



UEL Research & Knowledge Exchange Conference 2013

Call for Abstracts

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| Name & Title of Presenter: | Dr Roberta Garrett |
| School: | ADI |
| Co investigators: | |
| Title of Abstract: | 'Mum's Lit' and the Public Mother as Author |
| Key Theme/ Key words: | Motherhood, feminism, popular literature |

Abstract (No more than 400 words):

'Mum's lit is a popular literary form aimed primarily at middle-class mothers in the 30-40 age-bracket. It is marketed as both an offshoot and sequel to mainstream single-girl orientated 'chick-lit' and resembles the latter in its use of pastel dustjackets and the implementation of a chatty and informal first person narrative style. However, as my paper will argue, while mainstream 'chick-lit' blended conventional notions of female desire and behaviour with the new educational and employment aspirations of young women, 'mum's lit both reflects and reinforces the much more restrictive code of female behaviour expected of mothers of young children in the contemporary socio-political climate of the US and UK.

Mum's lit writers – such as Alison Pearson (*I Don't Know How She Does it*) India Knight (*My Life on A Plate*) Lucy Cavendish (*Samantha Smythe's Modern Home Journal*) and Fiona Gibson (*Mummy Said the F-word*) are journalists who had already established a niche as opinion makers and authorities on domestically life prior to publishing their first 'mum's' lit novel. Through the voice of the heroine-mother (a character who's lifestyle, attitudes and even appearance, bear an uncanny resemblance to the public mother/opinion maker author) such novels endorse what feminist critics have described as the 'new mommist' ideology of 24 hour attachment and intensive parenting. Although 'mum's lit' is promoted as supportive to mothers by critiquing the culture of maternal perfectionism, it clearly perpetuates binary notions of good and bad motherhood but supplants an older, now outdated mode of domestic perfectionism and rigid child

management regimes (associated with the Bowlby's 'refrigerator' mother – the frosty 1950s housewife) with a new ideology that forgives a small amount of domestic tardiness if this occurs in the service of creating a child-centred culture of continually fun and creativity which is accompanied by dizzying levels of emotional engagement and empathy. The paper will argue that the 'new mommist'/intensive parenting orthodoxy portrayed in these novels is thus as demanding as the post-war domestic ideology and is equally invested in biologically essentialist attitudes towards parenting and motherhood.