"Ok Girls, the FBI Is Here- Look Your Best!": The Defining of Postfeminism in Keeping up with the Kardashians

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“OK GIRLS, THE FBI IS HERE– LOOK YOUR BEST!”: THE DEFINING OF POSTFEMINISM IN KEEPING UP WITH THE KARDASHIANS

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To the faculty that has never stopped encouraging me to push myself and be a better scholar, to my family who has been so willing to make any sacrifice necessary to put me through school and has supported and encouraged me every step of the way, and to my advisor, Dr. Roberto Avant-Mier, for always setting the highest standard for me and never letting me fall short of it.
“OK GIRLS, THE FBI IS HERE—LOOK YOUR BEST!”: THE DEFINING OF POSTFEMINISM IN *KEEPING UP WITH THE KARDASHIANS*

by

JENNIFER LYNN HANDROP, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2018
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2006, casting director for Dancing with the Stars Deena Katz heard that Ryan Seacrest Productions was on the hunt for a new family for a reality television show. While dining at the home of the Kardashian-Jenners, a wealthy United States family who was well socialized with the likes of Paris Hilton and O.J. Simpson, Katz told matriarch Kris Jenner that her family needed their own show. Upon viewing a sample video of the Kardashian-Jenners at a family barbecue, Ryan Seacrest saw the family’s television potential and jumped at the opportunity to show off the family to the world (Newman & Bruce, 2011). The following year on October 14th, 2007, the family stepped into the global arena with the series premiere of their reality television series Keeping Up with the Kardashians (KUWTK) on E! Entertainment. Almost instantaneously, the family became a worldwide sensation, racking in an average of over one million viewers per episode in the first season of their show alone. In 2010, KUWTK earned the status of “top-rated series” and still holds that title to this day, appearing on television screens in 167 different countries around the globe, typically with audience members ranging from 18 to 49 years old (Newman & Bruce, 2011; Corinthios, 2017; Nededog, 2012). This status resulted in the October 2017 signing of the largest deal reality television has ever seen: $150 million for another five seasons with the network, meaning that the family will be prevalent in the media until at least 2019 (Pérez, 2017).

Although the family uses KUWTK as its main promotional platform, the television show has helped “momager” Kris Jenner parlay their reality television fame into a brand empire, and subsequently careers for the whole family (Tran & Strutton, 2014). The television show is still considered to be the family’s flagship promotional tool, however the family has adopted various communication media to engage with millions of people across the world over the years. These
media have contributed to the perpetuation and further cementation of the family’s fame, relevance, and influence in our global society today. For example, Kim Kardashian West, arguably the most famous of the family members, had 97.3 million followers on Instagram at the end of the first week of April 2017. Upon checking her account page at the end of the first week of February 2018, the number has grown to an impressive 107 million. This example is just one of many to illustrate the immense influence the family members can have on audience members across the world through the use of communication media and why the family’s influence should be analyzed further in academia. The question is, in what ways does the family’s reality television show impact its audience, and what messages are being sent to its viewers?

I want to investigate whether there is a relationship between postfeminism, class, and beauty in KUWTK and if there is, I want to determine the kind of effects this relationship may have on society. More specifically, my goal is to examine both the visual and verbal discourses of beauty and examine whether there is a connection to postfeminist ideologies and class issues. Although there is a great body of existing literature concerning postfeminism and beauty, it is important to conduct research on KUWTK and how the Kardashian-Jenners can potentially impact society. The Kardashian-Jenners have been rather ubiquitous for over a decade and have created a bigger name for themselves in global popular culture than many other celebrities and well-known public figures have. The Kardashian-Jenners are regularly visible in the media, and media coverage of them has occasionally surpassed that of major world events. The family continually finds new ways to remain relevant in the media and to maintain the interest of the consuming public. This contributes to their constant media presence and, further, the solidification of their meaning and position in our global society today.
Media are a primary place for “postfeminist” thematics to surface, and their messages convey that a woman’s body is directly tied to their ability to be successful. Moreover, postfeminist messages tend to be a celebration of a woman’s power to transform her life through altering her appearance and consumption (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). Michel Foucault argued that our modern society “exerts a painful and punishing control over women’s bodies” (Joseph, 2009, p. 238). Through the consumption of postfeminist media representations alongside discourse(s) concerning beauty, women and girls may find themselves struggling to match the impossible standards that our culture demands, resulting in disordered eating, body image issues, and low self-esteem (Murray, 2013). Although there is nothing wrong with trying to improve one’s appearance, Cashmore (2006) contends that it becomes a problem if,

…the search for perfection becomes a dizzyingly compulsive fixation that translates into an intolerance of anything slightly less than faultless. It becomes additionally damaging if the inevitable consequences of age must be denied or rejected by whatever surgical means available. In other words, like most other human predilections, the quest for beauty can become an endless and fruitless pursuit that leads to discontent rather than satisfaction (p. 99).

In addition to the impact postfeminist media representations can have on a woman, when considering the consumption that requires emulating these media representations through the form of purchasing cosmetic products, or even more extreme, cosmetic procedures, there lies another problematic dimension that frames this research problem: social class. Women of a lower socio-economic class may find themselves facing a tougher struggle when attempting to live up to the standards set forth by postfeminist media messages, due to their lack of access and economic resources to purchase the products or services shown in media representations.
requiring her to alter appearance. If there are postfeminist messages found in *KUWTK*, these messages concerning beauty and class may be harmful to the show’s audience. Postfeminist media messages wield immense power in modern society, and due to the Kardashian-Jenner family’s level of fame and global ubiquity, it is important to study their show to examine if it serves as a platform for disseminating such messages.

In the next chapter, I will first review the literature that provide a basis for this study before providing the research questions that will guide my research. Then, I will describe the methodology that will be used in this study to answer my research questions and explain how this method has been used in previous studies. Following that, I will conduct my analysis of the episodes to be analyzed in this study and will answer the research questions proposed at the end of chapter 2. Finally, I will provide my concluding thoughts, highlight this study’s contributions to the field, discuss its limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

FEMINISM

The word “feminism” has different connotations depending on who is asked, as different scholars have adjusted the meaning of the word to what feminism means to them. For example, Merriam-Webster defines “feminism” as “the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities,” while bell hooks, a feminist activist and scholar, defines it as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (Dastagir, 2017, para. 3). The feminist movement has taken on different meanings over time, and these various meanings have come about as the movement has changed and progressed. These evolutions in the movement are what scholars refer to as the “waves” of feminism. I will first describe the different waves of the feminist movement and debates surrounding them before beginning a discussion on postfeminism, which is the theory that guides this study.

First-wave feminism.

The early stages of the feminist movement began with civically engaged feminist activists who participated in the late 19th century abolitionist movement, with women like Sojourner Truth, Frances E. W. Harper, and Maria Stewart (Grady, 2018). First-wave feminism began in the setting of “industrial society and liberal politics,” but is also linked to the beginnings of socialist feminism and the “liberal women’s rights movement” in the United States and Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005, p. 1). Early feminists became civically engaged through the movement to end slavery. First-wave feminists, who were mostly White, well-educated, middle-class women, were troubled by the lack of equal opportunities and access for women, including voting rights and opportunities for women to access contraceptives. The desire for equality influenced feminist thoughts in the West and East during the 20th century (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005). An example of one of these early feminists
and women’s rights activists is Margaret Sanger, who worked to provide women with birth control and contraceptive devices in the midst of the *Comstock Act*, a federal law that made contraceptives illegal. Sanger fought against the statute in an effort to reduce repeated, unwanted pregnancies and subsequent botched back-alley abortions to which some women resorted (“The Pill: Margaret Sanger (1879-1966),” n.d.). In 1914, Sanger created the term “birth control” and carried out her mission to educate women about contraceptives and provide access to them. Sanger was arrested in 1915 and 1916 for her efforts, but was not discouraged and worked towards providing access to birth control for women for the rest of her life, establishing the American Birth Control League and eventually, the Planned Parenthood Federation. Her efforts were fruitful, and contraceptives were eventually deemed to be a constitutional right in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, a 1965 Supreme Court Case (“The Pill: Margaret Sanger (1879-1966),” n.d.).

Another great success of a first-wave feminist was achieved by the efforts of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the late 19th and early 20th century. At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in New York where over 200 women gathered, Stanton outlined what would become the “Seneca Falls Declaration,” or “Declaration of Sentiments” which stated that all women are equal to men and detailed the political plan of opportunity and equality (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005, p. 3). The declaration meant that women should be treated as equals to men, be permitted the same access to positions and resources, and be recognized for their influences and capabilities. This lead to the woman’s suffrage movement, which turned out to be a success with the passing of the *Nineteenth Amendment* to the United States Constitution in 1920. With this, the first-wave of feminism concluded (Dow, 1996). Four decades later, the second-wave of feminism arose.
Second-wave feminism.

Second-wave feminism is a term used to make a distinction from the first-wave feminist movement. This term is used in reference to the women’s liberation efforts and radical feminism that began in the 1960s, which surfaced alongside the anti-war and civil rights movements, and was no longer limited to White, middle-class, well-educated women (Dow, 1996; Rampton, 2008). There are several different events by which second-wave feminism can be dated, such as the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan, the creation of the National Organization for Women in 1966, the establishment of “women’s liberation groups” in 1967, or the highly publicized 1968 Miss America beauty pageant protest (Dow, 1996, p. 27; Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005). However, themes of women’s liberation began seriously surfacing in the national media in the 1970s, with front-page stories and entire issues being dedicated to the discussion of the new women’s movement. Radical feminist ideologies, like the eradication of marriage and the nuclear family and changing the patriarchy, received great attention because of their “sensationalism” in the media and printed books (Dow, 1996, p. 28). However, the press zeroed in on two particular aspects of the second-wave feminist agenda: oppression in the public sphere, which dealt with employment and education opportunities, and the criticism surrounding “sex-role conditioning” (i.e., women being portrayed in traditional family roles and often depicted as sex objects) (Dow, 1996, p. 28). Feminist groups concerned with reform, led by women like Betty Friedan, prioritized obtaining rights for women in the public sphere, while radical feminist groups such as the Redstockings or the New York Feminists focused on getting rid of “sex-role conditioning” and transforming the patriarchy (Dow, 1996, p. 28; Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005). The second-wave feminist agenda attempted to view the personal, social, and sexual troubles of a woman as interconnected, and focused on the passage of the *Equal Rights
Amendment to the Constitution, critiquing patriarchy, heteronormativity, and the capitalist system (Rampton, 2008; Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005). Additionally, second-wave feminists fought for women to apply for mortgages, have their own credit cards, forbid marital rape, increase domestic violence awareness, create laws against workplace sexual harassment, and construct shelters for victims of domestic and sexual violence (Grady, 2018).

Unfortunately, this wave has not been free of criticism. Scholars have drawn attention to the lack of fair race representation in the second-wave, claiming that this wave was a “white feminism” which disregarded the viewpoints of Black women and women of color, “so that they could never be the women whose lives feminism either narrated or were generated from” (Biklen, Marshall, & Pollard, 2008, p. 460). It is noted, however, that this statement is not a suggestion that the second-wave was always a “white feminism.” Pollard (2008) states that women of color were absent in women’s studies and feminist literature in the 1970s and 1980s, and that in later writings, their existence was typically acknowledged, but marginalized. In fact, in Black Feminist Thought, Collins (1990) draws attention to the fact that though Black women had been “writing about sexual politics for many years,” their work was nearly invisible because their “knowledge was suppressed” (Biklen, Marshall, & Pollard, 2008, p. 460; Collins, 1990, p. 5). Though this wave has been criticized for its race issues, the efforts and successes of second-wave feminists are not unnoticed. Scholars like Biklen, Marshall, and Pollard (2008) contend that had second-wave feminism not occurred, “most women would be worse off,” adding that education, academic disciplines, and even movies would be in a worse situation without this wave (p. 451). Furthermore, the authors claim that concepts and lexicon that exist today, such as “the personal is political,” “date rape,” Title IX, Roe v. Wade, and the “glass ceiling,” would be absent without the efforts of second-wave feminists (Biklen, Marshall, & Pollard, 2008, p. 451).
In the next wave, the rights that first- and second-wave feminists fought for are privileges to be enjoyed (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005).

**Third-wave feminism.**

Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, and feminists during this period tend to view women as confident, strong, and accomplished. Feminist activists and scholars during this time framed this wave as a more open-minded, inclusive, welcoming corrective, especially in regard to “racial/ethnic and class diversity,” to the waves that preceded it (Butler, 2013, p. 42). In this wave, women face less instances of sexism, are given more opportunities, and empower themselves through the “grrrl rhetoric” (“grrrl” was used to sound menacing) that came about with the creation of all-female punk bands in the 1990s (Grady, 2018). This rhetoric is used as a form of appropriation that takes derogatory terms typically aimed at women and uses these terms against oppressors (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005, p. 15). The main features of the third-wave consist of “local, national, and transnational activism,” fighting trafficking, violence towards women, body surgery, and the “‘pornofication’ of the media,” for example (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005, p. 17). Third-wave feminists would reclaim the things that the second-wave feminists rejected, like makeup, high heels, and “high-femme girliness,” aiming to bring young women back to the movement and allow for them to define feminism for themselves (Grady, 2018, para. 56; Butler, 2013). Third-wavers took back their girliness due to the belief that rejecting girliness was actually misogynistic, and that girliness should not be considered to be inferior to masculinity. Additionally, there was a growing idea that, for feminism to be successful, it should acknowledge that the “patriarchal structures that create the beauty standard” are both gratifying and threatening, and that it did not make sense to “punish and censure individual women for doing things that brought them pleasure” (Grady, 2018, para. 58).
Although third-wave feminism has many facets, the primary goal of the movement is to reevaluate feminism by criticizing victimization, the narratives of what it is to be truly female, and freedom, while also being interested in conventional feminine concerns like fighting sexual harassment in the workplace and getting more women in positions of authority (Grady, 2018). In this wave, feminists are different from second-wave feminists in that they are not defined by political or theoretical thoughts, but instead are characterized by their use of imitation, enactment, and rebellion as rhetorical tactics (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2005). For example, in “The third wave of feminism is now, and it is intersectional” (2017), Rand argues that the Women’s March took place in the third-wave. She proclaims that the aim of the recent Women’s March on Washington and the goals of the feminist movement are the same: equal pay for equal work, equal rights, and recognition of labor whether it be domestic or in the workplace. Furthermore, she points out that there are some flaws third-wave feminists are working to address at this time– the goals of feminism have nothing to do with socioeconomic status, race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, but feminism has historically been criticized for representing a certain type of woman (White, middle- to upper-class, well-educated, and heterosexual). The Woman’s March, an event-turned-movement organized by a white woman named Bob Bland, fell under fire for representing the concerns of this type of woman (Chira, 2018; Rand, 2017). In an effort to make the March more inclusive and intersectional, Bland created a national committee of marginalized women, including a Latina, a Muslim woman, and a Black woman (Rand, 2017). Additionally, rather than being overtly involved in political activism, third-wavers partake in “consumer-based ‘cultural’ activism,” such as listening to certain musicians, taking pole-dancing classes for exercise, or getting a bikini wax (Butler, 2013, p. 42).
Some scholars argue that a fourth-wave has emerged, while other writers maintain that the third-wave is not yet completed and simply do not acknowledge that a fourth-wave has taken over. The line between the third and fourth wave is arguably unclear (Roy, 2018). For instance, for scholars who believe that feminism has reached its fourth-wave, it can be argued that the Women’s March on Washington is a milestone in the fourth-wave, not the third like Rand (2017) claims (Roy, 2018). This debate will be discussed in the next section.

**Fourth-wave feminism.**

In 2013, Kira Cochrane of *The Guardian* declared that there was a new resurgence of feminism, or the fourth-wave. Cochrane did not state that the feminist movement had gone dormant—instead, she proclaimed that 2013 brought a new upsurge of the movement (Rivers, 2017). Rampton (2008) argues that this revival of feminism in the form of the fourth-wave may have emerged because people thought the third-wave to be too optimistic or hindered by becoming blind to the issues still at hand. Further, this wave indicates a shift from feminism being studied in the academy to being discussed in the public. Issues that women fought against in the beginnings of feminism such as unequal pay, sexual abuse, rape, and other forms of violence against women, and inequality in the workplace, have resurfaced in the discourse of the mainstream media with this wave of feminism. Fourth-wavers may have issues with the use of the word “feminism” because of its nuances of radicalism and due to its inference that the movement is strictly for women. This generation acknowledges the idea that society faces a struggle with the conventional gender binary, and as such battles societal gender norms. This allows “feminism” to take on a new role in its fight for gender equity rather than solely defining the struggles that women face (Rampton, 2008).
Is the Feminist Movement Really in its Fourth-wave? Although some people believe that feminism has reached the fourth-wave, this idea is still deliberated in the field. As previously stated, Roy (2018) recognizes that the line between the two waves is hazy. She states that the fourth-wave advocates for several of the causes that the third-wave fights for, but this wave ties in sexual violence against females. Examples of actions feminists have taken against sexual aggression are the #MeToo Movement and the Women’s March on Washington in 2017 and 2018, which have re-ignited the national conversation concerning feminism, patriarchy, and misogyny (Chira, 2018; Rand, 2017; Roy, 2018). Grady (2018) addresses the question of whether the fourth-wave of feminism has arrived or not. She states that while media coverage of the #MeToo phenomenon generally frame it as belonging to third-wave feminism, the characteristics of the movement do not quite fit the third-wave. She elaborates on this thought by explaining that the fourth-wave might be characterized by the use of the internet as a tool for the movement. Activists meet to discuss their plans online, feminist debate and discourse take place online, and we see movements being launched through online platforms, such as the #MeToo movement and the formation and proliferation of the Women’s March (Grady, 2018). The arrival of the fourth-wave has not been universally acknowledged or accepted, though it is argued in academia and the media that this wave has begun and is marked by the use of digital platforms (Grady, 2018; Roy, 2018). Now that the waves of feminism have been covered, I will focus in on an aspect of the third-wave that will be used for the purposes of this analysis.

POSTFEMINISM

Some scholars argue that we are currently living in a pervasive “postfeminist media culture,” where media serve as a platter on which to serve postfeminist ideas to the public (Gill, 2007, p. 249; Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). Postfeminism is said to have its roots in the third-
wave of feminism, beginning in the early 1980s with the publications of *The Second Stage* in 1981 by Betty Friedan and *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women’s Liberation in America* in 1986 by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Dow, 1996). Other scholars, such as Jess Butler (2013), contend that postfeminism emerged during the feminist sex wars that occurred in the mid-1980s, and has been growing in popularity ever since. Butler claims that feminists were focused on the issue of pornography during this time, and became divided into two groups: those who concentrated on the “need to *protect* women from sexual objectification,” and those who stressed the importance of “women’s sexual *liberation*” (Butler, 2013, p. 38; emphases in original). Postfeminism is argued to be a byproduct of eighteenth- and nineteenth century Foucaultian constructions of sex as being a “natural urge that power continually tries to suppress” (Butler, 2013, pp. 37-38).

Postfeminism is known popularly as “girl-power feminism” and “anti-feminism,” and operates under the assumption that sexism has been eradicated. As a result, inequality between the sexes has also been eliminated (Joseph, 2009, p. 240; Patrick, 2017; Rivers, 2017). In addition, postfeminism is “a sentiment of contemporary culture that directly follows on from feminist politics,” and takes on feminist ideologies like sexual liberation and autonomy, while rejecting feminism as obsolete (Evans & Riley, 2013, p. 270). In fact, postfeminism proposes that the successes of previous waves of feminism are the very reason for feminism’s irrelevance in modern society, rejecting “feminist activism in favor of feminine consumption” (Butler, 2013, p. 44). There is an additional emphasis on femininity as a “bodily property” and an indication of a shift from “objectification to subjectification,” drawing on a “vocabulary of individual choice and empowerment” (Gill, 2007, p. 254; Butler, 2013, p. 43). Women have the freedom of choice when it comes to their careers, their role at home, and how they parent. The importance of opportunities for women and girls in the educational and professional realms is also emphasized.
in postfeminist culture (Kauppinen, 2013; Tasker & Negra, 2014). Seen as “career girls,” women are responsible for their own success in the workplace. Furthermore, a woman seeks out her own education and employment, and is able to be equal to her male counterparts, being afforded the same opportunities to further her career (Patrick, 2017). Women can achieve a life of their own and can finally ‘have it all’ in postfeminism (Kauppinen, 2013, p. 84).

**Beauty and Postfeminism.** Postfeminist media culture relates femininity to an attractive body rather than social or structural roles, like motherhood (Gill, 2007). In postfeminism, femininity is considered to be a physical property that is critical to the identity of a woman. The female body necessitates unyielding discipline and monitoring due to modern society’s “painful and punishing control over women’s bodies” (Joseph, 2009, p. 238). This is to say that a woman regularly adjusts her body (through the use of beauty products or diet pills, for example) to fit into current socially constructed beauty standards. Through this constant self-monitoring and adjusting, women are expected to always be and feel sexy and desirable, and should judge themselves and others on their beauty (Evans & Riley, 2013). Self-surveillance is seen as a requisite of efficacious femininity, and the level of self-monitoring required of women is visible in magazines geared towards a female audience. Features like body shape or size, clothing, and aspects of life (i.e., sexual practice, money, the home, career choice) are seen as troubles that necessitate this ongoing self-monitoring, but are paradoxically passed off as pleasurable and a way of pampering the self.

Another feature of postfeminism in media culture is that all aspects of life are refracted through self-determination and autonomy. Cosmetic procedures, such as surgeries or body hair removal are indicative of a woman’s utilization of beauty to increase her self-confidence. Gill (2007) argues that a “makeover paradigm constitutes postfeminist media culture” (p. 156). The “makeover paradigm” rests
on the assumption that women must consider their lives flawed in some way, and that, there is a way to fix it through “consumerism” and the “commodification of difference” (Gill, 2007, p. 254). This translates into the purchase of clothing, cosmetic products, such as make-up, nail polish, or hair products, or payment for a cosmetic procedure or surgery.

**Plastic Surgery and Postfeminism.** Tasker and Negra (2014) assert that media culture praises techniques such as plastic surgery, and thus sets a requirement that women undergo these procedures to preserve youthful attitudes and appearances as they age. Michelle Green, a writer for *People*, penned an article in 2002, entitled “Those lips, that face…,” that reported on people who underwent cosmetic procedures to look like their favorite celebrities (Cashmore, 2006, p. 99). Some consumers desire to imitate the lives of celebrities, whether that imitation is the way that they dress, their hairstyle, the way they talk, or their overall appearance (Popescu, 2014; Tran & Strutton, 2014). As a matter of fact, Lieb (2013) argues that celebrities aid in bridging the gap between who consumers are and who they desire to become. Society has constructed celebrities to be the embodiment of perfection, so people tend to look to them for advice and ideas of how to become more like them. Celebrities serve as examples of what current trends dominate society and tell audiences what normal ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling are (McClain, 2014). Postfeminism perpetuates women, and specifically celebrity women, as a sort of “pinup, the enduring linchpin of commercial beauty culture,” and has provided new rationale for “guilt-free consumerism,” revitalizing beauty culture, and normalizing ostentatious and pricy beauty treatments to middle and upper class women (Tasker & Negra, 2014, p. 3). In the United States, over nine million people a year are participating in this guilt-free consumerism, undergoing cosmetic procedures to fix insecurities or enhance their features. This is resultant of the pervasiveness of “perfect” looking celebrities in today’s culture (Cashmore, 2006, p. 100).
Postfeminism is argued to be pervasive in popular culture, and reality television shows a strong relationship between the want to transform and the constant desire to make one’s physical being perfect (Tasker & Negra, 2014). Reality television makeover shows such as *The Swan* (2004) and *Extreme Makeover* (2002-2007) amassed sizeable audiences and were centered around the idea that self-fulfillment is available through changing one’s look through the adoption of a new wardrobe, make-up routine, and hairstyle (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). Additionally, this “new genre of makeover TV shows” encourages transformation through cosmetic modifications, like liposuction or chemical skin procedures, particularly to achieve a more youthful look for aging women (Tsaousi, 2017, p. 149).

Scholars argue that reality television aligns itself with a certain type of femininity that echoes modern ideologies of transforming one’s self, celebrating the body, and empowering women (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). These television shows adopt a postfeminist perspective that showcase tales of personal struggles, choices, and becoming triumphant over one’s situation, commending a woman’s power to alter her life by changing her body and her physical appearance. Through this celebration, these shows tell their audience “appearance is one’s character and capacity for achievement” (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p. 268; Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016).

Shows such as those mentioned above and *KUWTK* are perpetuating these ideas by focusing on revitalizing transformations and reinforcing the illusion that a youthful appearance can be maintained and achieved as a woman ages (Tasker & Negra, 2014). They applaud and encourage the transformations that have been achieved through hairdressing, changes in wardrobe, and undergoing plastic surgery or other clinical beauty enhancement treatments. This way of enhancing a woman’s image has a tendency to be normalized in reality television shows like these and is shown to be something a woman should do to fix her insecurities. These guiltless acts of pampering oneself appear “postfeminist” and are manifested in various forms of mass media such as reality television,
influencing viewers to act in a similar manner (McClain, 2011; Tasker & Negra, 2014). Since it has been established that celebrities represent cultural norms, the postfeminist ideas discussed above are perceived to be typical and even expected of the average middle to upper class woman (McClain, 2014).

**Class Issues in Postfeminism.** Bourdieu established that capital can be social, cultural, or symbolic. Cultural capital plays an essential role in power relations within society as it opens the door for classes to differentiate themselves through taste (Bourdieu, 1984/1979). Tastes serve as indicators of social class, and Bourdieu says that “…aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing…” are occasions to experience or affirm a person’s social position, and “as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept” (Bourdieu, 1984/1979, p. 57). Moreover, clothing, cosmetics, plastic surgery, and other image enhancing consumer procedures and products can serve as social markers through which agents classify themselves and others because these cosmetic marks rely on the economic means that can be spent on them (Bourdieu, 1984/1979).

Postfeminist ideas of beauty call for altering one’s image through the consumption of beauty products and services available in the marketplace, and as such, they ignore class struggles (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover,* reality makeover shows discussed above, highlight how a woman’s life can be improved and transformed through this kind of consumption. Additionally, in a study by Becker, Thomas, and Cope (2016), *Bratz* films, a line of fashion dolls marketed to pre-teenage girls that led to movie adaptations, were also found to exhibit postfeminist ideas. Empowerment through fashion makeovers and physical transformations were frequently shown to be solutions to problems that the girls faced; the girls’ strength was directly linked to consumption (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). A woman’s body image and confidence have been commoditized, and shows like *The Swan, Extreme Makeover,* and *Bratz* films suppose that self-esteem can be for sale
and women can always afford to buy it (Tsaousi, 2017). Through its emphasis on the “makeover paradigm” and consumption, postfeminism ignores the class division that it creates and results in a struggle for women who fall under a lower socioeconomic status to keep up with the “painful and punishing control” that Foucault states our society demands for a woman to have over her body and the consumption demanded by our “postfeminist media culture” (Joseph, 2009, p. 238; Gill, 2007, p. 249; Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016).

Postfeminist Debate. Like the fourth-wave of feminism, postfeminism is highly contested—Gill (2007) claims that this term is one of the most challenged and crucial terms in the field of feminist cultural studies. Postfeminism tends to be criticized for its detachment from the political roots of feminism, due to the assumption that women have achieved full access to education, and family organization and employment of their choosing. This success that postfeminists argue that women enjoy suggests that there is no longer a need for the feminist movement (the definition of postfeminism is considered to be the “‘overcoming’ of feminism”), and this idea is perpetuated in popular culture and mass media (Tsaousi, 2017, p. 148). Feminist and media studies scholars have analyzed some popular 1990s and early 2000s television shows and movies, such as Sex and the City (1998-2004) and Bridget Jones’s Diary (2001), that have contributed to the shift in popular culture’s portrayal of women. The feminist take on movies and television shows such as these is that the media have managed to shift attention away from serious feminist issues, like rebelling against patriarchy, to focusing on satirizing the daily struggle of the main characters, their careers, and their sex lives. This in turn puts emphasis on the idea that a woman’s worth stems from her consumption and sexual freedom (Tsaousi, 2017; Arthurs, 2003). However, Arthurs (2003) asserts that this newfound stress on fashion and
consumption have been seen as a way for women to obtain power and pleasure that is possibly impervious to the control of patriarchy. The research questions that drive this study are:

**RQ1:** Are there interconnections between postfeminism and beauty constructions on *KUWTK*, and if so, what kind of relationships do they have to the way social class is portrayed on the show?

**RQ2:** In what ways might *KUWTK* contribute to the defining of and cultural discourse concerning postfeminism?

These questions will help determine whether there is a relationship between postfeminism, class, and beauty in *KUWTK* as well as any possible effects this potential relationship may have on society. In the next section, I will describe the methodology for this research, discussing a previous article that helped in the framing of this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The idea for this study came to me after noticing how prevalent the Kardashian-Jenner family is in our culture today. I started to become fascinated with the family, and my curiosity about them grew after watching their reality television show, KUWTK. I began to study the family in a couple of my graduate courses and noticed how little published research there is concerning them. This gap in the literature influenced me to tackle the family’s reality television show (their primary platform of promotion for their celebrity brand) for this project. To facilitate in the gathering of data for this project, I conducted a textual analysis of specific episodes from KUWTK, coding for the regularity and intensity of themes and central ideas, and then categorizing them. The underlying goals of researchers in the social sciences are to “understand, predict, and control social phenomena” and to share findings with their peers (Park & Park, 2016, p. 3). Social science researchers take a qualitative, quantitative, or tri-angulation, a combination of the two, approach to research. Although both qualitative and quantitative research methods aim to find reliable and accurate results, the two approaches have distinct differences. The qualitative method is used to help a researcher “explore the descriptive accounts and similarities and differences of various social events,” and is “excellent for discovery” (Park & Park, 2016, p. 4). The researcher interacts with the data, takes an inductive approach to develop a theory, writes up the research using a personal voice, and its validity and reliability is tested through verification. On the other hand, quantitative research is a deductive process in which the researcher tests a theory, does not interact with the research, it is completely objective, is written in an impersonal voice, and uses reliability and validity testing to determine its accuracy. The data that this research depends on is stable, and can be tested through a replication
of the study (Park & Park, 2016). In this study, I chose to take a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one, as it best fits the goals of this research.

McKee (2003) notes that textual analysis is a methodological approach in which researchers try to understand the different ways that a consuming audience may interpret texts and to make educated guesses about them. A text can be a script, video, film, book, television program, or even an advertisement or clothing item. Texts are interpreted to attempt to discern how people in certain cultures and in particular moments in time understand the world. Through obtaining an understanding of the various ways people may understand reality, we are able to better understand our own cultures (McKee, 2003). Dow (1996) says that television texts are rhetorical beings, able to be interpreted as “performing particular functions at particular times,” which are are “persuasive functions that work to make some ideas, positions, and alternatives more attractive, accessible, and powerful to audiences than others.” Furthermore, Dow argues that when television texts are studied in terms of its influence on social change, a scholar may view the television show as discourse that “works to accomplish some end(s),” and that these shows do this through the use of strategies that will influence the audience. This discourse is said to be strategic by Kenneth Burke, as it has the ability to “interact with, draw from, and respond to the context in which it occurs and in which its audiences are situated (1973, pp. 1-3).” Television shows both draw from and contribute to greater cultural discourse concerning feminism (Dow, 1996, pp. 7-8). A prevailing ideology within a television text is powerful in that it “‘relays and reproduces, and processes and packages, and focuses ideology’ that is at work elsewhere in society as well (Gitlin, 1982, p. 510)” (Dow, 1996, p. 13).

My goal in using textual analysis was to investigate how a consuming audience can understand the messages found in KUWTK. Dow (1996) states that textual analysis cannot
always tell a critic what viewers actually think, but that a textual critic may guess as to what is occurring in their minds. Although a prevailing ideology within a television text can typically be recognized, the audience may not understand the intended message. In fact, audiences can combat, avoid, or negotiate with the ideology. However, I will make a guess as to how the audience may perceive the dominant ideologies within *KUWTK* and discuss potential impacts should they choose to interpret the text in the way that it is presented. This text was analyzed using the generative criticism method described by Foss (2004). Generative criticism is a nine-step process that normally starts when a researcher encounters an interesting artifact. After that, the researcher will code the artifact broadly, pursue an explanation, create a plan for the explanation, come up with research questions, code the artifact once more (but with detail), examine the literature, frame the study, and then write the essay (Foss, 2004). Here, I have encountered an interesting artifact, *KUWTK*. When I watched the show out of curiosity, I noticed common themes, or coded it in a general, informal way. I began to search for an explanation and created an “explanatory schema” which led to the formulation of my research questions. In this study, I coded the artifact in detail, continued searching the literature and relevant research, and was able to frame the study better upon gathering my data.

For this study, I specifically chose to analyze season one, as it is the very first season of the show and sets the tone for the series, and season 14 because it is the most recent complete season and thus most culturally up to date. The rest of the episodes that I analyzed were selected through a method used by Van Bauwel (2018). All in all, 77 episodes were watched from various seasons. Seasons one through 13 were viewed on Hulu, a paid subscription video on-demand service. As season 14 was not available on Hulu, I watched those episodes on E! Entertainment’s online website, [www.eonline.com/watch/keeping-up-with-the-kardashians](http://www.eonline.com/watch/keeping-up-with-the-kardashians). I was able to view
these episodes by logging in with my account information for my television provider. The show began its 15th season on August 5th, 2018, but the season is currently airing, and thus will be incomplete at the time of this research. Therefore, season 15 is not included in this research. Van Bauwel defines which episodes of television shows to be analyzed by concentrating on episodes in which ageing and its intersection with gender/femininity are dominant in the narrative for each specific episode. O’Malley also uses a textual analysis similar to Van Bauwel’s to understand issues of gender representation in the television shows DC Cupcakes and Cupcake Girls. O’Malley analyzes the first two seasons of each of these shows, focusing on certain themes within the episodes as well as the organization of the episodes. She then looks at the visual images within the shows, and focuses on dynamics between the women and their interactions with other people in the show, such as family members and customers, as well. In order to show how women are portrayed on these two female-led shows, O’Malley includes a section of analysis on two male-led baking shows, Cake Boss and Ace of Cakes, using the same parameters and looking at similar themes that she used when viewing DC Cupcakes and Cupcake Girls. Becker, Thomas, and Cope use a similar approach to analyzing Bratz films. The authors first select Bratz films that fit their parameters for analysis, then initially analyze the films using an inductive, open coding method, creating detailed transcripts, visual descriptions of the scenes, and tone in the characters’ voices. The authors identify themes and patterns in the open coding stage. In the second stage, the films are viewed once again to help further develop sub-codes within all of the initial categories found in the open coding stage. Like Van Bauwel, O’Malley, and Becker, Thomas, and Cope, I searched the series to find episodes in which the predominant messages concern beauty, transformation/image enhancement, and class. I carefully selected the episodes to code for my textual analysis by reading the synopsis of every episode in seasons two.
through 13, selecting episodes that indicated they may be related to the themes I was searching for, and also watched the previews at the conclusion of episodes that I had already chose to analyze to discover any potential episodes that I may not have already identified through the first round of selection. If the clips in the preview indicated that the next episode might contain any themes that I was looking for, I added that episode to the list of episodes to be watched and coded, as well.

The run time for episodes in seasons one through the tenth episode of season six are usually about 22 minutes long, with the exception of “specials” that may run anywhere between 45 minutes to an hour in length, such as the remainder of the episodes in season six in which Kim marries Kris Humphries. Episodes in seasons seven through 14 tend to run roughly 45 minutes long. In viewing these episodes, I took note of any time that there is a sign, symbol, or discourse concerning a beauty treatment, plastic surgery, clothing described as used to “look good,” cosmetics, or anything else that directly relates to a woman’s image. I paused the show and wrote out the transcripts or any notes that I had related to these signs, symbols, or discourse in an online document format. Additionally, I looked for ties to consumerism and class in the discussion of image enhancement, whether it was shown through imagery or discussed verbally. From there, I solidified a set of major themes that stood out during the process of coding and used them to understand the meaning of the data that was collected. Upon compiling a list of these major themes, I created a file online entitled “Themes” and assigned color codes to each of the themes that I had been searching for as well as those that had emerged. After that, I revisited every episode’s transcript and highlighted the notes or quotes, color-coding them according to the theme that they fall under. I then created an online text file for every theme and copied and pasted the color codes into their respective theme Word document, including any notes that I had
written about them previously, as well as the season and episode to which the quotes or notes belonged. Here, I took some time to analyze the information I moved over and put it in a “note” on that particular block of information (the note or quotes). I then used this to make sense of the data and draw conclusions from it to answer the research questions that guide this study.
Chapter 4: Analysis

After examining the selected episodes, four major themes occurred throughout the series: the use of plastic surgery and beauty treatments, focus on a woman’s career, criticism of a person’s appearance, particularly within the Kardashian-Jenner family, and product placement.

Plastic Surgery and Beauty Treatments

The first theme that I will analyze is the widespread usage of plastic surgery and beauty treatments throughout this series. Although there are numerous instances of plastic surgery or beauty treatments throughout the series, I will only highlight prominent scenes from across the show.

The first major instance of self-monitoring through a beauty treatment that occurred in the episodes that were watched is seen in season three, episode three. Kourtney and Khloe go to a liposuction clinic so that Khloe may inquire into the procedures offered by the clinic. While in the waiting room, Kourtney asks Khloe, “Why are you getting this? You don’t need lipo. You have not a dot of cellulite on you,” to which Khloe retorts, “It doesn’t matter if I have cellulite. I am larger than large.” In postfeminism, the female body requires relentless discipline and regulation as a result of modern society’s “painful and punishing control over women’s bodies” (Joseph, 2009, p. 238). Contemporary media culture applauds techniques like plastic surgery, and thus sets a stipulation that, in order to preserve a youthful appearance and attitude as women age, women should undergo plastic surgery and beauty treatments (Tasker & Negra, 2014). These cosmetic procedures are seen as an autonomous ways for a woman to increase her self-confidence. This idea stems from the “makeover paradigm” that Gill (2007) argues “constitutes postfeminist media culture” (p. 156). The “makeover paradigm” assumes that a woman can fix
her “flawed” life through consumerism and the “commodification of difference,” like paying for a cosmetic procedure or surgery (Gill, 2007, p. 254).

Khloe wants to monitor and adjust her body to combat negative media comments concerning her appearance, which Kourtney discusses in an on screen interview (OSI), even though she does not have cellulite that “needs” to be “gotten rid of.” Kourtney states that people compare Khloe to her and Kim when they stand together, adding that Khloe is 5’9” tall, and Kourt and Kim are closer to five feet tall, making Khloe look much larger than them because of their height differences. Due to this comparison, Khloe experiences episodes of extreme self-consciousness and attempts to adjust her body to fit the standard of beauty to which the media subject her, calling herself an “obese fat cow” and telling the doctor that, “When I wave, nothing should wave back at you.” Khloe tells the doctor that she wants to get lipolysis, but that Kourtney does not want her to do it. The doctor offers her less invasive options, and presents her with information on the Velashape procedure, explaining the process on camera to both Khloe and Kourtney and the consuming audience. The camera pans to an advertisement on the table next to Khloe for the Velashape procedure, resulting in a form of product placement, which is another major theme observed throughout the series. Khloe decides to go through with the Velashape option, and the actual procedure is shown to the audience. The doctor applies a gel on Khloe’s stomach, then takes a large wand that looks similar to a vacuum and moves it back and forth across her stomach, sucking on the skin, turning it bright red. Gill (2007) argues that in postfeminism, features such as body shape or size are seen as problems that women must self-monitor, but this monitoring is often presented as a pleasurable activity in which a woman spoils herself. Khloe is self-monitoring her body shape and size, because she sees these things as problems that need to be fixed due to comments made by the media. However, during the
procedure, Khloe and Kourtney crack jokes and laugh together, framing the procedure as a fun, bonding experience for the sisters.

At the beginning of season five episode five, Kris and her daughters are together in the kitchen talking when Kris pulls out a strand of Kim’s hair and exclaims, “Look at this! Look, look! That’s a grey hair!” Kim defends herself, refuting Kris’s claim, and they end up bantering back and forth, insults flying. Kris calls Kim “Wrinkle Eyes,” and points at her eyes, saying, “You’ve got a couple of creases there that are getting a little deep.” Kim retorts, “Yeah, because I haven’t done botox like you.” Kris warns her daughter, telling her that she “better start, because stress really ages you. Like, major.” In an OSI, Kim states, “I’m not even 30 yet. Lines on my face are totally unacceptable,” then tells her sisters back on camera that she is not “opposed” to botox and is willing to try it. Khloe tries to tell Kim that she is beautiful and calls on Kourtney to chime in, asking her “Do you see one wrinkle on her face?” Kourtney asks her sisters if she has wrinkles on her face, and Kim tells her, “You could just fill in a little under your eyes.” Shocked, Khloe cries out, “She doesn’t need to do anything! You don’t have wrinkles. You guys are all nuts.”

Postfeminist theory is arguably pervasive in popular culture, especially in reality television shows (Tasker and Negra, 2014). As discussed in chapter two, makeover television shows promote the use of cosmetic procedures to maintain a youthful appearance as a woman’s body ages (Tsaousi, 2017). Kris tells Kim that “stress really ages” a person, and that Kim “better start” using botox like Kris has to prevent stress from aging her. Additionally, Kim comments in an OSI that she is “not even 30 yet” and that wrinkles on her face are “totally unacceptable.”

Kim, a woman of only 29 years old, decides to go see her doctor for a botox consultation to prevent the effects of her stressful career from aging her any further. Meanwhile, Khloe
encourages Kim not to get botox injections, because she does not have wrinkles that “need” to be “filled in.” She tells Kim at the doctor’s office that she fails to see why Kim would undergo botox injections, and Kim tells her that the procedure is “completely painless and harmless.” The doctor comes in and says “Welcome to Lift,” as a form of product placement. During her consultation, Kim asks the doctor what the side effects are. He says that “serious side effects are very rare, but the benefits outweigh the side effects.” Kim decides to proceed with the injections, and the doctor offers her some numbing cream, which she turns down, saying, “I think I can handle it. I have a high tolerance for pain.” Khloe calls her “nuts,” and Kim adds, “All my friends do it with no numbing cream.” Though Kim recognizes that there could be potential side effects to the procedure and that the injections can be somewhat painful, calling for numbing cream, she decides to receive the injections regardless, because she “needs” to undergo this kind of procedure in order to preserve a youthful appearance. She also states that “all” of her friends receive the injections without the numbing cream, which indicates that botox injections are a common procedure for women fighting the aging process. These women are partaking in a kind of “guilt-free consumerism” that leads to the normalization of pricy beauty treatments to women who identify as middle to upper class. Kim asks her sister if she looks younger just after receiving the injections, to which Khloe says, “Three to five days sweetheart, but if you feel it, that’s all I want.” Khloe telling Kim that she only looks a few days younger, but that if she feels younger, that is all she wants for her supports the postfeminist assertion made by Tasker and Negra (2014), which says that plastic surgery should be used to preserve both youthful appearances and attitudes.

In the remainder of the episode, Kim experiences an allergic reaction to the botox, leaving her with painful bruises under her eyes. Kim declares that she will never receive botox
injections again, and Kris asks her to promise her that she will keep her word. However, in an OSI afterwards, Kim reflects on the experiences and says, “When I looked in the mirror and saw how bruised and swollen my face was, I cannot believe that I put myself through this. I will never do this again... Well, at least not until I’m like, 40.” Although Kim “promised” her mother she would never again receive botox treatments after Kris teased her into receiving them, she adds a clause: her promise will stay true until she is “like, 40.” In postfeminist theory, we see the desire to prevent the appearance of aging, and if it requires pain, swelling, and discomfort from an allergic reaction, then it is something that the woman has to deal with in order to fulfill the greater desire to appear younger.

In season 14 episode 14, Kris begins noticing that her earlobes have gotten bigger as she has aged. She looks for something to cover them up for an event she is attending that weekend. Khloe tells Kris that she is nitpicking and that she does not have big earlobes. The girls help her try to find a solution to “fix” her problem, trying out earmuffs, a turban, a beanie, a fur hat, and even hair extensions in an effort to draw attention away from her ear lobes. Kourtney eventually sings a taunting song about Kris’s earlobes, which makes her want to “fix” them even more, saying that all she wants is “cute ears.” In an OSI, Kris says, “I really like to look my best at all times, and ever since Kim made a comment about my ears I’ve always wondered and now I’m looking in the mirror obsessively, like, are they too big? What was she talking about? But I think that the decision to do something about my ever changing ears is suddenly a priority.” While Khloe and Kourtney seem to think that Kris’s obsession with her earlobes is ridiculous and laughable, Kim empathizes with Kris, saying, “I get it,” implying that she understands why Kris is self-monitoring and why she would like an earlobe reduction.
Later in the episode, Kris introduces Dr. Jason Diamond as a “world renowned surgeon who specializes in plastic surgery of the face,” in an OSI, resulting in a form of product placement for Dr. Diamond. Kris says that due to his prestige as a surgeon, she is confident that Dr. Diamond will be able to, “get everything kind of moved up to kind of the right place [sic].” During their conversation, we see Kris’s Chanel-brand backpack in the frame on top of a table. Dr. Diamond tells Kris that there are simple things that he can do to make a “big difference.” He then proceeds to pull up a computer program with an image of Kris on it and shows her and Kim, who went to the doctor’s office with her, how he would reduce the size of Kris’s earlobes. He tells Kris, “So what we do is cut out a wedge of tissue that looks something like this. So all that is gone, and it just brings this up, like this. The procedure takes about 30 minutes. It looks good in three days.” He then reassures her, saying, “You would love it. It’d be great.” In shock, Kris responds, “Who knew you could do that?!” Dr. Diamond reinforces her desire to self-monitor and prevent the aging process from showing by responding, “Yeah. That alone will take five, ten years off of you. Just the earlobe reduction.” Kris tells the doctor that her earlobes are “out of control,” and Dr. Diamond tells her, “It’s a common saying as we get older, our nose and our earlobes grow, so…” to which Kris replies, “It’s so annoying.” Kris presents her earlobes as “troubles” that necessitate self-monitoring and adjustment, and uses plastic surgery to “fix” the “problem.” Cosmetic procedures such as this surgery are tools that women use to increase their self-confidence, and are also a form of “guilt-free consumerism” (Gill, 2007; Tasker & Negra, 2014, p. 3). Kris’s use of plastic surgery to adjust her body and “fix problems” that arise with the aging process are part of the “makeover paradigm” that “constitutes postfeminist media culture” (Gill, 2007, p. 156). Dr. Diamond telling Kris that the earlobe reduction surgery will take “five, ten years” off of her appearance reinforces the idea that, as a
woman ages, she can still maintain a youthful appearance so long as she participates in “guilt-free consumerism” and uses plastic surgery to monitor and maintain her body.

The procedure, as most plastic surgeries that occur throughout the series, appears on screen for the audience’s consumption. The earlobe reduction surgery is seen to be a fairly simple, quick process, with little pain involved due to anesthetic. Kim watches the surgery from the doorway, and in an OSI admits that, “ Watching this is crazy and uncomfortable, but you know what? Do what you got to do. If you have to cut half your ear off, all good. I’m here to support you.” After her earlobes are mostly healed, Kris appears to have newfound self-confidence, showing off long, dangly earrings to her children, and proudly proclaiming, “This is like, the new me.” This idea that a woman should do what she has to do to make herself feel more self-confident and that her decisions will be supported by her family is a recurring theme throughout this series. Reality television shows such as *KUWTK* show a powerful relationship between the desire to change and woman’s endless pursuit to make her body perfect (Tasker & Negra, 2014). Celebrities, including reality television show celebrities, represent cultural norms, so the postfeminist acts of self-monitoring and “fixing” through plastic surgery and other beauty procedures shown in *KUWTK* are thought to be typical and even expected of the average person (McClain, 2014).

A Woman’s Career

Throughout the series, a woman’s career is often discussed or celebrated in various ways. Sometimes, this career celebration manifests itself in episodes where the audience follows the moments up to the launch of one of the women’s new product or line, resulting in a form of advertising and brand placement for their businesses, whereas on other occasions, the career is presented as taking precedence over many other things happening in a woman’s life. Feminist
culture allows a woman to choose her own career, and emphasizes the importance of having opportunities for women in the career world. These “career girls” take control of their own success in the workplace. However, in postfeminism, a woman celebrates the ability to be on a level playing field with males that feminists fought for and achieved, and she is offered the same chances to be successful in the corporate world (Kauppinen, 2013, p. 84; Tasker & Negra, 2014). There are moments in the series in which traditional family values clash with feminist ideas of being a successful career woman. In this section, I will address the various ways that “career girls” are presented in KUWTK.

In season three episode eight, Kim is with Reggie Bush, her boyfriend at the time, at his home in New Orleans. She says that the couple has been together over a year and a half, and that they are in a “strong, committed relationship,” and she explains that they are currently in a long-distance relationship. She adds that the couple used to be able to spend a lot of time together, but that her busy schedule has been keeping them apart, saying, “I guess that’s the price you have to pay.” In the next scene with Reggie, Kim is back in Los Angeles, and the two are video-chatting online. Kim explains to Reggie that she will not be able to attend his brother’s birthday party due to a photoshoot she has scheduled for a magazine, telling him that the photoshoot is for the cover of a magazine and that it is a “big deal.” Reggie understands, and in an OSI, Kim elaborates more, listing all of the things she has been doing for work that have been keeping her busy. While Kim is speaking, footage of her at various photoshoots and business ventures (such as her shoe company with Robert Shapiro, Shoedazzle) appears on the screen. Kim says, “My career is just on the up-and-up. I’ve got this momentum going, so no matter what it is in my life– Reggie and my friends, everyone needs to understand that I am on this train, that is not going to stop, and I need to be dedicated and focused on my career right now.” Over lunch with her sisters and
a friend, Kim complains that her and Reggie are not going to be able to see each other for quite some time due to her professional obligations. While at a photoshoot, Kim’s co-manager, Pilar DeMann, tells her that someone was wanting to “book” her for an event on the same weekend that Kim was supposed to attend a football game in New Orleans to watch Reggie play. Kim tells Pilar that she is supposed to be in New Orleans, but then decides, “Work comes first so it doesn’t matter, just book it. I’ll talk to Reggie.” In an OSI, Kim reflects, saying, “I feel really bad, but there’s no way I can go– I’m so busy, and I just hope he understands.” The camera pans back to Kim getting her photos taken at the photoshoot, and then her cell phone begins ringing. The camera shows the phone which says that Reggie is calling her, then pans to Kim who is posing for photos.

Later, we see Reggie and Kim video-chatting online again. Reggie tells Kim that he has been busy preparing for his first game, and that he cannot wait for it. Kim says she cannot wait to watch it...on television. Reggie, visibly saddened, says, “You can’t come?” to which Kim explains that her schedule is just “so hectic” and that she does not think that she can get out of her career commitments. Reggie tells her that he is not trying to make her feel bad, though she feels as if he is, and says, “It’s just really not cool.” A while later, Kris finds out that Kim is not going to be at Reggie’s first game, and tells her daughter that she should not miss it. Kim explains that she has a contract to appear at an event, and cannot break the contract. In an OSI, Kris confesses that Kim is a “workaholic” and that she, “doesn’t leave a lot of room for her personal life.” Eventually, after Kris explains the importance of supporting Reggie at his season opening game, Kim decides to cancel her career commitments and go to New Orleans for the game. After the game, Kim states in an OSI, “Spending time in New Orleans has made me realize that I have been putting my career as my number one priority, and it’s Reggie that needs...
to be my number one priority. He makes me happy, and in order for all of this to keep on going the way it’s going, I need to kind of switch gears a little bit and balance everything out.” In this episode, we see emphasis put on the various opportunities available to Kim that she can take to help advance her career. Kim has been able to choose her own career, and has an abundance of opportunities available to her throughout the episode, from photoshoots, to establishing business partnerships to form companies like ShoeDazzle, to appearing in movies, making appearances at events, and so on. Kim puts her career over her relationship with Reggie numerous times, deciding to make plays for her career rather than putting effort into her relationship. Kris points out that Kim needs to support her boyfriend, playing on traditional values. Kim is extremely career-centered, and Kris explains this in an OSI. Eventually, when Kim decides to put her career on the backburner to put Reggie at the forefront of her priority list, we see a complete flip from the “career girl” Kim has been the entire episode to Kim saying that she will put Reggie before her career. This freedom of choice is feminist in nature. Postfeminists celebrate the accomplishments of the feminist movement, and, as an empowered woman, Kim is able to choose how she wants to balance her career and her personal life.

Throughout the series, there are several episodes in which we see a woman struggling to balance her career with her personal life. In season four episode 11, for example, Kourtney and Khloe decide to move to Miami to help get their clothing boutique, DASH, get back on its feet after several of the employees quit. Kourtney reflects on this decision and says, “I really want to be a career mom. Lots of young moms work and raise their children, and I’m confident I can do both, even if that means working in Miami.” Kourtney and Khloe announce their decision to several members of the family, as well as their friend, Jonathan Cheban. While Scott, Kourtney’s boyfriend, is supportive of the move, the girls’ step-father Bruce is not so sure that the move is
the “right” decision for them to make. Directed at the girls, Bruce says, “Don’t you girls think you ought to get real about this thing?” to which the girls ask what he is referring to. He snaps back at Khloe saying, “What do you mean ‘what?’ You’ve been married to Lamar a couple months, and now you’re going to leave him?” Khloe defends herself, telling Bruce that she does not want to leave Lamar and would rather stay. Bruce asks her if things with Lamar are “really going that bad,” and after some backlash from Scott, Khloe, and Kourtney, explains that, “No one would leave their husband after four months and go to Miami.” Bruce then asks Kourtney what her reason is for moving to Miami. In an OSI, Kourtney explains that the store was her idea, that she puts a lot of work into it, and that she wants to see her business be successful so that her son, Mason, can benefit from it. Later, Kourtney says, “This is our store with our name on it. Like, we can’t just let it go to the ground.” Khloe tells Kourtney that the store is essentially her project, and that she will help out Kourtney with the store. However, Khloe makes it clear that she will be going back and forth between Los Angeles and Miami to balance her relationship with her husband with her career. The exchanges within this episode highlight the feminist idea that a woman is autonomous, free to choose how she wants to balance her career and personal life. Though women were once expected to stay home with their children, Kourtney chooses to strive to be a “career mom,” balancing her career and raising her son, Mason. She is able to do this in postfeminism because feminists have fought for this freedom from the chains of inequality and achieved this goal (Gill, 2007). Likewise, Khloe is free to choose how to balance her marriage and her career, free from the chains of the traditional values that Bruce attempts to impose on her.

The final instance of a woman’s career taking priority over other areas of her life, particularly in regard to traditional family values, that I will analyze here is in season six episode 15. This
episode is the second part of the Wedding Special for Kim and her fiancé at the time, Kris Humphries. While packing for her bachelorette party in Las Vegas, Kim holds up an Hermes brand belt and Kris Humphries exclaims, “Wow, an Hermes belt!” to which Kim replies, “With an ‘H’ on it for my new last name.” Kris Humphries clarifies, asking if she means “H” for Humphries. Kim affirms his assumption, and tells him that he will have to buy her “all new Hermes stuff” so that she can have “H’s everywhere.” Kris Humphries then realizes that they never discussed whether Kim would exchange her trademarked Kardashian name for her new husband’s last name. Kim tells Kris Humphries that she will “probably” change her last name. He says, “You’re just saying that. You wouldn’t actually do that. Khloe would do that for Lamar. Are you actually going to do it?” Kim tells him that she will in fact change her name, and in an OSI, she says, “Kris is a really traditional guy, and I know it would mean the world to him if I changed my last name to Humphries,” highlighting the traditional family values that Kris Humphries holds. Kris tells her happily, “That just shows how down you are for your man and how traditional you are,” and Kim agrees, saying, “I’m the downest beeeeeetch [sic].”

Later at her bridal shower, Kim’s mother Kris overhears her telling her friends that she plans to take her soon-to-be husband’s last name, and calls an emergency meeting with Kim in her office. In an OSI, Kris expresses disbelief that Kim would change her last name to Humphries, and declares that she will not allow her to change her name. Kris tells Kim that she cannot change her name because she is “incorporated,” and points to Kim’s signature fragrance, which says “Kim Kardashian, Inc.” Kris argues with Kim, using the logic that Britney Spears did not change her name, so neither should she. Later, we see Kris looking to Kourtney for confirmation that Kim should not change her name. However, Kourtney tells Kris that she thinks Kim should do what she wants to do. Then, to no avail, Kris tries to get Khloe on her side. Kris sets out to
prove a point, devising a re-branding plan for Kim’s products, and coming up with potential products that she could sell using the name “Humphries.” Her message is ill-received by Kim once more. Khloe eventually asks Kim what she plans to do with the products that she has under her Kardashian name should she change her last name to Humphries, and adds that she took on her husband Lamar’s last name, but changed her middle name to Kardashian to keep her name as well. Kim ultimately decides that she will not change her name whatsoever due to the career that she has built up. Kris Humphries becomes visibly bothered by Kim’s decision to keep her last name, and Kim defends herself by saying that keeping her name is better for her career.

At first, Kim wanted to change her last name to Humphries in an attempt to please a man (her soon-to-be husband) who holds very traditional values, saying that it would “mean the world” to him if she were to take his last name. Throughout the episode, Kim battles her deep desire to keep her last name for career purposes and her desire to please her future husband. Eventually, after several women in her family point out the various career issues that she may face if she were to abandon her Kardashian name, Kim fully realizes that changing her name to please Kris Humphries would not be a smart move for the career that she has been working endlessly to build up. In postfeminism, feminists have achieved the freedom of choice to decide whether to take someone else’s last name in marriage or to keep their own. Kim celebrates this success of feminism and is able to choose to keep her last name for the sake of her career. Kim is responsible for her own successes as a career woman, and as such, she believes that the best option to further advance her career would be to preserve her Kardashian name. Although Kris Humphries has more traditional viewpoints of how marriage should be, what a woman should do when she gets married, and is clearly upset when Kim defies those traditions, Kim is able to put her foot down, showing that she is equal to him and autonomous. She is able to make decisions
for herself, deciding to “have it all” by getting married to Kris Humphries and by also making a judgment call regarding what is best for her climb up the corporate ladder. We can see how this example confirms research by Patrick, 2017, Kauppinen, 2013, and Tasker & Negra, 2014.

**Commentary on a Person’s Appearance**

A common theme throughout the series is commenting on another woman’s appearance. These comments can be positive and complimentary, sarcastic, mean-spirited, or just general remarks, such as, “You look pretty today,” or “I like that outfit.” Some comments, however, can be extremely impactful and set the tone and theme for the episode.

In season 11 episode one, Kim exclaims to Khloe, “Look at you! How is your stomach so flat? You are such a freak. This is the Khloe I love. This is the best shape you’ve ever been in.” Khloe, as seen throughout the series, has struggled with her weight and feeling comfortable in her own skin. Khloe has trimmed down and become more focused on physical fitness, and Kim says that this is the Khloe that she “loves,” (which implies that she is proud of her sister’s successes and not necessarily that she did not love her before, but that she is happy that Khloe is doing well for herself). Rather than accepting the compliment, Khloe talks down on herself, telling Kim that she does not believe she is “there” yet. Kim says that she has been saying that for “two years now,” and that she does not have any idea how she is going to get any “closer” because her “belly button is tiny” (implying that the belly button is a sign of a person’s thinness). Through their conversation, Kim decides that Khloe needs to be the sister to represent the sister’s brand. Kim says, “I feel like our brand is known for being sexy, and there is nothing sexy about me. Kourtney doesn’t really bring the sexy. I’m not gonna lie. It’s all up to you now. Let me pass the baton onto you now. You’ve got to do some sexy shoots.” Here, Kim is telling Khloe that the Kardashian brand is known because of the girls’ “sexiness.” Kim is very pregnant
at this time, so she does not feel “sexy,” and she does not believe that Kourtney has the sex appeal required to promote their brand. Since Khloe has recently lost weight and is in very good shape, Kim wants Khloe to show off her body and participate in Magazine photoshoots to continue promoting the Kardashian brand as “sexy.” Khloe is uncomfortable with the idea of doing a photoshoot in minimal clothing, but Kim tells her that if she were to do a photoshoot in a two piece bikini, it would “be a sensation.” Khloe does not want to proceed with the idea, but Kim coerces her into it, telling her she has no choice. Kim believes that Khloe is in the “best shape ever,” and she thinks she should “show it off” to help her confidence.

After a few scenes, we arrive back at the theme of this episode. Khloe reflects on her interactions with people who have told her that they were looking at old pictures of her and that she used to be “so big.” Kim encourages her to do photoshoots because, in her mind, Khloe’s new photoshoots will replace the bad ones. Kim reveals to Khloe that she booked her for the cover of Complex Magazine, and warns her not to turn down the opportunity. Khloe worries, saying that the people who grace the cover of Complex Magazine have the “best bodies” and she does not believe that she can do that. Though Khloe has self-doubt, Kim wants to push her in an effort to build her self-confidence, because she is in the “best shape.” Khloe states that she is very thankful for Kim’s support and encouragement, but that she fears putting herself “out there like that.” In the end, Khloe follows through with the photoshoot, and in an OSI, recognizes that Kim was right to push her. She says that she is very proud of her own progress and wants to embrace her body, but does feel a lot of pressure.

In true “postfeminist” fashion, Khloe sees her body as something that necessitates the kind of relentless discipline, monitoring, and adjusting (Joseph, 2009). In postfeminist theory, women are encouraged to judge themselves and others on their beauty, and they should also
always be and feel both “sexy and desirable” (Evans & Riley, 2013). Kim judges Khloe based on her beauty, and even uses Khloe’s belly button size as a benchmark by which to judge her thinness. Kim says that Khloe is in the “best shape ever,” and since she is, she should feel “sexy” and want to do photoshoots that show off her body that she has been monitoring. Khloe tells Kim that she is not where she wants to be yet, and does not feel comfortable doing a revealing photoshoot because of that. Khloe saying that she is “not there yet” is illustrative of the idea that women should be constantly monitoring themselves, which is a concession of “postfeminism.” Though Kim reassures Khloe that she looks incredible, postfeminist theory suggests that Khloe should not accept this, and should continue to monitor her body. Although Khloe does not initially want to participate in a “sexy shoot” because she feels as though she does not have the “ideal” body for one, she winds up feeling empowered and experiences an increase in self-confidence as a result of embracing her body and using her sex appeal and beauty to show it off; she still feels pressure to be “sexier” and more physically attractive.

In season 12 episode 17, Khloe tells Kim that there is “something” about Kim that is making her envious of her, from her make-up to her body, and asks her who did her make up that day. Kim responds in shock, smiling and saying, “Whaaaat? You’re like, the skinniest person ever.” Kim seems to be almost proud of herself, pleasantly surprised at Khloe’s envy, and happy that she is envied by the “skinniest person ever.” Khloe tells Kim that she has always been envious of her because of her body, but during Kim’s two pregnancies, she felt better about herself. Now that Kim has her body and sex appeal “back,” however, Khloe is starting to be envious again. The two girls banter back and forth about things they are jealous about the other person, and the conversation leads to a discussion of Khloe’s breast size. Khloe states in an OSI that her weight loss has resulted in all over fat loss. Because of this, she lost some extra weight in
her chest, and she now feels as if she has lost her cleavage and is more “bottom heavy.” Khloe expresses that she desires to have an hourglass figure, and this leads to her exploring the possibility of getting breast implants.

Khloe judges herself and Kim on their beauty, and expresses her jealousy to Kim. This normalizes the postfeminist idea that it is acceptable to be envious of other women, and to compare oneself to other women. Khloe was more self-confident when Kim was not “sexy” by cultural standards because she was pregnant, but now that Kim has been self-monitoring and working steadily to get back her sex appeal, Khloe has begun to be jealous of her once again. Kim was surprised and seemingly pleased to hear of Khloe’s envy, which shows that sparking jealousy in another woman boosts one’s own self-confidence. Furthermore, the girls continue to compare each other and judge each other based on different aspects of their physical appearance, arguing back and forth about things that the other woman has. This results in a conversation concerning Khloe’s breast size, which loops back to seeking plastic surgery as a method of self-monitoring and adjusting in the “makeover paradigm” that is allowed in postfeminist theory.

In the 10th anniversary special episode at the beginning of season 14, host Ryan Seacrest addresses different milestones in each of the Kardashian-Jenners’ lives. In Khloe’s segment, Ryan touches on her physical transformation over the years. We see Khloe go from having low self-esteem and being known as the “fat sister” to an empowered, career woman who is committed to her personal health and fitness. The video clip shown touches on various moments in Khloe’s life, such as scenes from her show, Revenge Body with Khloe Kardashian, and footage concerning her product line, Good American. Once Khloe comes out on stage, Ryan asks her how she feels about seeing all of those moments throughout her life, and she says “That was fucking terrifying. It’s weird, because at the time, I never thought I was fat myself. I would call
myself fat because everybody else called me fat.” Ryan asks her if she feels better now and she says she does. However, she clarifies that this is not because of the way she looks, but is instead about the way she thinks. Khloe suggests that though she did not think she was fat, but that the pressures of society and the expectations of beauty forced her to exert the “painful and punishing control” Joseph (2009) says women must have over their bodies to fit beauty standards (p. 238).

The way that this footage is presented and the order in which it is shown indicates that it was only with Khloe’s physical transformation that she was able to have the confidence to experience successful career moves, like her “Revenge Body” show or the Good American line. In postfeminism, the “new genre of makeover TV shows” encourages transformations through plastic surgery or other beauty procedures. Although Khloe has not had full-blown plastic surgery to achieve her current appearance, she has experienced a transformation on the reality television show. Makeover television shows typically follow a pattern of showing the journey of a woman’s personal struggles, her choices, her eventual triumph over her situation, and eventually, how she has completely transformed her life by changing her physical appearance.

The celebration of a woman’s physical transformation and its connection to a transformation in her life tells the show’s audience that “appearance is one’s character and capacity for achievement” (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p. 268; Becker, Thomas, & Cope; 2016). Though KUWTK does not follow this pattern for every single episode and is not a show within this genre, this particular episode does exhibit this pattern. As such, the way that Khloe’s journey since beginning KUWTK has been portrayed here (struggle, transformation, career success as a result of the transformation) suggests that changing her appearance resulted in her “capacity for achievement,” or her success as a career woman.
In season 14 episode two, after unflattering bikini pictures of Kim in México celebrating Kourtney’s birthday get published online, Kim experiences a drastic decrease in self-confidence. Kim says that people think that she is “so self-confident” and “so secure,” but that she is actually very insecure and cannot handle the comments people are making about her. Her friends encourage her to comment “LOL” on the photos to show that she is not bothered by it and that she is “in on the joke,” but Kim just “likes” the photo and comments “gorg” on it. She begins to self-monitor and worry about her appearance, and it gets to the point where it begins to ruin her vacation. She critiques her body, finding areas with cellulite and saying that she always covers the area on her thigh that she has cellulite in. She picks apart the photo that was posted with her long-time best friend Jonathan Cheban, and they are in shock about how much cellulite the picture makes her appear to have on her legs and buttocks. In an OSI, Kim confesses that hearing enough of the negativity about her body can get to her and give her a “complex” because of what people in the media or public say. She begins to let the photo control her future decisions, such as whether she should attend the “Met Gala” event in the next episode or not. She fears that if she attends the Gala, she will obsess over what people may be thinking about her the whole time (which may be narcissistic on her end). This particular instance touches on a lot of self-monitoring and self-esteem issues, showing that the Kardashians are relatable and that they experience self-esteem issues as well. However, this could also be interpreted as the Kardashians putting on an act to try to be relatable to the audience.

In season 14 episode three, we get a kind of “backstage” look at the girls getting ready to attend the Met Gala. As Kylie gets fitted for the event, she tells her designers how she would like her dress to be tailored, cinching it tightly around her waist and hips and asking for it to be tight enough in those areas that she should “kind of suffocate.” She adds that she wants her body to
look “crazy” and needs to “not be able to breathe, like the whole time.” We also see older sister Kim getting fitted, telling the designers that she wants her dress to be “cellulite proofed” and wants a “barrier” in it, before focusing on her pose for pictures, saying, “I can’t be too much like this,” jutting her hip out to one side. Keeping her hips straight and flat, she says, “I need to be more like this to where I look skinnier.” Upon getting in the van that will take the girls to the Gala, Kim sacrifices comfort for style and beauty by sitting in a very awkward looking position to prevent her dress from wrinkling. Though she tries to prevent wrinkles from appearing in the fabric, the simple act of sitting wrinkles her dress slightly, so she has her “glam team” blow dry the wrinkles out of the fabric. Though she was warned that using a blow dryer in the van may blow a fuse, Kim brushes off the warning, saying she does not care because she needs the dress blow dried. As predicted, the fuse blows out and Kim reacts adversely to the situation. Prior to leaving the van to walk out onto the carpet at the Gala, she gets her make-up retouched by her team. This kind of extreme pressure and self-monitoring is partially resultant of the photo of her in Mexico that was released in the previous episode. Kim was initially uncertain whether she would attend the “Met Gala” event due to the negative press surrounding the unfortunate photo. Ultimately, she decided to attend the event, but feels enormous social and self-imposed pressure to look her absolute best at this high-profile event. As a result, she is extremely hard on herself, having the wrinkles blow dried out of her dress and getting her makeup retouched prior to getting out of the van, then wondering if having a full bladder is going to make her stomach look bloated, wondering if she is getting wet marks underneath her breast from sweating, and even laying in an awkward position in the van to avoid getting as many wrinkles as possible. This discomfort is seen not only in this instance, but in earlier instances such as the one in which Kylie explicitly asked for her designers to tailor her dress so tightly to her body, that she will
“not be able to breathe the whole time” and will “kind of suffocate” to give her the hourglass figure that many promote as an ideal, feminine shape in media and advertising. This kind of relentless monitoring comes off as uncomfortable and stressful, but entirely necessary to live up to the beauty standard that Kim and Kylie must uphold as both celebrities and as women (Cashmore, 2006). Kim and Kendall talk about the Gala in an OSI, going through all of the thoughts that run through their head at an event such as this, including, “suck my stomach in, stick my butt out...Chin down, arms down this way.” Kim asks Kendall why they freak out, and Kendall replies, “Because we wanna look good!” This shows that the level of self-monitoring expected of a woman does not end once she arrives at an event, but is a constant, ongoing process that a woman must be aware of and participate in at every step of the way (Cashmore, 2006; Joseph, 2009).

Later in the same episode, the Mexico picture comes back into the conversation because one of Kim’s friends texted her about it while she was out with her family and friend Jonathan at dinner. In an OSI, Khloe talks about Kim’s situation and relates it back to an earlier misfortunate incident in which Kim was robbed in her hotel room in Paris, France. Khloe feels badly for her sister and defends her, saying that her confidence was destroyed after being robbed and having people make a mockery out of her situation, and that going to Mexico with her sister and friends was the first time she had really been back out into the world. Khloe says that being treated this way after all that Kim has been through in recent times is atrocious and uncalled-for. The show follows Kim and Khloe through a workout session with their personal trainer, Joe, and we see them both wearing clothing related to Kim’s husband, Kanye West’s “Yeezy” brand and his musical tours, resulting in an instance of product placement. Kim later asks sister Kourtney, “Kourt, do you think I look skinnier?” to which Kourt responds, “Yeah, you do.” Kim proudly
shares that she has been exercising “three days of, like, an hour and a half” each with her trainer. The rest of the episode consists of Kim venting to her loved ones about the Mexico photo and new paparazzi photos of her coming out. New candid photos were released of her at her friend Chrissy Teigen’s house, and says that she looks, “like, 500 years old. Like, my face was so ugly,” and as a result, says that the media are attacking her saying, “Kim’s aging. Her face is so fucking ugly.” Upon leaving the room, Kourtney, Khloe, and Jonathan begin talking about Kim’s self-confidence issues that have come up as a result of the robbery and the media brutalizing her. Khloe tells Jonathan and Kourtney that Kim has become so insecure that, while at lunch together, Kim asked Khloe to cover her back. When Khloe asks why, Kim says it was because “it is so fat and so wide.” In disbelief, Khloe says, “she literally has the body of a Barbie doll.” Khloe adds that though she can identify with Kim concerning feeling badly about her weight, but that she does not think that anyone should live a life in such fear of going out and constant self-monitoring. Ultimately, the trio decides that Kim needs to stop looking at TMZ and other media outlets posting things such as these, and to devise a plan to take her phone and block those websites without her knowledge so that she can remember “how hot she is.” Kim’s obsession with how she looks and her self-monitoring ends up controlling her everyday life and is largely influential in the decisions that she makes regarding her social life. In postfeminism, celebrities are the epitome of perfection, so Kim has begun relentlessly monitoring her body. This constant control that she has imparted on herself has resulted in her limiting her social outings, avoiding situations in which the public may see her. Kim also participates in the “makeover paradigm” here by viewing her body as flawed in some way, and trying to fix it through consumerism by hiring a personal trainer to help her transform her body.
Product Placement

The last theme that occurs often throughout *KUWTK* is product placement and/or brand placement, which is the “strategic placement of an organization’s name, logo, or products” (Winston, 2017, p. 19). This theme manifests itself in many forms throughout the series, from quick shots of a brand logo, to products placed in the background of a scene, to using part of an episode as a commercial. The theme of brand placement is diverse, ever-present, and is often background noise or disguised under other themes such as pampering and beauty treatments or the celebration of career achievements. Throughout the previous sections of this analysis chapter, I have mentioned different moments of brand or product placement, but feel that it is necessary to dedicate a section to the theme.

Season 12 episode nine focuses on Kylie’s career. In this episode, Kylie is preparing to release more of her famous and wildly popular lipstick and lip liner from her cosmetic line, Kylie Cosmetics. When preparing for the restock of her products, Kylie is shown meeting with female founders of beauty companies on the best way to announce the restock on her social media. The camera pans to show a running diagnostic of the Kylie Cosmetics website on a computer, which is providing Kylie with an idea of how many customers are on the website at any given moment. In a matter of minutes, we see this number jump rather quickly from 16,000 customers to over 100,000. In under thirty minutes, all of Kylie’s new products completely sold out, and all of the women in the room are seen tearing up from happiness from this young woman’s success. Kris, Kylie’s mother, turns to her and proudly proclaims, “Kylie, I think you just launched an empire.” Kylie is an empowered young woman who has been able to successfully choose her own career, attain a life of her own, “have it all” as a young woman, and climb the corporate ladder to establish an “empire.” All of this is feminist in nature, and at first glance, seems to be simply a celebration of Kylie’s success. However, when re-considered, this is multi-dimensional. We can see that this is clear-cut promotion for Kylie’s cosmetics line, and an attempt at hyping up the
brand to show how in demand and popular it is. These episodes are not released in real time, and as such, may air on television months later. Since the audience is then viewing these as past events, they may take the cue that Kylie’s cosmetic line is very popular and in demand by women, so the next time there is a restock, one should be ready to purchase her products immediately should they have the desire for them. Due to the “makeover paradigm” that “constitutes postfeminist media culture,” women may participate in consumerism by purchasing cosmetic products such as Kylie Cosmetics as a way to self-monitor and “fix” their “flawed” lives (Gill, 2007, p. 156). Though cleverly disguised as a celebration of a young woman’s success, this episode is ultimately a commercial for Kylie’s brand, telling audiences that they should want to purchase her products due to their popularity, and likewise, should be ready to purchase them as soon as they are launched.

In season 14 episode seven, we see another instance of using KUWTK as a commercial for a cosmetics brand. This time around, it is Kylie’s older sister, Kim, who is launching a beauty brand. Kim’s best friend Jonathan asks Kim how her younger sister feels about her becoming a makeup mogul now, and Kim tells him that Kylie has been very supportive of her older sister’s career. In an OSI, Kim excitedly reveals that she will be taking on a project of her own and is launching her own makeup line, called “KKW Beauty.” Kim reflects on the fact that she and her sisters have been working under licensing deals for the previous ten years, so it is a big deal and an increase in responsibility for her to go from being a licensee to an owner of a company. She says that this is what she has been “working for for ten years.” In recognition of Kim’s hard work building her brand and career over the past ten years, she will travel to New York to be interviewed at the Forbes Women’s Summit by famed businessman Steve Forbes, editor-in-chief of Forbes Magazine, which Kim refers to as one of the “biggest business magazines in the
world.” Kim resolves to announce her new makeup line at the summit, as there is “no better time
to announce it.”

During her interview with Forbes, the editor-in-chief asks Kim how she handles the naysayers.
Kim states that the things people say do get under her skin, but she has a very supportive family
that is always on her side, and she wants to continue focusing on what is important: her career
and what is “authentically” her. When asked what her best advice would be to someone just
starting out their own careers by Associate Editor of Forbes Natalie Robehmed, Kim states that
there is no denying hard work, so one must push forward and put in the work to be successful.
Kim emphasizes hard work and perseverance and credits those things with being successful in
one’s business endeavors, saying “you cannot deny hard work.” Kim announces her KKW
Beauty line at the Forbes summit, then, then is shown announcing it on The View the next
morning as well. Later, in an OSI, Kim talks about her upcoming launch and how successful she
hopes that it will be, because this has been what she has “been working for for ten years.” This
segment of the episode shows the work that Kim is putting into her launch and the slight anxiety
that she has about the success of it. Throughout the entire episode, we see how successful Kim
has become as a career woman and that she is being validated as such by people such as Whoopi
Goldberg on The View and Steve Forbes of Forbes Magazine. She feels that the KKW Beauty
line is the pinnacle of her ten years of hard work “hustling in the game,” and is excited to have
the launch party at her own home. Similar to the previous episode analyzed in this section, Kim
is shown to be celebrating her hard work and success as a “career girl” who is finally able to
“have it all” and to be highly recognized by businessmen and women. Kim is on a level playing
field with her male counterparts, becoming very successful as a businesswoman and finally
owning her own business. However, once more, we see a drawn out commercial spanning across
the episode under the guise of lauding a woman’s hard work and success as a postfeminist “career girl.” This instance is similar to the launch of Kylie’s Lip Kit restock. Kim’s cosmetic line is being promoted within the show to encourage viewers to purchase her products upon release, as products can only be financially successful if people participate in consumerism. This consumption is related to the “makeover paradigm” that makes up postfeminist media culture. Women purchase beauty products in order to self-monitor and adjust their beauty to meet society beauty standards.

The explicit use of *KUWTK* as a commercial for promoting the Kardashian-Jenner brands under the guise of promoting a woman’s career success is not limited two these two episodes alone. In addition to this form of brand or product placement, there are instances of brand promotion that occur throughout the series in a less noticeable form. In season eight episode 12, Kim becomes enraged with younger sister Kylie upon seeing a photograph of her at a premiere wearing an entire outfit taken from Kim’s closet without receiving permission. Kim tells her best friend Jonathan in shock and anger, “Oh my God. Look, this is my outfit, and those are my shoes. This is my outfit from head to toe!” Jonathan notes that he has seen the shoes that Kylie is wearing before, and Kim states, “They’re like brand new Balmain shoes. I wore them one time in New York.” In disbelief, Kim and Jonathan go to the Jenner house to confront Kylie. Kim confronts Kylie while she is getting ready, telling her, “Nice outfit you wore to the premiere. Where did you get it?” Kylie admits that she used “the closet.” After their conversation Kim walks away, and in an OSI states that she is not going to let it bother her and she will brush it off as Kylie being a “rude teenager.” Later, while at the Jenner house, Kim tells Kylie that she wants to go through her closet and repossess all of the clothing items that she has taken from Kim without her permission or that she has borrowed and failed to return. As Kylie goes through her
closet, rows of high heels are clearly visible in the background. There are at least 12 pairs of heels and they all have red bottoms, which is the signature of high-end designer Christian Louboutin. As Kylie hands back different items of clothing she “thinks” Kim gave her, Kim tells her, “Ok, do you want to hand me this Burberry coat?”

Another example of quick and unapparent brand placement occurs within the first thirty seconds of season 10 episode two in which Scott and Kylie are interacting in the kitchen at the Jenner home. Scott tells Kylie, “You should go to the mall. Go to Cartier. Get yourself one more bracelet,” to which Kylie replies, “My mother says to keep it uneven, so I keep it at seven now.” Scott tells Kylie to go buy more Cartier bracelets, sarcastically, because her wrists are full of them. A similar occurrence is found in season 14 episode 14 while Kris is discussing various ways that she could try to cover her earlobes for an event. Kris and Khloe are talking to one another in Kris’s closet, and there is great distance between the mother and daughter. The camera shot reveals rows of designer handbags on shelves in the background between the two women. It is quite visible that these handbags are high-end fashion brands, showing logos of brands such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, and Gucci. (See photo below).
Although these instances may not be entirely obvious attempts at brand promotion, these are strategic and seemingly planned instances of product placement and intersect with potential social-class issues in the series. Though it is uncertain whether or not the Kardashian-Jenners receive compensation for product placement (sometimes brand logos are even blurred out), the brands that are promoted through tactful and seemingly benign methods tend to be very high-end, expensive designer products. For example, Christian Louboutin shoes similar to the styles in Kylie’s closet in season eight episode 12 cost upwards of $695 (according to his official website, http://us.christianlouboutin.com/). Likewise, upon a quick Internet search on the Cartier website, bracelets like the ones that adorned Kylie’s wrist in season 10 episode two can cost one anywhere from $4,050-$43,600 per bracelet, depending on the style. Louis Vuitton bags cost anywhere between $1,000-$29,500 depending on the style, Gucci bags start at $780 and go up to $31,000, Chanel bags are $2,900 to $11,000 or “price upon request,” and Yves Saint Laurent climb from $995 to $11,900. This kind of brand placement is indicative of participation in
consumer culture as part of the “makeover paradigm,” which includes the purchase of clothing, accessories, and other apparel in addition to cosmetics, beauty treatments, and even plastic surgery procedures (Gill, 2007, p. 254). Celebrities are said to serve as examples of what trends dominate society and also tell audiences how to behave and think. Postfeminism provides new rationale for “guilt-free consumerism” (Tasker & Negra, 2014, p. 3). Though normally, this “guilt-free consumerism” relates to plastic surgery treatments, I argue that it can also apply in the situation of purchasing excess amounts of high-end consumer products, such as designer clothing, bags, and shoes and that these products can be seen as a way to enhance the way that a woman looks, resulting in an increase of self-confidence and relating directly back to the “makeover paradigm” (Gill, 2007, p. 254). These postfeminist ideas of consuming beauty ignore class struggles because a woman’s body image and confidence have been turned into commodities. This can create conflicts for female viewers who are in a lower socioeconomic status when it comes to the need for the self-monitoring and control placed upon women by our “postfeminist media culture” (Joseph, 2009, p. 238; Gill, 2007, p. 249; Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016; Tsaousi, 2017).

At the end of my literature review, I introduced the two research questions that guided this study. In my first research question, I sought to determine if there are interconnections between postfeminism and beauty constructions on KUWTK, and if there are, I want to explore how this relationship may be related to social class constructions on the show. In my second research question, I ask how KUWTK contributes to the defining of and cultural discourse concerning postfeminism. In this chapter, I explored the four major themes that emerged from the episodes that were examined in this study, which are the use of plastic surgery and beauty treatments, focus on a woman’s career, criticism of a person’s appearance, and product
placement within the television series. In postfeminist theory, women are expected to participate in the “makeover paradigm,” relentlessly monitoring and adjusting their bodies to what society tells us is attractive. In *KUWTK*, we see the Kardashian-Jenner women turn to plastic surgery on several occasions as a way to bolster self-confidence or to “fix” a problem that the women see with their bodies. For example, in Season 14 Episode 14 when a self-conscious Kris decides that her earlobes have become a “problem” that need to be “fixed,” she turns to her plastic surgeon. As Kris gets the procedure done in her surgeon’s office, Kim watches and notes that the process is “crazy and uncomfortable” to see, but encourages audience to “do what you got to do,” and claims that she is there to support a person’s decision to undergo a plastic surgery if it makes them feel more confident. If a woman feels her earlobes are growing and she is becoming unattractive because of it, postfeminist theory suggests that she should do something to “fix” her earlobes to become attractive again. This instance, as well as others analyzed in this chapter, shows a relationship between postfeminist theory and the way that beauty is constructed on *KUWTK*.

To answer the second part of the first research question, I will point to the very last theme analyzed in this chapter: product placement. Though instances of brand promotion as product placement may not be obvious to an audience on *KUWTK*, the shoes, jewelry, and clothing that the women wear throughout the series are often shown. These instances may occur when a logo is visible and/or zoomed in on screen, or when the product/brand is being discussed verbally by the women or other people on the show. Upon researching the retail prices for the brands and particular products shown in *KUWTK*, I soon discovered that they are not something the average middle-class or lower-class woman can afford to purchase. These instances of brand placement tie into the “makeover paradigm” in that the women are participating in consumer culture. The
“makeover paradigm” that falls under postfeminist ideology is not limited to “fixing” the body through plastic surgery. This idea encompasses the use of jewelry, clothing, or even make up as a way to dress up the body and make it more attractive. A woman’s self-confidence and feelings about her body are turned into commodities in postfeminism and within *KUWTK*, which may be problematic for women who feel like they need to “keep up” with societal beauty ideals by “fixing” and “adjusting” their bodies, but cannot afford expensive treatments, surgeries, fancy clothing, jewelry, or makeup that are shown to increase a woman’s self-confidence on *KUWTK*.

In regards to my second research question concerning how *KUWTK* contributes to the defining of and cultural discourse concerning postfeminism, I would like to first state that there is not a moment in any of the episodes that I have examined in this study that specifically addresses postfeminist theory. However, both postfeminist and feminist ideas are manifested in various instances and episodes across the series. The various themes that I have explored in this chapter all have a place in postfeminist theory. As discussed above, the way that *KUWTK* shows plastic surgery and beauty treatments as a method of increasing self-confidence and how it is accepted as something that people should do if they want to (“do what you got to do”) is in line with the “makeover paradigm” that occurs within postfeminist theory. Further, the use of clothing and jewelry as a means of enhancing one’s image, but also simultaneously occurring as brand placement, is a way of participating in consumer culture, which also lends itself to postfeminism ideologies.

*KUWTK* also contributes to the definition of the “career girl” in postfeminist theory. Postfeminism says that a woman is free to choose her own career path, is responsible for her own successes, and is given the same opportunities to climb the corporate ladder as males are. When Kylie is celebrated as a successful career woman who “has it all,” we see a woman being
empowered. The way that *KUWTK* showcases career women and their successes is always positive and empowering in the episodes analyzed for this project, and contributes to this area of postfeminist theory. Lastly, commenting on a person’s appearance is also postfeminist in nature. In postfeminist theory, women are expected to judge themselves and others based on their appearances. When Kim is attacked in the media for the unflattering photos that were taken of her in Mexico, she is judged by others and feels the need to self-monitor and adjust to prove to the public that the pictures were not indicative of her true beauty. When Kim decides to attend a high profile event like the Met Gala, she judges herself very harshly and upholds herself to high standards, trying to ensure that her outfit, hair, and makeup are perfect so that the public will stop criticizing her. This back and forth criticism and judgment is something that should occur endlessly in postfeminist theory.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the four major themes that surfaced in this study. Additionally, I have restated my research questions and answered them based on the analysis of these four themes. In the next chapter, I will summarize this project, draw some conclusions based on my research, provide some thoughts, discuss what I have learned and how this study makes a contribution to the field, the limitations of this study, and provide suggestions for future research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

I began this study with curiosity concerning the Kardashian-Jenner family and their rise to fame. I began to first look into the history of their reality television show, which is their main promotional platform, before deciding to use the show as the subject of my analysis. I conducted a review of literature, exploring the history and waves of feminism before diving into postfeminism, the various areas of postfeminism such as postfeminism and beauty, postfeminism and class, and even explored the debate about whether or not we are living in postfeminist times. I came up with the research questions that drove this study at the conclusion of my literature review, or chapter two. In chapter three, I chose a methodology based on previous research, and decided to conduct a textual analysis, as I felt this was the best way to answer my research questions. In chapter four, I reported my findings and demonstrated how my data answers the research questions that I came up with after reviewing the literature. In this chapter, I will conclude my research, tell you my thoughts about this study and what I have learned, acknowledge the limitations of this study, and suggest areas for future research should any scholars wish to expand upon this study.

At the beginning of this research, I was interested in researching *KUWTK* due to the show’s and the Kardashian-Jenners’ prevalence in our contemporary culture today. I will admit that I was always perturbed by the Kardashian-Jenner family, and thus carried a slight bias against them because of that. However, since conducting this research, I have grown a respect for the women and their successes, though am slightly bothered by some of the conclusions I have reached. In researching postfeminism and the feminist movement as a whole, I have grown a new respect for the triumphs of the feminist movement and the hard work that feminists have put into achieving successes for women over decades. Initially, I was resistant to feminism, though I did not know much about it. In the interest of having well-rounded research and challenging me as a student, my advisor urged me to complete a review of literature concerning the waves of the feminist movement, rather than sticking to my postfeminist corner. In completing this inquiry
into the feminist movement, I have broadened my knowledge of the feminist movement and have removed biases concerning it.

I set out to discover if and how *KUWTK* contributes to the defining of postfeminism in contemporary culture, and if there is any relationship between postfeminism and beauty constructions on *KUWTK*, and if so, what the relationship is to the way social class is portrayed on the show. Though there are limitations to this research that will be discussed below, its contribution to our current understanding of how postfeminism is defined within contemporary culture is important. *KUWTK* helps to define postfeminism and feminism, which manifests itself through the use of plastic surgery and beauty treatments, celebration of a woman’s career, criticism of a person’s appearance, and through product placement. Though the family members and other key players within the series do not outright mention or discuss postfeminism in the episodes analyzed in this study, postfeminist and feminist ideas occur often throughout the series and are often left open to the audience’s interpretation. However, the audience is sometimes presented with opposing opinions, then told how to feel about them. For example, in season 14 episode 11, during an interview with Kris Jenner, Kareem Abdul-Jaber states,

> You’ve been very open about your own plastic surgery and you say, “A girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do,” but does that send a message to young women that you know their looks are the most important parts of who they are?

Here, Abdul-Jaber highlights the potential for this “a girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do” attitude to be negatively impact young female viewers, but Kris negates the idea that it is harmful by responding,

> I don’t think so. I think everybody has their own beauty at different ages, so I think that if something that you want to do makes you feel better about yourself, then why not? I think everybody has to make their own choice.
This example is one of many throughout the series as discussed in chapter 4. This perspective is postfeminist in nature and contributes to the cultural discourse of postfeminism in media texts. It is important to understand how popular media texts, especially those that have a global reach like *KUWTK*, contribute to the global discussion concerning ideologies such as postfeminism and feminism. Media are a central place for postfeminist thematics to appear, and their messages primarily communicate the idea that a woman’s ability to be successful is tied to her body, and that her life can be transformed by altering her appearance and by consuming beauty products available on the market (Becker, Thomas, & Cope, 2016). The kind of attitude that Kris has here is postfeminist, and tells the audience that they should not feel as if they are negatively impacted by this viewpoint, but should feel as if they have autonomy in making their own decisions concerning taking a particular course of action to increase self-confidence.

Through consuming media that convey these ideologies, females may struggle to “keep up” with the societal standards placed before them. They may begin to have self-esteem issues and turn to disordered eating in an attempt to meet these standards (Murray, 2013). Cashmore (2006) says that the idea of trying to improve one’s appearance in and of itself is not problematic. However, if a woman begins to fixate on the idea of becoming beautiful and obsessively use beauty procedures and treatments to meet societal standards and combat age, the constant search for beauty can become fruitless and result in dissatisfaction with oneself. This is where it can be problematic, as these messages are disseminated to *KUWTK*’s audience. Reality television shows, such as *KUWTK*, exhibit a strong relationship between the desire to change and the endless pursuit to perfect one’s body (Tasker & Negra, 2014). The notions that “a girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do,” and that a woman should use plastic surgery or treatments to make her
feel more confident and better about herself are promoted by the Kardashian-Jenner women throughout the series.

Although I cannot know for certain how the audience interprets the messages concerning beauty in *KUWTK*, I conclude that it is probable that these messages have influenced some female viewers to participate in the ‘makeover paradigm’ and may have a negative impact on the way that they view their own beauty. After all, over nine million people in the United States alone undergo cosmetic procedures and participate in guilt-free consumerism every year. Some scholars attribute this to the prevalence of “perfect” looking celebrities, like the Kardashian-Jenners, that flash across our screens constantly (Cashmore, 2006, p. 100). Messages in *KUWTK* concerning plastic surgery, autonomy in choosing how to “fix” a woman’s body, and the prevalent judgment and criticism of another person’s appearance may lead women to consider their bodies flawed and needing to be “fixed” through consumption (Gill, 2007, p. 254). As a result, they may become one of those nine million people who turn to costly procedures. These costly procedures are not available to everyone, however, so this leads to class issues. If a woman of lower socio-economic class finds herself viewing *KUWTK* and interprets these postfeminist messages as they are presented rather than as simple entertainment, and understands instances of brand placements as things she must have to make her beautiful rather than just product placement in an attempt to cultivate economic growth for that brand, she may find herself in a different struggle than a middle- to upper-class woman may face. This woman may not have the same access to economic resources as a middle- to upper-class woman may have, and thus cannot turn to beauty procedures or products to “fix” herself. However, I concur with Cashmore (2006) in claiming that changing one’s appearance is only problematic if she becomes
fixated on achieving perfection. Thus, I argue that women of all classes may be affected similarly by these messages, whether she can afford procedures or not.

In regard to the celebration of and feminist discourse concerning a woman’s career and her successes, I conclude that the messages in KUWTK may have a positive impact on the show’s audience. This show promotes women as successful “career girls” who are responsible for their own success, are given the same opportunities to be successful as their male counterparts, and that they have the freedom to choose what careers they wish to pursue (Patrick, 2017). These are all successes of the feminist movement, and are celebrated as such. Women are presented as very strong, successful, hard working “career girls” in KUWTK, and are applauded for their successes time and time again within the show. I conclude that the message that women are able to be successful and strong career oriented people that is prevalent throughout KUWTK is largely positive and may encourage women to feel boundless in the pursuit of their dreams.

Finally, I would like to point out that there are some contradictions that occur in the series that contribute to the defining of postfeminism. While the idea that women are autonomous and should do whatever they want to is very progressive and postfeminist, the series can flirt with conservative, traditional values. For example, when Kim was preparing to marry Kris Humphries, she struggled to decide whether or not she would take his last name. She has the traditional belief that taking her husband’s last name is something that a woman is obligated to or should do and wants to make Kris Humphries happy by doing so. This struggle is highlighted quite a bit in that particular episode, and is contradictory to what Kim ends up deciding to do. After persuasion by her mother, Kris Jenner, Kim makes a decision to keep her last name for business purposes against Kris Humphries’ wishes. Though she ended up choosing what was best for her, which happened to go against traditional values, she still had an internal battle with
the idea. Postfeminism recognizes these contradictions, though, and allows for a woman to live in them. She is able to be both traditional and free to make her own choices all at the same time. Kim is thus allowed to be traditional in her thought and occasionally her actions (for instance, when she put aside her job to go support her then-boyfriend Reggie Bush at a football game after her mother told her that she needs to support her boyfriend). A woman can make decisions that best benefit her relationships, but can also take a step back from those relationships and make a decision that is best for her when she needs to. This is evidenced by Kris Jenner telling Kim that she should keep her Kardashian name to protect her brand, but also tells Kim that she should visit her then-boyfriend to support him even though she was supposed to work. This contradiction in *KUWTK* further defines postfeminism by showing that a woman *can* “have it all” and have the best of both worlds. She can be traditional, but can also be a free, empowered woman. Next, I will discuss the limitations of this research study.

**Limitations**

A key limitation of this study is that the episodes selected were chosen based off of the episode description or what was shown in the preview for the episode. As a result, it is probable that there were episodes that contained themes related to those researched in this study that were left out because the episode description did not indicate that the episode discussed these themes. This means that the themes discovered and analyzed in this research may not be reflective of the overall series, and thus makes it difficult to generalize the series as a whole. Nevertheless, a total of 77 episodes were viewed and coded in this study, which is slightly over a third of the 221 total episodes that are currently available. The use of textual analysis to analyze this series is also a limitation of this research. This methodology cannot always tell a critic what the audience’s thoughts and feelings are, and thus leaves these up to the interpretation of the critic. Additionally,
although a dominant ideology may be recognized within a television text, the audience may not understand, receive, or accept the intended message (Dow, 1996). However, as a critic, I have made informed, educated guesses and drawn conclusions concerning how the audience can potentially perceive these prevailing ideologies and discuss how these ideas may impact the audience if they were to understand the message in the way that it is presented.

Another limitation of this study is that KUWTK is only one text out of several other potentially interactive media texts that the women use to reach their audience (potentially at the same time). In other words, this show can be seen as part of a larger structure of social media and promotion, and the television show could also be studied alongside, or in conjunction with, these other texts. This realization, if it is true, could have implications for how media/communication scholars study recent and/or contemporary mediated or tele-visual texts. Rather than focus only on studying one media text, research might suggest that scholars study media through the ways that they become interactive, or at least intersectional, with other media. As aforementioned, the Kardashian-Jenner women probably use social media to connect with a broader consuming audience simultaneously.

Furthermore, there are other issues of race and class on the Kardashian-Jenner social media accounts that could not be explored in this research due to the scope and limitations of this study. For example, the Kardashian-Jenners have been accused of being ethnically ambiguous, chameleon-like women on social media, while they do not explicitly discuss their race on the KUWTK television program. On the other hand, social media behavior reveals how they sometimes appropriate African-American culture. The women also seem to take on different skin colors and hairstyles as they wish. Overall, the women often seem to benefit from ethnic ambiguity, assimilation and an assumed “whiteness,” and perhaps even from white privilege.
Although I would have liked to touch more on the ethnicity and race issues concerning the Kardashian-Jenner family, there was simply not enough data found in the episodes analyzed for this study to support any larger claims concerning ethnicity or race. Furthermore, it would also be helpful to better understand the ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and social background details of the typical 18 to 49-year-old audience of *KUWTK*, in order to attempt to assess who the millions of viewers and social media followers of the Kardashian-Jenners actually are.

In summary, these texts are potentially interactive, meaning that the viewers of *KUWTK* may also follow the lives of the Kardashian-Jenners on social media, in the news, and elsewhere simultaneously. Likewise, there is further potential for examining complex issues related to ethnicity, race, and culture. Additionally, the women often use their social media platforms to promote various products to their audience, so investigating their audience(s) might be useful as well. It is hoped that such limitations from this study can be taken as suggestions for future research to connect *KUWTK* to the other texts used by the Kardashian-Jenner family to define their audience and search for issues of race and class within these texts. Next, I will provide another suggestion for scholars who may wish to expand upon this study.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

As previously stated, it is difficult to know the true thoughts and feelings of an audience through the use of textual analysis, though I can make guesses about the potential effects of messages within the text. I would like to encourage other scholars to continue this research by conducting a study on *KUWTK* using a quantitative approach. By employing a different kind of methodology, a scholar could recruit a group of participants, survey them on their feelings and attitudes concerning various items, such as attitudes towards plastic surgery, measuring their self-esteem, attitudes towards women’s freedom of choice, opportunities in the career world, and
so on. Then, the participants could watch a set of pre-selected episodes of *KUWTK* and be given the same survey once more upon viewing all of these episodes. Although there are limitations with this study as well concerning sample size, it would be interesting to measure the audience’s actual attitudes and feelings rather than making inferences about them. Along with this research, a study like that would greatly contribute to our current understanding of how postfeminist ideologies are portrayed in media and how they are communicated to a consuming audience.
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Appendix

This is the list of episodes selected for this study.

“I’m Watching You” (2007)

“Managing Mom” (2007)

“Brody in the House” (2007)

“Birthday Suit” (2007)

“Remembering Dad” (2007)

“You Are So Pregnant, Dude!” (2007)

“Helping Hand” (2007)

“The Price of Fame” (2007)

“I’d Rather Go Naked… Or Shopping” (2009)

“Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder” (2009)

“Meet the Kardashians” (2009)

“Delivery Baby Mason” (2010)

“Kim’s House Party” (2010)

“Botox and Cigarettes” (2010)


“Dash No More” (2010)

“The Kardashians Take NYC” (2010)

“Kim Becomes a Stage Mom” (2011)

“The Former Mrs. Jenner” (2011)

“Out of Wedlock” (2011)

“Kendall Goes on Birth Control” (2011)

“Getting to Know You” (2011)
“The Family That Plays Together” (2012)
“Cuts Both Ways” (2012)
“We’re Having a Baby!” (2013)
“Enough Is Enough” (2013)
“Life’s a Beach (House)” (2013)
“Kris’s Mother in Law” (2013)
“More to the Story” (2013)
“Close Encounters of the Kardashian Kind” (2013)
“Kylie’s Sweet 16” (2013)
“A Very Merry Christmas” (2013)
“Loving and Letting Go” (2014)
“A Surprise Engagement: Part 1” (2014)
“A Surprise Engagement: Part 2” (2014)
“2 Birthdays & a Yard Sale” (2014)
“The Vienna Incidents” (2014)
“Move It or Lose It” (2014)
“Secrets of a Double Life” (2014)
“Kim’s Journey to the Altar” (2014)
“Somewhere Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (2015)
“The Car Father” (2015)
“No Retreat” (2015)
“On the Road” (2015)

“Don’t Panic!” (2015)

“Lip Service” (2015)

“That Was Then This Is Now” (2015)


“Rites of Passage” (2015)

“The Big Launch” (2016)

“Family First” (2016)

“Fake It Til’ You Make It” (2016)

“Havana Good Night” (2016)

“Khloe’s New Breast Friends” (2016)

“Time to Dash” (2017)

“Paris” (2017)

“The Aftermath” (2017)

“Kim’s Last Ditch Effort” (2017)

“When It Rains, It Pours: Part 2” (2017)

“Classic Cars and Vintage Eggs” (2017)

“10th Anniversary Special” (2017)

“Cleveland Show” (2017)

“MILFs Gone Wild” (2017)

“Cheers To That” (2017)

“Clothes Quarters” (2017)

“Catch Me If You Cannes” (2017)
“Fan-Friction” (2017)
“Beauty Queen” (2017)
“Close To Home” (2017)
“A Very Kardashian Holiday” (2017)
“Baby One More Time” (2017)
“Press Pass” (2017)
“My Mother’s Keeper” (2018)
“Mime Over Matter” (2018)
“Bun in the Oven” (2018)
“Diamonds Are Forever” (2018)
“Tangled Web” (2018)
“Kris Jenner’s Legacy” (2018)
“Trimester Trouble” (2018)
“The Gender Reveal” (2018)
Vita

Jennifer Lynn Handrop was born in El Paso, Texas and graduated from Franklin High School in 2012. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Organizational and Corporate Communication at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in December of 2016. She taught Public Speaking, or COMM1301, from Spring 2017 to December 2018 at UTEP. Jennifer has presented her academic research at several conferences, such as the 2015 Liberal Arts Student Conference at UTEP, the 2018 Women’s History Month Conference at UTEP where she was awarded the Moira Murphy Top Paper Award, and the 2018 National Communication Association 104th Annual Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah. Jennifer is expected to graduate in December of 2018 with her Master of Arts in Communication at UTEP. She will be the Graduate School Banner Bearer and will be awarded the Outstanding Graduate Student Award in the Department of Communication.

This thesis was typed by Jennifer Lynn Handrop.