

'A literary phenomenon of the non-literate': classed cultural value, agency and techniques of self-representation in the ghostwritten reality TV star memoir
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ABSTRACT

The wide readership and commercial power of the ghostwritten celebrity memoir are indicative of its cultural significance, yet it remains a critically overlooked, much-derided genre. With some of the most popular texts being associated with female celebrities, both the books and their female author-subjects are 'bad objects': viewed as inauthentic due to visible mediation and thus denied authority. This article seeks to demonstrate that, far from being a legitimate means by which to invalidate the genre, the ghostwritten status of celebrity memoir is a source of complexity that rewards critique, and, indeed, makes it an exemplary site for the study of the wider dynamics of the construction and circulation of celebrity. This reading accounts for both the collaborative authorship and the industrial conditions of these texts' construction without dismissing them as the solely cynical manufacture of corporate merchandise. Contrasting the memoirs of Paris Hilton and Jade Goody (and their respective ghostwriters where visible) offers a productive interplay between polar class positions that enables a reading of the ways in which access to certain capitals inflects the celebrity's status as subject of her own life story. This shows the ways in which agency in self-representation is multiple and negotiated within gendered parameters.

KEYWORDS

Celebrity memoir;
ghostwriter; gender;
reality TV

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Celebrity memoir as broadsheet hate object

The wide readership and commercial power of the ghostwritten celebrity memoir are indicative of its cultural significance, yet it remains a critically overlooked, much-derided genre, dismissed by one *Observer* reviewer as 'a literary phenomenon of the non-literate' (Cadwalladr 2006). This somewhat typical sweeping insult takes in the texts, their readers, and their ghosted celebrity author-subjects. In the case of the latter, this highlights the fact that this denigration comes from a perceived gap between a celebrity subject's literary ability and their ghosted output. Yet the conflicted logics of 'ghosting' – its ambiguous and mediated claims to authorship and subjectivity – have yet to be fully explored in relation to celebrity memoir.

Every Christmas, as the new batch of celebrity memoirs is released in anticipation of the lucrative Christmas gift market, the broadsheet media gleefully predict the death of the celebrity memoir.¹ Yet such books continue to be released in great numbers, counting commercial successes amongst them.² 'Are We Seeing the Death of the Celebrity Memoir?' asked a *Daily Mail* headline, hopefully (Crone 2014). These stories pose as quantitative news, hiding behind a smattering of ('notoriously unreliable') Nielsen Bookscan sales data (Maatta 2014, p. 160). In reality, they present qualitative judgements laden with discourses of cultural value, with journalists keen to distance themselves from the genre and perform their 'superior' taste: 'As for me', states Iain Hollingshead (2011) in the closing sentence of a 2011 *Telegraph* article titled 'Is it Curtains for the Celebrity Memoir?', 'I'm going to do my best to hasten its demise by auctioning my collection on eBay – and buying some good novels instead. Especially ones not ghost-written for Katie Price'. Ghostwriting is presented as further contaminating unapologetically low culture. A *New Statesman* review of Jade Goody's *Catch a Falling Star* (2008) opens with a comparable disdainful reference to the invalidating presence of the ghostwriter: 'The last thing you expect to read, on opening the second autobiography by the former *Big Brother* contestant Jade Goody, is an extract from *Prospect* magazine. Like the rest of this book, it's not written by her' (Hanley 2008). Like Hollingshead, the author of a 2012 *Salon* article, titled 'The Death of the Celebrity Memoir', proudly asserts her distance from the material she is reviewing:

I seem to have a much lower than average interest in the people who write them. I've never watched a reality TV show. (My feeling is that if I'm going to be entertained, I'll go to professionals.) So I still don't really know who Snooki is. (Miller 2012)

These articles show journalists proudly and performatively distancing themselves, keen to 'distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 6). It is significant that, despite discussing a crop of memoirs by both male and female celebrity authors, and demonstrating contempt for the genre as a whole, both journalists choose to focus upon sexualised female reality-stars at the point of summing up their disparagement. Hollingshead (2011) mentions 17 texts authored by male celebrities (including footballer Paul Gascoigne, reality TV businessman Alan Sugar, and pop boy band One Direction) and two by female celebrities (Price and actress Joanna Lumley). Yet it is Price he holds as typifying the abasement

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of the genre. A 2007 *Independent* headline makes the gender specificity of the disparagement explicit, heralding the 'Decline and Fall of the C-list Female Celebrity Memoirs', claiming that a failure of 'likeability' is a problem specifically facing *female* celebrities (Bignell 2007, emphasis added). This article will demonstrate how contemporary celebrity memoirs and their female author-subjects are 'bad objects': viewed as inauthentic due to visible mediation, and thus denied authority and rejected due to the anxieties they stimulate.

It is significant that even celebrity studies, a field which deliberately and politically seeks to disrupt such cultural hierarchies, has neglected celebrity memoirs, treating them as just one of many supplementary texts that comprise intertextual celebrity identity work. In a scholarly field concerned with the vexed status of the 'real' amongst obvious mediation, celebrity memoirs have been held to epitomise the problems of inauthenticity and manufacture (Dyer 1977–1978, Bell 2008). Rather than viewing memoirs as a site for the interrogation of these central issues of celebrity, analysis of the memoir has tended to end with the identification (and dismissal) of these texts as constructions – an oversight which, deliberately or otherwise, reproduces gendered discourses of cultural value.

This article seeks to demonstrate that, far from being a legitimate means by which to invalidate the genre, the ghostwritten status of celebrity memoir is a source of complexity that rewards critique, and, indeed, makes it an exemplary site for the study of the wider dynamics of the construction and circulation of celebrity. This article seeks a framework for reading these texts which accounts for both their collaborative authorship and the industrial conditions of their construction without dismissing them as the solely cynical manufacture of corporate merchandise.

The production of a memoir, collaborative or otherwise, is an act that claims certain forms of agency in self-representation. Yet in responding, even indirectly, to external criticism and normative discourses, these regulatory narratives implicitly become contained within the memoir. This model of celebrity as assemblage applies not only to the complex mediations of collaboratively authored memoir, but to celebrity as a whole.

I use reality TV stars Jade Goody and Paris Hilton as examples, not because either can be seen as representative of female celebrity – many academics have argued for the particularity of their celebrity (Holmes 2004, Fahy 2007, Skeggs and Wood 2008). Rather, a productive interplay between their polar class positions enables a reading of the ways in which access to certain capitals inflects the celebrity's status as subject of her own life story. Smith and Watson argue for the way in which one is 'coax[ed], coach[ed] or coerce[d]' into giving an account of oneself as pre-existing 'discursive patterns both guide and compel us to tell stories about ourselves in particular ways' (2010, pp. 51 and 32). As Judith Butler argues, 'conditions do not "act" in the way that individual agents do, but no agent acts without them' (2004, p. 11). Thus, whilst the existence of industrial conditions which collectively produce the mediated life story of figures such as Hilton and Goody does not in itself negate their agency in self-representation, it must be understood as 'situated agency' – 'an agency that operates alongside and even within structural forces and constraints' (York 2013, p. 1339). For Goody, a deficit in socioeconomic

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status compels her to participate in her abjection through a process of confession that gives the reader-interlocutor the authority to judge and forgive her, not only for what she has done but for who she is, as she repents and seeks redemption from the shame of working-class origins. For Hilton, a reciprocal excess insulates her from having to produce a memoir that participates on the confessional terms set by convention or audience appetite, instead enabling a strategy of ellipsis and camp play. As reality TV stars denied the shield of a socially approved 'talent', however, neither have the cultural capital to save them from humiliation. For both Hilton and Goody, negotiating demand for their exposure means, at points, colluding with the degradations levelled at them: humiliation itself can be traded as a form of capital. This comparison shows the ways in which agency in self-representation is multiple and negotiated within gendered parameters.

Celebrity memoir as scholarly 'bad object'

Celebrity studies have yet to fully interrogate the celebrity memoir – the space in which many of these discourses are played out. A small community of scholars such as Leigh Gilmore (2010) and Julie Rak (2013) has convincingly examined the contemporary popularity of the memoir genre; however, this has tended to centre upon authors without any pre-existing fame. The community of scholars who have applied scholarly attention to memoirs by and about famous women is smaller still. Here, Pamela Fox's (1998) work on the memoirs of women in country music began the important work of questioning the role of the contradictory role of the ghost in manufacturing and undermining authenticity. More recently, Katja Lee (2014) stands out for her arguments for the possibility of celebrity agency and her endeavours to trace evidence of its presence in the co-authored text. However, with the exception of these attempts to recuperate the genre, celebrity memoir itself has rarely been the focus of analysis. Beyond this, celebrity studies scholars have, otherwise, tended only to deal with memoir as one of many elements of the cross-platform celebrity persona.

This intertextual approach was set by Richard Dyer (1977–1978), who observes how the meanings of offscreen and onscreen identities reciprocally constitute one another. His is a model of diffuse biographical details functioning paratextually to the core text of the feature film. Fan magazines, newspapers, studio publicity, and legal trials are treated similarly as elements lending meaning to, or resolving contradictions in, star images. Together, these collectively offer a 'finite multitude' of potential meanings, or a 'structured polysemy' (Dyer [1979] 1982, p. 3). When memoirs are acknowledged, at least in relation to classical Hollywood, they are treated with scepticism in relation to the highly controlled studio system ([1979] 1982, p. 421). Mention of memoir itself thus ends with the observation that it is a tool for deliberate, fabricated acts of branding.

Celebrity memoir has been equally neglected by literary scholarship. The genre's visible commercial function contributes to academic uneasiness regarding its validity as an object of study. As Julie Rak suggests, 'the books of the memoir boom are produced by mainstream presses for large audiences, and perhaps that is why critics of autobiography tend to overlook

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them or not teach them in their classes' (2013, p. 3). Ghostwritten celebrity memoir occupies a degraded subsection of the autobiography genre. As Mark A. Sanders observes, the perceived low status of ghostwritten memoir has led to scholarly neglect, and to it being 'largely dismissed in favour of the perceived authenticity found in self-generated texts' (1994, p. 455). G. Thomas Couser is one such scholar who, in his book *Memoir: An Introduction*, dismisses celebrity memoir out of hand, observing: 'seeking to immortalize oneself is not necessarily a noble motive; hence the redundancy of celebrity memoir' (2012, p. 14). Thus, the ghostwritten celebrity memoir becomes doubly discredited. That a book is authored by a sole subject is no guarantee that their words are credible, and yet if the authorship is collaborative it is read as a guarantee that their words are not. The association of the genre with subjects from 'low' culture has contributed to its devaluation. Echoing the synecdochal sexism of the broadsheet press, John Sutherland notes:

The general rule about ghosting is that the lower the literature, or aspiration, or our esteem for the author, the less we're upset . . . When Katie Price admits that hands other than her own create her bestselling works, we smile indulgently. No one expects a model to write her own books any more than they expect her to sew her own clothes.
(Sutherland 2001)

So low are society's expectations of such celebrity women that their inability to author their life stories is a presumption, not a disappointment. Falling between scholarly disciplines, ghostwritten celebrity memoir is the genre that no one wants to claim.

Goody and Hilton: an unlikely pair of celebrity class anomalies

I felt like utter shit. As I lay on my bed I even started hitting myself, somehow trying to take the pain away. (Goody 2009a, p. 13)

Possibly the best thing about being an heiress is that you don't necessarily have to work. Everyone else must work, though, so it immediately sets you apart. (Hilton 2004, p. 100)

Existing work in celebrity studies has convincingly drawn links between class and gender in the role of judgement in celebrity discourses. For example, we can mention here Skeggs and Wood's findings that reality TV upholds the middle-class 'subject of value' over the undesirable working-class participant as the form depends upon 'making good and bad behaviour specific to practices, bodies and people' (2008, p. 560) and then inviting audiences to make according moral judgements based upon how successfully its stars perform the 'labour of femininity' (2008, p. 564). Similarly, Allen and Mendick's investigation into the centrality of class and gender to distinctions between 'proper and improper celebrity' reveals exclusionary celebrity

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discourses in which 'it is the female working-class celebrity in particular that is constructed as abject other' (2013, p. 79).

Whilst developed in relation to sexuality, Judith Butler's theorisation of the abject can be productively applied to these classed practices of exclusion in subject formation which require the production of a category of abject beings who are 'not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' (1993, p. 3). Here, the abject other serves to define those social positions and spaces that are regarded as unliveable and uninhabitable and to mark those 'whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the abject' (1993, p. 3). Tyler and Bennett theorise celebrity culture as functioning as a 'class pantomime' in which gendered social hierarchies are cemented in the collectively censured figure of the (usually female) 'celebrity chav' (2010, p. 376). Thus, reality TV and celebrity discourses have been established as class-based, exclusionary practices, reinforcing dominant social hierarchies through the delegitimisation of certain practices, bodies, and selves. These findings about the ways in which working-class women are judged and found lacking apply directly to Jade Goody. Indeed, all three studies discuss her star image directly. This is why bringing Paris Hilton's antithetically privileged celebrity background as point of comparison offers such a productive and, as yet, unexamined contrast: the middle-class discourses of value, impropriety, and undesirability remain, suggesting that the hegemony of middle-class values operate in both directions – both 'downward', towards the working-class, and 'upward', towards the wealthy elite.

Whilst Paris Hilton and Jade Goody both represent (or in Goody's case, represented) female celebrities with TV careers and best-selling memoirs, they are not a pair that obviously belong together. The British working-class mum and the American heiress and girl about town appear to sit on the opposite sides of a number of representational binaries. Whilst reality TV was the vehicle by which both women entered mainstream public consciousness, their positions within their breakthrough shows are a direct inversion of one another. In 2002's UK *Big Brother*, Goody appeared as a member of the public and thus a representative of ordinariness who was thrust into an extraordinary situation. Having made the transition to serial celebrity 'reality' contestant, she made an ill-fated return to *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2007 which saw her evicted for the racist bullying of Indian co-star Shilpa Shetty. Attempting rehabilitation, she then participated in its Indian franchise *Bigg Boss* (2008) but was diagnosed mid-filming with the cancer which caused her death in 2009. Paris Hilton, by contrast, as an heiress and socialite, is held up as an extraordinary individual who, in 2003 American TV show *The Simple Life* (2003–2007), clashes with 'ordinary' life. She and fellow socialite Nicole Richie give up the privileges of their LA lifestyle and travel around America attempting to undertake demanding, poorly-paid labour in a chaotic, humorous, carnivalesque, and, crucially, temporary inversion of status (Bakhtin 1965). Ordinariness and specialness are not neutral, descriptive terms, but rather are constructed and value-laden, used to privilege certain things over others.

What is described as ordinary is disparaged for its quotidian mundanity, but also has the normative power to present something as naturalised. In the celebrity marketplace,

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ordinariness can be traded to make a star likeably accessible, while specialness is traded to inspire aspiration. Dyer ([1979] 1982, p. 7) argues that both ordinariness and specialness must combine in a star image to balance envy and aspiration. Like Goody, Hilton is an outlier in celebrity class identities and far from representative of celebrity in general. Rather than reconciling contradictions through a balance of representational elements as Dyer suggests, each appears to sit at polar extremes: one having come from a background of severe disadvantage, the other from the utmost privilege.

The contrast between Goody's memoir and Hilton's is stark. From its title, *Confessions of an Heiress*, to its chapters 'How to be an Heiress' and 'My Jet-set Life', and its photographs of mother and daughter on the catwalk in the height of 1980s luxury fashion, Hilton's (2004) memoir, first and foremost, is about being born rich. Hilton's star identity is characterised most strongly by inherited wealth. Thus, as Thomas Fahy (2007) argues, Hilton 'fails to embody the typical promise of modern-day celebrity – that anyone can achieve the same. If celebrity is a function of birth, it is as exclusive as we've always feared, and supremely undemocratic'. Contradictorily, Hilton's memoir simultaneously displays her privilege and undertakes an extraordinary denial of socio-economic reality, issuing advice to her readers to channel their 'inner heiress' because 'being an heiress is really all in your head' (2004, pp. 5–6); and to 'choose who you're born to' because 'lineage can be a state of mind' (2004, p. 10). Whilst these statements seem to play to the cultural narratives of 'a country so steeped in the myth of classlessness' (Wray and Newitz 1997, p. 1), the very existence of Hilton, who has claimed to be 'American royalty', refutes this myth (Sales 2000, cited Fahy 2007). Both Hilton's and Goody's star narrative test Dyer's ([1979] 1982) 'success myth' model of celebrity which 'demands' both talent and hard work.

Goody's memoir informs readers that she is the daughter of a man 'found overdosed in the toilet of a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant – which must go down as one of the classiest exits in history' (2009a, p. xxxvii). Where celebrity memoir convention sees its authors heavily emphasising their difficult beginnings, Goody uses sarcastic paralipsis to reject her background for not being 'the classiest' whilst emphasising how far she has come. Offset against this scene, her memoir teaches readers that 'reality' TV can be the catalyst for triumphing over such adversity: 'I had to find an escape . . . when I saw the advert for Big Brother it felt like I'd been offered a lifeline' (2009a, p. 14). Goody paints a picture of deprivation, desperation, and shame. Typically of the genre, both women claim that their memoirs offer up their 'true' selves, as distinct from their public identity. 'A lot of people have the wrong idea about me', opens Hilton's memoir, 'so I've finally decided to give you a sneak peek into my very hyped life – so you can know the real me' (2004, p. 4). Where Goody offers up inglorious revelations in an earnest tone that implies both shame and distress, Hilton is playful and titillating, offering only a 'sneak peek' that suggests her private self is hers to share at will (2004, p. 4). Hilton makes no such earnest promise and offers no such shameful detail. The subtitle of her *Confessions* is 'A Tongue-in-Chic Peek Behind the Pose'. This tells her readers three things: she is not being serious; this is not the full story; and none of it was 'real' in the first place. Both the promise of a glimpse of 'the real

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me' and that of revelations one has 'never dared tell' appeal to the same audience desire to cross the line between public and private self (so integral to autobiography and to celebrity culture as a whole). However, they suggest a power differential between the two women in relation to their status as subjects of their memoirs. The stakes, of course, are higher for Goody, who views celebrity as her 'lifeline' and depends upon remaining in the celebrity spotlight as her sole source of income, than for Hilton, whose celebrity career merely supplements her inherited wealth. Each book's title reflects these differing positions: Jade: *Fighting to the End*, a title strongly suggestive of struggle and adversity, and Hilton's *Confessions of an Heiress*, with its promise of tales of wealth and luxury.

Goody and her ghost

Thomas G. Couser charts the power dynamics of collaborative life writing along a continuum 'from ethnographic autobiography, in which the writer outranks the subject, to celebrity autobiography, in which the subject outranks the writer' (1998). However, this presentation of a clear direction to the hierarchy is a reductive distinction. A celebrity may 'outrank' their writer economically; this economic status, however, does not straightforwardly translate into agency in the production of their life story. Couser's analysis functions in terms of economic, and arguably symbolic, capital (Bourdieu 1984). However, consider as an example the difference in cultural capitals between Jade Goody and Lucie Cave, the ghostwriter of three out of Goody's four memoirs. Now the editor of UK celebrity gossip magazine *heat*, Cave is a university-educated journalist and broadcaster. Goody was repeatedly excluded from her state secondary school and became famous, and publicly mocked, for her malapropisms, confusion, and lack of education. One therefore cannot assume that Cave is merely an exploited scribe doing Goody's bidding, when it is possible, if not likely, that she had a greater awareness than her subject of the reception that aspects of Goody's life story would receive. As if in acknowledgement of this fact, a foreword by Cave to Goody's fifth and final memoir, *Jade: Fighting to the End*, describes Goody as 'extremely vulnerable' (Goody 2009a, p. vii). Goody's agency in the process of her self-representation is therefore not straightforward.

Smith and Watson identify the mode of autobiographical writing that dominates the field as the 'concept of the self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul of the meaning of public achievement' (2010, p. 2). When Cave opens Goody's memoir with a pre-prologue from her point of view as ghostwriter, she forecloses possible interpretations of Goody's life by directing readers as to how the text should be read. That Cave instructs that the text should 'serve as an inspirational reminder that success can be built on hard work, persistence and inner strength' firmly locates the meaning of Goody's life in the convention of the autobiography genre while reinforcing the success myth Dyer identifies as so integral to celebrity narratives (Goody 2009a, p. vii). Cave makes a claim to the validity and authority of the text as a continuation of a privileged literary form. Yet at the same time, by imposing external meaning upon Goody's life, she denies validity and authority to its celebrity subject, taking control of her life's meaning.

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Goody's memoir emphasises its ghostwriter's presence more openly than is conventional for the celebrity memoir. British pop star and TV personality Tulisa, for example, mentions the name of her ghostwriter in the acknowledgements page with nothing to mark out his role from any other employee of the publishing house. By contrast, a prologue to Goody's memoir by Lucie Cave offers 23 pages in Cave's own voice. Despite the promise of the genre to reveal the real woman behind the image, the book displays the mechanisms by which Goody's identity is mediated, a feature avoided elsewhere to protect the appearance of authenticity and the authority and validity that come with it. Cave attempts to mitigate this visible mediation by repeatedly stressing the verity of 'her' Jade. The first page relates:

The Jade I got to know was more open, honest and candid than any celebrity I'd ever met. [...] Extremely vulnerable, Jade wore her heart firmly on her sleeve in a way no-one else, especially those in the public eye, would dare. (Goody 2009a, p. vii)

This is the alternative source of authenticity for Goody, stemming from an emotional excess which is itself a failure to live within the boundaries of social acceptability.

The ultimate proof of Cave's dominance over the way Goody's life story is told is that it was published after her untimely death. Criticised by the publishing industry as a hasty, cynical move to capitalise upon renewed affection for the star, the book is a republishing of the memoir *Catch a Falling Star* (2008), with a brief closing section taken from her 2009 cancer diary *Forever in my Heart* (2009b). The only new content is therefore that provided by Cave, from her own point of view as ghostwriter and, according to *The Times*, without the permission of Goody's family (Foster 2009).

The presence of fame industry apparatus such as the interventions of management, branding, and public relations teams are an open secret that creates complex webs of mediation around both subject and writer. This further complicates any claims of unrestricted expression of subjectivity that is traditionally an inherent promise of the memoir genre. Goody's memoir describes her former manager, John Noel, making decisions about her career on her behalf, without the full ramifications being explained to her. Goody recounts 'being trapped into saying yes' to appearing on *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2007 with Noel responding 'Don't be a fucking idiot!' when she tried to say no (2009a, p. 74). She retrospectively states, 'I didn't realise then how much of an involvement John actually had with Endemol' (2009a, p. 74). Goody suggests that her autonomy over how she is represented is compromised, claiming that she has been manipulated, or even forced, by those with commercial interests in her high profile. The management team must therefore be added alongside the ghostwriter as a strand of the web of their mediation.

As a commodity in a marketplace, the celebrity memoir must stimulate, anticipate, and, to some degree, satisfy consumer desires. This must only satisfy desires to some degree as Goody, for example, published five autobiographical texts in three years, which suggests a strategic withholding of information to ensure future publications. To stimulate readers' desires, these texts must promise to enclose contents worth the exchange value of, roughly, £7.99. As Holmes argues, celebrity texts must compete with one another because each claims 'to

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offer a higher form of truth' (2004, p. 121). Reality TV promises full, unedited access while reactive gossip media contradictorily offer accompanying 'behind the scenes' stories in real time. Added to this cycle, a constant stream of celebrity social media 'has been equated with the assertion of the authentic celebrity voice [whilst] the seemingly unrehearsed quality of the communiqués lends the form an immediacy and casualness' (Muntean and Petersen 2009). With a high cover price, and a far-delayed (slow media) release date, memoir must work harder to deliver a return for appetites for the story 'behind' all previous stories whilst reconciling, tallying with, or reacting to this wealth of pre-existing extra-textual narratives. Virginia Blackburn, professional ghostwriter to Katie Price, suggests that a certain type of personal revelation is key to selling celebrity memoirs. Of the disappointing sales of Peter Kaye's second memoir, retailed at £20, Blackburn (2010) told *The Observer*: 'People aren't mugs; for that kind of money, they want 400 pages and at least one juicy revelation'. Blackburn describes readers as consumers seeking value for money. In this market, value takes the form of access to, at very least, the personal, ideally the juicily scandalous or shameful. Anticipation of readers' desires is a force that inevitably shapes both the form and content of the life presented. The expectations of readers are in turn formed through exposure to generic convention. Thus, the presence of a ghostwriter is only one element of these texts' structural complexity. They are assemblages, connecting with and reacting to other combinatory elements with which they circulate, existing as part of a web of reciprocal influences and stakes that collectively produce the life story.

Hilton and her ghost

Like Goody's memoir, Hilton's *Confessions of an Heiress* emphasises its ghostwriter more prominently than is usual for the memoir genre, having a cover bearing the authorial signature 'Paris Hilton with Merle Ginsberg'. Like Goody, rather than defend appearances of authenticity, Hilton claims to be revealing her 'real' self whilst displaying the mechanics of her mediation. Contradictorily, these women play no scripted part above and beyond playing themselves, but the process of mediation is part of their identity. In the context of a fame that offers multiple sites of conflicting 'real' selves, the instability of binaries of identity – on/off-screen; performance/self – is evident. Added to the unreliability of identity in a field in which 'performance' is integral, Dyer argues that 'the notion of "manipulation" is fairly widespread and this tends to undercut the illusion of the star's autonomous existence' ([1979] 1982, p. 110). These memoirs attempt to stake claim to their subject's autonomy whilst displaying their manipulation openly. The visibility of ghostwriters suggests that these women are not invested in having their audience believe in their ability to author a book unaided. This is a view perpetuated within their memoirs, with Goody (2009a, p. 49) stating, for example, 'As always, I was clueless' and Hilton (2004, p. 130) making statements such as 'I may not know how to do brain surgery (who wants to? Guys don't want girls to know that stuff)'. In this way they collude with criticisms of their intellect that have accompanied their reception.

When it comes to Hilton's agency in self-presentation, her memoir explicitly claims her own careful orchestration and control. Her image is referred to as something for her to

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construct. She advises her readers: 'Learn how to pose. [. . .] Always know your best angle – for your body and your face – and work it. Study your own pictures' (2004, p. 11). However, as with Goody, it is impossible to confidently conclude whether she even uttered these statements. This is presented as Hilton's 'work': the study of her image to craft the ideal presentation of the self, the fruits of this labour, are to be seen throughout the book's many photographs. The memoir invites the reader to infer signs of Hilton's hand in her representation. However, even here, agency must be negotiated between ghostwriter and subject.

Looking at Merle Ginsberg's career history, it is possible that she was chosen (whether by Hilton or her management) not only for her writing ability. As a television personality in her own right and the senior writer for *The Hollywood Reporter*, a magazine that is influential both with consumers and within the entertainment industry, Ginsberg has influence in the web of celebrity gossip as well as a platform to aid the promotion of the book once published. Hilton's memoir relates her hopes to embark on acting and singing careers. In these and Hilton's other aspirations for her celebrity career, Ginsberg would likely be a prominent and valuable contact. To what extent Ginsberg has subsequently helped Hilton is difficult to ascertain; however, under Ginsberg's tenure, *The Hollywood Reporter's* editorial line on Hilton has since been favourable, giving her ensuing second album and career as an electronic dance music DJ frequent and solely positive coverage. Whilst readers of Hilton's memoir can only infer to what degree she truly is 'taking charge and branding [her]self' (2004, p. 100), a memoir is a carefully crafted product, whether orchestrated by Hilton or by those who surround her.

Whilst non-disclosure contracts mean that the ghost is paid for their discretion as well as their writing, there is a risk in choosing a vocal, public figure with a platform for celebrity commentary as a 'ghost'. The traditional conception of the ghostwriter is that their job is to render themselves invisible in the process to allow the reader the feeling of unmediated access to the subject of the book (Couser 1998). By choosing someone highly visible, this dynamic is impossible. When a celebrity career depends upon the continued interest and favour of the gossip press, an entertainment writer may be a savvy choice for a ghost. It does, however, mean that the ghost brings different capitals to the exchange: influence and useful connections. In another example in which the celebrity far outranks the ghostwriter in economic capital, once again, but for different reasons, the ghostwriter is far from simply a lackey scribe, and is rather a strategic alliance.

Goody as autobiographical subject: shame, confession, and authority

In accordance with Blackburn's expectations of 'juicy revelations', Goody's memoir promises ignominious, hitherto untold secrets as she sets out to 'address stuff that [she has] never dared tell anyone before' in a tone that implies shame and distress (2009, p. xxxv). The memoir fulfils the genre convention of 'warts and all' anecdotes that Gilmore theorises as the 'neoconfessional'. This narrative trend in memoirs under neoliberalism sees 'endless versions of down and outers who make good' (Gilmore 2010, p. 657) displace life narratives which could invite structural critique of the causes of inequality. Instead, argues Gilmore, 'critical energies

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are recruited to the task of judgment' of the individual (2010, pp. 657–658). Seemingly committed to revealing how unlovely they are in reality, many contemporary female celebrities use their memoirs to reveal that, behind the public image, their lives are a mess. Thus, Goody duly shares her shame and narrates the lowest points in her life: 'I bashed my head repeatedly against the wall as hard as I could, I pulled my hair out of my head until my scalp was red raw' (2009a, p. 13). Goody acknowledges the possibility of not revealing the whole truth, explaining that she chose to hold back information in her previous memoir: 'this was what I was being forced to talk about. Something I'd never admitted [. . .] I'd glossed over it in my last book – I'd been too frightened to tell a living soul' (2009a, p. xxxvi). However, for reasons she does not explain, she claims not to have that option now: 'tears are streaming down my cheeks just knowing I have to talk about my mum in this way in the pages of this book' (2009a, p. xxxviii). The suggestion is that her commitment to 'telling all' to her readers is so great that she is willing to upset both herself and her mother to do so. This demonstration of emotional pain is another means by which she authenticates the verity of her book. Further, by suggesting she has no other option, this claim relinquishes any claim to agency and thereby responsibility. Readers are instructed to trust the book's account of Goody because she was innately, perhaps pathologically, incapable of anything other than excessive, candid outpourings. Whilst it may be a form of authenticity, it actively denies the authority that usually attends it, dovetailing perfectly with the criticisms of a lack of both intelligence and restraint that beleaguered her public reception.

Goody frames her 'address[ing] stuff' in the language of therapy, casting her memoir as part of a wider confessional process. The 'reality' TV genre is characterised by the therapeutic mode, combining self-reflexivity and self-disclosure under surveillance (Dubrofsky 2009). Michel Foucault famously observes that confession unfolds within a power relationship, requiring 'a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive' (1978, pp. 61–62).

Having become famous through reality TV with its confessional tropes, Goody later became (or in some cases was cemented as) a national hate figure after charges of racism during *Celebrity Big Brother* 2007. A breakdown followed, leading Goody to The Priory where she says therapists forced her to talk about her upbringing with her crackaddicted mother. Her memoir is positioned as a seamless continuation of this process, transferring the authority of the therapist to the ghostwriter, who will present her case to readers – the authority ultimately asked to judge and forgive her.

My intention is not to cast Goody's memoir as merely the artificial product of the industrial machine of celebrity manufacture, nor Goody herself as their unwitting puppet. Indeed, Goody's memoir presents an opportunity for her to make an intervention in her public image and as such is inherently an act that claims agency. Regardless of however much the seemingly unrestrained outpourings contained within her memoir may be imbued with the emotional authenticity of what Dyer called 'an untrammelled flow' ([1979] 1982, p. 138) and

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Goody herself described as 'the floodgates opening' (2009a, p. xxxv), she does have the choice of which anecdotes to share with her ghostwriter. As well as omission, she has the option to be disingenuous. Both of these are forms of agency, but impossible for a reader to identify with certainty. For example, the previously cited exchange, where Goody's manager calls her a 'fucking idiot' for not wanting to return to *Celebrity Big Brother*, precedes her account of the race row that ended her run of popularity. By claiming a lack of autonomy, she can distance herself from poor decisions that brought about her unpopularity. Thus, narrating one's loss of agency could in fact be a deliberate and useful strategy. The representation of Goody as 'coaxed' (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 51) to participate in certain celebrity or life-storying acts could itself be read as a mechanism by which she negotiates and manages those who may be coaxing her.

At points, Goody very clearly provided a function, not just as 'bad object' but as symbol of all society's ills. In the days after her funeral, British right-wing media described Goody as representing 'all that is wretched about Britain today' (Singh 2009). Similarly, left-of-centre think-tank the Fabian Society is quoted as saying: 'She symbolises the problem', 'our education system let her down' (Morrison 2009). This suggests that another important element is the symbolic function that the life provides to society. This elevating of woman to symbol is both an interpretation of the life and an imposition upon it, and plays as much to stock convention as Cave's imposition of success myths or generic tropes. In this context, Goody is neither a manipulated pawn nor, as Couser imagines, at the apex of society. Rather, her agency in self-representation is negotiated between aspects of her mediation and takes many forms; for example, presenting oneself as wholly lacking agency is a direct claim to agency. Memoirs offer the opportunity to intervene in a public image that often otherwise lies beyond the celebrity's grasp. However, the ghostwriter's editing, surrounding industries, literary convention, the star's symbolic function, and, in Goody's case, a deficit in certain capitals undermine authority and circumscribe the ways in which that agency can be manifested, leaving it instead in a state of multiplicity and negotiation.

Hilton as autobiographical subject: elliptic denial, camp play, and supplementary extra-textual worlds

Hilton and Goody's differing class positions are explicitly narrated in their memoirs and their varying agency as subject manifests through a differing relationship with confession and shame. Where Goody prostrates herself, sharing stories of her pain for the reader's judgement and forgiveness, Hilton's *Confessions*, despite its title, confesses little. If Goody's memoir puts the readers into the position of the confessed-to interlocutor and authority, Hilton's memoir refuses. Indeed, accompanying merchandise for Hilton's *Confessions* comes in the form of a journal titled *Your Heiress Diary: Confess it all to me*, retaining the position of confessed-to authority. The reader searching for 'at least one juicy revelation' (Blackburn 2010) for their \$22 may be disappointed by the limited nature of Hilton's 'confessions', for example: 'Here's one of

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my major secrets revealed: I have curly hair. I get it blown straight all the time so no one has to know' (Hilton 2004, p. 44). Statements such as these pale next to Goody's abjection. The hyperbolic tone with which she presents these 'major secrets' suggests an awareness of the expectations of the genre and a refusal to play by those terms. Despite the fact that Hilton claims, 'At this point, I'm not afraid of controversy', this book firmly avoids making reference to any controversial content (2004, p. 103). Past disgraces only appear in the text elliptically: 'I have pretty much grown up in public and I've done some pretty immature things along the way . . . Everything tends to get written about, so people don't forget as easily. I learned this lesson the hard way' (2004, p. 176). Unlike Goody, Hilton does not appear to be required to justify her actions. Misdemeanours are alluded to but not named. The assumption is that readers already know these stories from outside the text. So comprehensive has the coverage been from the tabloids, gossip blogs, and glossy magazines that, when it comes to events like her sex tape or jail time for drink-driving, these stories need not be repeated in her memoir.

A memoir is one element that contributes to a star persona which is, ultimately, intertextual. Here, the 'text' is Hilton's celebrity persona, so overexposed through multiple media outlets that her memoir cannot be read as a discreet, self-contained text. Rather, it is supplemented by a repository of stories and impressions that circulate around her star image, accumulated through newspapers, magazines, websites, and TV and radio programmes where Hilton appears or is discussed. As Su Holmes and Sean Redmond observe, tabloid news media 'would now seem strangely empty without celebrity disclosures' (2006, p. 289). This increased visibility of celebrity stories in mainstream news means that even the most disinterested consumers of popular culture and 'news' are likely to have some awareness of certain stories about Hilton.

Given that a memoir is fan merchandise, a product whose readership pays to know more about its author and subject, it is safe to assume that they come to the book with a thorough working knowledge of Hilton's previous scandals. Thus, *Confessions of an Heiress* cannot be separated from its position as, for example, the autobiography of a woman made famous for incidents including a leaked sex tape and jail time for driving under the influence, despite these incidents never being mentioned in its pages. Hilton claims that the reason for her writing this memoir is that 'a lot of people have the wrong idea about' her, indirectly raising the spectre of sexual shame in the form of the 'right' and 'wrong' kind of woman (2004, p. 4). Whether or not Hilton views the sex tape *1 Night in Paris* (2004) as contributing to this 'wrong idea', there is an intertextual association between her own star image and the sexual exposure and humiliation encapsulated in the video's existence. In a media environment where much celebrity coverage takes the form of unapproved exposés, control of the nature of the discussion about them lies beyond a celebrity's reach. By contrast, the celebrity memoir offers the possibility of an intervention where the identity presented can be carefully controlled. This version of the star's identity, however, can only be consumed in combination with the rest of a star's media image. Thus, the media web that a celebrity is part of can undermine the capacity of memoir to impose the star's preferred reading upon their life.

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That the reading Hilton offers is 'a tongue-in-chic peek behind the pose' suggests a playful pleasure in the artificial that casts her as a knowing, humorous, and resistant subject. Statements signal to readers that the Hilton in these pages is a construction: 'Create your own image. [. . .] Always act like you're on camera' (2004, p. 6). Hilton's emphasis upon her own fabrication flouts the generic convention of promising access to an unrestrained subjectivity and retracts her earlier assurance to readers: 'you can know the real me' (2004, p. 4). Hilton's memoir taunts, 'You can't always believe what you read.' This refers to her tabloid coverage, but such a comment in the opening page of her *Confessions* reads as a self-reflexive refusal to be pinned down. Hilton's flamboyance emphasises the performative aspect to 'being Paris Hilton'. This could be seen to be embracing the 'love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' that defines Susan Sontag's (1967, p. 275) conception of camp. Hilton (and/or Ginsberg) posits self-reflexive theories on the social function of celebrity, and Hilton's role within it:

I'm a fantasy to a lot of people. They want to think that I have more fun than they do, have fewer problems, wake up looking great, go to sleep looking great, can buy and eat anything in the world I want, and get any hot guy I want. They think I'm 'Paris Barbie'. (2004, p. 8; original emphasis)

Highlighting what people want to believe implies that fantasy does not match reality. However, her memoir then relates precisely that she has much fun, no problems, many 'hot guys', and buys and eats whatever she wants. This articulates and then plays out the fantasy narrative, illustrated with photographs of Hilton styled with the glitzy, excessive femininity of a Barbie doll which are even printed on Barbie-esque pink pages. Hilton pre-emptively punctures the narrative she is about to tell with a smirking irony which highlights the fact that this is Paris Hilton 'the pose'. Sontag's observation is that to 'perceive camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role' (1967, p. 280). Hilton is positioned as performing a fantasy of excess that is knowingly comic, anticipating and disarming potential criticism of her artificiality or privilege. Dyer argues that camp is 'a weapon [. . .] it demystifies by playing up the artifice' (2002, p. 52). Hilton's memoir acknowledges audience expectations of industrial manipulation using the transparent, self-aware, revelling artificiality of camp as a weapon against criticisms of artifice.

Another characteristic shared between Hilton's memoir and Sontag's conception of camp is its 'playful, anti-serious nature' (1967, p. 288). 'Rule Number Two' of 'How to be an Heiress' is: 'An heiress should never be too serious. [. . .] make fun of yourself first, no one gets the urge to do it behind your back. You've taken all the power' (Hilton 2004, p. 9). This refusal of seriousness and insistence upon fun is a form of camp play that is presented as aiding her in a power struggle. Rather than be defeated by press mockery, by campily refusing seriousness, Hilton is positioned as giving them permission to laugh:

While the stuff printed about me over the last few years is amusing and makes me laugh, I've finally decided to let the world know: Okay, I get it. Everyone can have fun with my image because I like to have fun with it too. (2004, p. 4; original emphasis)

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As well as insulation from mockery, Hilton's camp pose frees her from accountability for what she says within the memoir. At every possibility, readers have been assured that Hilton means little of what she says, leaving critics with little basis to hold her to her words. Dyer argues that 'by living out a high camp life-style [one develops] serenity and a sense of being-at-one-with-yourself' (2002, p. 49). In her camp heiress performance, Hilton is positioned as above having to worry about charges such as hypocrisy.

Therefore, when Hilton makes patently offensive comments such as 'being an heiress is all in your head', she is apparently insulated, having already undermined her own position. As the problematic aspects of Hilton's star image are smoothed over as humorous fun, readers are similarly released from the obligations of a sincere stance. Whilst Hilton's ironic posture is unusual for the celebrity memoir genre, it is reflective of contemporary celebrity media. Faye Woods argues that British 'structured reality' TV show (2010–2015) *The Only Way is Essex's* 'celebration of excess tilts toward caricature, yet they seek to defuse their problematic representations by employing a knowing tonal address [which] allows viewers to be detached yet simultaneously invested' (2014, p. 198). By exposing the constructedness, both Hilton and her reader are exonerated from their part in it.

This may free audiences who might otherwise feel shame attached to consuming such a book from a sincere stance. Hilton's publisher has acknowledged that the primary target audience for Hilton's memoir was teenage girls. However, Hilton's success has hinged upon her ability to cross-over to other audiences. The diversity of book-signing attendees surprised Fireside editor Trish Todd: 'We thought it was mostly going to be teenage girls . . . it was moms with strollers, it was little old ladies, it was gay guys, it was businessmen in suits – it was everyone' (cited Fahy 2007). Hilton can sell a princess fantasy, replete with pink pages and sparkly tiaras, to adults, because both are at a safe ironic distance. Hilton's evasive play, alluding to what is already in the public domain whilst refusing to satisfy audiences' appetites for her to narrate her shame, is presented as a deliberate, defensive strategy:

I went on Saturday Night Live soon after my name was in the headlines for something I wasn't proud of. [. . .] The script had [presenter, Jimmy Fallon] asking me, 'Is it hard to get a room in the Paris Hilton? Is it roomy?' and he wanted to cut it. But I wouldn't let him. No way. That was the funniest line. And I got the upper hand with the media the moment he said it on national TV. [. . .] People knew I could laugh at myself, and that one bad incident was not going to make me lock myself in my room. (Hilton 2004, p. 14)

This is the closest her memoir comes to showing vulnerability. It is presented as a personal triumph and successful power-play. She may have successfully positioned herself as in on the joke, invulnerable to ridicule; however, this does not alter the fact that it is a sexist joke at her expense.³ Just as Dyer highlights the pitfalls of camp as 'the self mockery of self protection', Hilton's agency is compromised when she is required to collude in her mockery in order to be accepted (Dyer 2002, p. 50). Ultimately, Hilton's repeated dictums to 'MAKE FUN OF YOURSELF' serve to reinforce that there is little place in the public eye for young, celebrity women who take themselves seriously (Hilton 2004, p. 15). Hilton's memoir does show a different status to

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Goody in relation to her audience and, as a result, does not have to fulfil their appetite for her shame. However, this does not mean that audiences do not have the appetite for Hilton's debasement or that this appetite will not inevitably be satisfied whether Hilton willingly participates or not.

Conclusion

Combining the intimate revelations that form the appeal of celebrity coverage and autobiography's promise of self-disclosure, the celebrity memoir occupies a nexus of access and authenticity. As such, the celebrity memoir is an exemplary text for analysing the construction of the celebrity image in relation to the multiplicity of industrial forces and audience appetites which shape and surround it. This article begins the important work of redressing the neglect of celebrity memoir to date, showing that its ambiguous and mediated claims to subjectivity demand interrogation. There is a rush to analyse new media forms such as social media and their cultural functions as technologies of self-making, and yet this 'old' (but still thriving) media form remains unexamined. The conventions of both 'reality' TV and contemporary memoir demand the subject's exposure as they reveal (ideally shameful) secrets, or are caught in candid moments of humiliation. Individual subjects must negotiate this demand for their exposure. The strategies available to each depend on the capitals they bring to the exchanges between a subject, their ghost, and their audience arising in the process of producing a memoir. By analysing two stars who represent antithetical extremes along the class spectrum, this article shows that strategies for negotiating shame and confession vary greatly from star to star, showing different power dynamics in relation to the status of autobiographical subject. Yet in celebrity memoir, even if evasively, shame and confession must nonetheless always be negotiated. Goody's relative deficit in social status forces her to participate in her abjection as she repents the shame of her class background, giving the reader the authority to judge and forgive. By contrast, Hilton's corresponding surfeit insulates her from the genre's demands for confession, mobilising ellipsis and camp play in the performance of 'tongue in chic' persona. This article has shown how these books and the star images of their subjects are both assemblages as they interact with, redress, seek to reconcile, and implicitly contain a multiplicity of overlapping, interconnecting, often competing narratives. This model has application for the ways in which all star images are multiply constituted of diverse, unreconciled narratives that circulate in the media web that surrounds them. By accounting for the collaborative construction of these texts and finding a space for the ghostwriter in our understanding of them, this article provides an approach for the way in which the industrial conditions of celebrity render all star images collaborative constructions. Agency in self-representation takes many shifting, multi-directional, interconnected forms. However, it is a finite multiplicity in which neither woman can shed her origins. At either end of the class spectrum, as heiress and 'chav', neither is perceived to have 'earned' her fame and lifestyle in ways which are particularly gendered. Memoirs represent an intervention into the web of media narratives that surround these women, but it is an intervention that attempts to make these

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women more palatable by the dominant norms that reject them, thus affording them agency enough only to participate in their own humiliation.

Notes

1. November and December are reportedly responsible for one-third of the annual turnover of bookshop chains (Bignell 2007). From 2007 to 2014, articles were published every year hailing the demise of the celebrity memoir. This would make sense if what they were describing was a steady decline. However, the articles contradict one another on which years are to be considered successes or failures. See, for example, 'Celebs Lose their Sheen for Publishers as Gift-buyers Spurn Celebrity Biographies' (Spanier 2014), 'Sports Stars Ahead on Points as Celebrity Memoirs Fade' (Wilson 2013), 'The Death of the Celebrity Memoir' (Miller 2012), 'Is it Curtains for the Celebrity Memoir?' (Hollingshead 2011), 'Celebrity Memoirs Shelved by Waterstone's after Readers Lose Appetite for Tales of Glitz and Glamour' (Driver 2010), 'Me-me-memoirs . . . Read 'em and Weep! Another Christmas and Another Stockingful of Hilariously Naff Celebrity Books' (Moir 2009), 'Top Memoirs, or Remainders of the Day?' (Kean 2008), and 'Decline and Fall of the C-list Female Celebrity Memoirs' (Bignell 2007).
2. For example, an article in *The Independent* titled 'Celebs Lose their Sheen for Publishers as Giftbuyers Spurn Celebrity Biographies' focuses upon the decline of the genre despite listing commercial successes from the celebrity author-subjects Zoe 'Zoella' Sugg (178,000 copies), Lynda Bellingham (265,000 copies), and Sir Alex Ferguson (850,000 copies) (Spanier 2014).
3. The joke hinges upon a pun conflating the hotel chain that is the source of her inherited wealth and her body, the implication that it is equally easy to pay for access to either, making a link between her perceived promiscuity and the size of her vagina.

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