

Title

“I Didn’t Know You Could Read”: Questioning the Legitimacy of Kim Kardashian-West’s Status as a Cultural and Literary Intermediary

Author

Stevie Marsden

Affiliation

CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies, University of Leicester

Biography

Dr. Stevie Marsden is a Research Associate at CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester. She completed her thesis, *The Saltire Society Literary Awards, 1936-2015: A Cultural History*, in 2016 through an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award at the University of Stirling’s Centre for International Publishing and Communication. Whilst conducting her research Stevie worked with the Saltire Society in the administration of the Literary Awards. Her research interests include literary award culture, the literary economy, intersections of celebrity and book culture, and inclusivity in publishing.

Abstract

This paper considers the reactions to the announcement of Kim Kardashian-West’s Book Klub and explore how this episode illustrated the perceived illegitimacy of celebrities like Kardashian-West, who are most commonly associated with “lowbrow culture” engaging with and discussing literature, an activity that has traditionally been seen as a middlebrow endeavour. The reactions to Kardashian-West’s Book Klub not only reflect issues surrounding the status of celebrities as cultural intermediaries, but they also brought to the fore historical principles which questioned the intelligence and capabilities of women readers. This paper positions Kim Kardashian-West’s Book Klub within the wider, historical context of women reader’s and book clubs and considers the prestige, or lack thereof, of celebrities who try to be cultural and literary intermediaries. Additionally, this paper considers Kardashian-West’s Book Klub in relation to other major celebrity book clubs and argues that such forays into literary culture are used by some celebrities to bolster their social and cultural capital, acting first and foremost as a branch of their personal brand identity, as opposed to altruistic enterprises.

Keywords

Book clubs, Kim Kardashian, Literary Intermediaries, Cultural Value

Introduction

In early February 2017 the business woman, social media mogul, reality TV star and all-round celebutante Kim Kardashian-West announced that she would be starting a book club with her friends, the model and social media star, Chrissy Teigen, and celebrity hairstylist Jen Atkin. As is often the way with announcements made by Kardashian-West, the news was met with equal measures of excitement, derision and confusion. While fans of Kardashian-West exclaimed that they had ‘never wanted to be apart [sic] of a book club so bad’ on Twitter and that the book club was ‘Such a great idea and wonderful example to set for young people [sic]’ on Facebook, others questioned Kardashian-West’s literacy, with a number of her Twitter and Facebook followers asking her if she could in fact read. Other followers questioned Kardashian-West’s legitimacy as a celebrity, simply asking ‘Why are you famous?’ and sarcastically suggesting that Kardashian-West, Teigen and Atkin should write a book called ‘How to become famous with absolutely no talent or skills necessary’. Media coverage of the announcement was equally torn between enthusiasm for a new ‘celebrity book club’ and interrogations of Kardashian-West’s competence as a reader and her intellectual aptitude.

This paper will consider the reactions to Kim Kardashian-West’s Book Klub and explore how this episode illustrated the perceived illegitimacy of celebrities like Kardashian-West – who are most commonly associated with “lowbrow culture” such as reality television and social media – engaging with and discussing literature, an activity that has traditionally been seen as a middlebrow endeavour. The reactions to Kardashian-West’s Book Klub not only reflect issues surrounding the status of celebrities as cultural intermediaries, but they also brought to the fore historical principles which questioned the intelligence and capabilities of women readers. This paper will therefore position Kim Kardashian-West’s Book Klub within the wider, historical context of women reader’s and book clubs and consider the prestige, or lack thereof, of celebrities who try to be cultural and literary intermediaries. Additionally, this

paper considers Kardashian-West's Book Klub in relation to other celebrity book clubs and argues that such forays into literary culture are used by some celebrities to bolster their social and cultural capital, acting first and foremost as a branch of their personal brand identity, as opposed to altruistic enterprises.

Celebrities as Literary Intermediaries

Julian Matthews and Jennifer Smith Maguire define cultural intermediaries as:

[T]he taste makers defining what counts as good taste and cool culture in today's marketplace. Working at the intersection of culture and economy, they perform critical operations in the production and promotion of consumption, constructing legitimacy and adding value through the qualification of goods. (Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014, 1)

Such a definition fits comfortably with a particular type of cultural intermediary that we may call the 'literary intermediary'. Within the history of publishing and books it has commonly been assumed that such 'taste makers', or gatekeepers, have been placed in such a position due to their background knowledge and expertise which enables them to credibly recommend or promote certain books or authors over others. However, in recent years there has been an upsurge in celebrities establishing themselves, with varying degrees of success, as cultural and literary intermediaries. From sharing their current reads or favourite authors on social media, to hosting online book clubs, celebrities are connecting with their fans through literature like never before. Yet, celebrity promotion of books through book clubs is by no means a new phenomenon. In the 1990s, Oprah Winfrey introduced a book club segment within her live daytime television programme which had a profound effect on book sales (the impact and influence of the Oprah Book Club and its relation to the Kardashian-West Book Klub will be discussed in more detail later in this paper).¹ Similarly, in the UK, the talk show hosts Richard & Judy introduced a book club segment to their late-afternoon television show in the mid-

2000s (see Rehberg Sedo 2008). However, in recent years the means by which celebrity book clubs are organised, and the kinds of celebrity that, seemingly, organise them, has changed. As highlighted by Ramdarshan-Bold (2018) and Branagh-Miscambell and Marsden (2017), there has been a move towards celebrities creating ‘new online reading communities and new reading trends as a result’ (Ramdarshan-Bold, 2018).

Using Instagram and Twitter the American actress and producer Reese Witherspoon urges her followers to follow her book recommendations using the hashtag #RWBookClub and as a result has, according to Seija Rankin, ‘created her own Oprah’s Book Club for the social media generation’ (Rankin, 2016). Witherspoon has also used this online space to showcase books she has optioned for film production (such as the 2014 movie adaptation of Cheryl Strayed’s bestselling 2012 memoir *Wild*, which Witherspoon starred in and produced). Through this transition from book recommendation to film production and release, Witherspoon is, according to Rankin, ‘creating the audience for her own movies before she even starts filming’ (Rankin, 2016). Likewise, in January 2015 Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg started ‘A Year of Books’, an online book club mediated through his Facebook page. Throughout 2015 Zuckerberg recommended a new book every two weeks and it has been reported that following the announcement of his first book selection – *The End of Power* (2014) a non-fiction book which considers balances of power within society – the paperback had promptly sold out on Amazon.com (Flood, 2015). Yet, as more of these celebrity book clubs and their reading communities materialise, hierarchies of taste and legitimacy are starting to emerge. It seems there is an acceptance of certain celebrities branching out into literary taste making over others. Emma Watson’s feminist book club ‘Our Shared Shelf’, which is hosted on Good Reads (‘the world’s largest site for readers and book recommendations’²), for example, was launched to broadly positive reviews, with many commentators foregrounding Watson’s role as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador and feminist activist (see Cain, 2016;

McCluskey, 2016). Indeed, the fact that Watson's book club was staunchly feminist was viewed as something which added intellectual and socio-political depth to the endeavour (Waldman, 2016). It is perhaps unsurprising that Watson's book club, of all the celebrity book clubs that have emerged in recent years, would be the one to appear most legitimate. Watson is best known for her role as the bookish and wise-beyond-her-years Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film series, a role that is imbued with a literary history and culture that is now inseparable from Watson herself. Further, Watson's university education became something of a public spectacle when she graduated from Brown University with a degree in English Literature in 2014 (*The Telegraph*, 2014) and was made an Oxford University Fellow in 2016 (Miller, 2016). Such professional and educational achievements, which have become part of Watson's celebrity identity, have imbued her with cultural and social capital that legitimises her venture into the world of celebrity book clubs. Alternatively, the YouTube star Zoella, who started her own book club in summer 2016 (Campbell, 2016), has received criticism for supposedly contributing to declining literacy rates amongst teenage readers in the UK (see Turner, 2017; William, 2017) and choosing unchallenging and 'vanilla' books for her book club (Tait, 2016). Zoella, who rose to fame by creating daily video blogs (vlogs) in her bedroom and gaining millions of viewers and fans in the process, is now an author (having released three books co-written with a ghost writer) and designer (her home and beauty ranges are available in a number of high street stores). However, Zoella remains associated with a type of celebrity stardom that is commonly referred to as 'famous for being famous'. In other words, the celebrity is known not for their specific talents or skills, but for their ubiquity, particularly on social media.

Kim Kardashian-West's fame, or notoriety, is of a similar type, and may be best defined as what Chris Rojek calls 'ascribed' celebrity, that is, fame and celebrity status which has developed from the 'reputation' of the individual (Rojek, 2012, viii). Ascribed celebrities are

in opposition to what Rojek calls ‘achieved celebrities’ who are ‘famous for their deeds’ (Rojek, 2012, viii). This is an important distinction to be made in this analysis of Kardashian-West’s legitimacy as a literary and cultural intermediary, since it is her status as an ascribed celebrity, and the sometimes ambiguous, or to some unsavoury, origins of her fame that bring her authenticity, and therefore legitimacy, into question. Indeed, she has had an unusual and somewhat disjointed journey into the media spotlight and many believe that what brought Kardashian-West to the fore of mainstream celebrity gossip was the release of a sex-tape: ‘[Kim Kardashian-West’s] was a body that entered the spotlight before she did, her public and sexual self initially collapsed by her infamous sex tape.’ (Sastre, 2014, 123). The fact that this was the setting within which Kardashian-West was announcing her book club is important as it influenced, as the following section of this article illustrates, the reactions to the announcement from Kardashian-West’s fans and critics alike.

‘Wait... you can read?’: Responses to the Kim Kardashian-West Book Klub

Kardashian-West’s venture into the world of book clubs was announced on Twitter and Facebook on Wednesday 1st February 2017.³ The Facebook announcement consisted of a link to an article on Kardashian-West’s website entitled ‘Chrissy Teigen, Jen Atkin and I Are Starting a Book Club’ along with the hashtag #BOOKKLUB and a picture of herself. As of writing, this post has received 20,248 reactions (18,749 ‘Likes’, 1,339 ‘Loves’, 103 ‘Hahas’, fifty ‘Wows’, six ‘Sads’ and one ‘Angry’⁴), has been shared 234 times and has, according to Facebook, 402 comments. I was able to export the comments data from Kardashian-West’s Book Klub announcement Facebook post in January 2018. This export provided me with 469 individual comments, sixty-seven comments more than the total number of comments stated on Facebook (402).⁵ This dataset is far from perfect, being affected by vague, and often

nonsensical, comments from trolls (people who deliberately disrupt online conversation with insulting or mocking comments, which can be antagonistic towards the original poster (OP), in this case Kim Kardashian-West, or towards commenters supporting or defending the OP).⁶ For example, of the 469 comments, 20% (94) have been coded as ‘Other’, because they appear to make no contribution to the conversation about Kardashian-West’s Book Klub.⁷ The remaining 469 comments have been categorised as follows:

Category	Number of Comments	Percentage (of 469 total)
Positive (about book club)	150	32%
Negative (about book club)	61	13%
Positive (general)	55	12%
Negative (general)	16	3%
Neutral	29	6%
Names Tagged	64	14%
Other	94	20%

The first two categories, ‘Positive (about book club)’ and ‘Negative (about book club)’, refer to comments which are easily identified as being complimentary or mocking of the news of Kardashian-West’s Book Klub (these categories will be discussed in more detail presently). The second and third categories, ‘Positive (general)’ and ‘Negative (general)’, include comments directed at Kardashian-West which are admiring (‘Love you Kim!’) or derogatory (‘Disgusting human being’) but not directly related to the book club. The ‘Neutral’ category contains comments which were neither positive nor negative and were unrelated to the book club (such as ‘OK’ and ‘Hi’) and the ‘Names Tagged’ category refers to all comments that only contained names of Facebook users which were ‘tagged’ by their friends. Tagging names means the person mentioned, or ‘tagged’, will be informed of the post, but since tags were often used without any contextualising remarks, it was unclear if commenters were alerting their friends to the post because they were enthusiastic about or ridiculing the news of the club. There is evidence of users tagging friends both because they are excited about the club,

(‘[Person A] we have to be part of this’) and also because they were inviting friends to see comments questioning, and therefore mocking, Kardashian-West’s literacy (‘[Person B] [Person C] ...I didn’t know you could read’). Such examples indicate that it was near impossible to deduce a user’s motivation for tagging friends on Facebook.

Markedly positive reactions to Kardashian-West’s Facebook announcement included affirmative remarks (‘Love that idea!’, ‘lovely’, ‘Exciting!!!’ and ‘It’s a really good idea’) and comments in which users would tag their friends as a form of invitation to join the club with them: ‘[Person D] should we join?’, ‘[Person E] please join this!’, ‘[Person F] Here it is!’, ‘[Person G] Book club number 2? [Winking face emoji]’. Some commenters would attempt to align themselves with, or speak directly to, Kardashian-West: ‘Yay now we’re both sexy book nerds’, ‘Omg that is so cool girl what will it be called do you know what name you want to title it Kim? [sic]’, ‘Even kim k is doing it [Spectacles emoji] we started it first #geeksonfleeek [Winking emoji, crying laughing emoji] [Person H]’ and ‘Um, was this MADE for me?!!!! I am a reader. I am an author. I am a Kardashian fan. I AM HAPPY! [Stack of books emoji, love heart emoji]’. Other commenters wrote specifically about the first book Kardashian-West had selected for the club, Betty Eadie’s *Embraced by the Light* (which will be discussed in more detail later in this article). One wrote that she was ‘so happy’ that Kardashian-West had selected this book (which discusses near death experiences), because she had recently buried her son and found comfort in the book. Another commenter noted that the ‘message’ of the book ‘moved [her] deeply’ and that selection of the book was an ‘amazing and empowered move’ by Kardashian-West.

Other comments, however, were impertinent, and mocked Kardashian-West’s endeavour and questioned her literacy. Many of the comments directly questioned, or sarcastically brought attention to, Kardashian-West’s capacity to read: ‘I didn’t know you could read’, ‘Like you know how to read’, ‘OMG you can read!! Go Kimmy!’, ‘You can read?’.

Others would question her aptitude whilst suggesting well known children's books or so-called 'easy reads' that may be more suitable for Kardashian-West. One commenter suggested that the well-known children's book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* recommended for children aged 2-5 years old would 'soon become a best seller thanks to KK Book Club. LOL [laugh out loud]'. Another asked 'Kim can I join?? [...] I've got copies of horrid Henry for everyone', referring to the children's book series by Francesca Simon which is recommended for readers between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. Likewise, two commenters referenced picture books, again insinuating that Kardashian-West's reading level was similar to that of a very young child.

Further negative comments were more explicit, often being overtly sexist and derogatory towards Kardashian-West and her body. A number of commenters suggested that the book club should in fact be referred to as a 'boob club'. Others stated that 'Hoes don't read books' and made suggestions for fictitious titles such as 'Modern Thotology in hardcover. Go Kim'. Such comments are inherently gendered: the term 'hoe' is an offensive slang term for promiscuous women and 'thotology' is an invented term said to define 'The study of hoes and all hoe associated studies.'⁸ Similarly, a number of comments were critical of Kardashian-West, Teigen and Atkin's status as working women and mothers, making reference to gender stereotypes which imply child-care and domestic duties are the responsibility of women: 'Ladies, don't you have custodial duties, and child care duties to be attending to in your homes?' and 'Wait but it's 3 girls so shouldn't it be called the cookbook club? Girls don't need to read anything besides a cookbook.' While it is possible that both of these comments are knowingly facetious and are using exaggerated stereotypes in order to make a joke, the inherent and overt sexism of the remarks brings to the fore the misogynistic undertones of many of the negative comments made towards Kardashian-West.

Kardashian-West received a similar mix of responses from Twitter users responding to the announcement of her book club. The Twitter announcement of the book club appeared to be more clearly directed at her followers: ‘So guys..... @chrissyteigen & @jenatkinhair & I are starting a book club!’ The tweet announcing the club has received 16,705 ‘Likes’, 1,058 Retweets and has 411 Replies from other Twitter users, who, it is worth noting, do not need to be following or be followed by Kardashian-West to reply to her tweet.⁹ Some Twitter users were excited by the prospect of being able to read a new book with one of their favourite superstar celebrities: ‘how can I join your book club? It will by far be the best book club [raised hands emoji] [open book emoji] #bestbookclub #loveguys’, ‘Love this! Encouraging people to read [love heart emoji]’, ‘such a great idea!!!’, ‘where do i sign up?’, ‘THIS IS MY NERD DREAM COME TRUE!!!! Sign me up, ladies.’ A number of users also shared images of themselves holding *Embraced by the Light* or screenshots of their payment confirmation following their purchase of the book, seemingly in preparation for the club.

However, much like the comments from Facebook users, many of the Tweets responding to Karadhian-West’s Twitter announcement questioned whether she was in fact capable of reading: ‘You can read? I’m impressed’, ‘you actually read? what’s your favourite book and why?’, ‘WOWEEEEEEEEEE They can read?’, ‘You can read? Mind Blown.’ Likewise, there were several tweets that made specific reference to the children’s author Dr. Seuss (‘Dr. Seuss is excited to hear this...’) and specifically the book *Green, Eggs and Ham*, (‘Omg! Have you read "Green Egg & Ham?!!" It's so bitchin' [sic]’), which is recommended for readers who are five years old and up.

Media reports of the announcement were similarly divided between excitement about, and subtle ridicule of, the book club. An online piece for *New York Mag*, took a sardonic look at the book club:

Late on Wednesday evening, Kardashian announced that she's — surprise! — starting an unofficial book club with her bestie Chrissy Teigen and her favorite hair stylist (and bestie), Jen Atkin [...] While Kardashian announced it as the first pick for her unofficial book club, it appears she's already read it. (Avila, 2017)

The repetition of the word 'unofficial' undermines the validity of the club, suggesting that Kardashian-West, Teigen and Atkin's venture is invalid. Another article questioned the practicalities of the book club – 'Teigen took to Twitter to urge fans to "join us". What does that mean, exactly? You read, *they* meet up for canapés and cocktails to discuss.' – implying that the book club would not bring readers closer to the stars leading the club (Donnelly, 2017).

Further commentary in coverage of the announcement was less cynical. The *Evening Standard* maintained that the book club enabled '[t]he reality TV star [and] Chrissy Teigen to encourage their followers to get reading.' (Powell, 2017) *Elle* magazine excitedly stated that: 'Kim Kardashian heard our prayers [...] because she has actually started a book club.' (Murray, 2017) Yet, while this article appeared to be more encouraging of the club, it was also peppered with comments that undermined Kardashian-West's literary prowess:

The beauty mogul, mother, and apparently, avid reader, announced on her Twitter account she has started a book club with our fave Chrissy Teigen and the superstar hairstylist Jen Atkin. The reading list is already out. It comes critically acclaimed (by Kim). (Murray, 2017)

Prefacing the phrase 'avid reader' with 'apparently', and quantifying the claim that the reading list is 'critically acclaimed' with 'by Kim' in parentheses, is not only subtly mocking of Kardashian-West's status as a reader, but also questions her standing as an evaluator of literature.

'You're not Oprah?!': Situating the Kardashian-West Book Klub within the Celebrity Book club phenomenon

As the comments highlighted in the previous section illustrate, contemptuous reactions to Kardashian-West's announcement brought to the fore issues surrounding her literacy, cultural legitimacy and gender. Many of the reactions indicated that even if the celebration and

promotion of reading was considered to be a positive and noble endeavour ('What an amazing and empowered move by you, to share this book, after what you have been through') it is one that is preserved for a *particular type* of celebrity. In other words, not Kardashian-West. Why, exactly, did this announcement receive such condemnation from that start? There are three ways in which to categorise and analyse the negative commentary surrounding Kardashian-West's Book Klub announcement. Firstly, it was related to her intelligence and literacy levels, with many commenters questioning Kardashian-West's ability to read. Whether these comments were intended jokingly or maliciously is somewhat superfluous, as their frequency alone indicate that this was a trend amongst the reactions to the book club. Secondly, the responses to the announcement scrutinised Kardashian-West's legitimacy as a celebrity and therefore brought into question her credibility as a cultural and literary intermediary. Finally, and relatedly, the comments were often misogynistic, undermining Kardashian-West's status as a successful business woman and reducing her to her physical features. These categories will be examined in turn.

Due to the nature of her celebrity, Kardashian-West is frequently ridiculed and her work, lifestyle and actions undermined. However, the pointed questioning of her literacy on the announcement of her book club noted above should not be viewed in isolation or specific to opinions of Kardashian-West herself, but should be considered part of what Beth Driscoll has identified as the 'historical degradation of women's reading' (Driscoll, 2014, 47). Situating the contemporary role of book clubs in publishing and book culture, Driscoll illustrates how the censure of 'women's active engagement in reading' (Driscoll, 2014, 47) dates back to the seventeenth century. This denunciation, Driscoll argues, 'reveal[s] features of women's shared reading that endure: the opprobrium it attracts, and its differentiation from legitimate, male culture and education.' (Driscoll, 2014, 48).¹⁰

Expanding upon this Driscoll highlights that '[t]he emergence of the novel in the late eighteenth century was another occasion when the opposition between authorized male reading and suspect female reading came sharply into view' (Driscoll, 2014, 48) and that,

In Bourdieusian terms, the emergence of the novel [...] prompted a struggle over literary legitimacy. In this struggle, the culturally dominant figures were men writing under the existing system of patronage, and this legitimacy was confirmed through the construction of an oppositional relationship with female readers and the new commercial landscape. (Driscoll, 2014, 48)

This 'new commercial landscape', which saw the cheap publication and distribution of books in the late nineteenth century, led to debates surrounding the literary and cultural value of such cheap books. As Janice A. Radway describes in *A Feeling For Books*, Reverend Noah Porter, an academic and President of Yale University between 1871 and 1886, was particularly vocal in his distrust of the prevalence of reading and books. In 1877 Porter argued:

Now the minds of tens of thousands are stimulated and occupied with books, books, books, [...] We read when we sit, when we lie down [...] sometimes when we eat and when we talk [...] bad books and inferior books are far more common than they once were [and] their position is [...] more subtle and less easily detected, for as the taste of readers becomes [...] less discriminating. (Radway, 1997, 143)

Porter's fury appears humorous to modern readers, but if we were to swap the word 'books' for a more contemporary form of supposedly harmful media such as the Internet, Twitter, Instagram, selfies, or indeed, Kardashian-West herself, Porter's comments are remarkably pertinent to this day. These historic contexts highlight the irony of the reaction to Kardashian-West's Book Klub because her ability to effectively read, discuss and recommend literature was challenged not only because she is considered by many to be a woman incapable of reading anything of value, but also because her ubiquity has reduced her cultural value, much in the same way as Porter claimed cheap books were making all books 'inferior'. Porter's comments are also unwittingly intertwined with the historic development of Bourdesian understandings of cultural intermediaries and how their legitimacy and competence enables them to promote cultural products according to their expertise. The reactions to Kardashian-West's

announcement indicated that few felt she had the relevant credentials or expertise to be a literary intermediary.

Likewise, in *The Woman Reader*, Belinda Jack notes how ‘reading has been deemed subversive, disruptive, or threatening to the stability of a relationship, a community, even a nation [...] The specific control of women’s reading has often been more private and subtle but motivated by similar convictions about the potentially dangerous influence of reading.’ (Jack, 2012, 4) While the books Kardashian-West selected for her book club – Betty Eadie’s 1992 near-death-experience memoir *Embraced by the Light* and William P Young’s 2007 religious fable *The Shack* – may not appear particularly subversive in and of themselves (although the significance of these selections will be discussed later in this paper), as an ascribed celebrity and a woman who has, for some, acquired her fame, or infamy, through unconventional means, Kardashian-West’s public declaration as a reader was a subversive act. In positioning herself as someone who enjoyed reading and wanted to recommend particular books to her followers, Kardashian-West was essentially attempting to assert herself as a cultural and literary intermediary.

Yet, this was not Kardashian-West’s first foray into the world of books. In May 2015 she released *Selfish*, a coffee-table book of selected selfies (pictures of Kardashian-West taken by herself) taken throughout her life. As one may expect, the book, which lists Kardashian-West as sole author and is published by the eminent art publisher Rizzoli, received mixed reviews. The *Guardian* arts correspondent and former Turner Prize juror, Jonathan Jones, argued that *Selfish* was ‘the ultimate slap in the face for anyone who ever pointed a camera with high hopes of being the new Henri Cartier-Bresson or Don McCullin’ (Jones, 2015). Alternatively, and despite referring to Kardashian-West as ‘our dirty little secret’, *The Bookseller*’s features editor Tom Tivnan suggested that the book was ‘landmark publishing, a cultural touchstone, the Catcher in the Rye of the Instagram generation’ (Flood, 2015). Indeed,

some argued that even though the book was, ‘mind-numbingly silly’ it was ‘also refreshingly honest’ (Garber, 2015) and ‘strangely liberating’ (Mapes, 2015). Mapes did continue, however, to note that she was ‘hesitant to use the word “reading” with regards to *Selfish*’ because there is very little text included (Maples, 2015).

The publication of *Selfish* was arguably one of the first instances in which Kardashian-West’s status as a potential cultural intermediary was examined. While most critics were torn between viewing the book as an example of perverse self-aggrandizement or evidence of Kardashian-West astutely ‘show[ing] off the manufacturing of image, both of her own, and of the selfie as a phenomenon’ (Begley, 2015), it was ultimately accepted as part of the broader canon of Kardashian-West’s work because it focused on an aspect of her celebrity identity that people are already mindful of: the self-promotion of her image. In this sense, the *Selfish* book fit within the ‘expert orientations and market context’ of Kardashian-West’s identity as a cultural intermediary. As Matthews and Smith Maguire note:

[C]ultural intermediaries must [...] be defined by their expert orientations and market context. In the struggle to influence others’ perceptions and attachments, cultural intermediaries are defined by their claims to professional expertise in taste and value within specific cultural fields. (Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014, 2)

While Kardashian-West may have been able to convince some critics of her ‘professional expertise in taste and value’ through the publication of *Selfish*, she was unable to do this when it came to expressing value judgments on literature via her book club. Indeed, her literacy was deemed illegitimate because she is not located in the literary field. As Smith Maguire has argued – borrowing from and expanding upon Pierre Bourdieu’s articulations of expertise, legitimacy and cultural intermediaries – cultural intermediaries are ‘concerned with legitimacy on two, interrelated fronts’:

The first front concerns the social standing of their occupation (in relation to other more and less legitimate, competing authorities) [...] The second dimension of

legitimacy concerns the field within which a cultural intermediary is located (and thus the goods, practices and forms of capital associated with that field). Drawing on their knowledge of the sphere of legitimacy [...] cultural intermediaries work to canonize the ‘not-yet-legitimate’ (Smith Maguire, 2014, 21)

What makes this essential when considering Kardashian-West’s legitimacy as a cultural and literary intermediary is the fact that, as Smith Maguire contends, Bourdieu’s original discussion of the legitimacy of cultural intermediaries relied on the understanding that ‘‘need merchants’ [are] sellers of symbolic goods and services who always sell themselves as models and as guarantors of the value of their products, who sell so well because they believe in what they sell’ (Bourdieu, (1984) 2010, 365). In other words, one of the reasons why Kardashian-West’s authenticity and legitimacy as a literary, and literate, cultural intermediary was questioned was because people did not ‘buy into’ reading and literature being part of her celebrity identity.

Apart from directly questioning Kardashian-West’s ability to read, one of the other ways in which her legitimacy as a cultural and literary intermediary was brought into question was through comparisons to Oprah Winfrey. A number of articles referenced Oprah in their coverage of the Kardashian-West Book Klub (Dewey, 2017; Vena, 2017; Tesema, 2017; Tang, 2017; Quinn, 2017) and while many of these allusions appeared innocuous, acting as points of reference for readers, the constant references to Oprah seemed to subtly invite comparison of the two women. Indeed, several commenters on social media made more explicit comparisons between Kardashian-West and Oprah. One Facebook commenter derisively exclaimed, ‘HaHa! Can you read? You’re not Oprah?!’, while another wrote the vague affirmation ‘Oprah did it....’. This latter comment is ambiguous. It may be undermining of Kardashian-West’s venture, suggesting that Oprah already has a well-established book club and there is no need for Kardashian-West to do the same. Or, it may be a supportive comment, arguing that, if Oprah can have a successful book club, Kardashian-West can too. Similarly, a Twitter user asked Kardashian-West if she was ‘trying to be Oprah now??’ The implication being that not only

was Kardashian-West pilfering the idea from Oprah, but that she would never be Oprah's equal. While many of the comparisons made between Oprah and Kardashian-West were, seemingly, throw-away comments, they are actually an important indication as to how the rhetoric and hierarchies surrounding celebrity book club culture function.

As one of the most successful celebrity book clubs to ever have existed, Oprah's Book Club has received much in the way of academic study, most notably Cecilia Konchar Farr's *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads* (2005). Farr and others' studies have highlighted, for example: the so-called 'Oprah Effect', the impact Oprah's Book Club had on book sales and, therefore, the publishing industry, at its height in the 1990s (Farr, 2005); the "'Oprahfication" of literacy' and the book club's status as an 'example of literacy as social practice' (Hall, 2003); the status of the Oprah Book Club as a middlebrow enterprise staged within daytime television, a traditionally lowbrow institution (Aubry, 2006; Driscoll, 2014); and, the role the book club had in instigating conversations surrounding 'cross-racial empathy' among Oprah's white audiences reading literature by African-American (often women) writers (Chabot Davis, 2004).

While, retrospectively, Oprah's Book Club was a resounding success and her status as a cultural and literary intermediary is now well established, when she announced the book club in the mid-1990s, much like Kardashian-West, Oprah's legitimacy was brought under question by sceptical critics.¹¹ Writing about the Oprah Book Club phenomenon months after it had been launched, Deidre Donahue quoted John Thornton, co-editor of *Dumbing Down: Essays on the Strip-Mining of American Culture*, who questioned how many people had 'actually finished' reading Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which was one of Oprah's first book club picks (Donahue, 1996). The implication being that, although the 'Oprah effect' may be quantifiable through book sales, it was possible her audience were not actually engaging with the

recommended titles. In another article, the literary critic Rebecca Pepper Sinkler, admitted being irritated and nervous on the announcement of Oprah's Book Club:

"I want to get the whole country reading again," Winfrey trumpeted when she announced the club. Okay, fine, I thought, if a bit irritating. [...] What was alarming was that Winfrey herself would dictate what we read. Was this the last shovelful of clay on the coffin of American culture? I wasn't alone in my alarm. As the critic Alfred Kazin harrumphed recently to the Los Angeles Times, Oprah's Book Club was the equivalent of the "carpet bombing of the American mind." (Sinkler, 1997)

Although Sinkler acknowledges that her 'fears were unfounded', her initial reaction was telling: she felt Oprah did not have the relevant expertise and knowledge to 'dictate what we read'. Sinkler seemed to find it particularly galling since, as an established literary critic for a national newspaper, she had spent her career acquiring the very expertise that Oprah was averring.

While such reactions mirror those that Kardashian-West received, as the above admission by Sinkler indicates, Oprah soon won over her critics and there are two main reasons why this was possible. Firstly, her book club made a tangible impact. As one 1996 article states, within two months of being included in Oprah's Book Club 'twice as many copies of [Toni Morrison's] *Song Of Solomon* [had] been sold than in the previous nine years added together' (Katz, 1996). Secondly, Oprah's reason for starting the book club was seen as commendable. Oprah stated, unequivocally, 'I want to get the whole country reading again.' (Bay, 1997) Like Watson's 'Our Shared Shelf' and Zuckerberg's 'A Year in Books', the motivations behind Oprah's Book Club were viewed as ultimately altruistic and positive: these book clubs would encourage people to read challenging and important books. The motivations of Kardashian-West's Book Klub, on the other hand, were suspect. Some wondered if the Kardashian-West Book Klub was going to be an extension of the Kardashian brand. On Twitter, a book blogger stated she would #boycotthebookklub, asking: 'Is there anything on this earth that isn't Kardashian branded these days?' Likewise, another tweeter suggested that the book club was

‘another way [for Kardashian-West] to scam [...] followers out of money’. However, while being paid to promote products online is a major aspect of Kardashian-West’s job, an examination of the books she selected indicates that, similarly to Oprah for whom ‘reading is a means of therapy, and books are agents of conversion’ (Chabot Davis, 2004), the motivations of Kardashian-West’s Book Klub are emotional as opposed to monetary.

‘Now the book means something different to me’: The Kim Kardashian-West Book Klub Picks

The first book Kardashian-West selected was *Embraced by the Light* by Betty Eadie. Originally published in 1992, the book is, as previously noted, a near-death-experience memoir and was on the New York Times bestseller list for seventeen weeks, climbing to number one in the chart in September 1993 (Wroe, 1994). When a Twitter follower asked Kardashian-West ‘what is it about? Make me wanna read it’, Kardashian-West replied: ‘It’s a story of a woman who died during surgery & came back 2life. She shares her journey of what heaven is like. It’s so good by @BettyJEadie [sic]’ This was not the first time Kardashian-West had highlighted her connection with the author on social media. A month earlier, in January 2017, Kardashian-West tweeted that she had also met and spoken with the author: ‘Today was such a good day! I spoke to my favorite author @BettyJEadie This seriously made my soul smile! I feel so enlightened by our convo! [sic]’ In response, Eadie tweeted ‘There is more to #kimkardashianwest then [sic] meets the eye. I found during our talk that she is tender, intelligent, appreciative and more.’ Such comments should have, perhaps, authenticated Kardashian-West’s knowledge and interest in Eadie’s book since, not only had Kardashian-West read the book, but she also sought out the author to discuss its contents – something which is not wholly dissimilar to Oprah inviting authors on to her daytime chat show to talk about their books and her reading of them.¹²

Further, Kardashian-West shared a short, expositional piece about the book on her personal App (which fans need to pay a subscription for to access all content) following the

announcement of the book club which revealed that its selection had a specific meaning to her. In the post Kardashian-West explains how her father had recommended the book to her when she was a teenager but she did not read the book until her father passed away years later. She states she then re-read the book when she had children and again following ‘life experiences [she] had more recently’ and these experiences meant the book ‘now means something different’. It is likely that the life experience Kardashian-West is referring to is the armed robbery she was the victim of in Paris in October 2016. During the attack, Kardashian-West was reportedly tied up and held at gunpoint while men stole jewellery and money (Seal, 2016). In the months that followed, Kardashian-West took a hiatus from social media. However, Kardashian-West gradually returned to her usual levels of social media use in late 2016 and early 2017, with the announcement of the book club and her selection of *Embraced by the Light* being one of the major stories following her re-emergence into the public eye. While not specifically referring to the incident when discussing the book, Kardashian-West hinted towards relating to the experiences of Eadie and seemed to want to express her emotional and spiritual response to her attack through the book.

The second book Kardashian-West selected for the book club was *The Shack*, a 2007 novel by the Canadian author William P Young. *The Shack* tells the story of a man who, when his young daughter is kidnapped and murdered, has a religious reawakening when he encounters God, personified as ‘a fat black lady called ‘Papa’ (Wakefield, 2008). Young reportedly wrote the book for his children as ‘a way of dealing with some painful traumatic [...] and [...] teaching his kids about his relationship with God.’ (Martin, 2008). Young was encouraged to publish the book, but on being rejected by nearly thirty publishers, he published the book himself and, as of September 2008, *The Shack* had sold over two million copies and was number one on the New York Times bestseller lists (Wakefield, 2008). Kardashian-West shared an image of *The Shack*, along with the following blurb, in March 2017:

Last week I started reading “The Shack” by William P. Young and I am obsessed!!! I have heard such good things about this book and after a few of you submitted it for the book club, I knew I had to read it. This book is great for anyone who wants to learn more about what faith means to them. The movie version also just came out, and I can’t wait to see it! So what do you guys think? Should this be the next book for my book club? (Kardashian-West, 2017)

This announcement was made on Kardashian-West’s App, so the questions at the end of this comment are directed at her fans and potential book club followers.

The third, and thus far final, book Kardashian-West reportedly announced as part of her book club was *Unshakeable: Your Financial Freedom Playbook*, a financial how-to guide by life coach Tony Robbins published in February 2017. Only a handful of reports noted the announcement of this third book selection by Kardashian-West, with one describing it as ‘unexpected’ (Galvan, 2017). Unlike the first two books, Kardashian-West only shared that she was reading *Unshakeable* on Snapchat, which shows a user’s images or messages for limited time periods, therefore there is no evidence that Kardashian-West formally included this book in her book club. Also, her sharing of the book happened around the same time she attended a live seminar hosted by Robbins, so it is possible that the image of the book shared by Kardashian-West was aligned with her attending this event rather than the book club. However, one tabloid newspaper did suggest that Kardashian-West’s attendance at the seminar was evidence of her, and her sisters, trying to ‘heal after robbery and breakdown’ (Samocha, 2017). Indeed, this theory that Kardashian-West’s attendance at this self-help seminar is part of her recovery following the armed burglary she was the victim of should, in fact, be extended to her founding of a book club and the books she selected. As previously noted, Oprah’s Book Club was positioned as a deeply personal project both for Oprah and her audience as Chabot Davis explains:

From the thousands of letters that [Oprah] receives in response to each month’s book selection, Oprah personally chooses four or five guests to participate in the book-club discussions. Since Oprah asks the prospective guests to ‘tell us what

you learned about yourself' by reading the novel, the response narratives of the winners are personal testimonials, detailing how their identification with the characters led them to confront their own repressed feelings. (Chabot Davis, 2004, 401)

Furthermore, Hall has argued that Oprah's Book Club is part of her 'literacy narrative of progress' which was 'told and retold in popular newspaper and magazine articles' (Hall, 2003, 649). Hall continues, noting how Oprah's career as a 'literacy sponsor' started early in her life when she would recommend Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* to close friends, a book which 'quite literally change[d] Winfrey's life' since '[a] few years later, she would appear in the film verison of *The Color Purple* [...] [i]n 1986 she was nominated for an Academy Award, and her top-rated talk show was syndicated to 120 stations nationwide.' (Hall, 2003, 649). In other words, Oprah's Book Club was not simply a means of getting 'the country reading again', but was also part of Oprah's celebrity brand identity and was facilitated through the emotion-work associated with reading books which are viewed as having transformative effects on their readers. This is similar to how Kardashian-West approached her own book club, particularly with the first two books she selected. Much like Oprah, Kardashian-West shared books that she claims to have had a deep emotional response to and which gave her 'tools on how to live a better life' (Kardashian-West, 2017).

With this in mind, this study posits that Oprah's level of celebrity as a daytime talk show host and book club leader is not unlike that of Kardashian-West, since, as David P. Marshall has argued: '[t]he gap between the fictional or mythical and the real life of the celebrity is narrowed through the relationship of the program and real time and the relationship to a live audience.' (Marshall, 2014, 131) Kardashian-West has a similarly 'all-access' persona through her reality television show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and her near constant social media use. Marshall suggests that Oprah is a 'narrative character' (Marshall, 2014, 133) and that the 'construction of the Oprah character is dependent on her relationship to other principal characters in the narrative' (Marshall, 2014, 134). This is true, also, of Kardashian-

West: her public image is closely tied to that of her famous family and husband (the rapper Kanye West), and her connections to other celebrities like Chrissy Teigen, for example. However, Kardashian-West has arguably developed this notion of the ‘narrative character’ into what Alison Hearn calls the ‘self-brander’ (Hearn, 2008, 198). Self-branding is, Hearn argues:

[T]he self-conscious construction of a meta-narrative and meta-image of self through the use of cultural meaning and images drawn from the narrative and visual codes of the mainstream culture industries. (Hearn, 2008, 198)

As a result, Kardashian-West’s Book Klub should be considered as part of her redemptive re-emergence into the public spotlight following the Paris attack and her subsequent hiatus from social media. This notion that the book club was an exercise of self-branding at a particular point in time for Kardashian-West was foregrounded further still when, in February 2018 (one year after Kardashian-West originally posted about starting the book club), she shared a Tweet with a link to a video titled ‘Never-Before-Seen Footage of My Book Club’ with the comment: ‘Remember this @ChrissyTeigen, @JenAtkinHair, @KourtneyKardash?! Our one and only book club meeting!!! [crying laughing emoji]. The still image on the video shows Kardashian-West, Teigen, Atkins and Kardashian-West’s sister, Kourtney Kardashian, posing with the author of *Embraced by the Light* holding up copies of the book while Kardashian-West takes a selfie of herself and the group.¹³ This comment appears to be a self-referential observation about the fact that the book club did not really take off and did not function as a ‘typical’ book club (i.e. with people meeting regularly to discuss books). Indeed, the inclusion of the crying laughing emoji suggests that Kardashian-West is aware of the perceived frivolity of this venture and it knowingly playing with that. This reflection on the club from Kardashian-West further emphasises the fact that the book club was, first and foremost, a means by which Kardashian-West could express her profundity and new outlook on life, whilst also controlling her self-brand by borrowing from recognised, and accepted, cultural values related to reading and its

transformative effects. However, while Oprah was ultimately successful in effectively establishing a 'literacy narrative' as part of her celebrity brand identity, Kardashian-West's foray into middlebrow culture was deemed suspect because of her perceived illegitimacy as a cultural and literary intermediary.

Besides questioning her capabilities as a woman reader and legitimacy as a cultural and literary intermediary, a number of responses to Kardashian-West's Book Klub announcement were reductive and sexist in their tone, referring to her breasts ('i think its boob club haha') and sexuality ('I never knew the hoe was book smart'). The immediate and hyper-sexualisation of Kardashian-West and her body is inextricably tied to criticisms surrounding her cultural illegitimacy, authenticity and intellectual prowess. Since she is an *ascribed* celebrity accruing fame through her reputation as opposed to a discernible 'talent', Kardashian-West's legitimacy is automatically undermined because she does not conform to classic realisations of celebrity. Indeed, the fact that Kardashian-West herself has played, and continues to play, a role in the commodification of her body, only adds to her supposed inauthenticity:

Kardashian[-West]'s is a body that requires constant authentication, of its normative sexuality and racial belonging [she is of Armenian heritage], its tangible physicality and social signification. This authentication in turn paradoxically situates Kardashian as both the (necessarily unspoken) agential author of her own heavily manufactured self, and the 'real' figure upon whose flaws her visibility depends. (Sastre, 2014, 124)

Since much of Kardashian-West's reputation is concentrated on her body, the questioning of her intellectual prowess is, while unjust, perhaps unsurprising. The public is often reminded of her sex tape and she frequently shares images, both selfies and backstage shots from formal shoots, of herself in provocative poses. Such imagery, exemplifies what Sastre refers to as Kardashian-West's ability to be 'concurrently deviant and normative' and is inextricably connected to her status as someone who is 'white and privileged, and non-white and exotic'

(Sastre. 2015, 134). All of these aspects of Kardashian-West's persona and celebrity identity are presumed to undermine her authority and credibility as a cultural and literary intermediary.

Like Kardashian-West, Oprah's body has been scrutinised over the years, but for different reasons. As Helen A. Shugart notes, Oprah is one of many women celebrities who have 'garnered significant public attention for their "struggles" with weight (Shugart, 2014, 59) so much so that despite her many achievements '[Oprah's] notoriously fluctuating weight has been a cornerstone of media coverage of her across decades' (Shugart, 2014, 60). Also like Kardashian-West, Oprah has attempted to control the public conversation surrounding her body, openly discussing her weight gain and loss on her daytime television show and making it her 'personal platform for her self-transformation' (Illouz and John, 2015, 97). The fact that both women have endured public interrogations of their bodies, whilst also trying to assert their intellectual capabilities (to varying degrees of success) reflects philosophical and patriarchal notions of 'associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity' (Butler, 1990, 17). In other words, the reduction of Oprah and Kardashian-West to their physical form is a further attempt to denigrate their intellect and therefore their potential to be legitimate cultural and literary intermediaries.

It is worth, at this point, bringing Emma Watson, the founder of the feminist book club 'Our Shared Shelf', into this analysis of the misogyny underscoring some of the reactions to Kardashian-West's Book Klub announcement since, as Ramdarshan-Bold has argued, part of Watson's legitimacy has come from her identity as a 'fresh faced', white and educated young woman (Ramdarshan-Bold, 2018). Unlike Kardashian-West (and Oprah, particularly in the early days of her career), Watson was able to immediately harness her 'celebrity capital' (Taylor, quoted in Ramdarshan-Bold, 2018) to establish her legitimacy as a literary intermediary discussing and recommended feminist literature. Watson is, Ramdarshan-Bold argues, what Rehberg-Sedo has called the 'trusted other' and part of this construction is based

on her identity as an educated white woman. Alternatively, both Oprah, who is African-American, and Kardashian-West have been described as characterising racial ambiguities. Tarshia L. Stanley has written of how she and other critical black spectators ‘sense an erasure of the black woman, both historically and culturally, in Winfrey’s relationship with her mainstream audience.’ (Stanley, 2015, 48) Correlatively, the fact that Kardashian-West references the fact that she is ‘partially’ of Armenian descent, is also part of *her* celebrity identity but is, as Sastre argues, another ‘nebulous example of how ethnicity is both constructed as fluid and leveraged in the framing of female sexuality’ (Sastre, 2014, 123). Accordingly, Kardashian-West’s legitimacy as a cultural and literary intermediary is not only challenged by vilifications of her sexuality and body but also through what is perceived by some to be racial ambiguity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this examination of the responses to the announcement of Kim Kardashian-West’s Book Klub in February 2017 was to interrogate the reasons why Kardashian-West’s foray into the world of celebrity book clubs was so negatively received. Immediate responses to her book club questioned her literacy levels, as well as her legitimacy as someone who could effectively critically engage with literature. Indeed, this examination of the Kim Kardashian-West Book Klub indicates that opinions concerning contemporary reading practices evoke age-old condemnations of illegitimate women readers who are denigrated because of their alleged intellectual vacuity, sexuality and racial identity.

Though there are limitations to this study – Kardashian-West’s Book Klub was never formalised like those by Oprah and Emma Watson, making it difficult to assess its impact as a book club which engaged a community of readers and, as a result, gathering data about the book club is difficult and may be impossible for future researchers who did not collect data as

the event unfolded – it adds to the existing literature about celebrity book clubs since it broadens understandings of the motivations of celebrity book clubs. Much of the existing critical discourse related to celebrity book clubs focuses on the impact the phenomenon has on developing communities of readers and increasing sales of books or the profiles of authors. However, as this study shows, it is valuable to consider book clubs as marketing and branding opportunities for the celebrity themselves, allowing them to appropriate the cultural value associated with books and reading and incorporate it into their own brand identity. Such studies, therefore, inform our understandings of how literature, reading and the book are utilised and scandalised in contemporary society and popular culture.

¹ For more on the Oprah Book Club and the impact it had, see Hall 2003, Farr, 2005, Rehberg-Sedo 2008, Driscoll 2014.

² ‘About us’, Good Reads, <https://www.goodreads.com/about/us>.

³ However, as one of Kardashian-West’s Twitter commenters noted, this was not the first time she had hinted at starting a book club. One January 29th 2012, Kardashian-West tweeted that she wanted to ‘start a bible study group with [her] friends!’, however, if Kardashian-West did pursue this, it was not a public-facing venture.

⁴ In 2016 Facebook introduced a redesign to the ‘Like’ feature, offering more options to users to ‘react’ to posts.

⁵ This is likely due to the fact that Facebook does not count replies between users as ‘comments’, however, these are included in my analysis of the exported data since these comments can be conversation between Facebook friends about the book club

⁶ For more on trolling Whitney Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship Between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

⁷ When analysed further, this ‘Other’ category includes comments from Facebook users touting for business or asking to be followed by Kardashian-West and other commenters (11), questions about Kardashian-West’s sisters (who are celebrities in their own right).

⁸ As defined on the online crowdsourced slang directory Urban Dictionary, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Thotology>.

⁹ Twitter does not allow users to export data from other Twitter user profiles, accordingly, the analysis of Twitter comments is based on replies that are still available to view as of the writing of this paper in 2018.

¹⁰ See also Anna Kiernan’s chapter ‘The Growth of Reading Groups as a Feminine Leisure Pursuit: Cultural Democracy or Dumbing Down?’ in *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace* (ed. by DeNel Rehberg Sedo, 2011) for more on this.

¹¹ For more on this see: Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: Chicago University Press: 2003).

¹² It has been reported that this conversation was filmed for inclusion in *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, but in November 2017 Eadie took to Facebook to tell her followers that ‘the Production has not found a place for it in their episodes’ (available at: <https://www.facebook.com/WanjiOnjinjinka/posts/1972556396105550>).

¹³ This tweet, and the attached video content, can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/KimKardashian/status/964975948574666753>.

Stevie Marsden: "I Didn't Know You Could Read": Questioning the Legitimacy of Kim Kardashian-West's Status as a Literary and Cultural Intermediary

Bibliography

2014. "Emma Watson graduates from Brown University". *The Telegraph*, 25 May. <Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/10855882/Emma-Watson-graduates-from-Brown-University.html>> (accessed on November 15, 2017).
- Aubrey, T.R., 2006. "Beware the furrow of the middlebrow: searching for paradise on the Oprah Winfrey show". *Modern Fiction Studies*, 52 (2) 350-373.
- Avila, T., 2015. "Kim Kardashian Is Rounding Up Her Friends for a Good Ol' Book Club". *The Cut*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://nymag.com/thecut/2017/02/kim-kardashian-starting-a-good-ol-book-club.html>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Bay, W., 1997. "Oprah's Reading Campaign". *ABC Good Morning America*, 19 January.
- Begley, S., 2015. "Kim Kardashian's Selfish Is Anything But". *Time*, 7 May. <Available online at: <http://time.com/3849456/kim-kardashians-selfish/>> (accessed November 15, 2017).
- Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans by Richard Nice, 2010. London: Routledge.
- Branagh-Miscampbell, M., & Marsden, S., 2017. "'Eating, sleeping, breathing, reading': The Zoella Book Club and the Ideal Young Woman Reader in the 21st Century". Presented at Society for History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, Victoria, CA.
- Butler, J., 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, L., 2016. "Zoella reveals first WHS book club titles". *The Bookseller*, 9 June. <Available online at: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/zoella-reveals-first-whs-book-club-titles-333396>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Cain, S., 2016. "Emma Watson starts feminist book group on Twitter". *The Guardian*, 7 January. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/07/emma-watson-to-start-feminist-book-group-on-twitter-our-shared-shelf>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Davis, K.C., 2004. "Oprah's Book Club and the politics of cross-racial empathy". *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7 (4) 399-419.
- Dewey, I., 2017. "A Chrissy Teigen and Kim Kardashian Book Club: Everything I Ever Wanted". *Spring.St*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://www.spring.st/chrissy-teigen-kim-kardashian-book-club>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Donahue, D., 1996. "Has Oprah saved books? But some wonder if people are really reading". *USA Today*, 12 December.

- Donnelly, E., 2017. "Chrissy Teigen & Kim Kardashian Just Started A Book Club". *Refinery* 29, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://www.refinery29.uk/2017/02/139016/chrissy-teigen-kim-kardashian-book-club>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Driscoll, B., 2014. *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Farr, C.K., 2005. *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Flood, A., 2015. "Facebook founder's book club choice sends sales rocketing". *The Guardian*, 8 January. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/08/facebook-book-club-mark-zuckerberg-the-end-of-power-naim-sales-rocket>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- 2015. "Kim Kardashian's Selfish book snapped up by thousands". *The Guardian*, 18 May. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/18/kim-kardashian-selfish-book-selfies>> (accessed November 15, 2017).
- Galvann, L., 2017. "Kim Kardashian's newest book club read is so unexpected". *AOL*, 15 May. <Available online at: <https://www.aol.com/article/shop/2017/03/15/kim-kardashians-newest-book-club-read-is-so-unexpected/21896082/>> (accessed on November 15 2017).
- Garber, M., 2015. "You win, Kim Kardashian". *The Atlantic*, 13 May. <Available online at: https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/05/kim-kardashian-selfish/393113/?utm_source=SFTwitter> (accessed November 15, 2017).
- Hall, M.R., 2003. "The "Oprahfication" of Literacy: Reading "Oprah's Book Club"". *College English*, 65 (6) 646-667.
- Illouz, E. & John, N., 2009. "Oprah Winfrey and Women's Autobiography: A Televisual Performance of the Therapeutic Self". In *The Oprah Phenomenon* ed. Harris, J., Watson, E., & Thompson, R.J. Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press.
- Jack, B., 2012. *The Woman Reader*. London: Yale University Press.
- Jones, J., 2015. "Kim Kardashian's Selfish: a nail in the coffin for artistic photography?". *The Guardian*, 5 May. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2015/may/05/kim-kardashian-selfish-book-photography-selfies>> (accessed November 15, 2017).
- Kardashian, K. W., 2017. "Favs". <Available online at: <https://www.kimkardashianwest.com/favs>> (accessed February, 2 2017 and March 16, 2017).
- Katz, I., 1996. "Oprah's new TV tie-in: Queen of the book clubs...when Oprah recommends, the tills ring out. But what will she go for next?". *The Guardian*, 19 December.
- Mapes, J., 2015. "Nothing Is Embarrassing: On Kim Kardashian's Strangely Liberating Book of Selfies". *Flavorwire*, 15 May. <Available online at: <http://flavorwire.com/519019/nothing-is-embarrassing-on-kim-kardashians-strangely-liberating-book-of-selfies>> (accessed November 15, 2017).

- Marshall, D.P., 2014. *Celebrity and Power*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Martin, R., 2008. "Self-published Christian novel sells millions". *National Public Radio (NPR)*, 21 May.
- McCluskey, M., "Here's how to join Emma Watson's feminist book club". *Time*, 8 January <Available online at: <http://time.com/4172664/join-emma-watsons-feminist-book-club/>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Miller, J., 2016. "Emma Watson is now an Oxford University Fellow". *Vanity Fair*, 5 February. <Available online at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/02/emma-watson-benedict-cumberbatch-oxford-university-fellow>> (accessed on November 15, 2017).
- Murray, D., 2017. "UPDATE: Kim Kardashian Has Actually Started A Book Club with Chrissy Teigen, And We're All Invited!". *Elle*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://www.elleuk.com/life-and-culture/culture/news/a33621/kim-kardashian-just-recommended-a-book-and-now-we-want-a-kardashian-book-club/>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Powell, E., 2017. "Kim Kardashian launches book club with Chrissy Teigen". *Evening Standard*, 2 February. <Available online at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-launches-book-club-with-chrissy-teigen-a3456251.html>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Quinn, D., 2017. "Kim Kardashian West is starting a book club and Chrissy Teigen is already on board". *People*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://people.com/books/kim-kardashian-west-book-club-chrissy-teigen/>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Ramdarshan-Bold, M., 2018. "The influence of marketplace feminism on literature culture: A case study of Emma Watson's Feminist book club, 'Our shared shelf'". Forthcoming.
- Rankin, S., 2016. "How Reese Witherspoon turned her Instagram book club into a movie empire". *E Online*, 12 October. <Available online at: <http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/801286/how-reese-witherspoon-turned-her-instagram-book-club-into-a-movie-empire>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Rojek, C., *Fame Attack: The inflation of celebrity and its consequences*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Samocha, L., "Kim Kardashian and Kanye West arrive in casual style for self-help guru Tony Robbins' 'turn fear into power' seminar with her sisters as they try to heal after robbery and breakdown". *The Daily Mail*, 23 March. <Available online at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-4344014/Kim-Kardashian-Kanye-West-attend-Tony-Robbins-seminar.html#ixzz55TrvYPg4>> (accessed on November 15 2017).
- Sastre, A., 2014. "Hottentot in the age of reality TV: sexuality, race, and Kim Kardashian's visible body". *Celebrity Studies*, 5 (1-2) 123-137.
- Seal, M., 2016. "The Inside Story of the Kim Kardashian Paris Hotel Heist". *Vanity Fair*, 2016. <Available online at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2016/10/solving-kim-kardashian-west-paris-robbery>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).

- Shugart, H. A., 2014. "Flesh Made Word: The Obese Body as Cultural Matter". *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 7 (1) 55-75.
- Sinkler, R.P., 1997. "My Case of Oprah Envy; She's Got America Reading -- And Critics Weeping". *The Washington Post*, 6 April.
- Smith Maguire, J., & Matthews, J., eds. 2013. *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*. London: SAGE.
- Stanley, T.L., 2009. "The Specter of Oprah Winfrey: Critical Black Female Spectatorship". In *The Oprah Phenomenon* ed. Harris, J., Watson, E., & Thompson, R.J. Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press.
- Tait, A., 2016. "Zoella's book club: cute, glittery-but all a bit vanilla". *The Guardian*, 15 June. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/15/zoella-book-club-cute-glittery-vanilla-vlogger-teenage>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Tang, E., 2017. "Here Are 10 Books Kim Kardashian's Book Club Should Read". *Elle*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://www.elle.com/culture/books/news/g29426/kim-kardashian-chrissy-teigen-book-club/>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Tesema, M., 2017. "Find your library cards —Kim Kardashian and Chrissy Teigen just started a book club". *Mashable*, 2 February. <Available online at: <https://mashable.com/2017/02/02/kim-kardashian-chrissy-teigen-book-club/#QB..JnLIAqqR>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Turner, C., 2017. "Novels by YouTube stars are ruining children's reading ages, experts warn". *The Telegraph*, 23 February. <Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/02/23/novels-youtube-stars-ruining-childrens-reading-agesexperts-warn/>> (accessed March 22, 2017).
- Vena, J., 2017. "Kim Kardashian and Chrissy Teigen Are Taking Friendship Goals to the Next Level by Starting a Book Club". *Bravo TV*, 2 February. <Available online at: <http://www.bravotv.com/the-daily-dish/kim-kardashian-and-chrissy-teigen-book-club>> (accessed on March 22, 2017).
- Wakefield, M., 2008. "A pilgrim's progress for the 21st century". *The Spectator*, 6 September.
- Waldman, K., 2016. "What I learned from joining Emma Watson's "Feminist Book Club". *Slate*, 2 February. <Available online at: http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/02/02/emma_watson_s_feminist_book_club_reviewed.html> (accessed on November 15, 2017).
- Williams, Z., 2017. "Zoe Sugg: the vlogger blamed for declining teenage literacy". *The Guardian*, 24 February. <Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/feb/24/zoe-sugg-zoella-the-vlogger-blamed-for-declining-teenage-literacy>> (accessed March 22, 2017).

Wroe, M., “Authors take their cut from grim reaper”. *The Observer*, 15 May.