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Keeping Up with Beauty Standards

The Kardashians have a vast influence on American culture through their highly popular reality TV show, multimillion-dollar businesses, and highly followed social media where they display their luxurious lifestyle such as their big, beautiful homes, flawless physical appearance, and lavish vacations. The Kardashians are idolized influencers to many teen girls and women by their influential beauty and fashion trends, even promoting consumerism through their various ways of interacting with their following. Though idolized, the Kardashians have negatively impacted women and teen girls, by setting unrealistic standards of beauty and promoting unrealistic unattainable lifestyles.

The Kardashians are very well known on social media by many women of all ages from teenage girls to adult women. Amanda McClain notes, “On Instagram as of August 2012, several Kardashians ranked in the top ten most popular users: Rob tenth, Kourtney seventh, Kylie fifth, Kendall third, while Kim, with close to four million followers” (69). Today, as this platform has grown, so have the Kardashians and their influence on beauty standards. For instance, Kim today has 357 million followers, Kylie has 393 million, Khloe has 303 million, and Kourtney has 219 million on Instagram. Instagram is a place where the Kardashians showcase their lives and beauty for everyone to see, and one thing that never fails is the endless, impeccable photos posted to their profiles to show their audience of women and teen girls how flawless they are despite having overly photoshopped their photos. Julia Szambolics, Sonia Malos, and Delia

Cristina Balaban confirm, “Previous research highlighted why Instagram filters are problematic for adolescents, given that digitally altered body images are accepted as standards” (131).

Overall, the Kardashians manipulate their photos to have a certain aesthetic appeal while harming the standards accepted by society as beautiful.

Equally important is the normalization of cosmetic surgeries. Amanda McClain observed various behaviors in *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Kim visits a plastic surgeon and “Kim justifies this visit, claiming that even with working out all the time, she still has cellulite” (52). In addition, “Kris undergoes a facelift (S6, E14) and has a breast enhancement surgery (S7, E17). These procedures correspond with American youthful beauty norms” (52). This idolization of a youthful appearance is toxic. In fact, it has led to states like California proposing bills to ban sales of anti-aging products for consumers under the age of 18, aiming to stomp out preteens and teens from purchasing skin care products that are not made for their skin. The idolization of a youthful appearance also facilitates women to grow very dissatisfied with their appearance as they age. The Kardashians use their platform to promote cosmetic procedures. While they might not think it is a horrible thing, it promotes and normalizes a standard that is not attainable for many women, leading to women being hyper-critical of themselves.

Furthermore, throughout the Kardashians’ time in the spotlight, it can be noted that their excessive promotion of diet culture is a concern. McClain discusses, “Kim is a paid spokesperson for Quick Trim, a diet supplement” (83). Another way they’ve promoted unhealthy eating habits is in the show “Keeping Up with the Kardashians.” Kim complains: “I’m starving.” Khloe responds: “Don’t you



have a photo shoot tomorrow? Stop eating.” And Kris whispers to Khloe: “I think she has a little junk in the truck. The jiggles” (S1, E1). To take it a step further, Khloe Kardashian in 2019 went on the podcast and said, “I can’t stand people who are like eating a bucket of Haagen-Dazs ice cream and they are like: I’m so fat, and like they won’t work out, they won’t change their diet, won’t drink water, they won’t whatever, but they’re complaining, complaining, complaining, and you’re always going to be in this victimized state” (Shetty). While not considering various medical conditions that can make weight loss more challenging, such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and metabolic disorders.

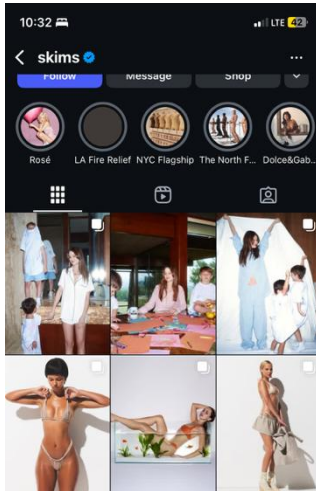
The diet culture has been a major cause of eating disorders, and the Kardashians promote diet culture in the worst ways, impacting many women. Serena Reese concurs, “Many women in American society are identified by their body types. This unrealistic beauty standard has been further distorted in the mass media.” Appearances are important to women, and shaming someone for something that is not as easy said as it is done or might be out of their control can cause a rise in eating disorders and self-hatred in women overall. The Kardashians do not promote body positivity; they promote negativity when it comes to body image.

In addition, they not only use their social media to promote diet culture and how beautiful they are, but they also encourage extreme consumerism.

All the Kardashians have promoted their brands through their social media from Skims to Kylie Cosmetics; both these brands have had a significant impact on women. Sarah Buggy emphasizes Kylie “uses herself and the image she has created of herself to promote and sell her own brand on Instagram” (28). She also deceived young girls, stating, that she “did not get lip-filler”



and that her lips looked the way they did because of her lip kits. Buggy also concurs, “If she looks attractive wearing her own makeup brand, that could be seen as successful behavior, and



so a teen may want to buy this product and imitate her makeup looks” (35). Meanwhile, Kim has promoted many brands including Sugar Bear Hair stating “I have two of these a day as part of my hair care routine” promoting her audience to purchase a hair vitamin but, she also has promoted brands of her own such as Skim created in 2019, launching a line of shapewear and clothing meant to encourage body positivity and inclusivity. The ad campaigns are diverse in racial perspectives but lack body positivity. These brands were created to profit off women’s insecurities.

Controversially, the Kardashians have also been under the spotlight for cultural appropriation. This is defined as taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture. Kim Kardashian has been criticized for wearing braided hairstyles such as cornrows. Patricia



Ekal insists, “While Kim Kardashian-West earns a casual 1.8 million Instagram “likes” from wearing a braided hairstyle, a Black woman wearing her hair in braids or naturally is a fireable offense.” This issue that Black women deal with is that they have the inability to wear their hair as desired because they can lose their jobs. Yet when Kim Kardashian wears the cornrows, it’s trendy and fails to acknowledge the history behind the hairstyle or respect the culture. Likewise, Khloe has rather offended and been cited for culture appropriation, which is deeply offensive to the Native American culture for wearing a feathered war bonnet. Although having faced

backlash, the Kardashians have never formally apologized to these communities for their inappropriate and disrespectful representations of cultures that are not theirs.

Lastly, the Kardashians' lack of accountability and authenticity is evident. The Kardashians have done things that have harmed communities in various ways, such as the African American community, women, and Native American communities, despite having been shamed by the public for these actions. They have lacked in the apologies given or have failed to administer an apology altogether. Ultimately, they have tarnished their reputations. Some examples: Kylie Jenner was dishonest to her followers about her lip filler. She said, "I didn't want to be a bad influence. I didn't want people to think you had to get your lips done to feel good about yourself" (Bailey). She lost authenticity when she lied to her audience. While this could be exactly how she felt about sharing information on the cosmetic work she had done, she also promoted her lip kits, profiting off young women's insecurities.



Another example is the self-made title claimed by Kylie. Self-made can be defined as made by oneself or having become successful or rich by a person's own effort. This can be argued to be an inauthentic representation of where their wealth came from. Kylie grew up very wealthy, attending private school and residing in Calabasas, California. This was all made possible by Caitlyn Jenner. Kylie claims her parents, Kris and Caitlyn Jenner, cut her off at the age of 15 and told her to start making her own fortune. Kylie once stated, "What I'm trying to say is I did have a platform, but none of my money is inherited" (Foley). And while she says none of the money was inherited, she gained her platform and momentum because of who her family is. She didn't have to work too hard for the publicity of her brands. Overall, the Kardashians have

been very dishonest with their audience from cosmetic procedures to the “self-made” title, but they have also lacked empathy for the damage they have done to communities and women.

As a result, the Kardashians have mainly promoted themselves in ways that relate to their fashion sense and makeup. In more recent years, they’ve attempted to make their brands appear more body-inclusive. However, despite their efforts of trying to appeal to all women, the Kardashians still fail to have positive impacted on all women. By promoting unattainable beauty standards, toxic diet culture, and excessive Photoshop, the Kardashians profit off of women’s insecurities that they’ve contributed to the worsening of. They use their vast influence to promote themselves and their lifestyles and do not lift women up in positive ways.

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