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Pramface Girls: The Class Politics of 'Maternal TV'

> Pramface. Noun: A teenage mother, usually from a council housing estate. Coined by the online gossip site, popbitch, and originally a woman with the facial looks of a poor single mother. Derog. (Peevish's online slang dictionary 2011)

The seven-second pre-credit sequence of Episode 3, Series 2 of the British reality television show *Underage and Pregnant* (BBC 3, 2010) opens with ambient music and a close-up shot of a baby sucking a plastic dummy (soother) in a pushchair. The camera zooms out and tilts upwards to reveal two teenage girls who are sharing a cigarette as they manoeuvre the pram along an alleyway. The girls are framed against a row of brown stone-faced terraced houses and a grey wet sky. The music fades and a young female voice with a broad Yorkshire accent and flat vowels speaks over the opening visual sequence, 'When my dad left, that is when I started being a bad girl [laughs]'. The camera cuts mid-sentence to a close-up of the younger of the two girls, who sits on a bedroom floor in her school uniform, her knees drawn up to her chest and her face framed by a baby's cot and a bed full of soft toys. This brief sequence communicates what Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood (2009) have termed 'a moral subject semiotics': a conjunction of signs, bodies and landscape which compose a familiar assemblage of classed and gendered values. The visual semiotics of this sequence are easy for a British television audience to decode: bleached hair, sports clothing, baby in pushchair, dummy,

'Becca and Michelle' pre-credit sequence of Episode 3, Series 2, *Underage and Pregnant* (BBC 3, 2010)

Cathy Come Home (Ken Loach, 1966)

cigarettes, broken home, regional accents, terraced houses, underage sex. This televisual grammar of working-class motherhood cites the visual iconography of the social-realist television drama of 1960s Britain, typified by Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home* (BBC, 1966). Loach's powerful drama fashioned a bleak (but beautifully shot) decaying post-industrial landscape, in which pinch-faced homeless mother Cathy (Carole White) pushed a pram through pot-holed terraced streets and past factory gates.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn have described social-realist television drama as 'overtly politicized … media engagement that rooted documentary practice in (albeit flawed) desires to change social policy, uncover invisible lives and challenge an inequitable social system' (Biressi and Nunn 2005: 10). Reality TV draws on many of the techniques of social realism, such as the use of hand-held cameras, the employment of non-actors and an improvised, unscripted 'home-made' aesthetic. Both genres (problematically) portray 'the British working class from the point of view of the social outsider or "cultural tourist" ' (Creeber 2009: 435). However, reality television has none of the political aspirations of social-realist drama; made by independent production companies, it is driven by profit (Creeber 2009). The unwed or homeless mother of social realism was quintessentially a 'good mother' who was represented as victim of historical social circumstances and outmoded social mores. The depiction of her poverty and stigmatisation was designed to raise political consciousness. In reality TV, she has metamorphosed into the 'pramface girl', a figure who dramatises what Skeggs and Wood have described as 'class inequality displayed as subjectivity' (Skeggs and Wood 2009: 639). In neo-liberal Britain, poverty is not perceived or represented as a social problem but as an individual failing, and in the case of teen motherhood as a pathological subjectivity.

The term 'pramface' surfaced in popular culture in 2003 as a slur to describe young celebrity mothers from working-class backgrounds with 'a face better suited to pushing a pram round a housing estate'.[1] It is now employed as a term of abuse for young working-class mothers who are perceived as a drain on the welfare state. The pramface girl is figured as a work-shy and feckless teen mother, a character who has purposefully squandered opportunities for social mobility in meritocratic Britain and has 'chosen' a life of poverty, state dependence and redundancy for herself and her

children.[2] This chapter tracks the televisual life of 'the pramface girl', for while this figure circulates within a wide range of popular media, her *raison d'être* is reality TV, and in particular the reality subgenre I term 'maternal TV'. Focusing on the most successful teen mother reality show in the UK, *Underage and Pregnant*, this chapter examines the meaning of this distinctly neo-liberal figuration of working-class motherhood and explores how reality TV transforms having a baby into a 'class act'.

Researching the social life of reality TV

This chapter draws on extra-textual sources, including interviews with seven participants in the programme and audience commentary from blogs and social networking sites. Through this mix of close textual analysis and social research methods, I have attempted to capture *the social life of reality TV*. As Wood and Skeggs insist, reality television is 'a frame of reference through which we and our forms of identity (as audience *and* potential performers) are increasingly and normatively mediated' (Wood and Skeggs 2010: 94). In other words, reality TV is not (simply) representational in respect of prevailing social relations and systems of value, but is fundamentally *constitutive* of contemporary social life. As Wood and Skeggs suggest of their audience research, 'mediated worlds and lived worlds are simultaneously experienced in significant and dynamic moments of connection' (ibid.: 104). The blurring of mediated and lived experience is evident when one tries to delineate reality TV, a ubiquitous form sustained by such a huge range of public and commercial industries that it simply cannot be understood in terms of television content alone, or even in the interaction between televisual texts and audiences: rather, 'reality' is better understood as the axiomatic system of media culture. For reality media are not only thoroughly embedded in everyday social practices, but are productive of 'televisual sociality'. One of the most significant developments in the phenomenal ascendance of reality TV is its extension into online formats through the development of Web 2.0 digital technologies. Social networking sites, in particular, play a pivotal role in the production, circulation and reception of reality TV.

The empirical research for this chapter took place when the second series of *Underage and Pregnant* was being aired in the UK (July–September 2010), which meant that I was able to track in 'real time' the online audience responses posted on message boards, blogs and social networking sites. Although a rich analysis of this audience data is beyond the scope of this chapter, while researching the 'online life' of *Underage and Pregnant*, it became apparent how the exaggerated characters on reality TV operate for audiences as vehicles for communicating values and beliefs. For example, the ways in which reality show participants' and viewers' 'likes' or 'dislikes' operate as signs of taste which are instrumentalised in everyday conversational practices of distinction-making (Tyler and Bennett 2010). While many responses to the participants in *Underage and Pregnant* reiterate the kinds of (often negative) judgments incited by the text, discussion threads offer a fascinating insight into how the televisual characterisations become animated in struggles over identity and value. This online research revealed how differently positioned viewers negotiate dominant spectatorial positions through articulations of identification and dis-identification with the caricatured representations and 'performances' of the young mothers on screen. This finding echoes those of Skeggs and Wood's

reality TV audience research project (2004–8)[3] in which reality participants represent complex figures of identification and dis-identification, the meaning and value of which is highly dependent on the classed, gendered, parental and racialised positioning of the audience (Skeggs, Wood and Thumim 2008). Wood and Skeggs conclude that 'reality television creates a structure of immanence for viewers through which there is rarely a singular stable "reading" of a programme, but rather a set of immediate affective moments through which our audiences experience and locate themselves in the unfolding drama' (Wood and Skeggs 2010: 104). My online research further reveals how reality television extends beyond immediate contexts of screening and viewing, as characters and storylines are reanimated in sometimes unanticipated ways.

As well as exploring audience responses to *Underage and Pregnant*, I was able to use social networking sites to contact and interview seven of the teen mothers who had participated in the programme. These interviews ranged from short exchanges to longer conversations which took place over a period of weeks. Significantly, these online research methods parallel those used by television production companies to recruit participants. 'Youth orientated' reality TV is completely enmeshed with social networking media, from the very early stages of production, through recruitment, marketing and reception. For teenagers with high levels of internet access, social networking is a technology deeply embedded in their everyday lives and accessed via personalised media technology. Young people use social networking sites, such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook, predominantly as a means of interacting with their peers. The nature of these communications is such that they are inevitably informal. This medium lends itself to new forms of intimacy and immediacy, one of the many features that social networking sites share with reality TV.

Many teenagers engage in practices of 'friending' with relatively little thought as to the consequences of exposing their private lives, thoughts and feelings in what is a privately owned for-profit information domain. One participant described to me the way in which she felt she was 'ensnared' by a researcher working for *Underage and Pregnant* after being 'friended' by her online. Another stated: 'I think they exploited my interest in the media and this is how *they hooked me* in the first place, because it actually all began when I started speaking to a researcher on Bebo' (my emphasis). Both social networking sites and reality TV are examples of *active surveillance media* in which participants 'volunteer' to participate. As Michael Bullock writes:

> The emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter […] among a myriad of others, hails the beginning of a new era of 'opt in' surveillance where users are encouraged to share their personal activities, information, and thoughts with their peers and even people they have no connection to. (Bullock 2009: 28)

This raises a series of ethical questions about the use of social networking as a research method and the relationship between academic research and television production research methods. However, this online research also revealed some of the ways in which social networking is also enabling of political communities, and creates spaces within which young mothers are able to acquire capital and recognition outside dominant systems of representation and social control. The combination of

online ethnography and participant interviews enabled me to track how reality TV participants employ social networking to respond to their negative framing within programming: three participants in *Underage and Pregnant* went to some lengths to intervene in online chatroom debates with audiences about their negative representation, while all of the participants discussed aspects of their participation in the show with each other, and with friends and audiences in social network sites. This highlights how social networking operates as a 'back-channel' for participants to 'recode' themselves.[4] Through their online dialogues and posts, and in their interviews with me, the young women rationalise and begin to 'theorise' their positioning within the programme, critiquing television production codes and editorial decision-making, and introducing alternative perspectives on specific sequences, shots, narrative, events and takes.

Maternal TV

'Maternal TV' is a proliferating reality subgenre and includes 'correctional' parenting shows such as *Supernanny* (Channel 4 2004–),[5] and hospital-based childbirth reality shows such as *One Born Every Minute* (Channel 4, 2010). There has been a growing focus within this genre on 'teen' parenting. In the UK, this includes programmes such as: *Baby Borrowers* (BBC 3, 2007), *Kimberley: Young Mum 10 Years On* (Channel 4, 2009), *Help! I'm a Teen Mum* (ITV, 2007), *Kizzy: Mum at 14* (BBC 3, 2007), *The Trouble with Girls: Three Girls and Three Babies* (BBC 3, 2009), *Teen High Mum* (BBC 3, 2009), *18 Pregnant Schoolgirls* (BBC 3, 2009) *Pregnancy: My Big Decision* (BBC 3, 2009), *Young Mum's Mansion* (BBC 3, 2009) and *Pramface Babies* (ITV, 2009). While this chapter focuses on British Maternal TV, these reality programmes are also in the ascendance in the USA where the most prominent examples are MTV's *16 and Pregnant* (2008 and 2010) and spin-off, *Teen Moms* (2009–10). *Teen Moms* was MTV's most successful show in 2009 and in the top three US cable shows for the year, attracting an average of 3.3 million viewers, franchised worldwide and dubbed 'the teen mom phenomenon' (Goldberg 2010).

Underage and Pregnant

Underage and Pregnant is commissioned and broadcast by BBC 3, the public broadcaster's 'youth channel', which targets a television audience of sixteen to thirty-four-year-olds and is described in a BBC press release as a programme that 'goes beyond the statistics and tabloid headlines to reveal the real story of life as a pregnant schoolgirl and teenage mum'.[6] This chapter focuses on Series 2 of *Underage and Pregnant* screened in the summer and autumn of 2010. This second series has proved a huge ratings succes, regularly pulling in audiences of a million. As I finished this chapter, the production company (Mentorn Television) had begun to recruit participants for a third series. The term 'underage' in the title is a reference to the fact that the girls were all under the British legal age for consensual sexual relations between a man and a woman when they became pregnant. The choice of the word 'underage', rather than young or teenage in the title, has a lurid quality that from the outset undermines the claim of the programme-makers that they want to get

'behind the sensational headlines'.[7] *Underage and Pregnant* does not focus the medical aspects of pregnancy and birth, but is concerned with documenting the teenagers' changing body-image, their friendships, sexual and family relationships, and issues around money and education. In some episodes, the drama centres on families coming to terms with teen pregnancy and preparing for the birth, while others focus on the ways in which the young mothers are coping, or failing to cope, with a newborn infant. Each episode is 30 minutes long, an individual storyline compressed into approximately 15 minutes of footage. The participants I interviewed said that filming for an individual episode took place over a period of approximately four months, with film crews spending in total between five and seven days with each participant. The participants are unpaid, receiving only a gift token worth approximately £250 for their participation.

The vast majority of the participants in *Underage and Pregnant* are from backgrounds which are coded as poor, working-class or lower-middle-class, although episodes often feature two teenage mothers who have contrasting storylines in terms of their perceived 'respectability'. As one participant noted, 'In most episodes, one family is always portrayed as uneducated and "working class" whereas the other is supposed to be a bit posher. I think they exaggerate that divide.' Regional accents and architecture are mobilised to reinforce class-based perceptual frames. This foregrounding of class differences is central to the spectatorial pleasure offered by the text and serves to reinforce the understanding that the audience can occupy a secure position from which to make evaluative assessments of the teenage mothers depicted (See Tyler and Bennett 2010; Skeggs 2005). This interpretation was reinforced in interviews with participants, one of whom described how she felt that the representation of her family was distorted to make them appear poor. As she notes: 'They didn't represent my family in an accurate or positive way, always making my family out to be poor. For example, they didn't screen the footage of us all going [abroad on holiday] even though they were filming at the airport with us.'

Edited sequences are threaded together with a voiceover by actress and television celebrity Natalie Cassidy, familiar to British viewers from her role as Sonia Jackson, a working-class character involved in an underage pregnancy storyline in the long-running soap opera *EastEnders*. The use of Cassidy as narrator reinforces the youthful, sympathetic 'big sisterly' mode of address of the programme. However, while Cassidy's softly spoken 'Estuary English' voiceover is sympathetic and neutral in tone, her narration is laid over what Skeggs and Wood term 'judgment shots': visual shots and sequences that incite negative moral judgment (Skeggs, Wood and Thumim 2008). As the series progresses, the familiarity of this ploy means that Cassidy's voiceover acquires a more condescending and ironic tone.

Shame on her

The encoding of what Skeggs (2005) terms 'person value' through visual sequences of townscapes is a central trope within *Underage and Pregnant*. 'Michela' (Episode 4, Series 2) begins with overhead views of Glasgow, which cut to overhead and extreme long shots of a housing estate before settling on a long shot of the frontage of one house. This bird's-eye narrative perspective is familiar to viewers of British

soap operas, such as *EastEnders* which uses satellite footage in the title sequence to zoom into the working-class East End of London, seemingly from outer space, and from *Coronation Street*, where the title montage whisks the viewer over the roofs of Victorian terraced houses in northern England (Lovell 1996). Andrew Higson describes these sequences as 'that long shot of our town from that hill' which form a critical part of 'social realist narrative positioning from outside and above the industrial landscape' (Higson 1996: 152). These long shots involve 'an external point of view, the voyeurism of one class looking at another … to read the shot in this way is to identify with a position outside and above' (ibid.: 152).

The voiceover to the opening sequence of this episode of *Underage and Pregnant* informs us that 'Michela lives on an estate near Glasgow with her parents, sister Suzanne and eight-week-old Tamara-Leigh.' The implication is that this is a council estate (referred to in Scotland as schemes): publicly built and subsidised housing, similar to 'projects' in the US. In Britain, council estates were built by regional governments (local councils) primarily between the 1950s and the 80s to supply affordable housing to working-class people whose properties were demolished as part of large-scale inner-city 'slum clearances', or who lived in overcrowded urban areas. The historical association between council estates and slums, and concerted attempts on the part of the middle classes to differentiate between private estates and council estates, led to the deep stigmatisation of council properties.[8] The focus of pre-credit and opening sequences on housing estates, and other 'working-class landscapes', metaphorically establishes a 'high ground' from which the viewer can pass judgment. These geographical sequences operate as 'psychological landscapes' which connote the personal qualities of the protagonist herself.

Michela's story was one of the more intrusive and disturbing episodes of *Underage and Pregnant*, and includes repeated sequences which shame Michela by dramatising her inadequate mothering. The episode is the only one to feature footage shot at night, while Michaela and her baby were sleeping. This low-resolution, night-vision footage resembles a sequence from a nature programme and while difficult to see clearly, it is presented through the narrative as visual evidence of Michela's incompetence at giving her baby night feeds and proof that she is an 'unfit mother' who is failing to care for her infant. By way of contrast, Michela's mother and sister (who is also a teen mother) are portrayed sympathetically in the programme as caring and concerned. In one sequence, a voiceover explains that Michela has been visited by social workers. In a shot/reverse-shot sequence, her older sister (a 'good' mother) asks Michela what the social workers said, and Michela replies, 'Don't know. Wasn't listening to them'. Her cheeks are flushed and she refuses to look at the camera or her sister. Michela's sister then proceeds to admonish her about her maternal failure. The negative judgment incited by this sequence is heightened by the use of subtitles, absent from the rest of the programme, which dramatise Michela's Glaswegian accent and draw attention to her 'incomprehensible' behaviour.

As Skeggs writes, 'the working-class appear to display and dramatise themselves as inadequate, in need of self-investment. They are shown to have not just deficit culture, but also deficit subjectivity' (Skeggs and Wood 2009: 636). Through the intervention of the expertise of social services, Michela's deficiencies are 'transformed', and at the end of the programme she is depicted as a model citizen in a scene in which she talks at a local youth centre to teens, warning them about the difficulties of

'Don't know. Wasn't listening to them.' Episode 4, Series 2, *Underage and Pregnant*

motherhood. Each episode of *Underage and Pregnant* follows a similar narrative arc: an initial crisis (pregnancy or new motherhood) leads to conflict in family and other intimate relationships, a crisis which reaches some kind of resolution when the teenage participants become adequate mothers. However, I would argue that these contrived narratives exist largely as a means of legitimising the entertainment garnered from highly selective and often intentionally 'shaming' footage of these young women's lives.

Class laughter

Laughter is central to processes of class-making, and 'laughter shots' feature regularly *Underage and Pregnant* (Tyler 2008). For instance, Episode 7, from Series 2 includes a street sequence in which pregnant teenager Chenice and her friend describe how she discovered she was pregnant. This sequence ends with a street-level medium shot of a fast-food restaurant and the words of the narrative voiceover, 'Chenice finally took a pregnancy test in the KFC toilet'. If Michela represents the council estate, then Chenice is encoded in the urban landscape of London, as 'cheap' and 'disposable' like the fast-food restaurant in which she discovered she was pregnant.

Reality TV audiences share and reiterate comic moments online, posting quotes and even sharing funny screen shots on message boards. For example, the comic line 'Chenice finally took a pregnancy test in the KFC toilet' was immediately circulated on Twitter as the programme was screened, surfaced later on Facebook and was mocked and discussed in several audience forums. Winfried Menninghaus (2003) argues that laughing at something is 'an act of expulsion' that closely resembles the rejecting movement of disgust. Disgust and laughter are, he notes, complementary ways of admitting an alterity (Menninghaus 2003: 11). This is explicit in online conversational threads, in which the vocabulary moves seamlessly between comedy and disgust, as seen in one blogger's comment on the Chenice episode, 'omg they are soooo disgusting. lol' [Oh, my God. They are so disgusting. Lots of Laughs]. Laughter has an important function for the reality television audience: it moves us both literally and figuratively, we are averted, moved away from the thing (the object or figure) we laugh at. Laughter is boundary-forming, creating a distance between 'them' and 'us', asserting moral judgments and a superior class position (Tyler 2008).

'Chenice finally took a pregnancy test in the KFC toilet.' Episode 7, Series 2 *Underage and Pregnant*

Laughter also plays a role in Tasha's story in Episode 7, Series 2, which begins with a spectacular series of aerial shots of the famous north of England seaside town Blackpool, a landscape immediately recognisable to British viewers from its promenade and tower. In the case of Tasha's story, this class voyeurism is reinforced by the fact that Blackpool has a long history as a Victorian working-class seaside resort but since the 1960s has been associated with post-industrial decline, unemployment, poverty and other social problems. The pre-credits sequence thus frames Tasha in a social and economic landscape associated with faded glory, poverty and seaside vulgarity. The sequence ends with a close-up shot of a pair of fake leopard-skin boots, before panning up to a young woman pushing a pram, creating a direct visual association between Tasha and Blackpool. The relationship between person and place is further encoded in the opening sequence, which features street-level views of the housing estate on which Tasha lives, the camera lingering on shots of a street, before focusing on a medium close-up of a specific bungalow. The voiceover to this sequence informs us that 'Renting a house across the street from her mum and dad, Tasha survives on benefits'.

Skeggs, Wood and Thumim (2008) develop the term 'judgment shots' to describe the key moments in reality programmes when the audience is incited to respond with judgment to what they are seeing and hearing on screen. In their focus groups, the audience 'gasped, laughed, tutted, sighed, "ooh"ed and/or "aah"ed' at these moments. These affective responses then often

> translated into judgement through mediating statements such as 'oh my God', which were then converted into moral judgements, such as 'How can they let their children behave like that?', or 'How can they get into that state?', or 'How can they let themselves go?' (Skeggs, Wood and Thumim 2008: 5)

'Tasha is struggling to cope.'
Episode 7, Series 2 *Underage and Pregnant*

Tasha's story features several typical 'judgment shots', the most obvious being the images of piles of clutter and unwashed clothes in her house. These judgment shots operate as audience direction, supporting what Samantha Lyle has termed 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). Tasha described how the production crew had filmed her house without her permission:

> They filmed my house when I wasn't in. They didn't ask me if they could film the mess; if they asked I would have sorted it out (obviously it's not like that now) but it was only odd days it was a big mess but it came across that I lived in a pig sty, that bit I was not happy about! As that is the only thing I have been judged on, 'If you are going on TV you don't leave your house in a mess you tidy it up'.

Tasha is deeply concerned about appearing as a respectable young mother and was angry about being represented as slovenly, clearly aware of the kinds of judgment these shots would encourage. She was particularly concerned about inviting the negative judgments of those she described as older mothers. Tasha identifies how the programme has been shot and edited to encourage mockery of her bodily habitus, domestic skills and her environment. As a result, she spent a considerable time on online message boards attempting to wrest back control over her representation. She prepared for the screening of the episode by placing messages on social network sites and message boards advertising the date of the screening and highlighting her anxiety that audiences might 'judge her'. She also responded in 'real time' to comments made on Facebook about her depiction on the programme, sought and received reassurance from Facebook 'friends' and intervened in a range of bulletin and message boards in which audiences had made negative comments about her. She argued with one poster who criticised her portrayal and she created online photo albums composed of shots of her tidy house, emphasising in captions the transformation of rooms which had previously appeared in negative judgment shots in the programme. Through these strategies, Tasha was able, at least partially, to redirect readings of her performance, and to dissipate her anxiety that she might be perceived as unrespectable or a bad mother. Tasha engaged in this as part of the process of participation and clearly enjoyed what she described as 'being famous', campaigning for a 'catch-up' series of *Underage and Pregnant*.

It is important to note, however, that the majority of the young women I interviewed expressed more ambivalence about participation in the programme, enjoying aspects of their exposure on television but also expressing regret at the more negative dimensions of their portrayal, and frustration at their lack of control over the editorial process. While many of them employed online back-channels, few did so with the gusto of Tasha. Other participants felt unable to challenge their negative portrayal at all and believed they had been exploited by the programme-makers. The following comments by one participant summarised some of the young women's feelings of being duped and exploited:

> At first I thought it would be a good idea to be on the programme but when they are actually in your face, telling you what to do and try getting you to saying things you don't want to, it is really difficult. You just don't realise what you've actually said and you also say things to keep them from stop going on. It is only when they show you what is going on TV you realise what you have said and how it will be judged, but by then they will not take anything off because you've signed a document.

Fertility Envy

This chapter emerges out of a larger research project on 'Maternal Publics', which explores the extraordinary proliferation of representations of maternity within popular culture (see Tyler 2010, 2009; Baraitser and Tyler 2010). The fascination with celebrity pregnancy and motherhood, the emergence of 'momoir' literary genres and a focus on the documentation of foetal life, pregnancy and childbirth have all emerged alongside an intensive interest in maternity within reality TV. Much of this maternal publicity is concerned with the *scaling* of maternal bodies: that is, with practices of coding particular kinds of maternity as desirable or abject (Young 1990). Historically, this scaling of maternal bodies is not a new phenomenon, and young unwed working-class mothers have always been a target of social stigma. Nevertheless, the mockery of 'pramface' has a contemporary specificity, and must be read in relation to what Helen Wilson and Annette Huntington have described as new neoliberal norms of femininity, in which the ideal life trajectory of middle-class girls and women conforms to the current governmental objectives of economic growth through higher education and increased female workforce participation (Wilson and Huntington 2005: 59). In *Underage and Pregnant*, the moral worth of participants is often correlated with their educational status: those mothers seen to be continuing in education are able to acquire forms of value and capital, while those seen as 'abandoning' education for motherhood are more harshly judged. However, the pramface is also castigated because she embodies anxiety about the time and place of motherhood in a society obsessed with paid work. Indeed, the 'inappropriate fertility' of teenagers embodied in the figure of the pramface is a symptom of a wider 'fertility anxiety' which haunts middle-class neoliberal femininity. Pramface is not only productive in the wrong way, but worse, she has that which is denied those who (in the words of one of my students) 'do what you are supposed to do, you know, work hard at school, go to university, have a proper career'. The increased visibility of the pregnant body, and an increasingly sexualised consumer culture of pregnant beauty, 'flaunts fertility in your face'

and generates widespread 'fertility anxiety' not only among older women, but also among teenagers and young women. Indeed, I want to suggest that the figure of the pramface girl is in fact a site of deep class envy.

Despite attempts to frame *Underage and Pregnant* as sex education, with the production of a complementary teacher's pack for schools, there is little sense that the programme plays any kind of 'contraceptive' function for its audience. On the contrary, what is striking from reading audience comments is how many women identify positively with the young mothers on screen. Particularly noticeable is how many audience members express their own 'fertility envy' of the participants: many blogs and posts attest to the ways in which this and similar programmes make girls and women feel broody. As one teenager viewer states, 'I love this stuff except it makes me want a baby weellll bad' (The Student Room 2010). Furthermore, as Wood and Skeggs (2010) suggest, motherhood becomes a central marker of value and identification which their viewers often mobilised against the stigmatising framing of reality participants. Maternal values and desires allow for a recoding of the young women through positive identifications with their mothering. Therefore, while *Underage and Pregnant* reiterates received mythologies about teen motherhood and the imagined deficiencies of working-class culture, I want to end this chapter with some very preliminary reflections on what this programme also *inadvertently* reveals about how maternity is experienced by some girls as a means of creating value in the context of impossible neo-liberal ideals.

Suzanne Cater and Lester Coleman's (2006) study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on 'planned' teenage pregnancy detailed how for many young people parenthood is viewed as 'an opportunity, within their own control, to change their life and to gain independence and a new identity' (Cater and Coleman 2006: 31). This was particularly the case for young people from relatively deprived backgrounds and from areas of Britain where there were limited employment and educational opportunities. In this context, having a baby is experienced by some young people as a rational response to their situation – a means of creating value for themselves and enriching their lives in a social context in which they are positioned as worthless.

> Nobody ever said anything to me at school – like – do you wanna do such and such a job … everyone knows you probably couldn't do them types of things round here so maybe that's why they don't put it in your head in the first place! [laughs] You'd only be pissed off that you couldn't do it, wouldn't ya. I see being a mum as a job though … if I didn't, if I wasn't a mum, I don't think I'd even have a job, so it was probably a good decision for me – personally. (female, aged eighteen, in Cater and Colman 2006: 31)

This quotation recalls Chenice in *Underage and Pregnant*. While the audience might have laughed as Chenice describes how she discovered that she was pregnant in a KFC toilet, her account in the same episode of how being pregnant has infused her life with value is deeply affecting. *Underage and Pregnant* does enable some positive readings of teen motherhood as identities of value by revealing the capacity of young women to mother their children, often with limited resources and

in the face of incredible social stigma, in ways that are both moving and inspiring. As Skeggs and Wood write,

> people excel at that which they are supposed to fail; they show integrity when they are positioned as trivial; they show good will when put into ridiculous situations which are designed to humiliate. Participants do challenge their coding and loading through their self-performances. (Skeffs and Wood 2009: 640)

Conclusion: Prymface and Proud

This chapter has taken me on a fascinating journey: I have watched many of hours of reality TV and have journeyed into an online world where 'proud 'n' pramface' girls poke fun at the 'fertility envy' of 'dried-up' middle-aged women. Despite negative coding in reality TV, the pramface girl moves through media culture in unanticipated ways, and becomes reanimated in deeper struggles over the strictures of 'neo-liberal girlhood'.

'Prymface' was the username of one mother who 'friended' me on Facebook. Prymface, she explained, stands for 'Promoting Respect for Young Mothers'. Through blogging, tweeting and networking with young mothers, Prymface and her network are challenging 'stereotypical views of teenage parents that encourage judgment and discrimination based on age'. Savvy women like Prymface not only actively challenge negative stereotypes, but are taking on politicians, pulling apart policy documents, writing diaries, poems and novels, making films and crucially representing themselves in their own terms.

Notes

1. For the etymology of this term and its implicit reworking of the figure of 'Cathy' from Loach's *Cathy Come Home*, see Dee O'Connell (2003).
2. This chapter develops earlier work on classed maternal figures: see Tyler 2008, 2009, 2010.
3. See ESRC report <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-148-25-0040/read/reports> accessed 2 February 2011.
4. I am grateful to Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood for this account of my research.
5. For an excellent analysis of *Supernanny* and the new televisual parenting paradigm, see Tracey Jensen (2010).
6. BBC press release [online], 2009. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/04_april/23/growing.shtml> accessed January 2011.
7. BBC 3's use of sensationalist programme titles has been frequently criticised in public debates. In 2007, another teen mother reality show, *Pramface Mansion*, underwent a last-minute title change to *Young Mum's Mansion* after negative public reactions to the use of the slur 'pramface'.
8. This is evident in the ubiquity of the pejorative slang term 'Chav', which is said to be an acronym for, variously, 'Council Housed and Violent', 'Council Housed and Vile' or 'Council House Associated Vermin'. 'Council' is similarly used as a derogatory slang word in its own right to describe somebody who is perceived to be poor or vulgar.

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