



"Cheers to babies!": A Duoethnography Approach to Women and Consumption in Yummy Mummies

Sarah Frankel and Leslie M. Cuevas, University of Tennessee

Keywords: Duoethnography, reality television, feminist, motherhood, luxury

Introduction: Reality television (TV) embodies trendy, yet conventional entertainment facets as jaunt depictions of real-world events uncover varied views of gender roles in society (Murray & Ouellette, 2004). With regard to women's roles, reality TV commonly introduces the struggles women encounter in motherhood and individuality (Casper & Gilmour, 2012). For example, *The Real Housewives of Orange County* delivers elaborate performances of femininity and sexuality, ironically naturalizing women's investment in self-creation (Wilhelm, 2013). Other reality TV shows like, *Snooki & JWoww: Moms with Attitude*, present female narratives that provide insight into newly discovered and idealized motherhood (e.g. the shift from party-girl to cool mom) (Gates, 2017).

The recurrent consumption of such fetishized motherhood imagery impacts consumers' outlook on life experiences and expectations (Richins, 1995). Although reality TV is often regarded by consumers as escapism from daily angsts, Wilhelm (2013) contends viewers are subconsciously driven to the veracity of material demands. In negotiating their identities as wives, mothers, and professionals, women engage in this cycle of consumption that leads to defining themselves within each domain (Hochschild, 2003). This negotiation of identity aligns with third-wave feminism in which personal narratives function as a central means toward honoring diversity and embracing contradiction (Kinser, 2004). Moreover, third-wave feminism supports women's sexualized existence while welcoming incessant self-transformation (Press, 2011). The women who are targets of materialistic ambitions among new mothers have been referred to as *Yummy Mummy* (O'Donohoe, 2006). This has been identified as a demography of attractive, stylish mothers presented in the media (e.g., reality TV show) (O'Donohoe, 2006). Thus, while continual self-maintenance supports women's choice in self-expression, it is financially attuned to a consumer society that bids an excess of products/services for shaping one's appearance (Press, 2011). The *Yummy Mummy* phenomenon sparked the interest of two childless female feminist wanting to explore the consumption of new motherhood.

In addition to exploring the consumption of new motherhood the researchers realized they both had vastly different lived experience on the subject. Therefore, this paper is not about presenting results from a qualitative study, but rather adopting duoethnography as a course to examine third-wave feminism and suggest a rejection of the ideal of a shared, collective, experience of women. We dive into the glamorous and uncomfortable world of reality TV by choosing to utilize duoethnography and ask, "can a methodology shift the way we, as researchers, see ourselves?" (Schultz & Paisley, 2016, p.142). In what ways do *Yummy Mummies*, the Australian reality TV show about wealth, fashion, and motherhood, create an impression on two feminists? Through duoethnography, a few bottles of champagne, along with video and audio recordings, we encounter luxurious motherhood from a safe distance and aim to reflect on layered meanings within our life journey (Shelton & McDermott, 2012).

Method: Duoethnographies are fluid hermeneutical texts where readers witness the researchers in the act of narrative discourse and reconceptualization as they scrutinize, reflect, and describe their previously held beliefs (Norris & Sawyer, 2012; Pinar, 1975). The conversations of

duoethnographies prompt readers to recall and reconceptualize their own stories (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). The duoethnographers do not strive to impose conclusions on readers but rather, they encourage readers to juxtapose their stories with the ones in the text (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Therefore, duoethnographies are both participatory and emancipatory in nature; our ontology is based on attempting to understand our world through reflection and scrutiny (Mair & Frew, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology is inclusive, critical and a dialogical endeavor; It is a process of interpretation (Mair & Frew, 2018). We each bring with us perspectival understandings, biases, pre-conceived notions, and practices (Shelton & McDermott, 2012). Through our individual feminist lenses, we focus on meaning verses an objective truth. Therefore, we accept that any findings presented will be a result of interpretation and our continued dialogue because we are working in a paradigm of interpretivism. Below we provide an example of dialogue between the researchers.

[Maria shows of a cabinet of baby shoes totaling 30 dress shoes and 18 sneakers]

L: Wow.

Maria: She is going to be a star. I can tell you now, definitely.

S: That poor child is going to be a f***** monster.

L: (laughs and sips champagne) Like mother like daughter

S: (laughs) She does seem like a monster.

[Maria is preparing the hospital bag for when the baby is born]

Maria: You know, what should she wear? What brand?

Margherita: I'll come and help you, because we're coming up shortly

Maria: All right.

L: What brand?!

S: Oh my god.

L: Why is that important?

Maria: Everything I've learned about being glamorous in general is from my mum.

L: Oh, so it is passed down...

S: F***** *[in unison with L]* generational! Like her mom obviously lives this lifestyle and if they are sitting here thinking what to dress the baby in, it makes me think that the baby isn't the focus, but the clothes on the baby is. So, it's like...

L: It is all about what [other] people see them as.

S: It the consumption of the baby!

L: Well, think about it...other reality stars like Kim Kardashian, like didn't you just see that thing in [Instagram] where her daughter ... [is] on the cover of the magazine, but like several different [photos], basically, on North. She is in all these fashionable (*burp*), excuse me, in all these fashionable outfits. But it is passed down from generation. I mean, look at Kris Jenner, look at Kim, look at her daughter. But there is a bit of Kanye because North's outfits aren't just any trend, it is like, unique. That is what this reminds me of. It is passed down through generation to generation, so it is the consumption. [Be]cause it is like, what brand?!Who says that?! Yummy mummies (*scoffs*).

Discussion: We identify as third-wave feminists and believe we are firmly rooted in our stance as open-minded, empowerment and nonjudgmental women. What a joke that is! Have a couple of drinks and our feminist foundation deteriorates! We judged other women based on their bodies, lifestyles, and

consumption without considering them as expressing a version of feminism that opposed our definition. We called these women names like, “monster”, “crazy” and even “bitch”! This offensive language around what a feminine body should look like and how a soon-to-be mother should act affirmed our implicit biases of a stereotypical woman in reality TV.

References

- Casper, M. F., & Gilmour, D. (2012). The reality of televised motherhood: The personal quest and feminine test of Kate Gosselin. In A. A. Ruggerio (Ed.), *Media depictions of brides, wives, and mothers*, (pp. 27). Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gates, R. (2017). What Snooki and Joseline taught me about race, motherhood, and reality TV. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/y59naycl>.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The commercialization of intimate life: Notes from home and work*. University of California Press.
- Kinser, A. E. (2004). Negotiating spaces for/through third-wave feminism. *NWSA journal*, 124-153.
- Mair, J., & Frew, E. (2018). Academic conferences: A female duo-ethnography. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(18), 2152-2172.
- Murray, S., & Ouellette, L. (2004). *Reality TV: Remaking television culture*. NYU Press.
- Norris, J., & Sawyer, R. D. (2012). Toward a dialogic methodology. In J. Norris, R. D. Sawyer, & D. Lund (Eds.), *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research* (pp. 9–39). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.
- O'Donohoe, S. (2006). Yummy mummies: The clamor of glamour in advertising to mothers. *Advertising & Society Review*, 7(3). Retrieved from Project Muse. <https://tinyurl.com/y2ngc3vq>.
- Pinar, W. (1975). *Curriculum theorizing: The reconceptualists*. McCutchan Publishing Corporation.
- Pozner, J. L. (2010). *Reality bites back: The troubling truth about guilty pleasure TV*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Press, A. (2011). 'Feminism? That's so seventies': Girls and young women discuss femininity and feminism in *America's Next Top Model*. In R. Gill & C. Scharff (Eds.), *Postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity* (pp. 117–133). New York: Palgrave.
- Richins, M. L. (1995). Social comparison, advertising, and consumer discontent. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 38(4), 593-607.
- Schultz, C. S., & Paisley, K. (2016). Social and institutional power structures meet duoethnography: The pedagogy of negotiating roles, dismantling Santa, and "tilting" bitch. In R. D. Sawyer & J. Norris (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary Reflective Practice through Duoethnography* (pp. 141-161). New York: Palgrave.
- Shelton, N. R. & McDermott, M (2012). A curriculum of beauty. In J. Norris, R.D. Sawyer & D. Lund (Eds.), *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research* (pp. 223-242). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.
- Spencer, C., & Paisley, K. (2013). Two women, a bottle of wine, and The Bachelor: Duoethnography as a means to explore experiences of femininity in a leisure setting. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 45(5), 695-716.
- Wilhelm, J. (2013). Money can't buy them class security: The stories of the Real Housewives of Bravo TV. *Storytelling*, 32-48.