

Adopting a specific sociological theoretical 'lens' of your choice critically explore one of the following contemporary issues in society: 'Disablism' 'Poverty Porn and/or Charity Porn' 'Compassion fatigue'.

This essay will be identifying how celebrities unintentionally, but possibly exploit individuals suffering from poverty, and how doing their charity work so publicly may result in Poverty Porn, and how this may be contributing to society becoming desensitised when being constantly bombarded with the frequent charity adverts asking for donations for different charities and so on. Also on the topic of exploitation, this essay will also be focusing on Poverty Porn in its many forms, such as reality TV shows and the tabloid press, and how it is happening in Britain too. This essay will also be exploring this topic through a sociological theoretical lens, specifically through the lens of structural functionalism, as it relates well to this area, focusing on the necessary structures that make up society today as we know it (Khan Academy, 2019). While viewing Poverty Porn through the lens of structural functionalism, this essay will also be linking in Conflict theory, how it still has a vital role in today's society, demonstrating that we still need to evolve socially and dynamically as a society in order to eradicate inequality among the social classes (Khan Academy, 2019).

Firstly, what is Poverty Porn and Charity Porn? According to Colin (2009), he states "any type of media, be it written, photographed or filmed which exploits the poor's condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers or increasing charitable donations or support through a given cause". In today's society, it appears that Poverty Porn is being exploited more and more on a regular basis, happening under people's noses and becoming the 'norm'. Individuals may assume that Poverty Porn only relates to third world countries, but this is far from the truth. Poverty Porn is happening right now in Britain, in the form of TV shows that exploit the poor, degrading those who are on benefits, and humiliating the working class communities (Independent, 2017). These TV shows include the well known Benefits Street, which views the individuals who live in the street known as James Turner Street in Birmingham. This particular show resulted in it receiving a number of complaints, with many people even complaining its makers were demonising communities that are considered deprived (Independent, 2017). Politicians also got involved such as Jeremy Corbyn, hoping to encourage a decrease in Poverty Porn and to make Poverty Porn history.

Corbyn also brought up the underfunding of Grenfell, and how the Grenfell Action Group were not acknowledged or listened to when it was imperative that they were heard and the awful outcome may have been prevented (Independent, 2017). Another example is when a woman spent £2000 on christmas presents for her six children, 66 presents, 11 each. This became a heated discussion on ITV's This Morning, which she revealed that the money she spent was in fact from benefits she had been receiving, and states she saved her money each week, rather than splashing out on drinking and smoking, she was still heavily criticised by viewers, because the money she was spending was benefit money (Independent, 2019). Had the fact that the money she spent on her children for christmas been hidden, would viewers have been so quick to criticise and demonise her? Unlikely. Due to the ongoing exploitation of the working-class with shows like Benefit Street, this will only continue to stigmatise the working class and those who are receiving benefits. These shows do not empower or look for any solution, instead they simply exploit the poor and the disadvantaged for the entertainment of today's society. This essay will also be looking into how detrimental Poverty Porn can be to those who are affected by poverty and deprivation to their mental health and well-being.

Continuing on this path, it is evident that there is a massive stigma that follows those from disadvantaged communities, and this has been the case for decades, even in this day and age, not much has changed. So long as certain reality TV shows continue, so do the clear divisions between communities. There is often the labels given to these individuals, such as the 'single mum' with lots of children, the 'immigrant' moving to Britain and the 'alcoholic' wasting their money (Aljazeera, 2019). These labels only feed into the issue more, furthering the division between communities, viewing them as "benefits cheats" (Aljazeera, 2019). Ruth Patrick, a researcher from the University of Liverpool states that reality TV shows exploiting the disadvantaged creates a 'them' and 'us' perspective. Patrick goes on to say "The reality is that we're all welfare dependent in different ways, so we all interact with and use the welfare state at certain times in our life" (Aljazeera, 2019). This statement certainly puts things into perspective, demonstrating that each and every one of us at some time in our lives needs and uses the welfare state, therefore everyone is in the same boat, just at different times. It always seems to be those receiving benefits who get exploited, never the tax avoiders, clearly indicating who it is who really holds the power in Britain (Aljazeera, 2019). Viewing this through a Structural Functionalism lens, in order to maintain positive diversity among our

society, the division between the social classes needs to be eradicated? Structural Functionalism views society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the social and biological needs of the individuals of that society (Lumen Sociology, n.d). If this continues, a healthy society will not be achieved if dynamic equilibrium is not balanced, and in its current state it most definitely is not (Lumen Sociology, n.d).

Focusing on another form of Poverty Porn, there is always celebrities going out to disadvantaged and deprived countries, doing their charity work while filming their experience and how they are helping. This is all good and well, but is this considered to be Poverty Porn? According to watchdog, it is. Ed Sheeran, Eddie Redmayne and Tom Hardy, who are all well known celebrities known for singing and acting, were at the forefront of criticism for their recent endeavours. In 2017, Ed Sheeran took part in one of three films which were made for comic relief and the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), with the aim to raise money for 13 major UK aid groups which include Oxfam, ActionAid in emergencies and Save The Children (The Guardian, 2017). Unfortunately, they were awarded “most offensive” campaigns in 2017 by the Radi-Aid awards (The Guardian, 2017). The chief executive of Comic Relief, Liz Warner, acknowledged that the organisation needed to be “edgy again” and had in fact, lost its touch. Ed Sheeran throughout the film offers to pay for hotel costs for children who are living on the streets in Liberia, which ends up being branded “Poverty tourism”, and although it is easy to recognise that Sheeran means well and wants to do the right thing, throughout the video it is him who is portrayed as the main character and the only person able to help, reinforcing the white saviour stereotypes which so greatly need to be diminished and boosting his own image, rather than seeing the bigger picture of what is actually going on in Liberia and many other disadvantaged countries (The Guardian, 2017). President of Saih, Beathe Øgård, stated “the three british films showed the local people as victims, and was an over-simplistic and outdated way to communicate about development” again, clearly demonstrating that the real issue that needed to be presented in these video’s was not seen, and was much like the ones that were released in the 1980’s (The Guardian, 2017). Although as already stated, Sheeran’s intentions were from a good place, but these forms of Poverty Porn can not be encouraged to continue. The white saviour stigma needs to be diminished, and while celebrities may help bring in donations for the cause, it tends to be focused on the celebrities , rather than the situation and those who are in need.

Relating back to Britain and the Poverty Porn that is currently happening, Zoe Williams with the Guardian explored how Poverty Porn blights the lives of people claiming benefits.

Williams researched what the effects may be on those who mainly live off benefits and when benefits are their main income (The Guardian, 2017). Williams concluded that those who are living off benefits felt their behaviour and actions are continuously being analysed, and found that they would refer to themselves as a “bum” or “scrounger”, regardless of their current situations that have put them into these positions, such as caring for their children which is a job in itself, coping with life altering situations like adjusting to an independent life after leaving care and simply seeking employment (The Guardian, 2017). It is also important to highlight how the ongoing stigma behind being on benefits and poverty is having a damaging effect on those who have to live with these situations, with it causing low self-esteem and mental health issues (The Guardian, 2017).

Poverty Porn is clearly having a profound effect on society, but not for the right reasons. The way in which many humans now view poverty is people who are from third world countries, look malnourished and think of the word “Africa”, suggesting that if this is what an individual thinks of when they think of the word poverty, then they have been exposed to Poverty Porn, according to Skye Davey (2018). The way in which celebrities continue to go the disadvantaged countries, with the message ‘we save them’ is sending the wrong message. As already mentioned, this enforces the white saviour stereotype, and implements the ‘us’ and ‘them’ theory even further, creating a toxic barrier between races that has existed for centuries (Oaktree, 2018). It is also relevant to mention how by sending these false messages of hope and statements such as “we can save them”, it is completely false hope and false advertisement. In other words, it is impossible for help to be given when structural change has not been achieved. While in most of these countries, the individuals who live in these communities are still behind in relation to Britain as a society (Oaktree, 2018). Gender inequality is still present, conflict, famine and social isolation are still very much relevant issues that need to be dealt with before charitable causes can fully help these people (Oaktree, 2018). Compassion fatigue is also relevant to highlight, as it is a form of secondary stress and is a state experienced by those who are helping animals or people who are in distress, meaning those who are under this stress, by being around them one takes on the symptoms

too (Compassion Fatigue, 2017). The battle of eradicating poverty is an ongoing one, one that will take a lot of time and sympathy, however the constant adverts on the television, the frequent requests for donations to charitable causes and poverty continuously being all over the tabloids is causing society to become less sensitive to poverty over all, instead individuals are becoming exhausted and drained by the harassment of poverty porn and undoubtedly suffering from compassion fatigue, seeing it as a nuisance rather than wanting to help (Oaktree, 2018). Instead of constantly exploiting how those in poverty are in need of saving, perhaps some positive displays of poverty would in fact support the cause, by displaying individuals who have experienced poverty and have overcome and escaped poverty, would be a positive and uplifting representation, and would possibly change society's views on poverty and that is can be challenged under the right circumstances (Oaktree, 2018).

Evidently, Poverty Porn relates well into Conflict theory. As Conflict theory suggested by Karl Marx states that society is in a constant state of conflict due to the competitiveness and feuding over resources being limited (Investopedia, 2019). Conflict theory also suggests that social order is obtained and maintained by force through power and domination, instead of harmony and compliance. Conflict theory has also been used to explain reasons for certain things happening in this world, such as domestic violence, discrimination, wars, wealth and poverty. Some may even say excusing it? This theory particularly explains a lot going on in today's society, how in Britain the levels of inequality among the social classes is becoming wider and even heading down a capitalist root, with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer (Investopedia, 2019). Rather than there being a social order with equality being achieved among communities, poverty in Britain does seem to be getting out of hand, with little being done to resolve it. Conflict theory is relevant to today's society, and could this be the reason why there is such a conflict between the classes? Why those from disadvantaged communities are being exploited throughout the media for entertainment, while the higher class are the ones behind it all pulling the strings (Investopedia, 2019). Conflict theory explains why there is so much inequality within Britain right now, and that perhaps the reason for it is the continuous divide among the social classes (Investopedia, 2019).

Although it may seem like the individuals in the United Kingdom who are currently suffering from experiencing poverty have got no rights behind them, it is important to acknowledge that these individuals are still human, and they do have legal legislation to support them here in the United Kingdom. The Human Rights Act 1998 is a perfect example of demonstrating how every individual here in the United Kingdom has human rights, no matter where they live or what their current circumstances are, this Act applies to all (Legislation, n.d). This Act will protect individuals in a variety of situations, including in court. The Data Protection Act (2018) is also a way of protecting individuals from Poverty porn, ensuring that every individual in Britain has the rights to their private information being shared, can stop or restrict the processing of their data and consent must be given before taking pictures of an individual, and for them to be shared publicly (Gov, n.d). This Act is a way of preventing Poverty Porn being made, with it protecting the individuals rights who it concerns and ensuring they are fully aware and are in control of their own person data (Gov, n.d). This Act also helps to further support individuals, who may be considered to be vulnerable, that they are not taken advantage of, while ensuring that General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is present to safeguard the rights and the freedom of the individuals, by securing their data (Data Protection, 2018).

To conclude, it is clear that Poverty Porn is very much happening on a global scale, in third world countries where videos are being made to pull the heartstrings of the British public in order to receive donations and praise, and with the main character of these videos almost always being a typical famous white male saviour stereotype. Although it can be considered that the 'main characters' in these videos have good intentions, these outdated ways of trying to raise money for charitable causes need to be eradicated. Evidently, they have been happening since the 1980's, and the affect it is having on the population is not the desired goal. Instead, it has created a society that is now numb to these causes, and has desensitised a nation. By being bombarded with depressing and badgering television adverts, frequently asking for donations, individuals will grow tired and resentful of charitable causes, creating a negative outlook. Changes need to be made, and a more updated and uplifting outlook on poverty is greatly needed, to demonstrate that poverty can one day be eradicated in the correct way. There is also the issue of poverty happening in Britain, and the way in which the media exploits it rather than helping to diminish the issue. By creating reality tv shows

exploiting individuals from disadvantaged communities will not empower them, instead it oppresses them, and entraps them in an in a category that they can not escape from. These shows do not look for a solution, they are stereotyping individuals and branding them with these labels, portraying them as the problem in today's society, continuing to support the ideologies behind Conflict theory and a capitalist Britain. In order to escape the ongoing issue of poverty, labelling these individuals needs to be stopped, and instead of exploiting them, real support needs to be given. Until true support can happen, firstly Poverty Porn must be eradicated.

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