

# **‘They’ve taken her!’ Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Mediating Maternity, Feeling and Loss**

**Caroline Bainbridge**

It is just over two years since the disappearance of Madeleine McCann from a family holiday resort in Praia da Luz in Portugal. The case has garnered an extraordinary level of global media attention, the vast majority of which has taken as its object of focus Mr and Mrs McCann themselves, perhaps an inevitable outcome of their decision to mobilise such a highly visible PR campaign. Many media commentators have remarked upon the ‘slick’ professionalism of both the campaign and its key protagonists. Indeed, within six months of its launch, the ubiquity of the campaign produced the view expressed by Booker prize-winning author, Anne Enright, that ‘disliking the McCanns [had become] an international sport’ (Enright, 2007). In this paper, I address some of the complexities and contradictions at play in the media response to this case by foregrounding issues of gender and the maternal because, as a case study, the story of the McCanns arguably works to underscore some of the most deeply embedded contradictions in contemporary cultural attitudes to maternity, feeling and loss, and thus furnishes us with an opportunity to think critically about woman-to-woman sociality.

During the first year of Madeleine’s disappearance, barely a day went by without some degree of press coverage of the case. What is of note for my paper is how Kate McCann became a particular focus for commentators on both the case itself and the broader context of the PR campaign. In particular, there was extensive discussion of Kate McCann’s conformity to dominant assumptions around gender and what it means to be suitably ‘maternal’ and ‘feminine’ or even ‘guilty’ or ‘innocent’. When female journalists commented on the case, these concerns became particularly

pronounced. Picking up on widely reported claims that the wives of Portuguese investigating officers had suggested that McCann's demeanour was too 'cold' and 'controlled', thereby signifying uncertainty about her innocence in the whole affair, female journalists in the UK repeatedly drew attention to McCann's 'thin-lipped fortitude', her 'consistently composed' state and to the fact that she is 'too thin', 'too intense' and 'too well-dressed'. It is worth noting that such commentary transcends the divide between broadsheet and tabloid journalism. In *The Guardian*, Germaine Greer commented that 'the sight of Kate McCann on television for the umpteenth time, clutching a pale pink toy called Cuddles in lieu of her lost daughter, Madeleine, makes me feel a bit sick' (Greer, 2007: 28) while Julia Hartley-Brewer, an extensive commentator on this story, used her column in *The Sunday Express* to remark that

I don't like the McCanns very much. I think they're bad parents for leaving their children alone while they went out to a restaurant and their refusal to accept any responsibility for what happened as a result of their selfishness makes my flesh crawl (Hartley-Brewer, 2007b: 29).

It is interesting to note that the complexity of the case, with its frequent intrigues and hyperbolic twists and turns, intensified the focus of press comment on Mrs McCann alone, and this tendency was enhanced all the more as the Portuguese police investigation began to turn its attention toward her as a possible suspect. In female-authored columns in the national press, there were widespread references to her 'emotionally unstable' character, which sat in uneasy tension with references to her devout Catholic faith and her professional role as a family doctor. Even the more sympathetic columnists claimed that 'just looking at her is torture' (Parsons, 2007). After the return of the McCanns to the UK, she was frequently described as a 'neurotic recluse,' whose 'face is lined with exhaustion and despair,' and there was extensive comment on the Portuguese police investigation of whether she might be 'suffering

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from ‘bipolar mental disorder’ as well as ‘hysteria’ and ‘clinical depression.’ She was deemed ‘unable to cope,’ which raised questions about whether she was *ever* able to cope with three children under four as a result of IVF – the connotations here suggest that Kate McCann is not a ‘natural’ mother, with IVF providing the proof.

Discussion of ‘appropriate’ maternal behaviour also underpinned the turn in the coverage prompted by Kate McCann’s mother, Susan Healy. She made a heartfelt plea to the press to stop commenting on Kate’s appearance because of the effect such journalism was having on the well-being of her daughter, suggesting that Kate herself felt that she would not be subject to such rounded criticism ‘if she had a fuller figure’ and ‘looked more maternal’ (Chaytor, 2007). This led commentators to suggest that McCann had brought this opprobrium upon herself because of the media campaign she and her husband had initiated – hence they dismissed her concerns that she was being denigrated because she did not look ‘mumsy’ enough on the grounds that this was indicative of her own prejudices. This turn in the coverage of the story led to even closer scrutiny of her image, and commentary on her appearance did not abate. Mary Carr’s invective is illustrative here:

How does a mother look? Angular, meticulously well-groomed and attractive like Kate McCann who has been judged and found wanting for her emotional indifference in the weeks and months after her daughter’s disappearance... Kate McCann certainly has an idea about how most mothers look. In her opinion, the archetypal mother is overweight, has ample breasts and looks ‘maternal’ which in Kate’s somewhat outdated lexicon regarding femininity probably also means owning plump facial features and radiating an easy-going humanity... If it weren’t for the lustre of her good looks, their remarkable campaign would never have had its impetus (Carr, 2007b: 17)

Aside from the inevitable debates here about McCann’s ‘yummy mummy’ status, the extent of the outcry around this particular turn of events is interesting in terms of press perceptions of McCann’s class aspirations. From the outset, the case triggered growing media disquiet about the apparently *laissez-faire* attitude of the McCanns and their

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friends in deciding to leave their children alone in their holiday apartments whilst drinking and dining in the tapas bar on the Mark Warner holiday complex. Initial reports on this aspect of the case opined that the McCanns' apparent middle class status and the assumption that Mark Warner holiday parks are aimed at the 'professional classes' somehow worked to sanction their decision to leave their children 'home alone' as vaguely responsible. Within one month of Madeleine's disappearance, however, piqued remarks in the media about the contrast in attitudes should this event have befallen a working class family at a Butlins family holiday centre marked out the beginning of an almighty backlash against the McCanns.

The issue of class also played a part in justifying the vilification of Kate McCann in particular. Media coverage initially sought to underscore the McCanns' middle class credentials, albeit the case that this status was deemed to have been hard-won through commitment to high academic achievement that was at odds with the couple's working class origins in Glasgow and Liverpool. In the first interview given by the McCanns to the BBC, some three weeks after Madeleine's disappearance, much is made of the bourgeois facilities available at the holiday park chosen for the trip with friends who were interested in water sports and tennis. The social mobility of the McCanns is underscored here, as it frequently is in the press coverage. However, by the end of May 2007, many bloggers and online commentators were increasingly expressing the view that the McCanns were being allowed to get away with irresponsible behaviour with regard to their children's well-being on the grounds that they were able to perform a bourgeois sensibility that helped them to avoid scrutiny by social services in the UK. By August, this row had intensified to the point that Julia Hartley-Brewer commented explicitly on this matter in *The Sunday Express*:

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The fact is, if the McCanns were unemployed scrotes from a grotty council estate, they would have been hung out to dry by now amid demands for their two children to be taken into care, but because they are middle class doctors, we're wary of criticising them. (2007a).

This comment came a matter of days after Kate McCann's first solo interview about her experiences on *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4. Here, the press commentary was shifting ever more against the McCanns (and especially against Kate), not least because the Portuguese investigation had by then turned its focus on the parents themselves. In this context, it is also worth noting that the radio 4 interview was the first sustained opportunity to hear Kate McCann's voice, with its distinctive Liverpool accent. Her working class roots were arguably accentuated in a medium in which her attractive physical appearance and the visual signifiers of her affluent lifestyle were not on show. More importantly, much of the broader media coverage made a great deal of the fact that McCann did not cry in any of media appearances (in stark contrast to the mothers of Rhys Jones and Shannon Matthews); nor was she given room for manoeuvre in being asked to justify her oft-stated dislike of the glare of media scrutiny and her simultaneous willingness to participate in photo shoots and so on.

By now, McCann was becoming something of an enigma, a melee of signifiers and contradictions, shot through with issues of gender, class and emotion. For Anna Pukas, in *The Daily Express*, these signifiers were overtly written on the body and the more slender she became, the more pronounced suspicion of her became:

In Kate McCann, we have a woman who has returned from more than four months in the Portuguese sun with her skin still milk white. Already slender from all that running, she is now whippet-thin. Her brown jeans slap around fleshless thighs and her blonde hair blows around fleshless cheeks. She looks far too girlish to be a mother of three who is pushing 40. (Pukas, 2007)

Someone has recently said that Kate McCann has been physically transformed by grief and that her back, shoulders, hands and mouth are now 'reshaped into the angular manifestation of a silent scream'. A florid description but no exaggeration. Always slender, Kate is now emaciated, her clothes flapping around her fleshless arms and thighs. Since their return, Kate's life – like her physique – has diminished. (Pukas, 2008)

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Such commentary came to a head once McCann had been officially named as a suspect during the autumn, when the media ‘outed’ her as ‘Hot Lips Healy’<sup>1</sup>, highlighting her proclivity for partying and good times during her time at University and suggesting that her innocent demeanour belied a more impassioned and sexually carefree lifestyle that once again threw the apparently demure and appropriately middle class demeanour into question and augmented some of the more sensationalist claims made about the attitudes and lifestyle of the McCanns and their friends. McCann’s authenticity was called into question, not just by the police investigation of her, but also through the mediatisation of her life. She was increasingly represented as a covert individual, as someone who may have something to hide – what this might be stretched from a history of mental ill health through concealed but highly classed social aspirations to highly speculative suggestions about her sexual preferences and behaviours. (Of course, all of these can be seen to work together to underscore her lack of authenticity and therefore to heighten her apparent ‘guilt’.)

As a signifier of woman, then, McCann seemingly occupied all of the old familiar stereotypes, and she became a point of coalescence for fantasies of femininity inscribed in madness and wanton abandon as well as in discourses of the maternal and religious belief. Her loss of a child conceived through IVF further undermined her claims to properly middle class status, because it goes without saying that middle class women must know how to hang on to the children they have struggled so hard to have in the first place. Perhaps the most disarming element of all of this, however, is in the fact that most of these images of Kate McCann were contrived by other women. The shocking willingness of women to disparage other women, regardless of their individual plight, raises serious questions about the status of women in contemporary

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culture and also about the psychological experience of femininity by women in general. How does this case help us to make sense of such developments?

Aside from the palpable envy at play in the commentary of the female journalists, there is a more insidious set of refusals that I find deeply worrying. At stake here seems to be the contemporary understanding of what it means to be a 'woman' and a 'mother.' Kate McCann seems to have become the yardstick against which femininity is measured. How depressing that even for female commentators, all discussion of what is to be understood as 'feminine' is framed either in terms of appearance or by gleeful and often snide observations on the inevitable obliteration of a woman who has seemingly all-too-successfully aspired to 'having it all.' In their insistence on undermining the public image of Kate McCann, female journalists have faithfully maintained allegiance to a time-worn definition of femininity inscribed through appearance and maternal devotion as well as shoring up 'the psychic price that gender inscription attaches to ambition and strivings and achievement' (Harris, 1997: 292).

Luce Irigaray offers an important critique of this position. Arguing that the symbolic order is an inherently masculinist one, she suggests that women are defined according to their appearance and demeanour and how this fits into a paradigm of masculine desire. They undergo 'specul(aris)ation' by the masculine, becoming exchangeable as commodities and acting as a mirror to the masculine in order to shore up its position of power and control. The commodification of women within the symbolic order according to such structures leads women to perceive themselves as commodities too and they unwittingly participate in this regime of commodification

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and ‘specul(aris)ation’ with the result that the feminine in itself is unable to be articulated. It becomes unspeakable.

Commodities can only enter into relationships under the watchful eyes of their ‘guardians’. It is out of the question for them to go to ‘market’ on their own, enjoy their own worth among themselves, speak to each other, desire each other, free from the control of the seller-buyer-consumer subjects. And the interests of businessmen require that commodities relate to each other as rivals. (Irigaray, 1977: 196)

As a result, relations between women (‘commodities among themselves’) are defined in terms which privilege masculinist perspectives on femininity. The upshot is that women inevitably become rivalrous with one another (196).

The parallels here with the general tenor of the commentary on Kate McCann by female journalists are telling. Arguably, the extraordinary levels of envious rivalry, biting criticism and sharp-tongued, often self-righteous judgement are heightened by the sense that McCann was somehow ‘fair game’ because she and her husband sought to mobilise the media to assist in their search for their lost daughter. Indeed, there was extensive commentary on this in these very same columns. For example, in *The Times*, India Knight remarked ‘There is a growing rumble of unease out there at the McCanns’ omnipresence in the papers and on television. No aspect of their grief is deemed too private to share with the media’ (Knight, 2007).<sup>ii</sup> Comments such as these raise issues about the ethics of PR as a media process, which is related to concerns about the fad for celebritisation that dominates the contemporary Western popular cultural scene.

Andrew Wernick argues that promotion has become a basis for the contemporary social and cultural condition, suggesting that ‘the range of cultural phenomena which ... serve to communicate a promotional message has become, today, virtually co-extensive with our produced symbolic world’ (1991: 182). What is more, ‘from dating and clothes shopping to attending a job interview, virtually everyone is

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involved in the self-promotionalism which overlays such practices in the micro-sphere of everyday life. At one level or another, then, and often at several levels at once, we are all promotional subjects' (1991: 192). Effectively, the view expressed here echoes Irigaray's description of women and the feminine as examples of symbolic commodities. As Wernick notes, 'the subject that promotes itself constructs itself for others in line with the competitive imaging needs of its market. ... The outcome ... is a self which continually produces itself for competitive circulation: an enacted projection, which includes not only dress, speech, gestures and actions, but also, through health and beauty practices, the cultivated body of the actor' (193).

In the case of Kate McCann, what appears to be at stake is the symbolic function of femininity. In mobilising PR strategies as a means of deflecting and managing, or better, overcoming, an irreparable sense of loss, the McCanns inadvertently opened themselves up to intense public scrutiny at a time when discourses of fame and celebrity were dominant within the domain of popular culture and everyday life.

Dominant fame-based culture comes replete with a number of effects for those who find themselves caught up within the 'vortex of publicity' it entails (Whannel, 2002). As Graeme Turner notes, the 'commodified status [of celebrity-commodities] must generate some personal costs along the way' (2004: 35). Indeed, 'the acceptance of celebrity-commodity status can carry quite severe personal consequences. It involves a framework of behaviour over which the individual will have virtually no control' (2004: 38). In the case of Kate McCann, this seems very apposite. However, Whannel notes that 'spectacular celebritydom' provides audiences with 'modes of public exchange in which moral and political positionalities can be rehearsed' (2002:

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214). Through the strategies of PR and self-immersion into the slippery spaces of mediatised fame culture, then, the McCanns have both exposed themselves to excessive public scrutiny of their private (emotional) well-being, and also constructed themselves as yardsticks against which contemporary ethical concerns might be measured.

With regard to contemporary notions of femininity and female behaviour, as represented in the media coverage discussed in this paper, the commodity-status of the mediatised individual is accentuated, and the relation between Kate McCann as a woman and the newsworthiness of her case is honed in a way that scrupulously maintains the boundaries of ascribed symbolic function. Where Irigaray discusses the commodification of women in everyday symbolic life in terms of ‘specul(aris)ation’, mediatised femininity has become prone to construction in terms of what we might call ‘spec(tac)ul(aris)ation.’ Female commentators respond to this by mapping envious and annihilating responses apparently based on unquestioned stereotypical notions of femininity onto women who overstep the mark. In so doing, they present an all-too-depressingly familiar backdrop of misogyny and feed into the cycle of commodifying women through the process of mediatisation in ways that shore up retrograde gender values and assumptions.

For Kate McCann, the deployment of a PR campaign and its associated media coverage was only ever intended to heighten public awareness of her missing daughter. She has not deliberately *sought* to become famous in the usual sense of the term. It is arguably because her appearance and personal and professional circumstances conform so neatly to the apparent ideals of women in Western society that McCann has become caught up in the glare of fame culture. Women reading McCann have attributed to her

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the desire for fame so celebrated in popular culture and have, in turn, used this to justify their envious misogynistic attacks on her. She has been roundly subjected to ‘spec(tac)ul(aris)ation’, turned into an unwitting celebrity-commodity, seen to embody values that mirror the contemporary state of femininity within the symbolic order. She is denigrated at every opportunity for being a professional career woman, but one who is also not quite what she seems, a woman who had to struggle to have children, turning to IVF, and whose suitability for the maternal role is therefore questionable. Her ‘yummy mummy’ sense of style and attention to personal grooming become weapons for use against her. By conforming too neatly to what is required of women in the contemporary domain of ‘post-feminism,’ Kate McCann apparently unwittingly sets herself up to fall.

The willingness of female journalists to use their columns to denigrate and attack everyday women on the basis of their appearance, demeanour and behaviour signals the extent of the worrying trend in popular culture to assume that feminism has had its day. As Angela McRobbie has argued, the effect of this is to create a sense that feminism is somehow ‘taken into account’ in the postfeminist context, but this ‘permits an all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal’ (McRobbie, 2004a: 256). McRobbie is clear that this process entails ‘repudiation rather than ambivalence’ (257), a position echoed by Tasker and Negra who describe the ‘othering’ of feminism as an ‘erasure of feminist politics from the popular’ (2007: 4-5).

It is against this backdrop of post-feminism that female commentators on women in the public eye endorse a retrograde patriarchalism by condemning women at every turn. They become, in this sense, the most masculinist mouthpiece imaginable,

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incarnating the position of Ariel Levy's 'female chauvinist pigs' (2005). The effect of this is insidious. The interpellation of women readers, especially of female-oriented 'magazine' sections of tabloid newspapers such as 'Femail' in *The Daily Mail*, is here couched in terms of a wholehearted reinscription and re-entrenchment of 'traditional' (read masculinist) gender positions. This conforms to an ethic of competitive negativity around struggles associated with the feminine and perpetuates myths of femininity inscribed only with reference to the masculine. The lack of sociality between women commenting on other women in the press and elsewhere maintains cultural boundaries and contributes to what McRobbie has called the 'new patriarchal same' (2004b). It is interesting to think through the fantasies at play here and to link these to the broader cultural context of femininity.

As much of the debate about the meaning of post-feminism makes clear, assumptions about the pastness of feminism are central to contemporary formations of femininity and female subjectivity. If we unpack this a little more, however, such assumptions imply a perception that feminism is irreparably resigned to the past, perhaps even dead (or at least in the midst of a drawn out process of dying). In contemporary theorising around the post-feminist phenomenon, it is not unusual to find references to the spectral and moribund qualities of feminism (McRobbie, 2004a, 2004b; Tasker and Negra, 2007) which underscore this further. If feminism is in the throes of dying (or, indeed, if it is already dead), space in which to mourn its passing would seem essential. The British object-relations psychoanalyst Melanie Klein discusses the importance of psychological processes at play in mourning, and she makes an important series of links between infantile manic depressive states and the experience of loss and grief.

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For Klein, the loss of a loved person/object entails the destruction of the internal version we carry around in our unconscious minds. This triggers a repetition of early states of anxiety characterised by feelings of guilt, remorse and fearful persecution. There is a sense of dread that all good inner objects can be lost in the same way, and there is a dominant sense that any surviving good objects become retaliatory and destructive. Klein argues that 'in mourning, the subject goes through a modified and transitory manic-depressive state' and this requires the subject to repeat the processes of early childhood in order to recuperate (Klein, 1940: 354), although there is also a sense that this kind of experience also both enables us and requires us to be able to be able to live with disappointment. Perhaps there is a model here that enables us to reconceptualise the paradoxes of post-feminism. It is as though the advent and entrenchment of the post-feminist sensibility creates an unnameable sense of loss for women. Whether overtly politicised or not, the close-lived relationship with feminism that has shaped the lives of a generation over the past thirty years or so can be seen as a structuring relation, and as such it is internalised within the inner world of women as an object which has both good and bad aspects. Its apparent cultural death in the new age of post-feminism entails an important psychical loss in this context, a loss that must be properly mourned in order to be overcome.

Arguably, then, what we see at play in women's vindictive behaviour toward other women can be framed in terms of the manic defences of projection, annihilation and disavowal – defences which are co-extensive with the early stages of mourning. The loss of feminism as an internal object leaves contemporary women in the west with no clear cut sense of what it means to be a woman. The enormity of such a loss cannot be underestimated and might, I wish to argue, help to explain a state of affairs

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in which women inflict such symbolic violence upon one another with such regularity. The loss of a political sense of a feminine/feminist identity is especially difficult to articulate within the parameters of a post-feminist sensibility in which the public visibility of women can be read as symptomatic of a broader psychical malaise, perhaps.

To conclude, I'll return to Irigaray briefly. Following on from her analysis of women as commodities among themselves, she also suggests that the masculinism of culture effectively renders women as mirrors to the masculine, as subjects with no clear voice through which to articulate their specificity. This suggests that women are always in pursuit of some means of articulating their apparent lack in order to overcome it. Ceccoli has suggested that women are thus in constant search of validation 'often through the male gaze as the object of their desire, but also through other women, who become mirrors that reflect their lack or become the object of envy, jealousy and competitiveness, because such women seem to own their femininity' (2000: 331). In this way, women become entangled in the 'image of woman,' and are simultaneously fascinated and persecuted by it (332). Drawing on the work of Jessica Benjamin and Adrienne Harris, Ceccoli suggests that 'Envy exemplifies one way in which aggression is a revolt against the other's subjectivity, a precondition for becoming a subject, for separateness, for womanhood. Viewed in this way, hostility between women can be seen as aimed at asserting separateness and individuality. Being able to transform hate into aggression in our daily lives frees us from the persecution of the image' (333). Perhaps, then, the extraordinary level of visual mediation of contemporary femininity somehow underlies the vindictiveness of women's responses to other women. However, as Adrienne Harris notes, 'Psychic

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consequences, conscious and unconscious, of thwarted and conflicted ambition and aggression arise in social structures in which female aggression is often pathologised ... Female aggression sets off irrational social and intrapsychic anxieties and this is floridly so when the aggression is cast as maternal destruction' (1997: 296-7). For Harris, competition between women is on the one hand impossible for women to own in any constructive way, and on the other the source of great shame. She links this experience to the problematic relation of women to the maternal imago, which is often cast as demonised in the psychoanalytic account. The maternal woman who appears to be in control and in power becomes profoundly menacing and dangerous. Harris links this to the expression of ambition and competitive strivings in women, characterising such attributes as forbidden or dangerous and presenting the threat of appearing either too masculine (through ambition) or too annihilating (because of the threat to the self that the figure of an ambitious woman represents). Social mobility, then, especially that which comes as a result of overtly expressed ambition and success, produces a profound sense of psychological betrayal and loss. As Harris asserts, 'women's compromised and conflicted relation to ambition often implicates the confusing power of maternal identification and the long legacy of repression and dissociation of hatred and anger in women's lives, particularly maternal hatred' (302).

The case of Kate McCann, then, appears to coalesce around just such a constellation of themes. The unconscious losses of contemporary women struggling against the tides of a retrograde 'post-feminist' culture tap directly into the psychological processes delineated by Harris in relation to women's responses to ambition and social mobility. With her professionalised media campaign asserting her maternal successes achieved through IVF and her media-friendly appearance along with her willingness to make public her aspirational lifestyle, Kate McCann in many ways embodies all that is most trenchant and fearful for women today. How is it possible for such a woman to

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check so many boxes around image, motherhood, career aspiration and media-savvy responses to tragedy and yet still lose a daughter through apparently thoughtless or careless planning of responsible childcare decisions? She simultaneously embodies both the idealised image of contemporary motherhood as well as all that is most inexpressibly hated about it. What is more, she also becomes a pitiful figure of loss and despair, and the weight of her public presence becomes perhaps unbearable as a consequence. The psychological dimensions of what is at stake here are complex and often difficult to articulate, but my sense is that there is much to be made here of the way that Kate McCann's voice, belying her working class origins, provides the punctum through which repressed aggression can flow. McCann is deemed to be not quite what she seems. In this respect, she also embodies what is most threatening about the 'postfeminist' world and the fear of what might lie beyond it. Perhaps then, because this case centres on issues of motherhood and the actual loss of a child, it becomes symptomatic of fearful fantasies of disintegration that accompany the loss of the perceived certainties of a female identity achieved as a result of and sometimes in spite of feminism.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Kate, from Liverpool, whose maiden name is Healy, studied at Dundee, where she was known to fellow medicine students as "hot lips Healy" ... The student handbook for 1992, when she was in her final year, gives a tongue-in-cheek review of her time there. It says she was part of a gang of first year friends referred to as the H G Girlies, who enjoyed drinking sessions. The book offers a quote, cheekily attributed to Kate, saying: "I hate sleeping on my own." ... Renowned for frequently indulging in alcoholic binges and dance-till-you-drop nocturnal activities, she immediately led the rest of her colleagues astray' *The Sunday Mirror*, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2007, p. 9.

<sup>ii</sup> Commentary such as this was widespread. Further examples include: 'their unquenchable thirst for publicity, and, yes, much of their behaviour left us feeling queasy' (Platell, 2007); 'This slick professionalism feels incongruous with the rawness of loss... in allowing themselves to be creatures of the media, the McCanns have become the Beckhams of grief' (Turner, 2007); 'It is the McCanns' misfortune, and perhaps their miscalculation, that by seeking publicity and trying to manipulate it, by hiring media managers, raising money, starting a blog and encouraging others to meet in cyberspace, they have shifted their predicament out of ordinary reality and into the world of virtual reality' (Marrin,

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2007); and 'If I was in that situation, I wouldn't be like Kate McCann, I'd be a nervous wreck in bed crying all the time instead of attracting all this attention. I certainly wouldn't have acted like the McCanns' (Kerry Katona quoted in Hudson, 2007).

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