



## The Rise of Kylie Jenner

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*Keeping Up With the Kardashians* broke into the world of reality television on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007 (Wikipedia). Since the airing of its first episode, it has had eleven seasons and is renewed for its twelfth season, set to air Spring 2016 (E! Online). Eighteen-year-old Kylie Jenner, the youngest of the Kardashian-Jenner clan, is worth far above \$10 million owns a \$2.7 million home, and retains 74% of the subscribers of all of her sisters' apps combined (Celebrity Net Worth, Hollywood Life 2015). In late September, Kylie had 36.5 million Instagram followers. Today, this number has risen a whopping 47% to 53.6 million. "King Kylie" is now the second most followed Kardashian sister, second only to Kim, long the Queen of the clan.

But only two years ago, Kylie was almost entirely shadowed by the spotlights that shone on her older sisters. When *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* began, Kim Kardashian was the center of attention, and Kylie and her older sister Kendall were almost indistinguishable as simply the two twin-like little siblings of the three attractive, desirable older sisters. As the sisters grew, Kendall embarked on her highly successful modeling career, and Kylie was, for a while, alone at the bottom, now outshined by what had been her partner from the very start. So how, exactly, did Kylie rise to such phenomenal levels of success so quickly? In two years, how did Kylie skyrocket from her place as the least significant sister to the second most famous one? To answer this question, I studied Kylie's celebrity timeline alongside celebrity culture and the art of fame. "Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities," says Richard Dyer in his study of fame, *Heavenly Bodies*, "they are both labour and the thing labour produces." My conclusion is this: through conscious strategy and step-by-step work, Kylie "produced" herself into the icon she is today. Kylie used four main branding strategies – becoming the "new" Kim, trademarking her lips, connecting with her fans, and marketing an alternative, ethereal image of herself – to create a massive empire for endless public consumption.

## *Becoming Kim: The Transformation of the Face*

Just three years ago Kylie was an entirely different entity: a natural beauty, her fresh face was delicate and youthful. She was feminine but reserved, put together and elegant. But unlike her older sisters, this fresh-faced, gentle beauty remained relatively out of the spotlight.

In early 2014, Kylie's face suddenly seemed to have transformed, bearing increasingly uncanny resemblance to Kim. Her fame then snowballed rapidly. But why did she choose to mimic Kim? I believe that by latching onto the most famous and stable sister, Kylie's publicity team aimed to boost Kylie in the eyes of the public, drawing the media attention she needed in order to rise in the ranks among her sisters. Batesian mimicry, a commonly occurring phenomenon in the wild, is "a relationship where one organism that is harmless... mimics a noxious species... [to] avoid predation" (Study.com); Kylie's own organic image was not drawing attention, as she was essentially irrelevant relative to the other sisters, so she began to change that image to mimic the most powerful and popular sister of all.



She matches Kim more than she does her own self . S/o to Doctor Miami

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Less than three full years later, Kylie's face has entirely transformed; two simple split-face side-by-sides of the new Kylie – one split with her old self, one split with Kim – reveals the shocking work that

has been done onto the delicate face of this 18-year-old girl. Kylie has become Kim Kardashian in a younger body. But this was only the first step in Kylie's strategic plan for fame.

After the initial rounds of plastic surgery to propel herself towards iconicity, I propose that Kylie Jenner crafted a step-by-step branding and sales strategy. The first step: publicity, through a scandal or otherwise. The second: public obsession. The third: commodification of that obsession. Kylie followed this step-by-step process for each of her next three branding endeavors, which she learned from stars before her: her lips, her "connection" to her fans, and (contrastingly), her self-objectification, repeatedly presenting doll-like ethereal image to the public to facilitate her own worship.

### *The Body-Part Obsession: Kylie's Lips*

Kylie's first branding strategy was the development of her lips into something that could be sold for public consumption. In April 2014, after only a single article was published speculating on Kylie's use of plastic surgery – by *OK! Magazine, Australia*, of all sources – Kylie took to her Twitter page to respond. She capitalized on her chance to cause a media frenzy. "These plastic surgery rumors hurt my feelings to be honest and are kinda insulting... Just in case anyone forgot... I'm 16." And so it began: the obsession with Kylie's lips had commenced. Hundreds of articles were published theorizing about Kylie's possible lip augmentation, and Kylie and her team continued to vehemently deny the allegations. As recently as March 2015, a representative told *The Daily Mail* that the allegations were "so ridiculous" and "not true," and her makeup artist stated in an interview that her lips were simply "created using expertly applied lip liner and a little lip balm" (Bustle 2015). Nevertheless, the rumors continued, attracting

Google

Images for kylie jenner lips 2013

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#### Has Kylie Jenner Had Lip Injections? Experts Say Yes

hollywoodlife.com/.../kylie-jenner-lips-plastic-surgery-li... ▼ Hollywood Life ▼  
Sep 24, 2014 - Recent photos of Kylie have sent fans into a frenzy — has she injected filler into her lips? ... Kylie Jenner, 17, is naturally beautiful, but is she enhancing her looks and following in the plastic surgery footsteps of members of the Kardashian / Jenner family? ... Certified plastic ...

#### Kylie Jenner, Before and After - Beauty Editor

beautyeditor.ca/2014/11/22/kylie-jenner-before-and-after ▼  
Nov 22, 2014 - After all, the 17-year-old reality star's plump-looking lips sure are ... Kylie Jenner at the 2013 premiere of 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire'.

#### Kylie Jenner's Lips Are Bigger Since Last Christmas: Photos ...

www.usmagazine.com/.../kylie-jenners-lips-are-bigger-since-l... ▼ Us Weekly ▼  
Dec 30, 2014 - Kylie Jenner switched up her beauty routine with bold lipstick in 2013, and in 2014 she has amplified the plumped-up look even more.

#### Kylie Jenner Lips Transformation - Celebrity Hair and ... - Mimi

www.mimichatter.com/kylie-jenner-beauty-looks-920271589.html ▼  
Aug 31, 2015 - See how much Kylie Jenner has transformed over the last few years. ... Kylie Jenner's (Very) Drastic Beauty Transformation ... September, 2013.

#### Kylie Jenner Lip Injections? Look At The Reality Star's ...

www.ibtimes.com > ... > Entertainment ▼ International Business Times ▼  
Aug 8, 2014 - It has been speculated that Kylie Jenner got lip injections to plump up her upper and lower lips. Take a look ... Kylie Jenner in September 2013 ...

enormous amounts of media attention.

Kylie had instigated the mass publicity herself as the first step of her branding strategy.

In 2015, the second step of Kylie's branding strategy proved complete: the viral Kylie Jenner Lip Challenge began, proving that Kylie's lips had become an obsession. With a shot glass, young girls, "significantly younger than Kylie, who [was] only 17" placed their lips into the shot glass and sucked the air out to create friction

(Washington Post 2015); this causes blood to rush into the lips, causing a temporary lip filling.

But some results were horrifying; the practice commonly caused extreme bruising and even serious injuries requiring stitches when the shot glass broke under the extreme pressure. But millions took the risk; her lips had become widely coveted – fetishized – and millions modeled themselves after this new icon, internalizing, mimicking her appearance to make it their own.

This is not the first time an enlarged body part has caused widespread “fetishization”: Jennifer Lopez's infamous rear end helped drive her career. Kylie, by enlarging a body part, did the same (Beltrán 2002). It seems Kylie may have even directly learned from Lopez's strategy, as Beltrán notes, “the discussion of Lopez's body was often initiated by Lopez herself”; Kylie capitalized on the first published article about her lips to incite media coverage. Like Lopez, she

continued to capitalize on this public fixation on her lips, flaunting them in social media pictures and intentionally, glamorously, and intriguingly evading questions about them in interviews. She strategically drew more and more attention to them until her lips had truly become an obsession. In May of 2015, the world gasped and rejoiced when Kylie finally came clean about her injections, stating, “I have had temporary lip fillers” (The Daily Mail 2015). And that was that.

Thus began the next step of Kylie’s branding strategy: turning the public obsession into a commodity for sale. Almost immediately, Kylie began on her next entrepreneurial endeavor, the Kylie Jenner lip kits, which she announced in August of 2015. The three colors of “Lip Kit by Kylie” had their first release at 12:00am on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, and all the kits, priced at \$30 each, sold out immediately. Two weeks later, a second batch was released and similarly sold out instantaneously. Kits were being resold on eBay for over \$800. (MTV 2015) Lip Kit by Kylie went on sale for a third time on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016, this time with three new colors. Within 10 minutes, all six colors had again sold out (Elle Magazine 2015). With the beautiful, attention-drawing face of Kim on a younger body, Kylie went a step further with her brand: she created a brand from her controversy-causing and obsessed-over feature. Kylie and her lips have become iconic, and she has wielded them: at first with shy glamour, and now with reckless abandon. The Kylie Jenner team is making an enormous profit. But the development of Kylie’s brand didn’t stop there.

### *Kylie’s Diary: The “Best Friend” Celebrity*

Kylie third branding scheme, also developed into a commodity using her step-by-step strategy, elevated her to even more spectacular levels of iconicity: Kylie spends most of her time developing an “intimate” relationship with her fans. Kylie began using Instagram for the same

reason that almost every single star does: for publicity. Kylie, however, was innovative in her use of Snapchat. An app previously used just between friends, Kylie began using Snapchat to broadcast her daily life to her fans before almost any other star realized the app's marketing capability. She posted – and continues to post today – clips getting her makeup done, goofing around with friends, going to lunch, going to bed, visiting her sisters, and even (controversially) driving her multi-hundred-thousand-dollar cars. Janice Min, former editor for *Us Weekly*, commented on the rise of the reality star in celebrity culture in a 2009 interview, stating, “the whole relationship dynamic between the general population and celebrity has morphed into a belief that there's very little separating you from being like them” (Davisson 5). And through her seemingly intimate use of social media, Kylie has seized this phenomenon and exploited it to its full potential: watching her Snapchat story, just one story among those of your real-life friends, you almost wonder whether Kylie is one of your best friends, too. In July of 2015, she became the “Queen of Snapchat,” the number-one viewed person on the app, which allows users to share everyday clips from their lives to their friends, or in Kylie's case, massive audiences (Elle Magazine 2015). The public had become obsessed with her social media presence, following every trace she left of herself on the Internet.

And thus came the third step of the strategy: commodification of this public obsession. While announcing that she had become the most followed person on Snapchat and one of the top ten most followed people on Instagram, Kylie announced the development of her website and mobile app, to which a subscription would cost \$2.99 per month. Her app, released in September, skyrocketed to the #1 spot on the iTunes charts, surpassing the download counts of her sisters' apps astronomically. Kylie's app, though one of the most expensive in the store, was downloaded 1.75 million times during its first week, followed by Khloe with 498,000 downloads

and Kim with 477,000 downloads (Fortune 2015). “Part digital diar[y], part lifestyle brand” (Wired 2015) Kylie’s website and accompanying app have Kylie-recommended clothes, accessories, and even foods that users can purchase with a simple click. They feature makeup tutorials to achieve Kylie’s infamous coveted look, and photos from A-list celebrity events; for \$2.99 a month, Kylie-obsessed fans can feast their eyes on exclusive pictures of Kylie and her boyfriend, rapper Tyga. At surprise moments, users will receive a push notification on their phones when Kylie is broadcasting *live* on the app. As mentioned, Kylie now retains over 74% of all the subscribers for the sisters’ apps combined. And the key to its massive success, stated by Kylie herself? Its intimacy: precisely the obsession she cultivated and turned into a commodity. In an interview with *Time*, who included Kylie in their 30 most influential teens list of 2015, Kylie noted that her app was more successful than hyper-famous older sister Kim’s because Kim’s is “simple, everything is black and white. Mine is more, I invite the cameras over and say, ‘Oh, hey, let’s just do this.’ We do makeup tutorials and I’m laughing and talking,” leading the star to an “unparalleled” level of openness with her fans. She further explained, “I just like to show my personality and show my fans my home and my dogs. I get really personal. I’m on Snapchat, and I’m just like them at the end of the day. Kim’s more private. She has kids. It’s just different” (Time Magazine 2015). As *Wired* puts it, “Kylie loves to share - and her fans love to follow.”

As Kylie seemed to have learned from Jennifer Lopez about the power of accentuated body parts, the full utilization of social media appears to have been learned from another star: Lady Gaga previously harnessed such platforms in a wildly successful way. Lady Gaga is a well-known player in the world of fame; she has been open about her extensive studies of previous stars before her to aide in her extraordinary success. In another of Richard Dyer’s works, *Stars*,



he writes, “the celebrity...is not distant but attainable – touchable by the multitude. The greatness of the celebrity is something that can be shared.” Similar to Kylie, Lady Gaga capitalized off of social media, using the most accessible platforms at the time, Facebook and Twitter. Rather than relying on mainstream media to translate her ideas, Gaga used the platforms to communicate directly with her fans (Davisson 18). In 2010, Gaga announced, “I believe, as an artist, being private in public is at the core of the aesthetic” (Davisson 6). Gaga was one of the first celebrities to recognize the power of such intimacy and harness social media to create her own brand, to allow fans to connect with her on a (seemingly) deeply personal level. As a result, Gaga became an icon almost overnight. Suddenly, the world was obsessed with Lady Gaga.

Like Kylie, Gaga also created her own website, Littlemonsters.com, after her social media platforms became enormously successful. On her site Gaga posted “random” photos from her day, thoughts while on tour, advance information about events, comments on current styles, and responses to media scandals about her behavior. She recorded videos just “consisting of her and her backup dancers sitting around after shows or during downtime, chatting” (Davisson 113). Kylie, in her day-to-day videos with friends, seems to copy Gaga’s technique. As Amber Davisson writes in her study of Gaga, *Lady Gaga and the Remaking of Celebrity Culture*, such “constant engagement increases fan awareness of Gaga and makes her more a part of fans’ day-to-day lives.” With new technology allowances today, Kylie’s spontaneously occurring live feed offered (for a price) from her app takes Gaga’s discovery and leaps forward.

### *The Commodification of the Self: Creating a Cultural Deity*

The final branding strategy I will discuss in this paper is Kylie’s self-commodification: though she cultivates an “intimate” relationship with her fans through her social media platforms,

there also exists a recurring image of Kylie as an inhuman, too-perfect doll. Perhaps this image could pass as Kylie's "alter ego," an alluring and glamorous addition to her "open, just-like-you" image. Either way, Kylie capitalizes on the public obsession with *herself* by representing *herself* as a commodity, an inhuman, doll-like object to be consumed.

First, consider the split-face of half the new Kylie and half the old. The light eye makeup of the past sharply contrasts with Kylie's new, dramatic shadow and false eyelashes, her brow



theatrically arched. The highly risen eyebrow hairs to accomplish this arch seem new too, as they exist in places that were simply not possible on her old face. Her youthful appearance has been somehow lifted even more, her skin airbrushed, her jawline widened and defined, her lips enlarged to over twice their old size. Her stare has gone from young, innocent and present to sultry and lifeless. She exists as a

real-life wax figure, a perfect porcelain doll; she does not seem human. Thus, under all the marketing and attempts at forming a connection with her fan base, a dichotomy exists: between the intimate, animated Kylie and the Kylie continuously presented as an *object* for public consumption. This is the commodification of the *entire being* of the icon. But we will see that the widespread presentation of such a perfected, inhuman image of Kylie has far greater power than simply self-commodification.

This technique, of projecting the image of ethereal facial-perfection, seemed to have been learned from another star: Greta Garbo. Like Garbo, such a representation of Kylie gives her an

essence of “the Divine... to convey... the essence on her corporeal person, descended from a heaven where all things are formed and perfected in the clearest light... her face was not to have any reality except that of its perfection” (Barthes 1972). Kylie learned from Garbo: by presenting herself to the public in flawless images, Kylie has figured out how to attain the highest level of iconicity: by becoming an object for worship. In numerous photo shoots, Kylie has posed as a literal (sex) doll; with lifeless eyes and skin airbrushed to resemble a perfectly flawless porcelain doll, Kylie has sold out magazines. In the previously discussed comparison photo with Kim, Kylie’s eyes seem even



*Interview Magazine 2015*

more lifeless than her famous sister’s. And thus, Kylie becomes truly a commodity, an icon to be sold to the worshipping public. She is not a person; she is not real. Like an orthodox Christian icon, she “remind[s] us what we are and what we should be...show[s] us the importance of matter and of material things... we are challenged to follow in [its] footsteps” (Orthodoxa.org). And it is true: millions of people follow Kylie Jenner’s every move. Images of her perfect face, augmented above those of the common person, are to be admired and mimicked. Every trace she leaves on the Earth is chased after and consumed. From the

dangerous Lip Challenge to the willingness of millions to pay \$36 a year to view every moment of how Kylie lives her daily life, Kylie's worshippers take risks and make sacrifices to learn from this "enlightened" being.

Thus, to achieve fame, Kylie has truly become the "commodity" of which Dyer spoke.



This technique of "fashioning the star out of the raw material of the person" is the norm in celebrity culture (Dyer 1986). Dyer states that the degree of change to create the icon varies from person to person, depending on the "inherent qualities of the material," in this case, Kylie transformed dramatically.

### *The Future of Kylie*

Kylie Jenner is creating her fame in a highly intelligent way. In an interview published in December of 2015, Kylie

admits that Lady Gaga, the fame strategist whom Kylie seemed to have imitated, has complimented her, telling Kylie, "I think you're so amazing, and whatever you're doing, people are just obsessed with it" (Interview Magazine 2015). Gaga knows: celebrities are an image; their actions and stories for the public are carefully and strategically planned. Before Kylie, Gaga fully understood the power that social media held in its ability to create a seemingly personal connection between the celebrity and her fan base.

Kylie Jenner began her rise to iconicity by physically mimicking Kim; with careful marketing strategy and the creation of her own brand, however, she has risen – and will continue to rise – far beyond Kim. Kylie has the (more youthful) face of Kim, but she also has strategized a commercial product: she is the Kim *for the people*, Kim 2.0. Kris Jenner, the famous “momager” of the Kardashian-Jenner clan, is rumored to be moving her attention away from Kim to Kylie, believing Kylie is now “the family’s biggest star” (Hollywood Life 2015). And in a live stream video on Kylie’s app with Kim – suggestively titled, “You’re in Bed with Kim and Kylie” – Kim asked Kylie, “How do you feel now that you’ve dethroned me?” (MTV). Kylie “laughed and brushed off the question,” without responding. No words needed to be said.

As her self-placed title suggests, “King Kylie” is – and always has been - on a mission to take her rightful place as the true leader of the clan. With the “reborn” face of Kim and the learned strategy of celebrity geniuses before her, Kylie is unstoppable. As *Wired* puts it, “Like It or Not, Kylie Jenner Is the Celebrity of the Future” (2015).

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