

Weight loss celebs

- 1 On April Fools' Day, let us reflect quickly on this century's biggest prank, the celebrity weight loss DVD. It was just after Scarlett Moffatt (of *Gogglebox* and *I'm a Celebrity* fame) had signed a six-figure contract to star in her first DVD, that a friend told me about one of its conditions. Not only was Moffatt contractually obliged to lose the usual literal wheelbarrow of weight (she went from a size 18 to a size 8 in a matter of months), but for a year after the DVD's release she had to keep the 3 stone off and endure regular weigh-ins, or pay back the cash. Though I was well aware of the dark machinations of the weight loss industry, I wasn't prepared for the starkness of the paperwork.
- 2 The sticky story of Moffatt's DVD is rumbling through the tabloids at the moment as a friend's (inverted commas) text messages confirm that, rather than losing weight simply through the exercise routines on the tape, she visited a Swiss bootcamp where she was made to train for six hours a day, eating a maximum of 700 calories. After she was branded 'fake' over claims the DVD showed an "unrealistic portrayal of how she lost weight" (a jarring accusation for a person whose career is based on her honesty and her humanness), a personal trainer came forward revealing similar stories about Moffatt's fellow reality stars, *Geordie Shore*'s Vicky Pattison and *Towie*'s Lauren Goodger, explaining that it's standard protocol for him to move in with the reality star for the duration of the project, cooking their food as well as keeping them fit. Both Pattison and Goodger received a lot of money for their DVDs (Pattison is rumoured to have been paid £160,000), and both also visited a series of secret fitness bootcamps, starting starvation diets before filming. All have offered regrets. All have since put on weight.
- 3 I interviewed Goodger about body image in 2012, having counted 546 *Mail Online* headlines about her yo-yoing body. We sat in a corner of Max Clifford's office, and she told me how odd it felt when scrutiny of your weight becomes your career, talking quietly about anorexia in her family, and the conflict she felt when her little sister complimented her on her weight loss. Against more *Mail Online* headlines (detailing her liposuction) she then went on to release her bestselling DVD. "I tried everything for years to lose weight but nothing worked. Now this system has done it for me." It hadn't.



- 4 It's not so much the con of the thing that gets me — the customers investing in a fairytale of fitness, their relentless living room squats adding up to only a fraction of what they'd been promised — but the way these tiny scandals illuminate the terrible arc of the reality star. It begins with a person, like Moffatt, whose jolly transparency and way with a camp put-down resonates with an audience that appreciates their normalness — which includes, of course, their un-celebrity body. Their fame means they quickly grow out of the reality show that spawned them and graduate to *I'm a Celebrity* grade, get a cheery column in a weekly glossy, their own branded line of tanning milk. And then, when quietness threatens, inevitably, a weight loss DVD follows, a project with its own bookended narrative, its own terrible arc.
- 5 The tabloid's candid shots that come in September, following January's bestselling DVD release, of the star looking fat in leggings as she leaves a Costa carrying a very large latte, initially do nothing to undermine her story. In fact, they add texture to it, a handful more lovely struggles that help them appear more human, more like the jolly girl they were at the start of the series. But eventually there is no going back. The bus just goes in one direction. 10
- 6 It is a very modern downfall, so modern that it's mirrored in gentrification. It is mirrored in the way an unloved area of a growing city becomes popular due to its grit and liveliness, the way its affordable buildings home artists and immigrants, and people yet to be ground down by respectability or hate. And then, in time, the area being razed to the ground, its buildings no longer affordable, being rebuilt in glass, like ice sculptures commemorating what once stood there. The kernel of insolence, of creativity, real life, in hot oil, is quickly popped. It's popped for profit, if not just because this is what it's assumed people want.
- 7 Reality stars plan for eventual gentrification in their agents' offices, offices like Clifford's in which I met Lauren Goodger, who, used to endless interviews about losing weight, was thrown, in the end, by a question about 'why'. These women are both land and property developer in this grim exchange, selling off bits of themselves until that bidding auction becomes all that defines them. And then, with a scandal like Moffatt's, sold to *The Sun* with a friend's leaked texts, another chapter begins, and onwards the storyline unfolds towards its inevitably sad end.

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