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# **‘Hollywood’s Hot Dads’: Tabloid, Reality and Scandal Discourses of Celebrity Postfeminist Fatherhood**

Hannah Hamad

Contemporary celebrity culture is rife with mediations of fatherhood, and the figure of the celebrity father has become a staple presence within the tabloid, reality and scandal media forms (Negra and Holmes 2008) through which celebrity is currently and widely circulated. Examples discussed in this article range from ‘high-end’ Hollywood actors such as Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt whose prominent positions in popular consciousness today are sustained as much by their tabloid media presence as by their cinematic roles,<sup>1</sup> to figures such as Hulk Hogan and Snoop Dogg whose public profiles have been boosted by celebrity reality television, to US president Barack Obama whose public identity has also been articulated via the mediating channels of celebrity culture. All have fatherhood and a conspicuously paternally inflected public image as the unifying trope of their celebrity, in line with what seems to be the increasing necessity for male celebrities in postfeminist culture to sustain a paternalised tabloid media presence. By demonstrating qualities of nurturance and sensitivity germane to a cultural climate in which ideal masculinity is affirmed through publicly showcased fatherhood, the marquee value of male celebrity can be maintained.<sup>2</sup>

The discursive intersection between mediated fatherhood and male celebrity will be examined here through analysis of a selection of examples from the tabloid media’s assiduous and prolific documentation of celebrity fatherhood. They have been chosen from various media forms germane to the textual dissemination of celebrity culture and include television news items, paparazzi photojournalism, celebrity gossip publications, sanctioned celebrity profiles, and celebrity reality tv. Specifically a spate of such television series in 2008-9 (such as *Hogan Knows Best*, *Snoop Dogg’s Father Hood* and *Run’s House*, and most recently *Meet the Hasselhoffs* and *Peter Andre: The Next Chapter*) in which fatherhood is candidly foregrounded, via the frank paternalisation of the celebrity subject. I have been necessarily selective in choosing these sites of analysis and case study texts, but all are taken from the realm of the popular, the mainstream and the high profile. Each exemplifies a

broader trend within media discourses of celebrity fatherhood, and each is symptomatic of the structuring tendency to paternalise male celebrity in postfeminist media culture.

This article seeks both to illustrate the trans-mediation and representational ubiquity of celebrity fatherhood in contemporary culture, and to interrogate the significance of the celebrity father to current cultural conceptualisations of gender. The cultural profusion of postfeminist fatherhood and its valorisation in celebrity culture is conceptualised here as symptomatic of a climate which assumes the ‘pastness’ (Tasker and Negra 2007, p. 1) of a ‘selectively defined feminism’ (Ibid., p. 1), which is ‘taken into account’ (McRobbie 2004, p. 255) while the burden of representing feminist politics is bypassed. Consequently, a politicised stance on mediated fatherhood as a contemporary discourse of gender is elided or shown to be anachronistic. An indicative case in point can be found in a 2007 article from celebrity gossip magazine *Us Weekly*, which helps to exemplify the historical and socio-cultural specificity of the matter-of-factly congratulatory tone of celebrity culture’s mediation of fatherhood to postfeminism. In it, father and child photographs (paparazzi, red carpet and sanctioned portrait respectively) of contemporary celebrity fathers Ryan Phillippe, Will Smith and Chris O’Donnell are juxtaposed and compared favourably with the more troublingly paternalised extra-filmic public personae of 1970s film actors Jon Voight, Jack Nicholson and Ryan O’Neal. The article flags up the paternal shortcomings of each (without suggesting any negative impact on their careers), citing Voight’s estrangement from daughter Angelina Jolie, O’Neal’s irresponsibility as a father that it suggests led to daughter Tatum’s alcoholism, and Nicholson’s ‘machismo’ (Jacobs 2007, p 57) as the reason for his reluctance to be seen in public with his children, as examples of a problematic ‘old style’ celebrity fathering role. Thus dichotomised on opposing sides of a ‘then and now’ and corresponding negative/positive relational binary, celebrity fatherhood is framed as having undergone a process of enlightenment and ‘evolution’ from the era of second wave feminism to that of latter day postfeminism in which “divorced dads don’t disappear,” “kids now don’t hurt sex appeal” and “staying home with the kids is cool.” (Ibid., p 57)<sup>3</sup> This further emphasises the extent to which latter day popular cultural articulations of ideal masculinity, through an intensified discourse of celebrity

paternity, is a singularly contemporary phenomenon, and one that is specific to its postfeminist moment.

In offering postfeminist fatherhood as contemporary culture's ideal masculinity I am positioning it theoretically in terms of RW Connell's 'hegemonic masculinity', a position that negotiates the perpetuation of a gendered power imbalance, which is naturalised into popular consciousness and thus constitutes 'the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy.' (Connell 2005, p 77) This contemporary ideal of masculinity is articulated in celebrity culture via the surface appearance of increased gender egalitarianism in parenting and childcare on the one hand, and a disingenuously depoliticised shift in the cultural logic of gender roles and parenthood on the other. However, I would suggest that the valorisation of postfeminist fatherhood in contemporary culture is neither as straightforwardly progressive, or as apolitical, as celebrity culture's articulations of this figure suggest. The political pitfalls for feminism were presciently alluded to by second wave feminist Gloria Steinem when she asserted that 'If men start taking care of children, the job will become more valuable.' (Steinem cited in Wallis 1989, p. 89) Further, Mary Douglas Vavrus points to the common sense driven ease with which postfeminist fatherhood can be incorporated into an everyday discourse of an enlightened masculinity that takes feminist ideology on board, but only selectively, and without confronting the necessity of challenging the extant gendered power balance that remains tipped in favour of the hegemonic and the patriarchal: 'even while they incorporate this aspect of feminism, [representations of fatherhood] provide little more than window dressing, for they pose no challenge to any other aspect of the nuclear family, including its dominance in mainstream cultural representations and the heteronormativity that undergirds it,' (Vavrus 2002, p 353) She continues:

'although representations of stay-at-home fathering appropriate one obvious aspect of second-wave feminist ideology – that fathers can and should do their fair share of nurturance as parents – [they] leave hegemonic masculinity's assumptions and power relations substantially unchanged, just as postfeminism does.' (Vavrus 2002, p. 356)

Therefore, in order to situate my discussion of celebrity fatherhood within a wider socio-political discourse, and to problematise the political ‘innocence’ with which it circulates through contemporary media, it is worth briefly highlighting the disjuncture between the pervasiveness of media representations of involved, hands-on or single fatherhood and the societal reality of this phenomenon. Studies have shown that 86% of fathers versus 32% of mothers in the UK are in full time work (Ward 2004, p 9), that only one in five take the paternity leave they are entitled to (Behr 2006, p 27), that British men conduct about 33% of the nation’s childcare (Honigsbaum 2003, p 44), and about 25% of single parent households are headed by fathers (Ibid., p 47). Meanwhile in the US, single father families comprised only 6% of family groups counted by the US Census in 2003 (Fields 2003, pp. 6-7), 0.2% of American family groups contained ‘stay-at-home’ fathers, compared with 7.6% with ‘stay-at-home’ mothers, (Ibid., pp 6-11) and 2006 figures showed that men headed 20% of single parent families (Jarrell 2007, ‘The Daddy Track’), while 34% of all American children live in the absence of their fathers (Mosiman and Kallio 2003, ‘Good Dads...’) This snapshot indicates that the majority of childcare in the US and UK is still done by women. While progress has certainly been made with regard to fathers increased involvement with their children since the 1970s (Fields, 2003; Honigsbaum, 2003; Appleyard, 2007), these statistics also indicate the complicity of celebrity culture in the wider popular misrepresentation of the extent of this progress, which I would suggest is far from politically innocent. Rather, that it is an appositely of-the-moment phenomenon whereby media culture discursively suggests the obsolescence of a politicised feminist stance, in this instance with regard to gender equity in parenting.

This article thus interrogates the cultural politics of postfeminist fatherhood, and explores the manner of its mediation and dominant tropes. This aspect of gender must necessarily negotiate what Diane Negra and Su Holmes have called ‘the complex interpenetration of tabloid, reality and scandal forms,’ (Negra and Holmes 2008, paragraph 23) through which contemporary celebrity culture mediates the public identities of the transient and changeable population of individuals under its purview. I therefore offer postfeminism as a critical framework through which to best understand the current proliferation of the figure of the celebrity father in media culture. As such, I argue that he is

articulated within and through a cultural climate in which a representational discourse of involved male parenting has been normalised and naturalised, seemingly in response to the second wave feminist call for increased egalitarianism in parenting and greater gender equity in its labour share, the issue of which is hence discursively positioned as moot and redundant, with the aid of a judiciously culturally circulated discourse of postfeminist fatherhood, which conceptualises it as beneficially transformative, as a prerequisite for the attainment of a credibly mature masculine identity, and as a boon to a man's sexual desirability.

As Rosemary Coombe has noted, 'Celebrity images provide important cultural resources for many practices of "doing" gender that subvert and reconstruct dominant forms of gender identity.' (Coombe 2009, p. 459) The figure of the celebrity postfeminist father, exemplifies one such cultural practice. The analysis that follows will elucidate the notion that a reconstructed form of masculinity is negotiated through this figure as he seems to account for and personify an apposite aspect of second wave feminism, while simultaneously hegemonically countermanding it. I thus aim to participate in the critical practice called for by Negra and Holmes that 'seeks to join together new scholarship on celebrity with new theories of gender in the postfeminist context.' (Negra and Holmes 2008, paragraph 17) They highlight that 'fame has [long] been understood as being shaped by gendered discourses of construction and reception,' but also that a 'gender-minded media studies practice that can account for the gendering of fame which pervades the everyday churn of celebrity culture – especially in its tabloid and "reality" forms – is still lacking.' (Ibid., paragraph 20) I hope here to partially redress one aspect of this lack. In so doing I aim to illustrate some of what is at stake, and to account for the ubiquity and discursive commonalities of the celebrity father in contemporary culture, as well as to understand the postfeminist implications of the gendered discourse this figure seems to exemplify.

### **Tabloid Culture and the Rhetoric of 'Hot' and 'Sexy' Fatherhood**

In a 2009 edition of the free daily tabloid *The London Paper*, amongst stories about Michael Jackson's death, the summer heat-wave, and Wimbledon tennis, sits a paparazzi photograph of Jude

Law walking with his young son. It is framed so they appear to be alone together. Law's arm is placed protectively around the boy, his hand resting on his son's chest. Unanchored by a corresponding article, there is only a caption: 'Hottie: Jude Law and his youngest son Rudy, six, cool off with drinks in north London yesterday.' ('Hottie' 2009, p. 3) The newsworthiness of celebrity fatherhood thus announces itself pictorially, and with the caption's added nuances, it neatly encapsulates a number of tropes germane to the intensification and proliferation of discourses of celebrity fatherhood in postfeminist media culture. Specifically, it showcases fatherhood as an attractive and desirable facet of contemporary masculinity, presents it as a spectacle unto itself, and suggests that in the hierarchy of discourses at work in an individual celebrity persona, fatherhood has the potential (and the tendency) to dominate, and to resolve tensions and inconsistencies in a public persona, which might otherwise trouble a postfeminist conceptualisation of ideal masculinity. In this case, for instance, Law's previously dominant persona as a 'love rat' does not figure, as it is superseded by the celebratory spectacle of his involved and tactile approach to fathering.<sup>4</sup>

This example is a useful indicator of the way in which the paternalisation of male celebrity in the tabloid media frequently serves to showcase heteronormativity, through characterisations of fatherhood as 'hot' or 'sexy'. Another is the appearance on 18 June 2009 on US television's *ABC News* of a five and a half minute long news item under the banner 'Hollywood's Hottest Dads,' in response to the cover story adorning the then current Fathers' Day special issue of *Life & Style Weekly*. The item was ostensibly a celebration of the so called 'hands on' fatherhood, which is currently being so assiduously covered in the tabloid and celebrity gossip media, of the male celebrities on Hollywood's current roster of male stars. It featured gushing segments about celebrity fathers such as Brad Pitt ('Father of all Fathers'), Will Smith ('Superstar Superdad'), Patrick Dempsey ('obviously a very great Dad'), Hugh Jackman ('you always see him out and about with the kids'), Matthew McConaughey ('Surfer Dad'), and – without drawing any discursive distinction between the nature of the celebrity of the US President and the aforementioned film and television actors – Barack Obama,<sup>5</sup> who has since been dubbed the 'Dad-in-Chief' by *Life & Style* ('Dad-in-Chief' 2009). For example, the magazine ran a cover on 14 January 2009 that depicted Obama and his

family over a large print headline that characterised him as ‘PRESIDENT DAD!’ (2009) Also notable in terms of the rhetoric of postfeminism is the corresponding caption: ‘Helping with the homework, explaining the birds and the bees, and fixing the economy. Barack Obama reveals how he’ll do it all!’ (PRESIDENT DAD!, 2009) This example is symptomatic of the way in which the cultural currency of ‘having/doing-it-all’ rhetoric that formerly characterised discussions of postfeminist femininity has been appropriated and re-applied to treatments of masculinity in postfeminism. Similarly, the June 2009 edition of *Parade* magazine opted to run a cover that visually privileged Obama as father, featuring the US President lounging happily on a sofa with his two daughters, above a caption that incorporated a statement by Obama himself, apparently taken from a published letter to his children: ‘If I could be anything in life, I would be a good father.’ (Obama, 2009)

The tone and rhetoric of the *ABC* item was unflinching celebratory and congratulatory. It made no bones about the fact that in representationally, rhetorically and discursively privileging the fatherhood of the celebrities in question (and thereby aligning their publicly mediated identities with an aspect of their ostensibly heretofore private identities), it was overtly painting it in an unequivocally positive light. Moreover, in celebrating and consciously mediating paternity, it articulated an identity for each of the celebrities discussed commensurate with postfeminist discourses of fatherhood that position men as active, involved, dedicated, loving, and ‘hands on.’ The ameliorative amendment to Matthew McConaughey’s public persona is articulated in a segment when he is described as having made a transition from ‘surfer dude to surfer dad.’ With this seemingly throwaway sound-bite, a number of notable recurring tropes of postfeminist fatherhood in contemporary celebrity culture are flagged up: such as the way in which it is subsumed into and accommodated by an extant persona or public identity for the male celebrity in question.<sup>6</sup> The potential for fatherhood to inflect and transform a celebrity’s dominant public persona from the immature (hence the epithet ‘dude’) to the mature in a manner whereby the ageing process for men is rendered not only acceptable in a youth oriented media culture, but positively desirable is also important here. The sexualisation of celebrity fatherhood (‘Hollywood’s Hottest Dads’) speaks directly to the notion that such fathers are desirable to women for whom sensitive parenting is an

attractive quality, and thus, this tendency to characterise them as ‘sexy’ is an important manifestation of the cultural reconfiguration of postfeminist masculinity.

For example, referring to Pitt, the *ABC* presenter says, ‘We always talk about Brad’s six pack, but it’s not just about his abs, you know!’ Thus a rhetorical alignment is made between Pitt’s sexual desirability and his prolific fatherhood. Similarly, Jackman is ‘really a hunky dad if ever I’ve seen one’ while Dempsey is a ‘McDreamy McDaddy.’ This allusion to Dempsey’s most well known screen role as Derek Shepherd aka ‘Dr McDreamy’ (who at the time of writing has yet to be paternalised in the show) in the serial television drama *Grey’s Anatomy* also flags up a tendency not only to conflate fatherhood and desirability, but also to rhetorically align male celebrity actors’ ‘sexy’ fatherhood with the dominant tropes of their respective screen personae. The same thing occurs in another paternal profile of Dempsey in *Us Weekly*, which calls him ‘McDaddy’ (Agresti and Abrahamson 2007, p. 55), and *People* which profiles him with his twin infant sons using a photograph of two sets of baby surgeon’s scrubs that bear the respective epithets ‘McCutie’ and ‘McCuddly.’ (Ingrassia 2007, p. 62)<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, postfeminist fatherhood entered Dempsey’s screen persona via his 2007 film role in *Enchanted*, in which he plays a single primary care giving father (which was similarly conflated with his ‘private’ paternal role: ‘It’s the movie I did for my daughter,’ (Ibid., p. 65)) and an advertising campaign for L’Oreal Men in which he features playing affectionately and good naturedly with a little boy.

Elsewhere, Dempsey was described as ‘The Sexiest Dad Alive’ by *Life* magazine (‘The Sexiest...’ 2007, p. 1), which pictured him on its cover in January 2007 touching the pregnant belly of his wife Jillian with his hands and face, while *Us Weekly* showcased celebrity postfeminist fatherhood, or ‘Hollywood’s Sexy Dads!’ on the cover of its 6 August 2007 issue with an invitation to readers to ‘meet the hunks who traded the fast lane for family,’ (‘Hollywood’s Sexy...’ 2007, p. 1) and profiling Dempsey’s ‘sexy’ fatherhood alongside that of Jason Priestley, Brad Pitt, Ben Affleck, Heath Ledger and Matt Damon.<sup>8</sup> Comparable celebrity oriented publications like *In Style* have run similar features showcasing, again, ‘Hollywood’s Hottest Dads’ (2008), or in the case of *People*, their ‘Favourite Star Dads,’ (Midler 2005) and collection of profiles of ‘Proud Papas’ (2009) all of which

are online picture galleries featuring many of the celebrity fathers already mentioned, and a host of others besides.

Hence, a celebrity oriented news item, like the *ABC* one described here, is symptomatic of a major trope of both the discourse of postfeminist fatherhood, and contemporary male celebrity. Rather than an isolated consequence of independent editorial decisions alongside the happenstance of Fathers' Day in the calendar, it can instead be understood as part of a wider trend in depicting masculinity within media culture more broadly. Instances of mediated celebrity fatherhood like those described here, in which fatherhood is articulated as a sexually desirable masculine trait via the celebrity gossip sector of the tabloid media, do seem to suggest a specifically young and female audience demographic. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the celebrity postfeminist fatherhood is a larger discursive phenomenon than this, which can be and has been niche marketed in more ways than one, to different audience demographics, in line with the totalising pervasiveness of postfeminist culture's discourses of gender. Indicative of this in the UK is the phenomenon of the 'dad mag' (Duffy 2003). This genre has seen the ageing male demographic previously targeted and interpellated in the 1990s through the men's lifestyle magazine and the 'lad mag,' (Whelehan 2000; Jackson et al 2001; Benwell 2003; Gill 2007, pp. 210-217) re-targeted, via an appeal first to the assumption that this generation of male magazine readers have reconceptualised their selfhood in terms of their identities as fathers, and second via the points of identification provided by the celebrity fathers who adorned the covers. *Dad* magazine (headed by a former editor of key 90s men's lifestyle magazines *Esquire* and *Arena*) and *FQ* (*Fathers Quarterly*, a de facto offshoot of *GQ*) were launched and continue to be promoted according to a market sensibility dictated by both the cultural logic of postfeminist fatherhood, and contemporary celebrity. Cover stories profile the same roster of celebrity fathers found in the gossip magazines: Hollywood actors like Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Hugh Jackman and Johnny Depp, celebrity sports figures like David Beckham, Jose Mourinho and Frank Lampard, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and 'celebrity politician' Barack Obama. In the case of *FQ* the significance of celebrity to this is intensified by its annual 'celebrity father of the year poll' (winners include Cruise for 2008 and Beckham for 2009).

As well as highlighting the different audience demographics to which the discourse of postfeminist fatherhood is mediated, it is also worth highlighting the synergistic manner in which this sometimes takes place, as different arms of the cultural industries cross-promote products via the common ground of celebrity fatherhood. A 2004 case in point saw *FQ* magazine promoted through the British DVD of the heavily paternally themed Eddie Murphy star vehicle *Daddy Day Care*, which contained an insert for a subscription offer to the magazine. Thus Hollywood filmmaking and UK magazine publishing are strategically aligned by the marketability of their mutual discourse of postfeminist fatherhood and male celebrity.

Having thus highlighted the intersection between mediated postfeminist fatherhood and contemporary celebrity culture, I now turn to the newer phenomenon of father centred celebrity reality tv, which has become an increasingly important part of maintaining, recuperating and revitalising a culturally significant public identity for the male celebrity subject.

### **‘Keepin’ It Real and Being A Family Man’: Celebrity Reality TV and Postfeminist Fatherhood**

The cross-mediation of celebrity fatherhood, has taken place alongside increased media access to the ostensibly private realms of celebrities, facilitated in part by the proliferation of reality tv. As Negra and Holmes point out:

‘celebrity is often deemed to connote a representational structure in which the primary, or only, emphasis is on the person’s “private” life or lifestyle.’ (Negra and Holmes 2008, paragraph 19)

Celebrity reality TV is symptomatic of this, as Holmes states, ‘reality TV has established a new televisual realism in the digital age, founded on the concept of self-revelation and (often) personal development as a privileged signifier of authenticity.’ (Holmes 2006, p. 54) This accelerated interest in the private realm of paternalised male celebrities is particularly apparent in celebrity gossip texts and paparazzi photographs with their penchant for publicly documenting ‘private’ father and child moments. But it can also be seen in the recent cluster of celebrity reality tv shows that open up the ‘private’ realm of celebrity fatherhood to public consumption.

That reality television has picked up on a representational trend already normalised in more traditionally prestigious sites for the articulation of fame (such as, Hollywood cinema) speaks to shifts in the locational power base of what Kevin Glynn calls the ‘discursive mainstream’ (Glynn 2000, p. 162). He argues, ‘television’s discursive mainstream or center has moved down market as the networks have lost portions of their more demographically desirable audience to satellite and cable programming... [and] The increased visibility of tabloid television genres is one manifestation of the downmarketing strategy.’ (Ibid., p. 162) Correspondingly, *Run’s House*, *Hogan Knows Best* and *Snoop Dogg’s Father Hood* were screened, respectively, on the cable channels *MTV*, *VH1* and *E!* As Holmes points out ‘celebrity reality TV is often peopled by faces who have experienced a decline in auratic status, names jostling for the chance to relaunch or reinvent their personae’ (Holmes 2006, p. 47), and in this way, these shows provided a form and a vehicle whereby the flagging cultural valence of their celebrity subjects – Joseph ‘Reverend Run’ Simmons, Calvin ‘Snoop Dogg’ Broadus, and Terry ‘Hulk Hogan’ Bollea – could be revitalised by way of the ‘revelation’ of their ‘personal development’ (Ibid., p. 54) through fathering, which given the contemporaneous cultural valence of postfeminist fatherhood throughout the media, seems an appropriate strategy, and proved successful.<sup>9</sup>

The discursive dominance and thematic centrality of fatherhood to the construction of the celebrity’s persona is indicated by the title of each show, as in the paternalistic omniscience of *Hogan Knows Best* (which ironically references 1950s sitcom *Father Knows Best*), and the proprietary paternalism of *Run’s House* and *Snoop Dogg’s Father Hood*. Other family members function in these shows only as relational conduits to facilitate the continued sustainability of the celebrity subjects through the performance of fathering. Numerous scenarios contrive to showcase Broadus, Hogan and Simmons *performing* emotionalism and a tactile closeness between father and child, which time and again emphasise affectionate physical contact, as in Season 1, Episode 5 of *Snoop Dogg’s Father Hood* that emphasises a close up two shot of Broadus hugging his daughter at dinner, or Season 2, Episode 1 which similarly privileges an embrace between father and son at a school graduation.

Another typical scenario contrives to showcase the emotional focus of Hogan’s postfeminist fatherhood in *Hogan Knows Best* (Season 2, Episode 3) in an episode featuring the aftermath of an

incident in which Hogan's teenage daughter Brooke was ostensibly 'missing' for a few hours during a family holiday. The next day, having been reunited with his daughter, Hogan sheds tears on camera as he tells her how he feared for her safety. Yet a production crew was with her throughout this episode, emphasising the disingenuousness of the scenario's 'reality,' and the extent to which it was contrived to showcase and facilitate seemingly candid emotionalism in Hogan's performance of postfeminist fatherhood. Moments such as these are typical of this strand of reality tv. Each show is centred upon documenting celebrity fatherhood, and the celebrity personae are enhanced – via paternalisation – for the requirements of the postfeminist cultural climate in which they are articulated.

### **Scandal, Backlash and Celebrity Postfeminist Fatherhood**

The extent to which the cultural viability of a male celebrity persona can be dependent on their ability to articulate postfeminist fatherhood is also highlighted in instances that see the coherence and continuity of a celebrity's public identity ruptured by scandal. It has been the case for several major male celebrities that scandal,<sup>10</sup> directly or indirectly related to their status as celebrity fathers, has violated or disrupted the terms of ideal masculinity with which their celebrity is sustained and articulated, as the following discussion demonstrates. As Fairclough has noted, it is often the case that 'female celebrities are unsurprisingly held to different and more exacting standards than their male counterparts,' (Fairclough 2008, paragraph 9) while Cobb points to narratives of 'bad celebrity motherhood [that] elide the bad father.' She continues:

'The insistence on the mother as the natural primary care-giver means that bad and/or absent fathers are of no consequence. In other words, the discourse suggests that if the mother had inhabited the appropriate maternal role then she would have had the power to override any negative influence from the father. However, the double standard of this part of the discourse is that the good father can be just as good as the good mother, if not better in times of need.' (Cobb 2008, paragraph 22)

This is symptomatic of the tendency to celebrate fatherhood and demonise motherhood in postfeminist celebrity culture,<sup>11</sup> and one manifestation of the double standards to which celebrities and

their publicly mediated behaviour are often held. A recent case in point would be the different way that Katie Price's motherhood and Peter Andre's fatherhood have been very publicly and widely mediated in Britain during the fallout and sustained aftermath of their high profile split. This evinced a marked partiality and sympathy towards Andre and his celebrated postfeminist fatherhood ('Saint Peter' was earlier this year named 'best celebrity Dad, ahead of David Beckham and Jamie Oliver in a Myspace poll' ('Peter Andre Voted Best...' 2009)), in contrast to the vilification of Price ('Katie Price Voted Worst...' 2009).<sup>12</sup>

In the introduction to their *Genders* issue on female celebrity in the tabloid media, Negra and Holmes point to the 'journalistic restraint' in tabloid mediation of male celebrity (Negra and Holmes 2008, paragraph 1) compared with the boundary free abandon that accompanies the mediation of their female contemporaries, citing Heath Ledger's death and Owen Wilson's suicide attempt as examples of 'male celebrities whose behaviour is largely immune from public referendum.' (Ibid., paragraph 12) They cite *New York Times* journalist Alex Williams, who claims that 'men who fall from grace are treated with gravity and distance, while women in similar circumstances are objects of derision, titillation and black comedy.' (Williams 2008) However, I would argue that this gender bifurcation is less clear-cut than Williams' dichotomous statement seems to suggest. In recent years 'high end' Hollywood celebrity fathers Tom Cruise, Eddie Murphy, Russell Crowe and Mel Gibson have all been subject to the tabloid derision, vilification and scorn that Williams, Negra, Holmes and Fairclough have suggested manifests more frequently in relation to female celebrity. Cruise, Murphy, Crowe and Gibson are representative of specific expectations germane to the public performance of postfeminist masculinity, in that the newsworthiness of their 'bad' fatherhood represented a noticeable and stark about face from their hitherto successful embodiments of the paternal ideal. Each of them had assiduously cultivated a paternal persona over the years in the lead up to the scandals concerned, which then undermined and troubled the coherence of their extant public identities, to which fatherhood had become central. As I have argued, the performance of postfeminist fatherhood in popular cultural spheres is now a discursive requirement for the attainment of ideal masculinity in contemporary celebrity culture. This is why a male celebrity's fall from grace will not be tolerated if it

violates the terms of the postfeminist paternal ideal, and why it is then subject to similar levels of judgmental jurisprudence as that enacted on female celebrities.

For each of the celebrity figures identified here, media discourses emerged that positioned them in violation of the terms of ideal masculinity. In most cases, this took place through a mutually subsuming interlocution between the dominant tropes of their filmic personae, and the cross mediated discourse of a fatherhood increasingly rendered available to public consumption via tabloid media, thus destabilising the classic public/private and onscreen/offscreen dichotomy (or “duality”) that the star occupies in popular culture (Ellis 1982; Dyer 1998 [1979]; Geraghty 2000).

Eddie Murphy’s status and bankability was ruptured by a paternity scandal in which he was figured as inhabiting one of the most damaging stereotypes of African-American masculinity – the ‘deadbeat dad’ –, when he publicly denied paternity of a child that a DNA test would prove to be his on Dutch television in December 2006,<sup>13</sup> (Silverman 2007, ‘Test Proves...’ 2007) and which effectively scuppered the career renaissance he was then experiencing. Murphy had successfully paternalised his cinematic persona from the late 1990s to the mid 2000s to considerable success, with a number of fatherhood themed box-office hits, most notably 2003’s *Daddy Day Care*. This occurred in conjunction with a transformation in his extra-filmic persona from ‘bad boy king of comedy’ to ‘a new image – and a new life – as a family man’ (Miller et al 2001, p. 101). However, two later attempts at playing postfeminist fatherhood in Hollywood movies in *Meet Dave* (2008) and *Imagine That* (2009) – both of which were released subsequent to the paternity scandal that discredited his family man persona (Lee 2006, ‘Murphy’s Split...’ 2006) – failed at the box-office (Barnes 2009),<sup>14</sup> as the coherence of his public identity as a postfeminist father had been shattered.

Russell Crowe’s ‘bad boy’<sup>15</sup> image noticeably softened with the introduction of postfeminist fatherhood to the extra-filmic celebrity discourse<sup>16</sup> surrounding the birth of his son Charlie in 2003. Thereafter it was dominated by paternal rhetoric: ‘Russell Crowe talks film and fatherhood’ (Cidoni 2005), ‘Russell Crowe on how fatherhood has changed him’ (Goodridge 2005, p. 1) and ‘Crowe, Meet Stork’ (Susman 2003). However, the effect of this paternal amendment to his persona was

undermined when he was arrested for assault three days after the release of *Cinderella Man* (2005), his most paternally themed film to date in which he played underdog boxer and devoted family man Jim Braddock. That film also underperformed at the box office relative to expectation.<sup>17</sup>

Mel Gibson, whose latter day persona has been, until relatively recently, defined by his fervently Christian family values, saw the coherence of this public identity disintegrate after he was arrested for drunk-driving and then widely reported for an attendant anti-semitic and misogynist tirade against the Malibu police on 28 July 2006 ('Gibson's Anti-Semitic Tirade' 2006). Latterly his divorce ('Mel Gibson's Wife Files...' 2009) and fathering of another child with new partner Oksana Grigorieva has also proved damaging. ('Mel Gibson Welcomes Daughter...' 2009)<sup>18</sup> In each case, the celebrity's failure to live up to current cultural ideals of masculinity or to maintain a consistency to his public identity as a postfeminist father, has seen him subject to vilification and ridicule in the tabloid media. This was also the case for Tom Cruise as I will now explore.

### **The Hyper-Paternalism of Tom Cruise's Postfeminist Fatherhood**

From the late 1990s, the two aspects of the 'duality' that comprised Tom Cruise's screen stardom and extra-filmic persona operated in a complementary relationship, as postfeminist fatherhood came to epitomise his public identity, via both the paternalisation of his screen roles (in *Jerry Maguire* (1996), *Minority Report* (2002), *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *War of the Worlds* (2005)) and his extra-filmic celebrity discourse, which correspondingly foregrounded his fatherhood (of his two adopted children, Isabella and Connor). The mediation of his split, and subsequent divorce from Nicole Kidman in 2001 had the potential to trouble his personification of the paternal ideal, but the discourse circulated throughout this period was so emphatically centred upon his 'involved' and sensitive fatherhood, that a relatively stable and coherent public identity was maintained, as the following examples from popular reportage of the time indicate. In July 2002 one journalist noted 'Though he's the world's biggest and busiest movie star, *Minority Report*'s Tom Cruise somehow finds time to... take every one of his kids' calls.' (Schruers 2002, p. 50) During promotion for *The Last Samurai* in 2003, another reported that 'His children are the main priority in his life at the moment and he talks proudly of them and how he deals with the problems of being a single father.... "My schedule goes around my

kids,” he says simply.’ (Hiscock 2003) He thus consistently publicly positioned himself in terms of his fatherhood by alluding to his children in interviews and promotional activities. However, media rhetoric surrounding Cruise’s fatherhood reached a new apex after the public announcement of the pregnancy of his then fiancée Katie Holmes on 5 October 2005, which prompted frenzied tabloid coverage of the story and an assiduous media watch culminating in the birth of the couple’s daughter Suri on 18 April 2006.

However, during this period, Cruise’s overt public demonstrations of proprietary patriarchal power, which were noticeably incongruous with the preferred cultural template of postfeminist fatherhood, began to undermine his credibility as a personification of the masculine ideal. The former cohesiveness of Cruise’s image suffered considerably, and his celebrity persona began to be vulnerable to ridicule in the public domain. An early indication that this was the case, was the box-office underperformance of *Mission: Impossible III*, relative to expectation, and opinion poll evidence indicated that his public image had deteriorated (Waxman 2006; Bowles 2006; Wloszczyna 2006). Industry confidence in Cruise eroded in subsequent months, culminating in the end of his fourteen year relationship with Paramount, amidst negative publicity especially surrounding his widely ridiculed appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in May 2005, during which he jumped excitedly up and down on her couch by way of professing his adoration of Holmes. Viacom chairman Sumner Redstone described Cruise’s public behaviour during this period as ‘unacceptable,’ and the primary reason for the alliance termination. (Bowles and Petrecca 2006).

The image management that had taken place during his divorce and which emphasised Cruise as a hands-on, emotionally available, sensitive and involved parent, aggrandizing his status as a single father, was in stark contrast to the widely mediated spectacles of paternalistic autocracy that surrounded the public announcement of Holmes’ pregnancy. For example, during an interview on NBC’s *Access Hollywood*, Cruise lambasted actor Brooke Shields for speaking out about her post-natal depression and the medication she took to overcome it, twice labelling her, and by implication her fitness as a mother, as ‘irresponsible.’ (‘Tom Cruise: Man...’ 2005) He insisted that the condition could be treated with ‘vitamins and exercise’ (“I’m Passionate...” 2005) and challenged its existence

with his assertion ‘there is no such thing as a chemical imbalance.’ (Ibid, 2005) Given the centrality of postfeminist fatherhood to Cruise’s public persona, his open belittling of post-natal depression, and moralistic veto of its treatment, was too candidly autocratic for the ideal masculinity postfeminism has favoured, especially in its assumption of superior knowledge of an experience germane to motherhood. Attempts to elicit a capitulation from Cruise to his lack of physical and personal experience of post-natal depression met with defiant rebuttals.

Holmes’s pregnancy was made public some months after the Shields episode in October 2005. Over time, media discourse surrounding Cruise and Holmes increasingly portrayed him as autocratic and controlling with regard to the pregnancy. In a November 2005 television appearance, Cruise announced his purchase of a sonogram machine to ABC’s Barbara Walters (‘Cruise Buys...’ 2005), and as the birth approached, reports circulated of Cruise running seminars with his family to ‘educate them,’ (‘Cruise Runs...’ 2006) in preparation for the baby’s arrival. More emerged suggesting that Holmes would be adhering to Scientological guidelines on silence during childbirth with reports that ‘huge placards saying, “be silent and make all physical movements slow and understandable,”’ had been carried into the couple’s home, to be displayed around the house to remind Holmes to deal with the extreme pain of childbirth quietly.’ (‘Holmes Gearing...’ 2006)

Media reportage of Cruise’s involved, attentive and dedicated fatherhood was hence deployed counter to the usual discursive end that has come to be normalised in postfeminist culture’s dominant mediation of fatherhood, which has so often utilised it in a purportedly progressive capacity, to ameliorate masculinity in line with ideals germane to postfeminism. In this instance then, an ideological impasse was reached as Cruise’s fatherhood veered off the postfeminist script according to which he should be domesticated, benignly emotionally effusive, present and available, and towards a troublingly traditional patriarchal model. In this way, fatherhood, and its discursive function for the cultural logic of Cruise’s persona performed a de facto u-turn, as its meanings shifted away from stability and maturity, and toward associations characterised instead by power, control and a paternalistic comportment long since outmoded by conceptualisations of ideal fatherhood in postfeminism.

The apparent detrimental effects this development had on Cruise's bankability and credibility suggest the public was unwilling or unable to reconcile the superficially benign and heroic depictions of fatherhood that had characterised his filmic and extra-filmic personae through his fathering of his first two children,<sup>19</sup> with the domineering, overbearing and controlling images of fatherhood that circulated in the media around Suri's birth.<sup>20</sup> When the aforementioned displays of controlling paternalism began to dominate his celebrity discourse, it exposed a less mutedly patriarchal mode than that allowed for by the cultural ideal of postfeminist fatherhood.

The publicity generated by Cruise's problematic paternalistic behaviour simultaneously constructed Holmes and motherhood as passive and infantilised. While the age gap between Cruise and Holmes (he is sixteen and a half years her senior) had been a media talking point since their relationship was first reported, Holmes, paradoxically, was more publicly infantilised during her pregnancy than before it. For example, Cruise arranged a birthday party for Holmes at a toy shop – New York's FAO Schwartz – on 15 December 2005. *People* magazine reported that '[t]he toy store was... festooned with balloons tied to small white tiger dolls and 7'-tall stuffed giraffes.' (Pienciak and Mascia 2005) Furthermore, although the speculations were never substantiated, a story in the tabloid *Star* magazine that claimed Cruise had purchased an 'adult pacifier' to keep Holmes quiet during labour, was widely reported in the entertainment news media. ('Cruise Denies Adult Pacifier...' 2006) This public infantilisation of Holmes thus discursively undermined the credibility of her motherhood and shifted attention and the locus of authority towards Cruise and fatherhood.

The happenstance of Suri's birth during a publicity drive for *Mission: Impossible III*, proved highly demonstrative of the marketability of celebrity postfeminist fatherhood, as it became the structuring theme of the film's publicity drive. Despite Cruise's insistence while promoting the film before the birth that he would abandon it to take up his paternal duties when the baby arrived (Clark 2006), and a press release issued after the birth indicating Cruise's decision to absent himself, ('Cruise Becomes a Dad' 2006) he was gone from the publicity drive for only two days, after which he returned to promoting the film by linking it to his new fatherhood (Lawson 2006; Friedman 2006). British television's *GMTV* broadcast a

pre-recorded interview with Cruise in April 2006, which became centred on his fatherhood, culminating in a gift of novelty baby clothes. The publicity trail was thus dominated by Cruise's postfeminist fatherhood which at times overshadowed the film. Thus, his celebrity persona transcended his high aura film star persona, as matters pertaining to his private life superseded his current star vehicle in terms of discursive prominence, as in the case of the *GMTV* interview.

Despite the potential boon to *Mission: Impossible III*'s profile provided by the timeliness of the celebrification of Cruise's fatherhood, his status as a power-broker in Hollywood discernibly diminished at that time, having been undermined seemingly through media mismanagement of the trait, upon which his persona had heretofore been so dependent. In apparent recognition of damage being wrought to his credibility, Cruise attempted to recover a benign version of postfeminist fatherhood to restore his flailing status by publicly apologising to Shields only days after his split from Paramount ('Cruise Apologizes...' 2006), and allowing *Vanity Fair* to exclusively observe his fatherhood first hand, and report back on what they described as his 'latest role... as the Ultimate Hands-On... Dad.' (Sarkin 2006b, p. 191) Four years after the germinal backlash against Cruise and his formerly lauded fatherhood, his auratic status remains in decline while his presence in celebrity oriented tabloid forms has increased to the extent that gossip about him has become a fixture. Interest in him as a film actor has diminished,<sup>21</sup> while the public appetite for mediated images of his celebrity postfeminist fatherhood remains strong. The profusion of tabloid imagery of Cruise's fatherhood was particularly noticeable when it appeared, given the dearth of such imagery prior to the officially sanctioned *Vanity Fair* spread that instigated the frenzy to document images of Cruise with his daughter. Since then, media discourses surrounding his fatherhood have wavered between extremes of celebrating him as one of 'Hollywood's Hottest Dads' and the recent tendency to characterise him as a pantomime villain with regard to his marriage to Holmes. Rhetoric focussed on Holmes has in turn become dominated by a new discourse of wifely suffering and victimhood. His paternal persona is thus celebrated as often as it is vilified, and has yet to recover the former coherence and consistency that characterised it prior to the taint of scandal.

Contemporary media culture has thus manifestly evinced a growing appetite for tabloid images of male celebrities performing postfeminist fatherhood, according to the dictates of its preferred cultural template. Correspondingly there has been a marked proliferation in visual and rhetorical media documentation of paternally themed images and discourses around the ostensibly private realm of male celebrities, which have been opened up to public consumption. This has occurred in line with a broader shift in this direction that the rise of tabloid, reality and scandal forms heralded, alongside the trans-media circulation of contemporary celebrity, both of which have shrewdly accommodated the popular cultural salience of postfeminist fatherhood into their representational discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> Where film and television actors are concerned it is of course necessary to highlight the distinction between screen persona and publicity image that was made in film studies theorisations of stars and star images, and hence the notion of 'duality' that was discussed in scholarly work on stardom thereafter (Ellis 1992 [1982]; Dyer 1998 [1979]; Geraghty 2000). So, the shift in significance from one side of the public/private, onscreen/offscreen (specifically, the cinema screen), extraordinary/ordinary binary as regards the primary avenues through which these figures register in popular consciousness, has lent the public identities of the Hollywood actors in question a mutability that speaks to the ongoing definitional and terminological debate regarding stardom versus celebrity, the 'blurred boundaries' between them, and the 'hierarchy of cultural values

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which organizes the meanings of these terms, with the concept of “star” positioned above the concept of the “celebrity.” (Redmond and Holmes 2007, p 8) Traditional star studies might consider this shift a diminishment of the ‘auratic’ (Benjamin 2007 [1973]; Mann 1988) status of their stardom, to the point where the (now blurred) line between star and celebrity status is crossed, as the principal textual realm in which their public identity is mediated moves to, or at least competes with, those which seem to allow greater access to a purportedly ‘authentic’ self (e.g. the tabloid and reality forms under consideration here), and which are thus lower on the auratic scale than the high aura cinematic star vehicle, or operate in a second tier capacity in the cultural hierarchy of star texts (Dyer 1998). Thus, without reiterating all the nuances of the stardom/celebrity debate (see Marshall 1997; Geraghty 2000; Evans 2005; Redmond and Holmes 2007) it makes greater sense, given the purview of this article, to discuss these Hollywood actors in terms of their status as celebrities rather than film stars. This is not to negate the significance of the screen persona, or the phenomenon of film stardom, and I will, where appropriate, make reference to cinematic and televisual fictions, where there is a productive parallel or point to be made about the mediation of postfeminist fatherhood. However it is beyond the scope of this piece to be able to adequately explicate all of the nuances of the discursive interlocution between stardom and celebrity.

<sup>2</sup> I am not claiming that the paternalisation of celebrity is a straightforwardly top-down linear process, or that it necessarily occurs as a direct upshot of the agency of the individuals in question. Nor am I making claims as to the conscious intentionality of particular individuals regarding their public paternalisation, other than in instances where the celebrity’s agency is manifestly evident, as in the case of Calvin ‘Snoop Dogg’ Broadus, who executive produced his reality tv show *Snoop Dogg’s Father Hood* purposefully in order to showcase ‘me as a father’ (Season 1 Episode 8). Rather, I wish to position it as a more circulatory and discursive process with a number of factors and facets of the cultural industries interoperating to facilitate this discourse of masculine identity in contemporary celebrity culture, and to effect this representational trend. I hence acknowledge the role of the celebrity’s own power and agency, the publicity machine and promotional culture, gossip culture, and the tabloid news agenda in contributing to this discourse. See scholarship by Gamson (1994), Marshall (1997), Turner et al (2000), Turner (2004) and Hesmondhalgh (2005) for discussions of the relationship between celebrity agency and power and the cultural production of celebrity.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Diane Negra for bringing this article to my attention.

<sup>4</sup> The image in question appeared several months prior to the confirmation that Law fathered a child from a one night stand with model Samantha Burke. This, of course, has troubled his personification of the paternal ideal

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and the impact of this development upon the coherence of his public persona as a postfeminist father remains to be seen. A later section of this article details examples of cases whereby scandal and/or backlash germane to a celebrity's fatherhood has ruptured the coherence of their personification of this ideal.

<sup>5</sup> This is in fact quite typical of the way that Barack Obama has been mediated within celebrity culture, and the fact that he became so quickly and widely entrenched within a celebrity oriented media culture did not go unnoticed by his political opponents who in fact attempted to flag it up in order to discredit him. Shelley Cobb has elsewhere highlighted 'John McCain's presidential campaign ad comparing Barack Obama's celebrity status to Paris [Hilton's] and Britney [Spears]', thus associating Obama with the public image of the young female celebrities as vacuous and immature.' (Cobb 2008, paragraph 25)

<sup>6</sup> In this way it acknowledges the aforementioned 'duality' of film stardom in terms of filmic persona and persona articulated elsewhere in media culture in the capacity of celebrity, but positions them in this case as complementary, as do the following examples relating to Patrick Dempsey.

<sup>7</sup> Other examples of this include the aforementioned alignment of Matthew McConaughey's fatherhood with his laid back 'dude' persona (amongst his film roles, *Failure to Launch* (2006) and *Surfer Dude* (2008) most visibly foreground this aspect of his persona), and the online gallery of celebrity fathers that makes rhetorical use of the title of Eddie Murphy's family comedy star vehicle *Daddy Day Care* (2003) (Byrne).

<sup>8</sup> Thanks again to Diane Negra for supplying this article.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing *Run's House* is now in its seventh season. The 2005 premiere of *Hogan Knows Best* attracted 10.2 million viewers, at the time VH1's 'highest rated premiere ever.' ('VH1's Sunday Night...' 2005)

<sup>10</sup> According to Adrienne McLean, 'a media scandal occurs when the *intentional* or *reckless personal actions* of *specific persons*, who can be identified as perpetrators of those actions, *disgrace* or *offend the idealized, dominant morality of a social community*' (McLean 2001, p. 6) and for all of the male celebrities concerned here, the offences perpetrated were incongruous with the morality or values associated with the dominant paternal ideal they had heretofore come to personify.

<sup>11</sup> See Cobb (2008) for an in depth case study of the demonization of celebrity motherhood in postfeminism.

<sup>12</sup> Recently the tabloid media have also seized upon and widely circulated a quotation by Price comparing her daughter to a 'troll' ('Katie Price Compares Daughter...' 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Eddie Murphy was speaking on Dutch television show *RTL Boulevard* while promoting his current vehicle *Dreamgirls* (2006), in which he played a womanising philandering African-American superstar, in a curious

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confluence of filmic persona and publicity image ('Murphy Ditches Scary Spice and Demands DNA Test' 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Diane Negra for supplying this article.

<sup>15</sup> There are innumerable references in the entertainment news media that refer to Russell Crowe in these terms both prior to and during the paternalisation of his public identity. At the time of the release of Crowe's then current vehicle *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003), one broadsheet profile did so, citing his 'unenviable tabloid reputation' as a 'foul-mouthed, drunken, bullying, womanising brawler.' (Goodwin 2003)

<sup>16</sup> This had already taken place through his cinematic output via paternal roles in *Gladiator* (2000) and *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*.

<sup>17</sup> A few months after its release, one journalist reported that although *Cinderella Man* (2005) had 'received almost unanimously rave reviews' its box-office takings were much 'lower than expected,' (Palmer 2005) while the World Entertainment News Network claimed, in the week following Crowe's arrest, that 'cinema-goers have stayed away since the actor attacked Nestor Estrada with a telephone last Monday, and the film struggled at the weekend.' ('Crowe's Attack Threatens New Film' 2005) See also Waxman (2005) and Gray (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Another example of a male celebrity who was vilified in the media following a scandalous revelation of their 'bad' fatherhood was Alec Baldwin, whose private answer phone message to his daughter Ireland in which he refers to her as a 'little pig' was leaked in the media and extremely widely circulated after it first appeared on celebrity gossip blog *TMZ* ('Alec Attacks' 2007).

<sup>19</sup> This was particularly prevalent in 1996 during the promotional activities surrounding the release of *Mission: Impossible*, but perhaps more importantly, ahead of the release of *Jerry Maguire* later that year. (Sarkin 2006a, p. 48)

<sup>20</sup> Alongside Cruise's paternal autocracy, the mediation of his fatherhood at this time continued to be posited according to the postfeminist template with regard to its practicalities: 'I change diapers all the time. I have to tell you I love it.' (Stewart 2006)

<sup>21</sup> He is much less prolific, and has not had a major box-office success since scandal discourse began to be circulated in relation to his postfeminist fatherhood

(<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/people/chart/?id=tomcruise.htm>).