



Centre for Parenting
Culture Studies

CPCSForums@Kent
Autumn series, 2011

(1) Expecting? How sexist ideology informs the “dos” and “don’ts” of pregnancy.

Amy Murphy and Dr Robbie Sutton, School of Psychology, University of Kent

Wednesday, 19th October 4-6pm, Cornwallis NW, sr9

Taboos have always surrounded the behaviour of pregnant women. Proscriptions surround the food and drink they consume, the places they should go, and even the states of mind that they should experience. Historically, these proscriptions have been based on guesswork, superstition, and gender prejudice. In this talk, we consider the extent to which they still are – despite advances in medical and social science. We outline official and unofficial proscriptions in contemporary developed societies and consider the oft-made suggestion that these are based, at least in part, on sexism and other value judgements rather than medical evidence. We argue specifically that the social-psychological theory of ambivalent sexism sheds light on the ancient and modern treatment of pregnant women. According to this theory, women are both revered and reviled. Benevolent sexism reveres women as morally and aesthetically superior to men, essential to men’s happiness, and in need of men’s protection, whereas hostile sexism reviles women as manipulative, devious and competitive with men. Our research findings show that benevolent sexism is associated with opposition to abortion rights, endorsement of other proscriptions on pregnant women (e.g., pregnant women should not drink alcohol or take exercise), and willingness to intervene paternalistically in order to steer pregnant women away from proscribed behaviours (e.g., by refusing to serve alcohol or soft cheese). On the other hand, hostile sexism is associated with the desire to punish women who flout such proscriptions. Our findings suggest that societal attitudes to pregnancy are shaped by these dual, complementary forms of sexism. They support the notion that these types of sexism comprise, together, a carrot-and-stick system of social control. They also suggest that these forms of sexism may be inextricably linked to women’s particular reproductive role. Ultimately, benevolence may be extended to women because they are seen to carry children on behalf of men and perhaps the community as a whole. It is therefore a double-edged sword, bringing both reverence and paternalism. Conversely, hostile sexism may be ultimately motivated to scrutinise and punish women’s behaviour in order to ensure that they fulfil their prescribed reproductive role.



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(2) **Parenting Policy and the English Riots**

Reading group and discussion, introduced Jennie Bristow, Journalist and PhD student, SSPSSR

Cornwallis NW, sr9, 7th December 4-6pm

Reading:

Christopher Lasch. 1977. *Haven in a Heartless World, The Family Besieged* esp. Chapter 8 'Authority and the Family: Law and Order in a Permissive Society

Jennie Bristow 2011 'These riots were not a product of permissiveness' Spiked online, available via:

<http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/11033/>

Frank Furedi 2011 'Cameron's cure will make society sicker' Spiked online, available via:

<http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/11008/>

Stuart Waiton. 2010. 'The Antisocialisation of Children and Young People: Undermining Professionals and Colonising Everyday Life' *Youth and Policy* available via:

<https://repository.abertay.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/10373/718/2/WaitonYouth%26PolicyPublisher2010.pdf>