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NOT BAD FOR A GIRL WITH NO TALENT:
LEISURE AS LABOR IN THE CONSUMPTION OF KIM KARDASHIAN'S BRANDS

by

ABBY O'CALLAGHAN

Under the Direction of Ethan Tussey, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Kim Kardashian's product lines present consumers with leisure labor, a category of consumer identity which manifests under the guise of "self-care" and "me-time." To recontextualize established assumptions of labor and leisure, I will demonstrate the ways that Kim Kardashian's own work bleeds into her personal life, setting a precedent for fans to be "always on". This schema is present in the text of the show, *The Kardashians*, and in the marketing discourse of their products. Fans are encouraged to experience this approach to "self-care" through her brands, specifically SKKN by Kim, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, and SKIMS. I will thus be analyzing these objects to intervene with popular notions of retail therapy as a break from routine and conclude that it is instead a "self-care" routine which reinforces neoliberal ideals of time and space in which one is always producing surplus value.

INDEX WORDS: Kim Kardashian, Leisure labor, Star studies, Retail media, Reality television,
Digital media, Celebrity brands, Influencer, Self-care, Me-time

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2023

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ABBY O'CALLAGHAN

Committee Chair: Ethan Tussey, PhD

Committee: Jade Petermon, PhD

Arianna Gass, PhD

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Academic Assistance

College of the Arts

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

To my sisters, Alexandra and Avery, who have been “keeping up with” the Kardashians alongside me since 2007.

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Special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Ethan Tussey and my committee members, Dr. Jade Petermon and Dr. Arianna Gass.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Kim Kardashian is known for many things, including the title of being famous for being famous. Since her reality show, *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, premiered on the E! Network in October of 2007, Kardashian has had to work hard in order to prove that she in fact works. Borrowing from Kylie Jarrett's interpretation of domestic labor, I define work as "the integral maintenance of capitalism" provided by continually laboring bodies and subjects (Jarrett, 3). Leisure, in turn, can be understood as the enjoyment of free time outside of the maintenance of capitalism. Though these concepts are seemingly at odds, Marxian notions dictate that leisure is justified not as a social expression but by providing a means to increase productivity (Hinman, 196). Leisure, therefore, maintains the optics of rest and relaxation while benefiting industrialism. The Kardashians uphold these values, exemplifying leisure labor.

Working is implicit in Kardashian's self-presentation, with *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* initially portraying the work life balance of Kim and her sisters, Kourtney and Khloe, running their clothing boutique, Dash, while managing family and relationship matters. As their vocation and business ventures have expanded, so too have the themes of labor that they exemplify. Kim's most recent reality series, *The Kardashians*, debuted on the streaming service, Hulu, in April of 2022. Episode five of season two - "One Night In Miami" - portrays Kim and Khloe taking what they deem to be a much needed girls trip to Miami to take a break from hard work and tabloid drama ("One Night In Miami"). The caveat, however, is that Kim is in fact not resting on her vacation but rather continuing to work ("One Night In Miami"). The bleeding of work into life and vice versa is, therefore, the key implication of Kardashian's brand. This is relatable on a universal level; in an age where smartphones have become an omnipresent tech accessory with entry points to "self-care" via mobile games, streaming services, and social media

platforms and employment via email and video conference software, the separation of work from leisure is aspirational, and the melding of the two is a given.

The idea of leisure as labor is one which Kardashian has offered to fans via consumption. Through her skincare brand, SKKN By Kim; mobile video game, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*; and lounge and shapewear clothing company, SKIMS, Kardashian provides consumers with the opportunity to professionalize retail therapy by implementing it as a part of “the grind”. I argue, therefore, that the consumption of Kim Kardashian’s leisure products is a “self-care” routine which reinforces neoliberal ideals of labor in which one is always on, always contributing to the maintenance of capitalism, to the point that our own leisure is understood in terms of capital.

Achieving reality tv stardom necessitates always being on by way of continual labor. Unscripted television programs are not unionized and therefore result in lower pay for hired talent (Hollenbeck). To leverage their fame and make money, reality tv stars must continually seek paid opportunities like appearances and social media sponsorships (Hollenbeck). In this way, they are often always hustling. Whether making notable appearances at TAO Asian Bistro and Nightclub in Las Vegas, endorsing detox teas, or competing on *Dancing With The Stars*, Kim Kardashian has become the poster child for this level of productive self-promotion. In “Keeping Up With The Kardashians: Fame-Work and the Production of Entrepreneurial Sisterhood”, Alice Leppert notes, “For the Kardashians, virtually every minute of every day could be constituted as work” (Leppert, 218-219). From daily minutiae like having a salad for lunch to more personal moments, such as giving birth, every aspect of their lives can be – and often is – publicized, monetized, and licensed content (Bereznak).

The family’s first show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, debuted on the E! Network in October of 2007 and centered on the Calabasas, California based Kardashian - Jenner family, with Kim - who first gained notoriety by being seen around the Los Angeles nightlife scene with

Paris Hilton - front and center as the star of the show (Villareal). Yvonne Villareal states, “Whether you consider this polarizing crew purveyors of a new kind of pop culture savvy or the poster family for the perils of fast fame in the 21st century, there’s no denying that the Kardashians exemplify the ascent of reality TV in American life” (Villareal). Villareal notes that the Kardashian family has not only redefined reality television but the concept of celebrity itself (Villareal). Modern celebrity does not operate through traditional notions of talent but rather through business opportunities and branding. The Kardashians do not market themselves as actors or singers but instead as personalities, and they have generated profit via media and business success through the publicity of self.

Kim’s mom and manager, Kris Jenner, told Villareal that their initial reaction to being offered a show was that it would be great press for their stores - the now defunct clothing boutiques, DASH and Smooch (Villareal). The family’s rise to fame effectively began with marketing in mind and therefore set them on a path to successfully brand themselves through merchandise. As noted by Christie D’Zurilla in an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, there have been accomplishments as well as missteps in the entrepreneurial ventures of the Kardashian family (D’Zurilla). Failures aside, the family continues to launch and endorse products, successfully earning big bucks (D’Zurilla).

This is exemplified on their most recent show for Hulu, *The Kardashians*, which premiered in April of 2022. Whether it’s having a scene filmed in the Kylie Cosmetics offices or filming a business meeting for eldest sister Kourtney Kardashian’s lifestyle blog, POOSH, each episode works in some capacity to market the family brand. Season two, episode five of *The Kardashians*, “One Night in Miami” is notable in that it especially highlights the inability of the sisters - namely, Kim - to separate work from life in this ceaseless promotion of self.

The episode opens with the Kardashian-Jenner family matriarch, Kris Jenner, undergoing hip replacement surgery (“One Night in Miami”). As she recovers in the next scene, her daughter, Khloe Kardashian, sits at her bedside, openly contemplating getting cosmetic plastic surgery (“One Night in Miami”). Within the first few minutes of this episode, enhancement is at the forefront. Improvement is central to the Kardashian brand, with Khloe even stating, “If I’m in a coma, I’m still getting my nails done” (“One Night in Miami”). Whether it's through business or appearance, one must always be working to advance. This is a prominent theme in the episode storyline, which follows younger sister, Kendall Jenner, taking a girls trip to Las Vegas to promote her liquor brand, 818 Tequila, and Kim Kardashian taking what she calls a mom’s night out to Miami to promote the launch of a swimwear pop up shop under her line of clothing and shapewear, SKIMS (“One Night in Miami”). Inherent in these plots is the implication that work and leisure must bleed together if one values themselves as much as their personal brand.

In a later scene, Kim walks into Khloe’s kitchen; scanning her outfit, she asks “Is that SKIMS?”. Pointing to different items of clothing on her person, Khloe responds “SKIMS, Good American, Yeezy”, respectively sporting the clothing lines of Kim, herself, and Kim’s ex-husband, Kanye West (“One Night in Miami”). Perfectly segueing, Kim says, “Speaking of SKIMS, I am launching swimwear, so we’re gonna go to Miami” (“One Night in Miami”). She adds that she and Khloe need to get away, as they have had an incredibly stressful few weeks, and invites her sister to go on the trip with her (“One Night in Miami”). In the confessional, Kim boasts about how proud she is of the swimwear launch and the success of her business, stating “I definitely take a minute to soak it all in, but not too long because I just need to keep grinding” (“One Night in Miami”). Thus, Kardashian underscores how important labor is to her image.

With friends tagging along, Kim calls the getaway a “mom’s night out” (“One Night in Miami”). Upon landing in Florida, she immediately gets into work mode, saying “While we’re

here in Miami I have to host the SKIMS dinner tonight and go to our pop up. I have to have a fitting with a corset maker, shoot tons of stuff in between. It's nonstop", later adding "I try to kill as many birds with one stone as possible" ("One Night in Miami"). While Khloe attempts to relax in the hotel room, Kim is simultaneously having photos taken for social media promotion of the swimwear launch, sharing that Instagram is a business for her, and she needs content ("One Night in Miami"). In the confessional, one of the show's producers states, "It seems like you have a hard time relaxing," to which Kim replies, "Yeah, I do. I definitely have a hard time relaxing. There's just so much that has to be done" ("One Night in Miami").

Kardashian divulges, "I've always felt like I've had to work a little bit harder than the average person just to get a little bit of respect" ("One Night in Miami"). This mentality likely stems from the fact that from the beginning of her career, Kim has pejoratively been labeled as only being famous for being famous, a title which implies there's no skill which merits her celebrity status. On a 2011 episode of the ABC News special, *Barbara Walters' 10 Most Fascinating People*, Barbara Walters sits down with Kim, Kourtney, Khloe, and Kris, and states, "You don't really act. You don't sing. You don't dance. You don't have any - forgive me -, any talent" ("Kardashians on Barbara Walters '10 most fascinating people"). Kim replies, "I think it's more of a challenge for you to go on a reality show and get people to fall in love with you for being you, so there is definitely a lot more pressure I think to be famous for being ourselves" ("Kardashians on Barbara Walters '10 most fascinating people"). Kardashian attempts to prove her worth by making her private life public, and this has set a precedent for fans to follow suit. "Self-care," then, becomes a way for Kardashian and consumers of her brand to survive in the attention economy.

Many institutions have been running 24/7 for decades, as stated by Jonathan Crary in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Crary, 9). However, it is a more recent

phenomenon that workers' personal lives and social identity have "been reorganized to conform to the uninterrupted operation of markets, information networks, and other systems" (Crary, 9). This has led to an "absoluteness of availability" in which not only our bodies, but our identities consume and produce an overabundance of images, procedures, and services (Crary, 10). In this sense, there is no disruption from the demands of capitalism (Crary, 10).

Crary states, "Initiated by the advanced research center of the Pentagon (DARPA), scientists in various labs are conducting experimental trials of sleeplessness techniques, including neurochemicals, gene therapy, and transcranial magnetic stimulation" (Crary, 2). The aim of this research is to discover means for humans to operate productively and efficiently without adequate sleep (Crary, 2). Longterm, the end goal is to develop methods for combatants to maintain high levels of physical and mental performance while functioning on "a minimum of seven days without sleep" (Crary, 2). Crary argues that a sleepless soldier would lead the way for a sleepless worker and consumer and predicts that non-sleep products such as pharmaceuticals may one day be a necessity to successfully participate as a member of society (Crary, 3). Crary notes, "24/7 markets and global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption have been in place for some time, but now a human subject is in the making to coincide with these more intensively" (Crary, 3). Sleeplessness as a means for production shines a light on neoliberal globalization and the processes of Western modernization that Crary describes as the "non stop life-world of twenty-first-century capitalism" (Crary, 8).

These values are exhibited in the work ethic of many celebrities, particularly reality television stars and social media influencers. Though vacations are often a time to disconnect from formal labor routines, this is not the case for the aforementioned groups. For the last decade, fashion and beauty brands have used influencer trips not as a reward for viral creators but as a marketing tool (Dudley). Typically inviting five to ten influencers on a vacation to an

exotic destination, brands like the cosmetic company, Tarte, hope to garner publicity and sales through influencers' social media posts (Dudley). Madalyn Dudley states, "As brands are forced to compete with the elaborate marketing budgets of large corporations, the competitive marketplace for influencers will continue to thrive, meaning the sky is the limit for what they could achieve" (Dudley). In this way, rest and relaxation cannot exist in any pure form, as they are meant to elicit promotion.

The celebrity standard for relaxation has evolved. In *A Burst of Light: Essays*, Audre Lorde states, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 125). As documented in the chapter, "A Burst of Light: Living With Cancer", Lorde was diagnosed with liver cancer two weeks before her fiftieth birthday (Lorde, 44). Initially in denial, she planned to continue with a "previously planned teaching trip to Europe" (Lorde, 44). Lorde states,

As I grew steadily sicker in Berlin, I received medical information about homeopathic alternatives to surgery, which strengthened my decision to maintain some control over my life for as long as possible. I believe that decision has prolonged my life, together with the loving energies of women who supported me in that decision and in the work which gives that life shape (Lorde, 44).

Therefore, "self-care" is not a way to gratify oneself through consumption. Instead, it is a mode of survival and a means for black women to triumph by way of community and self-determination (Lorde, 44).

Over time, the concepts of "me-time", "self-care", and leisure have become internet buzzwords and marketing tools working to sell consumerist endeavors as pampering and well-deserved experiences. For Lorde, "self-care" is about surviving via the support from your community in the face of death (Lorde). As previously stated, the Kardashians are attempting to

survive in the attention economy. Thus, “self-care” emerged from being an act of pure survival to being a labor of staying relevant. It is no longer about taking time for oneself as a form of self-preservation in the face of illness. Instead, celebrities have co-opted “self-care” as a performance meant to make one stand out. In this way, stars like Kim Kardashian have set a standard for what they deem to be the right way to relax. This form of relaxation is about documenting the investment in oneself. Just like we document everything else in the world of smartphones and social media, the right way to do “self-care” is a neoliberal presentation in which one is always showing, demonstrating, and monitoring themselves to prove that they add value to society.

As ordinary citizens are increasingly encouraged to adopt “always on” lifestyles, it is instructive to look at celebrities as a template for understanding this lifestyle. Star studies allows us to understand how celebrities' personal lives define luxury and upward mobility; therefore, they provide a roadmap for understanding modern definitions of “me-time” as luxury labor. In “Transmedia Celebrity The Kardashian Cosmos - Between Family Brand and Individual Storylines”, Šárka Gmitterková states, “Instead of prioritizing talent... ‘celebrity’ gains value from being an instantly recognizable personality at any time” (Gmitterková, 117). Though artful expertise and performance skills are often associated with traditional functions of stardom, celebrity is rooted in “personal qualities and information circulating in the media” (Gmitterková, 117). Celebrity, then, is a facet of a successful star’s continually thriving career (Gmitterková, 117). While personality, media fodder, and lack of hyperfocus on artistic talent may be attributed to twenty first century notions of influencer and reality television fame exemplified by Kim Kardashian and her family, celebrity in this context is nothing new. In fact, transmedia offerings have always been a necessary function of widely popular stars (Gmitterková, 116).

As noted by Graeme Turner in *Understanding Celebrity*, fame and the desire for it are integral ideals of Western civilization, dating as far back as early Roman times (Turner, 10).

Citing Leo Braudy, Turner states, “Modern fame has experienced a degree of inflation as a result of Post-Renaissance conceptions of the individual, the collapse of monarchic or religious systems of privilege or distinction in the face of democratisation, and the spread of mass communication” (Braudy cited in Turner, 10). The growth of celebrity, as the public tends to conceive of it, however, is largely due to the spread of mass media (Turner, 11). After 1922, more than half of circulation magazines focused on the world of entertainment (Turner, 13). This can be attributed to the widespread industrialization and popularity of motion pictures and their inclusion of cast lists beginning in the 1910s (Turner, 13-14). The promotion of actors as individuals cemented the performers as attractions which drew more attention from audiences than the narratives of the films (Turner, 14). Turner states, “The development of the star turned the individual into a commodity to be marketed and traded” (Turner, 15).

In *Film History: Theory and Practice*, Robert Clyde Allen and Douglas Gomery describe stars as actors with biographies (Allen and Gomery, 172). Said biographies tend to overshadow the actors’ works, as what is essential to stardom is the private life made public (Allen and Gomery, 172). The presentation of the public self is mediated through interviews, gossip columns, the films themselves, publicists, and other media points of entry (Allen and Gomery, 173). In this sense, the public does not see the star as a person, but rather, an image (Allen and Gomery, 173). This entails that Kim Kardashian’s image is less about family dynamics and more centered on the ideal of a successful multimedia performer and entrepreneur.

In the era of Classic Hollywood cinema, a star’s image was constructed by the studio system (Allen and Gomery, 178). In the following decades, the construction of celebrity has expanded. No longer does one need to be an actor in the studio system; instead an everyday person can now be bestowed with fame (Turner, 58). Since the 1990s, television networks have discovered that they can produce celebrities out of essentially nothing (Turner, 58). Graeme

Turner states, “Increasingly, they have done this by using ‘ordinary’ people, with no special abilities and achievements, as the ‘talent’ in their programmes” (Turner, 58). Special training or a background in performance are no longer necessary points of entry to fame, and being a specified entertainer like a singer or actor does not have to be the end goal (Turner, 58). Rather, the objective is to merely be famous (Turner, 58). This is most often realized through reality television (Turner, 58). Turner notes, “For the subjects or contestants in reality TV programmes, even where substantial cash prizes or career opportunities are to be won, celebrity is the real prize that is on offer” (Turner, 59).

An amalgamation of television genres such as the gameshow, the makeover, the docu-soap, and the talk show, *Big Brother* is one of the most well known reality tv competitions to date (Turner, 64). The show features a group of castmates each season who have every facet of their lives captured on camera while living together in a home often built on a studio soundstage (Turner, 64). Cast members, otherwise known as housemates, are nominated for eviction each week, and viewers get to vote on who leaves (Turner, 64). Turner states,

The publicity and promotions potential of the format has proven to be extraordinary: the programme can be promoted as a news event, as a cultural phenomenon, as the launching pad for a raft of new celebrities, as a contest to be played through SMS and social media, and, finally, as high concept or special event television (Turner, 65).

Engaging with the series goes beyond watching it on a television network; in fact, one of the most vital aspects of viewership is *Big Brother*'s website (Turner, 65). The interactivity on the site includes live footage of the inside of the house, highlight videos, merchandise, updates, blogs, social media links, and methods for fans to vote on cast evictions, among other things (Turner, 65). With a myriad of promotional content and 24/7 footage of personal - and often

explicit - elements of their day, the cast members of *Big Brother* are implicitly always visible and always on (Turner, 65).

The documentation of the ordinary displayed on *Big Brother* and its operation as a function of transmedia paved the way for the success of the Kardashians, who “develop and promote goods, apps, and additional content, which originates in their personal ups and downs as captured” on their multitude of shows, including *Keeping up With The Kardashians*, as noted by Šárka Gmitterková (Gmitterková, 120). In *Keeping Up The Kardashian Brand: Celebrity, Materialism, and Sexuality*, Amanda Scheiner McClain explores Kim Kardashian and her family’s place in the cultural lexicon, noting that they are not just ubiquitous on television but also throughout the entire media landscape (McClain, 1). Regularly appearing in tabloid magazines, gossip columns, newspaper articles, and other parts of mainstream press, the Kardashians transcend reality television and have become “contemporary cultural touchstones” (McClain, 1). McClain states, “In short, the Kardashians are omnipresent, permeating contemporary American culture” (McClain, 1)

Premiering on the E! Network in 2007, *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* quickly rose to popularity, becoming the highest ranked show in the history of the channel and producing a slew of ancillary spin offs - including, *Kourtney and Khloe Take Miami*, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, *Khloe and Lamar*, *Dash Dolls*, and *Life of Kylie* - in which the family invites viewers into their private lives (McClain, 5-6). Thus, their image has become pervasive throughout television, and they have used facets of reality TV, including the confessional and the brash nature of the medium to attract viewers (McClain, 7). While the Kardashians credit just being themselves as the reason for their fame, they insist that being a celebrity is still a job, one that requires constant work to be maintained (McClain, 4). What makes their stardom noteworthy and their image prevalent is that they have homed in on the intrinsic link between entertainment,

advertising, and consumerism (McClain, 7). Their “cross-platform self-promotion” has worked to help sustain their celebrity (McClain, 7).

Scholarship on star studies has established that the function of celebrity has evolved from a position bestowed on those deemed talented enough to merit it and has developed into a role that is ostensibly attainable for everyday people. What has stayed the same throughout its metamorphosis is that it requires a high amount of visibility throughout media and its multitude of sectors. This visibility happens through constructing an image in which one's private life becomes accessible to the public. Also inherent in this visibility is always being on and working. In this way, celebrities acquire value in order to gain status in the world. While everyday people are not operating for a widespread audience like the Kardashians are, there is something that can be learned from how they work for the status of celebrity.

In the age of social networks, smartphones, and digital media, there is no longer a defined separation between private and public. In this sense, notions like “self-care,” “me-time,” and leisure rarely exist in any pure form, as we are in a constant state of visibility. My project uses star studies by asserting that fans can use Kim Kardashian’s products to partake in the grind of celebrity to achieve its status - or enhance their status updates. There is an implicit logic in each of these products. SKKN by Kim promotes a self-gifting mentality in which one must always be working in order to merit reward – though the rewards require more labor; *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* demands free time be interrupted by the productivity of frequent game play; and SKIMS requires a constant social media presence to keep up with the latest product launches. In this way, consumers enact the performance of “self-care” as a maintenance of capitalism that documents the benefit to the self.

2 IT SEEMS LIKE NOBODY WANTS TO WORK THESE DAYS: SKKN BY KIM AND THE MERITOCRACY OF A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

JoliAmour DuBose-Morris of *InStyle* notes that beauty as a whole is hugely influenced by celebrities (DuBose-Morris). Social media has been a game changer for celebrity culture, allowing new avenues for fan participation and displays of aspirational self-branding (Hou, 535). Video sharing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok have become grounds for watching celebrities' morning and nighttime skincare routines. Model and influencer, Hailey Bieber, - often coveted for her 'glazed donut' skin – stars in multiple YouTube videos where she documents her skin care regimen. In a video for *Vogue*, she states, "I love the ritual, the commitment to skincare. Self-care, it's like at home in a bath with a mask on, doing all my skincare steps" (*Vogue*).

Most celebrity skincare demonstrations feature stars donning chic robes and standing in front of a hotel bathroom mirror. This positions skincare regimens as luxurious and relaxing moments. Simultaneously, many of these videos have the celebrity repping their own beauty brand. Consumers are impacted by what they think beauty is *supposed* to look like, and they watch these videos to ascertain how they can gain a fraction of the flawless image of their favorite stars (DuBose-Morris). Therefore, celebrity beauty routines influence the viewer to understand skincare as a function of leisure and hustle culture.

Because it functions this way, there is no shortage of content demonstrating the routines of stars. As of June 2023, the *Vogue* YouTube channel boasts nearly three hundred celebrity "beauty secrets" videos. This infinite amount of content translates to an "infinite amount of choices and concepts constantly determining what is 'best'" (DuBose-Morris). Ade Onibada states, "The number of celebrities leveraging their star power in the skin care and beauty industry has exploded in recent years" (Onibada). According to Bloomberg research, more than

fifty celebrities have launched skincare lines since 2020 (Onibada). The reason these brands keep launching is not because they are all offering innovative beauty products to consumers. These celebrities are not after revolutionizing the beauty industry so much as they are looking to proliferate under capitalism (Onibada). Skincare is an ideal avenue for this, as it has become one of the most profitable sectors in recent years (Mannion). Onibada suggests, “The need to constantly commodify oneself to make money and extend the fame cycle is now more pressing than ever. And it’s simply not enough for someone to just be a brand ambassador; they now must be CEO, too” (Onibada). Founding a company is a way for celebrities to build a personal brand and define worth through labor. Kennedy Coughlin adds that celebrities “use their influence to become players in the industry by branching off with their own visions of a beauty brand” (Coughlin).

Celebrity endorsement is crucial to beauty brand success. Marketing campaigns invest large sums of money into celebrity promotions, as these endeavors have proven to be bankable strategies (Choi, Lee, and Kim, 85). This can be traced back to the 1920s when cosmetics company, Maybelline New York, used silent film star, Gloria Swanson, to model their mascara for print advertisements (Clayman). Makeup was a hard sell at that time because it was viewed by many as immoral, so using an actress to promote the brand positively correlated the product with “the glamour of the cinema” (Clayman). Cheryl Wischhover notes, “This model historically thrived in beauty as a way to give consumers a perceived piece of a celebrity's lifestyle” (Wischhover). It additionally felt authentic; celebrities are seen as experts on beauty, as it’s their job to always look impeccable (Wischhover). This is what Rosie Findlay refers to as “authentic realness.” According to Findlay, brands use this strategy to suggest to their target demographic that “all it would take to embody the idealized state of one of their models... would be the purchase of their products, collapsing the distance between image and consumer” (Findlay, 4).

This allows products to take on a symbolic meaning in which they can transform identity (Findlay, 4). Authentic realness hinges on the consumer investing in the idea that the image the model is selling is a real representation of their life. Because celebrities are thought to be always opulent and beautiful, consumers believe that they can reproduce a celebrity's everyday life by purchasing the products they model.

Since the days of Maybelline New York touting silent film stars, celebrity brand ambassadors have been the norm for the beauty industry. In the 1980s, stars like Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, and Cher leveled up from simply repping a brand by collaborating with companies to create their own perfume (Wischhover). This paved the way for model, Iman, to become the first celebrity to start her own beauty company, Iman Cosmetics, in 1994. The success of Iman Cosmetics and similar ventures, like Jessica Alba's Honest Company – founded in 2012 -, exhibited how celebrities could “leverage perceived expertise into bankable, valuable companies” (Wischhover). This model, however, was the exception and not the rule (Wischhover). Celebrity beauty companies did not begin to disrupt the market until the 2010s when Rihanna's Fenty Beauty and Kylie Jenner's Kylie Cosmetics proved to be profitable through social media buzz (Wischhover). This approach works because of its authentic realness. Findlay states, “Snapshots posted to Instagram by influencers often implicitly claim a connection to the everyday” (Findlay, 7). Rihanna and Kylie Jenner both have found success through this tactic, each often posting videos to social media where they demonstrate product application in their bathrooms. Because of this effective method, other stars have followed suit, using social media to connect with fans through marketing their perceived every day. This has led to a rise in celebrities looking to be a part of these business models as executives and creative directors.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Kim Kardashian sought to have a stake in the booming beauty industry. Kardashian's newest product venture, SKKN By Kim, launched in June of

2022. As Kim has been noticed for extreme beauty ventures in the past - such as the infamous ‘vampire facial’ she received on *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* - skincare feels like a logical next step in her business empire (Strugatz). SKKN by Kim aims to answer questions to everyday skin problems, and at well over six hundred dollars in total, the nine-step routine is not cheap (Strugatz). Kardashian, however, sees the expensive price point as nonnegotiable, feeling that to get good results, you have to put the work in with high quality products (Strugatz). For the Kardashians, leisure is an investment of labor and time in oneself. She emphasizes that all but two of the products in the line are necessary for an everyday regimen and credits herself as someone consumers should trust, as she possesses first - class insider information on dermatological advice and formulations (Strugatz). This emphasis on a luxury skincare routine as a requisite for a successful beauty regimen interrupts the ideal of “self-care” as a break and instead posits it as a labor in which the body must work to elicit value. In this way, it represents leisure labor.

Bryant Simon recognizes the interwovenness of work and forms of relaxation – specifically consumption. In “Self - Gifting and Retail Therapy,” Simon explores the gendered concept of treating oneself to shopping as a break from demanding work, focusing on the consumption of Starbucks coffee. Simon defines this specific act of indulgence as self-gifting, a term used to describe the act of “buying presents or even time away from day-to-day- routines for yourself” (Simon 124). The women interviewed in his study calculate how much they deserve to buy and spend based on how hard they worked for it; some of the women are university students who add that buying a beverage at Starbucks is how they reward themselves for studying (Simon 123). According to Simon, self-gifting is always a calculated move with value and reward firmly in the buyer’s mind (Simon, 125).

Through self-gifting, “women say to themselves ‘I deserve it’” (Simon 128). The “it” refers to “a not-too-expensive indulgence, a little time, or a small dose of relief from the endless everyday pressures of work, household and child management, budgeting, and even dieting in postneed middle-class America” (Simon, 128). With the emergence of everyday discounts, easy credit, and the luxury economy in the 1990s and 2000s came a rise in the purchase of small indulgences (Simon, 130). This helped to drive what Michael Silverstein and Neil Fiske of Boston Consulting Group call the “I’m Worth It” phenomenon (Simon, 130). Simon, notes, though, that more than anything, the uptick in small indulgences is credited to “the frenzied pace of American life, the amount of working, driving, and activities Americans do” (Simon, 130). Simon continues,

Because they are worth it and their time is worth it, female consumers regularly treat themselves to a gift or a little time off from the monotony of cooking and cleaning or just a few moments of fun—a small indulgence as a rational reward or maybe as a useful incentive to keep up the frenzied pace (Simon, 131).

Thus, consumption is tied up in worth and value as well as time spent laboring and putting some of that effort toward oneself.

This rings true to Kardashian’s brand, as many episodes of her myriad of series focus on her affinity for overconsumption. Season three, episode ten of *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami* highlights what her family calls a shopping addiction. Embarrassed to find herself on a blog’s ‘worst dressed’ list, Kim decides to go on a “major shopping spree” (“See Ya Later, Alligator”). This is to the chagrin of Kourtney, who states in the confessional, “Kim has always loved fashion and always loved clothes ever since we were little girls, and she’s always worked really hard to buy whatever she wants. But I think lately she’s just going way above what she should be

spending” (“See Ya Later, Alligator”). For Kardashian, consumption is not only a way to reward oneself for working hard but also a means to maintain the image of celebrity.

For consumers of SKKN by Kim, reviews of the product are generally positive. The overarching hangup, however, is the cost. The complete set includes a cleanser, exfoliator, toner, hyaluronic acid serum, vitamin c serum, eye cream, face cream, oil drops, and night oil and amounts to over six hundred dollars. Dermatologists say that this many products is unnecessary, noting that a healthy skin care routine requires only three steps: cleanser, moisturizer, and sunscreen (Ryu). In fact, an excessive number of steps can be confusing for consumers who may be overwhelmed by the overabundance of choice (Ryu). TikTok user, Henna Ali, however, says that she loves the extra step of the face oils and enjoys taking time to do her skincare but acknowledges that the price point is out of budget for most people (@thehennaali). Despite liking the packaging and the aesthetics of the line, content creator, @naturalkaos, encourages her TikTok followers to not buy from the brand, stating that though the products are good, they are not worth the extreme price point (@naturalkaos). For the average consumer, the price tag of SKKN by Kim is unattainable. Kim Kardashian, though, feels that the price is justified by what she considers the best formulations and expert advice (Ryu). However, many experts, beauty gurus, and consumers note in their reviews of the line that comparable products could be found for a much cheaper cost at Target. What makes SKKN by Kim stand out is not its formulations but, rather, its assertion that "self-care" must come at an upscale price. In this way, fans can reward themselves in the same manner as Kardashian: excessive consumption.

In *Not Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*, Brooke Erin Duffy describes aspirational consumption as the purchasing of “products or brands to imitate the consumer behavior of those occupying higher-class standing” (Duffy, 22). It is an imitation of cultural capital attained by those of an elite social status (Duffy, 23). In a

2012 sit-down interview with the four eldest Kardashian siblings, Oprah Winfrey asks if they are spoiled (Oprah Winfrey Network). Kim replies, “We work hard to spoil ourselves,” adding “I like to work hard and set goals and buy myself things at certain periods of life, so that’s spoiling myself” (Oprah Winfrey Network). She notes that it was made clear to her by her parents that if she wanted the privileged life she grew up with, she had to get to work (Oprah Winfrey Network). In turn, Kardashian makes clear to fans that a reward like “self-care” must be earned.

The YouTube video, “Kim Kardashian's Facial using SKKN BY KIM Products” features Kardashian’s esthetician, Joanna Czech, giving her a facial with the SKKN by Kim line. By not applying it herself, this skincare regimen does not align with my definition of leisure labor. However, it emphasizes how Kardashian’s demonstration of leisure and labor is unrealistic for most. Czech starts with the brand’s cleanser, massaging it into Kardashian’s face for a few minutes and follows with an exfoliating scrub (SKKN by Kim). She then tones Kim’s skin, explaining that toner is vital to a good routine (SKKN by Kim). After, Czech massages in hyaluronic acid and vitamin c oil drops before conducting a laser treatment not offered by the SKKN by Kim brand (SKKN by Kim). Kardashian states, “I feel like this will make me look younger”, underscoring how her routine is a way to maintain value in celebrity culture (SKKN by Kim). Czech then applies an eye cream with Kim noting that she wanted the product to be light enough so that makeup could be worn on top; this demonstrates the need for versatility in Kardashian’s branding. Finally, the facial concludes with the SKNN by Kim moisturizer (SKKN by Kim).

Though this routine may seem exhaustive, multi-step skincare is nothing new, with ten-step routines becoming popular in the 1930s (Mackenzie). While full-scale routines may be the norm, what stands out about the current state of skincare is that its market is oversaturated, and SKKN by Kim plays a hand in this. Ninety years ago, skincare was purchased at pharmacies and

department stores. Now, it is everywhere. JoliAmour DuBose-Morris argues that the overabundance of celebrity brands is overwhelming for consumers (DuBose-Morris). Staying up to date on what is current and trendy in the skincare realm and understanding what products are worth buying is a labor-intensive pursuit meant to obtain a relaxing and luxurious ritual.

Social media and reality television make it appear like the Kardashians constantly bask in leisure, but keeping up with their appearances takes work. Brooke Erin Duffy states, “The narrative of creative self expression...conceals the unrelenting work...that takes place behind the screens” (Duffy, ix-x). This grasp of self expression as a manifestation of hard work serves to underscore the idea that gendered forms of meaning making are often grounded in labor intensive consumption and content creation (Duffy). Said consumption and creation not only bleed into each other but tend to be aspirational, in this sense referring to the belief among female content creators “that their unpaid work, motivated by passion and the infectious rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, will eventually yield respectable income and rewarding careers,” as noted by Duffy (Duffy, 15).

Duffy focuses on creative online positions, such as fashion blogging, noting how it fosters careerist aims through unpaid labor, realizes value through consumerism, and occurs in an unstructured time frame (Duffy). Fashion blogging’s perceived accessibility seemingly transfers power back to the masses and reflexively feeds back into the consumer marketplace (Duffy, 48). However, the system that operates “glamour industries” like fashion blogging often exacerbates social inequalities (Duffy, 13). The fashion industry has received negative publicity for its use of unpaid interns (Duffy, 13). While these positions may lead to entry level employment at prestigious companies, Duffy points out that “Only those from well-heeled families can afford the myriad expenses associated with working for free” (Duffy, 13).

Much like these internships, the work involved with online content creation tends to go unpaid. It therefore exists under the umbrella of aspirational labor, a “mode of (mostly) uncompensated, independent work that is propelled by the much-venerated ideal of getting paid to do what you love” (Duffy, 4). Aspirational labor works under the promise of a fully-fledged career in which labor and leisure can coexist; content creators hope that their unpaid productivity will eventually pay off in the form of material rewards and social capital (Duffy, 4-5). In the meantime, Duffy notes that these aspirational laborers “remain suspended in the consumption and promotion of branded commodities” (Duffy, 5). This uncompensated production is motivated by the expectation of a lucrative career brought on by the investment of time, energy, and capital (Duffy, 5).

Those engaging with leisure labor are also partaking in aspirational labor. The consumption of SKKN by Kim hinges on the hope that by using it, we can work toward an aspirational lifestyle and treat ourselves in the manner that she does. While skincare is often solely marketed as a leisure activity, SKKN by Kim implicitly sells itself as a product at the intersection of work and luxury. This is evidenced in the YouTube video, “Welcome to my Office! Official SKKN BY KIM office tour,” where Kardashian displays the SKKN by Kim offices, distinctly modeled after her own home and adorned with every magazine cover she has graced (Kim Kardashian). Unique to the office space is a room with an open shower and chair (Kim Kardashian). Commenting on this, Kardashian says that there have been times where she has needed to shower in the offices and simultaneously give input on business decisions while doing so (Kim Kardashian). Though unusual, this revelation is indicative of how for the Kardashians, even relaxation can be spent as a time to produce capital.

Though often and historically viewed as frivolous and inherently feminized behavior, shopping is a form of domestic responsibility that produces and reproduces labor power, thus

sustaining modern capitalism (Duffy, 24). This would make the consumption of products like SKKN by Kim a form of immaterial labor. JoliAmour DuBose-Morris states, “As skincare has evolved so much over the years, especially with a commodity of brands that pertain to different aesthetics, it's more difficult to *not* see this as a capitalistic stunt” (DuBose-Morris). As consumers are attempting to emulate Kim’s own self-gifting in response to working hard, the purchase and use of her products becomes an intertwining of indulgence and work, making it leisure labor.

3 NOT BAD FOR A GIRL WITH NO TALENT: CLIMBING THE SOCIAL LADDER IN KIM KARDASHIAN: HOLLYWOOD

Kim Kardashian: Hollywood is a mobile app game that launched in 2014. The premise is straightforward; the player customizes a role-playing character who in the first moments of gameplay is spotted at their retail job by Kim Kardashian, who takes them under her wing and helps to navigate the path to fame (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). From there, the player completes tasks which include being photographed by the paparazzi, meeting with managers and publicists, club appearances, magazine spreads, and even a wedding to earn rewards and work their way up from the E-List to the A-List (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). This gradual progress toward stardom by way of ostensibly limitless tasks mirrors Kardashian's own rise to fame. Zan Romanoff explores the Kardashian family's trajectory to stardom in "The Decade The Kardashians Took Over Everything." Romanoff states,

The story of how the Kardashians went from D-list nobodies to A-list stars who feature regularly on the covers of *Vogue* and *Forbes* alike is a remarkable tale of American self-reinvention and self-definition in the digital age. It's more complicated than you remember and more surprising than you'd expect (Romanoff).

While initially seen as D-List reality stars with ephemeral fame, the Kardashians spent the late 2000s and the entirety of the 2010s effectively marketing themselves through perfume launches, movie roles, reality competitions, tabloid covers, and high-profile weddings and divorces (Romanoff).

Alison Harvey examines the aspirational stardom that is performed in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* in "The Fame Game: Working Your Way Up The Celebrity Ladder In *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*." Harvey states that within the game, "a star is born but a celebrity is

discovered, supporting the notion that celebrity is a product of interaction rather than identity in the internet era” (Marwick as referenced in Harvey, 655). In this way, we can recognize celebrity as a role which is cultivated. The simulation of procedural capitalistic values in the game merits rewards and progress, thus paralleling Kardashian’s own rise to the A-List through systematic strategy (Harvey, 655). The completion of tasks in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* is accomplished by using up energy points, which are quickly depleted and generally take a couple of hours to replenish (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). While the overarching goal is to manage these tasks to make it to the A-List as a celebrity, the game does not have a definitive ending, with levels continually being added (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). Given the quick loss of energy and possibility of infinite gameplay, the game is more a marathon than a race and is therefore meant to be played in short spurts.

Elizabeth Evans refers to this category of app based mobile games as casual games, a term first coined by Jesper Juul (Evans, 1). Defined by simple and short, but frequent playing times, casual games by design discourage prolonged and repetitive engagement, thereby taking on an ephemeral form within the gaming world (Grainge as referenced in Evans, 2). Using a freemium business model, these games are free to play and download but encourage monetary exchanges through advertisements and the solicitation of in-app purchases (Evans, 2). As commercial strategies shift, freemium games “raise the importance of considering the wider industrial and economic context of gameplay design” (Evans, 2). This is important to consider, as the construction of tasks and goals which illicit pleasure for the player are intertwined with economic strategies for financial success (Evans, 2).

Evans states, “The differences brought about by the app gaming market, and epitomized in the form of freemium games, are both technological and economic” (Evans, 3). Unlike computers and game consoles, the devices used to play app games are multifunctional and

therefore do not have the capacity for as much processing power and memory (Evans, 3). This, then, necessitates that smartphone app games are sold at little to no upfront cost (Evans, 3). However, the companies developing these games must still make a profit (Evans, 3). That is where strategies unique to mobile apps come into play; freemium games are designed to be monetized (Evans, 3). This explicitly occurs via the exchange of money for digital items (Evans, 12). In the case of *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, money can - and is encouraged to - be exchanged for energy and experience points as well as for currency within the game (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). According to Evans, “Real money in these games does not simply function in the exchange, or ownership, of virtual assets but also to control the temporal dynamics of the gameplay experience” (Evans, 13). In this sense, money is integral to the function of these games, and spending it is vital to success.

Dismissed as irrelevant and illegitimate gaming experiences for their representations of passive consumption, casual games are often gendered and associated with female audiences (Vanderhoef, 1). John Vanderhoef states, “sectors of commercial culture and core gaming culture work to position casual games as first feminine and then, tacitly if not vocally, as inferior and lacking” (Vanderhoef, 3). This is in comparison to hardcore games, which are viewed as more masculine, valid forms of play. Though seen by the video game industry as a beneficial and profitable sector, casual games are simultaneously devalued (Vanderhoef, 4). Their audience is described as a feminized market who would not identify as gamers (Vanderhoef, 4). Casual games and their players are presumed to exist outside of the normative video game culture of hardcore games, therefore defined by their absence (Vanderhoef, 6). Vanderhoef states,

The repeated association of casual gaming and “lack” echoes the state of the feminine as defined by Lacan, a cultural feminine that lacks the ultimate, phallic expression of masculine power. Owing to this lack, feminized casual games are positioned as inferior to

hardcore games, existing in their shadow. They are seen and discursively positioned as deficient (Vanderhoef, 6).

Despite providing fiscal value for the gaming market, games like *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* are looked at as lesser for being outside the mainstream understanding of video games.

This devaluation echoes the derogatory public opinions of Kim Kardashian; criticized for being a figure of vapid consumption, she continually produces capital in order to subvert her negative reputation. Her display of being “always on” is mirrored in the play of casual games. As exemplified in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, freemium games are distinct in that their narrative is never ending (Evans, 13). Therefore, there is always a goal to be reached and a task to be completed, and in-app purchases help to speed up this progress. In that sense, these games are betting on impatience for monetary gain (Evans, 13).

Because of this, periods of waiting provide the perfect window to play freemium games. In “The Waiting Room: Profiting from Boredom,” Ethan Tussey notes that such games are ideal for “the in-between moments when a person is seeking entertainment” (Tussey, 120). With the advent of mobile devices, an opportunity is created in these instances for one to derive value in a period that is otherwise inconvenient (Tussey, 121). This analysis of media in times of waiting is in reference to Anna McCarthy’s *The Rhythms Of The Reception Area: Crisis, Capitalism, And The Waiting Room TV*. McCarthy states, “Waiting areas provide a stationary and focused group of viewers of advertisements as a natural resource out of which an ‘audience commodity’ may be extracted and sold to advertisers (McCarthy, 189). Rather than seen as a time to disrupt the flows of capitalist supply and demand, waiting has come to be understood as a moment in which brand reinforcement can replenish said supplies and goods (McCarthy, 189).

Tussey adds that waiting periods not only underscore the politics of waiting but additionally provide users with the opportunity to assert themselves and their value (Tussey,

111). Downtime is utilized in creative ways, and casual gamers have a sense of pride in this (Tussey, 127). In this sense, there are empowering possibilities when one uses waiting periods to play on mobile devices (Tussey, 128). This demand of labor rings true for playing *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*. In “Kim Kardashian is my new BFF: Video games and the looking glass celebrity,” Shira Chess and Jessica Maddox argue that players are empowered to perform the labor of aspiring fame in celebrity games (Chess and Maddox, 197). They state, “The player is always entrenched in a meaning-making process that is embedded in labor” (Chess and Maddox, 197). In enacting this labor, the player constructs what they believe to be a celebrity and does not see just themselves but rather sees themselves as Kim Kardashian (Chess and Maddox, 197). Stardom as labor is integral to understanding the crux of celebrity based mobile apps (Chess and Maddox, 197). I argue that it is also key in examining why players want credit for the “me-time” in the form of game attributes.

The first point of practice upon downloading the game is creating an avatar (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). The player can pick everything about appearance from eye color to shade of nail polish; a facet worth noting is that despite the abundance of hair textures, skin tones, and facial features, there is no way to alter the body shape (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). This lack of feature has not gone unnoticed. On Glu Mobile Inc’s general discussion forum for the game, user, Lana~, states, “I don't know why, but I've always wanted 'body shapes' to be introduced to the game. I think it's really un-natural [sic] that every doll looks absolutely [the] same when it comes to physique...it just gives the wrong picture” (Lana~, 2017). While it may very well give the wrong picture, the lack of agency in choosing a body is not only emblematic of societal standards for celebrities but harkens back to Kim Kardashian’s vehement denial of allegations of surgery, making it appear as if the physique she sports is not cultivated but rather

natural. In this way, the building of an avatar mirrors Kardashian's own appearance - an aesthetic which is highly curated but presented as effortless.

Once the avatar design is complete, the player finds their character working in a clothing boutique in Downtown Los Angeles called "So Chic," where they are prompted to use energy and earn rewards by completing tasks like folding clothing and locking the register (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). There are no visuals of this labor, as the character stands in a stationary position in an unmoving environment. Furthermore, all that is required of the player is to continually press a button on the screen until the task is finished. Left by the store manager, Luther Alexander, to close the shop alone, the player is met by Kim Kardashian, who asks, "Hi! Is this your store? Are you open? I could really use your help" (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). This prompts the player to choose one of the following replies: "Still open", "Just closing", and "Kim Kardashian!" (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). The player then allows Kim into the store and is asked to help her find something to wear for an event (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). Insisting that Kim can take the chosen outfit free of charge, the player is asked to accompany the star to a photoshoot for the fictional *Metropolitan Magazine* as thanks (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*).

Tapping a bus icon to travel from Downtown to Beverly Hills, the player arrives at the photoshoot and is offered rewards for doing so. They are met by the photographer, Garrett St. Clair, who like every other character, has his celebrity grade status next to his name (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). Garrett asks their name, and the player may then type a name of their choosing. This is a noteworthy function of gameplay. While it would seem more suitable for a player to choose a name from the beginning, picking one after meeting Kim aligns the character's identity with their ascent to fame. It's as if they were no one before meeting her. Once finished, it is revealed that Kim has set it up so it is a photoshoot for both of them, and this

entails completing tasks such as checking makeup and making sure the lighting is right. When this is done, Kim mentions that the player needs a manager and invites them to a party to meet the one she has in mind (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). From there, events and tasks start rolling in for the player and become seemingly never ending. This is an intrinsic feature of casual games, with Vanderhoef pointing out that productivity is marketed as a “requirement of feminine play” (Vanderhoef, 10).

Kim Kardashian: Hollywood offers tasks and events that transcend beyond the narrative of gameplay. Users get the opportunity to put their design skills to the test in events called “Show Your Style” (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). Players are given themes such as “Leather and Latex” and “Golden Hour Glamping” and prompted to put together looks and enter them into competitions to accumulate awards based on votes from other users (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). The pressure is on to style an ensemble which is trendy and noteworthy, and outfits may not be repeated (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). Fashion - and knowing how to adequately execute it - is essential to success and attention in the game. This plays into the method of operation of casual games, which place value on productivity, physical self-improvement, and consumption (Vanderhoef, 10).

As these values help the player catapult themselves to a higher grade of celebrity, they also help Kim Kardashian do the same in real life. Priya Elan states, “Kardashian has captured the viral nature of the internet ‘moment’ and bottled it. Like her body and the tabloid engine that follows her and her sisters, fashion has become another prop to ensnare eyeballs on multiple devices” (Elan). Kim Kardashian has used fashion to titillate the tabloids and stir up controversy (Elan). Through this spectacle, she has also graduated from being an outcast in the fashion world to being recognized as one of the most influential sartorial mavens of the twenty-first century.

Being the catalyst for this level of relevancy and virality necessitates an active media presence. “Social media is the most important tool to building your brand,” states Kardashian in Alicia Brunker’s *Instyle* article, “Kim Kardashian West Reveals the Secrets Behind Her Social Media Success” (Brunker). Personal branding through social media is what is to credit for Kardashian’s lasting empire (Romanoff). Her presence on Twitter has not only led to plummeting stock for major corporations but also to significant criminal justice reform (Romanoff). This level of influence hinges on internet virality. For Kim and her sisters to sustain success, they must remain in the headlines (Romanoff). In the same respect, it is vital for users of *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* to remain active on the app to do well in it. For one to progress within the game, they must continually complete ongoing events; once begun, the events last in increments of one, three, four, six, and eight hours (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*). While shorter events can usually be finished in one sitting, longer events require one to consistently wait for energy to refill and then check in to use it up until finally fulfilling the task (*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*).

These acts of labor are ways for the player to make meaning out of their interests as well as their in between periods. Casual games target female audiences who are looking for a means to take time for themselves away from family to “define their unique identity and create a personalized space” (Vanderhoef, 10). Though actualizing fan experience through game play may certainly be meaningful, it is simultaneously a function of the social order (Tussey, 121). Tussey states that casual games “heighten the audience’s awareness of waiting through the gameplay mechanics and the revenue model” and “at the same time...help people regain control of waiting by providing a way to document the value of their time” (Tussey, 2018, p. 121). Through its demand of labor and marketing of advertisements, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* fails to disrupt industrialism. It also simultaneously facilitates a way to value one's own time. Though

players have no control over having to wait in real time, they can have a grasp of control by using that time to level up in the game and earn status as a player. In this way, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* operates as leisure labor.

This oscillation of capitalism and agency is key to understanding the Kardashians and how fans make meaning of them. In an interview for *Variety*, Elizabeth Wagmeister asks Kardashian about the negative characterization that she is just “famous for being famous” (Wagmeister, 2021). Kardashian replies,

We focus on the positive. We work our asses off. If that’s what you think, then sorry. We just don’t have the energy for that. We don’t have to sing or dance or act; we get to live our lives — and hey, we made it. I don’t know what to tell you (Wagmeister, 2021).

Kardashian’s understanding of her own fame is that it is justified by the labor she puts into cultivating it. The way she puts value into her time is by commodifying it, and in doing so, she can dispel notions that her fame is unmerited.

In this way, when one plays *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, they are not just creating a character who is performing as a celebrity. Rather, the simultaneous interruption and value of one’s leisure time in playing the game is in and of itself a performance of celebrity. Borrowing from Francesca Coppa’s definition, performance, an act rooted in repetition and combination, is best understood as twice behaved or restored behavior with an intrinsic focus on bodies (Coppa, 222). This is easily understood through the lens of stage performance, where actors embody characters whose stories are meant to be acted out repeatedly. Coppa states, “In theatre, bodies are the storytelling medium, the carriers of symbolic action” (Coppa, 229). Bodies are a notable facet of the Kardashian brand. While the bodies of Kim and her sisters are often sensationalized, the focus on bodies is far less scandalous – but still important – on their reality shows. Each

episode of *The Kardashians* often features the sisters conversing as they lounge – usually laying down - in a bedroom or living room. Though these scenes are meant to show intimate moments away from the grind of work, Kim and her sisters are commonly on their phones throughout these times and in full glam to be camera ready. Even in periods not meant to directly produce capital, they are always on. Doubling and repetition are central to the essence of theatre and entertainment media (Coppa, 230). Much as scripts serve as a blueprint for actors to embody their stories, *The Kardashians* can be seen as a blueprint for how to conduct oneself during periods of downtime. In this sense, we can understand Kim Kardashian as a blueprint meant to be produced.

In *Celebrity*, Sean Redmond states, “Replication, repetition and product and service reinforcement are the indicators of mass culture” (Redmond,142). This results in the endless production of entertainment mediums such as pop music, tabloid press, and genre films (Redmond,142), and we can include the medium of celebrity in this. As production within a capitalist industry is made with profit in mind, the mass production of celebrity is a part of this rationale (Redmond,142-143). In this sense, we can understand celebrity as a text which necessitates that consumption exists in synchronicity with production. To make meaning out of Kim Kardashian is to mimic her. As this imitation is a form of production which exists under the capitalist machine, there is no rest. Profit making labor is compulsory. Just as she interrupts leisure time to legitimize her own fame, so must the fan. As such, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* serves as a means for the embodied performance and production of celebrity to take place.

4 FIT IN YOUR JEANS BY FRIDAY: MONITORING SKIMS PRODUCT LAUNCHES

Founded in 2019 as a shapewear brand, SKIMS has evolved, selling many clothing items, including loungewear, pajamas, intimates, bathing suits, and even socks. Named one of *TIME*'s most influential companies of 2022, SKIMS offers an affordable price point, inclusive sizing, and innovative advertising featuring celebrities like Paris Hilton, Ice Spice, Tyra Banks, and Addison Rae. In a world where many celebrity-backed brands quickly collapse, SKIMS has become a billion-dollar company. Co-founder, Jens Grede, credits the company's success to "a willingness to blow up the existing plan and shift to something new" (Caldwell). These values often translate to their marketing, which helps the company to gain traction through social media.

On July 6, 2023, the Instagram page for SKIMS published a series of photos and videos featuring media personalities, Carmen Electra and Jenny McCarthy. The first post, a video of the two provocatively washing a car in SKIMS bikinis was captioned: "Everybody's wearing SKIMS this summer! 90s bombshells @CarmenElectra and @JennyMcCarthy reunite in the sexiest swim under the sun" (SKIMS). Meant to draw attention for the brand's new "signature swim" line, the post garnered positive comments, prompting fans to express their excitement, ask about specific products, and share favorable feedback on the marketing endeavor. The marketing for this swimwear launch also included an email campaign which urged, "These are the styles you need for the ultimate confidence boost all summer long" (SKIMS). Incorporating notable - and nostalgic - figures, this marketing gained media traction, with *People Magazine* reporting, "Jenny McCarthy and Carmen Electra are bringing back the 90s with SKIMS. The former MTV icons and *Dirty Love* costars have reunited in a shoot that captures the sexiness and fun of summer - and the women's agelessness" (Huamani). In doing so, the campaign created hype through eliciting anticipation.

A strategy used to generate publicity, hype helps product launches to go viral by prompting social media fan engagement. Matt Hills states, “Fandom’s intensities, and its affective relations to media texts, other fans and other fans’ created texts, are all very much personal and collective” (Hills, 19). Therefore, fandom is an act that is both private and public. According to Hills, fan responses have been intensified and reconfigured by Web 2.0 (Hills, 20). Web 2.0 allows for different sectors of media to be consumed and interacted with simultaneously. For example, one can live tweet while watching television. In this way, fandom has been reconstituted as ‘always-on’ (Hills, 20).

Hills notes that the term, ‘hype,’ is now used to describe the word of mouth that fandoms foster through social media, stating, “Fandom is both felt within the self and encountered, projected or imagined as a (communal/massified) audience for one’s own affective relationships with specific media texts” (Hills, 20). In the age of the internet, fandom especially blossoms through collective experience. Instances such as this often occur in periods of waiting. Hiatus in media nourishes this community building in fandom. Hills says, “Fans are filling in time together, cooperating in sustaining their fan-cultural ontological security, and reassuring one another that this waiting can be endured without diminishing their fandom” (Hills, 23). These acts are built out of mutual longing, commitment, and dedication (Hills, 23). Passionate fandom prevails even throughout the liminality of standby. This is exemplified in the comments section of the SKIMS social media pages, where users share their enthusiasm for yet to be released product launches. In the Instagram post for the SKIMS bikini launch, user, @catk_fitness, states, “I have almost every color. But this makes me want to buy more” (@catk_fitness). On a TikTok video for the same campaign, @kkkkkakes shares, “Never planned on making a Kardashian purchase. Ever. This may have changed my mind.” (@kkkkkakes). In this way, SKIMS has convinced consumers to not only expand their collections but to buy the product despite not

previously considering doing so. This conviction inspires consumers to publicly share their excitement.

These acts ensure that even in private spaces, we are always on in a public manner. In *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration for Life in Digital Capitalism*, Judy Wacjman argues, “As technologies proliferate, we find that we do not have more time for ourselves; in fact, many of us have less” (Wacjman, 2). Therefore, there is a paradox in that we turn to digital technologies in order to alleviate the very time pressure they create (Wacjman, 2). This, however, is hard to escape, as our lives are entangled with these digital technologies, and the social determination of time is built into them (Wacjman, 2). Wacjman notes, “Leisure time itself may be subject to intensification because of the increasing habit of multitasking with digital devices” (Wacjman, 5). There is no pause from productivity.

Though abundant leisure and idle time were once markers of aristocracy, high status is now denoted by a “frenetic existence in which both work and leisure are crowded with multiple activities” (Wacjman, 61). This is due in part to digitalization, which is redefining the meaning of work and leisure (Wacjman, 61). According to Annette Hill, “television, radio, and social media are part of connected viewing, typified by people multi-screening and multi-tasking” (Hill). Technology does not produce more downtime and leisure; instead, it provides a faster pace of life (Wacjman, 61). In doing so, it upholds the ideal that through discretionary time, one can take agency over the hours in their day and make meaning out of them (Wacjman, 62). Therefore, social media followers of Kim Kardashian make meaning out of their leisure time through monitorial fandom. Kardashian’s business partner, Jens Grede, tells the *The New York Times* that SKIMS “operates on a drop model, releasing a new batch (or restocking them) every week or so” (Testa). The company's product launches and restocks have a limited number of units – anywhere between twenty thousand and two hundred thousand -, causing them to

consistently sell out (Testa). Grede adds that while this may frustrate customers, it is well worth the wait (Testa). Though SKIMS is known for its minimalistic designs, the brand boasts over thirty collections. For fans to stay up to date on its full-scale product launches, they must be ‘always on’. This necessitates that they be monitoring social media and in turn offer themselves up for surveillance by way of an online presence. Constant monitoring by fans is demonstrative of the Marxist notion of real subsumption, where people’s quotidian facets of life function “as a source of capitalist value” (Bakioglu). Companies like SKIMS greatly profit from the fan labor that goes into sustaining hype and virality. Hoping to get something out of it themselves, fans willingly participate in this production of value (Bakioglu).

These ideals are intrinsic to reality television, where constant surveillance of the everyday equates to value. Rachel E. Dubrofsky states, “Surveillance is key in understanding the space of reality TV” (Dubrofsky, 17). Through facets like the confessional, reality show participants give the impression of divulging privileged and confidential information all while disclosing it in front of a camera that will air the footage to millions of viewers (Dubrofsky, 19). Though confessionals are accomplished with a crew and producers, they are edited to appear as an intimate revelation of thoughts, where the show production is not acknowledged (Dubrofsky, 19). Reality TV success hinges on making surveillance appear desirable, and participants must possess the ability to appear under surveillance in a manner that mirrors how they are imagined behaving in a private space when cameras are not present (Dubrofsky, 19). This way, viewers buy into the idea that they are witnessing an undoctored and authentic glimpse of reality.

Dubrofsky notes, “A participant’s perceived attitude toward surveillance in the space of reality TV is important” (Dubrofsky, 19). To maintain a sense of authenticity, participants must perform in a way that does not appear as performance; it is key to seem genuine and vulnerable without letting on that you are being surveilled or that you mind (Dubrofsky, 20). Eldest

Kardashian sister, Kourtney, disrupted this model in season seventeen of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* when she set boundaries in terms of what she would share on the show and confessed that she didn't enjoy filming. When asked about her dating life, she states, "I try to keep certain things private" ("The Show Must Go On"). This is to the chagrin of her sisters, Kim and Khloe, who feel they do their fair share by opening up their lives on screen. Kim voices her frustrations, saying, "Kourt spends a lot of time off camera and won't talk about a relationship" ("The Show Must Go On").

When Kourtney abruptly walks off with no explanation from a scene she likely had an obligation to film and drives away, Kim and Khloe decide to get in a car and discreetly follow her with a camcorder ("The Show Must Go On"). This underscores that in the world of Kardashian, surveillance is imperative, and while consenting to this is preferred, it's not necessary. Justifying this, Kim shares,

Our job is being open and honest and sharing a lot of ourselves, and it just seems like...Kourtney hasn't really been open about her personal life on camera. So all of the days that Kourtney isn't filming, Khloe and I are picking up the slack and having to share more 'cause if we're not sharing our lives, then what is the show? ("The Show Must Go On").

In this way, surveillance, and the willingness to perform under it are equated to value, and because of her inclination toward privacy, Kourtney has gained a reputation amongst her family as the sister with the least work ethic and reliability. This sets an example for fans wherein they must always be on to adequately provide value.

Always being on in a manner that makes the private life public is embedded into the design of SKIMS products. Its line of clothing includes loungewear, and what makes these pieces distinctive is that many of the items are versatile and meant to be worn anywhere from

your couch to the club. For example, their slip dress accentuates the body, serving to “elevate” loungewear (SKIMS). Even if certain items, like swimsuits, have limited functionality, they at the very least are designed to be opulent, ensuring that that one exhibits glamour no matter the circumstance. Elizabeth Wissinger describes this as “glamour labor,” defining it as “the work to achieve the overall image touted by fashion modeling as a means to the good life” (Wissinger, 3). In essence, glamour labor entails keeping up with trends, fashion, and idealized physicality to enhance one’s own value in the world (Wissinger). Though Wissinger uses the term to describe the effort put forth by models, I assert that it extends to consumers through Web 2.0. By virtue of SKIMS’ multifaceted designs, consumers are encouraged to be ‘always on’ even when relaxing. This sets a precedent to publicize privacy and surveil themselves to be plugged in, thus demonstrating leisure labor.

5 CONCLUSION

With many people lamenting the death of what we know as the traditional Hollywood star, the contemporary concept of celebrity has evolved (Jacobs). Per Joshua Gamson, today's star hinges on visibility more than anything else (Gamson, 1062-1063). This is embodied by Kim Kardashian, who first gained notoriety by being seen partying with fellow reality star, Paris Hilton and has since been labeled as "being famous for being famous". In order to gain status and prove she is deserving of esteem, Kardashian has had to always be on, melding business with pleasure. Fans fit into this by following suit in order to add and derive value from society. Though little scholarly work has been written on the concept of "me-time", stars can teach us something about lifestyles, and Kim Kardashian demonstrates a merging of leisure and labor, thus providing us with an understanding of "me-time" and "self-care" within a neoliberal ideal and lifestyle. Through consuming her products, fans can take part in the bleeding of leisure and labor in order to gain status in a world that prioritizes "the grind". Thus, they are enacting leisure labor. In the world of capitalism, no longer is leisure a break from routine but rather the routine itself. What's not important is being famous but acting as if you already are.

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