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**Selfhood, Citizenship...and all things
Kardashian: Neoliberal and Postfeminist
Ideals in Reality Television**

Media and Communication Studies

Erin Klazas
Dr. Alice Leppert

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Abstract

*Power, politics, and the impact of societal opinion are outlined in Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics. This theory explains how historical reconstructions of our biological influences, our attitudes and senses of understanding, have an effect on how we see the world and subsequently develop governing guidelines—thus effecting how we live our lives. Based on this concept, Foucault expanded his analysis to incorporate what he calls “neo-liberalism.” Aside from its classic definition of a free-market economy that is based on competition and inequality, neoliberalism also highlights the privilege of the individual. Implementing neoliberal ideals into social constructs implies that the elementary elements of fundamental society (the way we talk, biologically develop, grow and exist) are controlled by the establishment of new technologies that directly influence personal behavior. As Americans, many of us develop some of our societal ideals regarding gender, appearance and race from television programming. This project specifically explores the culture of post-feminist ideals represented in modern television shows like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and *The Bachelor*. It investigates the proclivity of these programs to fashion women into incessant consumers by calling on the neoliberal model of reinventing the self, or “making over” the body, to conform to governing standards implemented by society that dictate the meaning of prosperity and achievement.*

“I think if I'm 40 and I don't have any kids and I'm not married,

I would have a baby artificially inseminated.

I would feel like Mary—like Jesus is my baby.”

-Kim Kardashian

Introduction

In today's day and age, reality television has become the subject of many Americans' viewing pleasure. The connections and implications in society regarding reality television has been a topic of research for media scholars across the globe. The way reality television gives

insight into the political sphere, as well as its link to certain societal ideals has been the focus of this area of study. There is an interesting way in which reality television illustrates the role of the citizen in society, as it has been adopted as a cultural technology that is capable of dispersing certain conceptual messages about how the self should behave as a citizen. Historically, reality television programs were an “extension of the public university” and were dominated by a stream of academics that “taught” individuals how to conduct themselves. Because of this, these early television programs were seen as a way to enable and empower “a gullible mass that needed guidance in the liberal arts to participate in the rituals of public democracy” (Ouellette and Hay 3). However, the citizen is now addressed in a new, more direct way in reality television programming. There is now an emphasis on how to engage the citizen privately—that is, engaging the viewer most directly to the point of self-evaluation and therefore, self-action. Now, these “academics” (now in the forms of makeup experts, renowned stylists, and esteemed medical professionals) “assist by acting as a visible component of a dispersed network of supporting technologies geared to self-help and self-actualization” (Ouellette and Hay 3). This concept is made concrete by featuring “real citizens” on these shows—that is, “everyday people,” and are cast as individuals one may see passing by on a busy city street—as a way to make concrete the concept of relatability and to promote a “they’re just like me” attitude.

These concepts of self-realization are part of the constructs behind Michel Foucault’s theory of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism hinges on the ideals of the free market and extends into a direction that explains the “governmentality of life,” better known as biopolitics. The role that freedom, action, rule-following, and self-reflection have in the “governmentality” of people is outlined by Foucault as an ideal that puts individual privilege as the source of power and knowledge at its focal point. It is the focus on the inner-workings and conduct of the individual

that ultimately defines Foucault's neoliberal ideal. This notion accentuates the "system of thought"—or the method and scope of human social function—in a way that targets the idea of self-conduct in order for human sustenance to be maintained. It is also important to grasp that neoliberalism and the governmental understanding of conduct *involves* self-conduct—that is, the subject who is governed is also a subject who governs. With this in mind, the analysis of the "government of life" is inextricable from the definition and societal meaning of subjectivity. Neoliberalism has had an impact on the way individuals themselves garner power and as a result has had an effect on how individuals think about and understand the "rules" of power itself. These concepts of neoliberalism also play an important role in how society "behaves" today. Neoliberal practices of putting the "citizen in control" or the focus on the privatization of the individual, can give insight into brand culture. Brand culture emphasizes self-entrepreneurship—the highlight of neoliberalism—as means to promote and maintain the self, as if the self is part of an advertisement. Sarah Banet-Weiser explains that "the context of brand culture, involve[s the] economic principles [of] brand management strategies, self-promotion, and advertising techniques that help to explain the self within a set of social and cultural conditions" (Banet-Weiser 55). With these concepts in consideration, "the visible self on display gains traction in the contemporary context of post feminism" (Banet-Weiser 55). Postfeminism therefore becomes not only an ideal that is focused upon by women themselves, but also an "increasingly normative strategy of engaging with the world" (Tasker and Negra 56). Banet-Weiser extends her explanation of postfeminism as she describes it as "an expansive and distinctly contemporary capitalist engagement with media, merchandise, and consumption" (Banet-Weiser 55). This means that postfeminism has a *cultural* impact, and can influence the way we as a society

function and conceptualize the principles, standards, and rules of “what it means to be a woman” today.

According to Angela McRobbie, postfeminism is based upon an idea that is beyond or after (hence “post”) the period of feminism (McRobbie, 34).” This would assume that the goals of feminism in its own right have been reached—that women have reached equality in all sectors, and have become just as “powerful,” socially-relevant, and esteemed as men. Since this assumption is based upon the idea that these goals have been reached by the collective effort of women as an entire “moving” body, it would only mean that “post” feminism would emphasize the skills and intellectual capacity of the individual woman simply because that is the next logical step. Now, it “can be all about me” because in the past “we were all together” and presently it is time to develop “our” own sense of ourselves in “our” personal right. This development sheds light onto the realm of entrepreneurship, and therefore calls upon the very ideals that Michel Foucault evokes in his definitions of neoliberalism.

The ideals behind postfeminism and neoliberalism are married in a way that puts center-stage the privilege of the individual, but at the same time highlights the ways women fashion themselves based on the larger context of the societal inner-workings of enterprise by placing them in a land of self-help tools—like makeup, hair products, and all things “sexy.” Postfeminism works to extend the already represented norms of femininity by redefining the image of “girl power.” This means that feminism is dismantled by remaking societal feminine thinking. Postfeminism is rooted in the “girly image”—like makeup and lavish clothes—and constitutes a corresponding ideal of consumerism with an strong emphasis on the production, maintenance, and when “necessary” the reinvention of the self, while at the same time other “societal differences” are ignored or not addressed (e.g. young women journalists refusing to

denunciate the proliferation of lap dancing clubs (McRobbie 34). This notion redefines sexual power because postfeminism also redefines the way women use their “freedom.” Angela McRobbie explains that “despite [a woman’s] freedom, [she is] called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl” (McRobbie 34). A woman’s own choice to “remain free of critique” is interesting in its own right as it is an exercise of freedom itself, while at the same time it is a demonstration of neoliberal subjectivity (those who govern are subject to governance). A woman exercises her freedom by remaining “quiet” and having an “uncritical relation[ship with] dominant, commercially produced, sexual representation[s] that actively invoked hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past” (McRobbie 34). Therefore, the postfeminist woman is relinquished by her sexuality and uses it as power, rather than being ridiculed for such sexuality, and subsequently advocates a new meaning of female consent and sexual participation. The ultimate goal with gender performances regarding postfeminist women is to “remain relevant”—or be the beacon of strong and sophisticated power among women. This is related to the neoliberal aspect of competition and the influence of the self-brand. It is the postfeminist woman who is focused solely on how to maintain her image primarily for the gain of the self, rather than focusing on creating or cultivating cultural power (like the *feminist* past).

Since neoliberalism positions citizens and individuals in a world that is responsible for themselves (since market-based economic practices “rule” over social ones), it too makes the state itself no longer responsible for the welfare of its subjects. In comparison, the postfeminist as the self-invested entrepreneur, loses enthusiasm for political female collectivism.

Neoliberalism attempts to “level the playing field” by placing emphasis on the success of individual merit—the notion that one should not “feel sorry for the self,” but rather focus effort

on achieving goals personally. Of course this notion is in reference to the inevitable existence of societal discrimination, and as a result ideologically rules out such discriminatory realities like sexism and racism.

Based on these above concepts, popular media, especially reality television, has seemingly influenced the way American millennials, especially women, understand femininity and the ways in which it must be performed. Based on the ideals of neoliberalism, I examine the “culture” of the reality television market by delving deep into postfeminist representations present on reality TV shows that capture the family dynamic like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, that pose romance as competition like *The Bachelor*, that give new meaning to the “makeover” paradigm like *Bridal Plasty*, *Botched*, and *The Biggest Loser*, and lastly, that shed light on women “in need” of fashion intervention like *What Not to Wear*, and Stacy London’s *Love, Lust or Run*. These television shows serve as a medium by which certain societal ideals are expressed and delivered to the American audience, especially women. I investigate just how these shows “choose” to convey postfeminist and neoliberal ideals. These shows illustrate the postfeminist and neoliberal mantra behind modern reality television—that the apex of femininity depends on the acquisition, maintenance, and public display of romance that ultimately results in a blissful heteronormative relationship.

The Intervention

The emergence of “makeover television” asserts the postfeminist and neoliberal ideal in many ways; but most importantly by making womanhood reinventions, a series of rules that must be learned and then applied. Female appearance can be managed both superficially and surgically, in order to maintain a certain standard of sexual attractiveness. This concept of self-maintenance based on the sustenance or improvement of sexual desirability is widely rejected by

feminists. However, *post-feminists* believe that this view encourages women to de-feminize themselves. In the postfeminist mindset, what actually occurs is the hypergenderization of feminine norms. It is being “extra” feminine and using it to one’s advantage—that is to garner power and success. How does a woman become hypergenderized, or hyper-feminine? Through the constant self-surveillance and self-monitoring of their bodily appearance. Because of this, consumer society has a special place in the hearts of modern “postfeminists.” This social practice of self-monitoring for the sake of femininity brings forth the idea of class ascension. The mobility of women to ascend social classes by merely “keeping tabs” on their looks is a popular theme in postfeminism. The end goal of proper self-improvement is then inevitably entrepreneurial success—success that is, of course, accompanied by glamour. What Makeover Television does to the American woman is place her into a consumerist world “for her own good” and to make her a successful contender in the American job and “love” market. By succumbing to the makeover, the “transformation process offers women a confirmed, stable, and permanent sense of their gendered identity” (Weber 129).

Makeovers can happen both *literally* and through the *process* of transformation. For shows like *America’s Next Top Model*, we see “average girls” slowly being given the tools to become professional models. Contestants on this show are taught to “perform better” as individuals, as fame and fortune will be theirs if they comply with the experts. The neoliberal theme of subjectivity is also apparent in *Top Model*, as the women must succumb to the better knowledge of the judges. This means that their individuality is stripped away, just so it can become a new, better individuality for the winner. Through learning and adapting to what the modeling industry expects of a young model (tips and tricks that are taught solely by the judges)

the contestants are brought into a new land of proper makeup, vesture, and runway walks. They are then photographed as if their own objective “value” is put on display.

On Episode 3 of Season 1, we are introduced to Robin, who is very assertive when it comes to her looks, insisting that “they are what will make her a model.” She is cast as the “know it all” character who believes she knows what is best for her own self in order to be the best model. Her “individuality” and distinction from the other women on the show is made known and is very clear. Once the contestants reach a certain point in the show, they are given a bodily makeover. Robin is very hesitant to “change” what she thinks is the proper and best “look” for her in order to be a model. When resistance strikes, and Robin starts to cry. Her crying reveals her vulnerability and Judge Jay Manuel quickly, and sternly, telling Robin that “this will make her a model” and if she “doesn’t go through with it” she risks being eliminated. From that point, Robin began to take Jay Manuel’s advice, because “he is a trusted expert who made models before her.” Robin “trusted” Jay because she understood that his expertise would make her the *best* model possible. Robin’s ultimate consent to the makeover reveals her willingness to make a better brand for herself— her professional model image. From a neoliberal perspective, what Robin sees as “model” may be saturated or “used” up in the modeling industry economy (Ouellette and Hay 126). Because of this, the ongoing reinvention strategy and the need for the subject to participate in this reinvention become necessary for the individual to succeed. Robin “the know it all” is an example of this as she relinquished her preconceived ideas about her appearance to Jay Manuel and consents to the makeover. Robin’s makeover features lightening of the hair, and new makeup procedures to make her look “more like a model” and therefore, to fit better into the scheme of femininity in the modeling industry. We are also witness to the scrutiny of Tyra Banks, the host of the show, shamelessly perusing through the

lineup of women assessing them and then revealing the physical changes she is going to make to them to make them “more feminine” and “model-worthy.”

It is also interesting to note that this makeover show also places a specific purpose on the heterosexual relationship. We see Nicole struggling all throughout Season 1 to find a balance between talking to her boyfriend and completing challenges on time. This show also paints a picture to the contestants of what achieved glamour can look like, by leading them on lavish shopping sprees and allowing them to attend the world’s most esteemed fashion events.

Shifting to the genre of makeover television that focuses on direct bodily intervention, there is an overwhelming emphasis that is placed upon the feminine, and how femininity should “work” in modern American society. We are witness to the “intervention” of experts of those who societally “fail” at their duty of being feminine and sophisticated, and are encouraged to become full participants and consumers in the neoliberal economy. For shows like *Love, Lust, or Run*, the makeover paradigm is one that features “two extremes”—the woman who does not care what she looks like, and the woman who “overdoes it.” The women are initially nervous and very reluctant to participate and to change their ways, but since Stacy London reassures them that they can still “remain themselves,” the participants are a lot more willing to participate and to dive head first into the makeover. This is interesting because there is a focus on becoming one’s “best self” as subjects are constantly reminded that there are fantastic attributes of themselves that they are hiding both internally (refashioning of self-confidence due to “feeling better about” one’s self after the makeover) and externally (due to ill-fitting clothes, the “wrong” makeup). Such attributes are brought to the forefront by the help from the experts, who can create not only a better version of the self, but the *best* self *because* these external appearance changes can promote the I-feel-great-about-myself attitude and can subsequently positively

effect a woman's performance in the job market and therefore, marking her as the apex of success. There is a reminder for the woman who "doesn't care" that she can be feminine and sophisticated and still be comfortable, but that her more sophisticated look would make her more "successful" in her career and love life.

Love, Lust or Run's premise involves whether or not men will "Love them," "lust for them," or "run from them." Before the makeover intervention, random men on the street are asked the love, lust or run question. Of course, most would respond with the answer of "run," and very few would say "lust" (perhaps a construction meant to enhance "natural" beauty), and virtually none would say "love." However, whenever the makeover was completed, all of the responses involving loving them and featured more "lusts" (perhaps a reassertion of a woman's need for makeup in order to be sexually attractive).

For instance we see Meghan, a high school track coach, who wears sweatpants every day to and from practice. Her style is lacking and Stacy insists that she allow her feminine self to appear. Once the makeover is finished, Meghan begins to cry as she exclaims, "This is really me!" Because of this, Meghan credits Stacy's guidance for her new found freedom, because now she "can assert her sexiness at work, while still remaining professional." On the flip side, the woman who is too invested in being "individualistic" by dressing outrageously needs a fashion intervention simply to become hypergenderized—or to become more powerfully feminine. Nicole is forced to "tone down" her radical rainbow hair and carnival-like outfits in order "to be taken seriously." She is reluctant to take off her stage makeup and be subject to personal insecurity. When Stacy takes her shopping and "teaches" just what is "right" to wear, she is at first very reluctant to let go of her characteristically individual style. Again, when her new clothes, makeup and hair are revealed to her and the viewing audience, she is captured and taken

aback by her “new” beautiful self. She even goes to the extent of saying, “Now I feel sexy” as her arms fly in the air and she adjust her collar—a gesture meant to mimic how confident and powerful she feels now. She also states that she “can still coach her kids dressed like this.” Because of this Meghan is empowered by her newfound confidence based on her appearance alone. This suggests that success in her career is based upon appearance, just as much as her “sexiness” is based on men being attracted to her. The two go hand-in-hand, and seem to be separate from a woman’s own mind and personality. The reason for this *new* confidence is because of her appearance—an attribute that can allow her to succeed in *both* her career and love life, thus garnering her a successful woman. The display of sexuality on *Love, Lust, or Run* is meant to highlight the empowerment of individual choice and subjectivity. It is giving a lesson on how to use individual freedoms by placing limitations on just about everything, so that the choices that are freely made are done so in a way that is socially acceptable.

We also see the intervention take shape on TLC’s *What Not to Wear* (WNTW). On this show we are reminded of the constant neoliberal ideal for self-reinvention to make sure the self is in its best condition. It disguises expert advice as self-enterprising, or that the subject knows just how much the expert is helping them in order to achieve success. WNTW serves as the most obvious example of the makeover TV paradox, as it prepares the makeover-subject to “take on burdens of insecurity and disposability in the name of a person’s own freedom, and provides them with the tenuous resources for navigating the impossibility of the task” (Ouellette and Hay 101). This means that the subject appears “helpless” or is in dire need of expert intervention and requires resources to aid in the self-reinvention. The reinvention requires constant effort and expert advice in order for the individual to really grasp how to perform their best self.

WNTW emphasizes the importance of femininity in order to “be sexy” and feel empowered. For example, we see Laura on Season 2, who is ridiculed for not wearing the proper bra in order to “show off her girls.” Clinton, the fashion expert on the show alongside Stacy London, exclaims to Laura that her choice of bra is “like carrying around two honeydews with some dental floss.” Clinton is criticizing the way she wears her clothes in order to find a “medium” in which her feminine parts are shown off, while still remaining “sophisticated.” This was a recurring theme as we were welcomed to Miriam (who was similar in character to Robin from ANTM in her attitudes about what makes herself an individual) who refused to wear bras, but then quickly became subject to Clinton and Stacy’s expert advice. We are also witness to Casey, whose work style is “drab,” and her “failing” work and marriage. Of course, Stacy and Clinton come to the rescue to revamp her look and to make her “successful” again.

The concept of hypergenderization is a theme that is constant throughout the Makeover TV genre. According to Brenda Weber, being hypergenderized is necessary for the makeover to be a success (Weber 4). The program *Botched*, which features the famous Dr. Dubrow, focuses on women who have had faulty plastic surgeries and need to be “fixed” in an emergency. *Botched* reveals the lengths that some women will go to achieve the “dream” of having the career that is wanted, and well as the man to go with it. We are introduced to Heather, who needs her breast surgery reconstructed. She is a model whose career has suffered because of her ill-constructed breasts. She “needs” reconstructive surgery in order to restore her “beautiful chest.” She also mentions how she is self-conscious in front of her husband, and that it ultimately affects her marriage. We are witness to Heather’s ultimate attempt to be feminine—to enhance herself by means of plastic surgery. At the end of her transformation, she exclaims, “I can’t wait to drive over to my agents and say, ‘I’m back!’” As Brenda Weber explains, Heather’s attitude can be a

testament to the transformation process which “offers women a confirmed, stable, and permanent sense of their gendered identity” (Weber 129).

Another makeover TV phenomenon deals with health and fitness. *The Biggest Loser* serves as a “life intervention” show which “mobilizes professional motivators ... to help people overcome hurdles in their personal, professional and domestic lives” (Ouellette and Hay 63). *The Biggest Loser* hones in on the ability of experts to regulate individuals in order to make them “better.” For women especially, this means “getting the guy” and being able to be “taken seriously” in the workforce because one “is skinny now.” These weight loss programs allow for an individual to ground herself by giving women the tools to run their lives almost like a business!

The Role of Romance

For the American public, the stereotypical view of romance—that love conquers all, or better known as “hopeless romance”—is part of the present-day, gendered society ideal. According to Jonathan Gray, this romance “fairy tale” is put on display in a rather interesting way by popular reality TV outlets. *The Bachelor* also reveals an interesting dynamic, and struggle, between collectivism (a feminist quality) and individualism (a postfeminist quality), which perhaps highlights the actual societal struggle of whether or feminism has truly reached its end. *The Bachelor* ideal highlights female desperation as finding their soul mate is a critical endeavor—one that can even require the outpouring of their own public intimacy on national television in order to do so. What Alice Leppert calls “performative intimacy” –or the direct engagement with those “watching” by putting on display private and personal behavior—takes on new meaning in *The Bachelor* context. This also can *literally* mean being *intimately* intimate. Not only are the women’s private lives on display, it is the *most* intimate parts of their lives that are on stage to

the public. It further solidifies the notion that the emphasis on “finding the one” is the most important endeavor as a woman. The way women viewers see love on television can be a collectivist call-to-action (a notion that is contrary to postfeminism), or the recruiting of female viewers by this underlying camaraderie that “these are lengths we should go to for love.” However, the sheer attempt to “find love” is a step in order to reclaim the self that was once failing (by being single)—an overarching theme of postfeminism.

We see in repeated fashion the struggle between feminist and postfeminist ideals in *The Bachelor*. On season 19 we are invited to watch Chris Soules “find love” as he is given a selection of 25 women. We first are witness to the “failing” woman when Kimberly, who is eliminated on Episode 2, trots back into the Bachelor Mansion and steals away Chris “for a second chance,” but this action then threatens the other women in the house—made known by the obvious dirty looks, slow, forced applause, and fake hugs. This “threatening nature” seen by the other women then reinforces the neoliberal ideal of individuality because it reinforces competition, and forces the self to “work on the self” in order to win the heart of Chris Soules. According to Vanessa Lehm and Miguell Vatter, the “power” outlined in neoliberalism suggest uprising—as the saying goes, “where there is power, there is resistance (Lehm and Vatter, 62).” The element of subjectivity also needs to be considered. As Kimberly was eliminated she became subject to Chris’ decision. She then quickly reasserted her “governance” by asking to return to Bachelor Mansion. However, as she was “welcomed” back by the other women, she was then subject again to the scrutiny of female competition and reluctance (resistance) to accept her back as part of the group.

In times of strife, the women seemingly band together as a means to comfort and subside female vulnerability. When Ashley I, a contestant on Season 19, reveals that she is a virgin to

the other women in Bachelor Mansion *before* she tells Chris, an overwhelming outpouring of support is felt by the other women. This then leads to Becca ultimately revealing that she is a virgin as well. Britt even lays her hand on Ashley's shoulder to comfort her as she reveals her concerns about "not creeping Chris out"—a notion that contradicts the classical definition of postfeminism. It is contradictory because it evokes a sense of collectivism, or that Britt's comforting was not just "nice" but was *needed* for Ashley's feeling better and emotional recovery. At the same time, Ashley later steals Chris aside and embarks on a steamy make-out session, as a way to reassert her sexual nature and sex-ability despite her lack of intimate experience. This sexual reassertion becomes a source of power for Ashley I., as she reminds herself, the other women, and the viewers that she is a true contender for Chris' heart *because* her sexual ability is something that "cannot be forgotten" and is *essential* for the heteronormative relationship to not only ignite, but to blossom.

Throughout the show we are also constantly reminded that the "fairy tale" marriage should be the end result to this dating show spectacle. We see Whitney, on her second one-on-one date with Chris, deciding to "crash" a nearby wedding. Again, reminding the viewer (and perhaps Whitney herself) that "that should be me." However, during Episode 6, Kelsey faints due to a canceled cocktail party. What is most interesting is that none of the other women in the house came to her aid—as if to watch their "competition" fail. But of course, we are reminded that Kelsey is not the woman who will let her "failing" fainting be the cause of her losing love, as she receives a rose on the next date with Chris—reminding us that Kelsey's individual reclaiming of her status with Chris was necessary in order for her chances at love to still be "successful."

Throughout the course of Season 19, we see a "power" struggle develop between Kelsey

and Ashley. Taking into consideration Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's explanation of the neoliberal "conducts of power," we are witness to an interesting outplay of feminist and postfeminist ideals. The "conducts of power" refer to the person who can "take charge of one's self" while at the same time "producing the desired results" (Tasker and Negra, 7). From a postfeminist standpoint, these results include the end goal of the man and the subsequent domesticated family. The climax to the Kelsey-Ashley debate is when Chris takes both of them on a date where each of the women subconsciously thinks they are going to "ruin" their competition and be the one to receive the rose. However, after an altercation caused by both women bad-mouthing each other to Chris, both women were sent home. The "end result" was had by neither Kelsey nor Ashley. In some ways, this symbolizes that when an individual's freedom is not "used properly" it can result in failure. However, Kelsey's next endeavor as the Bachelorette revealed to us that she is not willing to let Chris' rejection dampen her overwhelmingly desires and attempts to find love.

The Bachelorette, which features one woman who is faced with the decision of choosing one of 25 male suitors to build a life with, attempts to turn gender norms on its head. However, this may not be as successful as one may assume. Jonathan Gray explains how dating shows, like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, are spectacles. This is most obvious in the line-up of women put on display for the Bachelor to choose who stays and who goes. It offers a secondary invitation to viewers to criticize the women's looks, and especially the "masculinized viewer a chance to go pick women and as if it was a mail order catalogue" (Gray 265). This places considerable attention on the sexiness and attractiveness of the women where usually the "prettiest" woman wins. With *The Bachelorette*, however, we see the woman as "in control." This is where subjectivity comes into fruition—the bachelorette may hold the power to choose

dates, but she is still subject to the man's approval of her sexual attractiveness (usually seen by the proposal of the man *to* the woman at the end of the show). *The Bachelorette* can attempt to give its female characters considerable power and agency to decree what is an appropriate performance of gender—to exercise her individuality without any help from other women—however, it does not remove her neoliberal sense of subjectivity. For the Bachelorette Kaitlyn, camera shots and verbal “confessions” of Kaitlyn constantly reveal how distraught she is about finding love—an occurrence that *never* happened in *The Bachelor* season featuring Chris Soules. Although Kaitlyn “has the power,” her fervent yearning for true love and family is visibly put on display and is constant throughout the show. These hypergendered norms hinge on the very ideals that set “the genders” apart. For women this ideal most profoundly has to do with the importance of motherhood.

The emphasis upon motherhood, an ideal singular to postfeminism, is made evident throughout *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. We are placed directly into the Cinderella family of the 21st century. We are always reminded that the end-result of womanhood always revolves around getting married and having children. We are witness to the trials and tribulations of Kim, Kourtney, and Khloe's issues with love and romance—and their desperations to have a “fairy tale” romantic and domestic life. When Kim was getting engaged to Kris Humphries there was an entire episode dedicated to her new romantic journey. The entire “secret” engagement was titled Operation Pumpkin, as if to mimic a Cinderella in her pumpkin carriage. It is this fantasy of domestic partnership that is seen throughout the series, that reinforces the postfeminist ideal of the importance of romantic relationship in a young woman's life. For example, when Kris Humphries proposed to Kim Kardashian, Kim was welcomed by a lavish display of roses and

candles with the words “will you marry me?” spelled out in petals. Her fairy tale romance was just beginning—a fairy tale that establishes her now as a legitimate woman.

According to Alice Leppert, “the Kardashians have become models for young women seeking success through self-branding.” Through the seasons of the Kardashians we are first taken deep into the lives of the sisters who are concerned with selling their clothes at DASH. In some ways we are introduced “first” to the Kardashian brand as a “legitimate brand.” On Season 1, we are constantly reminded that DASH is the “job” that these girls have in order to make them “relatable” to the audience. But as the series progresses the “brand” becomes the Kardashians themselves. At first this brand is disguised by DASH. We are becoming witness to makeup, hair, and fashion advice and tips while still thinking it is just because they have a clothing store. However, as we enter into the most recent seasons of the show, this disguise is completely lifted and reveals single-handedly the importance of “female hustle” or the self-entrepreneurship of the *Kardashian* brand. This brand “keeps girls hot” in order to be fashioned as “right” from the male perspective. The Kardashians, by use of their brand, make “sexy” sexy. That is, their clothing line and hair products, as well as their image in general is so that women can self-monitor in a way that makes them sexy. The Kardashians do this in a way that is attractive in its own right. This is done in part by the emphasis that is placed on the family. In Season 6, we see the postfeminist work-life balance on display by Kim, Khloe, and Kourtney, as it is difficult for each of them to see each other. Kourtney complains that she “never gets to see her family anymore” as that it “needs to happen.” This emphasis is important because it keeps the brand alive.

This branding has “sisterhood” at its forefront. Over and over, we are witness to the “need” for the sisters to be together in order for them to “work.” For instance, the sisters are flown together to Mexico for a photoshoot together for a bikini line. We also are witness to

Kourtney's ongoing struggle with Scott Disick, and Khloe's ever-persistent support of the relationship, almost as if she is the couple's much needed therapist keeping their relationship alive. The Kardashian sisters feel "empowered" with and by each other. This is interesting because again, we see the struggle between self-branding for the *individual*, and the collective action of women sticking together for a goal. However, the Kardashian sisters offer a different example of individualism. It is a kind of *collective* individualism. Through strong bonds with each other, the sisters promote one brand set out for empowerment, and are the product of collective self-entrepreneurship.

"Becoming a Woman"

The "fairy tale" of the transition to womanhood is seen as a process.

The transition from girlhood to womanhood deals with the confirmed sense of identity that comes with being a "woman"—that is sexually attractive, career oriented, and of course a mother. With this, however, there is an adulthood aspect of womanhood which creates panic as aging can offer a woman fear of losing her previously established "womanly markers"—yet at the same time allows her to "perform her best" as mother because of "gained experience." As Jonathan Gray points out, the "fairy tale" of reality dating shows, like *The Bachelor*, marks the woman as the "damsel in distress" who is then rescued by her "prince charming." Once this "rescuing" has happened, usually by an engagement proposal or relationship bid to remain together romantically, the *girl* is now a woman. It is the open transition from girlhood to womanhood that is indicative of the postfeminist consumerist culture of the "maturity of girls" (Leppert 74). Therefore, a heteronormative relationship that results in marriage and motherhood is the primary way in which womanhood is reached. Because of this, young girls are placed into a land of incessant consumption—through buying the latest beauty products, hair gadgets, and

trying the latest diet fads—in order to capitalize on female attractiveness and end up center stage in a real-life fairy tale of their own. When Chris Soules proposes to his “choice” Whitney, we are welcomed by Whitney’s ecstatic excitement that “her dreams have come true.” This notion presents what Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra describe as the postfeminist emphasis on the female life cycle. The fact that “women’s lives are regularly conceived as timestarved, [and] women themselves are overworked, rushed, harassed, subject to their biological clocks to such a degree that female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic temporal crisis” (Tasker and Negra 10). It is this relationship between “becoming a woman” that is exemplified by the ushering in of young girls at a strikingly young age by increased “self-help” consumption, while at the same time “remaining a woman” which requires steering clear of irreversible *adult*-hood.

Enter Kris Jenner. According to Alice Leppert, Kris Jenner, the mother of the Kardashians and the matriarchal power behind their brand, is the reality TV example of the “end” of the postfeminist life cycle. As a means to combat her aging, it is almost as if she is hurdling her youngest daughters, Kendall and Kylie (bona fide tweens), into a life filled with beauty products and plastic surgery just as she is battling her own dilemmas of becoming the adult woman who is subject to the scrutiny of aging. Kris is seen getting a facelift right before Kim’s wedding and marriage to Kris Humphries. The constant need to “look younger” becomes part of the denial that aging is not glamorous. There has been many times that Kris Jenner has “failed”—most recently though her divorce with Bruce Jenner—she has lost “love”—but is quick to replace him with Corey Gamble, a much younger beau who fulfills not only her romantic void, but serves as a postfeminist example of “the girl getting the guy.” Since Gamble is much younger, it is also a symbol of Kris’ overwhelming effort to reclaim her postfeminist self, but is also subject to “looking desperate” by all of her attempts to remain young, attractive,

and fashion forward. Kris' role as manager of her children seems to give her much fulfillment as she is repeatedly concerned with booking Kim on photoshoot after photoshoot, making it clear that her duty as "mom" is fulfilled because she is "nurturing" Kim's career. According to Tasker and Negra, this "managing" by mothers is both helpful while at the same time limiting as it reveals the "generational reconstruction of girls and young women as enjoying the freedoms secured by the activism of their mothers and grandmothers" (Tasker and Negra 18). Kris may not even see her job as a "job" because it simply involves the ushering in of her daughter's success—something in which a postfeminist mother would be involved. This is exemplified by Kris' reaction to Kris Humphries engagement plans. She embraces Kris with open arms and lets out a loud shrill of excitement—an excitement that testifies to her happiness simply because her daughter will soon reach the apex of romance identified as marriage and the family.

Conclusion

Throughout my analysis of popular reality TV shows on the television market currently, many reveal just how much neoliberal and postfeminist ideals are intertwined. The focus on female individualization is interesting because in the neoliberal context socialism is stripped away, leading only the female (or individual) herself to blame when something "goes wrong." Shedding light onto the larger ideals of modern society, what does all this mean? From a neoliberal perspective the question therein lies, if individual liberation is linked to consumerism and the notion of class mobility, what does that mean for society when it comes to limited job opportunities, low income jobs (for women), and the increasing population and therefore pressure of those who are mothers? Does capitalism play a role in just "who" *gets* success? Yes. For instance, makeover television does not separate the "makeover" on the show with what it actually takes for such a transformation to happen in reality. This is the connection between

money and consumption that is not made, but is an ever present part of the *real* beauty industry. Because of this, makeover shows inevitably have an effect on class hierarchies. These hierarchies are perpetuated by the “imposing of restrictive notions of beauty and taste on women and the working/lower class” (Ouellette and Hay 101).

There is also the interesting connection to Western standards of beauty. This is also present throughout the intervention genre and is evident in shows like *Love, Lust or Run*, and *What Not to Wear*. Brenda Weber explains that on a British episode of WNTW, an Asian woman “whose drab style compromised her professional and romantic engagements” seeks the experts’ help to “write a Western code of beauty on her body” (Weber 132). This is an example of how the “western ideal” *is the ideal* and that all types of discourse that send society messages about how women should look and act is primarily focused on this Western ideal.

If ideals of postfeminism and neoliberalism constantly tell women to scrutinize themselves in order to be aware of their bodily needs for self-improvement, the societal shaping of how women see success also changes. This was seen by the Kardashians, as their incessant consumption and endorsement of such consumption plays out on the national television market. This sheds light on just how the public is “educated” on these issues. This education is what forms the societal norms that we all abide by—simply because “it is what society says.” When citizenship education is privatized, television’s technological role then becomes to link together individual enterprise to the lessons and tests of citizenship in its own right. This means that as we become aware of our own neoliberal attitudes in society—especially for women—it becomes a “test” or a way to decide whether or not an individual is a proper and therefore accepted member of society. It is through these texts, like reality television, that consumers receive the most

messages. Because of this, there is a concern that as televised texts become more riddled with social practices and ideals of gender, society itself will become what we watch.

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