

Celebrities in bankruptcy: The Spanish economic crisis through the lens of celebrity culture

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Abstract

In the last few years 'broke celebrities' have attracted the attention of Spanish media. If stars and celebrities symbolise the opportunities offered by capitalist society to talented and hard-working individuals (Dyer, 1979; Littler, 2003), celebrities in bankruptcy embody the anxieties of an era marked by the economic crisis, which has been especially severe in Spain.

In this paper we analyse how 'broke celebrities' are portrayed in Spanish media (TV, press and magazines) and how they are discussed in online forums. In doing so, this paper aims to not only analyse the representation of the economic crisis through the lens of celebrity culture but also better understand contemporary discourses about celebrity in Spain. These discourses are characterised by an ironic and self-reflexive point of view (Gamson, 1994); a tendency to *schadenfreude* in response to inequalities (Cross and Littler, 2010); as well as a heated debate on meritocratic values –which are related to the advance of neoliberal governmentality (Oliva, 2014; Holmes, 2004; Mendick, Allen and Harvey, 2015).

Our analysis shows that there are differences regarding how media portray 'legitimised' celebrities in bankruptcy (for example, singers such as Lolita or athletes such as Arancha Sánchez Vicario) and celebrities that cannot be linked to socially accepted definitions of talent and hard work (for example, reality TV celebrities, such as Chiqui or Marina Díaz). Furthermore, we argue that, in order to fully understand these discourses, class and gender must be taken into account.

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Biographical note

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