



## Representations & Role Models

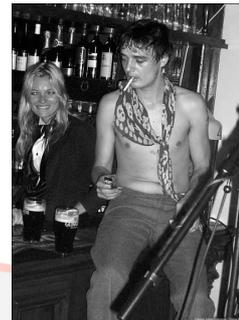
### Media images & representations:

- Substantive work on media reps  
→ 'media images', 'stereotypes', 'ideals'
- quantitative, causal relationships **but**:
  - how are images consumed, meaningful?
  - How do they translate into practice
  - social networks & friendships



### Role Models:

- Commonplace but “unclear ... in a psychological sense how ‘role modelling’ might actually work” (Gauntlett, 2008)
  - How do role models become meaningful to people?
  - Social or Individual function?
  - One or more role models depending on contexts/behaviours (tensions?)



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## Contemporary celebrity culture

- Historic, current configuration in 80s (Cashmore, 2006)
- Dominates media content across formats (tabloidization of news)
- Becoming/being a celebrity – accelerated, visible process
- Reality TV (X Factor, Britain's Got Talent, Big Brother)
- Extraordinary Ordinairiness, 'willabees'
- Taylor Herring: top 3 career aspirations
- Not achievable by all, except through:
  - **Consumption**: consuming, living, behaving like a celebrity
  - **Self-promotion**: technology enables us to construct ourselves as media



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- **Content & narrative analysis**
  - heat, Closer, OK!, New!
  - Highest ABC circulation figures for 18 – 24yr olds (most likely to participate in high-risk behaviours)
  - Examine contexts & narratives about celebrity (textual & visual)
- Readership survey – how is celeb content consumed in magazines?
- Interviews & focus groups – how celebrity/ies are meaningful to readers?

## Methodology



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## Initial findings

- Recycling of key, dominant narratives/stories:
  - Appearance (transformation: weight, cosmetic surgery, addiction)
  - Relationships (marriage/divorce etc.)
  - Pregnancy (attempts/miscarriage/adoption)
  - Mental/health breakdowns (mad-bad to recovering-good)
    - Katie Price, Kerry Katona, Cheryl Cole, Charlotte Church & Victoria Beckham – ongoing process of managing, repudiating, creating scandals that afford media attention
- Celebrities routinely shown engaging in high-risk behaviours, simultaneously depicted as shameful & aspirational
- Alongside 'advertorial' content – weight-loss, tanning, cosmetic, leisure, fitness, spiritual products

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→ Ideological function of celebrity magazines - *deconstruction* & *reconstruction* of celebrity & celebrities

## Implications for Social Marketing

- Celebrities engage in high-risk behaviours shown as shameful and aspirational – how do young people engage with this?
- Becoming a celebrity - aspirational identity narrative available to young people – what does this mean to them, what does it entail?
- Does the ideological tension of reconstruction/deconstruction invalidate celebrities as credible sources for soc mark interventions? OR does this mirror the lives of young people in an authentic manner?

→Critical need to qualitatively expand our understanding of representations and role models

→Downstream – we need to understand what role these dominant narratives perform for any intervention to be effective

→Upstream – whose interests are served?

*Celebrity is not an impartial declaration of merit or talent; it is an economic mechanism designed to keep consumers from asking questions about media ownership, control, and taste-making.*