

Celebrity Habitus, Confessional Style: Self-Reflective Bodily Instruction within Khloé Kardashian's *Strong Looks Better Naked*

Abstract

The article examines Khloé Kardashian's self-help book *Strong Looks Better Naked* from the perspective of representing a celebrity-based inspirational guide extolling the values of exercise and healthy living and in terms of key tenets of the autobiography. In this context, the article argues that the book is an example of Sean Redmond's concept of the 'celebrity confessional' in that it uses self-reflective disclosures to connect with readers. However, given the confessionals of bodily issues revealed within the book, the article explores how Kardashian exhibits a double sense of habitus through communicating bodily norms and expectations associated with celebrity culture, but also revealing her own relationship with this culture, a factor exacerbated through her membership of the Kardashian family and its potent celebrity brand.

'When my muscles hurt, my heart sings' (Khloé Kardashian, *Strong Looks Better Naked*, 2015: 28).

As Cooper Lawrence states within *The Cult of Celebrity*, the primary rationale for companies to pay substantial sums to celebrities is to tap into the levels of public worship they attract. Therefore, if 'we worship celebrities and aspire to their lifestyle, who better to influence our decisions; who better to tell us what to buy, who we need to be' (2009: 108). As such, a key issue within the study of the phenomenon of celebrity worship is the status of the idealized celebrity body (Maltby et al 2005; Maltby and Day, 2011; Young, Gabriel and Sechrist, 2012; Brown and Tiggemann, 2016; Ang, and Chan, 2018). In this context, celebrities are perceived to possess an enviable physique that is offered to viewers as a model to emulate, and are routinely presented within celebrity-based media discourses as key sources of 'gymspiration' (Lord 2018). In this context, this article will explore the issue of celebrity bodily transformation, based on the example of Khloé Kardashian, to examine the ways in which a reflective self-perception on bodily issues is expressed within a candid and autobiographical

fashion, but with the onus upon building self-confidence through physical exercise and the offering of the celebrity body and self, from an 'insider' perspective, as an inspirational exemplar.

As a member of the Kardashian family, consisting of sisters Kim, Kourtney, brother Rob, parents Kris Jenner and Caitlyn Jenner, and their daughters, Kylie and Kendall Jenner, Khloé Kardashian has experienced an intensely mediated life since the family first appeared in their Reality TV show, *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, first broadcast in 2007 on the *E!* entertainment channel. However, while the family has branched out into numerous spin-off TV shows, a myriad of product endorsements and self-branded ventures to become a potent celebrity-based economic force, a major focus of academic (and media) interest in the Kardashians and their 'brand empire' is the prominence of bodily image within the narratives of their Reality TV show and the plethora of media images that surround them, and are often produced by them. This latter factor was exemplified by Kim Kardashian's compilation of her now-voluminous collection of 'selfies' into her book, *Selfish* (Kardashian 2015), a self-presentational strategy reinforcing her status as a cultural figure who imbues a distinctive mode of 'hyperfeminine perfection' (Jones 2016: 131). Moreover, this form of visibility is powerfully enhanced through the family's strategic adeptness in uploading images of, and brand messages about, themselves onto various social media platforms to constantly update and reach out to fans, and so achieve a globally-diffused digital network of followers that number in the hundreds of millions (Lueck 2015; Hamad 2018). In this regard, as Amanda Scheiner McClain states in her study of 'brand Kardashian', the 'Kardashian women exemplify almost a caricature of femininity and the female form. This is illustrated through lengthy hair extensions, hourglass figures exaggerated through tight, fashionable designer clothing, sky-high

heels, huge eyes encircled with dramatically heavy makeup, and darkly tanned skin' (2014: 51). As such, a significant degree of the academic commentary focuses upon the Kardashian/Jenners in relation to media representations of their bodies (Scheiner McClain 2014; Sastre 2014; Monteverde 2016; Appleford 2016; Cobb 2016; Sood, Quintal and Phau, 2017).

Still, much of this focus is invariably focused on Kim Kardashian (with increasing attention given to Kendall and Kylie Jenner) in terms of inspirational body types. However, as Scheiner McClain states, within many episodes of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (and within wider media discourses), Khloé Kardashian has been depicted more negatively, and has been shown to cope with 'body image unhappiness and insecurity. [And adding] to her self-doubt, the family often jokes about her being overweight and larger than her sisters' (2014: 54). In this regard, she has stated within media interviews: 'Dealing with the Kardashian body image is hard. Kim and Kourtney have said to me, "If we were put under the same negative attention you are, we couldn't handle it"' (McClain 2013: 14). In consequence, Khloé Kardashian has self-reflectively engaged with this perception and pressure, most significantly within her 2015 book, *Strong Looks Better Naked*, a self-help text that also contains a significant degree of autobiographical reflection on her bodily status, and communicates her determination to transform herself through a committed regime of exercise and nutritional change. In this sense, Kardashian has created a 'confessional' book that is intended to inspire readers to do the same.

Therefore, this article will explore the content and ethos of *Strong Looks Better Naked*, drawing upon the concepts of habitus and glamour work with regard to the instructional nature of the book, underpinned as it is by the extolling of the physically

(and mentally) transformative power of the gym and a systematic regime of bodily exercise. Yet, given that Khloé Kardashian has often been the subject of critical appraisals of her body (even from, as Scheiner McClain states, her own family in terms of the centrality of bodily image to the potent and lucrative 'Kardashian Brand'), her book is rooted within a candid self-reflexive autobiographical account of her body issues, and how she is subject to what can be dubbed the 'Kardashian bodily habitus'. As such, the article will draw upon aspects of Sean Redmond's approach to the nature of the 'celebrity confession' to examine how the personal elements serve to reinforce the instructional and would-be inspirational message of the book.

The celebrity-focused design for life

As Elizabeth Arveda Kissling argues, celebrity self-help books emerged as a distinctive literary genre in the 1980s in the wake of the release of a number of glossy texts produced by celebrities as disparate as Raquel Welch, Elizabeth Taylor, Brooke Shields, and Cher. Although produced by very different kinds of stars, a unifying theme within these books was the clear association of female confidence and self-worth with enhanced levels of health, fitness, and beauty. Yet, rather than serving as empowering manifestos, what these celebrity self-help books actually contained, argues Kissling, were conservative acceptances of idealized principles of female physical appearance which offered few challenges to the prevailing bodily ideology and societal norms, as Cher acknowledges within her book: 'Look, we're a visual society. I didn't make this society. I just live here. I adapted to it' (2006: 554). In this regard, Kissling found that the prevailing message of such celebrity self-help books was that of promoting exercise and diet as the guaranteed route to achieving beauty and health. Consequently, these celebrity diet and fitness books did not acknowledge or criticize

sexist culture but, alternatively, stressed that the source of female unhappiness lies within and can therefore only be combated and overcome through bodily recreation through exercise and beauty regimes.

Significantly, the trend for celebrity-produced self-help books continued beyond the 1980s to become a distinctive and successful sub-genre covering topics such as diet, fitness, nutrition, health, or fashion advice and released by figures such as: Victoria Beckham, Gwyneth Paltrow, Cameron Diaz, Kate Hudson, Lauren Conrad, Kristin Cavallari, and Khloé Kardashian. It is Kardashian's contribution to this form, *Strong Looks Better Naked*, which is the focus within this article as it is a book that combines elements of autobiography with specific advice and guidance for a transformed body and attitude achievable through exercise, nutrition and mindfulness. As such, it fuses the personal, autobiographical or 'confessional' with bodily transformation guidance and advice, but from a distinctive celebrity standpoint within the Kardashian family, and, more importantly, the Kardashian brand. Thus, Andrei Codrescu's mid-1990s assessment of the nature of television seemingly predicted the Kardashians perfectly in relation to his view that via this medium 'we know television families better than our own' (1994: 29), and *Strong Looks Better Naked*, as a further *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* self-focused revelatory spin-off text, only serves to make that level of public knowledge even more explicit and personal.

Exercising religiously: Khloé Kardashian's bodily habitus

Right from the outset of *Strong Looks Better Naked*, Khloé Kardashian inevitably reflects upon her status as a Reality TV star, whose life has been constantly documented within the media for over ten years. This scrutiny has ranged from significant life events to celebrity gossip, but a recurring theme has been the focus

upon her weight, which underscores the rationale for her life change in terms of her body – a process that is the substance of the book, and the potential it has to guide and inspire others. As she states at the beginning of the book:

[Whether] I think of myself as a role model or not, there are a lot of young women (and a few men, too) who look up to me. I don't take their *admiration* lightly; it comes with a real responsibility. That is one of the many reasons I wanted to write *Strong Looks Better Naked* (Kardashian 2015: xv-xvi).

Within the introductory section, Khloé also strives to stress that her approach is essentially a holistic one, that her exercise regime has enabled her to align body, mind, and soul, but still emphasizes the primacy of body work – that the journey to overall wellbeing must begin with bodily change that comes from the work of committed and sustained exercise. However, the context of the book is notable in that the bodily advice is underpinned by a discussion of why Kardashian felt that she had to make a dramatic life change, a transformation driven by the embrace of exercise. In one sense, the issue of an autobiographical dimension to the book is connected to the nature of her fame, and her status as a 'demotic' celebrity – a figure whose renown is that of a once 'ordinary person' transformed into media content via reality TV (Turner 2006), a process whereby 'the labour of self-performance' is translated into 'marketable product' (Kavka and Weber 2017: 4). In this sense, Khloé and the rest of the Kardashian/Jenner family are argued to exemplify the nature (and excesses) of Reality TV. As Scheiner McClain states:

The Kardashians are more than just a reality TV show: they are a contemporary cultural touchstone, recognizable throughout the world; connoting warrantless celebrity, voluptuous beauty, and flash-in-the-pan marriage. The Kardashians are prevalent not only on television, but throughout the media landscape (2014: 1).

As Kris Jenner recalls in her autobiography, the unique selling point of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* was the candid 'all-access' media nature of the series, and the documenting of all aspects of their lives. As Jenner states of the producers' stipulation: '[They] asked for one promise from us: no matter what happened, the cameras would continue rolling' (2011: 261). In terms of Khloé Kardashian, a major life event documented in the show was her marriage (following a three-month relationship) and subsequent divorce from the basketball player, Lamar Odom. This relationship forms the context to *Strong Looks Better Naked*, with personal insights into her life with Odom revealed to the reader, but with the positive message linked explicitly to the powers and potentials of physical exercise. In this context, Khloé recounts that her life was adversely affected during the marriage because of the separation from her wider family that resulted from her living in Dallas, the location of Odom's basketball team. Additionally, Khloé details how she frequently found herself alone within their hotel apartment complex, a situation compounded by her eating copious amounts of junk food at the many basketball games that she attended, resulting in notable weight gain. Furthermore, within this period there was growing anxiety-inducing media and paparazzi questioning of the state of her marriage. In terms of dealing with these negative stresses and anxieties, Khloé recounts how she discovered the hotel gym, a space in which, as she states, 'I was transported to another place, away from myself

and my brooding thoughts' (Kardashian 2015: 4), to the point that the gym became a place of 'refuge and a sanctuary' and a 'genuine oasis' (Kardashian 2015: 4). As such, the space of the gym, and the exercise regime that Khloé engaged in within it, represents more than simply physical activity. As she recounts on the motivation to embrace strenuous working out:

It began when I was going through a particularly hard time in my life...Physically and emotionally I was at a really low point and I needed an outlet. The outlet I discovered was exercise. At first I focused on my physical body to distract myself from thinking about the things that were causing me real pain. But as my body got stronger, there was an unexpected side effect: my mind became clear (Kardashian 2015: xvi).

In reflecting upon this process, Khloé stresses that the motivation to work out was *not* simply based upon the desire to achieve a desired bodily aesthetic, but was instead a form of solitary therapy, especially as her marriage did begin to break down, leading to a divorce in 2013. In this context, she reveals: 'As things got worse on the home front, I began to rely more and more on these sanity-saving workouts' (Kardashian 2015: 19). In terms of context, the earlier sections of the book relate back to her early teenage years, a period in which she describes herself as being 'a little overweight' and having a problematic relationship to food, as she states: 'Whenever I was stressed or struggling with emotional issues, no matter how insignificant, I would turn to food' (Kardashian 2015: 8). Consequently, given the presence of such candid and autobiographical declarations, the ethos of *Strong Looks Better Naked* not only serves

as a self-help book extolling the virtues of physical exercise, but also reflects and adheres to key aspects of what Sean Redmond dubs the 'celebrity confessional'.

Within 'The Star and Celebrity Confessional', Redmond examines a culture that has become saturated by a myriad of 'revelatory communications' of private lives related to scandals, deviant behaviours and actions, and personal problems. Moreover, such is the reach of this confessional media culture that it has increasingly included celebrities within its spaces. As Redmond explains:

The star or celebrity seemingly attempts to speak openly and honestly about where they have come from. Such as confession(s) can include reference to their humble beginnings; the troubles, hardships and corruption they may have faced along the journey to fame; who they really are underneath the fame gown; and how alike they are to the everyday people who watch their films, buy their records, go to their concerts (2010: 2).

In this view, the celebrity confessional brings together a specific dynamic, a nexus point that unites revelations about the business of being a celebrity figure, their emotional thoughts, and often critical appraisals of their public and private selves. So, within media such as documentaries, TV and magazine interviews or personal blogs:

Stars and celebrities confess – they always have invested in the revelatory mode of self-enunciation– but in the self-reflexive, ubiquitous, highly simulated environment of 24/7 media culture today, they centrally rely on the confessional to authenticate, validate, humanize, resurrect, extend and enrich their star and celebrity identities. Stars and celebrities confess, and in so doing confirm their

status as truthful, emotive, experiential beings who – as devotional fans – we can invest in (Redmond 2010: 1–2).

As stated, Khloé Kardashian, and her extensively-mediated family, are exemplars of the confessional style, in that key aspects of their lives is broadcast willingly through Reality TV, from the positive and the controversial, and much of the narrative of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* is concerned with the participants revealing to the camera painful and ostensibly private personal feelings and disclosures (scandals, public humiliations, marriage and relationship break-downs, failed business and brand endorsement ventures, or traumatic crime experiences). In essence, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* is fundamentally a confessional narrative because this is the essence of its appeal – a personality-based narrative predicted upon the day-to-day activities of a family that is ‘unsurpassed at the many techniques of monetizing reality fame’ (Scheiner McClain 2014: 7). Within Khloé Kardashian’s *Strong Looks Better Naked*, with its evocation of autobiography, a literary genre predicated upon self-representation and the story of the self (Gilmore 1994), she presents a position that exhibits a reflexive tone that evokes what Jo Littler argues is the sense of ‘emotional interiority and self-criticism’ frequently central to celebrity confessional narratives. These are predicted upon communicating a palpable sense of authenticity, and, crucially, a bond ‘of emotional intimacy with the audience’ (2004: 13). As such, the book discusses a number of personal issues (the impact of the O.J. Simpson murder case on her family, her reaction to the death of her father, Robert Kardashian, the emotional issues that have affected her brother, Rob Kardashian, and her stepfather Bruce Jenner’s transition to a women), in addition to her candid insights about her weight problems and marriage breakdown. As such, these elements ensure that the exercise message is personalised, and that there is a connection between the celebrity

and the reader, with Khloé acting as the role model, but a role model who is keen to flag her own bodily flaws – the motivating reason for her exercise journey. In this sense, the prevailing message is not one of dieting or exercising with the sole goal of losing weight, as she states:

I never thought about losing weight. I know it sounds strange, but to me it wasn't about the scale. I really began paying attention to the pounds only after I started working out, when they began to melt away. Losing weight was a pleasant side effect, not the goal. To me, exercise was about how I *felt* in both body and mind, not about my weight. It's not about the weight, ladies, and it's not about the calories, either (2015: 29-30).

This tone of interpolation works to achieve the relation of intimacy that Littler refers to, as it downplays the idea that Khloé is offering a faddish celebrity-focused diet/exercise regime that will secure instant weight-loss. Indeed, she explicitly rejects that approach, instead conveying a grounded message in terms of getting into shape, as she states: 'there is no easy fix. It's a lifetime commitment. But the irony is that this commitment can be the most pleasurable part of the rest of your life' (Kardashian 2015: 37). In terms of Khloé's autobiographical story, she tells of returning to Los Angeles, with the media focus upon her life and image intensifying, leading to her further praising the virtues of the sanctuary-like escape of the gym. Moreover, in relation to this life-period, she essays the ways in which her healthy regime intensified, most notably through her hiring of a personal trainer, Gunnar Peterson, who she notes 'is affectionately known as the Trainer to the Stars' (Kardashian 2015: 21). As Khloé reflects, working with the trainer enables her to not only intensify her levels of exercise (such as increasing the regularity of gym sessions), but also having expert guidance enables her to take an

actively 'somatic' approach to her body, as she reveals with regard to her admiration for female celebrity bodies that she wishes to emulate:

Gunnar is all about building bodies, and that's what we were doing. I would come in with a picture of Jennifer Lopez's abs and I'd say, "I want those abs," and for the next two months he's make sure I put extra time into my abs. Another time I arrived at the gym with a picture of Beyoncé's ass and told Gunnar, "I want that ass. And we worked on my ass" (Kardashian 2015: 39).

In a text input section written by Peterson, he explains that his primary role is to structure her workout in terms of exercises, their sequence, but most importantly, to motivate and push her through the gym sessions (but acknowledging that he can only approximate the desired body images of the likes of Jennifer Lopez and Beyoncé in relation to Khloé's body type). In terms of clearly conveying the results of this work, *Strong Looks Better Naked* contains a number of double-page spread photographs which act to visually communicate the 'before' and 'after' effects of her exercise commitments, with the left-hand side showing older images, while the right-hand side picture is a post-exercise regime image that depicts a fitter and more slender bodily image. Consequently, the book represents a reflexive account of the process that Elizabeth Wissinger calls 'glamour labour', a practice that 'works on both body and image – the bodywork to manage appearance in person and image work to create and maintain one's "cool" quotient' (2015: 3).

While the cultural figure most commonly associated with glamour labour is the fashion model, Wissinger argues that the Kardashians, with their incessant focus upon

bodily maintenance, transformation and digital image posting and styling 'are glamour labourers extraordinaire' (2016: 141). Referring to Kim Kardashian, Wissinger stresses her unrelenting work ethic, emphasising that she 'is on the front lines of glamour labour, tirelessly working on her body and image, and has no patience with those who do not' (2016: 145). Furthermore, with the issue of her no-privacy and media oversharing of bodily, cosmetics and digital enhancement techniques clearly convey 'her message that anyone can do it' (2016: 149). Khloé' Kardashian's contribution to this potential for wider emulation, however, is a much more grounded one, and a position that fundamentally stresses the *work* component of emulating her image and body project. And so in this context, *Strong Looks Better Naked* offers a detailed guide to readers to follow her path closely, and attain a stronger sense of self and wellbeing through adhering to her techniques and instruction: her celebrity-based habitus.

Formulated by Pierre Bourdieu, habitus is 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions that are produced by the particular conditions of a class grouping' (Bourdieu 1994: 95). However, commentators such as Joanne Entwistle have applied the concept to fashion and to the idea of the construction of 'fashionable bodies'. The most salient aspect of this concept in relation to fashion and body image is that, as Entwistle argues, it establishes a link between the individual and their given wider society. In this sense, the ways in which social actors come to live in their bodies is structured by the social positions they occupy within the world, but these 'structures are reproduced only through the embodied actions of individuals. Once acquired, the *habitus* enables the generation of practices that are constantly adaptable to the conditions it meets' (2015: 36). In the context of fashion, the idea of habitus can explain the ways in which clothing is gendered, and how gendered expectations are then culturally reproduced. However, the idea of the individual playing a role in this process is articulated by Jennifer Craik in

relation to specific bodies and processes of bodily presentation and how social actors acquire specific body techniques. In relation to bodily actions, Craik argues that:

Habitus refers to specialized techniques and embedded knowledge that enable people to navigate the different levels of life such as: the unconscious dispositions, the classification schemes, taken-for-granted preferences which are evident in the individual's sense of the appropriateness and validity of [their] taste for cultural goods and practices...as well as being "inscribed on the body" through body techniques and modes of self-presentation (1993: 4).

Writing in relation to fashion models, Craik stresses that they are a figure that illuminate (in terms of changing body types and expectations from the industry), that changing ideas about gender are manifest within this aspect of the fashion industry. However, the continuing relevance of Craik's use of habitus lies in relation to the ways in which the fashion model constitutes the 'technical body of western consumer culture', a figure who stresses the primacy of bodily appearance, and, more crucially, the 'fetishisation' of the body that is built upon an extensive and perpetual process of discipline and physical labour associated with 'getting the look' (Craik 1993: 88). Hence, although the concept of habitus is frequently connected to the concept and expression of social class, habitus has also been related to gendered practice to explain the ways in which gender is culturally replicated and communicated through fashion styles. The importance for celebrity culture here is that people look to particular cultural 'role models' to guide them and to prescribe the acceptable and 'unacceptable' modes of presenting the body, or, in Wissinger's contemporary fashion-focused evocation of the essence of habitus in terms of fashion-based glamour labour, that

'bodies are shaped by gendered attitudes about what is desirable or considered ideal' (2015: 21).

In this way, while a substantial component of the Kardashian/Jenner appeal and media/public fascination is focused upon their bodies and the fashion-related glamour that surrounds it (Agin 2014), Khloé Kardashian's *Strong Looks Better Naked* represents a detailed celebrity-based 'habitus guide', as it provides a succession of points to the reader that offers them the potential to dramatically transform their bodies and to attain life-enhancing skills and attitudes, as evidenced by Khloé's own candid insights into her own bodily alteration journey, and, crucially, the physical results she has achieved. Consequently, *Strong Looks Better Naked*, in addition to the accounts of her own personal approach to gym-work, also includes a number of directives to readers to ensure that they too can engage in the same bodily processes. For example, Khloé exhorts readers to find the exercise that works for them, and to write down realistic goals in this regard in order to experience similar bodily change, such as: Start small; Devise a working plan; Reward yourself from time to time; Ask for help; Praise yourself; Challenge yourself; and Repetition is the key (Kardashian 2015: 36).

In addition to exercise insights, the book extends its life-guidance to subjects such as the benefits of good nutrition (provided by Khloé's personal nutritionist, Dr Phil Goglia), that recommends that readers drink more water, avoid sugar-filled fructose drinks, and switch to green tea and water-detox drinks (such as adding fresh melon, grapefruit and oranges to water to replace flavoured drinks). In terms of food, the book recommends that readers eat slowly in order to eat less, and switch to organic foods whenever they can (shopping at farmer's markets, for example), and offers healthy recipes that incorporate oatmeal, breaded chicken, homemade hummus, and kale

salads. These latter points underscore the book's commitment to a holistic fusion of healthy body and mind in terms of a commitment to work and daily routine, and the benefits of being organized, but accentuated by the centrality of the impact of physical exercise. As she states within the mindfulness sections of the book: 'If I miss my morning workout, it doesn't exactly ruin my day, but somehow I don't feel complete' (Kardashian 2015: 121). Therefore, while *Strong Looks Better Naked* gives the reader personalized insights into the Kardashian world, it is predicated upon Khloé Kardashian offering herself as a celebrity role model and bodily guide, and so stressing her body as a source of habitus. However, while the book does strive for a holistic fusion of strong body equaling a strong and healthy mind, the success of Khloé's dramatic bodily transformation does raise issues about her status as a conduit of a wider social habitus in terms of the gendered body, and cultural expectations concerning body image, especially in relation to a celebrity role model.

Khloé Kardashian: An unattainable role model?

In critically assessing the concept of fashion within the sociological work of Bourdieu, Agnès Rocamora looks at the ways in which dress relates to the class structuring of taste, and how this is aligned to practices of social and cultural distinction, a process in which fashion is crucial because 'fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference' (2016: 242). However, this concept of a fashion-based mechanism for communicating distinction also extends to the bodies that wear the fashions. As Entwistle and Rocamora argue in relation to the staging of Fashion Week events, a crucial feature within the field of fashion 'is the ability to articulate recognized forms of fashion capital and develop an appropriate fashion habitus so that one's body actually looks like it belongs' (2006: 746). This view of the nature and exercise of habitus is acutely illustrated by the example of Khloé Kardashian, but in two distinctive ways. At one

level, her self-help book is both a promulgation of the celebrity-standard bodily habitus that is prevalent within popular culture. However, it is also a self-reflexive account of her *own* personal labour to conform to a celebrity-standard of bodily representation, and, more directly, to 'belong to' the pervasive and globally-mediated Kardashian family standard of beauty that, as Scheiner McClain (2014) argues, is central to the nature and success of the Kardashian 'brand empire'.

For Scheiner McClain, the Kardashian sisters 'epitomize a level of physical appearance that most people cannot possibly achieve' (2014: 51). Within the confessional aspects of *Strong Looks Better Naked*, Khloé Kardashian reveals that she was often excluded from this perception, citing in wider interviews that from her early teens she endured numerous taunts and comments that she bore little physical resemblance to her sisters (Halperin 2015). In this sense, then, Khloé's text reflects a candid standpoint that adheres to key tenets of the autobiography in that 'the confession in both its oral and its written forms grants the autobiographer a kind of authority derived from the confessor's proximity to "truth" (Gilmore 1994: 56), or in her case, her position relative to a media/celebrity family/brand that is primarily lauded for physical 'perfection'. As such, *Strong Looks Better Naked* represents her apotheosis of such perceptions – that thanks to a punishing physical regime and professional nutritional guidance, she reflects its bodily and stylistic habitus, which is now offered to the public as a role model.

However, while Khloé's message throughout her book stresses the holistic nature of her lifestyle advice, the dominant result, and subsequent supporting imagery is related to bodily transformation, and as such reflects a pervasive societal norm in terms of acceptable bodily habitus. Hence, her bodily project ultimately conforms to the societal development identified by Susie Orbach in her critical analysis of the

growth of the pursuit of the gym-sculpted body, a process mirrored by the growth of the diet industry and increase in demand for cosmetic surgery. As Orbach states:

Late capitalism has catapulted us out of centuries-old bodily practices which were centred on survival, procreation, the provision of shelter and the satisfaction of hunger. Now, birthing, illness and ageing, while part of the ordinary cycle of life, are also events that can be interrupted or altered by personal endeavour in which one harnesses the medical advances and surgical restructurings on offer. Our body is judged as our individual production (2010: 5).

For Hamish Pringle (2004), celebrities hold a significant cultural position as role models for such dietary, cosmetic, and exercise procedures, and so the conception of the body as a site of 'individual production' is the central theme of *Strong Looks Better Naked*, and while the book offers a range of positive guidance that reinforce the physical and mental benefits of a committed exercise and nutrition regime, the leitmotif of the narrative is ultimately the bodily aesthetic results of such an endeavour. So, akin to the earlier celebrity self-book books examined by Kissling, it never questions the cultural impetus to sculpt bodies to reflect societal expectations. It is also notable that Khloé stresses the need for readers to find their own exercise path, as she states: 'You have to find an exercise you can grow to love. If you don't, you won't stick with it, and nothing will change' (2015: 34). But, it is unlikely that any self-chosen exercise activity will enable a reader to fully emulate Khloé Kardashian, given the centrality and professional guidance of her personal trainer, and the daily commitment required within this relationship. Consequently, *Strong Looks Better Naked* arguably reflects the same ethos that is inherent within the celebrity fitness video trend, whereby, as

Vanessa Russell (2007) argues, while the celebrity is positioned to act as a 'mirror' to the viewer's body and serve as the aspirational role model, in many cases celebrity workouts are habitually disempowering. This is because few viewers can feasibly match the celebrity's level of fitness (the work has already been done and the ideal body has been acquired), therefore many viewers must start with the low-impact workouts while the celebrity operates at what Russell calls the 'hardcore' expert level. Hence, while the advice given with *Strong Looks Better Naked* may well lead to a positive and healthier lifestyle change, it is doubtful, sans Gunnar Peterson, to enable the reader to fully follow Khloé Kardashian's bodily journey to the letter and so achieve comparable results.

Strong Looks Better Naked: celebrity self-representation and the 'double habitus'

In the view of Meredith Jones, contemporary media culture can be categorized as representing a 'makeover culture', an ethos that 'dictates that bodies, selves and environments must be in constant states of renovation, restoration, maintenance and improvement. And nowhere is makeover culture more obvious, more ubiquitous or more pernicious than in women's bodies, which are subject to its forever-in-flux imperatives to change' (2016: 132). Within the context of this perspective, given their continual usage and espousal of gym work, diets, professional makeup artists and even cosmetic surgeries, Jones dubs the Kardashians as representing 'makeover culture's poster-people' (2016: 132). And while their television popularity may be waning with regard to falling viewer figures for *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (Haney 2018), they remain a highly visual (albeit a critically divisive) cultural presence,

with Kylie Jenner possessing a 112 million-strong Instagram follower community that has seen her dubbed as being ‘arguably the most prominent face of our social-media age’ (Newis-Smith 2018: 105) and becoming, thanks to her Kylie Cosmetics brand, the ‘youngest self-made billionaire ever’ (Robehmed 2019). However, in the case of Khloé Kardashian, the idea of the ‘double habitus’ mentioned earlier is a potent one. As part of the image-central Kardashian family, she is part of the celebrity-driven and mediated bodily habitus, but her confessional tone, within earlier interviews and threaded throughout *Strong Looks Better Naked*, does provide an insight into how celebrities themselves feel pressured by this cultural habitus-expectation. Nonetheless, the essence of the ‘confession’ within the book is an account of conformity to this habitus, both in a wider cultural context, and Kardashian bodily expectations. Indeed, since the publication of *Strong Looks Better Naked*, extreme fitness and training has become a dominant component of Khloé Kardashian’s celebrity/brand persona. This is illustrated by the ways in which personal trainers are present within various episodes of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, and the degree to which she maintained a version of her exercise regime throughout her 2017/18 pregnancy period, resuming her regime (with personal trainer, Joel Bouraima), six weeks after the birth of her daughter, True. This regimen consists of five to six times a gym sessions week (Nahas 2018) and resulted in a rapid post-pregnancy ‘getting-your-body-back’ outcome that is now common within celebrity culture, but one that is far more difficult for women who have no access to ‘celebrity resources’ (Cunningham 2002; Nash 2015).

However, while Khloé Kardashian’s fame is explicitly the result of the revelation-dominated nature of reality television (Biressi and Nunn 2005), *Strong Looks Better Naked* does enable her to engage in a process of personalized self-reflection that

underscores life-events that were visually represented within *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, and does reveal moments of vulnerability, especially in relation to her body and her image. Hence, while the popular culture autobiographical form has been derided in the context of 'debasement of the self by commodifying it' (Anderson 2001: 8), the confessional nature of Khloé Kardashian's book offers an essential level of intimacy that underscores the practical guidance, and it is a crucial one in that it serves to empower her as a relatable bodily role-model (although it could still be viewed as a further Kardashian commercial product). Yet, in this sense, *Strong Looks Better Naked* cogently reflects Littler's critical assessment of the nature of celebrity and self-revelation, which is that through offering expressions of intimacy, a celebrity can effectively connect with a wider public and establish, however unlikely it may seem, that 'they have something in common' (2004: 23). In this instance, the commonality is that pressure to reflect the apparently bodily perfection of a celebrity figure such as Kim Kardashian is not only expressed beyond the confines of the celebrity family, but is also acutely felt *within* the Kardashians; but the differential access to a coterie of 'celebrity' personal trainers, nutritionists, cosmeticians, etc. is where the commonality is not so sustainable and not so authentic, because Khloé is still, after all, a Kardashian.

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