

The Politics of Hyperbole on *Geordie Shore*: Class, Gender, Youth and Excess.

Abstract

This article discusses MTV's *Geordie Shore* against the backcloth of current social conditions for working-class youth. It suggests that the aesthetic, physical and discursive features of excess represent hyperbole, produced from within an affective situation of precariousness and routed through the labour relations of media visibility. Hyper-glamour, hyper-sex and hyper-emotion are responses to the ideologies of the future-projected, self-governing neoliberal subject and to the contemporary gendered contradictions of sexually proclivity and monogamous heteronormativity. By 'flaunting' the realities of self-work and making the labour of themselves *more/most* visible, the participants of *Geordie Shore* are claiming an animated type of ill/legitimate subjectivity.

Introduction

Season One of MTV's *Geordie Shore*, the British version of the US programme *Jersey Shore*, first aired in the summer of 2011. That English summer also saw the break-out of five days of rioting where, in response to a police shooting in London, young people took to the streets across a number of British cities, attacking and looting commercial properties and hitting out at the police. The headlines read, 'The Underclass Lashes Out'ⁱ, but importantly those 'underclass' involved were all mostly under the age of 24 (Ball et al., 2011). The media panic and political rhetoric following the riots reinforced dominant neoliberal ideas about anti-social behaviour, denying any structural logic for young people's social exclusion and reinforcing a rhetoric of 'choice' and 'responsibility'. This framing of the riots came from the Right and the Left at a time of downward social mobility rates and high youth unemployment across Europe. The use of 'underclass' to describe the rioters is part of the heightened stigmatisation of the workless poor, who are divorced from the means of production and from the body politic itself. Importantly, it is a rhetoric that has also been used to impose greater penalties, austerity cuts and workfare regimes on young people (Tyler, 2013a).

The riots, and what they indicate about the current conditions of the young unemployed 'underclass', are used as the background context to understanding *Geordie Shore* which is also part of the ongoing 'spectacularisation' of the working class across television. This article intends to extend our understanding of the media's role in the politics of identity, as 'legitimat[ing] forms of identity that are primarily invented in order to generate commercial returns' (Turner, 2009: 23) but in doing so it also takes from Imogen Tyler's (2013b) analysis of broader political currents in the UK context, the more *dialectic* relationship between social abjection and revolt. Whilst it is impossible to completely do justice to Tyler's argument here, it broadly stems from Bataille's 1993 [1934]) analysis of the political functions of abjection and the creation of waste populations in order to reinforce sovereign power. Tyler's emphasis however is to attempt to theorise the struggle between subjectivity and sovereignty because in the process of marking the boundaries of exclusion, waste

populations are made instrumental to the 'imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture' (citing Stallybrass and White 1986:6 in Tyler 2013b: 20). In this way, moving on from Kristeva's (1982) more totalising psychoanalytic account of the notion of an abject subjectivity, Tyler argues for greater understanding of *social* abjection accounting for the potential subjectivities of those that are *made* abject as vital to understanding the discursive orders of social abjection itself. Through a reading of Butler (1993), Tyler insists on a politicization of abjection which can illuminate this sense of struggle and presumes a 'collective demand of those made abject to be heard in the political present tense' further arguing that:

it is only by critically engaging with abjection as contingent expressions of normativity that we might begin to disarticulate the effects of abjection as lived. That is to understand how abjection gives rise to resistance we need to consider the material effects of being made abject within specific historical, political and social locales. (Tyler 2013:37-8)

In this spirit this article turns to the aesthetics and histrionics of the reality television participants in *Geordie Shore*, addressing in more common parlance an understanding of 'what's in it for them?' rather than the more dominant question in reality television literature of 'how does it position us?' In so doing the article discusses how the participants actions are framed as forms of 'hyperbole' which are direct responses to being *made* abject and where reality television's role in the production of identity generates forms of exaggeration which externalise the struggle of contemporary socio-economic conditions.

Social abjection and reality television

Much reality television scholarship has been rightly concerned with how it has encouraged ways of seeing the working class within contemporary conditions of neoliberal late capitalism. Samantha Lyle (2008) refers to a 'middle-class gaze' in *Wife Swap* that sets up a normative middle-class subject position from which to judge the behaviours of participants. Reality television's emphasis upon judgement is one of the new injuries of class (Couldry, 2011), and Beverley Skeggs and I have contributed to that debate by insisting that spectacularisation often detaches the behaviours of individuals from their social and historical contexts to highlight personal failure (Wood and Skeggs, 2008; Skeggs and Wood, 2012). Gilligan's (2013) phrase 'post-digital slumming' describes how British documentaries obsessed with the urban poor have contributed to the ideological battle of blaming individuals and securing support for austerity cuts in the wake of the riots. The more popular journalistic phrase 'poverty porn'ⁱⁱ connects to the very real ways in which the poor are visualised in their naming and shaming for crime and benefit fraud, which is linked to increased systems of

surveillance in what Wacquant (2010) calls 'law and order pornography'. Such a set of scopical relations contributes to a culture in which those not succeeding under neoliberal regimes are *made* abject, failing as self-governing and self-disciplining citizens, and from which the normative middle-class gaze can draw a safe critical distance.

Enter *Geordie Shore*, MTV's British 'glocalized'ⁱⁱⁱ version of *Jersey Shore* which has been a ratings success, regularly achieving over a million viewers per episode and a similar following on Twitter and Facebook^{iv}. It was greeted as the arrival of 'hyper-reality TV' where 'the lowest common denominator is about to get a fraction lower' (Pettie, 2011) and is part of a third 'celebrity generation' of reality television which builds on the increasing media knowingness of both participants and audiences (Kavka, 2012). 'Geordie' is the regional name of the dialect of people from Newcastle Upon-Tyne as well as the name of its residents, and Newcastle is a post-industrial city in the north of England. On *Geordie Shore* we watch eight housemates, originally Gaz, Charlotte, Jay, Holly, Greg, Sophie, Vicki and James, live together in a *Big Brother*-style house where we follow their 'party lifestyle'. The focus is on an extraordinary everyday of clubbing, binge-drinking and having sex and, importantly, everything is framed by the over-dramatisation of events. The action is rarely set outside of the house, except for the nightclub, which could be any night club, whilst the house itself is regularly moved to other destinations, possibly to increase the sporting of swimwear, and also to highlight cultural clashes and the participants' cultural ignorance.^v The programme's provocative content invoked an outcry from local residents about its representation of Newcastle. In 2011 Newcastle MP Chi Onwurah condemned the programme and called for it to be discussed in Parliament over concerns about young people being plied with drink and performing lewd sexual acts for television. Local residents in Newcastle launched a Facebook page, 'RIP Geordie Pride'^{vi}. Clair Wood in *The Sun* fumed, 'Hope the idiots in Geordie Shore are hanging their heads in shame. The only thing they have achieved is being hated by the true Geordies'^{vii}. Thus the show presents working-class youth as beyond the 'limits of propriety' (Skeggs, 2004): partying, arguing, screaming, crying and screwing. They are ungovernable, abject, revolting subjects who operate without shame, the very opposite to the self-regulating, good, neoliberal citizen. In this light the show clearly perpetuates cruel and regional stereotypes of the white working class, fuelling the hate figure of the 'CHAV', which has become a key symbol of abjection and social exclusion in neoliberal Britain (Tyler, 2008; Tyler and Bennett, 2010).

Pleasure derived from watching such programming has been described as 'ironic viewing' where at least (middle-class) viewers can be reassured that they have better taste and moral judgement, whilst simultaneously enjoying voyeuristic titillation via the fantasy of an unregulated and carefree

life. (see Douglas, 2013 with regard to *Jersey Shore*, my parenthesis) The participants are therefore simultaneously 'shocking' and 'comforting' as they work to assuage 'our' anxieties, which means that the position of 'ironic viewing' relies on the viewer maintaining a distance from the participants^{viii}. However, audience research shows that scopic regimes in reality television viewing are more mobile and are triggered by different forms of attachments and empathies (Skeggs and Wood, 2012). Therefore, we also need to understand the embrace of these programmes by young participants and their young audiences; not all can surely enjoy that ironic position of distance and Facebook and Twitter feeds suggest a more celebratory appreciation of this form of reality celebrity, its narrative structure and its excessive characters.

Brenda Weber (2014) asks us to pay close attention to the generic hybridity of reality television and the way in which a show's 'architecture and narrative illustrate compelling points about identity, community and ideology'. For instance 'structured reality' programmes foreground their artificiality leading to questions about whether such self-awareness can provide some defence against stereotyping (Woods, 2014). Here I want to further that debate by offering a closer analysis of some of the forms of excess on *Geordie Shore*, and to emphasise how, whilst they are a dominant feature of sensational reality production, they are also part of the structural contemporary labour conditions of media visibility. Paying attention to the production of excess as hyperbole helps to show how young working-class participants are struggling to establish legitimate forms of subjectivity from within the spaces of their inclusion which produces a particular exaggerated and 'hyper' social aesthetics. As Tyler (2013) insists processes of abjection are produced from the relationship between the political and aesthetic where the 'visible and invisible' as well as 'speech and noise' shape the very nature and form of political experience (Ranciere, 2004).

Making labour visible

Mark Andrejevic (2004) has discussed reality television as 'the work of being watched' in that it acclimatises us into rationalized acceptance that our daily lives are monitored in the interests of mass customisation and global capital. Increasingly, reality participants understand that 'being themselves' can constitute 'labour', which has an identifiable 'value' in the context of market exchange (Jost, 2011). The cast members of *Jersey Shore* and *Geordie Shore* are part of a more 'durable' second generation of reality participants who have been able to sustain their media personae in order to accrue some personal wealth and sustain the dubious currency of reality celebrity (Curnutt, 2011). Here reality participants are clearly engaging in labour whereby the forms of exchange rely on their ability to perform themselves across multiple sites (through promotions, advertising, public appearances, as well as across social media) in order to preserve their place in the

realm of television production. This seems perfectly understandable given the current figures for youth unemployment, which will form an enduring legacy of the current economic crisis – a whole generation who have never worked, at least not under the terms of waged labour.^{ix}

As Andrejevic (2004) notes, reality television draws upon the increasing blurring of boundaries between the realms of production and consumption, where labour is subject to models of flexibility and where self-work is an increasingly important skill to stay relevant to the demands of the shifting labour market (Ulrich Beck, 1992). But this ‘flexibility’ is also sharp ‘insecurity’ for those at the bottom end of the labour market (Allen and Henry, 1997). Curiously, reality television participation does not sit comfortably within the realms of ‘legitimate’ capitalist culture or as a ‘proper’ site of social mobility, despite its fit with these models of capitalism. When the success of *Jersey Shore* allowed participants the ability to negotiate better pay per episode, the cast was reminded by the producer ‘not to lose sight of who you are’ (quoted in Curnott, 2011). It is extremely difficult to get accurate information about what reality participants get paid, as they sign secrecy clauses and cannot get equity cards to join more formal unions, cementing their exclusion from formal protected labour relations (Hearn, 2010). Participants on *Jersey Shore* and *Geordie Shore* actually make more money from public appearances through forms of precarious labour than through direct payment from Viacom. In one interview Vicky from *Geordie Shore* suggested that there was no pay – ‘you can’t get paid for getting drunk’ – but she is keen to point out that the nightclub ‘appearances’, which do pay, involve running up and down the country, which is very tiring ‘hard work’^x.

To make money, participants must continue to work on their visibility beyond the show whilst consciously publically defending themselves against criticism for getting ‘easy money’ or being ‘fame whores’; interestingly Viacom is not subject to such scrutiny. Taking part in the show was not a guarantee of financial reward; Gary says, ‘we filmed our first series, went home and signed back on the dole’, and according to Sophie, ‘I’ve only just paid off my debt after getting so many loans after *Geordie Shore*’^{xi}. Now that they have been filming *Geordie Shore* for three years, the participants discuss the transition they have made from unemployment to financial security and stress their more ‘legitimate’ forms of entrepreneurialism. Following headlines that they are ‘nearly’ millionaires, Gaz said, ‘I’ve saved all the money from the show, it’s all about saving. I’ve just bought a night-club as an investment. Altogether I’ve got three businesses’, whilst James now has a clothing range and a personal training website.^{xii} Interestingly the women’s entrepreneurialism beyond the show all relates to preserving their space within in the media sphere. Most of the women do cover shoots for lads magazines and Vicky has a fitness DVD; Charlotte was the winner of Channel 5’s *Celebrity Big Brother* in 2013 and has a spin-off show on TLC^{xiii}; whilst at the time of writing Holly had

just released a record with a predictably sexy music video^{xiv}. These differences relate to the gendering of media forms of visibility in the world of reality celebrity, but are also made part of the show, where occasional forays into work are all in the realm of promotions, working in bars, or running stag and hen parties.

At the end of his defence at becoming 'nearly' a millionaire, Gaz's punchline was, 'It's the best job in the world – we get paid to go out. It's our job to get pissed, whilst other people work in factories.' Crudely put, Gaz's remarks betray the irony of new labour relations since the decline of manufacturing in the UK, which has had a huge impact in the North East; in 2012 unemployment was 10.9%, above the 8.1% national average^{xv}. Media visibility is an opportunity for some potential (albeit restricted) economic mobility, but the participants must also be conscious of its precariousness and low status. Because the work itself is precarious, they must constantly engage in other work to extend their media visibility, and because it is devalued, they must also work hard to defend it. Where elsewhere the obscuring of the boundaries of labour relations might be seen as part of the new 'flexible' labour market populated by 'mobile' selves, here in reality celebrity, participants must constantly make apparent, demark and work to 'fix' the grounds of what constitutes their labour. As a result, not only are the cast of *Geordie Shore* engaged in a process of work that might be termed 'making themselves visible', but they are also involved in 'making their work as themselves even *more* visible'. This article suggests that these labour relations of media visibility produce the textual features of excess and hyperbole on *Geordie Shore*.

Making self-work visible: Hyper-glamour

Reality television creates spaces for the 'monetization of being' and the 'branding' of one's identity through performance (Hearn, 2008). Woods (2010) has described how in both *Towie* and *Made in Chelsea*, classed femininities are performed in ways commensurate with channel branding strategies. Interestingly, Kavka (2014) has suggested replacing the notion of the 'performative' (iterative and constitutive, from Butler) with a notion of 'flaunting' whereby in reality television participants must more consciously make their gender identities revealing of social codes and practices. It is not a question just of visibility, but of *visualisability*, such that in *Real Housewives*, 'the logic of the programme is to make visible those aspects of hetero-femininity that are usually airbrushed out' (Kavka, 2014: 64). As such, the classed and gender performances of *Geordie Shore* are similarly 'flaunted' so that they reveal the labour conditions of media visibility for working-class youth.

Each of the characters on *Geordie Shore* has a tag line, which is reiterated and repeated constantly through the show:

James: 'The hardest graft I've ever done is to do me hair.'

Vicky: 'I'm the Geordie Girl with the VIP edge.'

Charlotte: 'I'd never snog anyone without a six pack.'

Gaz: 'I've got a degree in pulling.'

Holly: 'I'm fit, I'm flirty and I've got double f's.'

Jay: 'My biggest fear is getting wrinkles.'

In these tag-lines participants attach their subjectivity to the level of sexuality or visibility as they enter into a process where they are continuously called to animate themselves, in what Eva Illouz (2010) might call the constant 'textualisation of subjectivity' that is also visible across numerous other cultural fields, such as internet dating sites. The tags demonstrate what Laura Grindstaff (2011) calls 'caricatures' of class in her discussion of *Jersey Shore*, distilled and condensed into the easy modes of performance in the era of 'self-serve celebrity' (2011). These tag-lines betray something of the emphasis upon visibility and its relationship to contemporary working-class identity. James' 'the hardest graft I've ever had to do is to do me hair' is testament to the contemporary conditions of working-class masculinity in the post-industrial North of England, whilst Vicky's 'Geordie girl with the VIP edge' registers the language of social mobility, resonant with economic hierarchies that are spatially lived out in capitalist culture in the emphasis upon 'VIP' entrances to clubs, restaurants and even airports.

The housemates are physically overloaded by classed markers of taste and excess, through which their bodies are the ultimate repositories of social experience (Bourdieu, 1984). Importantly here, too, labour is made visible: all of the women have excessively long 'mermaid' hair extensions, extended false finger nails, eyelashes, high-definition and exaggerated eyebrows, some breast augmentation, and deep orange tans. These are excessive masquerades of femininity that refuse the look of 'naturalness' normally prized in valuations of middle-class femininity (Skeggs, 1997) and instead the women of *Geordie Shore* work hard to *reveal*, rather than to *conceal*, fakeness^{xvi}. The men are similarly groomed and 'pumped' and many scenes are of both sexes curling, combing, spraying, plucking, etc. In some ways their collective appearance re-traditionalises gender in that girls are hyper-feminine whilst the boys flaunt 'hard' pumped bodies born through working at the

gym. But comparable appearances in *Jersey Shore* have also been described as 'camp' gender performances, as the men engage in constant beauty regimes (Douglas, 2013).

However, Klein (2014) argues that the 'GTL mantra' (Gym, Tanning, Laundry) of *Jersey Shore* is also connected to flaunting a subcultural expression of style associated with the working-class Italian American 'Guido'^{xvii}. Similarly, 'being mint' on *Geordie Shore* is expressive of a hyper-glamorous working-class aesthetic that is consciously 'flaunted' but is also highly visible on the city streets of the UK. For instance, there is a current fashion in Northern cities for young women to go shopping in the daytime in curlers and even a head scarf, simultaneously looking trendy in perhaps a Juicy Couture tracksuit, making public and visible the length of time spent preparing for a Saturday night out. Being seen in curlers would have previously been something the working-class woman would have wanted to avoid as a sign of lack of respectability^{xviii}, but here within the new labour relations of media visibility, it is re-coded as sign of the *work* and *time* you put into yourself.

Teeth whitening, high-definition eyebrows, fake tans are all exaggerated beauty treatments that are born for the stage or the camera in a performance of self that is highly attuned to media visibility, whether that is Facebook or reality television^{xix}. It is an aesthetic code which directly looks into the lens and stresses the labour of its production. The amount of time invested in these body regimes is important because this is time that you have if you are unemployed, but evidence of time-intensive grooming is also a visible symbolic display of *not* wasting time. Position this aesthetic code against another figure of working-class British youth – the 'hoodie'. According to Bell (2013), 'the hoodie' is the 'critical index of a young person from an inner city housing estate' and a figure that was central to the discussion of the riots of 2011. In David Cameron's 2006 'hug a hoodie' campaign, he talks about young people getting into trouble through boredom and having no better way to spend their time, not as connected directly to unemployment but through laziness and a nihilist ill-will; this same rhetoric returned in the wake of the riots (Tyler, 2013a). The 'hoodie' is configured in relation to contemporary surveillance regimes as looking away from the camera, refusing to take up the invitation of the lens and by remaining anonymous, in the political language of social exclusion, refusing the call to individual responsibility.

Hyper-glamour and the hoodie represent extreme extensions along the same axis of mediated labour relations because visibility is now one of the few forms of exchange available to unemployed working-class youth. Whilst the hoodie hides, the working-class reality participant exaggerates his/her visibility to claim some type of legitimate subjectivity and in each case labour is marked by a relation to what is made visible or what is withheld. In stepping into the frame of the lens of *Geordie Shore*, there is an over-performance of class-making which speaks back to the bourgeois framing of

working-class behaviour as 'out of control' and tasteless, and reveals the labour-intensive conditions of the self-work ethic (unlike the 'beige-ing' make-over imperative which denies labour (Weber, 2009)). Since the summer of the riots in Britain, there has been an extension of austerity cuts, which affect young people, and a number of penal reforms to place further limits on the ability of working-class youth to occupy and move through public space^{xx}. Within these conditions it would make sense to claim visibility and mediated space, as a dialectic reaction to forms of social exclusion and as a refusal of other depressed subjectivities available to the underclass because they are rendered invisible and outside of the labour market (see, Charlesworth, 2005). Of course, in the past youth subcultural expression has often involved a public and aesthetic claiming of visibility (Hebdige, 1984; Hall and Jefferson, 1993), but on reality television this is not a straightforwardly 'resistive' subcultural strategy. Its self-consciousness is only made possible by the normalisation of media visibility, such that visibility itself is the end game.

Immoral exteriority: hyper-sexual animation

The good neoliberal subject is a future-directed mobile self that can move through space and time with ease, and the television makeover narrative often emphasises a trajectory of moral redemption where the markers of class, race and excess must be overcome to move into that future (Weber, 2009). Historically, the working classes have been deemed morally acceptable if they can narrate a redemption narrative, such as that of the deserving poor (Steedman, 2000), but *Geordie Shore* resists such a classic positioning. The participants' excessive, sexually explicit and drunken behaviours are revelled in, over and over again. Whilst the house gets transported to other countries for visual relief, scenes of excess are revisited, as each night out represents a similar pattern: spend time getting ready (getting 'minted up'), going out, trying to 'get off', 'tash on' (making out with people of the opposite sex), which often ends in a raging argument or 'kick off' with the group. Without a redemption narrative the participants refuse any 'reflexive' understanding of their subjectivity through which to demonstrate moral interiority, instead stressing an alternative way of being through which they 'live spontaneously at the level of everyday life' (Bennett, 2003:22).

However, on *Geordie Shore* actual sex acts are not as important as the *visualisability* of sexual activity. Charlotte, when asked about sex on television, said:

'It's just like normal sex you totally forget the cameras are there... we have competitions and ask the crew, "who looks the best when they are having sex" And they always say on the sly that it's me. If only there were Baftas for that.'^{xxi}

It is the *visibility* of the act – who *looks* the best – not the performance, who *is* the best, which is prized here in an understanding of pornographic convention. What is curious is that on *Geordie Shore* there is actually very little sex shown: there's some grainy, night-time surveillance-cam footage, images of (mostly male) bare bottoms crawling under duvets, and duvets moving up and down, but there are rarely any breasts or genitalia; such sequences are mercifully short. Klein (2011) argues in *Jersey Shore* that the use of grainy footage contributes to a classed aesthetic that feels 'trash'. In another interview Holly suggests that the scenes 'are just bed covers going up and down with a bit of noise thrown in'^{xxii}. Yet we are still led to believe that the housemates are 'at it' all the time by their constant references to 'banging' and by their *talk* of sex, not only in terms of what actually happened, but to what they want or do not want to happen. It is the *talking* about sex, not so much the *act* of sex, which takes up most of the screen time. In reality television mode, it is the reaction not the action that is the central dramatic device. Sex therefore is exaggerated beyond what can actually be seen, which means that our understanding of 'visualisability' must extend beyond the visual to other ways of making actions, feelings etc. more *noticeable*.^{xxiii} In the space between the screening of sex acts and the hyperbolic talk of the sex acts, the sex itself becomes re-animated; given life that it perhaps never had and re-cast as something much more compelling than the original.

Consider the ratio of action to reaction in the visual economy of the showing and telling of sex. In a very short extract in Episode 3 of Series One, we see a duvet moving up and down, which is taken as an indication that one of the participants, Sophie, is having sex. This scene is interspersed with four to-camera segments where she 'commentates' on her own behaviour, which flout the accepted rules of 'confessional' to-camera narration that is common in documentary style:

"Last night I found meself a lad

I like tashed on n everything with him.

I don't know what happened but I'm the first girl to shag on Geordie Shore.

I think the 'year of the slut' has actually begun – get in' [slaps fist in triumph]

In Eva Illouz's (2010) description of emotional capitalism she talks about the various ways in which intimate relationships can be detached into objects for control and clarification so that they can be rationalised, traded and exchanged in processes of 'out-contextualisation'. As is common on reality television, Sophie is called to commentate on her own behaviour, producing a present-tense evaluation of her past performance. In the process Sophie is also detaching herself from her sexual relations and commentating on herself in a way that is not reflexive, but evaluative in terms of her

media visibility. In Illouz's terms the commentary is subject to depersonalisation, 'emptied of [its] particularity to be evaluated according to abstract criteria' (2010:36). Sophie's commentary registers her as 'the first girl to shag on *Geordie Shore*' whilst she does not talk about the experience of the shag. (Was it good? Was it the best or worse she has ever had?) This is followed by her analysis that 'the year of the slut' has actually begun, reinforcing her tag line. The use of this voice as witness to herself is not as it would be in news or documentary to validate the event with authenticity, but rather to re-animate the event into something else. This is not narration but *animation*, which can only produce hyperbole.

In the same episode we see Charlotte and Gary in bed accompanied by a volley of thirteen separate to-camera reports on the revelation surrounding the size of Gary's penis. This is how they culminate:

Charlotte: Gary is a sex machine and I think I'm one of the only girls that have not given him sex.

Gary: If I've got a secret weapon that does drive the girls wild it's me massive cock

Gary: When I got the secret out she was amazed.

Charlotte: It was like a parsnip, that's what I said it was like.

Gary: Obviously if it was like a parsnip I think I'd win obviously the vegetable competition because it'd be the biggest and best.

Charlotte: When it was swinging around the balcony I thought was going to smash the walls down, bosh, bosh, bosh, bang, bang, bang (?) I thought we were all going to fall out of the roof n that!

The story itself is more *re-performed* than performed as we see very little of it actually happening such that the event becomes a quotation of itself. When in the footage Charlotte is amazed ('that's so big'), in his own commentary on himself Gary repeats to camera, 'When I got the secret out she was amazed'. The commentary is in an endless present, despite the event being in the past; the participants move seamlessly between the past and present tense in the performing and re-animating of themselves then and now. Like a stuck record, in order to escape from retelling the same instance in the most banal of ways, the reactions can only get more exaggerated – 'it was like a parsnip!'. Therefore on *Geordie Shore* participants are involved in the continuous 'hyping' of events and in their escalation, performing them as ridiculous and 'out of control'. In doing so sex acts are amplified and result in the most outrageous of hyperbole – '*I thought it was going to smash the walls down – bosh bosh bosh*'. If there is a pornographic aesthetic to *Geordie Shore*, of the kind Lury

(2005) talks about in serial dramas such as *CSI*, it is one in which the kinetic editing of the scene and the commentary exaggerate the act as comedic cartoon, rather than a scene for arousal. This hyperbole frees the event from anything that might actually have happened, since it is the process of *making sex more noticeable*, rather than the sex itself, that is prized. The extent of the process of animation is suggestive of the work that must be put into exaggerating sexual proclivity. Appearing 'out of control' is here a discursive performance which ultimately gives events new life and simultaneously speaks back to expectations of self-governance. Instead of succumbing to any (neoliberal) demands to offer a self-reflexive narrative of redemption, the participants are constantly engaged in a (spitting) 'out-contextualisation' of hyperbole. Rather than present responsible moral interiority, under these labour conditions of televised visibility, they work hard to produce the opposite: hysterical immoral exteriority.

Sex, class and postfeminism

In the popular reactions to *Geordie Shore*, what is deemed most morally shocking, is that these stories about sex are presented as fun and not in any way shameful, and of course this weighs heaviest upon the women. It is the women rather than the men who are questioned about their public sexual exploits; for instance, a *Daily Mirror* headline ran, 'Holly Hagan admits she watches sex scenes with her parents and they're proud'^{xxiv}. This runs against the grain of gendered accounts of the 'deserving poor' where the 'recuperable fallen woman' should relate a narrative of seduction, betrayal and redemption (Steedman, 2000). Here the girls on *Geordie Shore* do not occupy the normative working-class position of shame that working-class women have been taught to embody as a result of their historical alignment with sexual activity. (Walkerdine, 2011) Of course the refusal to accept the shame narrative in other reality formats creates good television (for instance, in *Ladette to Lady* (Dobson, 2012; Skeggs and Wood, 2012)). Klein (2014) has discussed the ways in which the women of *Jersey Shore* revel in an 'abject femininity' through which their laddish and vulgar behavior refuses the subjectivity of traditional Italian femininity.

This can be related to the broader 'sexualisation of culture' and perhaps a postfeminist subjectivity whereby these women become the subjects rather than the objects of desire (Gill, 2007). But as Gill (2009) reminds us, this thesis is disrupted by distinctions of race, class and sexuality. For instance, the fictional white, middle-class, sexually active characters of *Sex and the City* can only deploy their overt sexuality by offsetting it against their considerable material and cultural capital (Arthurs, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). Work in American sociology by Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) on 'hook up' culture on college campuses suggests that for middle-class women fleeting sexual encounters can offer better opportunities than the ties of long-term relationships which impede their mobile trajectories

and yet the working-class women of their study could not 'own' this sexualisation in quite the same way. In Skeggs' (1997) ethnographic study the women take part in 'gender power plays' where they consciously deploy their positioning as overtly sexual to their (albeit limited) advantage. Whilst the women of *Geordie Shore* are involved in the reality production of their 'real' selves, they perform a 'hyper' sexual subjectivity where they can exteriorize their sexuality at the level of cartoon, rather than own it through any subjective interiority. It is perhaps one response to the mediated labour conditions in which they find themselves as they 'flaunt' their sexual proclivity that they spit it out, make it ridiculous, and perhaps, perversely in doing so, wrestle back some control.

***'You just wanna shag us and I just want to break your heart'* (Charlotte): Hyper-emotion and the limits of gender**

But sex is not the whole story on *Geordie Shore*, even as the narrative evolution is around heterosexual relationships. As others have argued about *Jersey Shore*, despite the 'camping' of aesthetic codes, it demands 'compulsory heteronormativity' (Klein, 2014) making it simultaneously 'prudish and pornographic' (Douglas, 2013). In fact when the group goes out, they sometimes make a pact to 'just be a family tonight', which means staying together and not 'getting off' with anyone else in the club. There is a considerable emphasis upon heterosexual relationships in the home: in the first series, Holly is trying to negotiate her separation from a boyfriend at home, whilst Charlotte and Vicky negotiate their relationships to Gary and Jay. In Series Two Vicky embarks on an ongoing relationship with Ricci, which lasts through to Series Five, and the two get engaged, posing for wedding photo-shoots on magazine covers, although the relationship ultimately breaks down. When in relationships they share bedrooms and become referred to as the 'married couples' and those rooms are off-limits for 'pulling', though there is a separate 'shag-pad' for casual sex. Sex is not exactly set free on *Geordie Shore*; rather, it is set up in direct opposition to monogamous heteronormative coupledness. The public world of sexual proclivity must literally fight it out with the domestic heteronormativity of 'the house'.

Much of the melodramatic excess – the shouting, crying and screaming – is generated when it all 'kicks off' as these tensions repeatedly rupture. Again, the housemates' commentary further animates and highlights the potential for those moments. These are most heightened when the women show their distress at the men 'tashing on' or 'pulling' someone else when they are attached to a couple. Heteronormativity through coupledness is one of the main routes for working-class women to display respectability (Skeggs, 1997). In Pamela Fox's (1994) work on the British working-class novel, for example, utopian moments for women are generated through romance, where a

fixed working-class identity is exchanged for a fixed gender identity, 'the absence of one making the other possible' (p24):

The romance plot comes into play in these works to display a longing for relations based in tenderness, rather than exploitation, yet also to represent a utopian private arena in which one is valued for one's gendered self alone. (Fox, 1994:24)

For the women on *Geordie Shore* this tension between sexual activity and monogamous heteronormativity represents precisely the fissure in their gendered and classed identities. For them, the breaking down of the romance plot is most devastating. Many of the excessive emotional outbursts in the house occur when the men take other women to the coupled women's rooms; floods of tears and anger are regular, in spite of their apparent carefree attitude to casual sex.

At the end of the first series the most consistent romance narrative was between Charlotte and Gary (also the most sexually active of the men) and, when Gary brings another woman home to their bed, Charlotte, drunk, breaks down. We see edited clips of her stumbling around the street and screaming, which are then put together with Greg and Vicky consoling her and her screaming at Jay. As with all scenes, much goes into its frenetic (hyper) animation. It is edited with commentary anticipating the scene, whereby it is already loaded for hyperbole. Charlotte herself sets it up by saying, 'I'm hoping Psycho-Charlotte won't come out on Gary, that would be bad, but she's maybe's gunno'. Externalising herself in the third person as another (rationalised) character, she pre-sets the events that we are *about* to see of her. Others help to hype this up; Vicky: 'Charlotte is a legitimate kick-off', Holly: 'she's mortal', and as Vicky tells us, 'no matter how switched on I say she is, no matter how much of a tough cookie I say she is, I think she's fallen a bit for him like'. In the moving backwards and forwards between events and commentary before and after the event, which actually culminates in Charlotte shouting at Jay, rather than the errant Gary, Charlotte is described over and over again in a number of ways. Finally Greg says, 'I don't think Gaz realises how mad Charlotte is like, we all thought she was nice and innocent, but she's absolutely mad, after seeing her go out, she's absolutely mad'.

In the many moments such as the one above, the women's aesthetic labour is undone, the hair and make-up dishevelled, the clothes become out of place. Their drink-fuelled, out-of-control anger provides the emotional spectacle that is the antithesis of the postfeminist and neoliberal value of composure, but it is also the undoing of their hyper-glamorous, working-class femininity. If sexualised culture is made hypervisible on *Geordie Shore*, then so too are its contradictions; that the girls are simultaneously 'up for it' and ultimately bound by scripts of femininity and monogamous

heteronormativity generates and hypes up the production of madness. Renold and Ringrose's (2011) research on young working-class girls' production of their sexuality on sites like Bebo and Facebook also suggests a similar set of contradictory performances (and the use of sexually explicit taglines) where the girls adopt a 'normative schizoid subjectivity'. This framing they take from Deleuze and Guattari, not as pathological, but as a way to describe the contradictory pulls for women under neoliberal capitalism which produces a social insanity. On *Geordie Shore* the women's madness is at once spectacular, seemingly excessive, but repeated over and over again and thus regularised, normalised and to be expected. The women must perform a sexually liberated consumer-driven sexuality as well as hold on to a longing for a monogamous relationship, through which the constant reiteration of those tensions serves only to further reinforce compulsory heteronormativity.

The gendered politics of this movement between being in and out of control also has a broader currency as part of the labour-conditions of media visibility. Similar contradictions are played out in gossip magazines and tabloids in the cycle of images of female reality television stars captured at points of extremes as either 'out of control' and 'on a bender' and then 'back in shape' (slim and toned) and having 'got their life back together'. The schizophrenic moving backwards and forwards between exaggerated positions of bodily control provides further, if confined, space through which to perform and show the work and labour on oneself expressed as hyper-femininity.

Conclusions

This reading of *Geordie Shore* has described the 'hying' of character, sex and emotion as features of the broader labour conditions of media visibility for working-class youth and the limits imposed by gender. In Imogen Tyler's (2013b) discussion of the dialectic nature of the 'revolt', she discusses how social abjection is made in politics and struggled over by those *made* abject. Here, reality television encourages hyperbole through which participants work hard to maintain their noticeability in response to the expectations of work and self-work in the current neoliberal conjuncture. Media visibility itself constitutes new forms of labour whereby looking into the lens, produces aesthetic and flaunted acts of excess. This can be seen as a response to downward social mobility whereby young people face a crisis of possibility where their futures are increasingly uncertain as they struggle to manage their conditions of precariousness (Berlant, 2011). In this context, on *Geordie Shore*, set in the post-industrial North of England, normative codes of working-class propriety, respectability and shame are reworked in the sight of media visibility as one of the depressingly few routes to some form of ill/legitimate subjectivity. In this struggle participants are negotiating the terms of their media visibility against the backdrop of expectations of being beyond responsibility where the cramped repetition of their performances forces animated hyperbole. As in

Kristeva's (1982) account of the looping back temporality of abjection subjectivity is always in revolt against itself where, 'I expel myself, I spit myself out' and thus in *Geordie Shore* stereotypes are literally 'spat out' as rhetorical expressions of the contemporary politico-affective situation.

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ⁱ The Telegraph, August 2011

ⁱⁱ See Owen Jones 2013 lecture to the Royal Television Society, 'Totally Shameless- How TV portrays the working class' <http://www.rts.org.uk/rts-huw-wheldon-memorial-lecture> or numerous articles on recent factual programming in Britain. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/05/benefits-street-poverty-porn-celebrity-bbc>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Woods (2014).

^{iv} Metro.co.uk November 15th 2012 <http://metro.co.uk/2012/11/15/geordie-shore-ratings-could-make-it-the-most-popular-series-yet-620064/>.

^v Series Three was filmed in Cancun in Mexico and series 6 in Sydney, Australia. Some episodes have involved trips to Barcelona, Amsterdam, Prague and Tignes and apparently the new series includes a trip to Iceland. The first series had a 'Magaluf Special', based on the fact that Magaluf in Spain is a popular holiday destination for young working class Britons on cheap package holidays.

^{vi} *Daily Mail*, 29 June 2011

^{vii} *The Sun* 26th May 2011

^{viii} This type of reading reiterates the spacial dynamics of disgust which are part of the political regimes of abjection discussed by Sara Ahmed (2004) amongst others.

^{ix} 'The Jobless young: Left behind' *The Economist* 25th September, 2011 and see Spencer Thompson Institute for Public Policy Research, 'States of Uncertainty: Youth Unemployment in Europe' November 2013.

^x Amelia Butterfly 'Geordie Shore stars say they work hard' BBC News Newsbeat 26th June 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/18593441>

^{xi} 5th November, 2012 *Huffington Post*

^{xii} *Daily Star* 20th July 2014

^{xiii} <http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/geordie-shore-charlotte-crosby-star-3024463>

^{xiv} <http://metro.co.uk/2014/08/01/geordie-shores-holly-hagan-has-totally-massacred-kelis-milkshake-4817931/>

^{xv} *The Economist*, 28th July, 2012.

^{xvi} Marnie, introduced in series 6, tagline is 'I'm a natural beauty real boobs, real hair'. Her introduction was to stir up some jealousy amongst the women and her tagline pokes at their fakeness.

^{xvii} Pauly D's phrase in Jersey Shore is 'fresh to Death' and in Geordie Shore it is replaced with an emphasis upon being 'mint', both which stress the need to be perfectly turned out.

^{xviii} Curlers and a head scarf were previous symbolic markers of the much less glamorous image of the working class housewife who would not have been able to afford a hairdresser. Thanks to Andrea Press for a conversation about this.

^{xix} This has of course been heightened still by the introduction of high definition television which exaggerates bodily size and imperfections.

^{xx} <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/uk-news/young-people-targeted-further-austerity-6471035>.

In a number of cities police have extended the use of ‘dispersal orders’ preventing young people from collecting together in public. For instance see <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/mar/31/barnsley-under-16-curfew-criminalises-generation>

^{xxi} Metro 24th July 2012

^{xxii} The Daily Mirror 27th July, 2014

^{xxiii} My thanks to the editors for helping me with this point.

^{xxiv} 27th July, 2014