

# “Who Kares About Kim Kardashian?!”

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According to Instagram (2015), apparently 54.6 million people do. This critical reflection is not solely about Kim Kardashian but about celebrities as a whole and what they represent in the society that we live in today. This reflection will unpack and deconstruct the processes behind celebrity culture as a new and expanding phenomenon focusing particularly on Foucault’s (1979) use of Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the ‘panopticon’ and surveillance; Ritzer’s (2005) ideas around consumerism; and ideas that suggest that we are now in a knowledge/information society. In using these theories, this critical reflection will explore the negative implications that the celebrity culture has for wider society, and in particular young girls.

Foucault’s (1979) ideas around surveillance and the panopticon are of significant importance here. He uses the panopticon to describe a social arrangement in the 1800s that meant, “the few saw the many” (Mathiesen, 1997: 219). Jeremy Bentham then used this idea in the context of a prison in relation to how the guards surveyed the prisoners. Mathiesen (1997) however, introduces the idea of the ‘synopticon’ as a development of the panopticon. The synopticon is now a key characteristic of modern society and is more significant in relation to

celebrity culture as it suggests that increasing advancements in technology and the mass media – something that Foucault (1979) did not take into account in his book – have now enabled the “many to see the few” (Mathiesen, 1997: 219). He points particularly to VIPs and the stars, the topic of this reflection. This development of the panopticon to the synopticon has caused a shift in normal surveillance.

Although individuals seldom realise that they are subjects of surveillance, Lyon (1994: 4) highlights that “ordinary people now find themselves ‘under surveillance’ in the routines of everyday life”. Individuals are not being directly ‘spied’ on, however large corporations,

national banks, the government and surveillance cameras are constantly gathering data on us when we complete the simplest of tasks. This idea of celebrity culture therefore juxtaposes with regular surveillance. The weak and powerless are now able to survey the

powerful – celebrities are only described as powerful here in accordance with their money and fame. It is tempting to call individuals who follow celebrities powerless, but are they really weak and powerless? The individuals referred to, are consumers within the celebrity culture and consequently have a spending power and market share of celebrity’s fame. Would the



construct of celebrities exist without the investment by 'followers'? The answer: probably not. Celebrities are simply individuals that are "known for being well known" (Boorstin, 1962: 2), which is not a new phenomenon. What is new however, is the way in which individuals are able to gain access and be close to celebrities on a daily basis through increasing ICTs; we become infatuated with the lives of those who have money, wear nice clothes and are 'beautiful' and this infatuation consequently reinforces their fame.

It is the information/knowledge society that enables these close connections and visibility of celebrities by ordinary, non-famous, individuals. The knowledge society can be defined in a variety of ways but Webster (2006: 9) offers a distinctive definition that "there is not more information today, but rather that the character of information is such as to have transformed how we live". As well as this he sees that television, PCs, and online information have reconstituted the social world (Webster, 2006). As a result of this technology, we can quite easily become obsessed with celebrities as we can surveil their everyday movements from the palm of our hands through the use of mobile devices. Webster (2006: 15) also notes "wealth production comes from... knowledge, skills, talent and creativity". However, what some Z-list celebrities promote to impressionable youths is a quick way to become famous, as some of these Z-list celebrities become famous whilst being talentless.

A prime example of this is looking towards reality TV shows such as *Made in Chelsea*, *The Only Way is Essex*, *Keeping up with the*

Kardashians and *Geordie Shore*. These types of shows represent pseudo-events. Pseudo-events are events or activities that take place purely for the purpose of media publicity (Boorstin, 1962). These shows are extremely staged and are a representation of superficial accomplishments whilst also sending out an unacceptable and unrealistic portrayal of morals and social norms for the audience watching. A knowledge society is one whereby individuals acquire knowledge and apply it to enhance economic and social development (Gesci, 2014). Nevertheless, this is not something that these types of shows offer to

those who are watching. It could therefore be said that we are not living in an information/knowledge society as our sources of value have changed; we are valuing particular famous celebrities that do not provide us with a source of intellectual knowledge and power that we can use to better ourselves or society.

Weber (1930) spoke of increasing rationality in modern society that meant individuals lost their sense of spirituality and traditional religious beliefs declined. What

Ritzer (2005) now argues is that Western societies are distinctly defined by consumption. His ideas see a change from religion to consumerism whereby he refers to shopping centres as 'cathedrals'. It could be argued that in an age of consumerism, we are given something different to believe in, something that brings us together with a new type of social glue as young people are willing to "pay up to fit in" (Klein, 2001). This is in no way to suggest that Christianity for example has been replaced by actions of consumption, but that religion and consumerism share certain worshipping characteristics. As Naomi Klein



(2001: 93) puts it: we are living in a “corporate climate obsessed with finding the secret recipe for cool”. This is where worshipping characteristics are similar. Young girls become obsessed with certain celebrities as a kind of ‘God’ and therefore the visibility of celebrities and their popularity, leads to young girls desperately trying to emulate the looks and styles of celebrities, as this will make them ‘cool’.

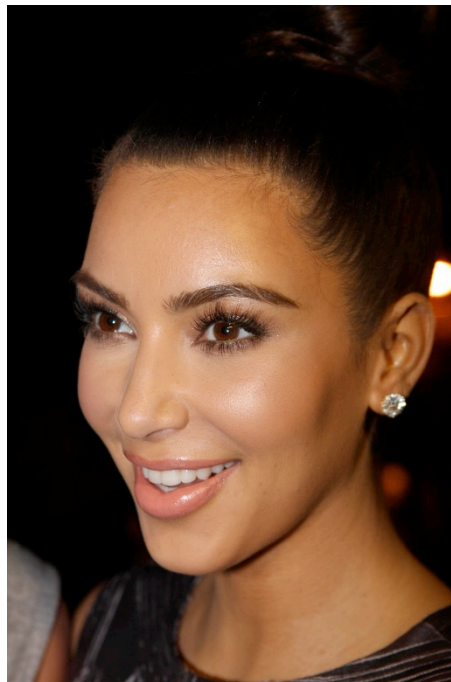
However, what is of great concern is the fact that celebrities come in different shapes and sizes, different hair colours, eye colours... This is what causes negative implications for young girls aspiring to be their ‘God-like’ celebrity. What exactly will make them cool? How exactly should they look? This age of consumerism and celebrity culture has a relationship with modern capitalism in the sense that young girls are aiming for unachievable goals. These unachievable goals are an example of hyperreality where the “concept of reality remains an order of illusion” (Gane, 2000: 34). There are so many false ideas surrounding beauty and beautiful body images that are permeating celebrities. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf (1991: 210) highlights the toxic pressures that are put onto young girls and strongly argues, “that the surprise is not how many do have eating disorders, but that any at all do not. This shows the severity of the impact that celebrity culture can have on young girls. In corroboration with this, the British Psychological Association (2013) argues that celebrity culture celebrates thin bodies, and ridicules larger ones. It is a sad state of affairs when society does not give girls the message that “their bodies are valuable simply because they are inside them” (Wolf, 1991: 197) as opposed to valuing the outside appearance of someone. Kim Kardashian for example, has a tiny waist and a large bum but is praised for her appearance. Typically,

someone with a large bum would be ridiculed for his or her weight. What individuals do not realise is that celebrities have millions of pounds and are able to visit the gym for multiple hours everyday, have someone style their hair and contour their face yet they are still seen as a natural beauty.

Again, this represents the hyperreality of everyday life. The theory of ‘false needs’ can be applied here as Marcuse (2002) argued that capitalism creates false needs that are consequently fulfilled through consumerism. For example, girls are told that having defined cheek bones is beautiful, as almost every female celebrity contours their make up. Girls then go out to buy a contouring kit to emulate

celebrities and satisfy their needs. This is all just a process of individuals surveying celebrities, and emulating what they do through consumerism.

As it was stated at the beginning of this critical reflection, this was not just about Kim Kardashian, but rather celebrity culture as a whole. What the title ‘*Who Cares about Kim Kardashian?*’ does represent however, is the way in which celebrities



make themselves visible and more appealing to consumers. By changing the C to a K, it gives individuals the ability to mimic the celebrity more and be on a personal level with them. Individuals are more likely to buy into products if they have emotional identifications with the celebrity that they ‘worship’ (Ritzer, 2005). What this reflection has hopefully echoed is how increasing technologies have given us more sources of knowledge, but that these technologies and knowledge are not always used in a positive way. Thus, we have celebrity’s lives right at our doorstep, yet this

can create unhealthy obsessions with young girls disliking their appearances and therefore lead them to increasingly consume more in order to become the people they admire.

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