

# Othered Body, Obscene Self(ie): A Sartrean Reading of Kim Kardashian-West

---

Else Dowden

In this existential reading of Kim Kardashian-West's International Women's Day selfie of 2016, I focus on the rise of selfie culture and public discourse around emerging digital representations of women's bodies. The selfie is a relatively new phenomenon, and is particularly curious because of the subject/object paradox it creates; in taking a selfie, a person asserts control over their own image, but at the same time, becomes object in their own gaze. My argument is that selfies, like other assertions of bodily subjectivity in digital spaces, are a threat to patriarchal structures that paint women as immanent, object, as reflected in public discourse around Kardashian-West's International Women's Day selfie. I draw on both Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's work on subjectivity in existentialism and phenomenology, as well as Amy Shields Dobson's work on post-feminism and young women's projections of self, in order to delineate what it is about the selfie that creates this paradox. I also make reference to the work of Elisabeth Grosz and Frantz Fanon in relation to a colonial hierarchy that prioritises body over mind, as well as Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze.

It seems that now, more than ever, young people, particularly women, are substantially immersed in digital cultures and digital communities. While there has always been social pressure for women to conform to certain beauty ideals, this pressure takes on new forms, particularly when we think about social media and the concept of the "selfie." In this paper I lay out a framework for a contemporary Sartrean and feminist reading of Kim Kardashian-West's 2016 International Women's Day selfie, using Amy Shields Dobson's notion of postfeminist femininity. I argue that Kardashian-West embodies and embraces this new mode of femininity with her projections of self in social media. To begin, I expound some of the key concepts in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and then apply this to the present-day setting in a consideration of structural oppression and the internalisation of the male gaze. Next, I move to a discussion of obscenity and obscene bodies, highlighting that while a Sartrean sadomasochistic paradox may be at play in postfeminist projections of subjectivity, performative femininity is not a binary between passive

internalisation and active defiance. Sartre's conceptions of sadism and masochism also feature centrally as I use these two notions in the context of Kim Kardashian-West's International Women's Day selfie. Lastly, with this framework in mind, I move to an analysis of Kim Kardashian-West's subject/object blurring in her taking of the selfie.

## Being-for-others

It would be an understatement to say that Kim Kardashian-West's International Women's Day selfie of 2016 caused a bit of a fuss. The selfie, which depicts Kardashian-West posing naked in a mirror, garnered over 340,000 comments on Instagram alone. Many reactions affirmed Kardashian-West's actions, but there were also many that denounced the selfie. While the picture made no reference to Kardashian-West's two children, commenters made express reference to them, with remarks including "so sad for your kids little disgusting thing [sic]" and "what are your children going to say about this" (Kardashian-West "When You're Like I Have Nothing to Wear Lol")? I argue that this exemplifies a kind of moral panic in public discourse, where onlookers essentialise Kardashian-West and can only see her in her proximity to the roles of wife and mother. The selfie elicited this response because Kardashian-West's image was an expression of her own bodily subjectivity, that challenged both the male gaze of the public because it was a selfie, and also contemporary notions of performative femininity. This challenge is indicative of a new genre, albeit a paradoxical one, of modern femininity. I will examine the structure of these responses and the nature of postfeminist femininity more thoroughly later in this paper.

To comprehend why the public responded in such a way to Kardashian-West's expression of subjectivity, I will begin by considering the three different types of being that Jean-Paul Sartre delineates in *Being and Nothingness*. First—there is *being-in-itself*, which is the kind of being we might ascribe to, say, a pair of glasses or a cup of coffee. This type of being is self-contained, and "does not enter into any connection with what is not itself" (22). My glasses, like my cup of coffee, are not conscious and have no potential for transcendence or the *for-itself* in that they are not filled with potential in the way that autonomous, embodied subjects like you or I might be. Both are complete and non-autonomous—they simply *are*. Our bodies are, to an extent, like this. A body becomes obscene when it is reduced to the *in-itself*, which I will expand on later in this paper. The body is a representation of immanence, and so *being-for-itself* pertains to transcendence, which is the basis for Sartre's existentialism. *Being-*

*for-itself* is a mode of being that is not pre-determined—instead it is a free form of being, defined by consciousness, negation, freedom and spontaneity. A *for-itself* is continually creating itself, continually moving toward endless possibilities, and *being-for-itself* is this movement. As a *for-itself*, I am different from my glasses and my cup of coffee in that I get to choose my fate. I am conscious and radically free with an open future of infinite possibilities before me. This is not to say that my future is necessarily one that promises great opportunities or success, but rather that as a free agent I have a large range of potential action. Perhaps I might take up deep-sea diving, or win a Nobel prize. Perhaps I might eat a peach. My glasses, however, will continue to be glasses, and my cup of coffee will continue to be a cup of coffee. With these two modes of being in mind, I now turn to the third mode of being as defined by Sartre. This mode of being is called *being-for-others*, and is a key part of this paper.

To have *being-for-others* is to be aware of your own being reduced to the *in-itself* in another being's awareness. It is the product of the Other's "look," and a good example of this is the feeling invoked when one is caught observing or being observed by a neighbour, for example. If *being-for-itself* is an act produced by the negation and nothingness of freedom and free consciousness, *being-for-others* is a kind of existential grounding, tied to self-objectification. It may be the case that each subject is fluctuating between all three modes: *being-in-itself*, *being-for-itself* and *being-for-others*. I now use Thomas Martin's explanation of the relationship between the two kinds of being. Martin says that "*being-for-others* and *being-for-itself* are two poles of being between which the self oscillates" (244). Shame and pride are borne of the feeling of the Other's look—perhaps I spill my cup of coffee down my shirt as I am speaking to you—this might be a source of shame. That shame is a kind of loose self-objectification, as all at once I find myself an object in your presence, judging myself according to your look. In this scenario I might see myself as an object against your background of the world, instead of as a subject in my own experience. In this way the look is almost a paradox—we are simultaneously a subject in our own world and an object for the other in their world. It is the look that entails a kind of possession, as Sartre elucidates:

I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it is, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am. He makes me be and

thereby he possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me. (386)

Feminist readings of Sartre's work reveal that he essentialises women in his philosophy, and particularly in his novels (Collins and Pierce 125). The usage of the word "he" to denote the subject in the previous passage is thus significant in that self-objectification, particularly for people who don't identify as heterosexual men, often stems from the patriarchal male gaze. The subject is made to feel as though they are possessed in some way by the other person, as though their access to their perception of themselves is limited.

The feeling of possession by the gaze of the other is a part of systematic marginalisation. As Marguerite La Caze notes, "oppression creates a structural context where humiliation is assumed, taken in, and focused on the self and so experienced as shame" (90). While there are many sources of shame and pride that are not synonymous with systems of oppression, there are equally many sources of shame and pride that are. If I spill my coffee on myself my shame in front of you is not necessarily connected to my social positioning. Shame does become infinitely more complicated, however, when my source of shame stems from a form of non-compliance with social norms. This is the kind of structural context in which shame is internalised. In this context, shame may function as a tool of oppression. To illustrate, I consider the experience of Bonnie, who identifies herself as a fat woman, and is a participant in a study by Jeannine Gailey of fat women's experiences of dating. Bonnie describes a scene in which she is sitting in a doctor's office, looking through a magazine:

I was flipping through a Reader's Digest, and you know how they have all those funny little things in there? And one of them was a story, and it said, 'If it wasn't for alcohol, fat girls would never get laid.' And I remember sitting in that office, and the tears coming to my eyes, and feeling so exposed, even though nobody knew what I had just read... . I didn't see myself as desirable. I didn't see myself as—I just didn't see myself as someone who men dated. (Gailey 84)

Bonnie's experience of shame stems from internalised structural oppression, where women's bodies are meant to fit a certain mould of normative, white femininity. In talking about normative white femininity, I refer to Western beauty standards that dictate that for a woman to be desirable, she should be thin, white, heterosexual and feminine. In invoking normative white femininity, I invoke a white, middle class subject. Increasingly, and particularly in the digital sphere, feminine traits associated with beauty include "slimness, large

breasts, curvaceousness, white tanned skin” (Carah and Dobson 8). Women who fit this ideal are assigned a higher position in social hierarchy according to the male gaze. As someone who does not fit this strict ideal, Bonnie is prompted by the *Reader’s Digest* story to feel humiliation after being made to see herself as an object in the background of another’s existence. I argue that this is an example of shame at feeling as though one’s body is obscene (and not graceful), and this feeling of shame functions as a method of control over women’s bodily subjectivity. This in itself is a mode of *being-for-others*, as I argue that wanting to have a graceful body is an internalised form of Sartre’s sadomasochism as I will explain in the sections that follow. These ideas are all particularly salient in public discourse around obscene and Othered bodies, which brings me to the next point.

## Obscene and othered bodies

Obscenity is a product of shame, and in this section I focus particularly on a patriarchal form of shame invoked by the male gaze. First, it is important to define precisely what it is I mean by “patriarchy” and “male gaze.” In invoking the notion of “patriarchy,” my definition is taken from Carole Pateman’s work on women’s exclusion from the social contract and other bases for civil society, which feeds into men’s patriarchal right over women. While the margins have extended markedly over the last hundred years, there remain numerous ways in which white, able-bodied heterosexual men hold privilege over people of differing abilities, races, sexes and genders. This is the patriarchal right of man. Further to this, in invoking the concept of the “male gaze,” I make reference to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey who, in the 1970s, delineated the look of the male other—the predominantly white, masculine and heterosexual other. I also make reference to Simone de Beauvoir, who also expounded this phenomenon in her best-known work, *The Second Sex*. This gaze is the phenomenon in which women’s bodies are sexualised for the pleasure of a masculine subject (Loreck). If a person’s body is not thought to be pleasurable for a masculine subject to look at, it is likely to be considered obscene. This is exemplified by Bonnie’s experience in the previous section.

It is important, however, to note that in the postfeminist era, people are not limited to invoking passive internalisations of the male gaze or active forms of defiance. Emerging modes of femininity blur the boundaries between these two modes to give way to new kinds of sexuality, gender, femininity and Otherness. Amy Shields Dobson highlights that:

Along with more 'active' and 'desiring' constructions of sexuality, cultural scholars have noted that in postfeminist mediascapes girls and young women are depicted and addressed as fun-loving, consumption focused, and more 'empowered,' active, and bold, physically, socially, and psychologically. Such constructions of femininity can be seen as a response to feminist critique of earlier, weaker versions of femininity portrayed widely in media and cultural representations. (Dobson 23)

I argue that the image projection of an active, desiring subject is a response to public perceptions of feminine subjects as submissive and in need of rescuing. Consider, for example, the production of Disney Pixar films. There has been a slow shift from the trope of the helpless princess in search of a male love interest, as depicted in the tales of Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, to the much fiercer and more autonomous heroine, as seen in more recent films like *Frozen*, *Brave* or *Moana* (although it ought to be noted that usually these heroines are white, heterosexual, able-bodied women, so there may still be quite a way to go). To reiterate, the complexity of this postfeminist mode of femininity must be emphasised, particularly because I wish to avoid casting the contemporary context as a kind of wasteland dichotomy where non-male subjects swing wildly between immanence, in the mode of *being-for-itself*, and transcendence, in the mode of *being-for-others*. Young people, particularly young women, are increasingly cultivating images of self that do not clearly defy, nor conform to, patriarchal notions of normative, white femininity, which has historically, in the West, been a (problematic) cultural mode to which young women aspire. This presents some curious problems for feminist theory in that the male gaze may still be internalised, but instead it is transformed into a projection and an expression of subjectivity, femininity, gender and sexuality outwards into the world. Those that actively perform this postfeminist femininity are autonomous subjects, but often this manifestation is problematic, and there is much work to be done on the blurring of boundaries and tropes around the appropriate ways in which femininity is expressed. I mentioned earlier in this paper that Kardashian-West was met with over 340,000 comments—among them quite a few that condemned her for being a “bad role model”—after posting the selfie on Instagram. She responded in an open letter on her website, saying:

I am empowered by my body. I am empowered by my sexuality. I am empowered by feeling comfortable in my skin.  
I am empowered by showing the world my flaws and not

being afraid of what anyone is going to say about me. And I hope that through this platform I have been given, I can encourage the same empowerment for girls and women all over the world. I am a mother. I am a wife, a sister, a daughter, an entrepreneur and I am allowed to be sexy. (Kardashian-West, "Happy International Women's Day")

Kardashian-West affirms her autonomy and her subjectivity—she is allowed to make herself desirable and does not rely on the male subject to make her body graceful. To return to Sartre, however, the obscene body is a woman's body. The obscene body is reduced to object status, to the mode of *being-in-itself*, and this is what makes it obscene. The body is viewed as an object of stark immanence where there should be a transcendent subject. It is of course possible that this might not be the case, and indeed visual art forms often depict women's bodies in states of immanence, as graceful bodies. However, to return to Sartre, we can imagine it unlikely that he had a man in mind when he said "the sight of a naked body from behind is not obscene. But certain involuntary waddlings of the rump are obscene" (423).

Nonetheless, I will now examine normative white femininity in relation to subjugation and Otherness, and invoke Elizabeth Grosz in highlighting the prominent Western dichotomy that implies a hierarchy of the mind over the body. This hierarchy has a large influence on the privileging of the mind, associated with maleness, over the body, which is associated with femaleness, and according to popular myth, it is natural and necessary that one is subjugated by the other (Grosz 3). This hierarchy is even more problematic when we consider the ways in which non-white people are primordialised, and further reduced to the category of the body. Frantz Fanon delineated this phenomenon in the 1930s, and it continues to the present day:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values ... He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (Fanon 41)

The racialising of the non-white Other as object, as *being-in-itself*, is symptomatic of a wider patriarchal form of Othering that relegates all people who aren't white cis-men to the category of the body, or the female. Elizabeth Grosz describes the body as being defined by this negation; as being "what is not mind, what is distinct from and other

than the privileged term... It is implicitly defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgement" (3). I argue that in some ways, new modes of femininity as elucidated earlier by Dobson embrace this negation. Women have been reduced to the category of the body for so long that it seems they may be attempting to reclaim it. This may be Kim Kardashian-West's intent in posting her International Women's Day selfie, which was clearly considered unruly and disruptive by those that chose to shame her in their comments on Instagram. Kardashian-West's selfie invoked a response that overwhelmingly called for her to reform her misdirected ways, and the public here reduced Kardashian-West to the status of object, body, negation: something to be conquered.

And so, an explanation is beginning to emerge from the cloak of moral panic surrounding Kim Kardashian-West's naked selfies. The obscene body is the exposed body—it is a body that refuses to be shrouded by the standards and limitations of white patriarchy and of conservative femininity, and yet at the same time, some bodies remain obscene even when conforming to these standards. We might, for example, consider the kinds of bodies depicted in *Playboy* or *GQ* magazine. These bodies are photoshopped to conform to the standards of white patriarchy, however, there is not a clear-cut line between "obscene" and "graceful" bodies when they are curated and shaped to conform in this way. Nonetheless, to return to the subject at hand, on Sartre's reading, "the supreme challenge of grace is to exhibit the body unveiled with no clothing, with no veil except grace itself. The most graceful body is the naked body whose acts enclose it with an invisible visible garment while entirely disrobing its flesh, while the flesh is totally present to the eyes of the spectators" (422). The obscene body is not a subtle body—but a graceful body may be transfigured into an obscene body by an obscene act. I argue that the notion of obscenity is used in a patriarchal way and, accordingly, transcendence entails rising above the lens dictated by the patriarchy. Men's bodies can most certainly be obscene; it is, however, much less common for this fact to be used to shame them into submission. Consider this passage from Simone de Beauvoir:

A woman who teases male desire too blatantly is considered vulgar; but a woman who is seen to repudiate this is disreputable as well: she is seen as wanting to look like a man: she's a lesbian; or to single herself out: she's an eccentric; refusing her role as object, she defies society: she's an anarchist. If she simply does not want to be noticed, she must still conserve her femininity. (652)



It might be helpful to think about Miley Cyrus, who was once a Disney poster girl. White, thin and blond, she was deemed an acceptable role model for young women as an exemplary model of normative, white femininity. In 2013, however, Cyrus began to project an overtly-sexualised and purposefully vulgar image that did not conform to this standard of white femininity. Following her Wrecking Ball transformation, for which she cut her hair short and began to cultivate an image that entailed tight, revealing clothing, Cyrus has now become Beauvoir's "eccentric; refusing her role as object, she defies society: she's an anarchist" (Beauvoir 652). Cyrus, in some ways, defies the male gaze by reclaiming her own bodily subjectivity and shocking people into seeing her subjectivity. This may be most clearly demonstrated by her Wrecking Ball video—in the Director's Cut version, all we are shown is an emotional Cyrus, singing directly to the camera and breaking the fourth wall (Cyrus, Director's Cut). However, in the official version of this music video, Cyrus is much more overtly sexualised, swinging on a wrecking ball naked and seductively licking a hammer (Cyrus, Wrecking Ball). This is an interesting difference, as in the Director's Cut it is as though Cyrus is challenging the male gaze with her own direct gaze, raw and emotional, gazing back at the masculine subject.

In contrast, the official video depicts Cyrus in a similarly subjective way, breaking the fourth wall, but in a curiously sexualised way instead. It is in this act that the anarchy and obscenity lies, as women's bodily subjectivity is, in 2018, still something that the Western public considers to be cause for concern. However, Miley Cyrus is still performing a form of overt sexuality, and while this may be empowering for her, in some ways it also reinforces the sexual objectification of the female subject, and this is where it presents a challenge for contemporary feminist theory. Nonetheless, obscenity is tied to sadism and masochism in Sartre's work in that the male gaze is one that derives pleasure from grace and claims patriarchal right over bodily subjectivity by systems that seek to control non-masculine bodies by ensuring that they internalise their own oppression. The public ridicule of women for their bodily subjectivity is thus a power tactic. I now turn to a discussion of sadism and masochism in Sartre's work to illuminate the concept of the male gaze in popular discourse.

## The sadomasochistic paradox

Sadism, according to Sartre, is "an effort to incarnate the Other through violence," and is like desire in that it "seeks to strip the Other of the acts which hide him. It seeks to reveal the flesh beneath the

action. But whereas the *for-itself* in desire loses itself in its own flesh in order to reveal to the Other that he too is flesh, the sadist refuses his own flesh at the same time that he uses instruments to reveal by force the Other's flesh to him" (Sartre 421). In the previous section, I touched on the concept of the graceful body, and I will examine Kardashian-West's selfie in relation to this concept later in this section. While in Sartre's work a woman's body is only graceful when a man's desire is projected upon it, the ideal, graceful body is, in the context of Western patriarchy, the white, feminine body. It is the opposite of Beauvoir's anarchist body, and is one to which those who have internalised the standards of the patriarchy aspire. Because this body is cloaked in grace, it is one that is inaccessible, or unobtainable. Sartre's sadist seeks to occupy or possess this body through violence and force. I argue that it is possible to be both a sadist and a masochist in attempting to emulate the beauty ideals of normative white femininity, and that this is an embodiment of the mode of *being-for-others* as one attempts to contort one's body into a certain form in order to fit into an external standard. I also argue that the male gaze, whether internalised and manifest as shame, or outward, looking toward and trying to possess other bodies, is a harmful tool of oppression.

A graceful body appears as an inaccessible body, and the sadist seeks to control the body of the Other by rendering the Other's body object, reducing that body to flesh. The graceful body is thus a threat to one's own freedom, as it projects the subject forth into the mode of *being-for-others*. Celebrity bodies are already commodified for us to some extent, and a consequence of this may be that they are more easily transformed into immanent bodies, objects, fit for public consumption, as Western audiences are already used to a certain kind of celebrity narrative that may reduce or limit perceptions of celebrity subjectivity. Nonetheless, as someone who identifies as a woman, it is difficult not to internalise the male gaze, which in turn means that graceful bodies, or subjects that embody normative white femininity, are, from a certain lens, a threat to my own *being-for-itself* and bodily subjectivity because they remind me of my place in the patriarchal hierarchy. In this sense, I am compelled to emulate the graceful other by conforming to patriarchal beauty standards through grooming, strict diet and exercise, expensive beauty treatments and further mechanisms that function to bring my own image closer to that of the graceful other. "The sadist ... wants to make the Other's flesh appear; and in its very appearance the flesh will destroy grace, and facticity will reabsorb the Other's freedom-as-object" (Sartre 424). By attempting to emulate this graceful other, I exist *for-others*, setting

aside my own bodily subjectivity and denying my own radical freedom.

At the same time, this transforms me into a masochist. I embody the mode of *being-for-others* and allow myself to be defined by the other in trying to emulate normative white femininity. I am the liar and the lied-to. "I refuse to be anything more than an object. I rest upon the Other, and as I experience this *being-as-object* in shame, I will and I love my shame as the profound sign of my objectivity. As the Other apprehends me as object by means of *actual desire*, I wish to be desired, I make myself in shame an object of desire" (Sartre 400). In transforming the self into an immanent object as a transcendent subject, one is simultaneously this liar and the lied-to. This, I argue, is the sadomasochistic paradox of postfeminist femininity in connection with the male gaze. It is the act of internalising the male gaze and reflexively turning it back on oneself in an attempt to fit the beauty standards of normative white femininity. Postfeminist projections of self often exemplify this phenomenon, and I argue that while Kardashian-West works hard to fit a mould of normative femininity, she is still subject to a great deal of criticism, as the public reduces her being to the category of the body. The male gaze is reflected back to us in her selfie, and the public reaction to her selfie made this particularly apparent. I turn now to an examination of Kardashian-West's intent with the projection of the image, as well as the public response to this image projection.

To be clear, Kim Kardashian-West's International Women's Day selfie was not entirely nude. The image depicts Kardashian-West in her bathroom, in a private and domestic sphere, taking an image of her reflection in a mirror. In this sense it is an image of an image, and this is important because it establishes a new distance between subject and object. Kardashian-West takes control over her own image by taking a selfie, and in this way the image is an expression of *being-for-itself*, of authentic being and of autonomy. However, there is a paradox in that at the same time, the image exhibits an awareness of the male gaze, and of the presence of Kardashian-West's own body in the presence of the other, or her audience, which we might consider a form of *being-for-others*. Kardashian-West literally becomes a spectator to her own being. There is tape over the more "obscene" parts of her body, which may be to comply with Instagram's rules around showing nipples and other signifiers of a naked body, but may also be to fit into the kind of grey area of subversiveness that Dobson delineates with her notion of postfeminist femininity. "Self-representational practices performatively signal one's ability to 'reveal interiority,' to be 'transparently' available to one's viewers in a

networked public" (Dobson 105). Kardashian-West performs this emerging mode of femininity by creating an appearance of openness and transparency in sharing images of her life and her body publicly across multiple platforms.

Sartre's supreme challenge of grace is, as noted earlier in this paper, to simultaneously reveal and cloak the body with "no veil except grace itself" (422). In many ways, this is Kardashian-West's project. She exhibits a paradoxical image—she is both naked and not naked, catering to the ideals of normative femininity and defying them by not pandering to a conservative status quo, and simultaneously projects an image of herself that is taken both by herself and of herself, as a subject and as an object. The selfie is deliberately provocative, and the nudity involved seems to make a claim towards authenticity consistent with Dobson's postfeminist femininity. In order to tie some of the earlier themes of this paper together with the later themes, I return to Sartre's notion of *being-for-others*. You may recall that the mode of *being-for-others* entails feeling as though one is possessed by the other, or the feeling of being an object in another's world. Women, particularly non-white women, are relegated to a kind of status of perpetual other, perpetual Object. While Kim Kardashian-West complies with a postfeminist standard of femininity, exemplifying a self-aware image of her own sexuality, she is also refusing to comply with other public standards of appropriate behaviour. In posting a nude selfie, Kardashian-West does disrupt the patriarchal male gaze, but it may still be the case that she is *being-for-others*, internalising the sadomasochistic Sartrean paradox.

To conclude, I acknowledge that there are limits to our knowledge of Kardashian-West's authentic self, and the lines between character and projection of self are blurred for anyone in the public eye, particularly for those who don't identify as cis-men. In talking about authenticity I make reference back to the discussion of *being-for-others* and the oscillation between *being-for-itself* and *being-in-itself* as described in the earlier part of this paper. It may be possible that Kardashian-West embodies a mode of *being-for-others* in projecting her nude selfie across the internet. Perhaps all forms of social media entail some kind of *being-for-others*, particularly emerging forms of digital expression that make claims to authenticity while simultaneously embracing increasingly conventional notions of heterosexual femininity. Kardashian-West's image is a curated one, and a nude image sends a particular message. Her figure is transformed to some degree by the perceived obscenity of the act of posting a naked selfie on the internet, which echoes a claim to *being-for-itself*. She is simultaneously cloaked and revealed in a masterful projection of self-

image. Kardashian-West, like a number of women in the digital age, is both the liar and the lied-to, the sadist and the masochist. Ultimately, Kardashian-West has taken up the terms of Sartre's supreme challenge of grace, succeeded and, perhaps, may have even transcended them in her expression of a mode of autonomous postfeminist embodiment.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to mention and thank those at the 2017 Excess and Desire conference for their careful responses to my presentation, as I have included some replies to these considerations in this paper.

## Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Random House, 2009.
- Carah, Nicholas, and Amy Dobson. "Algorithmic Hotness: Young Women's 'Promotion' and 'Reconnaissance' Work Via Social Media Body Images." *Social Media and Society* 2.4 (2016): 1–10.
- Collins, Margery, and Christine Pierce. "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis." *Philosophical Forum* 5:1 (1973): 112–27.
- Corner, Natalie. "Scarlett Johansson Debuts Amazing Post-Baby Body in LBD on Red Carpet with Chris Hemsworth." *Mirror* UK, 1 Feb 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/scarlett-johansson-debuts-amazing-post-baby-5084879>.
- Cyrus, Miley. "Wrecking Ball—Miley Cyrus." VEVO, 2018, <https://www.vevo.com/watch/miley-cyrus/wrecking-ball/USRV81300400>.
- . "Miley Cyrus—Wrecking Ball (Director's Cut)." YouTube, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YICuUtkjlg>.
- Dobson, Amy Shields. *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove, 1963.
- Gailey, Jeannine A. "Fat Shame to Fat Pride: Fat Women's Sexual and Dating Experiences." *Fat Studies* 1.1 (2012): 114–27.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1994.
- Ho-lie, Angelina. "Blac Chyna Post-Baby Body: Where's The Beef?!" *The Hollywood Gossip*, 2018, <https://www.thehollywoodgossip.com/2016/12/blac-chyna-post-baby-body-wheres-the-beef/>.
- Kardashian-West, Kim. "Happy International Women's Day." [kimkardashianwest.com](http://kimkardashianwest.com) 7/3/2016. <https://www.kimkardashianwest.com>

- com/behind-the-scenes/776-kim-kardashian-nude-instagram/.  
Accessed 30/01/2017.
- —. “When You’re Like I Have Nothing to Wear Lol.” Instagram  
08/03/2016.  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BCpQBQROS5l/>.  
Accessed 13/02/2017.
- La Caze, Marguerite. “At First Blush: The Politics of Guilt and Shame.” *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 18 (2013): 85–99.
- Loreck, Janice. “Explainer: What Does the ‘Male Gaze’ Mean, and What About a Female Gaze.” *The Conversation*, 6 Jan 2016.  
<https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-does-the-male-gaze-mean-and-what-about-a-female-gaze-52486>. Accessed 03/02/2017.
- Martin, Thomas. “Sartre, Sadism and Female Beauty Ideals.” *Australian Feminist Studies* 11. 24 (1996): 243–52.
- Pateman, Carole. *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1988.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. Hazel Estella Barnes. London: Routledge, 1998. Corporation Ebooks.
- Taylor, Sarah. “Khloe Kardashian Flaunts Dangerous-Looking Weight Loss.” *The Hollywood Gossip*, 2018. <https://www.thehollywoodgossip.com/2016/10/khloe-kardashian-flaunts-dangerous-looking-weight-loss/>.