

‘The variety of media available encourages us to create many different identities for ourselves. How far do you agree with this statement?’

For my case study on Kim Kardashian, I would argue that the media landscape does allow her to create a range of different identities. However, the issue (as with all cases of identity in the media) is whether it is the individual who has the power and opportunity to create and sustain this identity, or whether it is the power and control of global media institutions that determine it.

Kim Kardashian is known today as an American television and social media personality, actress, socialite, and model. She first gained media attention when she became ‘friends’ with Paris Hilton. Her identity was simply that of a ‘maid’. During this time in her life, Kim’s identity was simply that of a naïve young girl who would abide by all the instructions given by Paris Hilton who, at the time, was a revolutionizing celebrity and reality television star. Kim was seen to look up to longingly and adoringly towards Paris, wishing one day she could be like her.

Today, however, the roles have been reversed; with Kim being a successful reality television star and Paris Hilton no longer receiving the same amount of much media attention. In fact, Paris claims, ‘I created Kim Kardashian; her family owes me her life’.

The reason behind this radical change or reification of Kim Kardashian’s identity can be dated to events in 2007 when an intimate video (made in 2003) was leaked to the media by Vivid Entertainment; a company famous for leaking celebrity porn videos. This video may have gained Kim negative press but it also undoubtedly increased her media profile and transformed her identity in the eyes of the public.

Despite this increased negative attention on her private life, Kim Kardashian used the new identity this intimate video gave her to help launch her TV programme, ‘Keeping up with the Kardashians’ which began later that year and is still ongoing. This begs the question whether the publication of the video was (in part) deliberate attempt by Kim Kardashian to create a new identity for herself - one that would eventually lead to her having a celebrity status. If so, then clearly this supports the idea that the variety of media available encourages us to create many different identities for ourselves since she would have some control in the creation of this new identity.

Kim Kardashian has been extremely successful in constantly re-inventing her identity. This is seen in the way she now promotes herself as a ‘successful business women’ which is a completely different identity to the one she had following the publication of the sex tape. She has used a variety of media available to create an identity ‘brand’ through products such as the TV series ‘Keeping up with the Kardashians’, the marketing of 7 perfume fragrances, the Kardashian Kollektion (fashion), Kardashian Beauty and several books. The most recent book Kim has released (‘Selfish’) is a book consisting of all her selfies from past times to present. This book shows the reader exactly how Kim’s identity has changed over time as there are many different moments documenting her life. This provides a clear example of what Anthony Giddens argues that in a Post traditional society, identity is not fixed and that people are in the process of constantly constructing their identity.

In an interview about the book Kim stated: “Isn’t selfish really what selfie means? Kanye came up with the name and the idea to create a ‘coffee table book’ of all my selfies. It may be vain, ridiculous and funny but I love memories and for me that’s what these selfies represent.”

However, the most successful media product in establishing, defining and re-defining Kim Kardashian’s identity is undoubtedly her TV series ‘Keeping up with the Kardashians’. It was on this series that Kim was able to express her struggle to become pregnant. It is no surprise then that when she finally announced she was having her first child with Kanye West, the news received a lot of

coverage both on social media and mainstream media. So, it was with this that Kim was able to create another identity - that of 'mother'.

Being seen as a mother figure is one of Kim's many identities. North (the child of Kim and Kanye) has featured several times on KUWTK and Kim herself has been photographed on many occasions with her child in her arms, thereby reinforcing her identity as a caring and protective mother.

However, Kim's latest reification as a caring mother has been challenged by several media institutions with one article headlined: "Kim Kardashian's most outrageous mum moments." Whereas another states "7 times Kim Kardashian was an amazing mum."

Kim, herself, has attempted to make her maternal identity stronger by stating she is "a strict mum" whilst also being "fun and playful". In an article in The Daily Mail she represented herself as an "organised person" who made sure she had "enough time for everyone – for my husband and my baby and for work."

While printing this response, the traditional values and ideologies of The Daily Mail meant that it also chose to comment that "The reality TV star....was wearing a figure-hugging Balmain dress crafted out of rope." This detail is telling, suggesting the outfit is hardly something a traditionally 'good' mother would wear.

Kim has also featured in several magazine publications such as 'Glamour' Magazine. It is through magazines such as this that Kim can present to consumers with different and constantly re-defined identities. In this case, 'Glamour Magazine espouses a set of ideologies associated with fashion and celebrity. In the magazine, Kim is able to present herself and the consumer with the identity of a successful businesswoman.

However, different mainstream media institutions inevitably encompass different sets of values and ideologies and her most recent controversial project with 'Paper' Magazine' offered an identity that controversially challenged the 'maternal' identity that Kim had recently cultivated in her reality TV show. In Paper Magazine's 'Winter' issue of 2014, Kim was featured on the front cover naked. The now iconic photo captured her smiling broadly at the camera but with her prominent oiled buttocks on show, with the caption: "Break the Internet".

Another shot also accompanied this photograph picturing Kim holding a champagne bottle while balancing a champagne glass on her bottom. She is dressed in a long evening dress with a choker of large pearls, earrings and rings on her long, black gloves hands. This pose seems to be a parody or pastiche of the iconic photograph of Audrey Hepburn from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. As such, it may suggest that through this photograph Kim wishes to link her identity to that of the famous film star. However the addition of the champagne glass on her posterior is associating her identity with an excessive set of rather decadent values.

The critic Awan (*'Young people, identities and the media'*, 2007) argues that celebrity role models offer a 'tool box' which enabled individuals to make use of certain ideas within the formation of their self-identity. Kim Kardashian could well be 'borrowing' Audrey Hepburn's attitudes or life for the creation of her own identity. Perhaps even adopting her as a 'Prosthetic Identity' in her own attempt to gain stardom.

Many observers commentated on how unrealistic and fake the photograph and pose was. However, Kim responded (keep in past tense) to these claims tweeting "And they say I didn't have a talent... try balancing a champagne glass on your ass LOL #BreakTheInternet #PaperMagazine."

This shows us that Kim herself does not seem to be affected by the negative comments that circulated about this picture and her identity.

The controversial photograph set a new benchmark in terms of social media responses, with Paper's website receiving 15.9 million views in one day, compared with 25,000 views on an average day. This shows the impact that Kim Kardashian's identity had on the consumer.

This front cover generated considerable comment in both social and traditional media. Many people praised her for her uninhibited embracing of her curvaceous body. Some commentators saw this as Kim Kardashian establishing a feminist identity by proudly offering the consumer a physique that was far from that normally associated with models.

Other commentators, however, were confused as this seemed to radically challenge the carefully crafted 'mother' identity she had presented in both her TV show and in various photographs in celebrity features in magazines and newspapers. A Time magazine writer stated "Unlike previous celebrities' nudes that represented the women's rebellion against repressed society and "trying to tear down" barriers, Kardashian's exhibition was "just provocation and bluster, repeated images that seem to offer us some sort of truth or insight but are really just self-serving." In other words, that this was a deliberate effort by Kim Kardashian to cause controversy in the hope that it would raise her media profile.

Kim Kardashian has a large fan base, her unique and glamorous identity being loved and admired by many. Paper Magazine commented "In real life her black hair is thick, her lips fuller, her giant Bambi-eyes larger, their whites whiter, and the lashes that frame them longer. She is like a beautiful anime character come to life."

Some fans even go to the lengths of having surgery in order to look like her and also act like her. Jordan James Park is a male Kim Kardashian super fan who first began having surgery at 19 years old, now having over 50 procedures, spending around £150,000. The reason him basing his look on Kim is because he admires 'strong women' in which he thinks Kim fits into this category. Although after all the surgery he may not look like Kim, he is using the same methods Kim does in order to present her identity, he states based on the negative feedback about his look "any attention is good attention because you're still thinking about me."

This is a clear example of Awan's ideas about celebrity role models offering the consumer a 'tool box' for their own identity. In this case, Jordan James Park wishes to become, in some respects, Kim Kardashian.

Kim is also widely credited for her style and beauty which has helped her develop her identity over the years. Since being in a relationship with Kanye West her style has evolved, much of the inspiration coming from Kanye.

ELLE magazine included an article entitled 'I lived like Kim Kardashian for a week'. It consisted of a journalist producing four articles based on Life, Beauty, Style and Fitness and Diet and how she adjusted herself to live like Kim for a week. This concept shows us that Kim's identity has a large impact within the media, with media institutions using it to both to help the reader in the creation of their own identity and for the far more capitalist objective to sell more copies and make money.