



Future Justice

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Send in the Clowns

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Feeling a little ignored? Need a place in the sun? An invitation to an A-list event? There are not many ways to be memorable in the modern world, but some canny performers have found a way to get noticed. The bump is back, and although it only comes in two styles, its appearance demands a whole lot of reading and rehearsing. As a culture, we are fascinated by the fable of family follies, and in a world where fecundity has become the new golf, we are happy to consume and comment on the previously personal.

In the surrendering of the privacy of procreation, we have created a questionable culture where reproduction is just another act in the circus of celebrity. Conversations at the local coffee shop are no longer discussions of last weekend's party, but frank dialogues about follicle counts, sperm motility and placental health. Fertility is no longer a private act, and never before have we been so caught up in the fashionable rituals of reproduction.

The 'making of babies' is no longer committed behind a closed bedroom door or in the backseat of a car. Western societies are entering a 'brave new world', where men in white coats holding Petri dishes and test tubes have been given the responsibility to 'play God'. Huxley's vision has arrived, bringing not just new ways to conceive, but new dialogues, too. We are no longer afraid to ask women over 40 if their eggs are over-cooked, or to ask 20-year-olds if they have considered freezing some ovum for that day when career heights are high,

but men thin on the ground. Australia's fertile few have sparked media frenzy, and their perfect progeny project a dream to be pursued.

Career paths, education and a desire for material possessions have complicated our lives. The predictable cycle of marriage and motherhood has been delayed by a need to decorate and upgrade ourselves, and the nest. Finding time to procreate, and being successful at it, is a new form of empowerment. Notice me, notice me that bump calls — and we do.

The obsession with fertile women has taken the world by storm. At the Golden Globes, we speculate over rounded tummies and burgeoning breasts. Jennifer Aniston is constantly expecting that much awaited bundle of joy. Gestation delights us. We follow the conception, pregnancy, birth and postnatal period of any genetically blessed bub, waiting anxiously on the edge of our seats for the latest piece of news. We have paid the admission price, and we expect a performance.



Brangelina's 'rainbow' family is undoubtedly the most famous expanding clan. Photos of Brad Pitt's and Angelina Jolie's 2008 additions fetched US\$14 million; the world wanted a glimpse into the lives of those who are on every A list, and still found the time to reproduce. But are Angelina's motives entirely selfless in her creation of a 'UNICEF' family, or does she see a way to make a statement in a photo opportunity? Is this just a happy family, or is there a message in the mix?



Those of us without the 'sexiest man alive' de facto can find ways to have the fruits of our labours featured in the headlines. Nadya Suleman knew she needed six embryos, (with donor sperm in the mix), implanted in her getting-close-to-the-expiry-date-uterus for her 15 minutes of fame. (She scored 25 minutes when two of the eggs divided). The world will continue to ask — what was Nadya Suleman thinking? Did she

truly believe that the selling of her obstetric story was real compensation for the 18 years of hard struggle ahead, as a mother of eight? Fools that we are, we paid up and watched the parade.

There is always a new ‘magic’ family number. In *The Simpsons’* episode, *Eight Misbehavin’*, Apu’s wife Manjula Nahasapeemapetilon, unexpectedly gives birth to eight ‘little Indians’ after being slipped handfuls of fertility pills by her own husband, and various Simpson family members. Fame and fortune arrive with the babies, but this quickly evaporates when a woman from the neighbouring town of Shelbyville gives birth to nonuplets the next day. The celebrity ‘bigger is better’ birth is a fickle thing.

Our children are no longer commodities to be brutalised, like Hans Christian Anderson’s *Little Match Girl*, but they still have a commodity value. They are prizes which can be polished, and used to dazzle and delight. If we are smart, they can be our ticket to the biggest show in town. Like Holden Caulfield, we know that this is ‘phony’, but after the curtain has risen, it’s hard to stop the show.

What motivates the ‘yummy mummies’ and matriarchs of large families to expose their new arrivals to media mania and public posturing? With everyone vying for their chance to dance in the spotlight, many experts have warned society that the choices of our fertile favourites are fast becoming a reflection of the selfish values of 21st century living. For a generation obsessed with possessions, progeny provide street-cred. Offspring can be demanding, but they are 3D proof that a couple can make things happen. Increasingly, are we seeking private joy or public recognition when we choose to participate in the ‘circle of life’?

Thomas Beatie, 34, the world’s first ‘pregnant man’ is the latest follower of this frenzied, freaky science. ‘Wanting to have a biological child is neither a male nor female desire but a human desire’, writes Beatie. But Beatie knows there is celebrity here; the public is fascinated with his androgenous

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male body, which disguises female chromosomes and internal organs. The media warfare over crazed conceptions continues as we step into this brave new era of medicine, as scientists try the role of ring-masters.

The freak show continues, for the world learned earlier this month of a 13-year-old British boy who allegedly fathered a child with his 15-year-old girlfriend. Alfie Patten, only 12 when baby Maisie was conceived, and ‘has not got a clue of what a baby means’, but we wolfishly watch on, waiting for this boy to fly or fail. Arguments about appropriate parenting are meaningless to this young couple who surely see a quid in the story.

In this selfish circus, who is considering the needs of the children? In life we have hoops to jump through, tightropes to walk and responsibilities to juggle, but when we are placed on the red carpet, in front of the spotlight and quoted in *People*, we forget our humanity. Procreation is a fundamental and innate part of human essence. Regardless of whether we are passing on ‘Golden Globe genes’ or ‘crappy chromosomes’, our desires and motivations must remain honest. Procreation generally leads to parenting, and there is no human act which needs to be more selfless.

So, send in the clowns. But wait — maybe they’re here?



Georgia Bottomley wrote this in 2009 when she was in Year 12 at Somerville House in Queensland.