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doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1664277>

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NADYA SULEMAN AND KATE GOSSELIN IN THE MEDIA:  
EXPLORING IMAGES OF MOTHERHOOD AND REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

by

LISA ANN HANNA

Under the Direction of Marian Meyers

ABSTRACT

This project examines how Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin were represented in the media following the births of their higher order multiples by conducting a critical textual analysis of newspaper and entertainment magazine articles to answer the following questions: How were Suleman and Gosselin portrayed as mothers? And how were they portrayed as recipients of reproductive technology? The findings illustrate that race and class combined with gender to play an important role in determining who has a right to be a mother and what that mother should look like. Traditional stereotypes within media coverage about good mothers and bad mothers reinforced prejudices about who deserves access to reproductive technology and who does not.

INDEX WORDS: Reproductive technology, Nadya Suleman, Kate Gosselin, Infertility treatments, IVF, Celebrity mothers, New momism

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by

LISA ANN HANNA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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by

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December 2010

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank each member of my Thesis Committee for their personal and professional guidance. I would especially like to thank Dr. Marian Meyers, who supervised my thesis and provided me with support and encouragement.

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## Introduction

In 2009, a California woman named Nadya Suleman gave birth to octuplets, causing her to be dubbed “Octomom” by the media. That same year, Kate Gosselin, best known as Kate, the mother of sextuplets and twins who were featured in the reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, was regularly featured in tabloid and entertainment magazines as her marriage unraveled. While their stories are very different, both women conceived higher order multiples (triplets or greater) through reproductive technology (Gosselin, Gosselin, & Carson, 2008; Richards & Olshan, 2009).

Recent media attention – including the above two examples – directed at infertile couples has caused an increased awareness of reproductive technology (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). While many people support access to reproductive technology, many also oppose it. Some people feel that assisted conception is not part of God’s plan (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). Some feel that an embryo is a person at the moment of conception, and that there is no morally acceptable way to participate in procedures where eggs are fertilized outside of the uterus (Mundy, 2007). Some view reproductive technology as an attempt by men to medicalize women’s bodies and control motherhood (Michie & Cahn, 1997).

The media have played an important role in contributing to the controversy that surrounds reproductive technology (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). Most media coverage concerning breakthroughs in infertility treatments has been cautiously optimistic about the benefits of the technology (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). Media coverage of women suffering from infertility is more problematic. The media frequently portray infertility as an upper-middle-class, white women’s disease – even though infertility rates are higher for poor and working-class women – and blame women for their own infertility (Merrick & Blank, 2003; Mundy, 2007). Most

discourse about infertility focuses on women who can afford treatment, and this treatment is often unavailable to those judged by the medical practitioners to be outside of the standards they believe make a good mother (Merrick & Blank, 2003; Michie & Cahn, 1997).

Studies of the news, magazines, advertising, television and movies demonstrate that representations in the media matter (Kinnick, 2009). For example, young people use the mass media to obtain most of their political information, and the mass media significantly influence political opinions (Kinnick, 2009). Political information is not only found in expected places, such as the news, but also in advertisements and entertainment programming (Kinnick, 2009).

In *Backlash*, Susan Faludi (1991) discusses the power that the news media have over shaping the way people think. She explains that, “like any large institution, [the news media’s] movements aren’t premeditated or programmatic, just grossly susceptible to the prevailing political currents” (Faludi, 1991, p. 77). These political currents are reflective of the culture’s dominant ideology. The mass media create a mindset among audiences that supports those in power and authority within the culture (Althusser, 1971; Gitlin, 1980; S. Hall, 1982). The culture in the United States revolves around a system of “white, patriarchal capitalism” (Fiske, 1989, p. 1).

Not only do the mass media reinforce patriarchy, they play a very important role in convincing subordinated groups to buy into this ideology, as well. In *Mediated Women*, Marian Meyers (1999) discusses the ways in which patriarchy works to maintain the status quo:

[Those in power] must embrace and promote particular understandings of race, class, and sexuality—along with traditional gender stereotypes and beliefs—if the ideals, values, and opinions of white, heterosexual, middle- and upper class men are to remain the dominant ideology within society. Indeed, this prevailing ideology must appear natural, inevitable, commonsensical, and consensual to be effective. (p. 7)

Meyers (1999) also explains that the media help those in power gain compliance from dominated groups:

Subordinated groups—women, people of color, the poor and working classes, lesbians and gay men, the elderly—are encouraged to “buy into” the dominant ideology which, in fact, maintains the status quo by keeping them subordinated. Thus, the ideological work of the media consists, in part, of presenting a reality that appears more natural or real than the material circumstances of subordinated people’s lives—even when those circumstances would appear to contradict the media’s messages. (pp. 7-8)

Although those creating messages may have preferred meanings they hope to convey, mass media audiences are not passive receivers of these messages. Critical thinking allows audiences to take different meanings from and possibly resist a message being sent, therefore resisting the dominant ideology (Beail, 2009; Descartes & Kottak, 2009). John Fiske (1987) argues that “the dominant ideology...can be resisted, evaded, or negotiated with, in varying degrees by differently socially situated readers” (p. 179).

In *Women and Media: A Critical Introduction*, Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross (2006) discuss how the news media represent women in our culture:

The ways in which women are represented in news media send important messages to the viewing, listening, and reading publics about women’s place, women’s role, and women’s lives. The media...are arguably the primary definers and shapers of the news agenda and perform a crucial cultural function in their gendered framing of public issues and in the gendered discourses that they persistently promote. (p. 40)

In *Feminism, Front and Center*, Linda Beail and Lilly J. Goren (2009) explain, “analyzing the ways that women’s lives are depicted on television, in film, through magazines, and in literature is legitimate political activism, because those representations are used by women (and men) to make meaning and create realities” (p. 3). Media scholars have established links time and again between media representations and attitudes about women, including women’s own expectations of themselves (Beail & Goren, 2009). Research shows that representations of women in popular culture not only reflect (whether correctly or incorrectly) everyday life, they

also participate in creating it (Beail, 2009). In *Media Morality Tales and the Politics of Motherhood*, Katherine Kinnick (2009) explains that “by what all of these media choose to emphasize and valorize, as well as what they leave out, media play a profoundly important role in constructing societal norms and expectations for women at all stages of their lives” (p. 2). By analyzing popular culture, we gain insight into the current roles and norms of women (Beail, 2009).

Popular culture also creates and shapes our ideas about motherhood (Tong, 1989). Current media representations of mothers often idealize and glamorize motherhood, as well as set up a dichotomy between good mothers and bad mothers (Kinnick, 2009). In *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*, Ann Hall and Mardia Bishop (2009) explain that current representations of mothers sanctify and vilify motherhood while at the same time dismissing the difficulties that mothers face and the contributions that they make to family and society.

Reproductive technology is also changing the ways we view motherhood (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). While it could be argued that infertility treatments strengthen the family by promoting childbearing, these treatments challenge conventional notions of family and have therefore found themselves at the center of the controversies concerning the role of women and the meaning of family in our society (Marsh & Ronner, 1996).

Media coverage of the use of reproductive technology also has implications for legislation concerning who has access to this technology. In *Why We Should Ignore the Octomom*, Kimberly Krawiec (2009) argues that media coverage of Nadya Suleman and her octuplets has led to public outrage concerning reproductive technology and current regulations:

Suleman’s hard facts have led not only to bad regulatory reform proposals, but also to public fury and social hysteria. Critics have heaped both fascination and scorn on

Suleman, and legislators, policymakers, and others have called for a variety of new restrictions on the use of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in response to the Octomom controversy. (p. 120)

This public fury is also affecting public opinion about pending state legislation to make insurance coverage mandatory. In a website where people can voice their opinion about legislation that would mandate infertility insurance coverage in Michigan, a blogger stated, “I don't want to pay for infertility coverage. If someone wants to have a baby that otherwise cannot then let them pay for it. We don't need an Octomom in Michigan. How do you plan to pay for this one?” (“Michigan votes,” 2008).

The facts about mandatory insurance coverage for reproductive technology point in a different direction than public opinion (Marshall, 2009). Researchers have found when insurance coverage includes infertility treatments, the cost to insurers is small and may even save them money, as the risk of higher order multiple pregnancies is lowered (Marshall, 2009). In *Eight is Enough*, Naomi Cahn & Jennifer Collins (2009) explain:

Indeed, one of the reasons that individuals are willing to risk their own health and that of their future children by transferring a large number of embryos is because each individual IVF procedure is so expensive that a patient may only be able to afford one or at most two attempts. If patients knew that insurance would cover multiple IVF attempts, the temptation to gamble on any single procedure would be greatly reduced. (p. 511)

Exploring how the media portray women who use reproductive technologies thus can help us further evaluate and add to existing research concerning women and motherhood. Research in this area will enable us to gain a better understanding of how motherhood is viewed in our culture during a time when new technologies are quickly changing who can become a mother and at what time in their lives they are able to do so.

This research explores how Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin were represented in the media following the birth of their higher order multiples. It employs a feminist theoretical

framework that addresses relations of power and the roles gender, race and class play within representation. By conducting a critical textual analysis of newspaper and entertainment magazine articles, this study asks how Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin were represented in newspaper and entertainment magazine coverage. More specifically, it examines how Suleman and Gosselin were portrayed as mothers and how they were portrayed as recipients of reproductive technology. Using a feminist theoretical perspective to focus on how Kate and Nadya are portrayed in the media as mothers and recipients of reproductive technology allows us to further explore how women who receive infertility treatments are viewed by society. Additionally, this study will allow us to explore in more detail who our society feels deserves access to these treatments and why, and therefore who deserves to become a mother. Insurance coverage for infertility treatments is not mandatory in most states. Because of this, the majority of people receiving infertility treatments are those who can afford to pay for them out of pocket. Exploring how society views reproductive technology and the people who benefit from it can help us to better understand how to bring about change concerning laws that restrict access to reproductive technology.

## Literature Review

### Representations of Women in Popular Culture and Mass Media

Current media messages concerning women can be very conflicted. Meyers (1999) explains, “the representations of women in mediated popular culture are fractured, reflecting multiple and often contradictory images” (p. 7). She argues that current representations of women can be described as “fractured, the images and messages inconsistent and contradictory, torn between traditional, misogynistic notions about women and their roles on the one hand, and feminist ideals of equality for women on the other” (Meyers, 1999, p. 12).

Douglas (1995) argues that contradictory images of women in mass media are both part of our history and prevalent today:

The TV grilling of Anita Hill made many of us shake our fists in rage; Special K ads make most of us hide our thighs in shame... American women today are a bundle of contradictions because much of the media imagery we grew up with was itself filled with mixed messages about what women should and should not do, what women could and could not be. This was true of the 1960s and it is true today. (p. 9)

In *Gendered Media: Women, Men and Identity Politics*, Karen Ross (2010) explains that the gains feminists have made in the past few decades and an increase in women’s economic independence have provoked contradictory responses in the way that contemporary media represent women. For example, a study in 1997 found that women in the media are more likely to be shown in the workplace, seen as authority figures and represented as individuals than they were in past decades (Gill, 2007). However, many of these women fit the mold of the “new” sexy femininity – going to the office but bearing conspicuous cleavage while doing so (Ross, 2010, p. 7). Ross (2010) explains that the older, more obvious forms of sexism have mutated into more subtle, masked forms of sexism.

In *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*, Stephanie Genz (2009) also explores the “new femininity” in current representations of women in the media. She looks at the emergence of the “Supergirl” in popular media, such as the leading female roles in the movie *Miss Congeniality* (2000) and the network television show *Buffy and the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). She explains that while initially these representations of women seem positive, the “Supergirl” is actually “a complexly composite persona who inhabits a problematic social and emotional space and whose identifications involve a continuous play between passivity and activity, vulnerability and strength, individualism and communality” (p. 33). Genz argues that while this new representation of femininity seems positive for women, “in some cases, the promotion of a ‘new’ femininity camouflages the return to conventional modes of feminine behavior and appearance” (p. 11).

In *The City, The Suburbs, and Stars Hollow: The Return of the Evening Soap Opera*, Linda Beail (2009) also analyzes the new representations of women by looking at prime-time melodramas such as *Sex and the City*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Ugly Betty*. She finds that women on these dramadies are portrayed as powerful and occupy center stage. They are independent, successful and have fulfilling careers. She also points out that while these representations of women assume equality, “they fail to grapple deeply with the dilemmas that women as a group may still face or to connect with a larger context of feminist history and political action” (p. 112).

In her article *Feminism: Dead or Alive*, Andrea Stuart (1990) claims that “popular feminism” is being created by the media. She explains that this feminism “is a feminism grounded in consumption as play, it is ‘knowing and ironic,’ and it celebrates individuality, not collective action, pleasure not politics” (p. 30). In *Women, Feminism and Media*, Sue Thornham



(2007) also identifies “popular feminism” in melodramas featuring young, independent women in urban environments. She explains that “such series engage repeatedly with feminist issues, but in an ironic, playful, style-conscious and ambivalent way. Feminism itself is seen to belong to the past; what characterizes the post-feminist woman of popular culture is individualism, sophistication and choice” (p. 16).

In *Gender and the Media*, Rosalind Gill (2007) explains that feminism has also had a major impact on the representations of women in advertising, but this impact has not resulted in many ads that could be considered feminist. For decades feminist scholars have identified advertising as a key site for sexist representations of women (Gill, 2007). By the 1990s, advertisers recognized women’s anger toward their unattainable images of femininity as well as their increased financial independence (Gill, 2007). In response, advertisers developed what Goldman (1992) refers to as “commodity feminism” or “a bid to incorporate the cultural power and energy of feminism while simultaneously ‘domesticating’ its critique of advertising and the media” (p. 84).

An example of commodity feminism is the 2004 Dove campaign that showed “ordinary” women in its ads (Gill, 2007). These ads insisted “beauty comes in many shapes and sizes and ages” and claimed to understand women’s distress at narrow stereotypes in the media (Gill, 2007, p. 88). They included an address for a web site where women could find an invitation to join the Campaign for Real Beauty, a report on body image and young women, and a discussion about idealized body images (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) explains that while Dove claimed to understand women’s feelings about advertising, “the irony of selling creams to slim and firm the body on the back of a campaign for real beauty was not missed by everyone” (p. 88).

While older stereotypes still exist (Gill, 2007), new stereotypes coexist with them in the media and sometimes influence their style (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) explains that in contemporary ads, the ‘wife-mother-housewife’ has been replaced with images of confident, ambitious, sexually assertive women:

Women are not smiling, prone and submissive as they would have been twenty years ago, but instead present an image of femininity that is a hybrid of soft porn and action-adventure computer games. But in the shift from passive to active...from submissive to empowered...sexy “babes” are still selling cars. (pp. 111-112)

Gill (2007) explains that representations of women in contemporary ads are increasingly being refracted through sexually objectifying imagery. Ross (2010) also notes this change and how advertisers use it to their advantage:

One of the great triumphs of the advertising industry in the current decade is its clever insistence that the resexualization of women’s bodies, especially by women themselves, is both evidence of feminist achievement but also of women’s enhanced place in the world. (p. 62)

Many contemporary ads promise women power if they become objects of desire (Gill, 2007). They appear to give women the choice of becoming sex objects to further their own “liberated” interests (Gill, 2007, p. 90). These ads portray sexual objectification as freely chosen by assertive, confident women. Gill (2007) explains that this makes critique of the objectification much more difficult because it is seen as chosen by women, not imposed on them.

Even more significant to the representation of women in advertising is the ongoing trend of borrowing idioms, poses and vocabularies from pornography (Gill, 2007). In *Women in Popular Culture: Representations and Meaning*, Marian Meyers (2008) explains that mainstreaming pornography is increasingly accepted as the norm in the global market. She claims that “pornographic images of women and girls have become conventional within advertising and other popular media, and their mainstreaming has had detrimental effects on

individuals and society” (Meyers, 2008, pp. 19-20). She further explains that even progressive representations of women are affected by the mainstreaming of pornography and the resulting hypersexualization of women’s bodies.

Byerly and Ross (2006) explain that pornography has seeped into the mainstream of many forms of media. This trend can be seen especially in print and television news as they continue to change their focus to lighter, celebrity content. In response to market pressures and increasing competition, contemporary news has shifted its values from public service to entertainment (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) explains that “the news that resulted from these changes has become known as ‘newszak’, ‘bonk journalism’, infotainment’, or simply ‘tabloid news’ – the idea being that nearly all sections of the press, radio and television have become tabloidized” (p. 132). This shift from public service to consumer-led news has caused an increase in the sexualization of news, including the frequently featured pictures of provocatively posed, scantily clad young women in popular papers (Gill, 2007).

Another example of the sexualization of news is the tendency for the press to evaluate all women – whether politicians or pop-stars – by their sexual attractiveness (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) explains, “many newspaper editors seem incapable of printing a story featuring a woman without some evaluation of her attractiveness, or at least a description of her age and hair color” (p. 115). The media also vilify women who do not conform to their physical requirements:

The viciousness with which women are attacked if they do not meet the normative modes of attractiveness demanded by the press is chilling...even the Hollywood actress Kate Winslet found herself subject to attack by the popular press: after starring alongside Leonardo di Caprio in the film *Titanic*, she was dubbed ‘Titanic Kate’ and some newspapers printed diet plans for her to follow. (Gill, 2007, p. 116)

Although the media sends many messages to women, studies have shown that women are not passive receivers of these messages (Beail, 2009). For example, in the 1970’s, Gaye

Tuchman, Arelene Daniels and James Benet (1978) studied how women were portrayed in the media. Their book, *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, explained that mass media symbolically annihilated and trivialized women by depicting them in traditional sex roles and neglecting to challenge sexist norms (Tuchman et al., 1978). But as more research was conducted, feminist critics realized that “the images are not self-evident; women in divergent racial, class or other social identity positions might read the same show quite differently, creating subversive or empowering meanings rather than adopting the ‘preferred’ or hegemonic one” (Beail, 2009, p. 100). In *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, Susan Douglas (1995) discusses how critical readings of media messages were a part of making her and millions of other women feminists. “In a variety of ways the mass media helped make us the cultural schizophrenics we are today, women who rebel against yet submit to prevailing images about what a desirable, worthwhile woman should be” (Douglas, 1995, pp. 8-9). While some women are able to resist media messages, she adds that some messages are harder to resist than others, including, “the ones that insists a forty-year-old woman should have thighs like a twelve-year-old boy’s, and that no self-respecting woman should ever have wrinkles” (Douglas, 1995, pp. 16-17). These messages are harder to ignore because women have been taught that they are objects to be scrutinized, and because “the mass media have been obsessed with defining—and exaggerating—codes of masculinity and femininity, they have ensnared us in an endless struggle for gender self-definition” (Douglas, 1995, p. 17).

### **Media Representations of Mothers**

Like contemporary media representations of women, current media representations of mothers contain conflicting images and ideals. In *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*, Shari Thurer (1994) explains, “the current standards for good

mothering are so formidable, self-denying, elusive, changeable, and contradictory that they are unattainable. Our contemporary myth heaps upon the mother so many duties and expectations that to take it seriously would be hazardous to her mental health” (p. xvi).

In *Representations of Motherhood*, Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Kaplan (1994) explain that “the predominant image of the mother in white Western society is the ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother” (p. 2). Historically, this ideology of the good mother has been prevalent in the mass media. Many researchers have focused on how women have had trouble reconciling this image with their own life experiences. Bassin, Honey and Kaplan (1994) explain that in the 1950s, white women “struggled with a vision of a new mother, one who clearly has needs of her own, but must reconcile these needs with those of her child” (pp. 4-5). Douglas (1995) also discusses how mothers were portrayed in the media in the 1950s. She argues that mothers were “simultaneously revered and loathed” (p. 54). Mothers worked hard while commercials made it seem that machines did it all and that “housewives led a life of leisure” (p. 54). Other media representations of mothers also conflicted with what women were experiencing in real-life. Douglas (1995) explains, “TV moms didn’t work, many real moms we knew did. We got it, even as kids, that there was a big difference between June Cleaver’s attitude toward life and Mom’s. June was never harried, and my mother was always harried” (p. 45).

In *Mommy Angst: Motherhood in American Popular Culture*, Ann Hall and Mardia Bishop (2009) explore how mothers are currently represented in television, news, film and other media. They claim that these representations “attempt to control motherhood and mothers, while paradoxically presenting multiple representations of motherhood” (p. x). Hall and Bishop (2009) argue that despite a greater diversity in the stories media tell about mothers, these stories continue to reinforce the historical ideologies of motherhood. They explain that these stories

idealize and glamorize motherhood, therefore minimizing the challenges that many mothers face. These media narratives also contrast the “good mother” and the “bad mother.” Bad mothers include those who are single, lower income, work outside the home or do not conform in some way to traditional gender roles. In *Selling Anxiety: How the News Media Scare Women*, Caryl Rivers (2007) addresses two more media representations of bad mothers: the dangerous mother who neglects or physically harms her children, and the welfare mother.

In *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women*, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) examine how the media have created standards that are impossible for mothers to achieve. They call this idealization of motherhood “new momism” and define it as “a set of ideals, norms and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond your reach” (pp. 4-5). They argue that the new momism works to reinforce a conservative agenda, make child care solely a mother’s issue, and make raising children a personal instead of social issue. They also explain that the new momism creates competition between good and bad mothers while defining the ideal mother as white and upper-class.

The media have played a central role in reinforcing the new momism. In the 1980s, motherhood became a media obsession, and the media continue their extensive coverage of motherhood today (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). “Women have been deluged by an ever-thickening mudslide of maternal media advice, programming, and marketing that powerfully shapes how we mothers feel about our relationships with our own kids, and, indeed, how we feel about ourselves” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, pp. 6-7). Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that while the new momism insists that women have choices, the only correct choice that exists

within the new momism is to be a totally selfless mother. “We must learn to put on the masquerade of the doting, self-sacrificing mother and wear it at all times. With intensive mothering, everyone watches us, we watch ourselves and other mothers, and we watch ourselves watching ourselves” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 6).

Kinnick (2009) also identifies media portrayals of the self-sacrificing, idealized mother. She points to representations of mothers on shows like *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*. “These shows fueled the myth of the supermom: that doing it all, and doing it all with ease and style, was not only possible but was the new standard for modern moms” (Kinnick, 2009, p. 6). These shows also reinforce the idea that women need no assistance from the workplace or the government and that conveniences such as fast food and maid services are unnecessary (Kinnick, 2009).

In addition to these fictional supermoms, current media representations of mothers also include celebrity supermoms. The celebrity mom profile became popular in the 1980s and increased in popularity in entertainment and women’s magazines in the 1990s (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Douglas and Michaels (2004) claim that the celebrity mom profile is “the most influential media form to sell the new momism, and where its key features were refined, reinforced, and romanticized” (p. 113). During the 1990s, women’s magazines constantly featured “perfect, ‘sexy’ celebrity moms who’ve had babies, adopted babies, been to sperm banks, frozen their eggs for future use, hatched the frozen eggs, had more babies, or adopted a small Tibetan village, all to satisfy their ‘baby lust’” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 8). These profiles explain that the celebrity loves being a mom much more than she loves her work, her fame or her money (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

The celebrity mom profile is popular in current media as well. Celebrity mom profiles can frequently be found in *People* and *Us* magazines as well as featured in shows like *Entertainment Tonight* and *Access Hollywood* (Kinnick, 2009).

Interviews and photos of celebrity moms and their chubby-cheeked offspring paint an idealized picture of maternal bliss, with mothers declaring a new purpose and contentment, a satisfaction unmatched by fame and fortune. In fact, the word “bliss” occurs repeatedly in the headlines of these stories. (Kinnick, 2009, p. 5)

Recent celebrity mom profiles can also be found in mainstream news coverage. Rivers (2007) explains that movie stars, rock stars and young singers increasingly get coverage in the news pages. Rivers (2007) describes how infotainment in the news is a troubling trend: “The news media should be a counterweight to advertising, by showing images of women who are accomplished, educated, interesting – even as they age—but as we’ve seen, movie stars routinely gobble up far more ink than such women” (p. 7).

### **Bad Mothers**

The media also set up a dichotomy between good mothers and bad mothers (Kinnick, 2009). Kinnick (2009) explains that “both entertainment and news media narratives frequently cast motherhood in moral terms, contrasting the ‘good’ mother with the ‘bad’ mother and thus prescribing norms for maternal behavior” (p. 9). Good mothers are those who conform to feminine gender roles, put their family as their highest priority and sacrifice themselves for the family good. Bad mothers are often single, career-driven and self-centered. They may even be portrayed as neglectful and dangerous (Kinnick, 2009; Rivers, 2007).

While the media portray married mothers as good mothers and single mothers as bad mothers, even worse than the single mother is the *willfully* single mother, or single mother by choice (Kinnick, 2009). A popular, albeit dated, example of a single mother by choice is Candice Bergen’s television character Murphy Brown (1988-1998). When this single, career-driven



woman decided to have a child, the show drew criticism from conservatives. Then Vice President Dan Quayle argued that mothers like Murphy Brown were different from those that became single mothers through circumstance – i.e. the desertion or death of their husbands – as seen on *The Partridge Family* (Kinnick, 2009). He argued that Bergen’s character made a “morally incorrect ‘lifestyle choice’” (Goren, 2009, p. 160).

Murphy Brown as a white, well-educated, successful, and wealthy woman provided a different picture of the single mother, who was usually represented as a low-income African American (Goren, 2009). She led the way for a more positive representation of single motherhood in the media, and now single mothers are usually portrayed as more grounded and mature than before they had a child (Goren, 2009). Goren (2009) explains, “it is clear that the cultural presentation of motherhood has adapted, especially single motherhood. *Sex and the City*’s Miranda Hobbs did not get the Murphy Brown treatment” (Goren, 2009, p. 173).

While the media’s acceptance of Murphy Brown as a single mother was a breakthrough for the representation of single mothers in the media, there is still a long way to go (Goren, 2009). Like Miranda in *Sex and the City*, current depictions of “acceptable” single mothers in the media mirror Murphy Brown in important ways. As Goren (2009) explains, “they are wealthy enough and established enough to support a child; they have supportive and attentive friends...and they are generally white, straight, and older than thirty” (p. 161). Single mothers in celebrity profiles follow this same pattern, with Hollywood’s unmarried mothers approvingly profiled in magazines (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). At the same time, *Newsweek* articles titled “The Endangered Family” warn us that “for many African Americans marriage and childbearing do not go together” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 182). In the media “if you [are] really rich,

famous, beautiful, and white, being an unmarried mom [is] way cool. If you [are] poor and black, it [is] degenerate, the epitome of irresponsibility” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 182).

Another example of a “bad” mother is the working mother (Kinnick, 2009). The “family values” rhetoric of the 1990s identified out-of-wedlock births and high divorce rates as part of the moral decline of America. As a result, stay-at-home mothers further strengthened their position as “good” mothers, while working mothers were identified as part of the problem (Kinnick, 2009). In *Media and Middle Class Moms: Images and Realities of Work and Family*, Lara Descartes and Conrad P Kottak (2009) explain:

On the one hand, the increased frequency of working mothers in contemporary media accords with the fact of greater employment of wives and mothers in the United States today. On the other hand, the cultural model of motherhood remains much closer to the 1950s. A persistent component of the American ideal of motherhood is the expectation that a woman sacrifice herself for her children; her expected sacrifices extend to her personal career and aspirations. (p. 50)

In the 1990s the media created a battle between working and stay-at-home mothers, explaining that the working mother viewed the stay-at-home mother as limited, boring and a poor role model to her daughters, and the stay-at-home mother saw her opponent as selfish, neglectful, stressed out and deserving of whatever guilt she felt (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). While the media insisted that a battle existed between these two groups of mothers, studies indicated that during this time millions of women went back and forth between working and staying at home with their children. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that if this war really existed, women “would have to be just as much at war with themselves as with other mothers” (p. 204).

The “mommy track” is another media trend that first appeared in the late 1980s and 1990s. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that the mommy track began as “story after story announced that for working mothers, career success—even working outside the home, for that

matter—was not all it was cracked up to be” (p. 204). These stories, reporting that mothers were quickly retreating from the workplace to the “domestic bliss of home” (p. 204), could be found in *Ladies Home Journal* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and the theme was the same: professional, successful women were happily leaving the workplace for the more fulfilling domestic duties at home because they believed that doing so would be better for their children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

This trend can also be seen in contemporary film and television dramadies as they repeatedly use the plotline of an ambitious, professional woman unexpectedly forced into motherhood for her own betterment (Negra, 2009). In *No Reservations* (2007) Catherine Zeta-Jones plays an emotionally isolated gourmet chef who unexpectedly becomes a mother by inheriting a little girl named Zoe. Zoe helps her transform into a caring, warm person, therefore enabling her to enter into a romance with a fellow chef and ultimately earning her an idealized home life that includes giving up her career (Negra, 2009, p. 66). Similar plotlines where women give up their professional ambitions for motherhood can be found in the movie *Raising Helen* (2004) and the television series *Summerland* (2004-2005) (Negra, 2009).

In *Opting Out Moms in the News: Selling New Traditionalism in the New Millennium*, Mary Vavrus (2007) refers to this current trend as “opting out.” Vavrus (2007) analyzed opting out news stories in 2003 and found that they focused on personal fulfillment and the “tug of motherhood” as reasons why women leave the workplace. There was no mention of other difficulties that working mothers face, such as workplace inflexibility, childcare issues, long work-weeks or gender discrimination (Vavrus, 2007). In *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, Emilie Zaslow (2009) explains that trends in recent representations of working moms in the media have downplayed the difficulty women have creating harmony

between their family and work lives and have ignored the workforce discrimination that women experience. As a result, women who fail at maintaining a work/family balance are viewed as making bad decisions, not as victims of an oppressive system (Zaslow, 2009). Vavrus (2007) concludes that by portraying the decision to work or stay-at-home as a choice that women have, the reality that some of these women were pushed out is ignored. Kinnick (2009) further explains that women may give reasons to reporters that make them look like a “good” mother instead of admitting the truth about their situation:

The cultural pressure to be perceived as a “good” mother may lead mothers to emphasize to reporters the politically correct reason for staying home (for the love of baby) rather than acknowledge that a career was not all it was cracked up to be or that they lacked the political clout in the office to negotiate work-life accommodations. (p. 14)

In *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*, Diane Negra (2009) discusses the career “choice” made by Elizabeth Vargas, then anchor of ABC’s *World News Tonight*. In May 2006, after moving from co-anchor to solo anchor, Vargas suddenly resigned, explaining that her demanding job was affecting her pregnancy and family. She was quoted in *Washington Post* as saying, “For now, this year, I need to be a good mother” (Negra, 2009, p. 3). Many commentators claimed that her resignation was a cover-story created to “save-face” because she had lost out to a power play by Charles Gibson who insisted on becoming sole, permanent anchor of the show (Negra, 2009).

The most extreme example of “bad” mothers in the media is the dangerous mother. Rivers (2007) explains that, “Dangerous Mothers are a current obsession with the news media. Once upon a time, neglectful or even crazy mothers were basically a local story...today, with 24-hour cable news and the internet, bad mothers seem to be everywhere” (p. 56). Recent dangerous mother stories include Susan Smith of South Carolina, who watched her car roll into a lake knowing that her three children inside would drown, and Andrea Yates of Texas, who drowned

her five children in a bathtub while suffering from postpartum psychosis (Rivers, 2007). These stories and others like them have changed the way we think about mothers. Rivers (2007) explains, “while we still like to idealize mommies, suspicion has crept in” (p. 56).

Another dangerous mother media story involves “crack babies” born to drug addicted poor women (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). While news coverage of these “crack babies” was extensive in the 1990s, research showed no such relationship between cocaine use by pregnant women and long-term deficiencies in children existed. Unfortunately, these corrective studies received zero media coverage (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that these stories contributed significantly to “a vigilante culture in which mothers have to be carefully policed, because they are, potentially, their children’s worst enemies” (p. 170).

### **Missing Mothers**

While the media idealize and glamorize motherhood and draw distinctions between good mothers and bad mothers, they also devalue certain types of mothers by neglecting to portray them at all. For example, even though most single parents in the United States are mothers, television and movies more often focus on single fathers (Kinnick, 2009). Kinnick (2009) explains that “the message, according to these media portrayals, is that mom is replaceable, but a good father is essential, and single dads who fulfill this role are heroic” (p. 7).

The trend of missing moms is visible in television programming such as *Hannah Montana* and *Two and a Half Men* (Worthington, 2009). A long list of Disney movies fail to include a mother in their storyline, including more recent releases like *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Chicken Little* (2005) and *Ratatouille* (2007), as well as classics such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) (Worthington, 2009). In *The Motherless "Disney Princess": Marketing Mothers out of the Picture*, Marjorie Worthington (2009) explains that

“mothers have been so effectively erased from these later films that their absence is never remarked on by characters and perhaps even more importantly, their absence is therefore never noticed by the spectators, young girls” (p. 35). When the media fail to include mothers, girls conclude that a mother’s role is not important. This can affect both their relationships with their mothers and their considerations about becoming a mother in the future (Worthington, 2009). “The role of the mother, by being erased in these media, is threatened with devaluation by the culture at large” (Worthington, 2009, p. 42).

Other missing mothers include those who do not conform to societal norms. Thousands of gay and lesbian couples are raising children, but rarely do we see them depicted in everyday circumstances. In *Mommy Queerest: Contemporary Rhetorics of Lesbian Maternal Identity*, Julie Thompson (2002) explains that mainstream media portray lesbians and gay men as “intrinsically non-procreative” (p. 37). When they are featured in the media as parents, it is most often in sensational legal battles or custody cases (Kinnick, 2009). This absence of gay and lesbian mothers in the media perpetuates stereotypes and negates the struggles that these families face. Kinnick (2009) concludes that “what the media does not show us may be just as important as what it does” (p. 7).<sup>1</sup>

While welfare mothers also fall into the missing mothers category, this has not always been the case. Welfare mothers dominated news coverage during the 1980s and early 1990s (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain, “as the network news in the 1980s and 1990s became flashier, and deployed a growing array of images and graphics in their

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<sup>1</sup> A recent exception to this trend is a 2010 film, *The Kids are Alright*, about a married lesbian couple and their two teenage children who were conceived with donor sperm through artificial insemination. When one child contacts his biological father, an unexpected new chapter begins for the family.

newscasts, they used personification, more and more, to symbolize events and trends” (p. 176). These networks began to use welfare mothers to personify the complicated bureaucracy of welfare. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that this increase in stereotypical welfare mothers in the media “played a central role in justifying a major shift in public policy away from declaring a war on poverty in America to declaring a war on welfare, and then more specifically, on welfare mothers and their kids” (p. 176).

In the 1990s, the media painted a specific picture of the welfare mother. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that the media increasingly illustrated stories about welfare through images of black people and then black mothers with more than two kids. Reporters occasionally noted that there were more white people than black people on welfare, though they continued to use images of black people to illustrate stories about welfare (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). In a 1995 story where ABC reported that most welfare recipients were not black, they actually illustrated the point with a picture of a black woman (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) gives us a framework for exploring how the dominant culture has represented and defined black women. She explains that images such as the welfare mother are controlling in that they help to shape external defining realities. Because these images exist throughout popular culture, they have influenced policy and justified discrimination against black women (Collins, 2000). Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that during the 1980s and 1990s “African American mothers and other women of color became the scapegoats onto whom white culture projected its own fears about mothers ‘abandoning’ the home, losing their ‘maternal instinct,’ and neglecting their kids” (p. 176).

The war against welfare mothers in the 1980s and 1990s was actually part of a greater war against all mothers. In order for the new momism to work, there had to be mothers who

illustrated what happened to those that did not comply with the new norms (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Welfare mothers became the delinquents that other mothers could feel comfortable putting into detention (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

At the very same time that we witnessed the explosion of white celebrity moms, and the outpouring of advice to and surveillance of middle-class mothers, the welfare mother, trapped in a “cycle of dependency,” became ubiquitous in our media landscape, and she came to represent everything wrong with America. (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 181)

The welfare mother became a nationally recognized villain. The media warned that the welfare mother would become the norm if mothers did not conform to the new momism and become totally selfless mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

Today, news coverage of welfare mothers has dropped considerably (Rivers, 2007). Rivers (2007) notes that since 1996 the image of the welfare mother has all but vanished from mainstream news media. When the subject of welfare mothers is addressed in the media, it tends to be referred to indirectly through entertainment plots and narratives. In *Hip Mamas: Gilmore Girls and Ariel Gore*, Robin Silbergleid (2009) analyzes the television show *Gilmore Girls* and the mother-daughter relationship between the two main characters, Lorelai and Rory. Lorelai is a single mother who gave birth to Rory at age 16. According to the show, Lorelai was a teenage mom who started out as a maid living in a shed but worked her way up to running an inn and owning her own home (Silbergleid, 2009). The story line tells the audience that she did this through hard work, which ignores the realities of minimum wage workers. Lorelai’s character is seen as “family friendly,” she is acceptable because she has distanced herself from the welfare mom through self-sufficiency, and she has distanced herself from the “bad” single mother by providing for her child (Silbergleid, 2009). In his analysis of reproductive politics following Roe vs. Wade, Rich Solinger explains, “in the minds of many people, legitimate pregnancy has now become a class privilege reserved for women with resources. Other women—those without



resources—who get pregnant and stay pregnant are often regarded as making bad choices” (Silbergleid, 2009, pp. 99-100).

### **Nadya Suleman (Octomom)**

While current news and entertainment coverage of welfare mothers is almost nonexistent, an exception to this is Nadya Suleman. Nadya, born Natalie Denise Doud in Fullerton, California, is of Iraqi and Lithuanian descent. Her mother is of Iraqi and Lithuanian descent (Antonowicz, 2009) and her father is of Iraqi descent and a native of Iraq (Burriss, 2009). Nadya gave birth to octuplets in 2009, causing her to be dubbed “Octomom” (Kinnick, 2009). At the time of the octuplets’ birth, Nadya was living with her mother in Whittier, California while her father was working in Iraq (Kinnick, 2009). Instead of receiving positive media coverage and gifts from diaper companies, Nadya, a single woman on public assistance and pregnant through a sperm donor, was depicted by the press as morally and mentally deficient (Kinnick, 2009).

Nadya used in-vitro fertilization to become pregnant with the octuplets and her six older children - four singletons and a set of twins (Smolowe, 2009b). Nadya’s mother, Angela, claims that Nadya first attempted to get pregnant in high school (Smolowe, 2009b). Angela explains that endometriosis, blocked fallopian tubes, and three miscarriages left Nadya childless, so she finished high school and then earned a psychiatric technician license (Smolowe, 2009b). Nadya later married, but when her first child was born she was already separated from her husband (Smolowe, 2009b). They had been together four years, but he was not the boy’s father (Smolowe, 2009b). Suleman claims that all of her children share the same father – a friend who acted as a sperm donor (Smolowe, 2009b). She claims that they have signed a contract, and he will not be asked to support any of the children (Smolowe, 2009b).

*The Associated Press* reported that Nadya attempted the pregnancy so that frozen embryos remaining from her earlier procedures would not be destroyed (Statemen, 2009). Nadya claims that six frozen embryos were transferred, with one of those embryos splitting into twins, resulting in eight embryos. She was offered selective reduction but declined (Smolowe, 2009b).

The Suleman octuplets are the first octuplets born where all eight babies survived (Wikipedia, 2010b).<sup>2</sup> Given the high cost of IVF, questions have arisen about how Nadya could afford the procedure. Records show she previously worked as a psychiatric technician and earned \$625 a week (Statemen, 2009). Nadya did not appear to be working at the time of her IVF treatment because of a job-related injury. California Department of Industrial Relations records show that Nadya received disability payments in the amount of \$167,908 for a back injury suffered on the job (Statemen, 2009). She received the payments around the time she had most of her children. In an evaluation conducted while Nadya and her husband were attempting reconciliation, doctors noted that she was depressed and anxious (Statemen, 2009).

After the birth of her octuplets, television and print media featured Nadya Suleman in numerous stories. A search for news articles about Octomom in Lexis-Nexis Academic, a database that searches major world publications such as newspapers, magazines, wire services, broadcast transcripts and blogs, showed 2,812 hits with the key word Octomom for all news in English from January 1, 2009, to March 1, 2010. Much of the media coverage and public opinion of Nadya and her octuplets is negative (Wikipedia, 2010c). Nadya received death threats and

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<sup>2</sup> However, they are not the only octuplets ever born. World-wide, seven other births of eight babies being born alive are recorded (Wikipedia, 2010b). In three of the cases, none of the eight babies lived past a few days. In the other cases, at least one baby died within days of birth (Wikipedia, 2010b). In 1998, the only other octuplets born in the United States were born in Houston, Texas. The smallest of the babies died a week after birth and the other seven survived (Wikipedia, 2010b). Additionally, there have been three sets of nonuplet (nine) births recorded in which a few babies were born alive, though none lived longer than a few days (Wikipedia, 2010b).

people have organized protests outside of her home. Many people worry that Nadya's children will burden taxpayers because her family is on public support (Wikipedia, 2010c).

The doctor who performed Nadya's IVF had charges filed against him in January 2010 (Wikipedia, 2010c). The charges included gross negligence and failure to follow guidelines for the number of embryos to return to the uterus based on a patient's age and history (Wikipedia, 2010c). The charges also indicate that fresh embryos were used in each of Nadya's IVF attempts (Wikipedia, 2010c). The doctor has been expelled from the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (Rubin, 2009a). Sean Tipton, ASRM spokesman, explained that his group does not have the power to revoke a doctor's medical license, but that some insurance companies will only cover treatments provided by ASRM members (Rubin, 2009a).

### **Kate Gosselin (Jon & Kate Plus 8)**

Another multiple birth mother that remains in the headlines is Kate Gosselin. She is best known as Kate, the mother of sextuplets and twins that were featured in the reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8*.

After attempting to start a family, Kate was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome. The couple participated in infertility treatments and Kate became pregnant with twins who were born in October of 2000 (Gosselin et al., 2008). After the birth of their twins, Jon and Kate decided they wanted another child. Again they turned to infertility treatments, and Kate was given injections of fertility drugs that stimulated egg production of the ovaries (Gosselin et al., 2008). At the ultrasound confirming that her ovaries were producing follicles (or eggs that could potentially be fertilized) the doctor identified at least three, and possibly four follicles, but reassured the couple that it would be very unlikely that even three would be fertilized (Gosselin et al., 2008). They continued with the treatment and Kate became pregnant. At the initial

ultrasound, the doctor identified six embryos. The doctor suggested selective reduction but both Jon and Kate were strongly against it, and she gave birth to sextuplets in May of 2004 (Gosselin et al., 2008).

Kate had quit her job as a registered nurse early in her pregnancy, and when she was 18 weeks pregnant, Jon lost his job as an IT analyst (Gosselin et al., 2008). Before the sextuplets were born, he obtained another job only to lose it 30 days later (Gosselin et al., 2008). While it is not clear if they were ever on public assistance, her book mentions that the babies had a nurse provided by Medicaid (Gosselin et al., 2008).

The family was featured in *Surviving Sextuplets and Twins*, a special on Discovery Health in September 2005. In September 2006, they were featured in the special, *Sextuplets and Twins: One Year Later* (Gosselin et al., 2008). Both specials received high ratings, so Discovery Health signed the family to a series called *Jon & Kate Plus 8*. It began airing in April 2007 (Wikipedia, 2010a). The family was filmed for three or four days a week and received payment for their appearances on the show. After the show's first two seasons it moved to TLC. It was one of the highest rated programs on TLC, and the fifth season premiere was the most watched show of the evening (Wikipedia, 2010a).

After much media speculation, on June 22, 2009, Jon and Kate publicly announced that they were separating. The episode announcing their separation became the most watched episode of the series, with 10.6 million viewers (Wikipedia, 2010a). In November 2009, TLC changed the name of the show to *Kate Plus 8*, explaining that the series would focus on Kate as a single mother but Jon would appear on the show, just less frequently. In October of 2009, TLC announced that they could no longer film the children, as Jon's lawyers had delivered letters

calling for a cease and desist of production. The last episode of the show was the season five finale that aired in November 2009 (Wikipedia, 2010a).

Kate has been criticized for her intentions of continuing with the show and for allegedly exploiting her children and possibly putting them under emotional distress (Wikipedia, 2010a). She argues that the children are not in danger, and are in fact happy and healthy.

In September 2009, Kate filmed a talk show pilot with Paula Deen. In December 2009, it was announced that Kate is “too controversial” and that she is no longer being considered for the role (Wikipedia, 2010a). In March 2010, ABC announced that Kate would be a contestant on the 10th season of the television show *Dancing with the Stars* (“Kate Gosselin signs on to Dancing With The Stars,” 2010). In April 2010, TLC announced that Kate’s family life would be revisited (without Jon) in *Kate Plus 8* (Levin, 2010). TLC also announced that Kate would be getting her own show, *Twist of Kate*, where she will help women face their own life challenges (Levin, 2010).

In an interview on the *Today* show in April 2010, Kate responded to criticism about how her career as a celebrity is making her an “absentee mom” (Rao, 2010, p.1). “I don’t see another option — I have eight children to provide for...this is a great opportunity. It’s certainly not going to cut the mustard working 12-hour shifts, six days a week, as a nurse” (Rao, 2010, p. 1).

### **Celebrity and Class in Popular Culture**

In *Cultural Production*, Terry Lovell (1998) describes the study of popular culture as the process of examining how cultural objects are produced, the content of the objects, and the reception and meanings that the general public attributes to them. In *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, Stuart Hall (1998) argues that popular culture is not only socially and ideologically oriented, but that it also contains an economic component that is inescapable in the modern

Western world. One of the foundations of a capitalist society is the difference between those that have and those that have not. This divide affects both the production and consumption of cultural objects (Stuart Hall, 1998). Hall (1998) explains, “those from whom popular culture springs and those for whom it is created are not always the same people. In fact, the ability to produce and disseminate popular culture largely determines which constitutive social relations are reproduced in society” (p. 442).

In *American Idolatry: Celebrity, Commodity and Reality Television*, Christopher Bell (2010) argues that popular culture creates and maintains hegemonic structures:

In a society that is dominated by semiotics and media culture (particularly visual culture), popular media occupy a prominent (some might say dominate) position in the dissemination of hegemonic principles...with every turn of the television channel, radio station, or magazine page, one is being told how to look, believe, and behave—and those messages being transmitted work to the benefit of certain groups at the expense of other groups. (p. 17)

Celebrities play an important role in transmitting those messages. In *Our Celebrity Madness: A Reflection of Consumerism*, Tirdad Derakhshani (2008) explains that celebrities are “the ultimate sellers. They sell us things. And because of the intimacy and kinship we feel for them, they humanize the process” (p. 30). Celebrities not only sell us products, they also sell us ideology. Celebrities provide cultural standards while simultaneously acting as cultural examples for how to behave -- or not behave (Keats, 2008).

What constitutes celebrity or fame is difficult to define (Bell, 2010). In *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, P. David Marshall (1997) explains that the term celebrity has an “inherently ambiguous meaning” and is often used to describe a more fleeting type of fame in contemporary society (p. xii). In *Celebrity*, Chris Rojek (2001) identifies three types of celebrity status in popular culture: ascribed, attributed, and achieved. He defines ascribed celebrity as the celebrity of ideological descent. For example, “the king is respected

because he is the king” (p. 17). Rojek (2001) defines attributed celebrity as “the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries” (p. 18). He defines achieved celebrity as the celebrity of accomplishment, and he explains that achieved celebrities are recognized for having rare skills and/or talents (p. 18). While celebrities may be known for their skills and talent, Bell (2010) explains that they must also “work” at their celebrity in “real-life” (pp. 80-81). “She must appear on the red carpet, selling glamour, ethereality, and Versace. She must grant magazine interviews and talk about her dog and her children” (Bell, 2010, p. 81).

In *Stars*, Richard Dyer (1998) also discusses the on/off screen personas of celebrities. He explains that celebrities “express the particular notion we hold of the ‘individual’” (p. 8). He describes the audience as “obsessively and incessantly searching the star persona for the real and authentic” (Dyer, 1998, p. 17). While the audience knows that celebrities are constructed, the media encourages the audience to think of celebrities in terms of “really.” This question (what is the star really like?) depends on the existence of an “inner, private, essential core” which supports the idea of individualism, a notion that capitalist society depends upon (Dyer, 1998, p. 10).

While one idea of celebrity involves the physical human being that celebrity represents, another idea of celebrity involves the economic and social concepts that make celebrity a cultural construct. Rojek (2001) argues that celebrity culture brings together fame, selling, and desire:

Capitalism requires consumers to develop abstract desire for commodities...celebrity culture is therefore partly the expression of a cultural axis organized around abstract desire. It is an essential tool of commodification since it embodies desire. In particular, it provides consumers with compelling standards of emulation. (p. 187)

Bell (2010) claims that “celebrity has become the prism through which mainstream measures of success are filtered in Western society” (p. 71). Marshall (1997) also points out that

celebrity “operates as a way of providing distinctions and definitions of success in business, politics, and art” (p. x). He points to the discursive power given to celebrities, which gives them a voice in the media system that is seen as “legitimately significant” (p. x). Bell (2010) explains that celebrity “is not merely a commodity or status, but an intricate system through which meaning is made and social relations constituted” (p. 5).

In her research of readers of tabloid magazines, Sofia Johansson (2006) found that readers shifted between humanizing and exalting celebrities:

On the one hand, readers perceived celebrities as inhabiting a separate, glamorous existence, while on the other, fundamental human similarities were stressed. Both approaches were integral to the pleasure of reading, as the apparent “ordinariness” of celebrities appeared to invite a play with identity, allowing readers to imagine themselves in a different role...part of the reading pleasure, then, derived from the dissimilarity of the celebrity’s life, making the imaginary leap into a different world all the more fulfilling. (p. 349)

In other conversations with her readers, Johansson (2006) noted that they were involved in a balancing act between distancing themselves from celebrities and recognizing similarities in aspects of their lives. At times reading about celebrities served as reminders of participants’ own grim circumstances. Johansson (2006) explains that for the readers, tabloid celebrity stories “offered a way to cope with difficult circumstances, while they simultaneously highlighted the poverty of the everyday, coupling the pleasure of identity play with the pain of its boundaries” (p. 351). This contradiction can be better understood by looking at the dramatization of social mobility.

In her discussion of celebrities and class-passing, Gwendolyn Foster (2005) explains, “We all class-pass. We all negotiate class. We all experience and perform class. Yet very little discussion of class occurs, very little attention is paid to class in popular culture” (p. 1). In *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, bell hooks (2000) notes the absence of a discussion concerning class:



“As a nation we are afraid to have a dialogue about class even though the ever-widening gap between rich and poor has already set the stage for ongoing and sustained class warfare” (p. 1). Foster (2005) explains that class is constantly expressed in popular culture, but few people (besides a limited number of academics working in cultural studies and sociology) are prepared to comment on it. She argues that the desire for class mobility “seems as normative and opaque as the American Dream itself. Class-passing simply has been normed so intrinsically that it no longer stands out, much like whiteness. Like whiteness, it has been dangerously adopted as a norm” (Foster, 2005, p. 3).

Foster (2005) explains that in popular culture, audiences are told that they are just like celebrities and that celebrities are just like them. She claims that the idea of “we are just like you and you can class-pass as a celebrity” is the “not-so-secret” message sent by the media (Foster, 2005, pp. 64-65).

We are flooded with images of products we are suppose to desire, products that we can ill afford, but in the new American Dream (no, nightmare) we are repeatedly told that we can afford the same fetishized products that the celebrities embody...the burden of class representation *requires* that we consume the things we are told to desire. (Foster, 2005, p. 67)

Foster (2005) explains that the invitation to class-pass masks the existence of harsh social realities for many people. In *Reposition Class: Social Inequality in Industrial Societies*, Gordon Marshall (1997) discusses class structure at the turn of the twentieth century: “it seems we may have mistaken changes in the shape of the class structure for changes in social fluidity...More ‘room at the top’ has not been accompanied by greater equality in the opportunities to get there” (p. 5).

Foster (2005) claims that struggles regarding class are no longer focused in labor unions and corporate takeovers. Instead, “class struggle is deeply embroiled in the pages of celebrity

fantasy that declass us all into positions of submission and utterly deluded fantasies such as boob-jobbing our way into the life of Britney Spears” (p. 82).

### **Reality TV and Celebrity**

While past attempts to define reality television have focused on “real life” and “real people,” more recent attempts to define reality TV have moved away from programming that tries to capture life as it is lived to more traditional formatted environments (Corner, 2002). Increased focus has also been placed on celebrities instead of “ordinary” people (for example *The Osbournes*) and in celebrity versions of existing reality TV shows (for example *Celebrity Big Brother*) (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). In *Understanding Reality Television*, Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (2004) explain, “ultimately and importantly it is perhaps only possible to suggest that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as ‘Reality TV’ is primarily its discursive, visual and technological *claim* to ‘the real’” (p. 4). In *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*, James Friedman (2002) suggests:

The proliferation of reality-based programming... does not represent a fundamental shift in television programming, but the industry’s reliance on “reality” as a promotional marketing tool is unprecedented. What separates the spate of contemporary reality-based television... [is] the open and explicit sale of television programming as a representation of reality. (p. 7)

Reality TV now occupies a place at the front of television culture (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). Holmes and Jermyn (2004) explain:

Reality TV’s popularity seems to “speak” particularly clearly to the ways in which broadcasters are seeking to attract audiences in the multi-channel landscape, the ways in which television is harnessing its aesthetic and cultural power and, as an increasingly multimedia experience, the ways in which it resonates so extensively in the cultural sphere. (p. 1)

With Reality TV comes a new type of fame and celebrity. In *Approaching Celebrity in Big Brother*, Su Holmes (2004) explains:

A number of factors create a new celebrity relationship we see with Reality TV, including the hybrid nature of Reality TV (the blurring of fictional and factual forms to produce a form primarily organized around a rhetoric of entertainment); the increasing personalization of factual programming based around character narratives and performance; and its adoption of a serial form (not forgetting, of course, the increasing cultural obsession with celebrity culture more generally). (pp. 114-119)

Holmes (2004) explains that reality TV also “plays with the boundaries between on/in the media with its ‘celebration’ of the ‘ordinary’ person” (p. 114). She claims that reality TV has blurred the expectation that “ordinary people” not be in the media at all, only “on” the media in limited circumstances (p. 114)

In *Class and Transformation in Lifestyle Television*, Gareth Palmer (2004) explains that reality television has failed to acknowledge that many of its subjects are members of “that forgotten and rarely acknowledged sector once known as the working class” (p. 189). Foster (2005) explains that in reality television we are “barraged with images of real people as they class-pass into the public arena of celebrity where private persons indeed are an illusion” (p. 68). Many reality shows (such as *Survivor*, *The Real World* and *Big Brother*) make celebrities out of “ordinary” people. Foster (2005) claims that they also reveal that celebrity is about “performing before the camera, giving up your privacy; eating snakes on *Fear Factor* or being punked on *Punk’d*, we are all celebrities—so says the television” (p. 68). Foster (2005) explains that we are not only invited to class-pass, we are commanded to do so. This is what makes reality TV so attractive to viewers.

The point of contact, the rupture and fissure of class difference, is what lies at the heart of these reality programs. They enable their protagonists to realize their American dreams of professional success while also insisting that they remain in their “places.” But the difference is perhaps that reality shows enable the audience to distance themselves from any painful reminder of their own class or race differences or anxieties. (Foster, 2005, p. 7)

Reality TV programming can actually soothe our society's anxiety over these differences. In *Socially Soothing Stories? Gender, Race and Class in TLC's A Wedding Story and A Baby Story*, Rebecca Stephens (2004) looks at what TLC refers to as "life unscripted" and what is described as "happy TV" by one of the network's programming heads (p. 191). Stephens (2004) explains that *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story* "feature an endless parade of brides leaning on their fathers' arms, women puffing and grimacing as another healthy baby emerges from their carefully draped bodies, and couples gazing lovingly into one another's eyes as the sun sets/the guests party/the baby coos in their arms" (p. 191).

Stephens (2004) argues that there is a "blurring of public and private realms that happens in these shows, and in the connection between television and public discourse. Despite the idea that marriage and motherhood are essentially private concerns, the history of twentieth-century state interventions into these seemingly private realms is long and invasive" (p. 193). Stephens (2004) explains that the topics of the programs, marriage and fertility, are entangled in American society with anxieties about gender, race, class, and sexual orientation:

"Welfare mothers," for instance, is still a term unfortunately and incorrectly immediately associated with African Americans in the popular mind, and in 2002, as in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debates about immigration restriction still centre on the fertility of women of color and perceived fears that a racial underclass will someday dominate over "real" (sub-text, white) United States citizens...what this message boils down to is a dichotomy of "us" versus "them" based on consumption: those who can consume like "us" are celebrated; those who cannot must be *regulated*. (p. 206)

Stephens (2004) states that these TLC shows address social anxieties about motherhood and marriage that exist in public policy debates and in popular culture:

*A Baby Story* and *A Wedding Story* echo public policy in their method of alleviating or soothing prevailing social uncertainties – which is, unfortunately, to ignore the complexities of gender, race and class in favor of a fantasy vision of some mythic past where gender norms were absolute, the nuclear family serenely solved individual and social ills, and consumption is the ultimate normalizing rite. (pp. 192-193)

## Otherness

In *Theorizing Representing the Other*, Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1996) explain that the concept of woman as Other in contemporary feminism is based on the central claim that Otherness is projected on to women by men, in the interest of men. In this way women are constructed as inferior or abnormal (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996).

However, women do not have a monopoly on Otherness. Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (1991) explain that in feminist theory the “assumption that gender unites women more powerfully than race and class divides them has increasingly been challenged by women (and men) Othered because of (for example) their ‘race,’ ethnicity, class, sexual identity, disability, or age” (p. 2).

Throughout history, people world-wide have made distinctions between “we” and “they.” In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) explains:

No group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself...[T]o the native of a country, all who inhabit other countries are “foreigners”; Jews are “different” for the anti-Semite, Negroes are “inferior” for American racists, aborigines are “natives” for colonists, proletarians are the “lower class” for the privileged. (p. 52)

Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996) explain that “Colonialism has not involved simply the use of physical force and military might; it has also involved the construction of representations or discourses of the oppressed which serve to justify and legitimate the oppressor” (p. 5). Colonized and oppressed peoples are represented as Others in a way that reinforces the power of those in control (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996). Amina Mama (1995) explains, “White supremacy can thus be conceptualized as a set of discourses and practices that subjugated non-European people and cast them in the position of subjected Others, while it advanced the interests of European nations” (p. 17).

Antonio Gramsci (1973) adopted the concept of the subaltern (meaning inferior rank) to refer to groups in society that are subjected to the authority of the ruling classes. He claimed that the subaltern classes had a complex history that was necessarily fragmented as even in rebellion, the subaltern are subject to the activities of the ruling class (Gramsci, 1973). The concept of the subaltern was then adopted by the Subaltern Studies Historians Group that used the term in their work to refer to all oppressed groups and as a word to describe a general attribute of subordination (Guha & Spivak, 1988).

In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Gayatri Spivak (1988) criticizes Gramsci and the main assumptions of the Subaltern Group concerning the concept of the subaltern. She criticizes the claim that the subaltern group is autonomous and argues that this claim makes the concept ineffective as it defines the subaltern as a homogenous entity (Spivak, 1988).

The subaltern holds a subordinate position that is always in relation to but stands outside of and ambivalent to the central locus of power. However, the subaltern itself is a heterogeneous group. Radical political movements tend to romanticize subaltern and put the responsibility upon the subaltern to liberate themselves despite their place outside the system. (Spivak, 1988, p. 303)

Spivak (1988) argues against this essentialism of the subaltern because they cannot be easily put into categories. She explains, “Leftist intellectuals who romanticize the oppressed...essentialize the subaltern and thus replicate the colonialist discourses they purport to critique...A person’s or group’s identity is relational, a function of its place in a system of differences” (Spivak, 1988, p. 276). Spivak (1988) further explains that the dominant discourse provides the framework and categories that the subaltern use to speak, therefore no act of resistance occurs entirely separate from this dominant discourse.

The subaltern is not privileged (within the dominant discourse), and does not speak in a vocabulary that will get a hearing in institutional locations of power. The subaltern enters the official and intellectual discourse only rarely and usually through mediating commentary of someone more at home in those discourses. If the problematic is

understood in this way, it is hard to see how the subaltern can be capable of speaking. (Spivak, 1988, p. 304)

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) explores how Eastern cultures are depicted by writers, researchers, and artists in the West. Said (1978) explains that a pervasive Western tradition exists in academia and art of prejudiced interpretations of the East. Said (1978) claims that these interpretations are shaped by European imperialism and calls this tradition

Orientalism:

Orientalism is the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient...by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient...It also tries to show that European culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (p. 3)

Said (1978) explains that Orientalism is “cultural hegemony at work” and that it is never far from the “collective notion of identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (p. 6).

Indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (Said, 1978, p. 6)

Said (1980) also argues that Orientalism is a collection of false assumptions that make up the basic Western attitudes toward the Middle East. He explains that Orientalism is marked by a “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture” (Said, 1980, p. 1). Said (1980) argues that romanticized images of Middle East and Asia in Western culture has been used as justification for European and American colonial ambitions.

So far as the United States seems to be concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially seen as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Moslem life has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Arab world. What we have instead is a series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world

presented in such a way as to make that world vulnerable to military aggression. (Said, 1980)

In *They and We: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States*, Peter Rose (2006)

explains that much of the social practices and thinking in the United States is shaped by the European tendency to divide humans in terms of visually distinct “racial” classifications. He claims that these categories are usually color-keyed and referred to as “white,” “black,” “brown,” and “yellow” (p. 11). Rose (2006) explains:

If one were true to the scheme of using only specific criteria, not all would fit into the predetermined categories in the heuristic model...in this society, like many others, racial designations are not merely simple ways of classifying people according to their genetic makeup. Rather, “race” is used for locating or placing people according to culturally defined social positions. (p. 12)

In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2005) state that race “is not something that is objective, inherent, or fixed...[races] are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 7).

According to Richard Dyer (1997) white people are seen as “just people” or “just human,” while all other people are considered “something else” (p. 2). Dyer (1997) also explains that lower classes are often marked by a lack of whiteness:

In art and poetry working-class people are rendered darker than middle- or upper-class people. Class as well as such criteria of proper whiteness as sanity and non-criminality are expressed in terms of degrees of translucence, with murkiness associated with poor, working-class and immigrant white subjects. (p. 113)

Rose (2006) explains:

A critical aspect of placement in the status of hierarchy of American society is keyed to color—and to gender as well...most of the leadership positions and much of the power is held by white males. The double traits are related to perceptions deeply rooted in this culture. (p.10)

In the United States, women of color have been put “in double jeopardy” (Rose, 2006, p. 17).

Add class and many nonwhite poor women are put in “triple jeopardy,” as the effects of gender,



race and class add up in intensity of impact (Rose, 2006, p. 17). However, Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins (1995) warn, “seeing race, class and gender only in additive terms misses the social structural connections between them and the particular ways that different configurations of race, class, and gender affect group experience” (pp. xi-xii).

The idea of “us” versus “them” can also be found in the media. In *Race, Multiculturalism and the Media: From Mass to Class Communication*, Clint Wilson and Felix Gutierrez (1995) explain that coverage of non-Whites in American news media is controlled by gatekeepers and those who influence them. The coverage of non-Whites in the news media reveals the attitudes that are held by the majority of the American population (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995).

Because news content, in theory, reflects what is really important to society, the coverage of people of color in mainstream news media provides insight into their social status. By their professional judgments, the gatekeepers of news reveal how consequential they regard non-Whites in American society by determining the ways in which they are interpreted to the general audience. (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995, p. 151)

Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) explain that non-Whites are more likely to be covered by news media if they are involved in hard news (such as those that involve police action) or soft news involving holiday coverage (such as Chinese New Year). They also claim that reporting in recent years focuses on non-Whites who lack job and basic language skills, live in crime-infested neighborhoods, and are probably not United States citizens:

The old stereotype of non-Whites as violent people who are too lazy to work and who indulge in drugs and sexual promiscuity are prominent. In fact, the preponderance of such reporting has led some observers to say the news media have offered an image of non-Whites as “problem people,” which means they are projected as people who either have problems or cause problems for society. The legacy of news exclusion thus leads to the general audience seeing people of color as a social burden—the “us versus them” syndrome carried to another dimension. (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995, pp. 157-158)

## **Infertility and Reproductive Technology**

Infertility affects about 7.3 million women and their partners in the United States ("Assisted reproductive technology: Home," 2010). Infertility is defined by the medical community as failure to become pregnant after 12 months or longer of unprotected intercourse ("Assisted reproductive technology: Home," 2010). In the past, little hope existed for infertile men and women. Current advances in technology now offer hope to at least some of those suffering from infertility (Mundy, 2007). Diagnostic procedures such as laparoscopies and treatments including new fertility drugs, in vitro fertilization, microinjection of sperm and embryo transfers with donated eggs are now available not only to couples struggling with infertility, but to anyone who can afford them (Mundy, 2007).

The demand for infertility treatments has become big business in the United States. Diagnosing causes for infertility can cost from \$3,000 - \$8,000, and while more simple treatments cost around \$1,000, costs for "high-tech" procedures are much more expensive (Spar, 2006). A single in vitro fertilization attempt can cost more than \$12,000, and procedures including an egg-donor can cost over \$16,000 (Spar, 2006). In 2004, an estimated 1 million couples in the United States sought infertility assistance, resulting in the infertility industry generating more than \$3 billion in revenue (Spar, 2006).

The most expensive and controversial forms of infertility treatment are referred to as assisted reproductive technologies (ART) ("Assisted reproductive technology: Home," 2010). ART procedures are defined as those where eggs are surgically removed from a woman's ovaries, combined with sperm in the lab, and then returned to her body or the body of another woman. Treatments where only sperm are handled, such as intrauterine (otherwise known as artificial) insemination or where women take medicine to stimulate egg production but do not

have the eggs retrieved are not considered ART procedures ("Assisted reproductive technology: Home," 2010). The most common and well-known form of ART is in vitro fertilization (IVF). The use of IVF treatment increased dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. While initially used only for women with blocked fallopian tubes, IVF has become a treatment for more ambiguous cases of infertility as well (M'Charek & Keller, 2008).

IVF treatment begins with hormone therapy that causes the ovaries to produce up to twelve eggs in one cycle (super ovulation) (M'Charek & Keller, 2008). The eggs are monitored through hormone checks and ultrasound. Once the eggs are mature, they are retrieved by inserting a hollow needle through the uterus to the ovary. The eggs then are placed in a Petri dish and are fertilized with sperm. After three to five days, embryos are placed back into the uterus. Usually only one or two embryos are returned to the uterus, though the number may vary depending on the woman's age or cause of infertility. Any remaining embryos are then frozen for later use, disposed of, or used in scientific research (M'Charek & Keller, 2008).

While very expensive and invasive, success rates for ART procedures do not offer much hope to patients. In 2006, of 138,198 ART cycles performed, only 41,343 resulted in live births, giving ART only a 30 percent success rate for that year ("Assisted reproductive technology: Home," 2010). Also, regulations for these procedures are inconsistent and can sometimes be contradictory from state to state (Merrick & Blank, 2003). States have recently turned to professional organizations like the American Society of Reproductive Management (ASRM) to develop guidelines for reproductive services (Merrick & Blank, 2003). While these guidelines provide some control over how the technologies are used, there is no legal way to ensure compliance. Instead, organizations must rely on the use of ethical sanctions and the revoking of

accreditation privileges as punishment for not following suggested guidelines (Merrick & Blank, 2003).

### **Ethical Views of Reproductive Technology**

Marsh and Ronner (1996) explain that since the 1980s and 1990s, considerable media attention has been directed at infertile couples. This attention has caused increasing awareness of reproductive technology in academia and popular culture. While many people support access to reproductive technology, many others speak out against it (Marsh & Ronner, 1996).

In *Feminist Ethics and In Vitro Fertilization*, Sherwin (1987) explains that philosophers with a theological perspective object to reproductive technology because it is not considered part of God's plan for families. Marsh and Ronner (1996) further explain:

Most of the condemnation of in vitro fertilization and the technologies that emerged out of it came principally from the Catholic Church, which opposed any method of conception that did not result from the sexual act, and from antiabortion forces, who disapproved of a technique that involved the destruction of at least some of the embryos created. In an even more sensational way than had artificial insemination, these new techniques subverted the link between sex and reproduction and challenged traditional verities. (p. 251)

Philosophers who prefer utilitarianism generally take a more scientific approach. They approve of reproductive technology, arguing that there is no clear meaning of "natural," including one that would require special moral status. They believe that all medical and human activity could be viewed as interfering with nature and that this idea of interference is not a reason to avoid action (Sherwin, 1987). Philosophers of deontological orientation, or those that believe the moral content of an action is not wholly dependent on its consequences, also approve of the availability of reproductive technology. They believe in autonomy, individual rights and religious freedom. They believe the use of reproductive technologies is a private matter and should be decided by those seeking the treatment and medical specialists (Sherwin, 1987).

Moral problems concerning fertilized eggs are more controversial (Mundy, 2007). Superovulation often results in surplus eggs. As mentioned previously, several eggs are collected and fertilized during ART cycles. While a number of these are introduced into the uterus, frequently cycles produce “extras.” A count performed in 2002 showed that 400,000 excess frozen embryos existed in the United States (Mundy, 2007). Based on the number of treatment rounds performed since then, it is fair to assume that the number has now grown to over half a million (Mundy, 2007). Some are frozen for future cycles or used in research. Others are simply discarded. To those that feel an embryo is a person at the moment of conception, none of these options are acceptable (Mundy, 2007). In their opinion, there is no morally acceptable way to participate in ART procedures where eggs are fertilized outside of the uterus (Mundy, 2007).

In addition, some argue that reproductive technology is harmful to the environment by contributing to overpopulation. They argue that infertile couples should adopt or refrain from having children. In *The Ethics of Overpopulation*, Martin Rundkvist (2008) notes three ways to remedy overpopulation: limiting people to having only two children; allowing everyone access to contraceptives, abortion, surgical sterilization and adoption; and limiting access to infertility treatments. Rundkvist (2008) argues that “it is unethical to use public money to support infertility treatments. Let those unfortunate enough to need such treatment pay their own way or adopt” (p. 1).

While population control is important in the United States where environmental impacts such as human consumption and sustainability are serious concerns, the ecological perspective of restricting access to reproductive technology is also important in developing countries. Ruth Macklin (1995) argues that a more effective way of limiting population growth there is through educating women and other modes of development. “Denying infertility treatments to infertile

persons is simply ill-considered population control policy. A more effective means to manage population size is to assure a right to education” (Macklin, 1995, p. 276).

In a similar vein, Emily Evens (2004) argues that it is not always wise to encourage infertile couples to adopt children:

The degree to which adoption is culturally and individually acceptable varies however and...studies show a general lack of adoptable children and social customs that resist both giving up and taking in children in many places. Denying treatment for infertility is ultimately an ill considered population control measure; assurance of universal education or improved access to contraceptives would be more effective means to reducing population pressures. Whether used against the funding of infertility treatment or in favor of adoption, the overpopulation argument denies the importance of reproductive autonomy and distributes social responsibility for population pressures unfairly on the infertile. (p. 36)

### **Reproductive Technology and Feminist Theory**

Feminists are deeply divided when it comes to reproductive technologies. In *Confinements: Fertility and Infertility in Contemporary Culture*, Helena Michie and Naomi Cahn (1997) explain that some feminists cautiously accept new advancements in reproductive technologies and view them as giving women more reproductive choices. Other feminists are extremely suspicious of reproductive technologies and see them as an attempt by men to medicalize women’s bodies and control motherhood (Michie & Cahn, 1997). In *Reproductive Technologies, Surrogacy Arrangements, and the Politics of Motherhood*, Laura Woliver (2009) explains that scientific research and practices that seem objective often disguise and justify existing systems of dominance and control. For this reason, many modern feminists view reproduction and its medical and legal issues skeptically (Woliver, 2009). Woliver (2009) further explains that “new reproductive technologies and surrogacy arrangements are subtly altering women’s lives by making conception, gestation, and birth something that predominately male authorities increasingly monitor, examine and control” (p. 361). Sherwin (1987) explains, “IVF

as practiced does not altogether satisfy the motivation of fostering individual autonomy. It is after all the sort of technology that requires medical intervention and hence it is not really controlled by the women seeking it, but rather by the medical staff providing this ‘service’” (p. 273). These treatments are experimental, and recent studies show few women undergoing reproductive technology procedures understand that success rates are low (Spar, 2006). Also, these treatments are only provided to women who can afford them, and many times women are screened to determine that they meet the personal values of those administering the technology (Merrick & Blank, 2003).

Marsh and Ronner (1996) argue that feminist opponents of reproductive technology oversimplify the desire many women have to bear children and devalue a woman’s ability to create a reproductive strategy. They claim that “women in infertile relationships are not merely passive victims of a medical establishment that preys on their desires for a child but are active agents in seeking out medical solutions” (Marsh & Ronner, 1996, p. 252). They recognize that pressure to participate in therapy does exist, but that this pressure comes less from the medical establishment and more from cultural expectations that women will be mothers. They explain that this desire for a child is “socially produced” but only in so far as all human needs and desires are socially produced (Marsh & Ronner, 1996).

Many feminists are also concerned with class divisions concerning the availability of reproductive technologies (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). In *Reproductive Issues in America*, Janna Merrick and Robert Blank (2003) explain that the high costs of reproductive treatments create economic barriers that can only be overcome by patients with adequate financial resources. Many insurance plans do not cover infertility services, and most plans do not cover IVF, which is still viewed as an experimental procedure (Merrick & Blank, 2003). While groups such as

RESOLVE (part of the National Infertility Association) continue to lobby for state legislation that would mandate infertility coverage, so far courts have given mixed signals regarding insurance coverage (Merrick & Blank, 2003). Ten states have passed legislation forcing insurance companies in their states to provide coverage for IVF and other related infertility services, but there is little evidence that women without health insurance will have access to these services (Merrick & Blank, 2003). Merrick and Blank explain, “for those women who are unable to obtain assisted reproduction for lack of economic resources, reproduction as a positive right remains unfulfilled” (Merrick & Blank, 2003, p. 55).

### **Representations of Reproductive Technology in Popular Culture**

Reproductive technology is more than medical treatment for infertility. Marsh and Ronner (1996) argue that “it represents a particular way of conceptualizing reproductive choice, both for those seeking pregnancy and for society as a whole” (p. 245). Public attitudes about reproductive technology have changed over time. In the 1950s, little technology existed to treat infertility and most medical intervention was diagnostic only. During this period, public attitudes about infertility and those that treated the condition were almost all positive. This changed in the 1960s and 1970s, when fertility drugs became available and breakthroughs in new technologies took place (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). Attitudes towards reproductive technology started to change, and American media started to focus their attention on overpopulation and birth control. Marsha and Ronner (1996) explain that “although infertile couples continued to seek solutions to their problem, they did so in a fundamentally different cultural climate, one which, at least in the view of some of them, was less sympathetic to their anguish and their desires” (p. 242). In *Everything Conceivable: How Assisted Reproduction is Changing Men, Women, and the World*,



Liza Mundy (2007) explains, “In the twenty-first century the radical thing may not be to end a pregnancy, but to begin one (p. 23).

The media have played an important role in contributing to the controversy that surrounds reproductive technology. Most media coverage featuring breakthroughs in infertility treatments has been cautiously optimistic about the benefits of the technology (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2003). However, media coverage of women suffering from infertility has been more problematic. Since the 1990s, stories identifying an infertility epidemic, or rising infertility rates, have persisted in spite of demographic evidence to the contrary (Mundy, 2007). These stories reinforce the idea that women are to blame for their infertility by suggesting that increases in infertility rates are the result of the women’s movement and working women’s desires to postpone childbirth (Mundy, 2007). Recent media coverage also portrays middle-class women as the primary victims of infertility, even though current studies show that more poor and working-class women are infertile (Merrick & Blank, 2003).

While in the past infertility was considered a personal issue, infertility and reproductive technology have become the focus of considerable public attention (Scratchfield, 1995). Breakthroughs in reproductive technologies make good media stories, contributing to the amount of coverage infertility treatments receive. Scratchfield (1995) explains that “the popular press presents detailed stories about the frustrations and agonies of the infertile and the wondrous resolutions “available” with medical intervention...people’s attention has been drawn to the issue of infertility and its possible resolution” (pp. 138-139). As more media attention has been given to infertility and reproductive technologies, the public has become more convinced that there is an increase in infertility. Scratchfield (1995) argues that this makes couples trying to conceive more anxious about their potential for fertility problems, increasing the demand for

infertility services. This increase contributes to the perception that infertility is on the rise (Scritchfield, 1995). While the press publishes numerous articles that cite an infertility epidemic, Scritchfield (1995) explains, “there is no indication of increase—dramatic or otherwise—in the incidence of reproductive impairment” (p. 131).

### **Blaming Women**

As the recent infertility epidemic continues to receive media coverage, and the medical community and society in general have responded by blaming women (Mundy, 2007), “the tone of this blaming has been subdued, but the theme is nevertheless clear: Women should change the timing of their reproduction, have their babies earlier, and then return to work” (Scritchfield, 1995, p. 142). This response to infertility does not acknowledge that increases in infertility rates have only been seen in 20-24 year old women, a group little affected by decisions to delay having children (Mundy, 2007).

Infertility is most often acknowledged, medically and culturally, as a woman’s problem (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). Studies conclude that infertility affects women more than men, and that for many women the “motherhood mandate” remains a powerful influence in their lives (Marsh & Ronner, 1996, p. 250). Not only do women have to go through the most invasive procedures, women must also “bear the brunt of the current social construction of infertility” (Scritchfield, 1995, p. 142). Marsh and Ronner (1996) explain that assisted reproduction has gained in popularity at a time when our culture is deeply conflicted over the “meaning of family life,” with drastic changes in women’s roles contributing to the conflict (Marsh & Ronner, 1996, p. 244).

Although even many conservative politicians have come to recognize that most families need two earners to achieve or to hold a place in the middle classes, since the 1980s there has been an antifeminist backlash (among some women as well as men) that has

attempted to encourage high achieving women to abandon the “fast track” for the “mommy track.” (Marsh & Ronner, 1996, p. 244)

While it could be argued that infertility treatments strengthen the family by promoting childbearing, these treatments challenge conventional notions of family and have therefore found themselves at the center of the controversies concerning the role of women and the meaning of family in our society (Marsh & Ronner, 1996). The public, the media and even many medical professionals ignore the demographic analyses concerning the causes for infertility and information about those affected by it and instead choose an explanation that identifies upper-middle-class women who have waited until their thirties to conceive.

Inequities in the availability of these new technologies arise, at least in part, from the way in which this culture defines the problem of infertility today. This gap between the demographic realities of infertility and the way it is defined culturally enables Americans simultaneously to castigate women for careerism and to provide those who are well insured or well-to-do an ever-expanding array of technological resources with which to combat the condition. (Marsh & Ronner, 1996, p. 254)

Because the media portray infertility as an upper-middle-class white women’s disease – although studies indicate that poor and black women are more likely to be infertile (Merrick & Blank, 2003) – most discourse about infertility focuses on those who can afford treatment (Michie & Cahn, 1997). When discourse occurs concerning fertility among the poor or working class and minorities, the focus tends to be on contraception, family planning and sterilization, not infertility issues (Scritchfield, 1995). Scritchfield (1995) explains that “the concern for infertility is class and race biased; it is upper-middle class white couples who are most likely to seek assistance with fertility problems, most likely to be encouraged to seek treatment, and for whom treatment is most available and affordable” (p. 138). Class becomes very important where access to infertility treatments is concerned. While the choices that wealthy Americans make concerning infertility treatment remain private, usually involving only discussions about their

insurance coverage or personal financial limitations, the fertility choices of the poor are made public (Michie & Cahn, 1997). *Newsweek* reported in April of 1994 that Medicaid covered infertility drugs in almost twenty states (Beck, 1994). They explained that New Jersey covers infertility treatments for those on welfare, even though women on public assistance receive no additional money for additional children they have. This *Newsweek* article raised questions about whether women who can't afford to raise a child are entitled to conceive one and whether people can be denied by the government the chance to have children because they are poor (Beck, 1994). Michie and Cahn (1997) argue that in our culture, having children is seen as an opportunity that can be restricted first by a person's fertility, and then by finances. In this way class becomes an issue in defining and treating infertility because it can restrict a person's options for a "cure" (Michie & Cahn, 1997, p. 145).

But class is not the only obstacle some infertile people must overcome to gain access to treatments. While some people are denied access to treatments because of financial reasons, others are denied access because of their marital status or sexual orientation. Some countries outlaw or limit the availability of reproductive technology for single or lesbian women (Merrick & Blank, 2003). Even though laws in the United States do not restrict access to infertility treatments, many physicians and clinics still refuse to treat single or lesbian women (Merrick & Blank, 2003). To be treated at these clinics, women must be married to a man and have a stable marriage. She must prove that they have resources to support any children conceived through infertility treatments (Merrick & Blank, 2003). Treatment is not available to any woman who is judged by the medical practitioners to be outside of the standards they believe make a good mother (Merrick & Blank, 2003).

## Methodology

A critical textual analysis employing a feminist theoretical framework was conducted using articles found in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* to explore how Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin were represented by the news and entertainment media during the six months following the birth of Suleman's octuplets. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), *The New York Times* and *USA Today* were in the top five circulated newspapers in 2009 ("Consolidated media reports," 2010). *The New York Times* is one of the most influential newspapers in the United States (Bagdikian, 2000) and media frames in *The New York Times* are often picked up by other publications (Entman, 2004). *USA Today* is an established national newspaper with a broad readership. It often appeals to the more popular tastes of its audiences (Gladney, 1992).

*People* and *Entertainment Weekly* were also in ABC's list for the top circulated consumer magazines during 2009 ("Consolidated media reports," 2010). They are also listed in the top five bestselling entertainment magazines for Publishers Clearing House, the largest multi-magazine subscription agency in the magazine industry (PCH.com, 2010). Both *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* focus on popular culture. *People* magazine focuses on celebrity and human-interest stories, while *Entertainment Weekly* focuses on entertainment media and reviews ("Entertainment Weekly media kit," 2010; "People media kit," 2010). *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* also have similar demographics. They have a readership that is more than 60 percent female ("Entertainment Weekly media kit," 2010; "People media kit," 2010). The average reader of both magazines is 38 years old, has a median household income between \$65,000 and \$75,000, and more than 60% have some college education ("Entertainment Weekly media kit," 2010; "People media kit," 2010).

Newspapers and magazines were chosen so that the representations of Suleman and Gosselin could be studied in both news and entertainment media. The articles in these publications were analyzed using critical discourse analysis and the grounded theory approach.

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary study of discourse that focuses on text and talk as ways in which social and political domination are reproduced (Fairclough, 1995). Discourse analysis practitioners agree that language and power are linked. Developed by Norman Fairclough, the approach draws from linguistic theory as well as social theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx and Michel Foucault to study discourse and power relations (Fairclough, 1995). In *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987) describe the importance of social texts in popular culture:

Social texts do not merely reflect or mirror objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively construct a version of those things. They do not just describe things; they do things. And being active, they have social and political implications. (p. 6)

Discourse analysis is conducted by analyzing these social texts to identify themes and patterns involving social and political power relations (Fairclough, 1995).

Grounded theory is also concerned with social texts and relations. Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967), the grounded theory approach uses systematic data collection and analysis to explain “the variability in social interactions, the social structural conditions that support the interactions, the consequences of the interactions and the conditions that support changes in interactions over time” (Wells, 1995, p. 33).

Discourse analysis framed by a feminist theoretical perspective was conducted using the stages outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The main question explored was: How were

Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin represented in traditional news and entertainment news coverage? Subquestions explored were: How were Suleman and Gosselin portrayed as mothers? And how were they portrayed as recipients of reproductive technology?

This study attempts to further research in the area of how recipients of reproductive technology and mothers are portrayed in society today. While we could look at a time frame that compared news coverage of Kate in the months immediately following the birth of her sextuplets with coverage of Nadya in the months immediately following the birth of her octuplets, we would not be exploring how Kate as a mother and recipient of reproductive technology is viewed today. Attitudes towards motherhood, technology and infertility can change over time. A better comparison of Kate and Nadya as mothers and recipients of reproductive technology can be done by focusing on entertainment and traditional news coverage of them during the same time frame. Hence, this study used keyword searches for full-text articles that appeared during the six months following the birth of Nadya Suleman's higher order multiples: January 26, 2009, through July 26, 2009. This is the first time frame during which articles that focused on Kate Gosselin and Nadya Suleman were published simultaneously.

Keywords used to identify articles for Kate Gosselin included: Kate Gosselin and sextuplets. Keywords used to identify articles for Nadya Suleman were: Nadya Suleman, Octomom and octuplets. Preliminary examination of these publications during this time frame showed that they produce an ample yet manageable amount of data. The number of articles found in the preliminary examination for Kate Gosselin per publication was: *The New York Times*: 15, *USA Today*: 15, *People*: 11 and *Entertainment Weekly*: 10. The number of articles found for Nadya Suleman was: *The New York Times*: 8, *USA Today*: 7, *People*: 2, and

*Entertainment Weekly*: 5. Opinion-centered material such as Letters to the Editor and Editorial articles were not included in the research data.

The articles were printed and then coded using grounded theory. In grounded theory codes are defined as identifying anchors that allow for key points to be gathered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once identified, the codes are grouped into concepts, or collections of similar content. The concepts are then grouped into themes to be analyzed. While the codes are related to the research questions, some areas of interest do not come to light until the analysis begins. Because of this, the process is cyclical, moving between analysis and coding.

To analyze the data, two forms of patterns are searched for: variability, or differences in the content, and consistencies, or features that are shared by different parts of the data. Analysis and hypothesis formulation occur before, during and after the initial process of data collection. Again, the process is cyclical and data collection, analysis and hypotheses influence each other (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The hypotheses are checked for coherence so that they cover both the broad patterns in the discourse and account for small incidents. They are also checked for fruitfulness, or that they can explain new kinds of discourse and generate new explanations.

As noted previously, a feminist theoretical perspective was applied to the analysis. In *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach*, Patricia Maguire (1987) defines feminism as “(a) a belief that women universally face some form of oppression or exploitation; (b) a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms; and (c) a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression” (p. 79). While there is no standard agreement over what comprises feminist research, Sandra Harding (1987) argues that “studying women from their perspective, recognizing the



researcher as part of the research subject and acknowledging that the beliefs of the researcher shape the research is what makes feminist research feminist” (p. 9). Feminist studies also attempt to understand how our society uses gender along with other social inequalities such as race, class, age and religion to maintain power structures that guarantee social inequality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). In *Participatory and Action Research and Feminisms: Towards Transformative Praxis*, M. Brinton Lykes and Erzulie Coquillon (2006) explain that a feminist approach to research:

Seeks to recognize and value the multiple intelligences, diverse ways of knowing, and the frequently silenced voices among us. It requires creating a “safe” space that strives to be inclusive and supportive of developing relationships; a space valuing strengths and capacities, while also challenging reflective critical practices that problematize the concepts of power, privilege, and domination that are prevalent in the culture. (p. 33)

Sarah Pritchard (1994) suggests that “feminist critique starts with ‘women’ or ‘women’s issues’ but goes beyond to the impact of gender relations and gendered conditions of human development in all spheres of thought and action” (p. 42). Feminist research is often concerned with issues of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and physical ability in addition to issues of gender inequality (Pritchard, 1994), and frequently deals with the pervasive effects of capitalism and patriarchy (Reinharz, 1992).

There is no single methodology that is exclusively used by feminists to conduct research (Reinharz, 1992). While methods from quantitative or qualitative research are often adjusted to meet feminist principles, Judith Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow (1986) identify five basic principles that should be included in feminist methodologies: “women and gender as the focus of analysis; the importance of consciousness raising; the rejection of subject and object; a concern with ethics; and an intention to empower women and change power relations and inequality” (p. 12). By applying a feminist theoretical perspective, patterns and contradictions within or between

the articles that illustrated how gender, race and class effected the representation of Nadya Suleman and Kate Gosselin in traditional news and entertainment news coverage were identified.

## Findings

The following themes emerged while studying the articles that focused primarily on Kate: Kate as a celebrity, the welfare of Kate's children and Kate's marital trouble. The following themes emerged while studying the articles that focused primarily on Nadya: Nadya as a celebrity, Nadya's children and Nadya's use of reproductive technology.

### **Kate Gosselin in Entertainment and Traditional News**

**Kate as a celebrity.** The concepts of celebrity and mother are intertwined in these articles. While Kate initially became famous for being a mother of sextuplets and twins, articles concerning her children are not the majority of articles that were published about her during this time frame. Only 3 out of 25, or 12% of the total articles featuring Kate focus on her children. Instead, articles focus on her marital problems, the recent increase in her popularity and her appearance. She is portrayed as achieving a celebrity status that extends beyond her role as a mother.

The number of articles about Kate in entertainment news publications provides evidence of her celebrity status. Ten entertainment news articles feature Kate. Another 18 entertainment articles mention her. The types of articles that focus on Kate also point to her celebrity status. Entertainment publications frequently devote coverage to news concerning the relationship troubles of current celebrities, and 90% of the entertainment news articles that focused on Kate fell into the marital status category. For example, an article in *Entertainment Weekly* describes Jon and Kate's marriage as "about as steady as your grandma on Rollerblades" ("The must list," 2009, p. 7). In a write-up about the new show *Raising Sextuplets*, *Entertainment Weekly* asks readers to: "Think *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*, subtract two kids, and add a marriage that might last longer than the next seven minutes" (Shaw, 2009b, p. 56). The amount of coverage concerning

Kate's marital problems illustrates that changes in Kate's marital status are considered newsworthy for entertainment news publications, as would changes in the marital statuses of other celebrities.

As in entertainment news, traditional news coverage that featured Kate also focuses on her marital troubles. Kate's marital trouble was the most covered topic in traditional news stories with 60% of the articles focused on Kate's marital status. Most of these articles focus on how Jon and Kate's marital troubles are affecting the show. For example, in one article, TLC explains that "the show's ratings have grown consistently, as there has been interest in these real-life issues of this real-life family" (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1). An article in *USA Today* states that "The Season 5 premiere of the show...drew nearly 10 million viewers (more than twice the number who saw Season 4's finale). The show has drawn so much attention because of marital troubles between Jon and Kate" (Barker, 2009d, p. D.1). A *New York Times* article explains that "[TLC's] ratings have never been higher, thanks to *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, the big-brood reality show that has reinvigorated the once-ailing channel" (Stelter, 2009b, p. 1).

Traditional news articles also discuss the extent of coverage that Kate is receiving in entertainment news: "Celebrity media outlets have crowned a new hot subject for the week: Kate Gosselin of TLC's *Jon & Kate Plus 8*. The reality TV mother of twins and sextuplets is No. 1 on USA Today's Celebrity Heat Index, which measures media exposure" ("Gosselins' woes reign," 2009, p. D.12) and "the mom from TLC's *Jon & Kate Plus 8* retains her No. 1 position on USA Today's Celebrity Heat Index...the tabloid attention coincides with the show's Season 5 premiere" ("Gosselins grab top spots again," 2009, p. D.13). Another article in *The New York Times* discusses how Kate's popularity is affecting entertainment magazines sales: "*US Weekly*

and *People* magazine, which also placed Ms. Gosselin on the cover, have reported above-average sales for the issues featuring the family” (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1).

Entertainment news articles also focus on Kate’s increasing popularity and how it is affecting her life. An article in *Entertainment Weekly* discusses Kate’s celebrity status directly: “Jon and Kate Gosselin, stars of TLC’s hit series *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*, are learning that fame has its price, and its privileges (like a giant new house)” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). The article explains that the Gosselins “got fed up with all the looky-loos peering through the front windows of their old place” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). To escape the onlookers, they “moved to a sprawling three-story home on 24 acres” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). The same article notes that their show on TLC “pays the Gosselins an undisclosed salary and occasionally sets them up with free vacations, appliances, and household goods, courtesy of lucrative product-placement deals” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). The article also announces that “the new season of *Jon & Kate* will incorporate the issues that their fame (and infamy) have brought” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). A quote by Kate explains, “It will touch on our lack of privacy” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36).

Celebrity sightings and appearances at various functions or vacations are also featured regularly in entertainment news publications. Kate’s appearance was commented on many times in entertainment news, and a considerable amount of the coverage focused on how she looked. A *People* article states: “When Kate Gosselin took her eight kids on a beach vacation, she flaunted a bikini body that impressed some onlookers...Kate ‘looked like a movie star,’ says Brittani Reynolds, a local resident. ‘She looked really like she takes care of herself’” (Coyne, 2009, p. 62). The article continues with an explanation of how she has such a great body: “In 2006 Kate was treated to a tummy tuck by the husband of a fan of the show...she also eats healthy going organic about seven years ago and exercises fanatically” (Coyne, 2009, p. 62).

Another article in *People* comments on Kate's bikini body: "On vacation, at least, Kate was rolling along just fine. Flaunting a taut bikini body" (Hamm, 2009c, p. 72). This article also mentions Kate's tummy tuck: "A 2006 abdomino-plasty (a.k.a. tummy tuck) gave Kate Gosselin her bikini body back after eight kids!" (Hamm, 2009c, p. 72).

The articles found in *Entertainment Weekly* also contain coverage about Kate's appearance. One article explains that: "In many ways, fame has agreed with Kate, who has slimmed down to a size 4 and keeps her skin a deep bronze with regular visits to a tanning booth" (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). Like with other celebrities, not all of the comments about Kate's appearance are positive. In *Entertainment Weekly*, four articles commented disapprovingly about Kate's hair. One article asks, "When did Kate Gosselin turn into Posh Spice?" ("The bullseye," 2009c, p. 66). Another article in *Entertainment Weekly* comments about an episode of *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*: "Not normal: Emeril Lagasse showing up. Even less normal: Kate's hair" (Shaw, 2009b, p. 56). Another article states: "Yes, her marriage is in trouble, but we're far more concerned about her hair" ("The bullseye," 2009b, p. 68). In another article, Kate comments on her own hair while putting on a fuzzy hat: "Since my hair is the talk of the town, let's just make it a little bit worse, shall we?" ("SoundBites," 2009, p. 106).

While Kate's marital trouble, celebrity status and appearance were focused on in entertainment and traditional news coverage during this time frame, few articles focused primarily on Kate's children or her role as a mother. None of the articles found in entertainment news focused on the welfare of Kate's children. In traditional news, three articles focused on the welfare of Kate's children, making up only 20% of the total articles that focused on Kate, and only 10% of the total articles that mentioned Kate. However, Kate's children are mentioned in

many of the articles that focus on her marital trouble. As a wife, Kate is clearly portrayed as angry and aggressive. As a mother, however, the coverage of Kate is more complex.

An article in *Entertainment Weekly* describes Kate as “sharp-tongued” and makes note of it when Kate is “uncharacteristically reserved” with some of her comments (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). Many articles that describe Kate as aggressive also portray Jon as a victim, further illustrating her hostility. One article describes Jon as “the long-suffering patriarch” and informs readers that Kate is “famous for her tough-talking approach” (Rice, 2009b, p. 11). Another article explains that “On the season premiere of TLC hit *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*, Jon Gosselin...looks like a broken man” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 26). When talking about their marital troubles, one article explained that, “*Tough loving* [italics added] Kate, 34, talked about having ‘a lot of anger,’ and how ‘we very swiftly turned into two different people,’ while *weary-looking* [italics added] Jon, 32, reiterated that he didn’t cheat on his wife” (Rice, 2009e, p. 13). In an *Entertainment Weekly* list of the five top moments in reality television, an argument between Jon and Kate came in at number five: ‘Jon & Kate Plus Eight’: Kate Berates Jon For Interrupting Her: “She goes into a long monologue, and the inner monologue from him is clearly much stronger” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 26).

Kate’s nagging is also mentioned in the description of a new show about multiples called *Raising Sextuplets*: “It’s easy to cringe at WE’s attempt...to put forth husband and wife Bryan and Jenny Masche as the anti-Jon & Kate (bearlike Bryan’s major complaint about perky Jenny is that she sugarcoats her nagging)” (Shaw, 2009c, p. 56). An *Entertainment Weekly* article also comments on how Kate’s behavior is criticized on the web: “Then there’s the Web chatter from viewers tearing Kate apart for how she nitpicks her husband” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36) and “Kate is

also regularly lambasted on websites (like the Gosselins Without Pity blog) for her harsh words to Jon” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36).

Like the articles found in *Entertainment Weekly*, many articles found in *People* portray Jon as a victim, further illustrating Kate’s hostility. In an article that featured an interview with a friend of Jon and Kate’s, the friend claims that “Kate wears the pants. Jon will sit back and take orders” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). One article mentions her “oft-televised berating of Jon” (Hamm, 2009a, p. 74) while another goes into more detail explaining that “Kate and Jon disagree[ing] is no surprise to fans of their show, in which Kate is often shown nagging, berating or snapping at Jon for failing to perform one task or another” (Coyne & Hamm, 2009, p. 56). Kate is described as “blast[ing] her husband for his ‘poor choices’” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66) and one article claims that “By the time Jon Gosselin arrives at the Manhattan offices of his newly hired media attorneys, he looks like he’s been through a war” (Coyne, 2009, p. 62). Another article explains that “Given that Kate notoriously lost her cool in one episode when Jon failed to use a coupon, one can only imagine the havoc wreaked by splurging on an automobile” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). Another article informs readers that when Jon was asked on the show why his marriage ended he replied: “I was too passive...I finally stood up on my own two feet, and I’m proud of myself” (Coyne & Ingrassia, 2009, p. 54).

As in entertainment news, Jon is portrayed as a victim of Kate’s aggression in traditional news. A *USA Today* article provides two story-lines for Kate in current pop culture: “Kate Gosselin is a selfless and sympathetic mother struggling to raise eight children” or “Kate Gosselin is a self-centered, shrewish diva who is driving her husband away” (Barker, 2009a, p. D.3). In the second depiction of Kate, Jon is “a devoted dad helplessly under the French-manicured thumb of his controlling wife” (Barker, 2009a, p. D.3). An article in *The New York*



*Times* explained that, “If Mr. Gosselin, dry and laid-back, is passive-aggressive, his wife is just plain aggressive. ‘I’m sorry for breathing’ Mr. Gosselin said once. This was not rhetorical; Ms. Gosselin had just chastised him for breathing too loudly” (Stewart, 2009, p. 19). A marriage therapist quoted in an *USA Today* article states that the couple’s marriage was doomed from the start because of Kate’s “overly-critical treatment of her husband” (Barker, 2009a, p. D.3). In a *New York Times* article, Jon and Kate were compared to Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar of the show *18 & Counting*: “it is hard to envision Jim Bob Duggar telling his wife, as Mr. Gosselin did, ‘You yelled at me like I’m a fricking dog’” (Stewart, 2009, p. 19).

In traditional and entertainment news, Kate is also portrayed as unremorseful about her angry and aggressive behavior. An article in *The New York Times* explains that she is “not terribly bothered by the vitriol expressed toward her in the blogosphere, where she is frequently vilified as a publicity-hungry control freak” (Stewart, 2009, p. 19). Another *New York Times* article noted the unexpected nature of Kate making an effort to invoke sympathy from the viewers: “Ms. Gosselin seemed determined to be cast as a sympathetic figure, a stark change from previous episodes” (Stelter, 2009b, p. 1). *Entertainment Weekly* also portrays Kate as unremorseful about her behavior: “Kate doesn’t mind having her snippier moments yelling, ‘Don’t be a victim!’ after Jon complained about her slapping him, for example, captured for posterity. ‘I’ve got to take care of my kids and live my life and do 150,000 things. What they catch, they catch, and it does not bother me’” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36).

In addition to Kate’s aggressive personality, her quest for celebrity and fame is portrayed as ruining her marriage. A *USA Today* article quotes Jon discussing how Kate’s fame is hurting their marriage. “Kate’s career is taking off and I’m a bit lost... This struggle has definitely put some tension in our marriage” (Hamm, 2009a, p. 74). In a *New York Times* article that described

an episode of *Jon & Kate* where bikers from *American Chopper* were guests, the author commented that “bikers from *American Chopper*...showed up to make Jon, who does not work, realize how emasculated he had become” (Bellafante, 2009, p. 5). In an article in *People*, Kate acknowledges that her success has “driven a wedge into her marriage” (Coyne & Hamm, 2009, p. 56). She explains, “I have always made more money than Jon. That doesn’t bother me at all...but it obviously, at this point, really matters to him” (Coyne & Hamm, 2009, p. 56).

Articles found in traditional news coverage of Kate also indicate that quitting the show may be the only way she can save her marriage, though Kate is portrayed as reluctant to do so. In an *USA Today* article, Jon and Kate are instructed to try and save their marriage by removing producers and viewers from the picture (Barker, 2009a). In a *New York Times* article, Kate is portrayed as unwilling to discontinue the show for her marriage. The article states that she “worried aloud about having the marriage labeled a failure” but then she asks and answers the question, “How does the show go on? The show must go on” (Stelter, 2009b, p. 1).

**Kate as a mother.** Two different images of Kate as a mother are portrayed in entertainment news coverage of her during this time frame. In *People*, at times Kate is portrayed as a good mother, but at other times she is portrayed as a bad mother for putting her children at risk to pursue her career. While *Entertainment Weekly* contains very little coverage of Kate as a mother, the coverage that exists also portrays Kate as a bad mother for putting her career first.

One article published in *People* describes Kate as “best known as the hyper-efficient matriarch on the hit TLC reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8*” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). This article explains that “the sextuplets were born at nearly 30 weeks and in good health” and quotes Kate as saying: “I’ve fought through a pregnancy where every minute was a battle...I will not fail my kids” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). In another article found in *People*, Kate gathers the children to the

kitchen table to work on an art project on a rainy day. The article explains that “Kate is cherishing a regular routine with her kids,” including reading books and making ice cream (Coyne & Ingrassia, 2009, p. 54).

While Kate is portrayed as a working mom in *People*, she is at times shown in a positive manner. An article that mentions Kate’s recent hectic travel schedule states that: “Kate is quick to point out that even when she’s not at home, she’s in constant contact with her children. ‘I’ve been doing major emotional support of my kids,’ she explains. ‘All the spare time I have, I am talking to my kids on the phone’” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). Another article describes Kate’s feelings about working: “Parents work. That’s a fact...providing for my kids is important. I just need to make the best decisions and hope they line up for a great future for my kids” (Coyne & Ingrassia, 2009, p. 54). In another *People* article, Kate defends her decision to keep working: “I step up for the needs of my kids. I have a huge weight on my shoulders. This needs to go on because I need to be able to provide for my kids” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66).

Articles in *People* that discuss how the children are coping with the divorce also portray Kate as a good mother. She is shown as a strong woman who is keeping it together for her children:

Every day I have moments where I cry and I say, ‘It’s too much, I don’t want to go on.’ And then I think, ‘Well, you have two choices. Your choices are laying on the floor or moving forward for the sake of your kids, your marriage, for everything you believe in.’ And so I pull myself together and I keep going. (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66)

In another *People* article, a quote from a source close to the family states that: “No matter what is happening between Jon and Kate, they are clearly going to rally around the kids” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). In another article Kate explains, “My goal is peace and wholeness and health and lots of love for our kids. I will never stop trying for that. I will never stop doing the best I can for them” (Coyne & Ingrassia, 2009, p. 54).

Another image of Kate that is portrayed in *People* is that of a bad mother who is willing to put her children at risk to pursue her career as a celebrity. Many of the articles explain that Kate enjoys her work and wishes to continue with the show despite the toll it takes on her marriage and warnings from child experts about how it is affecting the children. One article states that “for Kate Gosselin...there’s a surefire recipe for stress relief: throwing herself into her work” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). In another article Kate claims, “I’ve become a pro at compartmentalizing...When I am filming, nothing else matters” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66).

Another article in *People* illustrates that Jon is also critical of Kate’s continued insistence that the family stays in the spotlight:

While Kate told people that she will continue with the show because “I must go on and provide for my kids,” Jon takes exception to the idea that reality stardom is his new profession. “It’s not my job,” he insists. “My job is to take care of my kids and raise them the way that they need to be raised. That’s Kate’s job too.” (Coyne, 2009, p. 62)

While articles in *People* portray Kate as enjoying her job as a celebrity, it also portrays the show and media spotlight as bad for the children. One article explains that, “The busiest parents on TV...confess they’re going through a rocky time raising eight kids in the spotlight” (Hamm, 2009a, p. 74) and another states that “while the couple is still together, they admit that raising 8-year-old twins and 4-year-old sextuplets in front of millions on TV has taken a toll” (Hamm, 2009a, p. 74). Another article points out that “Given the past few months they’ve spent in the spotlight, it’s a good thing the Gosselin kids can fend for themselves” (Hamm, 2009b, p. 58).

Another *People* article explains that the show may actually be endangering the children:

The reality show has continued to document the family’s daily life despite the considerable tension between Mom and Dad. It is this fact that has led critics to blast the show as exploiting the family’s problems and, worse, their eight children. Recently the Pennsylvania Department of Labor announced that they were investigating to see if the show was complying with the state’s child labor laws. (Coyne, 2009, p. 62)

Later in the article, child expert Paul Peterson, head of the nonprofit group *A Minor Consideration* that monitors the treatment of child actors, criticizes the children's participation in the show: "The idea that there are permanent cameras in the home - that's not the way to raise children" (Coyne, 2009, p. 62).

The coverage of Kate in *Entertainment Weekly* contained one reference to Kate as a mother. This reference also pointed to Kate as exploiting her children for her dream of being a celebrity: "Yes, they're still just a normal family, albeit one with an eight-headed cottage industry and a mom who dreams of having her own talk show" (Rice, 2009c, p. 36).

Traditional news coverage of Kate portrays her as willing to sacrifice the well-being of her children to continue her job as a celebrity. A *New York Times* article suggests that Kate's children are an afterthought to her career: "The star of reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8* has had a lot on her plate: reports of trouble in her relationship with husband Jon, a new book called *Eight Little Faces* and her TLC show. Oh, there's also that matter of being a parent to twins and sextuplets" (Blas, 2009c, p. D.12). Another *New York Times* article explains that Kate has been portrayed as a bad mother in recent tabloid coverage:

Jon's subjugation to Kate's ambition has been a persistent theme of tabloid coverage, which has demonized Kate for inadequately tending to her children as she travels to promote the show and her books on child rearing. Recent issues of *Us* have featured the cover lines "Mom of 8 refuses to touch bleeding son during press event," "Mommy You are Mean!" and... "Kate Gosselin, Mom to Monster: Sick obsession with money, freebies & her appearance. (Bellafante, 2009, p. 5)

Also included in this article is a quote from the publication *Christianity Today* that claims, "Sexual immorality – whether actual or merely suspected – caught our attention, but the materialism, narcissism and exploitation of children that preceded it was largely overlooked" (Bellafante, 2009, p. 5).

Traditional news also portrayed Kate as a dangerous mother, with three articles devoted to coverage about the welfare of Kate's children. An article in *USA Today* that focused on the welfare of Kate's children stated that, "In the Jon-minus-Kate legal equation, it's the remaining eight whom some experts worry about most" (Barker, 2009b, p. D.1). Later, the article explained that, "Even if the parents reach a private custody agreement, there's still a chance the long arm of the law will reach in and say, 'I think these kids need a child advocate because people have not been looking out for their best interests'" (Barker, 2009b, p. D.1). Another article found in *USA Today* that focused on Kate's children noted public opinion about Kate's insistence that the show continue: "A USA Today/Gallup Poll shows nearly half (48%) think the eight Gosselin children...will be worse off for having taken part in the series" and that 49% of Americans believe that children under the age of 18 should be prohibited from appearing on reality TV (Barker, 2009c, p. D.2). The article also informed readers that "last week, Kate Gosselin's brother and sister-in-law accused Jon and Kate of turning their children into a commodity" (Barker, 2009c, p. D.2). An article in *The New York Times* that focused on the welfare of Kate's children also announced the labor investigation into the show: "The Pennsylvania Department of Labor said it was investigating a complaint about the hit TLC reality show *Jon & Kate Plus 8* to make sure it was complying with the state's child labor laws" (Itzkoff, 2009, p. 2).

Other traditional news articles that did not focus solely on Kate's children also portrayed Kate as exploiting her children. An article in *The New York Times* states that:

Even before the allegations of infidelity surfaced, the image of a happy, healthy family was being challenged. On Amazon.com, users can tag books with words that relate to the topic. For Ms. Gosselin's books, the terms "exploitation," "narcissism" and "child abuse" are among the most common tags. (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1)

Another *New York Times* article states that “This all-too-real drama has transfixed viewers and celebrity magazine readers in recent months, prompting critics and fans and even some people who know the Gosselins to accuse TLC of exploiting the family” (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1).

An article in *USA Today* gives the opinions of other show producers about the safety of the children’s continued presence on the show. John Irwin, producer of *Celebrity Rehab* claims, “if I were producing that show, my primary goal would be protecting those kids (and) not putting them in a situation that could really adversely affect them” (Keveney, 2009, p. D.6). Barb Hachen, co-producer of the show *Jen and Barb, MomLife* states that, “if the cameras have to continue because of contractual obligations, then leave the kids out at this point” (Keveney, 2009, p. D.6) Another article includes an opinion from child expert Geoffrey White, a psychologist from Los Angeles who has consulted on many other reality shows: “There is also a lot of conforming pressure on Jon and Kate to give the audience what they believe the audience wants. That’s not good for the kids...the implications for shows like Jon & Kate are frightening” (Barker, 2009a, p. D.3).

**Kate as a recipient of reproductive technology.** While the coverage of Kate during this time frame did not have any articles that focused specifically on reproductive technology, two traditional news articles and one entertainment news article briefly mentioned Kate’s use of reproductive technology. In the first traditional news article, the sextuplets are described as “the surprising outcome of their second visit to a fertility clinic for, as they say in the show’s intro, ‘just one more’” (Stewart, 2009, p. 19). This coverage is positive and does not blame Kate for the outcome of her infertility treatments (sextuplets). The other mention of Kate’s use of reproductive technology in traditional news is found at the end of an article. A quote by Julie Vermeer Elliott is cited from the publication *Christianity Today*: “We cheered on Jon and Kate’s

decision to carry all six babies to term...but rarely considered the prior questions: Was it right for them to undergo risky fertility treatments in the first place?” (Bellafante, 2009, p. 5). This statement is the only one found in traditional or entertainment news coverage that questions Kate’s use of reproductive technology.

In entertainment news, an *Entertainment Weekly* article explains that: “When fertility drugs left Kate pregnant with sextuplets in 2003, the deeply religious mom made the risky decision to carry them to term” (Rice, 2009c, p. 36). While this article does mention that Kate’s sextuplets were the result of her use of fertility drugs, the words used are passive and Kate’s decision to carry all six babies is portrayed as self-sacrificing.

While three news articles mentioned Kate’s use of reproductive technology, it is also important to note where Kate’s use of infertility treatments is not discussed. In traditional news, for example, when explaining the origins of the show *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, an article in *The New York Times* never mentions how Kate became pregnant with sextuplets. The article stated only that, “Figure 8 first profiled the Gosselins in 2006 on the Discovery Health Channel two years after Ms. Gosselin gave birth to sextuplets” (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1). A *USA Today* article includes a description of the Gosselins, but the write-up, which consisted of three paragraphs, never mentions that Kate received infertility treatments. The section describing the family lists Dad, Mom, twins and sextuplets with their names. The section describing the show says only that “the show revolves around the lives of Jon...Kate...and their family of multiples” (Blas, 2009a, p. D.3). Other articles describe Kate as a parent of twins and sextuplets, never giving an explanation for her higher order multiple children. In a *New York Times* article, Kate’s children are described as the outcome of a “10-year marriage that resulted in a pair of twins and a set of sextuplets” (Bellafante, 2009, p. 5). A *USA Today* article fails to mention anything about the



origins of Kate's children, only explaining that Kate "has a lot on her plate" including "being a parent to twins and sextuplets" (Blas, 2009c, p. D.12). Another *USA Today* article describes Jon and Kate only as "the parents of 8-year-old twins and 5-year-old sextuplets" (A. Thompson, 2009, p. D.1). An article in *The New York Times* states that "the Gosselins have raised their pair of twins and set of sextuplets in front of the cameras since 2007" ("Relationships June 21-27," 2009, p. 2), again making no mention of the reproductive technology used to conceive the children.

In fact, coverage of Kate's family in traditional news seems to attempt to convince us that the Gosselins are in some ways just a regular family. An article printed in *The New York Times* before Jon and Kate's marital problems became public states that Kate's sextuplets have "turned into six healthy toddlers, and now their problems seem no more serious than the average family's: a messy house, too little time and too little sleep" (Stewart, 2009, p. 19). Two other *New York Times* articles (also published before Jon and Kate's marital troubles began) portray the Gosselins as a regular family. One article claims that the Gosselins are "an ordinary family of an extraordinary size, they show a portrait of enduring family values" (Stelter, 2009a, p. 1). The other article states that the message of Jon and Kate's show is: "The size of the family may be freakish, but the people in it don't necessarily have to be" (Stewart, 2009, p. 19). Even after the marital troubles begin, an article in *USA Today* quotes a fan as saying, "The Gosselins are growing as a family just like everyone else does. They're encountering problems just like everyone else does" (Barker, 2009a, p. D.3).

While four articles in *People* and one article in *Entertainment Weekly* mentioned Kate's "brood" of eight children (Coyne & Ingrassia, 2009; Hamm, 2009b, 2009c; Rice, 2009c), most articles in entertainment news coverage also failed to mention how Kate became pregnant with

twins and then sextuplets. An article in *People* explains how Kate and Jon became famous, but neglects to mention how the multiple babies came to be in the first place: “Married when Kate was 24 and Jon just 22, they found sudden fame after a documentary about their life with multiple babies became an instant hit” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). Another article in *People* contains a box story about Kate’s sextuplets – again failing to mention the infertility treatments she used to conceive them. “Babies on Board: The sextuplets were born at nearly 30 weeks and in good health. Hard Work: ‘I’ve fought through a pregnancy where every minute was a battle,’ says Kate (of the sextuplets). ‘I will not fail my kids’” (Hamm, 2009d, p. 66). While two articles in *People* mention the tummy tuck she received a few years ago to correct the damage caused by carrying the sextuplets, neither article mentions how she came to be pregnant with that many babies at one time (Coyne, 2009, p. 62; Hamm, 2009c).

### **Nadya Suleman in Entertainment and Traditional News**

**Nadya as a mother.** Nadya received entertainment and traditional news coverage during this time frame for becoming a mother of octuplets. In the articles featuring Nadya, 5 out of 11, or 45% focused on her children and 2 out of 11, or 18% of the articles focused on her celebrity status. Nadya is portrayed as a mother who is attempting to achieve celebrity status through her children. She is also portrayed as mentally and financially unable to care for them.

All articles that focus on Nadya’s celebrity status are found in entertainment news. Headlines for these articles include, “The Octuplets Mom Gestates her Hollywood Career” (Rice, 2009d, p. 13) and “‘Octomom’ Media Circus” (Stack, 2009, p. 22). An *Entertainment Weekly* article chastises Nadya for seeking public attention:

As a mother with eight newborn babies not to mention six kids already at home you’d think Nadya Suleman, 33, would keep a low profile. But “Octomom” once again ignited a media firestorm when Radar Online posted a video of Nadya and her mother...heatedly debating her decision to keep eight more children...Nadya’s former publicist, Joann

Killeen, who quit after receiving multiple death threats, says she would have advised against the sit-down: “I think it is best that those issues remain private.” (Stack, 2009, p. 22)

Another *Entertainment Weekly* article explains: “Plenty [of TLC fans] have already flooded the network’s website with threats to boycott any show that might feature Suleman and her 14 children. (Typical post: ‘I beg you not to support anything this woman has done or will do.’)” (Rice, 2009d, p. 13). The article continues: “All of this means any network, publisher, or studio will have serious issues to consider before going into business with Suleman” (Rice, 2009d, p. 13).

Entertainment news articles that focus on other topics but mentioned Nadya also contain negative comments about her celebrity status. An article in *Entertainment Weekly* about late night shows contains a sample joke by Chelsea Handler: “Octomom has gotten her own reality show. I’m only watching if one of the kids gets voted off every week” (Rice, 2009a, p. 34). Another *Entertainment Weekly* article also discusses Nadya’s role in a proposed reality show: “Octomom Nadya Suleman looks forward to doing some of the filming herself. How, Nadya? Have you grown yourself a ninth tentacle?” (Brown, 2009, p. 17). An *Entertainment Weekly* article that discusses the end of the season for *Jon & Kate Plus 8* states: “*Jon & Kate Plus 8* finishes its season. Does that mean we have to pay attention to the Octomom again?” (“The bullseye,” 2009a, p. 72). An article that discusses the series debut of another reality show about families with multiples claims that in this show, “the wholesome depiction of multiples does wash away the ‘Octomom’ ickiness” (Shaw, 2009a, p. 58).

While there were no traditional news articles that focused on Nadya and her celebrity status, traditional news articles that focused on other topics did mention Nadya and how she plans to use media attention to support her family. In a *New York Times* article, Nadya’s publicist

states that “Ms. Suleman had not determined how she would support her family, though they were weighing several media offers” and that Nadya is “weigh[ing] book, television, newspaper and movie requests from around the world to tell her story” (Archibold, 2009, p. 14). Other traditional news articles portray Nadya as seeking out media attention. A *New York Times* article states that, “in this news cycle, the press has become so obsessed with Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner and Edward M. Liddy, A.I.G.’s dollar-a-year C.E.O., that even Octomom and Rihanna have trouble grabbing air time and column inches” (Impoco, 2009, p. 6). A *USA Today* article explains that “tabloids just can’t get enough of Octo-mom or her babies, of course it helps when the subject courts attention by offering exclusive photos and more” (Blas, 2009b, p. D.2).

In traditional news articles that featured Nadya, three out of the seven articles (or 43%) focused on Nadya’s children. Early in the time frame, articles about Nadya focused on facts about the birth of the babies and how they were breaking records. For example, an article in *The New York Times* announced, “A woman gave birth to eight babies in Southern California, the world’s second live-born set of octuplets” (Associated Press, 2009e, p. 23). Another *New York Times* article points out that the babies were breaking records. “On the ninth day, the eight ‘Suleman Babies A to H,’ oblivious to their place in the record books as the second set of octuplets born in the United States and now the longest surviving, rested comfortably in a hospital” (Archibold, 2009, p. 14). As more information about Nadya became available, however, traditional news coverage of Nadya began to focus on the controversy surrounding the octuplets and their mother: “And a national discussion – on talk shows, blogs, in coffee shops, and Ms. Suleman’s block, among other places – raged over whether this was a cuddly family bloom or medical science run amok” (Archibold, 2009, p. 14).

The traditional news articles that focused on Nadya also portray her as mentally and financially unable to take care of her children. In a *New York Times* article, Nadya's mother is again quoted discussing Nadya's obsession with having children:

Nadya Suleman, her mother said, has been "obsessed" with having children since her teenage years. "She loves children, she is very good with children, but obviously she overdid herself." (Archibold, 2009, p. 14)

A *New York Times* article also focuses on Nadya's financial situation: "Baldo Ramirez, who lives next door to the Sulemans...said he was torn between wishing the family well and worrying over the care of the children. 'It's nice in a way, but they are poor people and cannot afford this,' Mr. Ramirez said" (Archibold, 2009, p. 14). The article continues with further information about Nadya's financial situation: "Ms. Suleman's mother has filed for bankruptcy, claiming \$1 million in liabilities, according to court records, and Ms. Suleman, a psychiatric technician at a hospital, stopped working at some point in her pregnancy" (Archibold, 2009, p. 14).

Another *New York Times* article mentions that Nadya could use her children to support her family:

Hollywood celebrity brokers debated how much the family would receive and the ethics of seeking so much publicity for young children. Howard Burgman, a Hollywood publicist...wondered if the family would start "using the kids as an A.T.M. machine." He explains: "That's the part that bothers me...exactly what are they going to do with them? The more money you get, the more privacy you give up. These kids are going to have a hard enough time without becoming media freaks." (Archibold, 2009, p. 14)

In entertainment news, *People* had the most articles that questioned Nadya's ability to care for her children. An article describing her interview with Ann Curry quotes Curry as saying: "she's focusing on taking care of her children and is trying to figure out how to do that" (Smolowe, 2009b, p.70) The article then states, "how things will work once the babies are part of the picture, no one knows" (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 70). A *People* cover published during this time frame contained the headline: "Octuplet Mom – Can She Handle 14 Kids? ("Cover description,"

2009). Another *People* cover read, “Octuplet Mom Loses Another Spokesperson. ‘I wish her the best of luck,’ says Victor Munoz. ‘She’s going to need it’” (Hamm, 2009a, p. 74). An *Entertainment Weekly* article also portrays Nadya as unable to care for her children. The article asks, “Who’ll take care of Nadya Suleman’s eight new babies?” and then points to someone other than Nadya: “Dr. Phil McGraw, 59, announced...that neonatal agency Angels in Waiting will be helping out” (Vozick-Levinson & Allen, 2009, p. 22).

Other *People* articles questioned Nadya’s mental stability. In one article, Nadya’s mother was quoted numerous times questioning her daughter’s reasoning. “‘She’s obsessed’ with having kids, says Nadya Suleman’s mother about the 33-year-old’s astonishing multiple birth delivery” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). Nadya’s obsessive behavior was mentioned again by her mother later in the article when she explains that as an only child, Nadya “was always upset about not having brothers and sisters... she’s obsessed.” The article continues, “Her Dad and I have told her that she has six beautiful children, why do you want more, we can’t understand... she is a good person but a little misguided” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). Also in this article, a neighbor comments about Nadya’s mental stability: “It’s just insane,” says Amy Longstretch, 20, a neighbor on the same quiet cul-de-sac. “How on earth can she do it?” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). Later in the article, the quote by Longstretch appears again: “It’s just insane. How on earth can she do it with six kids, let alone eight more?” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79).

Both *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* articles use Nadya’s past history of mental illnesses to portray her as mentally unstable. A *People* article describes a “confident” Nadya declaring, “I’ll do the best I possibly can,” and then states that “amid revelations about her past struggles with depression, she offers few details about how she’ll raise 14 kids under 8” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 70). The article further explains:

Contradicting the serene image that Suleman is presenting to the cameras were 332 pages of documents released by the state of California that painted a portrait of a young woman given to depression and suicidal thinking. In the documents, Suleman speaks of developing “an intense depression” and says, “I just wanted to die.” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 71)

The article also goes into further detail about Nadya’s past:

Five months after Elijah was born, Dr. Alfred Bloch, her psychiatrist, reported that Suleman had “become very fearful that [Elijah] will be kidnapped, injured, etc.” and was so anxious that she reported “somebody, my husband or my mother, has to take me almost everywhere.” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 71)

Coverage of Nadya in *Entertainment Weekly* also portrays Nadya as mentally unstable.

One article stated that when Nadya’s father appeared on *Oprah* he claimed that during a Dateline NBC interview his daughter was under duress (Stack, 2009). “I question her mental situation,” Doud said. “I need her to be evaluated. Can you help with that?” (Stack, 2009, p. 22).

Entertainment news coverage about Nadya during this time-frame also portrays her as financially unable to care for her children. One article states that “Questions continue to fly about how a 33-year-old single mother without a job could adequately care for 14 children” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 70). Another article explains that “It’s unclear if Suleman currently has a job; her mother filed for bankruptcy last March (but never followed through)” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). Discrepancies between how Nadya describes her financial situation and the reality of her situation are also pointed out in one *People* article:

She told *Today’s* Ann Curry, “I’m not receiving help from the government.” But her publicist Michael Furtney confirmed reports that she receives \$490 a month in food stamps as well as federal supplemental security income to cover the disabilities of three of her older six children. (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 70)

Another article in *People* describes Nadya’s living conditions, which seems to question how she will handle the addition of eight more children into her home:

At the small three-bedroom house in suburban Whittier that Suleman and her six older children share with her mom, Angela...leaves and dead ficus branches were scattered

across the hard-packed dirt yard; a cracked kitchen window was held together with duct tape. Inside... showed a master bedroom where two cribs were strewn with clothes and towels, and the window was covered by a bed sheet; another bedroom, equipped with bunk beds, showed knee-high mounds of clothes tumbling from a closet. (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 71)

Another article that appeared in *People* explains that the father will not be offering any financial assistance: “Suleman acknowledged that the 14 children all came from the same sperm donor, a friend. They have a contract drawn up; he’s not going to be asked to support any of the children” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 70).

**Nadya as a recipient of reproductive technology.** All of Nadya’s articles that focused on reproductive technology were found in traditional news. They focused on why Nadya was able to receive these treatments and pending investigations against the doctor and clinic for violation of care. These articles portray Nadya as an unworthy recipient of reproductive technology. They question how she gained access to this technology considering the number of children (six) she already had at the time, her marital status and her financial situation. These articles also portray Nadya as a victim by blaming her doctor for her use of infertility treatments.

The first articles that appeared about Nadya in traditional news during this time frame did not focus on her use of reproductive technology. While it was suggested that Nadya used IVF to conceive the octuplets, the articles announcing the octuplets’ birth only speculated about Nadya’s use of reproductive technology. For example, a *New York Times* article stated that, “A Kaiser spokeswoman said she could not release any information about the mother, including whether or not she used fertility drugs” (Associated Press, 2009e, p. 23). Later articles confirmed that Nadya’s octuplets were conceived through reproductive technology. A *New York Times* article stated: “After receiving in vitro fertilization, hospital officials said, Ms. Suleman gave birth on Jan. 26 to the two girls and six boys” (Archibold, 2009, p. 14). This article also



confirmed that Nadya used IVF to conceive her other children as well: “Ms. Suleman’s mother, Angela Suleman, told The Associated Press that [the first six children] also resulted from in vitro and that Ms. Suleman used the remaining embryos to conceive the octuplets” (Archibold, 2009, p. 14).

Later traditional news coverage of Nadya portrays her as an unworthy recipient of reproductive technology. The articles question how she gained access to this technology considering the six children she already had at home, her marital status and her financial situation. A *USA Today* article begins with the statement that:

The Associated Press has reported that the mother [of the octuplets] is a single 33-year-old named Nadya Suleman who already had six children at home, and that all 14 of her children were conceived via in vitro fertilization, or IVF. How she could afford expensive IVF, and why a doctor would transfer enough embryos to result in octuplets, a rare, extremely risky “high-order multiples” pregnancy, is unknown. (Rubin, 2009b, p. D.5)

The article then continues with a question and answer section that includes the following question: “Can’t doctors just say no when patients ask that more than the recommended number of embryos be transferred, especially if they question a woman’s ability to care for multiples?” (Rubin, 2009b, p. D.5). The answer was provided by fertility specialists:

Not really. The ASRM (American Society for Reproductive Medicine) ethics committee...said fertility programs can withhold services only if they have “well-substantiated judgments” that the patient won’t be able to provide adequate child-rearing... drug abuse, child abuse or psychotic behavior could be grounds to withhold treatment. (Rubin, 2009b, p. D.5)

The answer continues with a quote from an infertility doctor: “We’re not in a position, nor should we be in a position, of deciding who’s going to be good parents or how many children we want them to have” (Rubin, 2009b, p. D.5). An article in *The New York Times* also mentions the number of children Nadya has at home: “should Ms. Suleman, already a mother of six children under the age of 7, have been given fertility treatments to have eight more?” (Archibold, 2009, p.

14). Another *New York Times* article also questions Nadya's access to reproductive technology considering her marital status and financial situation: "Many mothers, in fact, shared the revulsion and the ethical questioning about the in vitro fertilization that led to the birth of eight babies by the unwed and unemployed California mother" (Zernike, 2009, p. 1).

One news article that questions Nadya's decision to use infertility treatments asks about Nadya's options for her frozen embryos besides discarding them or using them all at once. The question is answered by Anne Lysterly, an obstetrician/gynecologist and bioethics researcher: "If she couldn't bear to discard those embryos or to have them be in somebody else's family, they could have been transferred one at a time or two at a time. If that had been done...Suleman might have decided to stop trying to have more children before using all of her embryos" (Rubin, 2009b, p. D.5).

Other articles point out that Nadya's specific situation has caused new scrutiny in the area of multiple births. A *New York Times* article states that "to the government and fertility industry...such large multiple births have begun to look like breakdowns in the system. The issue has taken on renewed scrutiny since a California woman, Nadya Suleman, who already had six children conceived through in vitro procedures, gave birth to octuplets...last month" (Saul, 2009, p. 1). A *USA Today* article explains that the birth of Nadya Suleman's octuplets:

Galvanized Americans, many of whom hadn't given much thought to the risks of multiple births, such as prematurity and low birth weight, which can cause health problems at birth and lifelong disabilities. Images of the scrawny, fragile Suleman octuplets...have sparked debate about whether the United States should follow the lead of Belgium and Sweden, whose laws restrict the number of embryos that a doctor may transfer at a time. (Rubin, 2009c, p. D.1)

In addition to portraying Nadya as an unworthy recipient of technology, these articles also portray Nadya as a victim by blaming her doctor for her use of infertility treatments. Many

of the articles focused on charges that Nadya's doctor would be facing. An article in *The New York Times* explains that:

The fertility doctor who helped a woman have 14 children, including octuplets born last month, is now facing a state investigation on top of strong criticism from medical ethicists. The Medical Board of California did not identify the doctor who helped Nadya Suleman...become pregnant with the six boys and two girls...even though she already had six other children. "We're looking into the matter to see if we can substantiate if there was a violation of the standard of care," a board spokeswoman said. (Associated Press, 2009c, p. 14)

Another *New York Times* article mentions the investigation of Suleman's infertility doctor: "The American Society of Reproductive Medicine says it is investigating whether fertility treatment guidelines were broken in the case of a Southern California woman who gave birth to octuplets last month" (Associated Press, 2009d, p. 17). The next day another *New York Times* article stated, "the California Medical Board said it was investigating her fertility doctor...to determine whether acceptable standards of medical practice had been violated" (Saul, 2009, p. 1). Another *New York Times* article explains:

No laws restrict the number of embryos that can be placed in a mother's womb, but fertility doctors generally abide by guidelines that recommend doctors take account of the mother's physical and mental condition and home life... a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania, Arthur L. Caplan, said the case posed thorny ethical questions, including whether a doctor should have accepted Ms. Suleman for fertility treatment considering she already had six children and the costs of caring for 14 offspring. 'I find it a huge ethical failure that she was even accepted as a patient,' Dr. Caplan said. (Archibold, 2009, p. 14)

Very little coverage of Nadya's use of reproductive technology was found in the entertainment news articles during this time frame. Only two articles, both found in *People*, discussed Nadya's use of reproductive technology. The first article focused on how Nadya's access to reproductive technology has caused debates in the medical community and society in general: "Suleman became the focal point of an intense national debate about whether doctors have an ethical responsibility to safeguard against what might be considered "extreme" multiple

births” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). The article states that “the hospital confirmed that Suleman had been impregnated at a different facility through in vitro fertilization” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). The article later states that “the situation has lit up mommy chat boards, stirred debate among medical ethicists and fertility doctors and become the talk of Whittier, where Nadya lives” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79). This article also contains a box story with the following information: “There are no federal or state laws that limit the number of embryos used in IVF; BUT Medical guidelines suggest no more than two embryos per IVF cycle for women under 35” (Smolowe, 2009a, p. 79).

The other *People* article that discussed Nadya’s use of reproductive technology focused on her doctor:

In 2006, when Nadya Suleman was pregnant with twins, she spoke to local KTLA-TV about the IVF treatments she’d received from Dr. Michael Kamrava... ‘It worked the very first time,’ she said... This time round, with the Medical Board of California investigating Suleman’s latest pregnancy, Kamrava didn’t return *People’s* call for comment. Public records indicate no disciplinary action has been taken against him. But while the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology generally recommends no more than two embryo transfers per cycle in women under 35, his clinic averaged 3.6 in ’06 yet produced few pregnancies – a “red flag,” says Dr. Jamie Grifo, a SART past president. “Something is not quite right.” (Smolowe, 2009b, p. 71)

## Conclusion

The concepts of celebrity and motherhood are intertwined in these articles. While Kate initially became famous for being a mother of sextuplets and twins, she manages to achieve a celebrity status that extends beyond her role as a mother, which affects the way she is portrayed as a mother.

Kate is allowed to become a celebrity because she meets at least some of the criteria for a “celebrity mother” as defined by Douglas and Michaels (2004). They explain that new momism defines the ideal mother as white and upper-class, and Kate possesses both of these traits (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). They also claim that the celebrity mother is sexy (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Kate is portrayed as sexy in the comments that focus on her appearance, namely her bikini body. While the ideal mother is married and the inevitability of Kate acting as a single mother becomes apparent during the time frame of this study, it is acceptable in her case as she meets the criteria for an acceptable single mother as outlined by Goren (2009): white, straight, older than thirty, wealthy, and established enough to support her children. Douglas and Michaels (2004) point out that single mothers in celebrity profiles follow this pattern and are approvingly profiled in magazines.

Because Kate meets at least some of the celebrity mother criteria, entertainment news publications like *People*, which frequently feature celebrity mother profiles, portray Kate in some instances as a good mother. However, Kate encounters problems with the celebrity mother profile when it comes to how she became a celebrity. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that the celebrity mother is said to love being a mom much more than she loves her work, her fame or her money. They also explain that the only correct choice that exists for good mothers is to be a totally selfless mother (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Kate’s access to celebrity is through her

children. When the welfare of her children is called into question and she refuses to discontinue their participation in the show, she fails to meet the most important criteria of being a good mother (total selflessness) and therefore fails to meet the criteria for a self-sacrificing celebrity mother. When this happens, the door remains open to portray Kate as a bad mother.

Kinnick (2009) explains that “both entertainment and news media narratives frequently cast motherhood in moral terms, contrasting the ‘good’ mother with the ‘bad’ mother and thus prescribing norms for maternal behavior” (p. 9). Good mothers are those who conform to traditional feminine gender roles, put their family as their highest priority, and sacrifice themselves for the family good. Bad mothers are often single, career-driven, and self-centered. They may even be portrayed as neglectful and dangerous (Kinnick, 2009; Rivers, 2007). In many articles, Kate is portrayed as angry and aggressive, especially in her relationship with her husband. Described as sharp-tongued and overly critical, she unquestionably fails to conform to traditional feminine gender roles. Her behavior is also portrayed as ruining her marriage. Kinnick (2009) explains that while the media portray married mothers as good mothers and single mothers as bad mothers, even worse than the single mother is the *willfully* single mother, or single mother by choice. Kate’s behavior and quest for celebrity are portrayed as reasons for her marital trouble. She is also portrayed as having no remorse about her behavior and as unwilling to quit her job as a celebrity to save her marriage. In this way, she becomes the worst type of single mother – the single mother by choice. Kate is also portrayed as willing to sacrifice the well-being of her children to continue her job as a celebrity. Thus, Kate fails to put her family as her highest priority or sacrifice herself for the family good.

Foster (2005) explains that in reality television we are “barraged with images of real people as they class-pass into the public arena of celebrity” (p. 68). Many reality shows (such as

*Survivor*, *The Real World* and *Big Brother*) make celebrities out of “ordinary” people (Foster, 2005). Kate is portrayed as a celebrity, but is criticized for this at the same time. Because she became a celebrity through reality TV, Kate’s celebrity is seen as her job, and her pursuit of celebrity is seen as working. While “real” celebrities may be known for their skills and talent, Bell (2010) explains that they must also “work” at their celebrity in real-life by granting interviews, appearing on the red carpet and selling glamour (pp. 80-81). This selling of celebrity is generally invisible to the public so that it seems natural and inevitable. While Kate is portrayed negatively for “working” at celebrity, the work of other celebrities is rarely noticed or criticized.

Foster (2005) explains that what makes reality TV so attractive to viewers is “the rupture and fissure of class difference” (p. 7). She explains that this difference “enables their protagonists to realize their American dreams of professional success while also insisting that they remain in their ‘places’” (p. 7). Kate has refused to remain in her “place” as a reality TV celebrity.

Kate fails to meet the good mother criteria because, unlike other celebrity moms who appear not to “work” at their celebrity, Kate’s reality TV roots require her to “work” at celebrity to support her children. The truly good celebrity mothers are those who can afford not to work. Kate’s need to work reflects a working class status that belies the wealth she has accumulated but also recognizes that her financial stability requires that she remain in the public eye and that she continue to be a public celebrity. Descartes and Kottak (2009) explain that “a persistent component of the American ideal of motherhood is the expectation that a woman sacrifice herself for her children” and that “her expected sacrifices extend to her personal career and aspirations” (p. 50). As long as Kate is portrayed as “working” at her celebrity status, she can never be portrayed as a good mother.

Nadya is portrayed as a bad mother because of her marital status and financial situation. She does not meet any of the criteria for a celebrity mother, and there is backlash in the media whenever she attempts to position herself as a celebrity. She is not white or upper-class, nor does she meet the criteria to make her status as a single mother acceptable. Douglas and Michaels explain that “In the media “if you [are] really rich, famous, beautiful, and white, being an unmarried mom [is] way cool. If you [are] poor and black, it [is] degenerate, the epitome of irresponsibility” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 182). While Nadya is not black, her ethnicity marks her as “other.” She is also poor.

Nadya is portrayed as non-white, poor, and dangerous – designating her as an Other. She is best known by the dehumanizing nickname Octomom which further portrays her as an Other. While little comment is given to her ethnic background, Nadya’s name and skin tone mark her as non-white. Her last name (Suleman) and her Iraqi descent suggest that she could be Muslim. Said (1978) argues that a “major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (p. 6). Said (1978) also explains that “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice” exists against “Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture” (Said, 1980, p. 1). Nadya is portrayed as a non-European Other.

Dyer (1997) explains that white people are seen as “just people” or “just human” while all other people are considered “something else” (p. 2). Dyer (1997) also explains that lower classes are often marked by a lack of whiteness. “Class as well as such criteria of proper whiteness as sanity and non-criminality are expressed in terms of degrees of translucence, with murkiness associated with poor, working-class and immigrant white subjects” (Dyer, 1997, p. 113). Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) explain that non-Whites are often portrayed by the news



media as “problem people” who have or cause problems for society (p. 157). This leads audiences to viewing non-Whites as a “social burden” (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995, p. 158).

Nadya’s financial situation is the focus of many articles. She is portrayed as unable to financially support her children and it is reported that she is on welfare. Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that in past media representations “the welfare mother, trapped in a ‘cycle of dependency,’ became ubiquitous in our media landscape, and she came to represent everything wrong with America” (p. 181). They point out that welfare mothers are the delinquents that other mothers can feel comfortable putting into detention (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Because of her financial situation, Nadya is portrayed as an irresponsible welfare mother and a “problem person” who has been and will continue to be a social burden.

Nadya is also portrayed as a dangerous mother because of her mental health. Her ability to care for her children was questioned many times in the articles. Rivers (2007) explains that, “Dangerous Mothers are a current obsession with the news media...while we still like to idealize mommies, suspicion has crept in” (p. 56). Douglas and Michaels (2004) explain that these stories contributed significantly to “a vigilante culture in which mothers have to be carefully policed, because they are, potentially, their children’s worst enemies” (p. 170).

Dyer (1998) explains that while the audience knows that celebrities are constructed, the media encourages the audience to think of celebrities in terms of what they are “really” like. When audiences look for the “real” Nadya in the media, they are given a picture of a single, poor, unemployed, welfare mother. In her research of readers of tabloid magazines, Sofia Johansson (2006) found that readers shifted between humanizing and exalting celebrities. Nadya is not portrayed as someone that audiences would want to identify with or imagine themselves

as. Nor is she portrayed as occupying a glamorous existence. Her Otherness excludes her from celebrity status.

In entertainment and traditional news coverage during this time frame, Nadya is also portrayed as an unworthy recipient of reproductive technology because of the number of children she already has (six), her financial situation and her marital status. Scritchfield (1995) explains that when discourse occurs concerning fertility among the poor or working class and minorities, the focus tends to be on contraception, family planning and sterilization, not infertility issues. “The concern for infertility is class and race biased; it is upper-middle class white couples who are most likely to seek assistance with fertility problems, most likely to be encouraged to seek treatment, and for whom treatment is most available and affordable” (Scritchfield 1995) (p. 138). Nadya, who is single, poor, and a minority, is perceived as an unworthy recipient of infertility treatments.

These articles also portray Nadya as a victim by blaming her doctor for her use of infertility treatments. Woliver (2009) explains that scientific research and practices that seem objective often disguise and justify existing systems of dominance and control. Sherwin (1987) explains, “IVF as practiced does not altogether satisfy the motivation of fostering individual autonomy. It is after all the sort of technology that requires medical intervention and hence it is not really controlled by the women seeking it, but rather by the medical staff providing this ‘service’” (p. 273). By blaming her doctor for giving Nadya access to reproductive technology and the ability to transfer numerous embryos, Nadya is portrayed as a victim with little or no control over her body.

Race and class played an important role in how Kate and Nadya were portrayed in the media during this time frame. At times Kate is portrayed as a good mother because she meets

some of the criteria for a celebrity mother such as being white, wealthy and sexy. Even though she will soon be a single mother, her situation allows for it to be acceptable. However, because she is not willing to sacrifice her celebrity status for her family she is also portrayed as a bad mother. She must “work” to maintain her celebrity status; therefore she can never be a celebrity and a good mother. Nadya’s Otherness will never allow her to be a celebrity. She is portrayed as a bad mother because she fails to meet any of the celebrity mom criteria. She is not white, wealthy or traditionally sexy. She is also portrayed as a bad mother because of her marital status, her financial situation, and questions about her mental health.

While Kate has a voice in the media Nadya does not. Kate is quoted and interviewed several times and allowed to speak her mind and give her side where her marriage and children are concerned. Nadya is rarely quoted or interviewed. While other people (such as her mother) speak for her, she rarely speaks for herself. Spivak (1988) explains that “the subaltern is not privileged (within the dominant discourse), and does not speak in a vocabulary that will get a hearing in institutional locations of power” (p. 304). As an Other, Nadya has no voice in the media.

Kate is portrayed as a worthy recipient of reproductive technology because of her race and class, even though she already had two children. Nadya is portrayed as an unworthy recipient of reproductive technology because she is an unemployed, single, minority mother on public assistance with six other children at home.

While Nadya’s use of reproductive technology is the most covered topic for her during this time frame, Kate’s use of reproductive technology is mostly ignored. One reason for this is the time frame chosen for this study. Kate’s infertility treatments and the birth of her children took place many years ago. This study took place during the time frame immediately following

the birth of Nadya's octuplets, so how she became pregnant with eight babies at once is a natural news topic for this time frame. However, considering the amount of news coverage that Nadya's use of reproductive technology received during this time frame, it is important to note the lack of coverage about Kate's use of reproductive technology.

Michie and Cahn (1997) explain that class becomes very important where access to infertility treatments is concerned. While the choices that wealthy Americans make concerning infertility treatment remain private, the fertility choices of the poor are made public (Michie & Cahn, 1997). Because of her class, Nadya's use of infertility treatments is viewed as a public issue, while Kate's is regarded mainly as a private issue.

While Kate's decision to use reproductive technology to have children is rarely questioned, Nadya's decision to use reproductive technology to become a mother is criticized. Rich Solinger explains that "in the minds of many people, legitimate pregnancy has now become a class privilege reserved for women with resources. Other women—those without resources—who get pregnant and stay pregnant are often regarded as making bad choices" (Silbergleid, 2009, pp. 99-100).

Feminist scholars attempt to understand how our society uses gender along with other social inequalities such as race, class, age and religion to maintain power structures that guarantee social inequality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). These findings speak to how our society views celebrity and motherhood. They also illustrate that race and class play an important role when society determines who has a right to be a mother and what that mother should look like. While it may seem problematic to allow people who cannot afford to have children access to reproductive technology, denying them access limits children and parenthood to those who can afford to pay for it. As a society, most of us would not think of denying people access to

reproductive technology based on race or religion, but economic class for many is a different matter. However, it is no less discriminatory or problematic. The ability to have children exists for all fertile people. As long as our ideas about good mothers and bad mothers are shaped by stereotypes of gender, class and race, prejudices about who deserves access to reproductive technology, and therefore which infertile people have the ability to have children, will remain.

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