments. The connections they make are through the labouring of the participants

## ‘She Just Did it’: Jordan (Labour = Being Real)

**Mel:** Well not that I didn’t like her, I didn’t know her, I didn’t know anything about her really just what I’d seen on the telly and I think she’s got a bad, not a bad name but she adds up, well she did, really did hear her talking and that she had quite a lot to talk about, it weren’t just about herself. She’s quite a funny person as well. You think a person like her, ‘cause she’s got money and that and she’s going to be spoilt: ‘me me me’, but she weren’t. She was like--, she did the tasks and that, she didn’t think, no I ain’t doing that, like some of them said, “I’m not going to do that,” and she just got on and did it.

**Joan:** She had to prove herself and she did. (Addington, FG, Dec 2006). Labour for the Addington group is a performance of anti- pretension, of remaining working-class

# Something for Nothing: Not All Labour is Recognised or Valued

Liselle: That's why I have a problem I think, because once it gets into getting something out of it--,

Ann: It's humiliating.

Liselle: It says at what lengths you will go to and I think, I think we start to think that you don't have to work hard at things and we don't have to, it's like kids who just want to be famous, you know it doesn't matter what I do but I want to be famous. It takes away every sense of working hard at things and thinking about making a difference or it's just about this--,

Ann: Yeah.

Orlaine: I think, I think it's called trash or trash is also about this celebrity thing isn't it? About how people get famous and rich for not having any skills any more. I mean that's the trash label as well. I think there's an element about that, people thinking, you know, that's just trashy that people can just get rich you know, just for doing nothing--, (Forest Hill FG Nov 2006). For the middle-class group the labour of the performance is not recognised, the labour is fetishised as person type = trashy and undeserving. They make the equation of labor with working hard and skills beyond the 'performance' on TV. Nb: note property values.

# Judgement Converted Back into Affect: Disgust/ Derision/ Contempt

Emily: I mean I think that the idea around celebrities is, because you know people are so desperate to get on television that they'll do anything, like TVs--, what do you call these morning programmes, that horrible man Jeremy-

Bev: Jeremy Kyle.

Emily: He is disgusting. I mean [all talking at once] and you're having people who are having these arguments, it's terrible. But they'll do it because it means they're on television and actually when you say about change, they become a little celebrity. People go back to their communities and they become famous, they get that famous feeling for a week.

- The 'type' of person 'desperate' and 'little' is recognised.
- Lack of emotional restraint is recognised: 'having these arguments'
- The 'feelings' of others are read on them as trivial

# Refusals: Sexual, Feminine, Care of the Self

- Authority is challenged (Ladette to Lady – aristocrats become freaks!)
- Supposed 'experts' subject to much critique (esp. You are What you Eat and What Not to Wear)
- People positioned as 'Bad People' come across with dignity, trying hard, integrity.
- Strong awareness of moral judgement and positioning.
- Labour is valued (people who 'make the effort', 'up for a laugh' "who stay real")
- Pretentiousness highly criticised (aspirations subject to great critique) (long history of class struggle eg Vicinus)

# Ethics?

- Rather than the production of judgements, it is the shaping of incidents and their participants that constitutes ethics: 'rather than judging ethics according to how well it is or not able to judge a world that is external to it, its value lies in its own immanent actualisation in a world in which it is inextricably, implicated' (Mariam Fraser 2005:19)
- Judgement is generated in the actualisation that occurs through Reality TV (sometimes literally) shaping the participants; spectacularly shaping the the type of person (in need of correction/responsible/abject) known through the intensity and performance of their labour. But judgment is different depending on where one stands: different forms of labour are attached to different persons – only some forms of labour are recognised as such.

# Summary

- Reality TV offers a mechanism for understanding current person-value production through the evaluation of women through emotional/domestic/labour for femininity.
- The mechanisms for telling, knowing, performing and dramatising the self', premised on the how of cultural capital and thereby reveal inadequate subject through inadequate performance.
- Different temporalities of liberalism generate different subject/citizenship possibilities: correctional –useless subject value.
- The responsibility for relationships is a hierarchised regulated responsibility
- But the repeat of the failure of heteronormativity exposes its investment in the 'future promise.'
- Motherhood, care, feminine and sexual labour become subject to increased value scrutiny: gendered and classed bodily attachments important in assessment of value.

# Moral Judgement Moves Away From Justice

- (Boltanski 1999) draws on Hannah Arendt to make a distinction between the politics of pity – abject and failed selves that need pity – and the politics of justice.
- The flattening out of difference occurs when homosexuals are represented as having more personal difficulties, experiencing more suffering (life is more difficult therefore not a good ‘choice’)
- And they also provide the affect of Freudian notion of Schadenfreude (sharden-freud-er) to take pleasure in the pain of others, or getting pleasure at the expense of others, often whilst being entertained.
- The affect of pity and the display of failed selves, suffering or failed relations deserving of pity and compassion becomes a cultural commodity to make money for TV programmes and enable a shift in person-value.