

Book of Abstracts



ONLINE SYMPOSIUM ABOUT ALL THINGS KARDASHIAN

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SKIMS: Unpacking the contradictions in Kim's body-positive shapewear 'solutions'

KATHERINE APPLEFORD

Kingston University, London, UK

Abstract

In September 2019 Kim Kardashian launched her fashion venture SKIMS. Described as a 'solutions-oriented' brand, the SKIMS collections include shapewear, underwear and, more recently, loungewear, and the brand is currently valued at \$1.6 Million.

According to Kim, 'Diversity and Inclusivity are in the brand's DNA' with products available in a wide range of skin tones and sizes. And across SKIMS' advertising the emphasis on 'body positivity' is evident, from its use of 'plus size' models and women of colour to its 'fits everybody' collection. Yet, as this paper explores, the notion of body positivity seems somewhat at odds with SKIMS 'solutionswear', which aims to sculpt, contour, control and slim women's bodies in some places, and enhance curves and fullness in others.

As several academics note (e.g. Sastre, 2014, Wissinger, 2016) Kim Kardashian has been pivotal in cultivating a new body ideal, which is largely unrealistic and unachievable for ordinary women without extreme dieting or exercise, or some form of restrictive shapewear or surgery. In fact, Kim's media interviews seem to suggest that even for her, the exaggerated hourglass shape she has promoted is impossible to maintain without unique 'shapewear', and hence she developed SKIMS. Consequently, this paper suggests, that though the brand may make different body shapes and skin tones more visible across its various platforms, Kim Kardashian and the beauty ideal she embodies are at the centre of SKIMS imagery and product. Thus, although it may present as diverse and inclusive, SKIMS demonstrates the problematic nature of body positivity, as it encourages surveillance and control of women's body, and draws women into beauty comparisons, which largely elevates and reinforces Kim's unrealistic body ideal in the process.

Bio

Dr Katherine Appleford has been a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Kingston University London since 2013, and had previously taught Cultural and Historical Studies at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London.

Her research considers women's everyday fashion practices and tastes and beauty and body ideals, exploring the ways in which these are shaped by class, gender and race. Her monograph, 'Classifying Fashion, Fashioning Class' (2020, Routledge) examines the role class plays in British women's fashion choices, highlighting important intersections, perceptions of public and private space, performances of femininity and motherhood, and understandings and evaluations of class and taste. More recently, her research has explored the role of celebrity and social media in shifting discourses around 'curves', fatness, and body positivity, focusing particularly on the notion of 'slim-thick'.

Her work has featured on BBC Radio 4's Thinking Allowed, Resonance FM's Modulations, in Forbes Magazine and Vice.

Kim Kardashian as a Transhumanist Icon

SARAH MARILYN BARRICK

Abstract

Transhumanism -

1. the belief or theory that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology.

Kim Kardashian is a transhumanist icon because she lives and exists on the digital frontier, and is emblematic of the shift onto social media technology and digital existence in such a way that nobody had done before.

Keeping up with the Kardashians, an unscripted show about a certain family's regular life, broke the paradigm of reality tv being heavily scripted with a dramatized plot. Likewise, our digital selves and the content we created and consumed on social media were emerging in this vein - just regular life transposed onto a digital space.

The currents of the evolution of the digital self can be traced back to Kim Kardashian - the 'selfie', the real-life consequences of existing openly in the digital space and how to handle it, 'influencer' business models, an e-commerce empire on the frontier of supply chain innovation, the personal brand, working on/from your phone, emoji communication, even a multi-million dollar app game based around her digital self.

Kim K as a person exists and pioneers on the boundary of the real self and the digital self.

Most of us gradually begin putting more and more of ourselves online, and often begrudgingly as more and more artifacts of the world go online. But some humans jumped headfirst into digital existence - persisted through consequences, and served as a blueprint for how the rest of us can maximally embrace the technology of the digital self. Kim K is arguably the most impactful of them all.

Bio

Sarah Marilyn Barrick is a New York Times featured memelord mom, former neuroscientist and futurist. Most of her work focuses on business growth and marketing operations, and she has built multiple viral meme movements and communities. Her research began with developing brain-computer interfaces in a lab, but in an increasingly digital world she has evolved to focus on the general interfacing of humans with digital technology and developing sustainable, symbiotic business models and products.

The Kardashians and contemporary publishing: self-representation, ghost writing and authentic authorship

DONNA LEE BRIEN

Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Despite the proliferation of new media forms, writers continue to generate and disseminate fiction and non-fiction stories via books published in print and online. This presentation is built around a case study of the publishing careers of Kim and other members of the extended Kardashian family to tease out concepts of authenticity and self-representation in relation to contemporary forms of publishing including memoir, biography and other personally inflected popular writing. This includes a brief discussion of readers' expectations of such book-length works and the ethics of publishing. This presentation also profiles the fascinating and rapidly evolving profession of the contemporary ghost writer and the role these shadowy figures play in the contemporary publishing industry.

Bio

Dr Donna Lee Brien, BEd (Deakin), GCHed (UNE), MA(Prelim) (USyd), MA (Writing) (Research) (UTS), PhD (QUT), is currently undertaking a second PhD at the Australian Catholic University, writing an object-based history of Bondi Beach. Emeritus Professor of Creative Industries at Central Queensland University, Australia, Donna has authored and edited over 20 books and monographs and published some 200 refereed journal articles, book chapters and scholarly conference papers, many of which investigate popular genres of non-fiction writing, publishing, and writing pedagogy. Her latest books are *The Shadow Side of Nursing: Paradox, Image and Identity*, authored with Margaret McAllister (Routledge, 2020) and *Writing the Australian Beach: Local Site, Global Idea*, edited with Elizabeth Ellison (Palgrave, 2021).

Vocal Fry

MONIKA CHAO ¹, JULIA BURSTEN ²

University of California, Berkeley, California, USA ¹

University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, USA ²

Abstract

Vocal fry is a phonation, or voicing, in which an individual drops their voice below its natural register and consequently emits a low, growly, creaky tone of voice. Media outlets have widely acknowledged it as a generational vocal style characteristic of millennial women, frequently nodding to Kim Kardashian as a main offender. Critics of vocal fry often claim that it is an exclusively female vocal pattern, and some say that the voicing is so distracting that they cannot understand what is being said under the phonation. Claiming that a phonation is so distracting as to prevent uptake of the semantic content of an utterance associated with it is an extreme reaction, especially when accompanied by demands for women to change their phonation. We argue that this reaction limits women's communicative autonomy. We argue that when fry is heard as annoying and distracting, it is because the hearer interprets the speaker as echoing an utterance from a position of authority to which she is not entitled. We show that this reaction encodes conscious or unconscious sexist attitudes toward women's voices. Kim poses a particularly interesting example, as her use of vocal fry abides by these guidelines but also showcases some originality. We argue that in her case, not only does she use vocal fry to garner authority, but she also enacts some control over her life and narrative with her use of vocal fry.

Bio

Monika Chao is a graduate student in philosophy at UC Berkeley. She is mainly interested in ethics and political philosophy, especially questions about privacy as they relate to data science. She has also done work in philosophy of language and feminist philosophy.

Dr. Bursten is Associate Professor of Philosophy and affiliated faculty in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Kentucky. Her primary research interests are in the philosophy of science. More information about her research can be found at <http://www.juliabursten.org/>.

‘Which City is Kim Kardashian? An Introduction’

MJ COREY

Abstract

A Video Essay by mj corey and Super Lestela Productions

The Kardashians are prototypical ‘Cali Girls’ who’ve built an empire that has taken them all over the world. Like the famous cities they visit for work, their brand is industry-driven and instantly recognizable - and, in an increasingly urbanized global community, it’s not a stretch to wonder:

If the Kardashians were a city, which city would they be?

In this Video Essay (produced by Super Lestela Productions) I survey three major cities —Los Angeles, New York, and Paris —before landing on the conclusion that if The Kardashians were a city, they’d ‘be’ Las Vegas. Colorful, capitalistic, and divisive, both The Kardashians and Las Vegas have mastered a balance of high-design and mass appeal.

We’ll discover surprising things about all of the iconic cities listed as we view them using the lenses of Thom Andersen, John Berger, Edward Bernays, Natasha Dow Schull, and Stefan Al (among others). We’ll transport from Kim’s tabloid times with Paris Hilton, to the Pop Art period, to our more recent media memories of Kim’s Paris Robbery, and, finally, to the neon-lit architectural history of The Vegas strip.

We’ll watch clips from *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, and journey through some incredibly satisfying Urban Studies and Media Studies texts; we’ll interview the people of Las Vegas out on the sidewalks on a Saturday night; and we’ll sit down with renowned urban planner Stefan Al to talk about the theory and history that make Vegas the cultural force it is.

As Al writes in his book, *The Strip: Las Vegas and the Architecture of the American Dream*, ‘the strip began as an exception. But increasingly it has become the rule.’

Can the same be said about The Kardashians?

Bio

mj corey is the author behind the social media presence *Kardashian_Kolloquium*. She received her Masters in Nonfiction Writing as well as Counselling Psychology from Columbia University. She is interested in psychoanalysis, postmodernism, media theory, and simulation theory. Her work has been in many places, including *Killing the Buddha*, *Entropy*, and *The Rumpus*.

Kardashian_kolloquium and Nori's Black Book: A Conversation

MJ COREY , NATALIE FRANKLIN
Kardashian_Kolloquium

Abstract

Kardashian_kolloquium and Nori's Black Book in Conversation

Since 2018, mj corey has maintained an Instagram account called @Kardashian_kolloquium, on which she hyper-intellectualizes the Kardashian-Jenner empire (most often through a postmodernist lens). She also recently created a conjunctive TikTok account, which has been rapidly and significantly accelerating in growth.

Natalie Franklin is a California-based writer; specifically, she authors the massively famous satirical Instagram account Nori's Black Book (NBB) which has been operating since 2013, and was recently featured in an actual Season 20 episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. NBB's appeal is its voice-driven, speculative rendering of the Kardashian world - as seen through the eyes of 8-year-old North West. Franklin's content was famously anonymous through most of the years of its production. The 'KUWTK' Reveal of the Woman Behind the Words, aired on May 13, 2021, was an iconic moment for fans.

Through their collective years of writing about The Kardashians, Natalie and mj have come to observe much about the family's interpersonal dynamics, identity politics, media presentation, and, perhaps most interestingly, their influence on fanhood and fan behavior.

In this session they will discuss the observations, experiences, and theories gleaned from years of *Keeping Up with the family*.

Bio

mj corey is the author behind the social media presence Kardashian_Kolloquium. She received her Masters in Nonfiction Writing as well as Counselling Psychology from Columbia University. She is interested in psychoanalysis, postmodernism, media theory, and simulation theory. Her work has been in many places, including *Killing the Buddha*, *Entropy*, and *The Rumpus*.

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'I Remember *Almost* Every Pet We've Had': Pets as Narrative Device in *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*

CAT DORMAN , STEFF BOULTON,
Dead Pet Girls

Abstract

In an early season of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Kim finds a quivering chihuahua in the parking lot of a nail salon. In classic early KUWTK fashion some low-stakes, farcical plot points follow with Kim buying the dog a shirt to cover her exposed nipples and forgetting that she should in fact give it a name before landing on Princess. Kim briefly decides to keep the dog before ultimately giving her to a vet tech instead, tidily completing the episode's narrative, leaving us ready to begin anew the following week.

Here Kim is still best known as the former friend of Paris Hilton, queen of chihuahuas, and this episode places her firmly into Paris's shoes, ready to take the reality TV throne. Over the years as Kim became a reality TV icon in her own right, animals continued to make occasional appearances as vehicles to push the plot forward. Most often, they tether the increasingly glamorous family to some semblance of normalcy. But these interactions feel staged and hollow much of the time, warping the carefully crafted illusion of a normal family in an extraordinary circumstance of immense fame.

This video presentation will explore the ways that pets function as a narrative device in the world of KUWTK and while simultaneously complicating the show's proximity to reality and the family's proximity to us (normal people with maybe a couple of pets).

As the Kardashians live publicly beyond the TV screen, their interactions with pets on their social media - or lack thereof - color our understanding of these relationships and underscore the generally performative and calculated role of pets within the family. From disappearing dogs to navigating break-ups through pet ownership, this presentation will explore the question: What do pets tell us about the world the Kardashians construct for themselves?

Bio

Cat Dorman is a writer and curator based in Washington, DC and Steff Boulton is a TV assistant producer based outside of London, and together they run Dead Pet Girls.

Dead Pet Girls is a platform to explore grief culture through the lens of pet bereavement. Their platform uses pop culture, art, history and writing to examine the aspects of our lives that are often deemed too uncomfortable or insignificant to talk about.

Steff Boulton graduated from University College London with a bachelor's degree in history. Cat Dorman has a bachelor's degree in English and art history from American University, and a master's in Issues in Modern Culture from University College London.

Both are reality TV devotees.

'I don't want to sound like I'm not grateful' on Kim Kardashian, Trauma, and Lost Time

OLINE EATON

New York University, Washington DC, USA

Abstract

On 2 October 2016, Kim Kardashian West posted a photograph of herself on Instagram. In the wee hours of the following morning, she was assaulted and robbed in a Paris apartment. She did not appear on social media again until 3 January 2017. The assault of Kardashian in Paris and its seeming collective forgetting provides a lens through which we can interrogate the tangling of trauma, language, and time. In particular, the episode illuminates the human impulse to paper over sites of violence, and the damaging haste with which western societies attempt to move on and recover a 'normal'—a haste especially relevant now, in the COVID-19 pandemic, as we endure the second year of a global mass death event.

How, I wonder, does history look when we unpick the layer of inevitability that has settled upon it? When, in our historical analysis and writing, we account for how it felt for those living through it when they did not know what would happen next? How can we tell stories for which the language is resisted and/or non-existent?

In this paper, I use this episode from Kardashian's life to shift the story and tease out the value and necessities of lost time— which I construe as time forgotten because it is time where language has failed. Situated within the 'lost time' of the pandemic, the paper uses autoethnography in combination with media, cultural, and historical analysis to examine this incident of lost time in Kardashian's life. Mining Kardashian's traumatic experience and her recounting of it illuminates the connections between time, language, celebrities, and individuals in moments of historical trauma. In doing so, the paper argues for the necessity and value of lost times, as well as their remembrance.

Bio

Oline Eaton (@oline_eaton; www.FindingJackie.com) teaches writing and rhetoric at Howard University and NYU-DC. Her research examines celebrity life-narratives as trans-medially constructed, trans-historically contested, ideologically saturated affective spaces.

Kim Kardashian's Private Island, Pandemic Celebrity and Digital Modes of Being

KIRSTY FAIRCLOUGH

Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

Abstract

In October of 2020, Kim Kardashian announced on her social media platforms that she had flown her friends and family to a private island to celebrate her 40th birthday with the following statement. *'After 2 weeks of multiple health screens and asking everyone to quarantine, I surprised my closest inner circle with a trip to a private island where we could pretend things were normal just for a brief moment in time.'* The post quickly became a much distributed meme, with individuals and organisations sharing photographs of their own often more menacing 'private islands' at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This moment in Kim Kardashian's digital existence and its widely agreed 'tone deafness' speaks to the central question of the function of the Kardashian's particular brand of celebrity in times of global crisis. This five minute pop up paper will address such ideas around the relatability, spectacle, cultural sway and ultimately, limits of the Kardashians in the COVID era.

Bio

Dr Kirsty Fairclough is Reader in Screen Studies at the School of Digital Arts (SODA) at Manchester Metropolitan University. Kirsty researches in the areas of, celebrity studies, the audio-visual mediation of popular music and gender representation in popular culture with an emphasis on the life and legacy of Prince.

Kirsty has published widely on popular culture and is the co-editor of *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop* (Routledge), *The Arena Concert: Music, Media and Mass Entertainment* (Bloomsbury) *The Legacy of Mad Men: Cultural History, Intermediality and American Television*. (Palgrave) and *Music/Video: Forms, Aesthetics, Media*. (Bloomsbury) and author of the forthcoming *Beyoncé: Celebrity Feminism and Popular Culture* (Bloomsbury) and *Pop Stars on Film* (Bloomsbury).

Kirsty's work has been featured on BBC 2, BBC 4, Channel 5 and in The Guardian and Creative Review amongst others. She is the co-curator of Sound and Vision: Pop Stars on Film and the curator of In Her View: Women Documentary Filmmakers film seasons at HOME, Manchester and is Chair of Manchester Jazz Festival, Manchester's longest running music festival.

Kardashians and the Myth of Maternity

JESSA FAITHFULL

University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

The Kardashian family both perpetuate and subvert traditional understandings of motherhood. While their matriarchal dynamics resonate deeply with their audience, their presentation of maternity in particular, often clashes with contemporary ideas of what it means to be a woman or mother.

This paper conceives the parasocial relationships that evolve between the viewers and the Kardashians as an opportunity for discourse about fertility, bodily integrity and reproductive autonomy, and will explore maternity-related topics utilising the Kardashian women as avatars who navigate a range of reproductive experiences that relate to many ordinary people's understandings of maternity.

The idea that motherhood is an opportunity for women to return to the Madonna archetype, be absolved of sin, and validated by society for fulfilling their innate reproductive purpose forms the basis of many KUWTK storylines.

Topics including surrogacy, the role of the father and the conflicting portrayals of pregnancy are unpacked through a conflict theory framework which places every reproductive body at odds with the needs and values of the society surrounding it.

Bio

Jessa Faithfull has an MA in Peace and Conflict from the University of Sydney. She is also a youth worker, researcher and avid watcher of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Their current academic focus is on applying conflict theories and mapping techniques to social debates around maternity, pregnancy, reproductive health and abortion. Their dissertation dissects the relationship between the state and the singular fertile body in these conversations, and expands on the concept of the 'Maternity Myth' as the root of this social conflict. The Kardashians complex relationships with motherhood, womanhood, innocence and sexuality have provided much inspiration in her academic life, and have also inspired many conversations about feminism and critical thought with the young people she works alongside.

Girlhood in the Mirror: Kardashians, celebrity capital and the teenage girl gaze

EUNICE GAERLAN-PRICE

Laidlaw College and Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Abstract

This presentation weaves together sociological analyses of Kardashian celebrity capital and the teenage girl gaze to understand the complexities of modern girlhood. In a hybrid format of scholarly presentation and the poetic, this presentation will engage with gaze theory and a Bourdieusian analysis of empirical research on teenage girls to explore how modern girlhood emphasises aspirational achievement and the-self-as-project. The presentation questions whether the gaze of the young woman upon the Kardashian phenomenon acts as a mirror to her own desires for self-invention, and how such desires may reflect broader societal structures underpinned by neoliberal and postfeminist doxa that simultaneously empower and hegemonize young women during their journey to adulthood.

Bio

Eunice Gaerlan-Price is a Filipinx lecturer, researcher at Laidlaw College and Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. Her research interests include girlhood studies, gender and education, gifted and talented education, critical theory, social media, critical media literacy and the use of arts-based research methods such as collective stories. Her current research focuses on critical understandings of giftedness and talent, particularly as they pertain to young women's developing self-identities and experiences of empowerment.

Personal pronoun: she/her

'No Aerial Shots Please': The Moral Limits of Kardashian Sexuality

ARIANNE GOODELL

The New School for Social Research, New York, USA

Abstract

The Kardashians spearheaded the culture of hypersensual self-representation of women on Instagram, and part of what upholds their fame has been the meta-dynamic of celebrity, grounded in almost-but-not-quite sex or porn. Although their fame is often attributed in part to Kim Kardashian's leaked sex tape in 2007 and prominent rappers have written lyrics detailing sexual encounters with Kardashian-Jenner sisters, they uphold a moral distinction between what they do and selling sex. In their TV show they have condemned sex work and Kylie has said in a video on social media, 'You'll never see a sex tape from me.' Everything about their brand points to their sex, but the only thing off limits to their brand is their actual sex. With the rise in popularity of OnlyFans and the normalization of selling sex and sexual content, this 'moral' distinction will become dated and the Kardashian allure will fade. Working within the fields of porn studies, postfeminist studies glamor labour and influencer culture.

Bio

Arianne Goodell is pursuing a master's degree in New Humanities at The New School for Social Research. Her interests lie with postfeminist sexuality on Instagram and beyond. In the past, she has written about Kylie Jenner fan pages and the social media filter as a gimmick. She lives in Brooklyn with her partner and two cats.

Kim Kardashian's 'Kimono': why we should care about cultural appropriation

JENNY HALL

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

When Kim Kardashian launched her new underwear brand in 2019 there was a media storm about the name – Kimono. The public outrage centred on the concept of the cultural appropriation of a Japanese national symbol. Opposition to the trademark name was so strong that it eventuated in the mayor of Kyoto, Daisaku Kadokawa, writing a letter asking her to reconsider. Kardashian eventually abandoned the plan and relaunched her brand later that year under a different trademark. 'Kimono', meaning 'thing to wear', has come to represent the outer robe worn for formal occasions in Japan. Not only is a kimono not underwear, it is an outer garment that has come to stand for formality and high culture. It follows strict rules of etiquette. In contrast to underwear, which is hidden and usually unseen, a kimono is explicitly worn to be seen. In addition, in terms of the female shape, although both the kimono and shapewear are worn to mould the body, the shapes and values they promote are very different. This presentation examines the meanings behind the term kimono and its relationship to Japanese people to explain the significance of Kardashian's attempted branding. In exploring the kimono and its role as a symbol of culture and nationalism for Japan, and comparing it to Kardashian's underwear brand, it is easy to denounce her idea as a poor marketing ploy. However, the real issue is that by trademarking a word, one individual – who in this case is often perceived as illegitimate and associated with lowbrow culture yet wields worldwide influence – could potentially alter or erase thousands of years of cultural heritage and tradition.

Bio

Jenny Hall is a Research Officer at the Japanese Studies Centre, Monash University. Her research is situated at the intersection of Anthropology, Japanese Studies, Fashion and Design Studies, and Cultural Heritage Studies. She was awarded a PhD in Anthropology in 2016 from Monash University. Her first book, *Japan Beyond the Kimono: Tradition and Innovation in the Kyoto Textile Industry* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020) is a sensory analysis of the design, production and consumption of contemporary Japanese apparel created using heritage industry techniques. Her forthcoming chapter 'When the looms stop, the baby cries: The changing sounds of the Kyoto kimono-making industry' will be published in Iris Haukamp, Christin Hoene and Martyn Smith (Eds.), *Asian Sound Cultures*, (Routledge, forthcoming November 2021).

‘These pics bring back so many memories’ - a *Selfish* archive

LAURA HENDERSON CHILD
University of Oxford (BA), Oxford, UK

Abstract

A personal archive that both points outwards to the rest of Kim’s expansive oeuvre and insists upon being a bounded entity, *Selfish* typifies the way that Kardashian demanded to be read in the early to mid-2010s. This presentation will offer a close reading of *Selfish*, exploring its genius temporality, the intimacy it creates with its reading public, and its structural fixation with Kanye West. I will question the text’s significance six years after publication, as the cancelling of *Keeping Up* marks Kim’s most significant narrative ending yet. Crucial to my reading will be Warner’s theories of the public and Levine’s writing on form.

Firstly, I will examine how *Selfish* enjoys its calm, decidedly chronological position within Kim’s otherwise confusingly pixelated temporality. Everything in the Kardashian universe is paratext, with climax created by the friction not within stories but between them: as Natasha Stagg writes, time for the sisters moves sideways. Secondly, I will think about the text’s structured intimacy, a search for softness that predates the toughness of Skims and law school. The font is made to look like Kim’s handwriting and the pictures are mainly taken just before she steps onto the red carpet. The more a reader knows of Kim’s life already, the more the text rewards them: the tethering of countless moments to her televisual brand means that we are allowed to see the same event re-enacted from marginally different angles. Thirdly, I will consider *Selfish*’s marriage plot, as the text culminates in Kim’s nuptials to West and abruptly turns our gaze away from her face and to an image of her freshly double-barrelled name and ringed hand. I am especially excited to read this codified version of the good life, from which Kris Humphries is totally erased, against the second season of *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*.

Bio

Laura Henderson Child is a writer and teacher originally from Birmingham, UK. While studying at Oxford University, she became interested in the literary form of the modern celebrity. Now she’s worried about who’ll keep the sinks in the Kimye divorce. She’d like to thank Ruth Ramsden-Karelse, without whom this paper would not exist.

Spectacular Happiness: Reality TV and the ‘Good Life’

CASSAUNDR HILL
Independent Scholar

Abstract

In *The Promise of Happiness*, philosopher Sara Ahmed questions the notion of happiness: What does it mean to be ‘happy’? Where does happiness come from? What are the limitations of happiness as we know it? Using her text as a framework, among others, this presentation seeks to interrogate the notion of happiness as it is imagined in the popular reality television show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. When Kylie Jenner posts an image of her altered, bikini-clad body, wearing expensive jewelry, basking in the sun next to her private pool at her mansion, what does it mean when she captions such an image, ‘happiness above everything and anything’? Bourgeois ideals about ‘the good life’ tend to dominate the collective imagination, making our orientation towards ‘happiness’ one that is consumerist, individualist, and spectacular (in the sense of ‘the spectacle’ as described by theorist Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*). As the plenary address of the inaugural session of this symposium noted, there is a ‘fetishization’ of individuality — and I would add, of individual happiness — under neoliberalism, and I suggest that this shapes how we understand the concept of what it means to be happy. Much of what the Kardashians do is controversial and can be discussed in regards to not only class, but race, gender, and sexuality. Without denying their achievements, and while holding space for their positive feminist influence, I want to question the way that they may create, perpetuate, and even intensify hegemonic discourses regarding happiness. Ahmed writes about societal ‘scripts’ for happiness, and I contend that such scripts, particularly as they are acted out by the Kardashians, are largely informed by the spectacular nature of modern capitalism, making people content with the idea that happiness means projecting an image of beauty, affluence, and independence.

Bio

Cassandra Hill is a writer currently based in Philadelphia. Her work focuses on the intersections of identity and mass culture. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and Political Science from Emory University.

Caitlyn Jenner through Opera: Trans Voice and Embodiment on Stage

DANA KAUFMAN

University of California, Riverside, USA

Abstract

This lecture/paper explores the role of Caitlyn Jenner in *Opera Kardashian* (music by Dana Kaufman, libretto by Tom Swift), a one-act opera about tragedy and the human condition, as told through the Kardashian clan. The role of Jenner is one of the first known trans operatic roles composed exclusively for performance by trans-identifying women/transfeminine voices. Kaufman aims to use composition for trans voice as a way to explore complex conceptions of femininity, sexuality, power, fame, and politics that characterize the Kardashian family; the opera centers on the juxtaposition of the lives of Kim Kardashian and Caitlyn Jenner.

Opera Kardashian received a workshop reading in Miami in 2018. It also was a winner of/finalist in Hartford Opera Theater's New in November 10 Festival (USA), where it made history in Connecticut when an excerpt was staged in November 2019. Plans for a production of the opera in a 2023 Los Angeles opera festival are in progress.

As a cis composer collaborating with a cis librettist, the presenter will discuss ethical issues and concerns regarding the construction of a trans role—and on-stage portrayal of issues facing trans communities—by cis-identifying people. The presenter will also discuss approaches to composing for trans voices, and musical construction of the role of Jenner so that it is as accessible to trans women/transfeminine vocalists as possible.

Short excerpts of recordings of *Opera Kardashian* performed by both cis and trans vocalists will be played during this presentation. While Western opera has embraced gender queering throughout its 400-year history in the forms of, for example, castrati and pants roles, only recently has the world of opera become receptive to inclusion of trans roles and voices—both literal and figurative. The opera strives to embrace and highlight these voices, as well as create accessible music and theatrical material for rapidly changing audiences.

Bio

Hailed as 'whirlwind' (*Gramophone*), the work of composer Dr. Dana Kaufman focuses on disruptive opera and accessible and inclusive stages. Her music has been heard at venues and festivals throughout North America and Europe, such as New York Opera Fest; Jordan Hall; Contemporary Music Center of Milan; Carlow Arts Festival; Hartford Opera Theater; Hot Air Music Festival, Boston New Music Festival; Spontaneous Combustion New Music Festival; Ravinia Festival's *One Score, One Chicago* Program; and Opera on Tap Chicago. Her works also have been performed and/or commissioned by GRAMMY®-winning pianist Nadia Shpachenko, Wet Ink Ensemble, So Percussion, Passepartout Duo, Great Noise Ensemble, 5th Wave Collective, the Lowell Chamber Orchestra, mezzo-soprano/bassoonist duo Megan Ihnen and Darrel Hale, and members of OperaRox Productions and the Houston Grand Opera Orchestra. A former Fulbright Research Fellow in Estonia and four-time American Prize awardee/honoree, Kaufman also has received honors from the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards, Boston Choral Ensemble, Black House New Operas Project, New American Voices, and more.

Kaufman is a frequent speaker on women in composition and composing for trans voice, and has given lectures at institutions and conferences such as the LA Opera, Women Composers Festival of Hartford, Leuphana Universität Lüneberg, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Music by Women Festival, and Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the 21st-Century Conference; she also was a panelist for 'Gender Representation in New Opera' at New Music Gathering. She is Assistant Professor in Music Composition at University of California, Riverside in the United States of America.

‘The End of an Era’: Repetition as Futurity in *Keeping up with the Kardashians*

PHOEBE KAUFMAN¹, GEMMA GODFREY²
Money Can’t Buy You Class, Co-host^{1,2}

Abstract

In this presentation, we will discuss how the Kardashians are emblems of American culture, situating themselves as homonymic with westernized time. Their insistence that the viewer ‘keep up’ is a direct nod to their conscious self-rendering as American pace-keepers. Viewers are tasked with both ‘keeping up’ and also with the formal application of Kardashian time, one which grafts onto Deleuzian repetition. From repetitive episode structure, to cosmetic surgeries which infinitely repeat aesthetics of youth, to marketing campaigns drenched in endless beige, the Kardashian franchise is enmeshed in a repetition geared towards infinity. Further, the supposed ending of their televised era merely exacerbates this claim.

Five years before the advent of reality television via *An American Family*, Gilles Deleuze published *Difference & Repetition*, where he argues that repetition is the underpinning of past, present, and future. He writes: ‘The present is the repeater, the past is repetition itself, [and] the future is that which is repeated.’ Through Marx’s theory of historical repetition in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and Nietzsche’s eternal return, Deleuze formulates a simultaneously materialist and mystical rendering of repetition. Repetition ‘forms a synthesis’ of an otherwise ‘empty time... formless in the eternal return.’ In other words, the structure of repetition questions western notions of linearity.

Pop culture — with the Kardashians at the forefront — is obsessed with quotidian repetition. This dailiness provides an intimacy between subject and viewer and suggests a type of infinity, understood through the Deleuzian relationship between repetition and the future. This presentation seeks to explore repetition and all its consequences as the driving force of the Kardashian universe. The visual component to the presentation will include stills from KUWTK and their various marketing campaigns as a way to explore the specific persistence of repetition through their brand’s visual language and aesthetic.

Bio

Gemma Godfrey is an interdisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles, CA where she moved after graduating from Bard College in 2018. She performs in an experimental art pop duo called Humors, as well as co-hosts *Money Can’t Buy You Class*, a podcast about the intersection of critical thought and reality television.

Phoebe Kaufman is a writer and artist based in Chicago, IL. Her poetry has been featured on The Poetry Project’s website and in *Forever Magazine*, and her performance work has been included in The anchoress Syndicate’s ‘My Smutty Valentine.’ Her monthly column for *Forever Magazine*, ‘Return of the Real,’ which focuses on the intersection of reality television and critical theory, can be found at forevermag.net. She also co-hosts *Money Can’t Buy You Class*, a theory-based podcast about reality television.

Producing Posthuman Celebrity: Fashion, Architecture, and the Body in *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*

MAUREEN LEHTO BREWSTER

University of Georgia, Georgia, USA

Abstract

Pitched as a ‘modern day *Brady Bunch* with a kick,’ *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (KUWTK, 2007-2021) documented the ascent of the Kardashian-Jenner family from reality television curiosities to established celebrities. The show’s cameras also captured the family’s changing lifestyle: their move from a chintz-filled ranch-style home to various multi-million dollar mansions packed with contemporary art; from a single Bentley to multiple luxury cars per person, and from mass fashion to private designer fittings. KUWTK’s selective camerawork and editing amplified these increasingly lavish material surroundings, creating an exclusive and spectacular space in which everyday social anxieties (including those about cultural appropriation) vanish. Few studies have considered the role of fashion, architecture, and interior design in the production, mediatization, and celebrification of the Kardashian-Jenner family.

In this presentation I will consider how the material landscape of KUWTK produced the Kardashian-Jenner family as celebrities. Content analysis of the show, digital ethnography of the family’s social media accounts, and discourse analysis of media coverage of the family will trace the mediation of fashion, architecture, and the body on KUWTK. I will argue that the intra-actions of the family and their cars, clothes, and homes on KUWTK enact ‘specific material (re)configurings’ of the Kardashian-Jenner bodies and lifestyles, ‘through which [the] boundaries, properties, and meanings’ of the family are continually (re)produced (Barad, 2003, p. 820-821). I will also contemplate how these mediatized spaces and bodies matter in the development of the Kardashian-Jenner brand. Keeping up with the material-discursive production of postmodern (and perhaps posthuman) celebrity will enable a more thorough understanding of its traces and impact in popular culture and media.

Bio

Maureen Lehto Brewster is a PhD student in International Merchandising at the University of Georgia. She previously earned her MA in Fashion Studies from Parsons School of Design. Her research explores the intersections of fashion and (micro)celebrity culture, social media, fan culture, pregnancy and parenthood, and licensing.

Khardashian Konversations around the Kootchie

SIRI LINDHOLM

London College of Fashion, London, UK

Abstract

While Kim Kardashian and the extended Kardashian-Jenner sisterhood do not openly identify as feminists, over the 20 seasons of *Keeping up With the Kardashians* many a frank conversation over women's sexual health comes to mind. From the beginning, periods, contraception and childbirth were discussed in a way that was unusual for the time. Now in the aftermath of the #MeToo era I want to further explore their impact on the changing media climate and how it has made female bodily experiences more seen. I especially want to explore the growing demand for surrogacy in the West and how the conversations had on KUWTK, which have touched upon the ethical considerations of the practice, are echoed in media and in policy making alike.

My background is in gender and cultural studies and I want to draw on the wealth of feminist theory and ideas of representation in exploring the interplay between pop cultural narratives and deeper social shifts. I would argue that we stand at a time where women's reproductive experiences and rights to their bodies are very visible in public discourse, however they are also increasingly under attack in many countries. The presence of these conversations in popular culture may hence aid in depoliticising them and redirecting them into the realm of the personal, physical and medical.

Bio

Siri Lindholm is an associate lecturer and PhD candidate in cultural studies at London College of Fashion. Her PhD concerns itself with early millennial media discourses about sexualised girls' dress which in the pre-#metoo era often appeared to uphold ideas of inappropriateness, shame and victim blame. Over the course of Covid, Siri has been a visiting researcher at Aalto University, Helsinki where her research centred around women, the body and the physicality of childbirth.

The Folk Tales of Women's Bodies: from Anne Boleyn to Kim Kardashian

ROBERTA MARANGI

University of St Andrews, Scotland, UK

Abstract

Besmirched, divorced, famous. Prima donna of prime-time television, Anne Boleyn was the original hated woman. This hatred started manifesting from the moment she rose to fame and her life became a narrative for public consumption. Stephanie Russo and Susan Bordo have both studied the ways in which the inconsistencies in her story have resulted in the construction of an almost mythic figure: the devout femme fatale; the not-so-fertile mother; the political woman who played a game she did not understand (*The Afterlife of Anne Boleyn*, 2021; *The Creation of Anne Boleyn*, 2014). This 'myth' is one shared with Kim Kardashian (West?). Indeed, this seductive woman who struggled in her journey to motherhood and influenced her political landscape in unexpected ways, is as much Anne Boleyn as it is Kim K. In this 20-minute paper, I wish to argue that not only are their stories similar, but also that the collective 'tension-imagery' born out of the paradoxes of their lived experiences is reflected in the folk tales that are told about their bodies (Walter Abell's 'Myth, Mind and History', 1945). Anne Boleyn's sixth finger and Kim Kardashian's butt implants are the manifestation of a social unpreparedness to accept these women's stories of power, falling for a fallacy that favours a patriarchal and gendered narrative over truth. Through an analysis of their public lives (from Nicholas Sander's *De origine ac progressu schimatis anglicani* to blog posts and social media) I will show that these folk tales are used to push a more 'comfortable' narrative based on the characterisation of these women as deviant bodies, favouring a cartesian separation of mind and body at the expense of modern theories of embodied cognition. And, of course, at the expense of any complex, dynamic, and wonderful idiosyncrasy that *makes* these powerful women.

Bio

Roberta Marangi is a PhD candidate and teaching assistant in the School of English at the University of St Andrews. Her thesis focuses on dynamics of power and gender in stories of opposite-sex decapitations in medieval English literature. Her research interests also include violence, both physical and social, in relation to gender as well as the impact of medieval literature in contemporary medievalism.

Warhol Was Right: Making Art About Celebrity in our Proverbial Fifteen Minutes

PIA MARCHETTI

Independent Artist and Illustrator

Abstract

Elevating the lowbrow and lampooning the highbrow is a moral imperative! This smart about dumb/dumb about smart mindset rules my artistic practice. And what better possible subject could I find for that practice than American royalty/trash tv moguls, the Kardashians? Through my own work, I'll examine what it means to make art about celebrities, citing the oft misunderstood pop art god, Warhol. I'll talk in detail about my thought process when creating the Kimposium flyer, Kardashian Kolloquium logo, and my micro-viral Skelekim illustration, among other non-Kardashian centric pieces. Finally, I'll present new work; one piece after Magritte and one after Picasso. By injecting a Kardashian perspective to these icons of art history, I'll show that Kanye West was correct: 'Everything is exactly the same.'

Bio

Pia Marchetti is an artist, illustrator, and pontificator living in Brooklyn. (And aren't we all?) Their practice functions on a 'smart about dumb/dumb about smart' ethos, validating popular culture while lampooning highbrow art. They created the logo for @kardashian_kolloquium and the graphic for this very Kimposium! In addition to the Kardashians, their interests include music videos, the many metaphors of witchcraft, and emojis. Not tired of hearing Pia speak? They also have a podcast called We Did the Reading, wherein they dissect queer media with their good Judy, Clementine von Radics.

The Kardashians as a Family Brand

CYNTHIA MEYERS

College of Mount Saint Vincent, New York City, USA

Abstract

The Kardashians are practitioners of what I call the ‘family brand’: members of a family who become characters in entertainment formats, building a recognizable identity as a family, and then commercializing that identification by endorsing brands, creating product lines (‘merch’), producing media content, and cross-promoting all of it. The Kardashians’ willingness to commercialize their celebrity has been criticized by their detractors. However, their effort to commercialize their celebrity is not a bug, but a feature: a central purpose of a family brand. And the Kardashians are neither the first nor the last family to create a family brand and commercialize it.

Entertainment families are a long time tradition. There were many performing families in vaudeville, for example, the dance act the Five Kellys, which featured a young Gene Kelly. Then the Nelsons, who were successful from the 1930s until the 1970s in music, radio, and television, most famously playing themselves in the anodyne television sitcom, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-66). Sponsors’ products such as pancake mix, soft drinks, cameras, and kitchen appliances were interwoven throughout their program.

And the descendants of the Nelsons can be found in family vlogs on YouTube. Many of these family vloggers, such as the ACE Family, promote brands and sell merch, while filming their children saying the darndest things for millions of viewers.

The Kardashians, then, belong to a longtime tradition in entertainment to draw audience attention as a family brand. Their appeal, like that of the Nelsons or the ACE Family, rests on their identity as a family. Their ability to commercialize that appeal through brand endorsements and product lines will, no doubt, continue past the end of their reality show.

Bio

Cynthia B. Meyers is the author of *A Word from Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio*, as well as articles about advertising and media in *Journal of American History*, *Cinema Journal*, *American Journalism*, and other publications. She is Professor of Communication, Fine Art, & Media at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City.

Kimimpact: The impact of Kim Kardashian on Indian girls

PRABODH MISHRA¹, SAYAN CHAKRABORTY²

Swarnnim Startup and Innovation University, Gandhinagar, India^{1,2}

Abstract

Celebrities and popular culture have been consequential in shaping the minds, attitudes and fashion choices of young girls worldwide. The advent of globalisation meant that the influence of celebrities is not limited to their countries. The reception of global celebrities in India has been beyond comprehension - Justin Bieber's concert, Hardwell's show. The attachment of western celebrities in Indian youth is not just limited to events. The celebrations of Leo Di Caprio's Oscar win were also held in Mumbai; the pain of Bukayako Saka's penalty shootout miss was felt on the streets of Kolkata. Kim Kardashian has more than 235 million followers on Instagram, many of them hail from India. The paper will discuss the impact of Kim Kardashian on young girls in India with respect to their body – image, self-consciousness and fashion choices making a case for responsibility in fashion and lifestyle values promoted by celebrities.

Bio

An International Fashion Marketer and Educator with over 10 years of global and dynamic work profiles, Prabodh Mishra heads the Department of Fashion at Swarnnim Startup and Innovation University, Gandhinagar, India. He is the principle organizer of one of the first androgynous fashion shows in India called Feronia Fashion Night. Being an alumnus of premier institutes such as National Institute of Fashion Technology, India and Heriot Watt University, Scotland, he has a diverse global work experience in the United Kingdom, Bali and India. As an academic, Prabodh has presented papers at prestigious institutions like London College of Fashion and is a prominent academic scholarship on the interdisciplinary applications of fashion. He is also one of the leading Indian academic voices making a call for utilizing fashion and popular culture as instruments for social change actively voicing scholarship on responsible communication from brands and celebrities.

Sayan Chakraborty is a UI-UX Design student at Swarnnim Startup and Innovation University, as well as the host of the international podcast 'Dil Bole OG.' Dil Bole OG is a self-help podcast that has been recognised among the top 40 self-help podcasts in India. It was created with the goal of raising awareness and bringing individuals closer to their goals. He is extremely interested in videography, photography and sound editing.

Transgender identity and privilege: coming out in the public eye and the role of celebrity

CAVYN MITCHELL

Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UK

Abstract

Caitlyn Jenner launched her gender identity by publicly coming out as transgender on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in 2015. As with other transgender celebrities such as Elliot Page, Jenner had already undergone some aspects of medical transition prior to publicly coming out. This included taking hormones and surgery on her nose, trachea, breasts and facial feminisation. Whilst undergoing these affirming trans treatments outside of the public eye, Jenner was able to access the privacy that she needed to explore gender and exist how she wishes to be, by transitioning partially in private this gives wider society a skewed view of what transgender is and how a trans person should look. This also erases much of the waiting and other challenges and gatekeeping that transgender people who do not have such privilege go through.

With so few transgender celebrities, people view transgender as a fixed concept based on what they see in mainstream media. This creates ideals of what transgender is and how transgender people should act, present etc including what the aesthetics of transgender identity should look like.

This paper investigates the delicate balance which transgender celebrities face when coming out and transitioning and the effect that this has on societal views. The aim of this paper is to also explore the cultural context in which Caitlyn Jenner transitioned and the ways in which society is more accepting of transgender people when they can see a physical change from one visible gender to another.

Bio

Cavyn Mitchell (He/They) is a doctoral researcher at Brunel University London. He is also a community development coordinator within a trans empowerment programme and an executive committee member for the Feminist Studies Association. Their current research focuses on transgender identity and disability and the stigma and coping mechanisms shared by those who are transdisabled. His thesis interrogates whether there is a link between trans identity and disability and the ways in which trans disabled people internalise and navigate difficult situations. Their presentation within this symposium focuses upon the perception of transgender individuals in the public eye and the ways in which transgender celebrities alter the public's view of what it means to be transgender.

Kylie Cosmetics: An Instagram Story

CHRISTIE NOLASCO

California State University, Long Beach, USA

Abstract

The cosmetic industry has faced criticism for its reproduction of feminine beauty standards. Cosmetic companies have adjusted to marketing on social media sites, particularly Instagram, due to its popularity with young women. In this study, titled 'Beauty is in the Eye of the Brand: A Content Analysis of Representation by Cosmetic Companies,' I investigated how a social movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, and its cultural awakening impacted cosmetic companies' racial and gender presentation on social media. By conducting visual and textual analysis of cosmetic companies' Instagram content, I identified three major findings. First, the BLM movement did impact how cosmetic companies shared Black women and women of color since there was an increase of posts, including them during and after June. Second, I found the majority of Instagram posts included women with stereotypically gendered poses through Goffman's gender display framework. Lastly, consumers appear to be more enthusiastic than not about racial diversity due to the positive feedback from Instagram users' comments. This study contributes to how social movements impact the cosmetic industry, social media marketing, and self-presentation on social media. Through a sociological lens, this paper reflects the dominant standard of beauty among women and women of color within social media (Instagram). It is also important to note Kylie Cosmetics is included in the data and the project discusses topics of beauty, cosmetic companies, social media, influencers, selfies, and consumerism. This paper can be a five-minute pop-up paper or a standard 20-minute paper. This paper is an undergraduate thesis completed in the sociology department's honor program at California State University, Long Beach.

Bio

Christie Nolasco recently completed her undergraduate program in Sociology with a minor in Political Science at California State University, Long Beach. Her thesis explored representation among the beauty industry by examining cosmetic companies' social media during the reemergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Nolasco is currently working as a research assistant for Dr. Claudia Maria Lopez at CSU Long Beach on a project about how high-impact practices promote student success. Nolasco's research interests include culture, race and ethnicity, and social media.

Debunking Celebrity Activism

LIDA PAPAKONSTANTINO

Maastricht University, Berlin, Germany

Abstract

In late capitalism, celebrity involvement in matters of policy change and philanthropy has become a de facto requirement. Lately, Kim Kardashian has begun to share another layer of herself with the public; one that has at its core her professional expansion as a lawyer and as an advocate of prison reform. In this presentation, the implications of Kim's prison advocacy and attendance in governance mechanisms are discussed. Further issues regarding the complexity of media presentation of her work as well as the appropriation of (black) activism on prison reform are highlighted and explained. The goal of this discourse is to signify the ramifications for contemporary public policymaking in the light of celebrity activism and to debunk the latter.

Bio

I am a Masters student in Forensic Psychology. By the end of August I will have officially finished my degree at Maastricht University (NL). Originally, I come from Greece but I have been living abroad (mostly in Berlin) for the past seven years. Currently, my research project is about the incorporation of strengths into evidence-based treatments for personality disorders and the validation of two new strengths-finding assessment tools. However, I am interested in a multitude of disciplines, such as Sociology, Communication and Gender studies. I particularly like to investigate how they are interconnected with the justice system or for instance, how can feminist sociology and psychology affect and improve policy making. On a broader level, I am also interested in how these disciplines can help us understand our implicit perceptions as well as our social/interpersonal behaviours.

Fashion's, or the weak point of the Kardashian Matriarchy

MANON RENAULT

Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France

Abstract

While they may seem absent from the matriarchal show *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, the masculinities animating the show's narratives exemplify conservative class, gender and race stereotypes.

Thus, far from being anecdotal, the study of masculinity and male performance in the Kardashians seems to allow for an analysis of the patriarchal and conservative dynamics at work in the show.

After presenting the organization of male roles in the series, we propose to question the particular place of Kanye West, through the prism of his relationship to the fashion sphere.

'Now you're going to be on the best-dressed lists,' the rapper and designer said in 2012, as he purged the overly ostentatious wardrobe of his future wife Kim, a product of the metonymic wardrobe of reality TV culture.

In 2014, Kanye West embarked Kim on the Balmain campaign, dressing her in Givenchy and educating her in Parisian names of 'experimental' fashion such as Rick Owens. Gradually he dressed the whole matriarchy, putting them in Yeezy. In the last season he styled 65 designer looks for Kris Jenner's 65th birthday.

Thus the field of fashion - although historically associated with the female domain (see Steele, Mc Robbie), retains power dynamics based on shared gendered roles, finding its axes in the narrative of the designer and his muse. The male figure of the creator, is subject as opposed to the female object looked upon, devoid of agentivity. (On this subject see Morna Laing, and the discussions around Mulvey's Male Gaze theory applied to fashion).

In the context of the distribution of masculinity in the show, it seems that in 'fashion' to study paradoxes and to nuance the idea of a clothing domain as tools of power of matriarchy in the show. We see here that male dominance is re-established, in the particular field of so-called designer fashion.

Bio

Manon Renault, Journalist, doctoral student at the Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris 3) on the influence of the media in the popular turn of Parisian fashion. Prior to this PhD, Manon did a thesis on the media coverage of the Kardashians in France, and the culture of 'schadenfreude' perpetuated.

Kanye's Inferno: Donda West, the Divine Comedy and search for love through absolution

STEVEN RODRIGUEZ
INFORMATION SYSTEMS SPECIALIST

Abstract

This presentation looks at the central theme of Divine Love within Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy and applies it to Kanye West's performance of 'Donda'. Dante and Kanye both experience the loss of Divine Love (Beatrice, Donda West/Kim Kardashian West) and the anguish that ensues. The only way to mitigate this grief is to descend into their own hells to find what was lost. The presentation will theorize that unless we address the failures of human nature and attain absolution then ascension from torment cannot be attained.

Bio

Steven Rodriguez, MSIS, is an Information Systems Specialist, based in Brooklyn, NY. His studies in English Literature at the University of North Texas were based in Modern and Post Modern Literature with a concentration in BIPOC, Queer and Gender studies. While at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Information, he focused his graduate work on the creation of Information Systems in Higher Education and Enterprise organizations. He has been a Kardashian viewer and enthusiast over the past 20 seasons vacillating between love and hate depending on the season. Most episodes he sits and analyzes the various types of plot lines and internal politics of Kim, Kourt, Kris and Khloé with his wife.

Nobody Can Steal Our Bodies Ever! Celebrity, Death and immortality: Tales from the Kardashian Crypt

RUBY SMITH

Researcher, London, UK

Abstract

The spectre of death haunts the Kardashians, their life, an exercise in curation and control — defies abjection. When person becomes brand, and body becomes product, youth is currency. They fear death, and in turn so do we. As we see their bodies transform and contort, ever tighter and smoother they appear ageless and undefined. But one thing is certain, wealth cannot escape the inevitability of death.

Arguably, through the digital age, Kim has unlocked immortality. We see her image through screens, captured by the eyes of others. She lives through our phones and in our lives, beyond timezones and geography, she paved the way for the omnipresent celebrity. The ability to scroll through hundreds of versions of her in seconds. She is constantly documenting herself into existence, her obsession with capturing, collecting and archiving her life and image, through *Selfish*, and *KUWTK*, sees the divide between personal memory and cultural memory start to blur.

How can this blurring become a tool to develop a cultural afterlife? As the death industry adapts to digital memorialisations, is it still important to have a final resting place? Is it significant to create space for communal grief and fan pilgrimage? We see shadows of the Kardashians permeate society, with their products acting as both immortalisations and memorials of their existence. Memory keeps the deceased alive and present, which is clear through the spectre of death himself, Robert Kardashian Sr, in his haunting apparition come hologram.

And as the family drive into the Hollywood Forever Cemetery on *KUWTK* the welcome sign, a large infinity symbol reminds us that death is forever, or maybe just the beginning?

Bio

Ruby Smith, is a design strategist and researcher based in London. Applying her interest and work in future forecasting, she is fascinated in the possibilities of death in the digital age, and what it could mean for celebrities and cultural memory.

Revisiting Image Restoration Theory: Kimono and Skims

REBECCA STEINER

The University of Georgia, Georgia, USA

Abstract

The Kardashian family is rich with scandal. This paper analyzes Kim Kardashian's 2019 shapewear line scandal. After Kim Kardashian announced the name of her new shapewear brand was 'Kimono,' she was quickly accused of cultural appropriation and insensitivity towards Japanese culture. The scandal garnered attention among her supporters, enemies, and even Japanese government officials such as Daisaku Kadokawa, who made a personal appeal to Kardashian asking her to not use that name for her brand. Borrowing from William Benoit's image restoration theory, I apply public relations concepts such as mortification, evading responsibility, and corrective action to analyze Kardashian's attempts to restore her image and brand. After analyzing the public relations strategies at work, I reflect on the successes and failures of her image repair campaign. I offer suggestions for how the image repair campaign could have been improved in 2019. Lastly, I propose a brief list of recommendations for Kim Kardashian broadly to improve future scandal management.

Bio

Dr. Rebecca Steiner is a recent PhD in Communication Studies from the University of Georgia. Her research interests include organizational communication, popular culture, celebrity studies, and health communication. Her research has appeared in the *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, the *National Journal of Speech and Debate*, the *Journal of Communication and Religion*, among others. She currently serves as a debate and dialogue specialist for the competitive debate team at Emory University.

Is Kim Kardashian White (And Why Does It Really Matter Anyway)?: Law, Race Mutability and the Politics of the Body in the Body Politic

JOHN TEHRANIAN

Academic, Attorney and Author

Abstract

With the world's most ubiquitous celebutante firmly cast in the starring role, this Paper conducts an exegesis on the semiotics of Kim Kardashian's racial identity. In the process, the Paper explores the social construction of race in action, weighs the individual agency possible in the racialization process, and further probes the reality of identity mutability at a time when society and the law are only just beginning to grapple with more malleable conceptions of race. Through the lens of Kardashian's racial identity, this Paper first presents an analysis of the social, legal and historical formulation of the concept of whiteness and traces the dramatic transformation of notions of racial belonging over the course of American history. The Paper then locates this discourse regarding racial identity in recent controversies involving Rachael Dolezal and Elizabeth Warren and proposals for a new MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) racial category on the U.S. Census to question some of our most fundamental perceptions about race and provide a unique spin on issues of diversity, identity, and color blindness. All told, the Paper highlights (for better or worse) the continuing relevance of race in American life and underscores the under-appreciated significance of racial fluidity (in a time when society is growing increasingly 'woke' about gender fluidity) and its potentially seismic impact on long-held, but rarely questioned, assumptions in anti-discrimination and equal-protection jurisprudence.

Bio

John Tehranian is an academic, attorney, and author. He currently serves as the Paul W. Wildman Chair and Professor of Law at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles, California. He has previously served as a tenured Professor of Law at the University of Utah, S.J. Quinney College of Law, and as a Visiting Professor of Law at Loyola Law School.

John is also a founding partner of One LLP, a 35-attorney intellectual property and entertainment firm in Southern California. In his practice, he has litigated numerous high-profile lawsuits, including copyright, trademark and right of publicity disputes involving Madonna, Don Henley, B.B. King, Bettie Page, Jimi Hendrix, Winston Churchill and Perez Hilton, among others. Variety's Legal Impact Report has recognized John as one of the world's top 50 entertainment lawyers, Billboard Magazine has identified him as one of the top music lawyers in the business, and he has been repeatedly honored as a Southern California Super Lawyer.

A graduate of Harvard University and Yale Law School, John is the author of dozens of articles and two books: *Whitewashed* (New York University Press, 2009), which Publisher's Weekly has lauded as a 'consistently informative' work that 'covers fresh legal and social territory,' and *Infringement Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2011), which the Harvard Law Review has praised for its 'insightful critique of the copyright regime' and 'convincing case for . . . reform.' His work has also appeared in such publications as the Yale Law Journal, Harvard Journal of Law & Gender, Northwestern University Law Review, University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law, Iowa Law Review, William & Mary Law Review, George Washington Law Review, Berkeley Technology Law Journal and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

John's scholarship has been widely cited, including in testimony before Congress, numerous federal, state and foreign court decisions and in briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court in several landmark intellectual property cases. A frequent commentator for the broadcast and print media, he has appeared on such television programs as ABC's Nightline and has been quoted as an expert on legal issues in such publications as The New York Times, Harper's Magazine, Financial Times, Los Angeles Times, Hollywood Reporter and Christian Science Monitor.

Kardashian Conflict Resolution: Addressing Harm, Public Relations and Adjudicating Support and Ex-communication

NICK WHITE¹, MEERA GOVINDASAMY²

Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto, Canada¹

The Studio for Media Activism and Critical Thought, Toronto, Canada²

Abstract

Much of the storytelling on *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* has mimicked the arc of restorative approaches to justice. For example, when the partners of the Kardashians cause harm, the family addresses that harm by vocalizing their needs and boundaries, but rarely cutting off support to those who have hurt them. As Mariam Kaba explains, in transformative approaches to justice, those who cause harm may face consequences for their actions in order to protect those who have been harmed, but they are not punished beyond what is needed to remedy a conflict.¹ Given the show's face value emphasis on non-violent approaches to addressing harm, it is unsurprising that Kim Kardashian is pursuing a career in criminal justice reform. Still, by intercutting our paper with clips from *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, our essay will argue that what appears as a restorative approach to conflict resolution, side steps a truly radical approach to community. Instead, we propose that the public nature of the relationship conflicts the Kardashians display, as well as their family-dependent approach to business are central motivators in the Kardashians' way of managing harm.

Drawing upon literature about transformative and restorative approaches to justice, we will consider the ways in which race, gender, mental health, and PR factor into how the Kardashians can be resolutely supportive and publicly caring to each other and ex-partners, as well as deeply imperfect in their approach to conflict with Jordyn Woods and Blac Chyna.² When maintaining publicly caring relationships with friends and family who cause harm is not integral for public relation purposes, the Kardashians may treat people as disposable. Just as Kim is seeking prison reform rather than abolition, the Kardashians decide who deserves compassion and whose behaviour crosses a line of moral and financial harm rendering them unworthy of continued support.

¹Kaba, M. (2021). *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*. Haymarket Books.

² Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L., & Dixon, E. (2020). *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*. AK Press.; Chen, C., Dulani, J., & Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2016). *The Revolution Starts at home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities*. Arsenal Pulp Press.; Samaran, N. (2019). *Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture*. AK Press

Bio

Nick White is an articling student in criminal defence and a 2021 graduate from Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, Canada. Nick holds a Master's degree in Communication and Culture from the joint program at York and Ryerson Universities. Additionally, Nick volunteers with Toronto's Movement Defence Committee, a group that provides legal observation and jail support for activist movements. Meera Govindasamy is an educator, podcast creator, and activist-researcher living in Toronto. In addition to her role as co-director at The Studio for Media Activism and Critical Thought,

Meera works at Student Life and Learning Support at Ryerson, where she facilitates a number of programs, including the Social Justice Writing Group. She is presently the Principal Investigator on an RBC Immigrant, Diversity, and Inclusion Project grant, which will use podcasts as a medium for investigating the writing and mental health related experiences of international students at Canadian universities. In 2019 Meera graduated from the joint program at York University and Ryerson University with a Master's degree in Communication and Culture. She received the Gold Medal in Interdisciplinary Studies for her project-based research about the use of audio media as a tool for access to public legal education amongst newcomers. Additionally Meera holds a BAH from Queen's University in sociology

Aesthetic capitalism in Calabasas: Kardashian Parties as Experimental Marketing

IMOGEN WILLETTS

Kingston School of Art and Design, Kingston, UK

Abstract

English Tudor kings perfected the art of spectacle to display wealth, power and inspire loyalty through the cultural innovation of Court Masques. Building extravagant sets, curating light shows and commissioning top architects of the day, it was a lavish expense which attracted influential European royals to court. The role of spectacle and the performativity of hedonistic pleasure to cultivate power appears throughout history.

In *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, extravagant parties are used as effective televisual feasts and plot devices. Disagreements over small details, the division of duties and outfits worn on the night are all a rich source of tension for workers in this family business. Much like how the Weberian work-ethic is embodied through the Kardashian fitness regimes, I will explore the function of these lavish parties, and how the performativity of hedonism and excess relates to the Kardashian brand and the sociology of consumption more broadly.

Using Campbell's notion of the 'romantic ethic' (1987), and modern hedonism to frame this study, I will also incorporate seminal findings in Marketing and Consumer Culture Theory that situate the Kardashian parties as experiential marketing (Schmitt: 1999) in creating scenographic and 'atmospheric' (Donovan: 1982) enactments of their individual brand profiles. I believe that by exploring the function of Kardashian parties as branded environments will provide some insight into the relationship between aesthetics and the creation of wealth.

Bio

Imogen Willetts is a creative producer, Lecturer and PhD student whose research spans consumerism, culture and the experience economy. Imogen leads the Curations BA course at Kingston School of Art and Design and is studying for her PhD with the Institute of Management Studies at Goldsmiths. She previously worked at the Royal Academy of Arts where she curated and produced the RA Lates, a series of immersive festivals inspired by art history. Imogen is fascinated by the complex role that parties, nightlife and festivals play within culture and society.

Social Media's Commoditized Transgender Ambassador: Caitlyn Jenner, Twitter, and Transgender Digital activism

MELVIN L. WILLIAMS

Pace University, New York, USA

Abstract

Since reintroducing herself as a transgender woman in 2015, Caitlyn Jenner has been framed as a figurehead for transgender activism in mass media due to her avowed intention to disrupt transphobia and Twitter commentary on politics, and equally accused of commodifying her transgender experience for economic gain. Given the many questions surrounding the legitimacy of Jenner's transgender advocacy and her intentional use of Twitter as a medium to discuss transgender politics, this research conducted a textual analysis of Jenner's Twitter account, @Caitlyn_Jenner to examine how the transgender celebrity used social media to discuss her lived experiences as a transgender woman and advocate on behalf of the transgender community. The findings supported prior scholarly criticisms of Jenner's celebrity image, online celebrity activism, and transwomen's representations in celebrity culture. @Caitlyn_Jenner fostered online social connections and discussions with her transgender followers. However, Jenner did not facilitate any collective social movement actions due to her ideological differences with Republican and transgender communities.

Bio

Dr. Melvin L. Williams is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Pace University, where he teaches undergraduate courses in critical media studies, popular culture, and race and ethnicity in the media. A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Williams earned his Ph.D. in Communication, Culture, and Media Studies and a graduate certificate in Women's Studies from Howard University, as well as his Bachelor and Master's degrees from Tennessee State University. An award-winning, communication scholar, he examines the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in popular culture. Specifically, his research considers the political ramifications of popular culture to investigate how minority communities use its mediums to address disparaging media representations. Dr. Williams has published research in several books and journals, including *Celebrity Studies*, *Feminist Theory and Pop Culture*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, *Race, Gender, and Class: The Journal*, *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, *The Journal of Hip-Hop Studies*, and *The Journal of Sports Media*.

The Persona is Political: Kuntina K. Klakalakis

YIORGOS ZAFIRIOU
Sydney, Australia

Abstract

I will present a video essay documenting my drag persona Kuntina K. Klakalakis along with a short 5 minute pop up paper. The intent of Kuntina K. Klakalakis was to become a grotesque feminine subject who questions canons of conventional drag and more broadly the artifice found in feminine beauty standards. The curvaceous Kuntina is loosely modelled on Kim Kardashian, and also shares other traits such as being from an ethnic migrant background and whose identity relies on being part of a bigger family. In the case of Kuntina this is a cohort of drag artists.

Bio

Yiorgos Zafiriou is an inter-disciplinary contemporary visual artist who has recently completed a PhD at Sydney University, Sydney College of the Arts. Yiorgos maintains ongoing participation in exhibition practice and regularly undertakes live performance. His research focuses on drag and its relationship to queer identity. His own drag interrogates intersections between sex, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity and is explored through the lens of the carnivalesque grotesque.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Pia Marchetti for the genius artwork, mj corey for continued and enthusiastic support for this project, Maureen Senatore for marvellous administrative wrangling, Thomas Ryan for exceptional event management, Sebastian Jenner (no relation as far as we know) for event technical support, Eliza Kania for brilliant social media management, Kath Burton of Taylor&Francis for helping to stretch the boundaries, Hayley Gutteridge for press and publicity, Baljinder Ghoman for helping me to think laterally, and Rebecca Lingwood for all the encouragement.

Meredith Jones

Director, Institute for Communities and Society

Brunel University London

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