

Online and In the Spotlight: A Critical Analysis of The Beauty Vlogger

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Dedication

For David, my twin and unwavering pillar of support.

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the beauty vlogger, who I define for purposes of this project as an individual who produces beauty content across multiple social media platforms as her full-time job. Through textual and discourse analysis, personal observation, and interviews with content creators, I theorize the beauty vlogger through the multiple identities that she simultaneously embodies – those of the female entrepreneurial laborer, the public persona, and the social media “influencer.” Not only does this dissertation critically interrogate the beauty vlogger as she exists within the contemporary post-Fordist and neoliberal capitalist context, but it also historicizes the figure of the beauty vlogger by looking to other modes of gendered, raced, and classed entrepreneurialism within and around the beauty industry over the course of the twentieth century. In the current moment, the beauty vlogger exists within a highly commercialized environment, both through her engagement with online video and social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat which monetize the content she creates and through her positionality vis-à-vis the traditional beauty industry. In her role as a public persona and social media influencer who tests and reviews beauty products, the beauty vlogger functions as a critical part of emergent marketing and advertising strategies that capitalize on the relationship the beauty vlogger fosters with her audience. Increasingly, this content has materialized into formalized, paid partnerships between the beauty vlogger and beauty brands, which provides the beauty vlogger with additional revenue streams. The lifestyle that the beauty vlogger promotes online as an entrepreneur, a public persona, and an influencer, is one which others aspire

to attain, but it is important to remember the curated nature of the beauty vlogger's online identity. In this dissertation, I render visible the beauty vlogger's hidden labor that produces and mitigates her seemingly glamorous lifestyle.

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Introduction – Positioning The Beauty Vlogger

A little less than a decade ago, when many of the beauty vloggers who now have millions of subscribers were just starting their YouTube channels, the Internet was a very different space than it is now. Social media platforms were just taking off; YouTube launched in 2005, Twitter was established in 2006, Facebook opened to the public in 2007, and Instagram and Snapchat were founded in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Being a beauty vlogger was not yet a career trajectory. Product placement and sponsorships were not commonplace. And beauty vloggers were not “instafamous” microcelebrities (Marwick 2015). Many beauty vloggers in these early days filmed in their bedrooms or similar domestic, private spaces. Camera phones and webcams were used for filming, not DSLR cameras on tripods in dedicated filming spaces with artificial lighting that produce the videos we see today. Editing was rare, if engaged at all. Creating beauty content, which was mainly posted to YouTube, was a hobby – beauty videos provided a type of a subcultural space where people who loved all-things-beauty could create content, share information, and eventually build an online community around their interest in beauty culture (Ito et al. 2010).

The community of beauty vloggers is much different, and much more expansive, a decade later. One panel moderator at VidCon, a popular online video convention, called the online beauty community “an industry staple” within the broader realm of online video and Anne Jerslev (2016), who has written about famed UK-based beauty vlogger Zoe Sugg (channel name: Zoella, 12 million subscribers¹), notes that beauty and style content on YouTube is one of the top three genres on the platform (5233). This online

¹ All metrics updated as of August 15, 2018.

beauty community comprises a sizable segment of YouTube's user-generated content and has drastically altered how beauty products are marketed and sold to consumers, through what has become known as influencer marketing. And this beauty content is not confined to YouTube. On the contrary, the beauty vlogger is now expected to actively engage with her audience on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat (Burgess and Green 2009). These industry shifts have heightened the expectations placed on the beauty vlogger as an individual and as a content creator. On YouTube, high production values are critical to maintaining a beauty channel in an increasingly saturated landscape of beauty vloggers (Dunn 2016). Upgrading equipment, from cameras to lighting to microphones to editing software, is seen as an investment in one's channel(s)² (Duffy 2015, 2016; Dunn 2016, Neff et al. 2005). The beauty vlogger monetizes her content in many ways, including through YouTube's Partner Program and AdSense revenue and through sponsorships with beauty and lifestyle brands. These two sources of income optimize the number of revenue streams a beauty vlogger can access. And a certain subset of the young women who engaged with beauty vlogging as a hobby have transformed this passion into a full-time job and source of income. Through this professionalization of her content creation, the beauty vlogger has entered the commercial sphere in a much more pronounced way than when she filmed in her bedroom for a substantially smaller audience.

To date, very little scholarly work has directly engaged beauty vlogging. The existing literature tends to be article or chapter-length work, and oftentimes combines

² Some beauty vloggers maintain two, or more, channels. Their beauty channel is often considered their "main" channel. Less formal content, or non beauty-related content usually appears on secondary channels.

beauty vlogging with other creative industrial labor like fashion blogging and/or modeling. It also tends to focus on the most famous beauty vloggers such as Zoe Sugg (Jerslev 2016) and Michelle Phan (8.9 million subscribers) (Banet-Weiser 2017, Cunningham and Craig 2017, Jenkins 2016, Nathanson 2014). This dissertation provides one of the first sustained, long-form analyses of beauty vlogging. Specifically, my project concentrates on the full-time beauty vlogger, who has optimized her online content creation and established a career trajectory for herself. The beauty vlogger juggles multiple identities – as an entrepreneur, a public persona, and an influencer – and deftly navigates the constantly changing social media space. As such, this dissertation critically interrogates each of these identities by making them the respective focus of each of the three main chapters of this dissertation.

The beauty vlogger is an important object of study because of the ways in which she exists simultaneously within and outside of the beauty industry. She is an entrepreneur and independent contractor and is not beholden to the beauty industry and specific beauty brands directly except for when she enters compensated partnerships with them, as I discuss in Chapter One. She embodies the ideal labor subject in the contemporary post-Fordist and neoliberal context. While she is part of the marketing and advertising mechanisms for the beauty industry, as an “influencer” she engages with the industry in a more implicit manner through her content, in which she frames herself as a “trusted friend” giving advice, as I unpack in Chapter Three. To achieve this position, her persona must be persuasive and intriguing; she sells both beauty products and the broader lifestyle she has created for herself as a beauty vlogger, as discussed in Chapter Two. She

also sells a sense of “interest-driven community” and camaraderie to her audience because she functions within a broader online beauty community (Ito et al. 2010).

Beauty vlogging, along with other feminized forms of creative labor, is often dismissed as frivolous and unnecessary. This dissertation challenges this ideology; I assert that the beauty vlogger is a valuable object of study because of the unique way she uses her personality to engage with her audience, and because of the reach her content has through its circulation across multiple social media platforms. This combination of personality-driven content and far-reaching distribution is why I became enamored with the beauty vlogger in the first place and why I personally find her important to analyze. As I began to watch beauty content online five years ago, I quickly found myself buying the products I saw featured in online beauty content.

Who Is The Beauty Vlogger?

For the purposes of limiting the scope of this project, I do not look at all people who create beauty content across social media, but instead focus specifically on those who consider beauty vlogging to be their full-time career. While this population constitutes one subset of a much larger population of content creators, limiting the scope of who I am engaging in this project has helped me make stronger claims about the beauty vlogger’s labor, public persona, and influence, as explored in the forthcoming chapters of this dissertation.

In this project, I refer to the beauty vlogger in the singular. I do not do so with the intention of generalizing about her subjectivity. Instead, the singular beauty vlogger I engage in this dissertation is an amalgamation of my observations; a collective

embodiment of the many beauty vloggers who have informed this project. I also utilize specific examples of beauty vloggers throughout this dissertation to nuance and counterbalance this generalized personification of the beauty vlogger.

The central research question that shapes this project is a simple one – who is the beauty vlogger? Each of my chapters expands upon this question, as each interrogates a critical facet of the beauty vlogger’s identity – her entrepreneurialism, her public persona, and her role as a social media “influencer.” Some of these driving questions include: how does her labor compare with that performed in other, particularly feminized, creative industries? What is the historical context for her entrepreneurialism within the beauty industry? How does she construct herself through her online presence? What are the expectations placed upon her in terms of truthfulness and authenticity, especially in the commercialized spaces of social media and the beauty industry? How does she function as an “influencer?” What is she able to influence? Additionally, I pay particular attention to the beauty vlogger’s specifically gendered, raced, and classed identity throughout this dissertation. The identity of the full-time beauty vlogger most often aligns with the idealized feminine subject in contemporary neoliberal culture and the idealized consumer of beauty products who is White, middle class, and from a Western context (Banet-Weiser 2018). Looking only at this White positionality, as much literature on gendered creative labor has done, leaves out important insights about entrepreneurialism and inclusivity that women of color involved in the beauty industry bring to this project. Therefore, I engage women of color’s experience with and within the beauty industry

throughout this project through historical analysis (in Chapter One) and discourses of diversity and post-racial ideology (in Chapters Two and Three).

As I consider the beauty vlogger and the social media ecology in which she functions, I situate YouTube as her central social media platform. YouTube provides an important commercial context for the beauty vlogger's entrepreneurial labor, which then extends to other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. This commercial context, and the fact that the beauty vlogger engages with online video and social media as her sole job, as opposed to as a side-gig, confirms the beauty vlogger's status as a model neoliberal subject. She is a flexible and autonomous laborer who does not depend on traditional safety nets provided by corporations like health insurance and retirement savings (Duffy 2017, Gregg 2011, McRobbie 2016). Here, I emphasize her neoliberal subjectivity within the explicitly feminized domain of beauty culture. While some scholars would align the beauty vlogger with a postfeminist subjectivity as well, I find this identification less relevant for how I engage the beauty vlogger in this project (Gill 2007, Banet-Weiser 2018). As Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) explains: "postfeminism is enabled by a neoliberal capitalist context, where values such as entrepreneurialism, individualism, and the expansion of capitalist markets are embraced and adopted by girls and women as a way to craft their selves" (154). Neoliberal capitalism enables the identity that scholars identify as postfeminist, and thus I focus on this more broadly defined subjectivity rooted in commercialization and neoliberal economics that shapes the figure of the beauty vlogger.

Links between the feminine and the commercial pre-date the beauty vlogger, as women have been positioned as idealized consumers since the 1950s (Spigel 1992). As Lisa Adkins (2001) notes, the feminine is positioned “at the center of consumer culture” (677). The beauty vlogger not only constitutes an ideal consumer because of the beauty products that she consumes, but also through the role she plays in selling those products to other women. Therefore, she exists within a historical lineage of female entrepreneurs whose work has and continues to be undervalued if not dismissed entirely, as well as within a history of women who sell beauty products to other women through various structures like direct selling (Banks and Zimmerman 1987, Biggart 1989, Duffy 2017). As Elana Levine (2015) explains, spheres of “feminized popular culture” have two trajectories – they are “readily disregarded as fluff” or “eagerly co-opted as a commercial gold mine” (1). Beauty vlogging, and beauty culture more broadly, proves that these claims are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as attention to beauty is simultaneously dismissed and seen as frivolous yet also constitutes a huge commercial industry driven by female consumption. Brooke Duffy (2017) sees the Internet as playing an important role in the commercialization of feminized domains like beauty culture: “The internet has also given rise to markedly gendered – and unabashedly commercial – genres of content: fashion blogging, beauty vlogging, mommy blogging, and DIY design, among others” (42). This commercialism not only drives sales through consumption by viewers of these genres of content, but also fuels the careers of those women who produce this content like the beauty vlogger. Duffy continues: “Though these activities are superficially framed as amusement and sociality, I contend that many young women don’t produce and promote

content *just for the fun of it*. Rather, they approach social media creation with *strategy, purpose, and aspirations of career success*” (48). As a neoliberal subject, the beauty vlogger harnesses her entrepreneurial work ethic into what she has shaped into a viable career for herself. She strategically makes this job appear to be fun, lighthearted, and glamorous through her curated public persona, as detailed in Chapter Two.

An important facet of the commercialism of beauty vlogging is the process by which the beauty vlogger monetizes the social media content that she creates. I consider YouTube as the central hub for the beauty vlogger’s content creation, not only because of the long-form videos that are posted to the platform, but also because of the way YouTube monetizes content. In the early days of beauty vlogging, revenue earned through ads on YouTube constituted the majority of the full-time beauty vlogger’s income. This advertising revenue was, and still is, allocated through Google’s AdSense program, first established in 2007 (Cunningham, Craig, and Silver 2016). In order for a content creator, like the beauty vlogger, to gain access to AdSense revenue, he or she must enter the YouTube Partner Program. AdSense allocates money to its YouTube Partners based on an individual content creator’s “click-per-thousand” (CPM) rate. CPM is a measure of how many views a given video receives and fluctuates based on demand and how many other content creators are monetizing their content through AdSense. While this revenue stream was reliable for content creators when YouTube was a relatively new platform, Stuart Cunningham, David Craig, and Jon Silver (2016) explain: “AdSense income cannot in any way keep pace with the exponential growth of content

seeking advertising support” (381). Cunningham and Craig (2017) describe how monetization has shifted as a result:

For creators, the massive growth in scale of SME [social media entertainment] content has destroyed value – the click-per-thousand rate that drives Google’s AdSense revenue-sharing on YouTube has bottomed out, driving creators into further non-scalable engagements to restore value (brand deals, merchandising, television and cable options, live appearances and licensing content). (2)

For the beauty vlogger, the most common way to supplement AdSense revenue is through paid partnerships with beauty brands. These brand deals vary from vlogger to vlogger, and I explain the mechanics of these sponsorships in detail in Chapter One.

While the intricacies of what the beauty vlogger does and how she makes her living are unique to the online video and social media industries, the substance of what the beauty vlogger shares through her content is not new. Information sharing about beauty and community building around this feminized domain has existed in many previous iterations. Kathy Peiss (1998) traces this advice-giving back to the nineteenth century when, “like household hints and cooking recipes, cosmetic knowledge spread by word of mouth, within families and between neighbors” (13). In the late 1920’s, we saw this advice appear within the pages of women’s magazines (Peiss 1998, 124). Like the beauty vlogger, who shares advice about beauty *and* functions to sell products, early magazines blurred these purposes through their content. In *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Naomi Wolf notes the important role magazines played, as they “intensified” beauty ideals and wants within the female population who read them (73). Wolf also details that magazines filled a void in women’s lives who did not have people with whom to converse about beauty culture:

The voice of the magazine gives women an invisible female authority figure to admire and obey, parallel to the mentor-protégé relationship that many men are encouraged to forge in their educations and on the job, but women are rarely offered anywhere else but in their glossy magazines. (74)

Magazines became “how-to” guides for women, setting her beauty-related expectations and driving her product purchases. This “voice” of the magazine, as Wolf explains, “encourages trust” (74). The centrality of this trust persists in relation to the beauty vlogger, as I outline in Chapter Three. Before the beauty vlogger, magazines and staff at beauty counters occupied the role of beauty-information authority, in addition to word-of-mouth information sharing (Peiss 1998, 176). The Internet and social media have enabled this role to move online and towards the beauty vlogger.

Literature Review

This dissertation is in conversation with two primary bodies of literature – discussions of gendered forms of immaterial labor and discussions of identity, authenticity, and microcelebrity in the age of social media.

Gendered Immaterial Labor in Creative Industries

While the figure of the beauty vlogger has not been the focus of much scholarly work to date, literature which theorizes the feminized figures of the model (Entwistle and Wissinger 2012, Neff et al. 2005; Ouellette 2013; Wissinger 2007, 2011, 2015) and the fashion blogger (Duffy 2017, Duffy and Hund 2015, Nathanson 2014, Pham 2015) has been instrumental in shaping this project. Brooke Duffy’s (2017) recent book, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*, was especially useful in shaping my own intervention in this project, as it engages similar subjects, theory, and methodology as my own work. While this scholarship can be

overwhelming given the number of forms of labor that it poses, each of these labors ties back to the broader concept of “immaterial labor.” I use Maurizio Lazzarato’s (1996) definition of immaterial labor as a guidepost in this dissertation. Lazzarato defines immaterial labor as “... [involving] activities not normally recognized as ‘work’ – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” (132). This definition of immaterial labor is particularly salient when looking to entrepreneurial workers like the beauty vlogger whose labor is often unseen and dismissed, particularly in the contemporary post-Fordist and neoliberal cultural context which encourages individualized and precarious work formations, as I discuss in Chapter One. As Brooke Duffy and Elizabeth Wissinger (2017) emphasize, “At first blush, a career in which ‘every day is different’ sounds exhilarating; however, projecting such excitement necessarily camouflages the radically unstable, profoundly taxing nature of those enterprising careers” (4663). This literature pushes me to look beyond the glamorous veneer of the beauty vlogger and the career she has created for herself, taking her labor seriously as anything but frivolous and shallow.

Specifically, this project engages three more specified genres of labor – relational labor, aesthetic labor, and emotional labor. Relational labor, as theorized by Nancy Baym (2015) defines the labor involved in the relationships fostered by the labor subject, who in her case is the musician. The relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience is critical for many reasons, including the fact that audience engagement with her content provides the beauty vlogger with important streams of income. Aesthetic labor focuses on

appearance. Ashley Mears (2014) describes aesthetic labor as “[entailing] not just looking good but also ‘looking good and sounding right’” (1331). Aesthetic labor runs deeper than outward appearance, as it also relates to how a person comports him or herself and how closely he or she aligns with the overwhelmingly heteronormative beauty standards valued by contemporary culture (1338). Because of her proximity to the beauty industry, appearance matters for the beauty vlogger and is a constant work in progress for her. Lastly, emotional labor centers on the emotional state that a subject, like the beauty vlogger, enables another person to experience. Arlie Hochschild (1983) first explored this form of labor through the flight attendant, who is required to manage, and sometimes even suppress, her own emotions in order to produce an outwardly calm experience for the travelers with whom she interacts (7). For the beauty vlogger, this emotional labor is complex and manifests in many ways, including what she chooses to share online and her overall demeanor in her online content. All of these genres of labor also fall under the umbrella of “invisible labor” as theorized by Winifred Poster, Marion Crain, and Miriam A. Cherry (2016). These authors consider “invisibility as a *symbolic concept*,” and focus on that labor that is socially judged as not constituting work (6).

This immaterial labor follows the beauty vlogger and permeates all aspects of her identity. While I do not directly engage discourses of labor in Chapters Two and Three of this project, both the beauty vlogger’s manufacturing of her public persona and her influence are direct results of the immaterial labor which marks her career and lifestyle. Additionally, this immaterial labor, particularly her aesthetic labor, constructs the beauty

vlogger's gendered, racialized, and classed identity as she conforms to dominant notions of conventionally feminine, White, and middle-class personhood.

Theorizations of Authenticity and Microcelebrity

The beauty vlogger is expected to be an authentic person, which could be considered at odds with the commercial imperatives of her job. Her beauty recommendations need to come from a place of trust. Hence, her public persona, as I theorize in Chapter Two, is a performance, which encompasses her performance of authenticity. Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2012) work helps me understand this authenticity as a critical component of the beauty vlogger's self-brand. The beauty vlogger is a persona that is being sold to her audience and to beauty brands through her social media presence (Banet-Weiser 2012, 76). Her visibility is critical in the commercial context of social media – visibility translates to other metrics of currency for her like “views,” “likes,” and subscriber count (74).

My use of theorizations of authenticity overlaps with those of microcelebrity. Therefore, I engage them together, both in this literature review and in Chapter Two. The scholars I draw my understanding of microcelebrity from include Crystal Abidin (2015, 2016), Alice Marwick (2013b, 2015), and Theresa Senft (2008, 2013). As Alice Marwick describes (2013b),

Becoming a microcelebrity requires creating a persona, producing content, and strategically appealing to online fans by being ‘authentic.’ Authenticity in this context is a quality that takes many forms, from direct interaction with admirers to the public discussion of deeply personal information, and it is tenuous at best. (114)

Authenticity and microcelebrity are fundamentally linked concepts, hinging on a publicly recognized aura of authenticity on the part of the beauty vlogger, as it applies to my

project. Marwick (2013b) further explains that microcelebrities “strategically construct their presentation to appeal to others” (115). Therefore, a microcelebrity constructs an outwardly coherent performance of authenticity for her audience. She differs from a traditional celebrity in important ways that Marwick (2013b) outlines: “Microcelebrity is the state of being famous to a niche group of people, but it is also a behavior: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention” (114). While her audience is more limited than a traditional celebrity’s, the microcelebrity is subject to scrutiny based on any and everything she posts online. Much of this scrutiny stems from the fact that the beauty vlogger, for purposes of this project, is expected not to have commercial incentives for her content, even though she of course does. These commercial incentives, especially regarding sponsored (paid for) content causes her audience to question the authenticity of her product reviews and recommendations, for example.

This literature draws upon “parasocial relations” as a mode through which the microcelebrity and her audience relationship functions (Abidin 2015, 2016; Marwick 2015; Marwick and boyd 2010, 2011). In this dissertation, I separate “parasocial relations” from my discussion of microcelebrity in order to better understand the beauty vlogger’s role as an “influencer.” I do so in order to critically interrogate the concept of social media “influence” and how it is engaged by public figures like the beauty vlogger. In addition to drawing on the mass communication concept of “parasocial relations” first theorized by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl (1956), I also engage the concept of “personal influence” conceived by Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1955) in order to

theorize the contemporary role of the influencer. While these mass communication concepts are usually contended within cultural studies scholarship, I find them important to engage (with reservations) because they help me understand the seemingly two way flow of communication between the beauty vlogger and her audience (parasocial relations) and how the unique personality of the beauty vlogger allows some to achieve success while others do not (personal influence).

Methodology

This dissertation combines discursive and ethnographic methods to examine beauty vlogging as both an individual practice and as one genre within the larger context of the online video industry. In order to delve into the various facets of the beauty vlogger's identity that I explore in this dissertation, I have engaged with beauty vlogging in the ways detailed below.

About Ethnography

I utilize ethnographic approaches in this dissertation, and very much echo Vicki Mayer's (2011) sentiments when she refers to her book *Below the Line* as a book "with ethnographic orientation" (3). Because my project does not *only* use ethnographic methods, I see ethnography as one piece of my larger methodological framework that also includes industrial, discursive, textual, and historical analyses. I have trouble categorizing my project as purely ethnographic because I did not take on the role of participant-observer. In my mind, I would have needed to become a content creator to consider myself as such, and I deliberately chose not to do so for this project. I do not see

myself as a “participant,” though I was very much as an “observer.” Hence, I consider this dissertation to be informed by ethnography, but not an ethnography in and of itself.

Ethnography, as it is applied to online spaces, differs from traditional theorizations of the methodology as well. Therefore, I looked to Tom Boellstorff et al.’s (2012) work on virtual worlds and Robert V. Kozinets’ (2015) conception of “netnography” in order to clarify my own approach to studying beauty vloggers and beauty vlogging. As defined by Boellstorff et al. (2012), “virtual worlds” are “*places* and have a sense of *worldness*” (7). The authors continue: “they exist as shared social environments” and “they are persistent” (7). While beauty vlogging exists across multiple social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat), the connection that an audience feels with a beauty vlogger, as discussed in Chapter Three, creates the “shared social environment” that Boellstorff et al. explain. Additionally, YouTube’s (and other social media platform’s) archival function makes the presence of the beauty vlogger persistent; viewers can access her videos on demand through the platform. Hence, I would categorize beauty vlogging as constitutive of a virtual world. Yet Boellstorff et al. also emphasize the importance of participant-observation when studying a virtual world, as it is what they call “the cornerstone of ethnography” (77). Furthermore, the authors outline: “Ethnography is an immersive, naturalistic methodology, but not all personal experience constitutes ethnography” (43). Thus, while beauty vlogging is an observable virtual world, I do not see myself studying it in *only* an ethnographic sense. My personal experience with and observation of beauty vlogging

inform the examples I choose to engage and the critiques I have of them in this dissertation, but I am not a participant in this space.

Like Boellstorff et al. (2012), Robert V. Kozinets (2015) notes the centrality of “core ethnographic principles” like participant-observation to what he calls “netnography” (3). Kozinets explains: “Netnography requires interpretation of human communications under realistic contexts, in situ, in native conditions of interaction, when those human communications are shaped by new technologies” (5). Netnography is invested in context. For Kozinets, it is important that netnography takes into account the specifics of online interaction within the context that they occur. Digital context has also been a central focus of my observations of beauty vloggers. I follow the beauty vlogger across multiple social media platforms to be able to note the differences in the way she uses particular social media platforms. I read the comments on her YouTube videos and Instagram feeds and I used screenshots as a way to capture these moments, in context, while also allowing me the ability to go back and refer to them when needed. In doing this, I recognized what Kozinets outlines: netnography “originates in and manifests through the data shared freely on the Internet” (79). This freely shared information provides the grounding for netnography (and my own analyses), but Kozinets stipulates that “it does not obviate the need to ground, emplace and contextualize data through analysis of other related archives and sites, including ones that include fleshy contact” (79). This insistence on contextualization beyond the digital is critical to netnography, but also to feminist research methods more generally. In planning this dissertation, I was committed to contextualizing my study of beauty vloggers within historical and industrial

discourses. Yet, I also was adamant that I could not study this population without speaking to beauty vloggers as well. Hence, theorizations of netnography significantly informed the methodological structure of this dissertation.

My Ethnographic Engagements

In addition to the textual and discursive analyses I provide in this project, I employ a few additional methods to round out my research. These include non-participant observation of beauty vloggers online, attending VidCon (an annual online video convention), and in-depth interviews with online content creators.

I always knew that I wanted interviews to be a part of this project, but I struggled to find an additional, ethnographically-informed method to combine with those interviews. From my previous attempt to interview beauty vloggers during coursework, I knew getting interviews was going to be one of the more challenging aspects of my dissertation methodology. Hence, I decided to attend VidCon in June 2017. Held in Anaheim, CA,³ VidCon gathers content creators and fans for an annual convention about all things online video. While not solely focused on beauty and beauty vloggers, beauty vloggers were a sizable presence at VidCon. I opted to attend VidCon over a specifically beauty-focused convention (of which there are many) because I wanted to learn more about the online video industry generally, as well as specifically about beauty vlogging at the beauty-specific panels. Attending VidCon allowed me to experience beauty vlogging in a manner that was as close as I could get to being a participant-observer; I saw how

³ In 2017, VidCon expanded to hold conventions in Europe (Amsterdam) and Australia (Melbourne) as well as the original convention.

beauty vloggers spoke about themselves and their labor in real life, instead of from behind my computer screen where their content is edited and curated.

VidCon importantly supplemented my interviews, as it also helped me discover more beauty vloggers who I had not found through my own engagement with online beauty content (like Jackie Aina who I engage in Chapter Two). Going to VidCon allowed me to understand how mainstream beauty vlogging is seen and valued by that powerful organization.⁴ This perspective tempered what I gleaned from my interviews, as I spoke with people who are not full-time beauty vloggers. Experiencing VidCon made me more sure of the patterns I already observed about beauty vlogging, and gave me the confidence to make claims about beauty vlogging that I could not substantiate by only watching content online. Attending VidCon also helped me to balance the information I gathered through my interviews, as interviews are often held up by scholars as the best way to gain information about a specific population. As Sophie Bishop (2017) explains, “the privileging of offline interviews as affording access to truth seems to support the idea that users have a fixed and stable backstage identity that can only be revealed by a researcher in an offline situation” (3). Like me, Bishop studies beauty vloggers. While interviews are a great way to access this population, they are not the only way. By attending VidCon I feel that I utilized, but did not privilege, my interviews. In many cases, my interviews provided counter-examples and counter-narratives that helped me unpack the practice of beauty vlogging in more detail.

⁴ VidCon invites content creators to be “featured creators” at each annual convention.

My Observation Process

I have watched thousands of hours of beauty videos on YouTube. This observation process has been a nearly daily practice starting in early 2014 and continuing through the duration of my dissertation writing. Additionally, my engagement with YouTube beauty content and beauty vloggers has extended beyond my YouTube viewing to following various beauty vloggers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. In this project, my observations are distilled into textual analysis from specific videos and social media posts, which I organized into an informal archive. This dissertation also engages informal case studies that I noted throughout my observation process. One beauty vlogger I focus on extensively in this project is Ingrid Nilsen (previous channel name: MissGlamorazzi, 3.8 million subscribers), one of the most well-known US-based beauty vloggers. Nilsen conforms to normative standards for a beauty vlogger. She creates beauty, fashion, and lifestyle content. She posts favorites videos, skincare routines, and makeup tutorials. Yet, in many ways Nilsen also defies many assumptions and stereotypes about being a beauty vlogger as she is mixed race (Thai and White) as opposed to being White,⁵ and she is an out lesbian who uses her platform on YouTube and other social media channels to advocate for social issues like LGBTQ equality and women's reproductive rights.

In addition to observing the practice of beauty vlogging on this detailed level, I have also noted dominant discourses and themes surrounding beauty vlogging throughout my research process. This more macro-level observation has helped me understand how

⁵ Whiteness is the norm in the beauty industry and for the beauty vlogger, as I discuss in my subsequent chapters.

the beauty vlogging industry functions, the expectations for content made by beauty vloggers and how they have intensified over the past decade, and how beauty content is monetized on YouTube and across other social media platforms.

My Experience at VidCon

At VidCon, I opted to purchase a “creator” ticket, which allowed me entry to panels designed for content creators, as opposed to the “community” ticket. I was not able to obtain an “industry” ticket, which is the third ticket option.⁶ I attended both Day One and Day Two of the three-day convention.⁷ Most of the beauty-centric panels were held on the “community” floor with audiences mostly comprised of young girls.⁸ Something I found unique about the panels on the “community” floor is that it was clear that the featured creators (those on panels) were kept in separate areas from those with “community” tickets. This action is presumably enforced to ensure the safety of the featured creators, yet it fostered a tangible sense of distance between the creators on panels and their followers/fans. This distance was further amplified by the height of the stage on which the panels took place and the distance between the stage and the place where the Q&A microphone was set up. Attendees and featured creators were also separated on the “creator” floor⁹ at VidCon, as the featured creators were kept in a greenroom before their panels and left the room promptly after them. Even so, the stage

⁶ A single “industry ticket” for the 2018 convention is \$650 (at early bird pricing).

⁷ I had to skip the third day of the convention due to a personal conflict.

⁸ Most of the girls at the beauty panels were avid beauty content watchers in high school or college. If and when a content creator was in the main expo area, which I only witnessed once, these girls would Snapchat about it and would run over to the creator to get selfies with her.

⁹ There were literal floor separations between the ticket tiers at VidCon and to be able to get onto an escalator, you had to show your badge, valid for the next floor up. The main floor was the “community” floor, the second was the “creator” floor, and the third was the “industry” floor.

height was much lower and the creators on panels appeared to be much more accessible to those holding VidCon “creator” tickets.

Who I Interviewed

Due to the separation between featured creators and attendees at VidCon, I was unable to network at the convention or recruit any interview subjects for my project there. I did attempt to email a few of the creators I had seen on panels at VidCon, but did not hear back from any of them during my interviewing process. I also attempted to recruit interview subjects through sending direct messages on Instagram. In total, I conducted five interviews during the summer of 2017. Even in this small number of conversations, clear themes emerged from the conversations, such as issues of “authenticity” discussed in Chapter Two, and I was confident moving forward with my project with just these five interviews.

Prior to conducting each interview, I reviewed my interviewee’s YouTube channel(s) and other social media accounts. If I was talking to someone with whom I was not familiar, I also watched a few different videos to get a sense of the type of content that creator produced. I then updated my template interview schedule that I had submitted as part of my IRB exemption accordingly. Each interview lasted roughly one hour.

I held my first interview with a beauty vlogger who has asked to remain anonymous for the purposes of my project.¹⁰ I have been a long-time viewer of this beauty vlogger’s channel, and we have developed an online friendship through YouTube and Instagram. This channel is smaller, with 10,000 subscribers, and has a specified focus

¹⁰ Per my IRB exemption, I asked each subject if they wanted to be anonymized. This subject was the only one who opted for anonymity. Otherwise, I will be using the full names and channel names of the people whom I interviewed with their informed content.

within the beauty community on YouTube. This vlogger's YouTube channel is a hobby and/or passion project, as she held a full-time job outside of vlogging when I conducted the interview. I was very eager to interview this participant as she holds a doctoral degree in a field related to Communication Studies. Her perspective on beauty vlogging is not about "selling" products, and with that focus and her critical perspective on beauty vlogging in general, she brings a unique voice to this project.

This first interviewee referred me to two more subjects. My first of these two interviews was with Jess Lee, the owner of Stark Skincare. Stark Skincare is a direct-to-consumer skincare line based in Canada. Jess has a YouTube channel (channel name: stark skincare, 1,100 subscribers) on which she posts informal videos about different aspects of skincare and occasionally features new product launches from her line. Our conversation was illuminating, as I was able to gain insight into the brand perspective regarding influencer marketing and the use of social media. Like my first interviewee, Jess' views about beauty vlogging and product marketing are not mainstream, in that they do not align with what I have observed in the conventional (i.e. not eco-/green) beauty space. I find these interviews to be important counter-examples to mainstream beauty vlogging, which is the focus of this dissertation. These two conversations have helped me articulate my own critiques of the conventional beauty vlogging space.

The second interview that materialized from my initial conversation was with Sandra Bischin (channel name: ttsandra, 58,000 subscribers). This interview was the one interview I conducted via e-mail, as Sandra's full-time work and travel schedule did not accommodate a single, longer conversation. I did attempt to have a brief follow-up

conversation with Sandra, but the timing did not work. Sandra is my interviewee that most aligns with the key subjects I focus on in this dissertation. The type of content she creates and the brands she partners with most closely mirror the full-time beauty vloggers who I draw into this dissertation through my informal case studies. Particularly, Sandra's assertion that she views herself as a content creator, and not an "influencer," illuminates at a key tension that I explore in Chapter Three.

My next interview materialized through a connection between my former classmate from University of Texas at Austin and her former student at University of North Texas. Arianna Henderson (channel name: Arianna Jonae, 69,000 subscribers) is an African American beauty vlogger who is also pursuing acting in Los Angeles. Arianna is affiliated with AwesomenessTV, so I was able to focus some of my questions for her on her affiliation with a multi-channel network (MCN). We also discussed how services like Grapevine Logic and FameBit¹¹ can connect content creators with sponsorships. I am grateful for how open Arianna was with me about how much income she makes from different tiers of sponsorships (ex: a shout-out versus a dedicated video on YouTube, or an Instagram post). Arianna and I also talked about issues of race and the beauty industry, particularly in terms of shade ranges of products that are able to suit her skin tone and the expectation she feels to continue to make hair videos, as those were some of the first videos that she posted on YouTube and are what drew many of her subscribers to her channel.

¹¹ Grapevine Logic and FameBit are two services that content creators can use to connect with potential sponsors. With a minimum threshold of followers, creators who use these services can browse available sponsorships and apply for them. Many of these middleman type of services are gaining traction in the online video space, as the business model leans heavily on sponsorships for vlogger income and these services negate the need to be affiliated with a multi-channel network (MCN).

My last interview with was Gaby Dunn, one half of the YouTube comedy channel *Just Between Us* (746,000 subscribers). Gaby also has a personal YouTube channel (channel name: Gaby Dunn, 94,000 subscribers). I was connected to Gaby through Brooke Duffy, as she had interviewed Gaby for her book *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. While she is not a beauty vlogger, Gaby was able to provide me with insight about the unseen labor associated with content creation. Like many of the beauty vloggers I profile in my informal case studies, Gaby's "work" has expanded well beyond YouTube – she has a podcast; she and her comedy partner wrote a book, *I Hate Everyone But You*; Gaby has her own book deal; and more. Like Arianna, Gaby was incredibly open with me about how her online engagements are able to support her financially. Additionally, Gaby is of the mindset that a content creator should not be wedded to one particular online platform, like YouTube, and we discussed the shortcomings of YouTube for content creators including algorithm issues and subscriber loss. Gaby helped me to think deeply about the "what's next" question that comprises the conclusion of this dissertation.

The Ethical Implications of My Chosen Methodology

I would be remiss not to address some of the ethical questions that my chosen methodology raises. Particularly, I have been asked on numerous occasions how I feel about using examples in this dissertation without the consent of the beauty vloggers I engage. For me, this question is complex, as I am not comfortable just citing that the content is online and posted to public forums and therefore constitutes fair use. I am highly aware of my position as a researcher and the asymmetrical power relations that

accompany such a positionality (Boellstorff et al. 2012, 129). The Internet and social media platforms create what Kozinets (2015) calls “a research ethics puzzle,” as so much information is available to researchers, and we must decide how and when to engage it in our work (178).

The examples I engage in this dissertation come predominantly from beauty vloggers I have followed for a long period of time. Having engaged with these beauty vloggers’ content for the better part of four years, across YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, I feel I know these creators’ content and can point to specific ways it has changed over time. Because of this prolonged relationship with these beauty vloggers and their content, I am confident that the examples and people I engage in this dissertation are not cherry-picked. Instead, I draw my conclusions about beauty vlogging holistically through my engagement with these creators’ content. I do believe that since these content creators post this content online that I am free to use it, but I do so with caution. There are many gossip channels on YouTube and many gossip sites about beauty vloggers online, and I have avoided all of those in this project. I ground the critiques I have of the beauty vlogger in her content, and as much as I can I use her own words – through direct quotations from video content, screenshots of Tweets or Instagram posts I have transcribed, and my interviews. I am careful to provide as much context as I can for the material I engage. This approach is not perfect, but it allows me to employ material that strengthens this project while mitigating the feeling that I am using this content to my own advantage at the expense of beauty vloggers I profile in this project.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One – The Beauty Vlogger as Female Entrepreneurial Laborer

Chapter One looks beyond the content the beauty vlogger produces and focuses on the labor involved in making that content possible in the first place. Using the theoretical concept of immaterial labor, I identify the layers of work the beauty vlogger engages in order to produce her consistent stream of social media content. Chapter One also explores the beauty vlogger's particular entrepreneurial labor (Neff et al. 2005). Her work is situated within a very specific feminized domain of everyday life – beauty culture – and contemporary post-Fordist and neoliberal capitalist economic contexts encourage her positionality as an entrepreneur. The beauty vlogger's labor is persistent, blurring any distinctions between her work and her leisure time, as she is “always-on.” Audiences imagine her labor to be highly individualized, which I unpack by pointing out the unseen teams of people who support the beauty vlogger behind the scenes.

Chapter One not only considers the beauty vlogger's labor at the present moment, but also looks back to other modes of female entrepreneurship which pre-date her subjectivity. Most notably, I focus on female housewives who worked for direct selling organizations (DSOs) beginning the 1950s and the entrepreneurs who shaped the Black hair salon that dates back to the nineteenth century. This historical focus directly contests the presentist focus of most scholarship on creative laborers like the beauty vlogger. While she has created a career for herself where none previously existed within the realm of online video and social media, she also exists within a long lineage of female entrepreneurs.

Chapter Two – The Beauty Vlogger as Public Persona

In Chapter Two, I engage the beauty vlogger through how she curates her public-facing image. She strategically cultivates her online image with her audience and beauty brands in mind, as she must juggle being authentically herself with being appealing to those brands. Because beauty vlogging is her job, and she engages in the highly commercialized spaces of social media and the beauty industry, the beauty vlogger must navigate her image-management carefully.

Additionally, Chapter Two examines the racialized identity of the beauty vlogger. The beauty industry has historically privileged the White consumer, and still does to a large extent. Yet recent events within the beauty industry, including two foundation line launches I explore in detail, Fenty Beauty's and Tarte's Shape Tape Foundation, shift this conversation. In particular, I profile specific beauty vloggers of color who are using their voices to call for more inclusivity and diversity within the beauty industry.

Chapter Three – The Beauty Vlogger as Influencer

Chapter Three critically interrogates what it means to be an influencer on social media, using the beauty vlogger as its key example. The “influencer” is often used as a non-specific, catch-all term. In this chapter, I explore how the beauty vlogger harnesses her influence, through “parasocial relations” (Horton and Wohl 1956) and “personal influence” (Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) to be an advocate for issues beyond the beauty industry. The beauty vlogger's audience enables her influence, as none of the opportunities she is afforded, within or beyond the beauty industry are possible without the visibility she attains from her audience's engagement with her content. As I imagine

her, the beauty vlogger becomes a “trusted friend” to her audience – she educates them, recommends products to them, shares life events with them, and more.

In terms of influence, this chapter explores the opportunities granted to the beauty vlogger, ranging from brand sponsorships to book contracts. I use my interviewee Gaby and beauty vlogger Ingrid Nilsen (channel name: Ingrid Nilsen, former channel name: MissGlamorazzi, 3.8 million subscribers) as key case studies in this chapter. Both of these women advocate for underserved populations and social causes and have taken on roles as thought and opinion leaders that extend beyond their engagements on social media.

These chapters collectively interrogate three of the most salient aspects of the beauty vlogger’s identity. The beauty vlogger’s identity is complex and multi-faceted, as evidenced by her gendered entrepreneurial labor, her public persona, and her influence. While the majority of this dissertation purposefully engages the beauty vlogger as an individual, my conclusion turns toward the collective imagination of beauty vlogging and focuses on YouTube as I critique the pitfalls and shortcomings of the social media platforms upon which the beauty vlogger relies as places to share her content.

Chapter One – The Beauty Vlogger as Female Entrepreneurial Laborer

In her blog post on social media misconceptions, UK-based beauty blogger and vlogger Victoria Magrath (channel name: Inthefrow, 604,000 subscribers) reflects on her career path and the common misunderstandings that accompany it:

Blogging on Inthefrow and working in the fashion, lifestyle and beauty industry is a dream come true for me. [...] I will always say I am lucky because I am so grateful for this path, but essentially having approximately a weeks worth of days off in about 4 years, hopefully goes to show that hard work is the real reason behind where Inthefrow is currently at. (Magrath 2017)

Beauty vlogging is often dismissed as an *easy* job. Yet, this notion is disproven quickly in the rare occurrences when when beauty vloggers like Magrath open up about what beauty vlogging fully entails. As Magrath notes, those who build their careers on social media must cultivate their content with an aura of “positivity” (Arcy 2016, Duffy 2017). They broadcast the most exciting parts of their days across social media platforms, and this decisive curation tends to obscure, or even erase, many forms of labor taking place behind the scenes. Magrath reflects:

Seeing me smiling on beaches or hanging out of helicopters may look like I’m having a barrel of laughs at all times, but it doesn’t show the late hours at my laptop afterwards, the moments of upset at missed photo opportunities or the stress when I’m struggling to edit a video for 7pm.

As Magrath notes through these examples, the labor required to be a beauty vlogger entails much more than any audience member sees through the beauty vlogger’s content. Showing the labor required to produce the final product posted online is not an accepted practice within the beauty vlogging space. Hence, there are many misconceptions that Magrath points to and unpacks in her blog post.

In many ways, this blog post legitimizes Magrath’s work to her blog audience, who are willing to listen to her and likely already trust her, as discussed in Chapter Three. As she explains what she sees as misconceptions about her career path, she opens up about the labor involved with being a beauty blogger and vlogger that her audience does not see. Scholars refer to this labor as “invisible labor,” as it is pertinent to the beauty vlogger’s job but is “overlooked, ignored, and/or devalued” by those who do not engage in this form of work themselves (Poster et al. 2016, 6). One specific misconception that I want to highlight from Magrath’s list of ten misconceptions is “BLOGGING IS SO EASY.” Magrath explains this misconception from her perspective:

Now to a certain extent I bring this upon myself. I publish 3 blog posts and 3 videos most weeks but on top of working around a schedule that’s booked out until 2018, drowning in my never ending inbox (please send help!) and the constant travelling, it must look easy from the outside because I am keeping up, just. [...] This is a 16 hours a day, 7 days a week job for me. It’s certainly easy to find the motivation when you have a job you love but that doesn’t mean creating all the content you see online also comes easily to me.

It is important that Magrath does recognize that because she is able to keep up with her workload and she does not make these forms of labor visible online, she actively feeds the misconception about how *easy* her work is. Additionally, she dictates a lot of her workload herself, as no external entity requires her to produce three blog posts and three videos a week, to go on press trips abroad, to make public appearances, and in Magrath’s case to develop a handbag line with the Scottish brand Strathberry (“HUGE ANNOUNCEMENT! I’M LAUNCHING MY OWN BAG COLLECTION | INTHEFROW”). But just because her audience does not see the time she dedicates to her blog, YouTube channel, Instagram feed – all of which make up her self-enterprise,

Inthefrow – does not mean that this labor is invalid, easy, or not time-consuming.

Working sixteen-hour days, seven days a week is far more than the typical workweek of forty-hours, spread over five working days.

Beauty vloggers are not necessarily shy about saying that their workload is a lot to manage or that they are busy, but they do not often provide any detail about what it is that makes them so busy. At most of the VidCon panels I attended, creators lamented that content takes a lot of time to produce and that it is a lot of work, but the statements never got much more specific than that. It is this lack of specificity that feeds the idea that beauty vlogging is an easy, glamorous job and not the “intensive career” that Magrath describes. When all audience members witness of the beauty vlogger’s labor is the productive outcome of her work – a video, a blog post, an Instagram photo, etc. – it becomes easy for those who are not in the industry themselves, or who do not work in creative industries more generally, to assume that the labor they do not see does not exist. Magrath closes her section on the presumed ease of beauty vlogging with the following statement:

It’s a shame that some people see blogging as this easy, throw away career that anyone can do. When in fact that could not be further from the truth and a lot of bloggers are extremely intelligent, switched on, career driven Girl Bosses.

In this chapter, I examine the labor of the beauty vlogger and consider her as the “career driven Girl Boss” of Magrath’s claims. By shedding light on this unseen, overlooked, and dismissed labor, this chapter names and details the immaterial and invisible labor that the beauty vlogger performs.

This chapter engages the beauty vlogger's labor as serious and worthy of discussion. In creative industries, like beauty vlogging, consumers fetishize the end product of these laborers' work, which obfuscates the amount of time and planning that goes into producing these creative products. We see the beauty vlogger's YouTube video feed and her Instagram grid, but we do not see the layers of work that the beauty vlogger performs that allows those outcomes to be posted online with regularity and consistency in the first place. Thus, this chapter utilizes theorizations of immaterial labor (Gregg 2009, Lazzarato 1996, McRobbie 2010) and invisible labor (Poster et al. 2016) – including but not limited to relational labor (Baym 2015), aesthetic labor (Banet-Weiser 2017; Elias, Scharff, and Gill 2017; Mears 2014; Ouellette 2016, 2017), and emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) – in order to disprove assumptions about the ease of beauty vlogging, just as Magrath does on her blog. Additionally, this chapter positions the beauty vlogger as a female entrepreneur who works for herself and embodies ideals of post-Fordist capitalism and neoliberalism through her passion for flexible and boundless work (McRobbie 2016). The beauty vlogger embodies a specifically gendered subjectivity, which I explore by positioning this subjectivity and her labor in relation to other historical and contemporary formations of female entrepreneurship.

While popular culture lauds the beauty vlogger as an innovative entrepreneur who made a career for herself where none previously existed, women have in fact been creating jobs and career paths for themselves long before the Internet and online video. For example, direct selling organizations (DSOs) like Mary Kay and Avon have allowed women to work for themselves since the mid-twentieth century (Banks and Zimmerman

1987, Biggart 1989). The only thing that is really *new* about the beauty vlogger's work is the platform(s) on which she shares her creative work. In this chapter, I also contextualize the figure of the beauty vlogger historically, and look at previous models of women's work (Hochschild 1989, Spigel 1992) and female entrepreneurialism (Banks and Zimmerman 1987, Black 2004, Biggart 1989, Craig 2002, Gill 2010, Peiss 1998; Willett 2000) dating back to the nineteenth century. In doing so, I place the beauty vlogger at the contemporary end of a lineage of female entrepreneurs within the beauty industry, with particular focus on the history of female entrepreneurship in the Black hair salon.

As with many previously theorized feminized and entrepreneurial career paths, the beauty vlogger's labor blurs with her leisure time, rendering the two almost inseparable from each other. The boundlessness of the beauty vlogger's labor follows a model set forth by other creative industries – like modeling (Entwistle and Wissinger 2012; Ouellette 2013, 2016, 2017; Wissinger 2007, 2015) and fashion blogging (Duffy and Hund 2015, Nathanson 2014, Pham 2015) – and is endemic to broader expectations about work in the post-Fordist paradigm (McRobbie 2016, Weeks 2011). As I expand further in Chapter Two, the beauty vlogger's job is less a contained job than a lifestyle where she is always working. Yet, what is considered to be “work” for the beauty vlogger does not always appear as work in the ways it has previously been defined through bounded hours, a specific location, and tangible tasks. Much of the labor that encapsulates the beauty vlogger lifestyle includes mining her everyday life – from travel, to home renovations, to shopping – to keep up her regular stream of content. Partnerships with established beauty brands, which constitute a substantial share of her income, only

amplify this labor. In these partnerships, the beauty vlogger must toggle between her self-brand (discussed in more depth in Chapter Two), the brand she is partnering with, and her audience's expectations for her presentation of self and her content (expanded upon in Chapters Two and Three). Overall, this work structure does not allow the beauty vlogger much time to unplug from social media; she provides her livelihood through a medium that is seen as a leisure activity for most people. Being "always-on" is essential in creative careers and taking breaks from content production feeds the assumption that beauty vlogging is an easy job.

I very decisively engage the beauty vlogger in the singular in this dissertation (as discussed in the Introduction), not to generalize about this population, but to emphasize that beauty vlogging is constructed as an individual endeavor. We imagine the beauty vlogger working by herself and for herself (Duffy 2015, Ouellette 2013, Pham 2015), and in the early years of the industry this configuration was common. Yet, as the industry has progressed and professionalized, and as the labor involved in being a beauty vlogger has become more than one person can manage on her own, this individual self-enterprise has expanded to include more people. This support comes in various ways, through agents, multi-channel networks (MCNs), personal assistants, photographers and videographers, video editors, and more (Cunningham, Craig, and Silver 2016; Duffy 2017). What is notable about this labor configuration is that it continues to promote the mythology that the beauty vlogger works independently. The beauty vlogger has a self-brand that centers on herself, and thus it is in her interest to maintain the illusion of individualism. In the past year or so, beauty vloggers have become more open about disclosing who is helping

them, but the focus of the beauty vlogger's content remains on herself – she is seen in her videos on screen and she features herself in Instagram posts. This mythology is further fueled by the lack of audience understanding about what goes on behind-the-scenes and in the day-to-day work of the beauty vlogger, as noted above.

Historicizing The Beauty Vlogger

I begin the analysis in this chapter by situating the beauty vlogger within a lineage of female entrepreneurialism in the beauty industry. I find it especially important to trace this lineage, as contemporary feminized careers like beauty vlogging and other digitally-bound enterprises are often celebrated as new and innovative when they are actually grounded in a history of female enterprise. Rosalind Gill (2016) notes that we exist in a world “that so fetishizes the new” (625); and yes, beauty vlogging is a new practice, but female community that assembles around beauty products and women demonstrating how-to use beauty products has existed in many iterations since the nineteenth century (Peiss 1998). In this section I engage historical, feminist literature about women's work, gendered labor, and female entrepreneurship to trace how the figure of the beauty vlogger draws heavily upon historical ways women interacted with the beauty industry and feminine beauty standards in order to contextualize the specifically feminine and feminized labor of the beauty vlogger.

Before I move to historical analysis, I first want to contextualize the current moment in terms of labor conditions and expectations. In the contemporary moment, being an entrepreneur is a lauded choice. The post-Fordist context and neoliberal capitalism promote entrepreneurialism as an ideal work configuration. Duffy (2017)

notes, “more than ever, contemporary culture’s benchmark of success is the figure of the entrepreneur” (2). Like the feminine subjects who preceded her, the beauty vlogger follows the entrepreneurial lead of self-enterprising models and fashion bloggers (Duffy and Hund 2015, Ouellette 2013, Wissinger 2015) within a context that Melissa Gregg (2011) notes has been glamorized since the dot.com boom (xi). The work conditions that accompany entrepreneurial careers align with the ideals promoted to young women by a neoliberal culture that expects her to be a worker who is “self-making, resilient, and flexible” (Harris 2004, 6). Sarah Banet-Weiser (2017) echoes this sentiment, writing specifically about beauty vloggers:

There are necessary cultural and economic conditions that allow for the emergence of beauty vloggers as a particular kind of success story. YouTube make-up tutorials can be seen as a quintessential neoliberal industry in that the focus is on the individual entrepreneur who mobilises her own creativity and gumption into a lucrative career. (278)

The beauty vlogger is creative, self-enterprising, an ideal consumer, and a driven worker. Thus, as Banet-Weiser explains, she is positioned to take full advantage of the current social and economic conditions that qualify and reward her entrepreneurial career path. Not every young woman who wants to be a beauty vlogger becomes one, but those who are fortunate enough to have the right balance of privilege (money and time, as well as social and cultural privileges like race that will be discussed in this and subsequent chapters), fortitude, and luck professionalize this passion and turn what often remains a hobby into a career.

Scholars often cite a neoliberal framework to explain the celebration of entrepreneurial careers at the present moment. Working conditions are not what they

were a few decades ago, and the safety nets that were built into worker benefits like pensions, health insurance, and retirement contributions are not at all as commonplace as they were previously. Hence, the risky, flexible labor of the entrepreneur who is not bound to a company complements the realities of work in the twenty-first century. As Angela McRobbie (2016) explains in her book on creative labor:

Neoliberalism succeeds in its mission in this respect if a now very swollen youthful middle class bypasses mainstream employment with its trade unions and its trenches of welfare and protection in favour of the challenge and excitement of being a creative entrepreneur. Concomitantly, when in a post-industrial society there are fewer jobs offering permanent and secure employment, such a risk-taking stance becomes a necessity rather than a choice. The two come together in a kind of magic formula. (11)

The beauty vlogger is the product of this context McRobbie and Banet-Weiser discuss.

Facing a labor market where more and more jobs are contract-based, precarious, and risky, the entrepreneurial beauty vlogger follows the creative and exciting, albeit less stable, path. In their work on entrepreneurial labor, Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger, and Sharon Zukin (2005) note that the entrepreneurial inclination of the contemporary workforce is endemic to what they label as the post-industrial economy's biggest innovation:

The new economy's cutting edge – and its true *social* innovation – is the production of a new labor force that is more 'entrepreneurial' than previous generations of workers. This entrepreneurial work force is risk-taking rather than risk-averse and willing to accept more flexibility in both jobs and careers than workers have been. (309)

Neff et al. note the willingness of the current generation of young people entering the workforce to be entrepreneurial. It is a social innovation, but also a necessity as the

“stable” jobs of the past cease to exist as viable pathways for those entering the workforce.

With this contemporary neoliberal and post-Fordist context in mind, I now turn to historical literature to trace the lineage of the beauty vlogger. While the literature on neoliberalism does explain the conditions under which entrepreneurial career paths have emerged, it does not account for the specific gendered and racialized labor of the beauty vlogger or the basis of her entrepreneurial endeavors within previously theorized modes of labor within the beauty industry. The current context does explain a lot in terms of why young people, particularly young woman, are drawn towards entrepreneurial career paths, but including the history of beauty entrepreneurialism renders my analysis intersectional, engaging gender, race, and class.

Historically, many accounts of women’s labor center on their positionality as a housewife in the feminine domestic sphere, especially if we look to the post-WWII period. Scholars such as Lynn Spigel (1992) posit that in this period, when women who supplemented the workforce during the war retreated back to their homes, “women had a divine purpose in the home” (13). Unlike cities, which Spigel notes had “feminine social networks,” suburbs where families were moving lacked these connections (17). Thus, the middle-class housewife existed on her own, in the domain of the domestic (Banks and Zimmerman 1987, Hochschild 1983). Unlike for her husband, for whom the home was a space for leisure away from work, the housewife’s realm of productivity was inside the home (93). As Spigel notes, the housewife’s “work and leisure intertwined” within the home, setting the stage for the blurring of work and leisure that we see at the

contemporary moment (75). Tied to this role in the home was the housewife's construction as "Mrs. Consumer" (22). Building on a foundation set by advertisers around 1900 that women were consumers, especially in the domestic realm, part of the housewife's labor was to learn to effectively purchase consumer goods (Peiss 1998, 50; Black 2004, 27; Spigel 1992, 83).

Not all women had the privilege of being a housewife. This role was markedly classed and raced. As Arlie Hochschild explains in *The Second Shift* (1983), she observed a distinct difference in her interviews between the working class woman who "had" to work and the middle class woman who "*wanted*" to work and/or felt like she "*should want*" to work (62, emphasis in original text). Needing to supplement family income puts a very different pressure on the female worker than being in a position where she feels obligated to get out of the home or wants to work for her own fulfillment. As I will detail, it is not surprising that female entrepreneurs within the beauty industry tended to be working class or marginalized in other ways, either racially or because of their status as immigrants (Peiss 1998, 5). In particular, women of color took up hairdressing, as I discuss later in this chapter, to supplement family income while also establishing their own salons as spaces to serve their community (Black 2004, Gill 2010, Willett 2000). This labor formation marked a departure from previous work opportunities for women of color, who worked *on* and *for* White persons in subservient roles (Willett 2000).

When entering the workforce, women found themselves in a variety of labor sectors. In the late 19th century, Kathy Peiss (1998) notes that women found work in factories, on farms, as domestic workers, as dressmakers, and in cosmetics work, where

the wages were quite low (62). Yet in the cosmetics industry Peiss notes that there was “sustained female entrepreneurship and ownership” dating back to the 1890’s (62, 5). For those women who needed to work, working within the beauty industry freed them from domestic work in the homes of wealthier (White) families, particularly for female laborers of color (Gill 2010, 33; Willett 2000, 21). Part of what made the presence of women acceptable in the workplace across many industries was her engagement with beauty culture. As Naomi Wolf notes in *The Beauty Myth* (1991), a woman’s “beautiful” appearance linked her to public life (20, 35). This expectation that visible workers will display feminine beauty is not without its problems, including the gendered double standard for appearance that Wolf emphasizes; men do not need to conform to such high beauty standards to succeed at work (35). Part of the female worker’s labor is what Wolf calls the “professional beauty qualification (PBQ)” which is tiring for women and keeps them poor, because they must consume beauty products in order to meet this qualification (48, 52-53). This extra dimension of work applied for those who worked both inside and beyond the beauty industry, as Peiss explains that “the act of beautifying, though it seems enticing and freely chosen, is really compulsory work” for female workers (4). About the pervasiveness of beauty culture more broadly, Peiss notes: “*Beauty culture* [...] should be understood not only as a type of commerce but as a system of meaning that helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience” (6). Beauty culture became a mode of socialization for women who were in and entering the workforce. In more contemporary literature, scholars have coined the term “aesthetic labor” to refer to the labor that a woman performs to make her appearance adhere to

feminine ideals (Banet-Weiser 2017; Elias, Scharff, and Gill 2017; Mears 2014; Ouellette 2016; Wissinger 2015). It is important to keep in mind that this culture and the expectations for female appearance are not innocuous but are enforced to create a particular type of working woman. In this vein, Peiss notes that “beauty culture targeted not only native-born, affluent white women but other women aspiring to middle-class respectability (85). In this manner, beauty culture became an avenue for women who did not fit into the White, middle class mold of feminine beauty to buy into this dominant culture to help elevate their status as working women.

The beauty industry continues to cater primarily to White women. Pale skin, as Paula Black (2004) notes, “signifies a lack of physical labor and exposure to the elements” (23). Hence, the ideal subject for the beauty industry was a White, middle-class woman who was not engaging in outdoor and/or manual labor. These ideals were and remain pervasive, but are not fixed, as beauty culture also made space for Black women who had lighter skin as well. Peiss writes that Black press advertised the use of “powders and skin whiteners among African Americans [...] as early as the 1850’s” (41). Using skin bleach to lighten the skin was especially common among Black women and is noted in much of the literature about Black women and the beauty industry (Craig 2000, 26; Gill 2010, 18; Tate 2017, 204). The reasons dark-skinned women used bleach to lighten their skin were varied, but all stem from beauty culture’s privileging of Eurocentric beauty standards (Craig 2000, 21). The desire to lighten darker skin aligns with the social value ascribed to women based on skin tone; Shirley Anne Tate (2017) explains, “white and lighter Black skins have more societal value than others” (205). As

Black women increasingly existed in the public sphere through their labor, lighter skin could afford them better work opportunities. Additionally, as Peiss notes, “many black women invoked their rights to social participation and cultural legitimacy precisely through their use of beauty aids” (7). Beauty aids like skin bleach showed Black women’s purchasing power, and helped this disenfranchised population move toward a social position of respectability (Willett 2000, 89).

Another means for Black women to gain respect was through their grooming, and specifically the grooming of their hair (Craig 2002, 23). This led to the foundation of the Black hair salon, a key entrepreneurial space in the beauty industry’s history. As Maxine Leeds Craig (2002) explains, “the average black woman could not alter her skin color or facial features, but she could effectively remove the curl from her hair” (26). Craig notes that entrepreneurial figures within the Black community and “hair business,” namely Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Malone, helped associate “good grooming with racial pride” during the 1950s and 60s as the Civil Rights Movement claimed the national spotlight (34). It is important to note that this Black hair community was completely separate from the Eurocentric or Anglo beauty industry. Julie A. Willett (2000) explains this separation: “From the standpoint of the white hairdressing industry, the black beauty shop was virtually invisible and financially insignificant until the 1970’s” (4). Until the 1970’s, Black beauty spaces like hair salons were separated from the mainstream beauty industry as an “ethnic market” with different distribution networks and advertising strategies (Peiss 1998, 89). Yet this separation does not discount the Black beauty shop as rich entrepreneurial spaces; instead, it only reaffirms the racial exclusion rampant in the

beauty and hair industries (Willett 2000, 7). This exclusion was largely predicated on the Eurocentric assumption that Black women only worked on or for other White persons (as hairdressers, in domestic positions, etc.).

Female Entrepreneurialism through DSOs

In order to understand the labor of the beauty vlogger in its contemporary context, it is particularly interesting to look at how housewives have historically harnessed their position in the domestic and social space to bring additional revenue into their homes. Many beauty vloggers work from home, and thus understanding how the space of the home can become productive as more than a space for housework is especially important in the the history of female entrepreneurialism. Earning income independent of the husband afforded the housewife a degree of autonomy, and gave her something to fill her time besides domestic chores and childrearing.

One of the most prevalent avenues for women to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors was through direct selling organizations (DSOs) – more commonly referred to as multi-level marketing companies (MLMs) in contemporary parlance. Within the beauty industry these companies include Avon, Mary Kay, and more recently Beautycounter; beyond the beauty industry these companies include Tupperware, Norwex (microfiber cleaning products), Stella & Dot (women’s jewelry and apparel) and LuLaRoe (women’s apparel). As Nicole Woolsey Biggart explains in *Charismatic Capitalism* (1989), “DSOs take people’s social networks and transform them into financial networks” (9). DSOs depend on a person to use their social connections for their financial benefit, as they sell the product they associate themselves with to the people in

their lives. Direct selling is a predominantly female-oriented mode of work – Biggart cites that 80% of direct salespeople are female – and this makes sense given the sociality required to sell goods like beauty products and Tupperware (2). The DSO provides a mutually beneficial outcome for all parties involved. The DSO does not have strict recruitment criteria for their salespeople, who are often housewives without previous work experience (3). One can work from home and have “infinitely flexible” hours that contour nicely around other familial obligations (25, 58; Banks and Zimmerman 1987, 91). The salesperson is her own boss (68). In short, “Direct selling has many different appeals, including the sense of control over work, being rewarded for performance rather than social characteristics, ease of entry, the tax deductions of an independent business, and the familylike nature of network relations” (49-50). A DSO’s salespeople are independent contractors, not employees who require an office or benefits, which removes much of the overhead cost for the company (37, 40, 65).

Yet, for all that the DSO appears to provide for women who want to run their own business, it has downsides. While Biggart acknowledges the value a DSO can bring to a woman and her family, the job also entails pressure to make sales and recruit more people to be a part of the DSO mechanism; Biggart notes that within the DSO model, the pressure a woman feels to sell product is her internally imposed (48; Banks and Zimmerman 1987, 92). But because of the family-like nature of the DSO, distributors are involved in fellow salespeople’s lives, and in the DSO context, “distributors are taught to help each other be successful, sometimes even at the cost of their own success” (Biggart 1989, 3, 4). Being an entrepreneur within a DSO is challenging, as salespeople are

expected to help others while also making sure they are making enough income to meet their own goals. The requisite sociality, positivity, and consciousness of what serves the greater good of all the salespeople within the DSO draws upon a form a feminine labor that Arlie Hochschild (1983) calls “emotional labor.” In her analysis of flight attendants, Hochschild found there was an immense amount of labor involved in representing a company, as each flight attendant was a “symbol” of the company for which she worked (154). Furthermore, emotional labor, as Hochschild theorizes it, “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (7). The DSO structure makes female entrepreneurialism a challenge, as the salesperson must co-manage the expectations of the DSO with her own ambitions as an entrepreneur. She is expected to treat others like family, and to help them succeed, and thus is not really her own boss; the emotional labor required of her means the salesperson often has trouble containing her work to specific hours or times. Biggart echoes this sentiment by pointing out that direct selling is not a job, but rather a “way of life” (108). All social connections become potential transactions for the salesperson, and the job of being a DSO salesperson involves much more than selling a product. Despite these realities, DSOs continue to successfully recruit salespeople. Biggart explains this through the draw of entrepreneurialism for participants; “Being an ‘entrepreneur,’ to them, is a morally superior way of being in the economy” (134). Entrepreneurialism is a socially valued mode of labor that Americans view positively (162).

In their study of Mary Kay, Jane Banks and Patricia R. Zimmerman (1987) examine the success of one of the longest standing beauty DSOs. They attribute Mary

Kay's success to the use of the "home party plan marketing technique," as the "home 'party' plan transforms waged labor into a privatized social interaction" (85, 90; Biggart 1989, 43). Following Tupperware's distribution model, these Mary Kay parties "deliberately blurred [the] public sphere of corporate life and [the] private sphere of the home" because the Mary Kay consultant conducted her business within the intimate, domestic space of her or one of her customer's homes (87, 92). The "home party plan" Used the Mary Kay consultant's time effectively, as she was able to sell Mary Kay to multiple customers in the same few hours. Like DSOs more broadly, the Mary Kay consultant is part of what Banks and Zimmerman (1987) call a "homemaker workforce," where the family obligations of the consultant were prioritized over her sales (90, 92). For Banks and Zimmerman, what differentiated Mary Kay from its closest competitor, Avon, was its skincare line (94). Because Mary Kay focused on more than just cosmetic products it could frame its brand as about a woman's "health and hygiene" (94). Instead of selling individual products, the Mary Kay consultant sold "the five-step Mary Kay process" (94). This "process" was customizable and personalized based on the skincare needs of the specific customer, as the consultant "matched" the customer with products that suited her individual concerns best (94).

Contemporary creative laborers, like the beauty vlogger, engage in many of the forms of labor as the DSO salesperson. She is her own boss and the pressure she feels about her productive outcomes are self-imposed – and perhaps augmented by the audience's expectations, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. In this way, beauty vlogging, too, can be seen as a "way of life." While the beauty vlogger does not translate

her social relations into financial revenue for herself in the same literal way that the DSO salesperson must, the beauty vlogger uses her personality and curated self-brand in order to cultivate and sustain an audience for her content. This involves “emotional labor” as well as other forms of immaterial and invisible labor that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Entrepreneurialism and The Black Hair Salon

As mentioned previously, the beauty industry was racially segregated until the 1970s. Yet entrepreneurialism was linked across racial divides through the mode by which products were distributed, as many of the “system methods” developed by entrepreneurs like Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Malone used a direct sales model (Gill 2010, 124; Peiss 1998, 76). Madam C.J. Walker herself sold Malone’s products before she became a product developer in her own right (Gill 2010, 21).

African American women have been in the hairdressing business for quite some time – Tiffany M. Gill (2010) notes that they entered the industry “in large numbers” during the antebellum period (10). This professional orientation toward hairdressing has roots in slavery, as Gill continues by pointing out that hairdressing went from being “a servant’s obligation to a business enterprise” (10). Unlike the housewife who affiliated herself with a DSO in order to contribute additional revenue to her family, for the Black woman entering the hairdressing trade became a way to control her economic destiny, as paid work was “an important way to express freedom” post-slavery (Gill 2010, 10). Even though slavery was over, Willett (2000) does point out that in the mid-1800s, “hairdressing in the United States also reinforced racial hierarchies as it became yet

another service in which black labor catered to white needs” (17). And these racial hierarchies persisted until the 1970s, mostly through the separation of the beauty industry along racialized lines.

For Black entrepreneurs, the Black hair salon was a local venture; it was a “vital community institution” according to Gill (107). Yes, it was a community space “built on [racial] exclusion,” yet this was merely a reflection of the broader racial tensions in the communities in which these salons emerged (Willett 2000, 2). For women in particular, not just those who worked in these spaces, “the salon was the centre of the community” (Black 2004, 29). The hair salon was a “social space” and a place where women could come together in companionship to “exchange information, share secrets, and either temporarily escape or collectively confront their problems and heartaches” (Black 2004, 3; Willett 2000, 3). The hair salon did not only serve the utilitarian purpose of wrangling the locks of the women who patronized the salon, but as a community space for the hairdressers and their clientele, it provided a place of respite for Black women who were balancing the work they did outside the home with their own families.

Because these hair salons were established and run by Black women, they could be spaces for women’s activism and community building in addition to creating entrepreneurial opportunities for Black women (Gill 2010, 1; Willett 2002, 37). The beauty salon, as Black explains, was “a business venture” that was made successful by the space it afforded to Black women who did not have other community institutions (11). The women who ran these salons had a dual task, though, as they had to “establish the ‘respectability’ of beauty as a business” while also establishing themselves as

respectable women and entrepreneurs of color (Black 2004, 29). This contextualizes why Madam C.J. Walker and Annie Malone are held up as pioneers and examples of Black entrepreneurialism across most of the literature on Black hair salons. Gill (2010) explains that the two “were pioneering black female ownership of black beauty culture and giving women tangible role models” (22). Black beauty culture existed outside of mainstream beauty culture at the time that Walker and Malone were at their peak visibility and highest sales, and their success proved that Black women could create and monetize their own beauty culture. Gill is also careful to point out that “black women such as Annie Malone and Madam C.J. Walker diversified the black beauty industry to include not only the selling of products but also the selling of beauty, independence and financial success” (19). The success that Walker and Malone achieved in the early twentieth century showed Black women that they could work for themselves and be successful by following the lead of Walker and Malone in the hair industry or striking out into other entrepreneurial endeavors.

The Civil Rights era was pivotal for the Black hair salon. Black hair trends changed over the course of the twentieth century, and the Civil Rights era politicized appearance like never before (Black 2004, 37). While before and again after the Civil Rights era Black women commonly straightened their hair, during the height of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s, many women embraced their natural hair texture under the “black is beautiful proclamation” (Craig 2002, 13). While this shift did not directly increase growth for the hair salons, as different services were required for natural

hair, the hair salon took on a different role during the Civil Rights era. Gill (2010)

explains:

While activism was already deeply entrenched in the professional culture of beauticians by the 1960s, the political climate of the modern black freedom struggle gave their access to community space and intimate role in black women's lives greater significance. (99)

The hair salon provided a "community space" built by and for Black women to come together during this challenging time. Gill also points out that the hair salon was a "unique institutional space [that Black women] controlled" (99). This control was especially important in allowing hair salons to become safe spaces for Black women to come together. Willett (2000) reflects that the hair salon was a "less visible institution" to the non-Black community, and thus this space remained an importance space within "the community's life" (135, 134).

After the Civil Rights era, mainstream (White) beauty culture began to co-opt the Black hair salon. There are many reasons for this, but most notable was a combination of the decline of the "system method" first popularized by Walker and Malone and White corporate American realizing the "profit potential in the black hair-care market" (Gill 2010, 124; Willett 2000, 151). Black women lost the level of presence they had had in the black hair-care market as well as their power as entrepreneurs within the industry as large corporations swooped into their market (Gill 2010, 124). Even so, the entrepreneurialism of people like Walker and Malone remains a testament to Black women's fortitude and determination to create, grow, and sustain an industry that served them, in more ways than just the hair care, for most of the twentieth century.

So where does the beauty vlogger fit in this historical context? Like the housewife, she works from home, within a domestic context, for herself, and on a schedule that she gets to determine. As her own brand, she chooses what content she produces and who she partners with in order to maintain her revenue stream. This labor formation differs from the DSO context salespeople are independent contractors, selling the DSO's specifically branded products. Like the Black hair salon owner, the beauty vlogger is self-enterprising, and creates a community around her online presence and productive content. While this community is not bound by a tangible space, it is bound by a common interest in beauty. This online community is diverse and racially integrated, but it is not fully inclusive (nor is the beauty industry) and still privileges a White positionality, as I discuss in more depth in Chapter Two. Following the example of Minh-Ha T. Pham (2015) in her study of Asian (fashion) superbloggers, I consider the beauty vlogger not as a "postracial or postpolitical labor identity *but instead* a historically situated, racially gendered and class-based formation" (11-12). The beauty vlogger, as I situate her in this chapter, is positioned within a historical lineage of female entrepreneurs, like the DSO housewife and the Black hair salon owner. She does not exist only as she is experienced in the contemporary moment, but also through the gendered, raced, and classed history from which she emerges. These intersections will be more clearly outlined throughout the rest of this chapter and in those that follow, as I unpack the beauty vlogger's labor, public persona, and influence.

All Work, No Play?

The beauty vlogger's life is her work, as she is a beauty and lifestyle icon for her audience. Beauty vlogging is her full-time job, but this job bleeds into all aspects of her life as her work does not *just* involve content creation, but also maintaining the lifestyle she has established for herself (Ouellette 2016). She works for herself and thus her job encapsulates what Laurie Ouellette (2013) calls a "self-enterprise" in her study of models (168). Theorizations about the entrepreneurial and self-enterprising nature of modeling are especially helpful when theorizing the figure of the beauty vlogger, as the labor required of each subject is similar. In the introduction to their edited collection on models, Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wissinger (2012) pose:

The fashion model today is the ultimate contemporary worker. One could argue that despite being an exotic and rare creature, the model is paradigmatic of working life in the early twenty-first century: a freelance, flexible, aesthetic worker who sells body and soul in the demanding and increasingly unpredictable labour markets of modern capitalism. (13)

The model and the beauty vlogger are products of the neoliberal and post-Fordist contexts in which they work. Both professions epitomize the "ultimate contemporary worker" who navigates a work context fraught with precarity and instability, and capitalizes on her skills, and herself, in order to carve out a career. In *The Problem With Work* (2011), Kathy Weeks notes that work in the post-Fordist configuration is "not just the labor of the hand, but the labors of the head and the heart" (69). She continues, "Whereas Fordism demanded from its core workers a lifetime of compliance with work discipline, post-Fordism also demands many of its workers flexibility, adaptability, and continual reinvention" (70). Discipline takes on a different form in a post-Fordist context,

as it is not the discipline of working diligently from 9am to 5pm, five days a week, but rather an all-consuming discipline to work as long and as hard as is necessary. The beauty vlogger's job challenges the Fordist assumptions of work, and renders it increasingly difficult to disentangle work and leisure.

What the audience sees of the beauty vlogger's "work" seems fun and glamorous – photoshoots and press trip with brands, attendance at major events like the BAFTAs and the Cannes Film Festival, interviews with world leaders like President Barack Obama – and thus it does not seem like the beauty vlogger is actually working (Duffy and Hund 2015, Poster et al. 2016). These seemingly leisure-like activities do not fit previous Fordist definitions of work and from an outside perspective, the beauty vlogger's work sphere and the leisure sphere blur into each other (Duffy 2017; Duffy and Wissinger 2017; McRobbie 2010, 2016; Ouellette 2013). This blurring of work and leisure is one of the many aspects of precarious and immaterial labor that Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt (2008) list:

a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic patterns of working; **the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play**; poor pay; high levels of mobility; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity of creative labourer; an attitudinal mindset that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money, and 'keeping up' in rapidly changing fields. (14, emphasis added)

This list is not exhaustive, but it does synthesize the pressures of being an entrepreneur in a creative industry like beauty vlogging. Just because her work is not visible in the same ways as someone who works in a coffee shop or as a construction worker does not mean that the beauty vlogger and creatives like her do not work (Poster et al. 2016). What

differs between these types of jobs is their materiality and visibility; much of the beauty vlogger's labor is *immaterial* and *invisible*. Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) defines immaterial labor as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (132). Jacquelyn Arcy (2016), draws on Tiziana Terranova's (2000) work to build on this definition, noting that immaterial labor "generates cultural and economic value" (365). The beauty vlogger's labor is not as obvious as material and visible labor, which often occurs in the public sphere rather than from home or a similarly domestic and/or feminized space (Gregg 2009, Poster et al. 2016). Winifred Poster, Marion Crain, and Miriam A. Cherry (2016) explain that "invisible labor" includes "activities that occur within the context of paid employment that workers perform in response to requirements (either implicit or explicit) from employers and that are crucial for workers to generate income, to obtain or retain their jobs, and to further their careers" (6). While the beauty vlogger does not have an "employer," the concept of invisible labor is still applicable to her because it is "tied to her job and its rewards" (7). Additionally, Poster et al. (2016) name precarious labor as a form of invisible labor because work is fragmented in precarious work formations and thus harder to see (12). The beauty vlogger's videos and social media posts create cultural value for herself (and her self-brand) in the form of sharing information (mostly about beauty) with her audience, and her public appearances and visibility around other beauty vloggers at press events and other similar situations helps her accrue cultural capital which can help her establish relationships with brands that may lead to partnerships, and thus income (Duffy 2017, Neff et al. 2005). The economic value that the beauty vlogger produces benefits her as income, but also

contributes to the growth of the beauty industry more generally. As Gaby Dunn (2016) (one of my interviewees who is also a journalist) notes in her piece in *Broadly.*, the beauty vlogger's labor benefits the beauty industry because when she features beauty products in her videos (across sponsored and not sponsored content) she “secures paying eyeballs in the [lucrative] women ages 18-24 demographic” who constitute her audience.

Scholars have engaged the concept of immaterial labor extensively in studies about labor in creative industries in the last few decades, theorizing dozens of highly specific iterations of immaterial labor. In this chapter, and in the dissertation more broadly, I engage three of these forms of immaterial labor most directly: relational labor (Baym 2015), aesthetic labor (Banet-Weiser 2017; Elias, Scharff, and Gill 2017; Mears 2014; Ouellette 2016, 2017), and emotional labor (Hochschild 1983). These forms of labor overlap, as all three of these forms of labor can also be considered through the lens of invisible labor, in addition to being immaterial. Nancy Baym (2015) uses musicians as her example when conceiving of “relational labor.” She notes that, for musicians, “producing economically valuable feelings increasingly requires offering a continuous identity and interactive presence both in person and through social media” (19). While beauty vloggers are not as interactive in person with their audience as musicians are,¹² they still engage in relational labor, particularly through their continual interaction on multiple social media platforms. These social media interactions constitute the beauty vlogger's public persona that is the focus of Chapter Two. Aesthetic labor, in its simplest form, comprises the “labor involved in producing a conventionally feminine body”

¹² Beauty vloggers do interact in person with their audience at branded public appearances and at events like VidCon and other beauty-specific conventions. These appearances serve mostly as photo opportunities, with little time for conversation or deep interaction.

(Banet-Weiser 2017, 272). This is a critical but often unseen component of the beauty vlogger's lifestyle (Poster et al. 2016). Beauty tutorials do make this labor visible, but the corporeal expectations for the beauty vlogger exceed makeup and hairstyling; aesthetic labor extends to weight management and fitness, diet, grooming of the brows, an always-perfect manicure, removal of unwanted body hair, on-trend fashion and styling, and much more. Lastly, emotional labor, as defined by Arlie Hochschild in *The Managed Heart* (1983), "require[s] the worker to produce an emotional state in another person" (147). Hochschild uses flight attendants as her labor example when theorizing emotional labor, observing how they produced a feeling of calm and ease for the passengers they served. Whatever was going on in the flight attendant's personal life needed to be masked from the passengers, as it was her responsibility to represent her airline and maintain a specific level of customer service experience for her passengers (Poster et al. 2016). While the beauty vlogger is not dealing with people in person, she is aware that her creative content, especially her videos, often provide an escape for her audience. Thus, she is careful to keep her channel and her content positive and upbeat, no matter what is going on in her personal life.

Leisurely Work

For most people, going on vacation (or as the British call it, "going on a holiday") constitutes a break from work responsibilities and would be considered "leisure." But this is not the case for the beauty vlogger. Though some of the trips she goes on are "work" trips, in that they are hosted by brands and follow a model for press trips within similar industries, everywhere a beauty vlogger travels provides fodder for her channel ("HOW I

WORK WITH BRANDS | Lily Pebbles”). Every activity the beauty vlogger engages in has the potential to become content across her social media channels. For example, a press trip can drive a steady stream of content – a pack and/or unpack with me video, a “what I eat in a day” on vacation video, travel vlogs of the activities they participate in (often split into multiple videos), a “get ready with me” video for one of the events during the trip, a haul of what the beauty vlogger bought and/or was gifted during the trip, as well as numerous scenic photos for Instagram each featuring a different outfit or look from the trip. Granted, not every beauty vlogger makes all of this content on each of her press trips, but this list illustrates the potential content a trip can provide for the beauty vlogger. And this does not only apply to press or work trips, but also to personal travel and proper vacations.

This travel example may seem extreme, but it is exemplar of the immaterial and invisible labor the beauty vlogger performs. She mines all aspects of her life, and increasingly not just those directly related to beauty, in order to keep up her regular stream of content. Being a beauty vlogger is not just a job, it is what Ouellette (2013) calls a “way of life” in her work on the labor of models (171). Elizabeth Wissinger (2015) echoes this sentiment, calling modeling “a lifestyle” and “endless” (45, 164). The same rhetoric applies to the beauty vlogger, who enjoys her job so much that she is willing to have it spread into many parts of her offline life. Angela McRobbie (2016) deftly synthesizes why this work formation has become acceptable and desirable at the current moment:

Today we live in a world of collapsing boundaries and with the intensification of the working day, working lives nowadays merge with leisure time and with non-

work activities, so these kinds of creative careers are especially desirable because they promise a social life as part of the job. Work is entirely entangled with life itself. (150)

Sociality is a key part of the beauty vloggers day-to-day life. The press lunches and product launch events she attends are part of what Neff et al. (2005) call “compulsory networking” in their analysis of models and “new media workers” (321-322). These public engagements also serve a social function for the beauty vlogger, who tends to work alone and from home.

Further developing McRobbie’s claim, we can make sense of why the beauty vlogger’s performance of labor is appealing when looking at the ways in which jobs have transformed by being a means to make money to enjoy life (Fordist) to a life’s purpose (post-Fordist). Weeks (2011) notes: “What is perplexing is less the acceptance of the present reality that one must work to live than the willingness to live for work” (2). The beauty vlogger does not work as hard as she does because she feels as though she must, she does so because it is fulfilling for her. She experiences this sense of fulfillment because work has become central to how we define ourselves. McRobbie claims: “Work has been re-invented to satisfy the needs and demands of a generation who, ‘disembedded’ from traditional attachments to family, kinship, community or region, now find that work must become a fulfilling mark of self” (22). The beauty vlogger’s sense of self and self-worth is tied to her labor and her productivity within the post-Fordist context. Thus, the boundless work is worthwhile, because it gives her meaning and purpose.

As Magrath states in her blog post cited in the introduction to this chapter, she gets very little true time off and works very intense hours to create the content she posts across her social media channels. Some would question just how fulfilling this seemingly endless labor can really be, yet Magrath and many others are quick to include that they love their work and feel lucky and privileged to be able to do it. This response represents another facet of the beauty vlogger's emotional labor. Hochschild (1983) explains: "Seeming to 'love the job' becomes part of the job; and actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort" (6). Again, though Hochschild's labor example is the flight attendant, these foundational ideas persist when applied to the beauty vlogger. The beauty vlogger puts up with a lot in the name of her work – online hate and unconstructive criticism on her content, little offline/personal time, an unpredictable schedule – all for the love of her job. And she does so convincingly, curating her online engagement to make all this labor appear as though it is effortless (Hochschild 1983, 8). Like the reality TV casters that Vicki Mayer discusses in *Below the Line* (2011), the beauty vlogger balances "the public display and private management of emotions needed to generate profits and earn wages in return" (131). Such are the sacrifices of being an entrepreneur who puts one's life online as part of one's job. The love of the work also masks many beauty vloggers' struggle to monetize their labor into the equivalent of a full-time income (theorized as "aspirational labor" in Duffy 2017).

The beauty vlogger transforms her leisure into content in much more quotidian ways as well as when on vacation. As part of her aesthetic labor, the beauty vlogger must be on top of current fashion and beauty trends, and thus she shops a lot. Shopping is not

often considered work, but for the beauty vlogger it very much is. We see her shopping in “follow me around” vlogs and “day in the life” videos. We see what she buys in haul videos, where she meticulously links as many of the products she features as she can locate online in the description box provided by YouTube, using affiliate marketing to make a small commission on the purchases she drives. And we can shop her favorites items through shoppable (again linked with affiliate marketing) pages on her blog, if she has one, and through the “swipe up” (again affiliate linked) feature on Instagram stories. Additionally, because the beauty vlogger is constantly accumulating clothes and beauty products from her own purchases and through PR packages sent by brands for her consideration, she also shows her audience her process of decluttering her wardrobe and makeup collection. She needs to do these things anyway, so it is only a bit more effort to turn on the camera and document the process for her audience.¹³

The brand partnerships that the beauty vlogger undertakes to provide the bulk of her income further augment the beauty vlogger’s relational labor. With these partnerships, she must toggle between her self-brand and the image she promotes for her brand partner. She knows her audience and what they have come to expect from her content, and she must negotiate between her own creative design for the branded content and the marketing aims outlined by the brand. In terms of work that is posted on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, Arcy (2016) explains: “on digital platforms, women invest their emotional energy to engage with and generate content that in turn adds value to branded platforms” (366). This emotional labor has many complex layers,

¹³ Decluttering videos became very popular after the publication of Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* in 2014. Having less and getting rid of excess was not always “on trend,” as previously beauty vloggers found value in how large their makeup collections were, for example.

as content posted on a branded platform like YouTube or Instagram is not the sole property of a creative laborer like the beauty vlogger and there are rules and guidelines that she must follow, but are unevenly enforced, especially concerning the disclosure of sponsored content. This lack of full ownership of their content is the reason why many beauty vloggers have blogs, which constitute a beauty vloggers own corner of the Internet solely controlled by them (Pham 2015). In the case of sponsored content on YouTube or Instagram, the beauty vlogger adds value to both the social media platforms where she posts AND to the brand with which she has a partnership, involving more labor on her part because she must balance her self-brand and online persona with the brand's advertising aims. Analyzing the labor of models and new media workers, Neff et al. (2005) explain that these fields "encourage artistic creativity and self-expression – albeit in a commercial way" (315). Sponsored content heightens commercial incentives for the beauty vlogger, as it creates commercial value for herself through compensation by the brand and for the brand through the marketing the beauty vlogger's content provides.¹⁴

In June 2018, UK-based beauty vlogger Lily Pebbles (472,000 subscribers) posted a video about working with brands ("HOW I WORK WITH BRANDS | Lily Pebbles"). This video helps the audience of beauty videos understand the mechanics of sponsored or branded content. In this video, Pebbles explains the immaterial and invisible labor involved in brand deals of all types, not just sponsored content. She posted this video because she knows her savvy audience does not understand how these transactions work, and that this lack of understanding feeds distrust about sponsored content in particular.

¹⁴ Whether or not content is sponsored (i.e. a brand pays a beauty vlogger for content), if it featured products, which it more than often does, it creates commercial value for the brands who get featured.

Pebbles has an agent, Gleam Futures, who handles and negotiates all of her branded deals, though Pebbles explains her role in the creative process and emphasizes that all decisions are her own – from deciding to work with a brand, to testing the product (if applicable) before agreeing to move forward with the partnership, to the structure of the video, and how the video is edited. Pebbles spends much of this forty-one minute video explaining the “brief” developed between a brand and vlogger for any sponsored content. This brief outlines all the messaging that the brand wants included in the video as well as the concept for the video, provided by the vlogger. The brief is a contract of sorts, as its negotiation and finalization irons out all the details of the sponsored content and manages the expectations of the brand and the vlogger. When Pebbles explains the labor involved in making branded content from start to finish, she notes that about 70% of the labor is negotiations on the front end (including the brief), 20% of the labor involves the production of the content, and 10% of the labor involves back-end logistics, particularly approval by the brand. Since a brand is paying for the content, they give final approval before any branded content is posted live on an Internet platform. My interviewee Sandra echoes Pebbles’ distribution of labor for the time and negotiation involved in producing branded content:

It [making sponsored content] is more involved as it requires all concepts and content approved ahead of time, including captions for photos. Sometimes there are multiple parties involved that all have to sign off on a project so it can be a lengthy process.

This back and forth can be taxing on the beauty vlogger, and in Pebbles’ case her agent, as Pebbles notes that these jobs often have a quick turnaround and require her to be “on-call” 24/7 in order to continue negotiations and get the job completed by the brand’s

deadline. Thus, while these partnerships are great sources of income for the beauty vlogger, they come at the price of increased labor and constant availability to make sure the finished product satisfies both the beauty vlogger and the brand.

Never Not Working

As has already been addressed multiple times in this chapter, the beauty vlogger's labor is often doubted and criticized as not being "real" work because most of the work she performs does not get seen on social media. What does get seen is labor that appears to be leisure, and thus the beauty vlogger is constantly scrutinized for how she spends her time and what keeps her so busy. What is important to remember about the beauty vlogger's labor, and is worth repeating, is that her work is not bounded in the same ways that more traditional jobs are. She does not clock in and 9am and clock out at 5pm; instead, as Elizabeth Wissinger (2007) explains in relation to models, her workday is a "boundary-less working day" (254). Additionally, social media platforms, accessible on smartphones, create a context where the beauty vlogger uses what Melissa Gregg (2011) calls an "always-on device," which in turn enables her always-on lifestyle (6). Brooke Duffy (2017) reiterates this lifestyle by explaining that these types of jobs require an always-on and multi-tasking mentality (29). In short, the beauty vlogger's lifestyle is one that very rarely gets completely shut off – there is always more work to be done, more editing, a deadline for a brand deal, emails to respond to, administrative business to handle, and more. And none of this labor is visible or witnessed in her creative outputs.

Like most contemporary workers, the beauty vlogger experiences what Melissa Gregg (2011) calls "presence bleed." Gregg explains:

Communication platforms and devices allow work to invade spaces and times that were once less susceptible to its presence. This is a process we might describe the *presence bleed* of contemporary office culture, where firm boundaries between personal and professional identities no longer apply. (2)

For the beauty vlogger, what is personal is professional. Unless she is particularly decisive about boundaries between her work life and her personal life, the two can become so enmeshed that they are indiscernible from each other. In my interview with my anonymous interviewee, we discussed these boundaries and how she is thoughtful and intentional about what she shares on her YouTube channel and on other social media platforms.

For me, [...] I think I'm relatively alone on this, [...] I'm very intentionally minimal with that kind of thing. [...] The only other real thing that I spend time on is Instagram.

I'm quite intentional I guess about my life and how I do spend my time with the channel. I don't want it to be on my mind 24/7, but I want to be engaged with it. I would say Instagram is the thing that I am most on-a-daily-basis engaged with. I usually try and get one post up every day, although lately I've been a little more lax with that. I do like the stories. I didn't really think I would, but I do enjoy them. It's a way for me to, especially for when I'm only doing one video a week, I think it's nice to pop on there and say hi to people and sort of maintain some continuity and interaction. [...] I feel no desire to do anything more than that.

For her, it is important to maintain a balance between keeping up a certain level of engagement with her channel and having a life that she does not broadcast on social media. Her observation that she is alone in this boundary-setting aligns with my own observations of the beauty vlogging community. While there are certainly things we do not see – beauty vloggers often do not vlog when drunk at press events or record fights with their partners, for instance – they tend to share *so* much that their channel must be front of mind for them nearly 24/7.

In her response, my interviewee directly addresses the relational labor that she experiences as a beauty vlogger. She wants to be present enough online to maintain the relationship she has fostered with her audience, but not so present that she cannot turn off that engagement as well. Nancy Baym (2015) accents the important of “ongoing connections” when thinking about relational labor (16). This is why beauty vloggers post regularly across their social media channels – this is how they relate to and engage with their audience. The importance of relational labor also explains why we do not see beauty vloggers take breaks from posting online.¹⁵ This is not to say that beauty vloggers do not take breaks from creating content, but they commonly plan ahead, pre-recording and pre-scheduling content, so their audience does not feel their absence. This practice of seamless and continuous engagement is especially important for beauty vloggers who adhere to a weekly posting schedule. Under these conditions, it makes sense that Duffy (2017) calls time off in these types of professions a “misnomer” (205).

Indeed, when a beauty vlogger does miss an upload, or does not upload for an unusually prolonged period of time, they are often met with a mix of questions concerned about their wellbeing and attacks about how they should be working harder because their job is not that hard. On May 18, 2018, UK-based beauty vlogger Alix Colburn (channel name: I Covet Thee, 418,000 subscribers) posted on her Instagram stories that she would be missing her weekly upload. Her first post read:

¹⁵ Taking breaks has become more common in the last six months or so, but it is too soon for me to draw many conclusions from this. What is becoming clear already is that the generation of beauty vloggers who have been full-time for nearly a decade are experiencing burn out from the boundless work schedule they’ve been keeping up for so long.

a little youtube update;
there's not going to be a video going up tonight or monday i'm afraid
it's been a bit of a week
normal scheduling shall resume next friday though, fingers crossed
let's all hope my brain is working by then . .

She had no obligation to inform her audience of these missed uploads, but she wanted to keep up her relationship with her audience the best she could. While I am sure that she got plenty of direct messages sending her love and support for whatever was going on, she felt compelled to share an image of a specific direct message she received on the next post in her stories as follows:

Oh ffs you have the most easy and free job in the world!all you do is sitting in the sun and read!at least have the dignity to do that little!what if you had a normal 5 or 6 days a week job like the rest of the world?you are not the only one with problems!you need to set your mind around it or maybe ask for help because I think you struggle...

Alix explained why she posted this message in text overlaying the message:

I wouldn't normally share this kind of message, but i think especially as it's mental health awareness week this is important to say.

Please remember that i choose what i post on the internet. You know just about as little about what goes on in my head as i would do scrolling through your instagram feed.

I've had messages asking me when i'm going to 'get over' this and 'it's been enough time already'. And to the people sending those, i actually envy the fact that you must have never been through something difficult in your life to allow you to understand.

I wholeheartedly encourage you to have your own thoughts and opinions, but please, take a moment to think before you do and say. If someone seems like they're struggling with mental health by all means reach out if you feel you can help. But this way of thinking is only ever going to cause more harm than good.

Alix has been open about her struggle with mental health on her channel over prior months, and took this opportunity to speak back against the assumptions that her job is

easy and that she needs to take it more seriously. On the Internet and through social media specifically, the mediated nature of the communication often gives people more gumption than they would have in person to say critical, rude things like what was said to Alix in this exchange. This response is indicative of the idea that the beauty vlogger has an easy life and is not allowed to take time away from her time online to take care of herself – or to just unplug for no other reason than to disconnect from being “always-on.”

All in all, this section has unpacked how and why the lived truth of the beauty vlogger’s job and lifestyle is far from the leisurely appearance she projects. Her life is not all glamour, even though that is what she tends to show on social media. The beauty vlogger’s labor is complex, multi-faceted, and ever-changing with the constant innovations across social media platforms. She, like the creative laborers who came before her, is evidence that just because a job does not appear to be intense or time-consuming from an outside perspective does not mean that the worker’s lived reality is congruent with those assumptions. Because viewers so value the productive outcomes of the beauty vlogger’s labor, like her YouTube videos, her audience assumes that all her work that they cannot see does not exist at all. Historically, the direct selling housewife and the Black hair salon owner produced material and visible labor, even if it was only to the customers in her presence. So much of the beauty vlogger’s labor occurs behind the scenes, and all that an outsider can see and name about her labor is the productive outcomes of her work. This focus on product overlooks an immense amount of immaterial and invisible labor she performs.

The Myth of the Independent Beauty Vlogger

Entrepreneurial endeavors like the beauty vlogger's are often imagined to be individual projects. As I explained earlier and in the Introduction, I refer to the beauty vlogger in the singular to reflect this perception. But beauty vlogging in 2018 is not what it was a decade ago, and the labor the beauty vlogger must perform has become more than one singular person can feasibly handle. Beauty vlogging, as a business endeavor and not just a hobby, involves much more administrative labor for the beauty vlogger which is only heightened with the increase in sponsored and branded content that the beauty vlogger produces.

So why is the ideal of the individual, entrepreneurial beauty vlogger so pervasive? What feeds what Brooke Duffy (2015a) calls the "myth of autonomy" when speaking about female cultural producers? Drawing from theorizations of the creative class originally theorized by Richard Florida (2002), Minh-Ha T. Pham (2015) notes:

[...] the creative class embodies an implicit ideological assumption about the democratic and even liberatory properties of creative work. Framed by ideas of individualism, agency, meritocracy, post-racism, and liberal multiculturalism, creative work and success in the so-called new economy is understood as fueled by individual drive and intellectual capacity rather than capital, credentials, and other institutionally conferred privileges. (8)

Creative work, like the fashion blogging that Pham focuses on in her study, reflects neoliberal ideologies that privilege the individual as opposed to institutions and safety nets. The entrepreneur is understood as an individual whose "drive" allows for his or her success. In her work on *America's Next Top Model*, Laurie Ouellette (2013) draws a similar conclusion about the connection between entrepreneurialism and individualism, as "the self-invention demanded of workers requires an entrepreneurial relationship to the

self” (173). The autonomous entrepreneurial self is a key construct in understanding creative industrial work like the beauty vlogger’s.

How do we resolve the dissonance between the ideology that the beauty vlogger is an independent entrepreneur with the reality that she needs help from various professional to be able to produce creative outputs across her social media channels? I find it productive to look to Vicki Mayer’s (2011) work on above and below the line workers in the reality TV industry. Mayer explains the differentiation: “Professionals located ‘above the line’ managed themselves and used their intellectual capacities, as opposed to tradespeople, artisans, and others ‘below the line,’ who used their manual skills under the control of managers” (4). The beauty vlogger’s identity as a laborer is not as simple as her being “above the line” labor and those who assist her being “below the line.” But because the beauty vlogger is the face of her self-brand and self-enterprise, she is the laborer who is often most visible. Some of the people who assist her could be considered “below the line” – the camera operator she may hire for a complicated shoot, the editor to whom she may outsource the labor of video editing, or the photographers she uses because not everything can be a selfie. These “below the line” laborers engage in invisible labor and are rendered invisible themselves (Poster et al. 2016, 3). Yet, the beauty vlogger also utilizes external labor that would be more aligned with “above the line” labor – the management company or manager she is affiliated with, the multi-channel network (MCN) that she may work with and the assistants she hires who do much more than get her coffee. What I find most important about breaking down the aura and mythos of the individualism of the beauty vlogger echoes the purpose of what

Mayer's (2011) project; to make visible "the range of workers and laborers not recognized in media industries' final product" and break down the distinctions between above/below the line labor and mental/manual labor (5, 176). The beauty vlogger's labor is indeed bigger than herself, and it is important to shine light on these other people who help her create her content.

The types of help that a beauty vlogger seeks varies from case to case, but some general patterns emerge. More often than not, she is affiliated with either a management team or an MCN. Lily Pebbles, discussed above, is affiliated with Gleam Futures and this management company helps her in various ways from negotiating branded deals to helping her expand her creative outputs beyond social media, as discussed in Chapter Three. Conversely, my interviewee Arianna is affiliated with an MCN, AwesomenessTV. Cunningham, Craig, and Silver (2016) define an MCN: "An MCN is a Google/YouTube-approved intermediary aggregating, affiliated with, and/or managing YouTube channels by 'offering their assistance in diverse areas, ranging from production to monetization, in exchange for a percentage of the ad revenue'" (377). Both management companies and MCNs take a cut of the creator's revenue, and, as my interviewee Gaby explained to me, having both is oftentimes redundant as they provide many of the same services.

The other pattern that I have seen is that beauty vloggers have hired assistants. The scope of the assistant's work is variable, but more often than not the assistant is treated as more of a creative partner to the beauty vlogger. Alix, discussed above, employs her brother in an assistant capacity, and while she does not openly discuss the scope of his work, she did share that he edited a recent video for her, which she then

checked and approved. Another example of this configuration is the working relationship between beauty vlogger Ingrid Nilsen (3.8 million subscribers) and her assistant Eileen Grennen.¹⁶ According to Grennen’s LinkedIn page, her job title is “Head of Operations and Production.” In the last two years or so, Nilsen has started to show more of Grennen’s presence in her content, particularly on Instagram, as Grennen travels with her pretty regularly and managed the podcast that Nilsen co-hosted, for example. As the scope of the job of the beauty vlogger expands beyond beauty content on social media, as discussed in Chapter Three, the beauty vlogger requires help. As her self-enterprise grows, she must decide what she wants to delegate to others, and who those other people should be. She still maintains creative control of her self-brand, even with the help of a management team, a MCN, or an assistant.

The myth of autonomy around creative workers is perpetuated by a lack of understanding about the immaterial and invisible labor associated with these jobs, as I noted earlier. Many assume that the beauty vlogger just sits down, films a video, edits it, and uploads it to YouTube. In fact, the majority of the labor involved in producing YouTube content – which does not constitute *all* of her labor either as she posts across social media and engages in creative opportunities across other platforms as her reach grows – comes before and after the filming of the video.

I focus here on the production of the beauty vlogger’s YouTube content, as I see that as the central node of her labor. While it is not her only labor, unpacking what it takes to produce a YouTube video, according to my interviewees, renders the beauty

¹⁶ This partnership ended in June 2018, as Nilsen is relocating from Los Angeles to New York City (“LIFE UPDATE: I’m Moving to NYC (For Good!) | Ingrid Nilsen”).

vlogger's careful considerations about content creation clear. For instance, talking about what viewers do not see about the production process, Sandra emphasized the importance finding adequate lighting for her videos:

Viewers don't really see the all the planning and possible production issues that can go on, especially in more involved videos or a brand collaboration. Also, getting good lighting is much more of a challenge than most would think. Studio lighting is expensive and takes up a lot of physical space. Daylight is good but inconsistent – especially in my case given that I work full time and am restricted to the time of day that I can film in daylight. Also, good equipment is really expensive and the pressure to produce high quality content is very high.

Recording a video is not just about the content, but also the production value, which must be high for beauty videos, especially those that show the beauty vlogger applying products because the lighting needs to reflect the true colors of those products. Lighting is a critical part of the production planning, and for Sandra, who works during the day, the time she can film in natural light is limited. Another element viewers may be unaware of is the planning and preparation that goes into deciding what content to film, and when to film it. Sandra and Arianna both told me about the various methods they use to plan their content – Sandra in a spreadsheet and Arianna in journals. Both beauty vloggers also roughly sketch out the flow of a video, in order to plan the shots they need to capture and to make the filming process run smoothly. My anonymous interviewee detailed her start-to-finish process with me as well:

I always keep a running list of video ideas. I guess it would start conceptually first before the actual production of the videos, so kind of always thinking a week or two ahead about what I want to film. [...] The timing of stuff matters, so it's like I always want to get my [subscription box] review up, and favorites videos, and things like that. I'll be taking notes on certain videos a week or two before, and then I usually film on Fridays because I work at home. Sometimes on Saturdays.

If it's a product-centric video, those require a lot more work because you have to assemble everything together and then do product close-up shots and stuff. I'll have to obviously get ready, so that's another time consideration. I have to do my makeup, and my hair if I need to, and figure out what I'm going to wear, decide what part of my home I went to film in, bring out my lights, set up the equipment, and then I film the actual video, which usually takes usually no more than 45 minutes. A “get ready with me” video is a whole other ordeal. Those are the hardest to film and set up.

This labor – including the aesthetic labor that she notes – all occurs before even sitting down to film a video. Then, while everything is still set up for the video, she begins her post-production labor.

Then, I'll try to get an Instagram shot, any additional photos I might want to take if I want to do a blog post. That will kind of wrap the production aspect of it, and then I have to do all of the cleanup, which is really annoying when they're product centric videos, or very gratifying if it's an empty product video and I can throw sh*t away.

She notes that the last thing she does before she takes a break is to import her footage and check it. Files can get corrupted and sometimes a whole video can be out of focus, so this checking is an important step. She continues:

I don't usually edit right after filming. I need a break. [...] My new thing is that I like to just reserve a couple of hours for editing rather than sort of drag it out over multiple days. Honestly, I've been editing on Sunday mornings lately, and then just uploading sometime on Sunday, and that seems to work best. That's usually anywhere from one to four hours depending on the style of video.

That's about it, and then obviously there's additional work to actually get it uploaded and published, doing the description box, all of that, affiliate linking, posting to Instagram, posting on the blog, all of that.

Even when she says, “that’s about it,” there is even more. While some of this time is waiting for a video to process and upload to YouTube, a lot of actual labor is involved – finding each product link and generating affiliate links, having promotional content ready and scheduled for Instagram and other social media platforms, and making an

accompanying blog post. And my interviewee does all of this work on her own. Every content creator has their own process, and some of the standout information from my conversation with Arianna that differed from my other interviews was that Arianna takes a lot of time to make a thumbnail and make sure it is what she referred to as “clickable” – something that would urge people to click on her video. She also noted the importance of annotating her videos, which is a relatively new feature on YouTube where she is able to link videos she may refer to in the upper right hand of her video as it plays. Lastly, she added that she finds that her videos are viewed when she posts them earlier in the day, so if she finishes editing a video at night, she will wait until the following morning to make it live.

Here we hear, from the voices of my interviewees, what is involved in the production of a YouTube video. While my interviewees are not full-time beauty vloggers, their experiences illustrate the labor involved in content production, which is likely only augmented for full-time beauty vloggers. Through hearing these accounts, it made sense to me why the beauty vlogger needs help. As Sandra mentioned, the expectations for YouTube beauty content are high already and as technology advances, so too does the labor involved in learning that technology and integrating it – from new cameras to new editing equipment, and more. Just as other laborers in other sectors hire out parts of their work that are not within their realm of expertise, so too does the beauty vlogger. Not *every* beauty vlogger has regular (or any) help. One example that comes to mind is Emily Eddington (channel name: emilynoel83, 969,000 subscribers), who does not do sponsored content and does not have help with her content, aside from the occasional

assistance from her husband. I do not bring up Eddington to undercut my own claims about the beauty vlogger's lack of autonomy, but instead to illustrate that what the beauty industry lacks is a culture of disclosure about the help that the beauty vlogger utilizes. What I find troubling about this autonomy myth is not the outsourcing of labor, but the lack of conversation about the practice within the beauty vlogging industry at large.

There are no rules about disclosing the help a beauty vlogger receives with creating content. Some beauty vloggers will include photo credits on Instagram (usually with a camera emoji) or say in a video that someone else edited it, but there is no rule or guideline about giving such credit; it is completely up to the individual beauty vlogger if they choose to disclose this information, and where and how they choose to disclose it. Brooke Duffy (2017) addresses this lack of disclosure in terms of maintaining a self-brand. She acknowledges that creative laborers, like the beauty vlogger, do indeed have support staff, but that the laborer also has to make sure that the presence of this support staff does not "tarnish" the image of her self-brand (197). For the beauty vlogger, her self-brand is tied to her so closely that it is often literally represented by her full legal name.¹⁷ Yet even with the imperative to maintain a self-brand, it is important to acknowledge laborers who have been disenfranchised by not getting credit for their labor, as Mayer's (2011) work reminds us. The culture of silence around the help that beauty vlogger's indeed employs does a disservice not only to those who work with her and go unacknowledged but also to those young people who aspire to be content creators and are shown an unrealistic image of how the beauty vlogger maintains her workload.

¹⁷ As YouTube professionalized, many beauty vloggers changed their channel names from more quirky or fun names to their full name or first and middle name.

Conclusion

The beauty vlogger's creative labor challenges previous long-held, culturally valued formations of work. The figure of the beauty vlogger is complex and nuanced, and engages in many forms of immaterial and invisible labor. She is a precarious worker, whose work and leisure time blur into each other, so much so that they are hard to separate. The beauty vlogger performs relational labor, aesthetic labor, and emotional labor, none of which directly contribute to the social media content she produces. In this chapter I have intentionally identified and validated her labor, which is often misunderstood, trivialized, and dismissed as consisting of much less effort than it actually entails. While the beauty vlogger is valued for her entrepreneurialism within the current post-Fordist and neoliberal context, her labor centers around beauty, a domain that has historically been devalued and delegitimized because it is feminine and feminized. A large proportion of her labor time is spent on labor that is not seen and/or is not traditionally considered to constitute labor, like international travel. Thus, the beauty vlogger's labor is doubly undervalued, because of the content she produces and the industry in which she labors.

My historicization of the beauty vlogger, particularly in her similarity to the DSO saleswoman (Banks and Zimmerman 1987, Biggart 1989) and the Black hair salon owner (Black 2004, Craig 2002, Gill 2010, Willett 2000), is a key contribution in this chapter. While beauty vlogging does not mirror a direct sales model in that vloggers are not salespeople, both career paths depend heavily on the female entrepreneur's sociality. While the DSO saleswoman relies on connections that already exist in her life (even if

they have moved online, especially onto Facebook), the beauty vlogger too must have a sociable and friendly rapport with her audience. This is a critical part of the role she takes on as a “trusted friend” to her viewers, which I analyze in Chapter Three. Without a warm relationship with her audience, the beauty vlogger would not be able to support herself, as her livelihood is contingent upon her audience engaging with her content. Beauty vlogging mirrors the entrepreneurialism of the Black hair salon because the beauty vlogger carves out a space, albeit online, where she and her audience can discuss beauty, share tips, and support each other. While these online communities around the beauty vlogger are not universally predicated upon exclusion from the mainstream beauty industry like those of the Black hair salon, she continues the rich history Black hair salon owners began of shaping spaces for women’s interaction where none existed previously, creating a unique platform to engage with people who share her passion for beauty and female empowerment.

Chapter Two – The Beauty Vlogger as Public Persona

Be authentic.

Create the content you enjoy watching yourself.

Collaborate with brands that fit your voice.

These statements, and the broader ideology behind them, were common refrains voiced by the featured creators throughout the sessions I attended at VidCon. There is an implicit expectation that you have to be yourself and stay true to yourself no matter how large your social media channels become in order to be successful in online video production, and within the realm of beauty vlogging specifically. The content you create should be content you would want to watch yourself. And you also have to be on social media for the *right* reasons – for the love of beauty, and not *just* for the money.

The beauty vlogger must establish and maintain a coherent self-brand within the commercial context of the social media platforms like YouTube that she utilizes (Banet-Weiser 2012). She also needs to be careful to only partner with brands that align with this vision of herself that she has established through her online presence. The beauty vlogger voluntarily places herself in a public-facing role through the content she posts across multiple social media platforms. She is a public persona, and her audience comes to know her through the content she produces. The publicness of her job has many rewards and benefits, but also opens her up to scrutiny and scorn from her audience if she veers too far astray from the online identity that she has constructed for herself.

The beauty vlogger positions herself strategically in order to navigate the commercialized spaces where she makes her living. Her self-brand's success hinges on

the assumption that she is always being authentically herself in her online self-presentation. Yet importantly, the commercialized spaces in which she functions calls her “authenticity” into question; audiences and media critics more broadly assume the beauty vlogger is inauthentic due to the monetary compensation she receives for the content she posts online, and they view her sponsored content with particular disdain. Previous scholarship on self-presentation and authenticity online (Banet-Weiser 2012) does not account for the increasing commercialization and saturation of social media and the online beauty community. Furthermore, while this scholarship does focus on specifically gendered (often feminized) spaces like that in which beauty vlogger exists, race is often undertheorized or left out of these conversations. Thus, using theorizations of authenticity and microcelebrity (Abidin 2015, 2016; Marwick 2013b, 2015; Senft 2008, 2013), this chapter expands on the existing academic discourse on online self-performance by widening its scope to include this explicitly gendered, racialized, and commercial online space.

As a public persona, the beauty vlogger is deeply dependent on her audience. It renders her visible and affirms her relevance as a beauty vlogger. We can attribute this dependence largely to the beauty vlogger’s situation within a broader “attention economy” (Duffy 2017, Marwick 2015). The attention economy is an “economy of visibility” (Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova 2013, 176). The more people see and pay attention to the beauty vlogger, the more “social benefits,” like income, become available to her (Marwick 2013b, 5). The audience looks to the beauty vlogger for simple things like recommendations for beauty products but also more holistically as a successful

model of womanhood in the current social, cultural, and economic climate. The beauty vlogger provides her audience with templates for how to exist in the contemporary world, predominantly focusing on performances of ideal femininity and attaining a desirable lifestyle.

Yet the beauty vlogger's self-presentation is fraught with tensions and contradictions that boil down to the fundamental differences between how she curates an authentic and coherent version of her life online and what her audience expects of and from her. Audience expectation is facilitated by the beauty vlogger's public presentation of self and how much of her life she shares within her online audience. The beauty vlogger mediates authenticity through her decisive, intentional, and strategic deployment of her public, online persona. She must balance the dual imperatives of being "real" for her audience and making a living (Duffy 2017). The latter involves making her "self" salable and palatable to advertisers and to brands with which she may partner. As the demands for her to continue to create a steady stream of content intensifies, the beauty vlogger increasingly looks to her personal life for material and infuses it into her social media content. Thus, her performance of femininity and her lifestyle become commercial templates that model how her audience can attain a lifestyle that emulates hers.

While her audience only sees the parts of her life that the beauty vlogger has intentionally made public, her audience experiences the beauty vlogger's varied content across multiple social media platforms. It can be easy for the audience to forget that their experience of the beauty vlogger is partial and curated for them because they are bombarded with so much content from the beauty vlogger and feel an intimate

connection with her (Abidin 2015, Marwick and boyd 2011). Having been granted a peek into the beauty vlogger's life, the audience comes to demand an authentic and coherent performance of self that represents an unattainable and impossible ideal. The beauty vlogger's openness about certain aspects of her life across social media creates a context in which the audience feels entitled to witness, and comment on, all facets of the beauty vlogger's life.

The beauty industry is incredibly White, and so is the online space where the beauty vlogger exists. Our broader culture's systemic privileging of Whiteness is mirrored in the online beauty space (Dyer 1997). This chapter interrogates the pervasive Whiteness of the beauty industry, and of beauty vlogging, alongside the recent shifts within the beauty industry aimed at increasing diversity and inclusivity. Increasingly, beauty brands are lauded for their inclusivity and product launches that cater to *all* consumers, particularly when they launch new foundation shade ranges, or expand the shade selections in existing ranges. This focus on inclusivity is part of the beauty industry's marketing strategy, and is adopted by the beauty vlogger. This strategy becomes particularly salient for beauty vloggers of color who point out and play up their racialized identities when it is commercially viable, and profitable, to do so. Part of the beauty vlogger's authentic brand involves being aware and conscious of the inequities that exist within the beauty industry, even if they do not directly affect her personal subjectivity.

The Beauty Vlogger as an Authentic, Coherent Self

The publicly visible nature of beauty vlogging places particular and specific expectations upon the beauty vlogger. These expectations are often tied to the assumption that the beauty vlogger has a coherent and consistent persona or identity across the many social media platforms where her persona exists (Abidin 2015, Duffy 2017, Marwick 2013b). These multiple social media sites function collectively to construct the beauty vlogger's public identity as coherent across social media platforms and constituted by looking at these platforms all together. This notion of coherence directly connects to claims about the beauty vlogger's "authenticity." For the beauty vlogger, authenticity is linked to the public image she projects online. Many theorists have noted that online performances of selfhood are just that, performances (Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova 2013, Banet-Weiser 2017, Jerslev 2016, Marwick and boyd 2010). The beauty vlogger's publicly projected life is partial and curated. The authenticity that she claims to embody, or that her audience perceives, is an illusion validated across multiple social media platforms. The beauty vlogger constantly cultivates and reasserts her authenticity through her YouTube videos, Instagram posts, Tweets, and sponsored content (Jerselv 2016, Rettberg 2014).

For example, in January 2018 Canadian beauty vlogger Allana Davison (previous channel name: allanaramaa, 494,000 subscribers) partnered with Maybelline and fellow Canadian beauty vlogger Jamie Paige (419,000 subscribers) to promote the makeup brand's new #TotalTemptation line on YouTube and Instagram ("DRUGSTORE MAKEUP CHALLENGE W/ JAMIE PAIGE | #AD | allanaramaa."). Allana rarely uses

drugstore-branded makeup on her YouTube channel, and thus this sponsorship raised questions from Allana’s audience about whether Allana really liked these products or if she was just participating in this partnership with Maybelline for financial gain. Allana’s audience did not find this content, especially her positive review of the Total Temptation mascara (\$7.99 USD), to be truthful as she had exclusively used the Lancôme Monsieur Big Mascara (\$25 USD) since its launch in 2017. Allana responded to the comments about her review of the Maybelline mascara and her character on her Instagram stories, noting that she enjoys high-end makeup and that is how she chooses to spend her money. Thus, those are the products she features in her beauty content most heavily. She did not see how her use of mostly high-end cosmetic products would discount or nullify the validity of her positive review of the Maybelline mascara. Allana also featured both mascaras in her subsequent “Things I’m Loving Right Now” video posted at the beginning of February (“Things I’m Loving RN Pt. 7 | allanaramaa.”). In that video, she compares the two mascaras, noting that the Maybelline mascara is more what she would use for an “everyday” look while the Lancôme is what she would use when going out and getting more dressed up. Like most beauty vloggers, Allana defended her positive opinion of the Maybelline mascara by using the common rhetoric that she “only promotes products she truly loves” on her channel and social media accounts. This echoes the claim that the beauty vlogger “only endorses products [she] already uses” (Duffy and Wissinger 2017). Therefore, Allana’s audience should trust that she is featuring the Maybelline mascara because she truly enjoys using it.

In addition to illustrating the coherence expected of the beauty vlogger, I use this example as a touch point for my analysis of the “authenticity” expected of the beauty vlogger. Allana’s experience of being accused of being insincere in her product recommendation encapsulates how her social media audience enforces and polices the beauty vlogger’s perceived authenticity. Viewers assumed Allana was disingenuous in her review of the Maybelline mascara because the product she chose to feature *for compensation* was not “on brand” with her other content. Her regular viewers know how much Allana adores the Lancôme mascara and that her rave reviews for the Lancôme mascara had not wavered for months. Allana’s infatuation with the Lancôme mascara became a part of her self-brand. Hence, her endorsement of the Maybelline mascara created a two-fold problem for Allana. First, the recommendations that beauty vloggers make influence purchasing decisions. I will examine this further in Chapter Three, but the trust and honesty between the beauty vlogger and the audience makes their recommendations appear as though a “trusted friend” is making the recommendation, not someone who is part of the marketing and advertising apparatus for the beauty industry. Allana’s raves about the Lancôme mascara drove a lot of people (myself included) to buy that high-end mascara. Secondly, Allana was creating sponsored content for Maybelline. This means that Maybelline paid Allana (and Jamie) a fixed sum for her video and Instagram posts about the #TotalTemptation line and that Maybelline approved the online content before it went live.

It is important to keep this context in mind, since audiences generally lack trust around sponsored recommendations by beauty vloggers. Audiences tend to be wary of

sponsored content, especially positive reviews of products which beauty vloggers are overtly paid to promote. While not a universal truth, viewers tend to associate sponsored content with being false, containing lies, and being inauthentic (Duffy 2017). Allana's mascara recommendation was off-brand for her *and* she was being paid to promote the mascara. Was she really promoting a product that she "truly loved" and would have used outside of the context of this sponsorship? This example illustrates the audience holding Allana accountable to her own self-brand, but this behavior also stifles the beauty vlogger's creative voice. Authenticity is not static; it is continually cultivated and so are personal preferences. The beauty vlogger tests and tries dozens of cosmetic products on a weekly basis and part of her job is to look for the next best product to recommend to her audience. Thus her audience's demand for coherence cultivates a dynamic of surveillance between the beauty vlogger and her audience, and this scrutiny becomes much more a judgment about the beauty vlogger's honesty, integrity, and character, than about the makeup.

Theories of Authenticity and Microcelebrity

The concept of authenticity is riddled with dichotomies. For instance, that which is associated with traditional media is not authentic (Cunningham 2017) and that which is outside of the market is authentic and that which exists in the commercial sphere is not (Banet-Weiser 2012). As Stuart Cunningham and David Craig (2017) point out, these binaries are often too simple and reductive when looking at mediated online platforms like YouTube. In her 2012 book *Authentic*, Sarah Banet-Weiser theorizes an understanding of authenticity that does not rely on these binary modes to make sense of

the concept. She asserts that “rather than representing a loss of authentic humanity, the authentic and commodity self are intertwined within brand culture, where authenticity is itself a brand” (13-14). In this way, we can see a public figure like the beauty vlogger less in terms of actually being authentic or inauthentic, and more through how authentic she is perceived to be across her social media platforms. She performs authenticity and her audience gauges her performance as effective or ineffective (Banet-Weiser 2017, Marwick and boyd 2010). Alice Marwick (2013b) further develops this line of thinking:

Authenticity is negotiated symbolically; information disclosure is used to determine its presence or absence, but is an incomplete measure at best. Authenticity’s slipperiness is part of what makes it useful: it can satisfy many objectives, and can be interpreted widely. (121)

There is no inherent right or wrong when it comes to the perception of authenticity.

Rather, audiences assume the beauty vlogger intends to project personal authenticity and hopefully interpret her actions as coherent and authentic.

At its core, beauty vlogging is a commercial endeavor, and an analysis of the full-time beauty vlogger as an authentic subject must take her financial motivations into account. As the example with Allana shows, tension between authenticity and income remains. Banet-Weiser (2017) notes that the beauty vlogger’s persona is “carefully constructed to be authentic and passionate and not profit-driven” (275). The beauty vlogger must tread lightly, especially with sponsored content that is overtly flagged as income. Brooke Duffy (2017) echoes this ideology in her work on aspirational labor. In her study of creative industries like beauty vlogging and fashion blogging, Duffy found that economic incentives, while critical to the individual creator’s livelihood and valuation for her labor, threaten audience perceptions of that creator’s authenticity and

trustworthiness (172). Duffy points to the performativity of these online identities, which must balance “an aura of realness” while also earning money (218). These dual imperatives are hard to resolve, as the audience knows and often appreciates that the full-time beauty vlogger must earn a living, or at least be compensated for her labor. But this reality runs counter to the markers of authenticity associated with online personalities like the beauty vlogger’s.

The beauty vlogger harnesses her creative endeavors into a full-time job by creating a self-brand – an ever-present ideal for young females in contemporary postfeminist and neoliberal culture (Banet-Weiser 2012; Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova 2013; Elias, Scharff, and Gill 2017, Harris 2004). In *Authentic*, Banet-Weiser discusses the self-brand at length, looking at how self-branding and authenticity are intertwined concepts. Social media has increasingly become a tool used to promote (self-)brand visibility (52). Once the beauty vlogger establishes her public, branded persona, self-branding work becomes a business endeavor, and maintaining her online brand becomes a huge part of her job (53). In 2018, this self-brand spans across multiple social media sites; YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat all become nodes for the beauty vlogger to articulate her self-brand. Each functions in its own medium (i.e. Instagram through photography, Twitter through micro-blogging) and simultaneously builds the larger self-as-brand. Connecting this self-brand to authenticity, Banet-Weiser argues that self-branding is a means to access one’s authentic self (59). This authentic self reflects who the beauty vlogger is and who is she intends to be. This concept of self

is what she packages and “sells” to her audience as the coherent identity we see across social media platforms.

The Beauty Vlogger as Microcelebrity

Even though she is a person who voluntarily puts her life online, audiences expect the beauty vlogger to remain “herself” as much as possible. This expectation is evident through her performance of authenticity, as detailed above. But it is critical to look beyond this notion of authenticity as well. Particularly, I am invested in understanding the beauty vlogger as a microcelebrity. First theorized by Theresa Senft (2008) through her analysis of camgirls, the microcelebrity identity involves more than crafting and maintaining a coherent self-brand. As Senft defines it, “the practice of microcelebrity” is “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (Senft 2013, 346). A microcelebrity packages and sells her life and her lifestyle through what Senft describes as a combination of branding and celebrity (Senft 2008, 48). Senft (2013) came to this term while attempting to “describe how camgirls utilized still images, video, blogging, and crosslinking strategies to present themselves as coherent, branded packages to their online fans” (346). Microcelebrity is less about the kind of selfhood one projects online and more about how one crafts themselves into a branded good. This self is a brand, but more importantly this self is a “commodity” (Jerslev 2016, 5240).

Theorizations of microcelebrity are not divorced from notions of authenticity, but this specific modality of authenticity emphasizes the commodification of the individual. For the beauty vlogger, being authentic is part of being perceived as trustworthy to and

consumable by her audience. Alice Marwick (2013a) notes that there is an “expectation of authenticity” for microcelebrities (361). I argue that this authenticity is mediated and performed, but through theorizations of microcelebrity, it becomes clear that authenticity is deployed as a “marketing strategy” as well (Marwick 2013b, 17). As Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011) explain: “Micro-celebrity involves viewing friends and followers as a fan base; acknowledging popularity as a goal, managing the fan base using a variety of affiliative techniques; and constructing an image of self that can be easily consumed by others” (141). Microcelebrities often strategically deploy authenticity as a means of “creating and promoting intimate knowledge” (Marwick 2013b, 251). What the beauty vlogger chooses to share online about her personal life is a choice carried out methodically and with foresight. She must balance putting forth a representation of herself that feels genuine for her with maintaining a personal life and identity outside of what she posts online. I identify two templates for how the beauty vlogger makes her life consumable for her audience – her performance of normative femininity and her performance of “the beauty vlogger” lifestyle.

Microcelebrity is not simply a micro- version of celebrity culture. The beauty vlogger, and other online persons like her, exist in a space somewhere between being a bonafide celebrity and being an average girl who happens to make social media content about makeup. The beauty vlogger is not a celebrity because much of her consumable identity and her ability to monetize her labor stems from her connection with her audience. As Marwick (2013b) explains, microcelebrity “involves closeness and accountability” and the microcelebrity is a person who “has direct interaction with fans”

(118). Without that interaction, the audience would not feel a connection to the beauty vlogger, and that connection is critical to the consumability of the beauty vlogger's public-facing persona, as I expand upon in Chapter Three. Without this intimate, personal connection, her audience would not find the templates she poses for how she lives her life relevant. People want the life and lifestyle that they see beauty vloggers perform online – it is that sense of attainability that drives the beauty vlogger's microcelebrity. She was not always what she has become, and thus there is potential for others to follow the path she has forged for herself. On the other hand, with her carefully crafted persona, the beauty vlogger is not really just like any average person with an online presence. Duffy (2017) argues that digital influencers “allegedly disrupt the ‘fame paradigm’” of celebrity and thus “are upheld in the popular imagination as individuals *just like us*” (3). I do not find the distinction so simple. The beauty vlogger is not a traditional celebrity, but she has garnered attention online and built a career through her online pursuits on YouTube and other social media platforms. And she is not “just like us.” While the average social media user engages with platforms as they see fit, the beauty vlogger strategically engages with social media. Her performance of self must be congruent across social media platforms and she must engage with her audience on social media regularly to maintain and grow her online presence.

The Beauty Vlogger as Idealized Feminine Subject

As a microcelebrity, one of the templates the beauty vlogger performs for her audience is idealized femininity. The typical beauty vlogger adheres to conventional standards of subjectivity; in her work on fashion bloggers Duffy (2015b) notes that the

bloggers who are able to turn their passion projects into full-time careers tend to be “white, middle class, well-educated, and typify conventional beauty standards” (711). This is not exclusively the case for the beauty vlogger, but more often than not she fulfills most of these standards. In her work on beauty vloggers, Banet-Weiser (2017) claims that content producers can be considered “aesthetic entrepreneurs,” as those who conform to conventional gender, class, and racial standards tend to be those who are financially successful in the online space (272). More often than not, beauty vloggers who garner a large audience are marked by privilege across many axes of their identity.

Within the context of postfeminism and neoliberal culture, the beauty vlogger is a model of successful femininity. She is an entrepreneurial self-starter who has created a career for herself where none previously existed, as discussed in Chapter One. As Duffy (2017) notes, the beauty vlogger harnesses her creativity and used it “as a route to entrepreneurial success” (61). The beauty vlogger combines her creativity, visibility, and individual expression in order to curate a salable commodified version of herself (Duffy 2017, 9). Her work is flexible and (appears to be) autonomous (Duffy 2017, 10). As a postfeminist subject, the beauty vlogger is exemplar, someone to emulate. This is why I assert that the beauty vlogger’s commodified self is a template of idealized femininity. Through her performance of microcelebrity, audiences are manipulated to want the life that she shows them through her online content. Watching the beauty vlogger teaches the audience what they should want, value, and aspire to be as feminine subjects in contemporary culture. Banet-Weiser (2017) echoes this: “Beauty vlogging is invested in perpetuating a conventional understanding of beauty and femininity through instruction,

where disciplined citizens teach others how to become similarly empowered, visually appealing feminine subjects” (272). The beauty vlogger performs a relatable, accessible femininity through her online content. Even if it is not her intention, she models a femininity that others are likely to want, especially when they witness the material rewards of this performance for the beauty vlogger. In this way, as Banet-Weiser (2017) articulates, the beauty vlogger becomes the “master,” teaching her viewers how to follow her lead (273). The beauty vlogger is rewarded by her entrepreneurial success – by the partnerships she cultivates and the PR she receives, the events she is invited to and the increased affluence that comes with professional success. The beauty vlogger is an empowered female subject who provides inspiration for her audience and suggests that they too can be empowered. Banet-Weiser and co-author Inna Arzumanova (2013) explore this empowerment by looking specifically at haul videos (videos that show what a vlogger has purchased):

Crafting one’s personal identity in front of a web-cam by applying make-up and displaying fashion purchases is not positioned as narcissistic, but rather empowering, precisely because these activities nurture the promise of an entrepreneurial future that may include corporate partnership and sponsorship, fashion blogging, and paid product reviews (166).

In the case of the beauty vlogger, this future has already been actualized. By being successful and continuing to make content, the beauty vlogger constantly re-asserts her empowerment and the fact that her entrepreneurialism continues to be a fulfilling career that supports her financially. Though the acts that have led to her success can be read as narcissism, she has been able to build a career and cobble together an income that allows her to have what many beauty vloggers call the best job in the world.

It is important to keep in mind that these narratives of success privilege a particular brand and iteration of femininity in the online beauty space. Not everyone can become a beauty vlogger. Vlogger who most closely align their performances of femininity with dominant beauty standards tend to be rewarded. In her piece on makeup tutorials, Elizabeth Affuso (2017) notes: “Vlogging culture creates a kind of uber customization of the beauty industry, but this seeming diversity belies the truth that most of these videos are ultimately asking women to aspire to the same feminine beauty standards.” This promotion of the same beauty standards regardless of the specific beauty vlogger further enforces the template of idealized femininity the beauty vlogger projects for her audience. The beauty vlogger creates this template more clearly through the conspicuous consumption we witness her engage in. As an ideal feminine subject, the beauty vlogger also encourages the image of women as consumers of material goods, even beyond the scope of beauty products.

On a nearly weekly basis, we witness the beauty vlogger consuming material goods – fashion, homewares, beauty products, and more. She is always browsing on websites like Asos.com and she regularly films “collections” of her shoes, her handbags, her makeup, and her updated skincare routine. As a beauty vlogger, she does not necessarily purchase *all* of these items since brands often gift her their products, but she does purchase many of them. This consumption is part of the beauty vlogger’s responsibility to always be on top of the latest trends – audiences expect her to wear the latest fashions and test the newest product launches. As one can imagine, all this consumption gets very expensive very quickly.

The beauty vlogger signals her success by displaying this spending power. She clearly makes a sizable income if she is able to purchase items like designer handbags and shoes regularly. In her work, Duffy (2017) calls this phenomenon “status-induced consumerism” (7). In one of my interviews, my interviewee discussed this consumption as linked to what she calls “the luxification lifestyle consumption habits that come with the rising affluence of beauty bloggers.” She names Jaclyn Hill (5.3 million subscribers) and Anna Newton (channel name: The Anna Edit, 459,000 subscribers) as two examples of this “luxification” and continues: “It’s like they start wearing Gucci slippers and wearing Cartier bracelets. I’m like, f*ck off. I’m done with this. I can’t.” For reference, Gucci loafers retail for around \$680. My interviewee expresses the sentiment that these items that mark the “luxification” of the beauty vlogger are not attainable, or responsible, purchases for the average consumer. Often we do not see a beauty vlogger buy just one high-priced, luxury item; luxury goods have become part of her lifestyle and are semi-regular purchases for her. Beauty vloggers often link cheaper alternatives to the designer purchases they make in the descriptions for their videos, but these purchases communicate to the audience that they should want the real, designer version of these items. Luxury purchases create a culture of spending and of judging someone based on what they can buy, and its really hard to witness without questioning the vlogger’s sensitivity. The beauty vlogger often offers a disclaimer that she has saved up for these purchases and that no one should go into credit card debt to get a luxury handbag, but her words are belied when we see these items featured over and over again.

This “luxufication” is not limited to fashion, beauty and other material goods, but also extends to the beauty vlogger’s living situation, the car she drives, and other upgrades she makes in her life to demonstrate her financial success. While this is a trend among beauty vloggers, not every single vlogger engages in these consumption patterns. Another one of my interviewees, Gaby, noted that after signing two book deals for which the advances equaled almost \$200,000, the only “upgrade” that she made to her life was to hire an assistant. Granted, Gaby is a comedian and not a beauty vlogger, but it was humbling to hear her state: “I haven’t moved. I live in the same apartment I did four years ago. I have the same shitty car. I didn’t upgrade my life in any real way other than hiring [my assistant].” It’s not that Gaby did not have the option to move or get a new car, but she chose not to. This is a rare decision to make when living a life that is so public and within a culture where status is marked by what you have.

The beauty vlogger almost always displays her consumption through a link to the product she references. And these links are not innocuous. The links represent the brand of femininity that the beauty vlogger showcases through her purchases. She links the products because her audience asks her to, but also because in those links implicitly suggest that by buying the products a beauty vlogger has, the audience gets closer to being like her and successfully following her template for feminine consumption. Additionally, these links function as a part of the affiliate marketing apparatus which makes up one of the beauty vlogger’s revenue streams. Fashion bloggers and beauty vloggers use services like LikeToKnowIt to monetize the links they provide their audience. Instagram features a “swipe up” function within the stories, where a link can be

accessed by literally swiping up on that specific story. The beauty vlogger gets a commission on any sale resulting from each click on a link (or swipe up). Therefore, it behooves the beauty vlogger to include product links as that revenue in turn funds her purchase of more items that she can link for her audience. Affiliate technologies also create an imperative for beauty vloggers to wear and feature linkable items in their content. This fact is part of the reason we see beauty vloggers consume so many items. They want to wear an item that is linkable, use a beauty product that is linkable, and be able to link anything that appears in a photo or video, because odds are the audience wants to know how they too can get their hands on the product.

Through theorizations of microcelebrity, we see how the beauty vlogger projects a template for idealized femininity that her audience is primed to emulate. The beauty vlogger strategizes so that her content features products that are linkable, down to the clothes and makeup she chooses to wear. As she becomes more successful, we see her upgrade different aspects of her life, inspiring us to desire the same upgrades for ourselves. This template for idealized femininity works at both conscious and subconscious levels, for the beauty vlogger and her audience. What may seem like an innocuous recommendation for a product is perhaps a marketing pitch for something the beauty vlogger was sent for free, and through featuring and promoting it, she drives the sales of something that she was gifted and may not have purchased otherwise. Making links available for nearly everything in a video may cause the audience to make impulsive purchases that they do not need or perhaps cannot really afford because they are following the template the beauty vlogger puts forth.

The Beauty Vlogger as Lifestyle Template

In addition to performing a particular brand of femininity, the beauty vlogger also packages and sells her day-to-day life as a lifestyle that others could potentially emulate. Here, I define “lifestyle” as anything that does not relate to beauty and fashion. As the beauty vlogger continues to make regular content as a part of her job, she mines her life for content. Everything she does becomes fair game for integration into her content because beauty and fashion content cannot sustain the sheer quantity of videos a beauty vlogger produces. Hence, she looks to other aspects of her life – home décor, fitness, cooking, travel – to fill her editorial calendar. Perhaps a more accurate term for “the beauty vlogger” would be “the lifestyle vlogger,” but I choose to engage “the beauty vlogger” since the central theme of her content still revolves around beauty. This transition to lifestyle content was somewhat inevitable as the beauty vlogger has matured, hitting different milestones in her life as she approaches thirty than she was in her early twenties. Many beauty vlogger’s channels, in that sense, have grown up with the content creator.

One consistent theme for the lifestyle template the beauty vlogger creates through her content is an aspiration for “the good life” (Ouellette 2016, 34). As the beauty vlogger matures, she wants to get married and own a home and she wants to continue to have a creative career that inspires and fulfills her. By aspiring to this “good life,” she reinforces these norms of adulthood are things her audience should want as well. In her book *Lifestyle TV*, Laurie Ouellette (2016) explores the concept of the “living brand,” defined as the “merger of celebrity culture and lifestyle expertise” (40-41). Just as Chip

and Joanna Gaines are a living brand who have “commodified the lifestyle expertise” of the Fixer Upper, the beauty vlogger is a lifestyle expert on how to live an entrepreneurial life (43). Put differently, the beauty vlogger is what Ouellette calls an “entrepreneur of the self.”

Increasingly we are called upon to operate as *entrepreneurs of the self* (Rose 1996; Foucault 2010), who embrace values like competition and personal branding, invest in our ‘human capital’ and maximize our quotidian choices to our own strategic advantage (69).

As a microcelebrity, the beauty vlogger strategically uses what is already going on in her life as the basis for her lifestyle content. Her day-to-day life choices become the basis for a portion of the content she produces, perhaps modeled most clearly in her “follow me around” vlogs. This content is literally footage of her life as it unfolds over the course of a day or a week. These “follow me around” vlogs give the audience a glimpse into the beauty vlogger’s daily life, which she of course manages carefully, deciding what she wants to include and what she wants to leave out. The “follow me around” vlog is strategically curated, showing what UK-based vloggers like to call the “best bits” of a beauty vlogger’s week. Yet to the audience, they appear to unfold organically and the audience bases their judgments of the beauty vlogger’s life and lifestyle on the fragments that are shown.

What the beauty vlogger chooses to include and disclose in content like a “follow me around” vlog gets us back to questions of authenticity, particularly as they pertain to the beauty vlogger as microcelebrity. The audience expects the beauty vlogger to be up-to-date, in the know, honest, accessible, and authentic, but these expectations are mediated and tempered by what the beauty vlogger decides to disclose to her audience.

As evidenced through the templates for life that she creates in her content, the beauty vlogger's authenticity depends on illusory images. The audience often feels like they are seeing everything that unfolds in a beauty vlogger's life, while in fact this is usually not the case. This false perception is encouraged by the amount of content the beauty vlogger produces. In her exploration of influencers, Crystal Abidin (2015) notes that "the pace, quantity, and wide circulation of their social media posts among followers contributes to the impression that influencers are constantly sharing aspects of their personal lives with followers." Considering the vast quantity of content the beauty vlogger produces, it is hard for the audience to imagine they are being left out of certain aspects and details of a beauty vlogger's life.

The beauty vlogger's choice about what to disclose and what to hide gets at Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of frontstage and backstage identity performance. Many scholars have used Goffman's theorizations to understand online content producer's decisions to show certain aspects of their lives online and not others (Abidin 2015, 2016; Bishop 2017; Marwick and boyd 2011). In thinking about the frontstage for creative laborers like the beauty vlogger, I find it helpful to draw on Duffy's (2017) notions of visibility. She claims that "maintaining visibility is crucial for success in the attention economy; one must be *seen* in order to bolster her image and burnish her self-brand" (121). Without her audience, the beauty vlogger is irrelevant. Her microcelebrity requires that she makes herself visible across social media platforms on a regular basis. This ties directly to Duffy's (2017) assertion that "compulsory visibility" is a "market logic" in the age of the Internet (126).

If visibility is frontstage, what is backstage for the beauty vlogger? Backstage is the teasing glimpses we see of her life that we presume are unedited. It is witnessing private moments like the beauty vlogger cooking with her partner, a picture from the beauty vlogger's wedding, or anything that simply makes the audience feel like they have gained entry into the beauty vlogger's home or personal space. Affuso (2017) remarks: "The mode of recording utilized by makeup tutorials creates an intimacy of space that is fostered not only by the intimacy of YouTube, but also entering the domestic spaces of vloggers and sharing in the private act of putting on make-up." The simple act of recording a tutorial in one's home is a backstage act as we see a glimpse into the space where the beauty vlogger spends her time. The backstage is anything we perceive as intimate, where we feel that the beauty vlogger is "letting her guard down" (Duffy and Hund 2015, 7). Audiences project authenticity onto these seemingly raw and intimate moments, as Duffy and co-author Emily Hund (2015) explain, presumably because these backstage glimpses "temper the glamorous lifestyle" of the beauty vlogger that we otherwise witness (7).

Boundaries Around Self-Disclosure

Where does the beauty vlogger draw the line between what to show her audience and what to keep private? How much backstage access to her life is enough? I addressed these questions in my conversation with Jess. Talking about a conversation she had with another content creator, Jess articulated the importance of boundaries:

She [the other content creator] was really conflicted by this problem that she had, or this habit that she had. She was like, "It makes me feel like a hypocrite." But I said, "You don't have to tell your followers that. You can be super authentic and very open, but still have a private life and still have secrets." We forget that.

Sometimes I look at other vloggers, and they're vlogging everything, and their whole lives are out there. And that just feels so vulnerable. You know? It's like this weird balancing being authentic but being too vulnerable.

While the beauty vlogger may feel an obligation to share her whole life online, as Jess states, it is acceptable to create boundaries and to decide that you will not discuss certain information online. For example, before Ingrid Nilsen (3.8 million subscribers) came out in 2015, she showed her relationships with boyfriends on camera. Upon coming out, she dated fellow content creator Hannah Hart (2.5 million subscribers) and they showed parts of that relationship online across their social media channels as well. After they broke up, Ingrid made the decision to keep her love life private. She does not mention who she is dating in her videos. She rarely posts photos of her and a partner on her social media channels. She has chosen to keep that part of her life to herself.

Boundaries like those Ingrid now enforces around her love life are sometimes met with questions, or even scorn, by a beauty vlogger's audience. Many people see self-disclosure and openness as part of being online (Duffy 2017, 126). They see it as an obligation. Furthermore, once a beauty vlogger opens up about a certain aspect of her life, the audience feels entitled to know what is going on when her life changes. While the audience never has full context for what happens in a beauty vlogger's life, they believe they do because of the publicness of the beauty vlogger's life and the image that they have backstage access to her life which she "sells" across social media platforms. This sense of entitlement is not necessarily the audience's or the vlogger's fault, but it does empower the audience to ask invasive questions that may disrupt the boundaries a beauty vlogger has set around her privacy.

There are certain things that the beauty vlogger does not show her audience, including day-to-day things like swearing (for the most part) and times when she is drunk. We also have to keep in mind that not everyone in a beauty vlogger's life wants to be on camera, so we do not see time she spends with anyone who has declined being filmed. If a beauty vlogger shows a particular person in her content a lot and then that person disappears from her content, the audience often comments on videos asking if that friend or partner is still in the vlogger's life. Going through something like a breakup is hard enough for the average person, but when a beauty vlogger breaks up with a partner, especially a long-term one, she must field constant questions from her audience about where that person is and if they broke up. Recently, four UK-based beauty vloggers made videos addressing their breakups, mostly prompted by incessant questions and speculation from viewer comments. Suzie Bonaldi (channel name: HelloOctoberXO, 427,000 subscribers), Alix Coburn (channel name: I Covet Thee, 418,000 subscribers), Estée Lalonde (previous channel name: essiebutton, 1.2 million subscribers), and Amelia Sopher (channel name: Amelia Liana, 483,000 subscribers) all experienced break-ups after long-term relationships. Each vlogger felt an obligation to address questions about their relationship status once it became clear that they were single. These beauty vlogger's commodified life online involves their partners at one time or another and to varying degrees, and thus they felt compelled to address the absence of these people in their lives. But events like breakups are often complicated and the beauty vlogger is not necessarily entitled to air all the details of the breakup. Suzie notes in her video that the personal questions she got about her breakup on videos that had nothing to do with her

relationship and did not show her ex-partner undercut the efforts she makes and time she spends producing content for her audience (“What’s been going on: Life Update | Hello October”). Allana, who also went through a public break-up, expressed that she learned that she “can’t share too much of herself on the Internet” because “the more you share, the more people have to use against you” (“Answering Your Burning Questions | allanaramaa”). Allana also shared that she posts content featuring her in her happiest state, acknowledging that she is manufacturing an “unrealistic perfect world” and “fake online life” by doing so. When her previous relationship did not work out, Allana recounted that she not only had to deal with the breakup, but the online questions and vitriol about the breakup too. After that experience, she concluded that for her it is “not worth sharing that part of my life” (“Let's Talk About Some Things | allanaramaa”). Navigating these boundaries is extremely difficult for beauty vloggers who appear to live their entire lives online, and who feel pressure to share personal details about their lives to appear more authentic and relatable. Suzie and Allana both experienced the entitlement viewers feel to incessantly ask them invasive and personal questions. This audience behavior is a testament to how different online behavior is to how people act in real life. Dealing with these inquiries is part and parcel of the public lifestyle of the beauty vlogger, but it does not mean that it is not rude, unwarranted, or invasive.

Two other moments that stand out as examples of audience entitlement to knowledge about a beauty vlogger’s personal life. In late December, Fleur Bell (channel name: Fleur DeForce, 1.4 million subscribers) had her first child. When a beauty vlogger is pregnant, she makes a conscious decision about how much and when to share her

pregnancy, and Fleur was pretty private about her pregnancy, particularly about the name she had chosen for her baby. When her baby arrived, Fleur posted on Instagram, but still did not disclose the name, a choice that her audience did not take well. They had been with her through the whole pregnancy, so why would she not share the name?! It was not until one month after giving birth that Fleur finally made a video to introduce River (“Meet My BABY GIRL | Fleur de Force”). Fleur explained that she had withheld sharing the name because it was unconventional and in her post-partum state, could not have handled comments about her name choice sooner. In another instance, Alix had been inconsistent with her social media engagement for about a year before she made a video explaining where she had been and why she had not reliably been posting. As it turns out, her mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer and had passed away (“What’s Really Been Going On | I Covet Thee”). Despite this loss, Alix felt as though she owed her audience an explanation and she shared this personal update in a YouTube video. These examples illustrate the downsides of living a beauty vlogger’s public life. She cannot take a week off from posting on social media without an explanation for her audience. She will be asked about her personal life in the comments of every video she posts and across other social media outlets.

The lifestyle template the beauty vlogger cultivates is mostly glamorous, but it also has downsides. Once a beauty vlogger shares a certain amount of information about herself online, the audience comes to expect disclosure and access to her “backstage” life on a regular basis. And for the most part, the beauty vlogger does provide that for her audience. The beauty vlogger curates and manages self-disclosure about things beyond

beauty as a key element of her identity – it is a part of the self she sells to her audience. Personal disclosures also create connection between the beauty vlogger and her audience, which is critical to maintaining her relevance to their lives. But this level of publicity is not without its struggles like invasions of privacy and its incessant questions across social media sites. For better or for worse, this audience expectation and entitlement to personal information is part and parcel of living life in the public eye.

The Beauty Vlogger as a Racialized Subject

The beauty vlogger's microcelebrity relies on the commodification of not only her public persona but also her entire identity. In particular, this section focuses specifically on the beauty vlogger's racial identity. Beyond the beauty vlogger and the beauty industry, "[Whiteness] occupies an unquestioned and unexamined place of esteem, power and privilege" (Bell and Hartmann 2007, 907). Western culture normalizes a White positionality to the degree that it often goes unseen and uninterrogated. In *White*, Richard Dyer (1997) calls whiteness "ordinary" and aligns it with what is human. The dominant positionality of Whiteness is "secured through its habitual performance," according to Raka Shome (2014, 12). Drawing from the work of Sara Ahmed (2007), Shome explains that Whiteness "secures its ideological power through constant repetition of its logics" (12). In this cultural context in which Whiteness dominates, Joyce Bell and Douglas Hartmann position those who are non-White: "racial others 'add flavor' or 'bring fresh ideas' to a white center" (909).

Given this context, I contend that the beauty vlogger, as she is theorized in this dissertation, assumes a White positionality. This subjectivity reflects both the dominance

of Whiteness within contemporary culture and its authority within the beauty industry. Explicitly racialized analyses of creative industries are rare (see Pham 2015), as are analyses of public-facing creative laborers who are non-White. Additionally, the “authentic” beauty vlogger is more often than not the White beauty vlogger – the beauty vlogger who is systemically privileged because she represents the idealized consumer audience for the products she helps sell.

Discourses of “inclusivity” and “diversity” make the online beauty space appear welcoming to all people. Yet, like the broader cultural structures that inform them, these spaces reproduce and reward Whiteness and White subjects. Brooke Duffy (2017) looks at the link between authenticity and the fashion blogosphere’s “outward promise of diversity” where “plus-sized, ethnic, and differently abled fashion bloggers” are all made to feel included (103). While there may be space for fashion bloggers who identify with these diversity markers to start fashion blogs, Duffy’s (2017) book explores how the “aspirational labor” of these fashion bloggers often never turns into a stable, reliable, and full-time income. This “outward promise of diversity” is a false promise, before even considering identities that intersect with gender such as race, class, or ability. Like the fashion blogosphere, the realm of beauty vloggers faces the issue endemic to most creative digital industries: more people want to break into the industry than the market can accommodate. In beauty vlogging’s neoliberal and post-racial context, there is not much space for non-normative gender performance and racial identity, despite the prevalent discourses to the contrary. The beauty industry at large caters to a White

consumer, and thus the beauty vloggers who have become a part of that industry also “sell” a particular (self-)brand that aligns with that valuable identity.

This racialization of the beauty vlogger is not overt. Rather, it is deeply embedded in many facets of beauty culture and into the notion of the beauty vlogger’s authentic performance. The value of Whiteness is revealed in shade ranges that cater to the skin tones and undertones of Caucasian consumers and veiled in “the language of aesthetics” that refers to non-White complexions as “deep,” “rich,” “caramel,” and “mocha” (Wissinger 2015, 2016). Beauty culture reflects broader sentiments of post-racial ideology, as the systemic privileging of White identities upholds the whole apparatus of the beauty industry. Bell and Hartmann discuss the basis of discourses of diversity in what they call “white worldviews:”

The discourse of diversity captured in our interviews rests on a white normative perspective. This perspective starts from the dominance of white worldviews, and see the culture, experiences, and indeed *lives*, of people of color only as they relate to or interact with the white world. (907)

The beauty industry mimics this attitude. The industry imagines its ideal consumer as White and therefore crafts its products to fit the needs of that consumer audience. It is not unusual for complexion products to have just a few shades in a range included for people of color. The lack of a full shade spectrum requires darker-skinned consumers to purchase more than one shade in order to mix their own shade, or worse, to feel they have no shade option at all. Therefore, notions of a “diverse” beauty industry hinge on systemic industry standards that devalue those who are not White (Tate 2017). This framework reproduces the imagined White consumer and moves concerns about brands’ inability or unwillingness to provide products for people of color to the periphery.

Reflecting the neoliberal context in which this dissertation situates its intervention about beauty vloggers, the beauty industry's systemic shortcomings are displaced onto individual consumers; it is the consumer's deficiency that they are not part of a wide enough consumer base to have their needs met. Shirley Anne Tate speaks to these ideas as part of what she calls the "aesthetic racialisation" of the beauty industry (204). She notes that the beauty industry is one "in which the white ideal continues to be peddled by cosmetic companies, advertisers and entrepreneurs alike" (204). This racialization runs deep in the beauty industry; it functions through unspoken adherence from most corners of the industry and a tacit understanding of and continual reproduction of White hegemonic ideals of Western beauty.

With that said, it is important to look at counter-examples to this common privileging of the White consumer within the beauty industry. Rihanna's "Fenty Beauty" line launched in late 2017 with an unprecedented forty shades of foundation, and consumers and critics lauded the line for its groundbreaking inclusivity for women of *all* colors. The brand's tagline is "Beauty for All" and on the landing page there is a note from Rihanna:

Fenty Beauty was created for everyone: for women of all shades, personalities, attitudes, cultures, and races. I wanted everyone to feel included. That's the real reason I made this line (www.fentybeauty.com).

The mixing of overt racialized language with other personality traits makes this line not *just* for people of color, but for "everyone." I draw from Bell and Hartmann once again, as they find discourses of diversity often accompanied by what they call "an aura of optimism" (896). Rihanna is a woman of color and crafted a line of beauty products that

caters to women like herself. Yet this line is not designed just for women of color like Iman Cosmetics, Black Radiance, or the CoverGirl Queen collection. Her brand positioning maintains claims of “inclusion” and “diversity,” making her line widely palatable for *all* consumers. In this way, Fenty Beauty uses a discourse that names race as a barrier for inclusion, but not so much so that it would offend the White consumer base for these products. While this strategy does not demonstrate a completely “colorblind rhetoric,” Rihanna’s language does undercut some of the strides Fenty Beauty attempts to make and the widespread celebration of the line’s inclusivity. Bell and Hartmann explain Americans have widely adopted a colorblind rhetoric “because colorblindness fits comfortably within core liberal-individualist ideals. This allows Americans to downplay the existence of fundamental racial differences and persistent racial inequalities” (905). While Fenty Beauty names the racism in the beauty industry, it also fundamentally contradicts itself by appealing to the lowest common denominator consumer base – White people. Fenty Beauty made a statement with its launch, but not *too* much of a statement as to offend potential White customers.

As can be expected, Fenty Beauty is held up as an example of the beauty industry’s future direction with regard to what complexion ranges should look like. All the shades sold, and quickly. It was hard to keep any shade of the foundation in stock when it launched. As such, this one product launch is being celebrated as a pivotal moment for the beauty industry because it dispels the myth that there is not a big enough consumer base to justify including a wide range of shades for non-White complexion products (Labouvier 2017, Muller 2017). But we have to remember that this is *one*

product launch. One foundation of the 237 SKUs of foundation available for purchase on Sephora.com.¹⁸ One product cannot shift an entire industry, though in many respects Fenty Beauty is being put on a pedestal for doing just that. The public celebration of Fenty Beauty sets a high bar for what beauty consumers expect from complexion products' shade ranges in the future. This sets the industry up to let down this newly empowered consumer base.¹⁹

In this manner, Fenty Beauty reflects the persistence of post-racial ideologies within the beauty industry. Race is named and engaged in order to target a consumer based and to ignite larger industrial shifts around the inclusion of complexion products for people of color. Fenty Beauty commodifies race and sells it to consumers through each bottle of foundation. But, returning to the text from Fenty Beauty's website, it sells this commodified racial identity to "everyone." Both Ralina Joseph (2013) and Amy Hasinoff (2008) have looked at the commodification of race and racial identities in *America's Next Top Model*, and I see many parallels between their analyses and what is happening with Fenty Beauty. Modeling, another feminized industry like beauty vlogging, has become an important site through which to engage with racialization and post-race modes of thinking. Through the figure of Tyra Banks and the models she trains on *America's Next Top Model*, both Joseph and Hasinoff analyze with how the model's marked, racialized body is packaged and sold in the modeling industry, much like the microcelebrity. The model must be able to turn on and turn off her race, only engaging

¹⁸ As of August 15, 2018.

¹⁹ In June 2018, Too Faced expanded the shade range of their popular Born This Way foundation in partnership with beauty vlogger Jackie Aina (2.6 million subscribers). Too Faced added nine shades to the line, all for medium to dark skintones ("IT'S HERE! My Collab With Too Faced! Born This Way | Jackie Aina").

with it when it is productive (and lucrative) for her (Hasinoff 337). In this manner, race becomes what Hasinoff calls “a valuable commodity” and a “lucrative flexible personal asset” (324). Within a consumer marketplace, where modeling is considered a career, post-racial and neoliberal ideologies coalesce. Race is a “personal asset,” not a system of oppression and exclusion. And the rhetoric of race, as Hasinoff aptly notes, is “deployed to commodify race and maintain its political invisibility” (326). Joseph describes Banks as a figure who demonstrates appropriate racial performance for her trainees, teaching them to “perform racial transcendence” (126). A model of color is taught to perform both distinct and ambiguous racial identities to find her place within the modeling industry, which involves shifting racialized codes depending on the situation she encounters (125-126). Joseph concludes that on *America’s Next Top Model*, “race becomes simply another facet of beauty or a beauty trait that is ultimately malleable, and ultimately a matter of lifestyle choice” (152). By continually situating race as individual and flexible vis-a-vis modeling, Hasinoff and Joseph point to post-racial discourse that undercuts and masks the material and systemic dynamics of race and racism. Fenty Beauty has followed these patterns, making the line palatable to “everyone” by playing up its malleability and flexibility; the line has a shade match for “everyone,” not just the people of color who are left out of a huge segment of this market.

What has been interesting to observe since Fenty Beauty’s success is how its accomplishment has colored the way other complexion product launches are received. As I have witnessed, the beauty vlogger has largely led this shift through the framing of her product reviews. Prior to Fenty Beauty, the beauty vlogger’s review of a foundation

would usually address the shade range, noting that it lacked many options for “deeper” skintones, and that is about as far it would go. But in the months since Fenty’s success, beauty vloggers are paying a bit more than lip service to shade range “inclusivity.” When Tarte’s Shape Tape Matte and Hydrating Foundations launched in January 2018, beauty vloggers of all races let it be known that they were not impressed by the range’s three shades for people of color out of fifteen total shades. While some beauty vloggers did review the foundation, others posted on social media that they would not review the product, and/or they would take down their reviews as they did not want to support a brand and product that was so egregiously not inclusive (Underwood 2018). These beauty vloggers did not want to align themselves or their self-brand with Tarte in the name of maintaining their authenticity and their commitment to only promote beauty products that fit the voice and public image they have crafted for themselves online. Catherine Squires (2007) notes that in framing political news, “assumptions about the majority (White) audience steer reporters to frame racial events from the standpoint of White Americans” (5). Reporters assume a majority White news audience, and thus adopt that standpoint. Beauty vloggers, even those of color, tend to frame their videos for a largely White imagined audience. I am still thinking particularly about complexion product reviews. For the majority of this imagined White audience, there is a shade match in a major range at a place like Sephora, a department store, or even a drugstore. This reasoning is why saying “there might not be the greatest options for skintones deeper than mine” has often been enough acknowledgement for the audience to perceive that the beauty vlogger has completed a thorough review of a complexion product. With broader cultural shifts

around activism and feminism, beauty vloggers have adopted a more activist stance and tone in their reviews, particularly those of the Tarte Shape Tape Foundation. I examine three reviews of the foundation together – reviews by Jackie Aina (2.6 million subscribers), Deepica Mutyala (previous channel name: deepicam, 204,000 subscribers), and Fleur Bell (channel name: Fleur DeForce, 1.4 million subscribers).

Jackie Aina is a Black beauty vlogger who is known for, as she calls it, “roasting” brands. It is part of her self-brand online. She is outspoken on social media and admits that her content is not to everyone’s taste. She does not shy away from saying what is on her mind in her content. In her video about the Tarte Shape Tape Foundation, she states that when she saw press photos of the shade range, she had no intention to review the product despite its highly anticipated launch (“Black Girls React to Tarte Shape Tape Foundation | Jackie Aina”). It was when she received the three darkest shades as PR from Tarte for consideration/review that she decided to make the video. She notes that she decided to make the video because when seen in person, the actual shades were worse than what she had anticipated from photos posted online. Fellow Black beauty vlogger Alissa Ashley (1.5 million subscribers) joins Jackie for part of the video. Neither one of them has a shade match in the range, as launched.²⁰ Despite this fact, Jackie still wants to give Tarte the “benefit of the doubt” and does a side-by-side application of the two formulas, each on half of her face. She tries to get beyond the orange cast the foundation gives her face, but she and Ashley agree, “this is just bad.” Jackie tells Tarte what she thinks of this launch: “I just don’t appreciate the blatant erasure of a whole spectrum of

²⁰ Upon the launch, Tarte announced that ten more shades would be added to the initial range of fifteen. As of August 15, 2018, there are twenty-five shades of each formula for sale.

people [...] it doesn't even look like they tried." Jackie continues by noting that in her opinion of their marketing and Instagram feed, Tarte "has the be the most whitewashed brand out there." The brand is not inclusive, and this foundation launch reinforces that in her mind. She sees the launch as a missed opportunity; Tarte "could have a beautiful gradient" of shades. She concludes her video by stating that no matter what other shades are launched, she will not buy, use, or recommend the foundation.

Like Jackie, Deepica Mutyala is a beauty vlogger of color. She is South Indian and an advocate for inclusivity in the beauty industry. In fact, she launched "Tinted" – a digital community to empower "all the shades in between" – within weeks of the Tarte Foundation launch ("My Skin is NOT a TREND! INTRODUCING: TINTED | Deepica Mutyala"). Deepica posted her video about a week after Jackie's, and by then the backlash against Tarte for its lack of inclusivity was in full force ("Brown Girl Friendly?? TARTE SHAPE TAPE FOUNDATION Honest Review + Wear Test | Deepica Mutyala"). Since Deepica loved the Tarte Shape Tape concealer (launched prior to the foundation), she decided to review the foundation despite the controversy. Like Jackie, she used each of the two formulations on each half of her face. She notes that she has a very low bar for brands having a shade that will match her skin tone, so when the foundation makes her look whiter (her word choice) she is not surprised. Deepica has worked in the beauty industry and understands the logistics of a foundation launch like this one. She explains that a brand like Tarte does not really have an excuse to throw in a few deep shades to "check off a box." For Deepica, Tarte is just the latest example in a broader trend of making complexion products designed only for a White consumer base.

Deepica then comes back on camera, noting that it is the next day. She is noticeably angry. She, like Jackie, wishes that Tarte would have “spread the shades out” to “give the melanin a little bit more love.” In her mind, this launch was a lost opportunity for Tarte and what she calls “a fail.” Tarte is one of the biggest players in the industry, and in Deepica’s mind, they need to do better.

Fleur Bell is a UK-based White beauty vlogger. She did not make a dedicated video about the Tarte foundation like Jackie and Deepica, but instead featured it in her monthly favorites video posted in early February 2018 (“January FAVES | Fleur De Force”). For context, Fleur had her first child in late December 2017, and took most of the month of January off to adjust to new motherhood. Therefore, she was not as up-to-date as she would normally be about the happenings in the beauty industry. After posting her favorites video featuring the Tarte foundation, Fleur was quickly called out by her audience since she did not address the controversy about the shade range. She only mentions that she is happy to see a longwearing, high coverage, non-matte foundation on the market, referencing the hydrating formula in the Tarte release. After learning about the controversy with the shade range, Fleur posted an apology Tweet, and an abridged version of her Tweet in the description box of her favorites video:

I’m really sorry that so many of you feel upset that I’ve included the new Tarte foundation in my monthly favourites. I was genuinely unaware of the recent controversy surrounding their poor range of shades to cater for darker skin tones. I 100% put my hands up and admit total ignorance here. It’s something I would normally be aware of and would definitely comment on, however I have spent most of the past 6 weeks offline after the arrival of baby River and was completely unaware how many shades the foundation came in, let alone the lack of diversity in their shade choices. I’m sorry if any of you felt I was being insensitive to the issue for including it, I was completely unaware and watching the video back now = [face palm emoji].

Fleur's ignorance about the conversation surrounding the foundation launch is an honest mistake, but also an example of the beauty industry's systemic privileging of White people. There was a shade in the range for Fleur. Why would she know about the lack of diversity in shades that were not her own? This fact is particularly relevant since Tarte's PR package only included three shades of foundation for each beauty vlogger who received it.²¹ This does not excuse Fleur's ignorance, which she herself admits, but does point to the fact that vloggers like Jackie and Deepica are the ones who carry the onus to call brands like Tarte out for the lack of inclusive shade ranges. Awareness of whether a shade range suits a variety of skin tones falls on beauty vloggers of color who directly experience not having a shade match in many brand's ranges. Unlike Fleur, the lack of deep shades directly effects Jackie's and Deepica's ability to review a complexion product. In this instance, Fleur and other White beauty vloggers like her have the privilege of being ignorant. The beauty market values her as a consumer and regularly produces complexion products to suit her skin tone. As with many other non-dominant populations across consumer industries, the marketplace excludes beauty vloggers like Jackie and Deepica, who thus do not have the luxury of ignorance. Their identity as non-White, full-time beauty vloggers puts them in a position where they are continuously the people who address issues of racism and exclusion within the beauty industry – this is why Jackie has her reputation for being outspoken online. As public figures, beauty vloggers like Jackie and Deepica are tokenized. They comprise two of very few voices of color who have the platform (on YouTube and other social media sites) to both call out

²¹ The PR packages are featured in Jackie's and Deepica's videos. Presumably Tarte included the three shades that would be the closest match(es) for the given vlogger.

brands like Tarte when they get a launch very wrong and to give voice to their audiences who are also underrepresented within the beauty industry. Jackie and Deepica become the voices for the populations of consumers whose voices go unheard and whose skin tones are erased in the consumer marketplace.

In his book *Appropriating Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson (2003) talks about how Blackness is often appropriated in ways that are designed to exclude (3). What it means to be Black is reduced through this appropriation, and made devoid of its meaning as a “complex and nuanced racial signifier” (3). Similarly, Jackie and Deepica are reduced to their skin tones in the case of the Tarte foundation launch and more broadly within the beauty vlogging industry. What does it mean for Jackie to be authentically herself as a Black beauty vlogger? And how is that authenticity tied to a certain performance of race and Blackness that has a history much longer than the past decade in which beauty vlogging has become a phenomenon? What are the consequences of women like Jackie and Deepica speaking up and speaking out against brands like Tarte? Will they affect any change within the beauty industry that is so deeply steeped and invested in their imagined White consumer base?

I ask these questions not so much to pose concrete answers, but to circle back to the concepts of authenticity and self-branding. How do beauty vloggers like Jackie and Deepica, who represent those the beauty industry actively disenfranchises, maintain an “authentic” self and self-brand while being a part of the beauty industry’s the selling apparatus? Fleur can be sensitive to the criticism of Tarte, apologize for her oversight, and move on. She performs her care about this issue (which is not to say that she does not

genuinely care about issues of racism and discrimination in the beauty industry), but promoting the foundation has no lasting impact on her personally.

Conclusion

The beauty vlogger is nothing without her audience. Her audience makes her visible, affirms her “authenticity,” and consumes her microcelebrity. Her audience also makes the public life she leads relevant; her life becomes a template for them to follow in order to attain or aspire to a certain lifestyle, and she guides the audience in how to perform an idealized version of femininity in their own lives through the consumption of the same material goods the vlogger consumes.

The beauty vlogger’s gender and race inform her saleable image. In an industry that privileges a White subjectivity, the burden to speak up and speak out when brands that claim to be inclusive of all consumers fail at their mission falls to non-White beauty vloggers. These vlogger’s racial identity becomes an integral part of her self-brand, as she brings visibility to populations of people who are disenfranchised by the assumed Whiteness projected onto the beauty consumer.

In the next chapter I will focus on the beauty vlogger as “influencer.” As an extension of her public persona, the beauty vlogger’s influence hinges on the seemingly personal connection she fosters with her audience. This influence makes the beauty vlogger a valuable part of the beauty industry’s marketing and advertising apparatus, but like the beauty vlogger’s lifestyle-oriented content, her influence extends beyond to the beauty industry.

Chapter Three – The Beauty Vlogger as Influencer

In January 2018, *The New York Times* published an exposé on the black market for Twitter followers. The authors noted what they call a “follower factory,” operated by companies such as Devumi, the company profiled in this piece, which openly sells Twitter followers and retweets, as well as views on YouTube, endorsements on LinkedIn, and more (Confessore, Dance, Harris, and Hansen 2018). According to this investigative journalism, Devumi provides their 200,000 customers with more than 200 million followers, sold for about a penny each. The reporters go on to note that roughly 15% of active users on Twitter are bots “designed to simulate real people” – they are essentially shadow accounts of *real* Twitter users.

Why does this underground market exist? Who is buying followers on social media? Underneath this specific story is a larger phenomenon linked to the rise of the entrepreneurial career of the “influencer” – the beauty vlogger is a prime example of this new career path. For an influencer, according to Confessore et al. (2018), virtual status accrued through the number of followers someone has on social media becomes “a real-world currency,” dictating who is hired for particular branded partnerships and how much they are compensated. In other words, an influencer’s “market value” is “directly linked to his or her follower counts on social media.” As the authors of the *New York Times* article crassly stated, “the more people influencers reach, the more money they make.”

This *New York Times* article was not the first time I had heard about buying followers on social media – beauty vloggers have been discussing it for quite some time.

Back in November 2017, YouTube beauty vlogger Mallory Cornelison (previous channel name: mallory1712, 102,000 subscribers) tweeted:

I get so many emails about buying views and subs [subscribers] on YouTube...are people really doing this?!! Like is this a real thing?!

Not only are beauty vloggers flooded with emails regarding sponsorship offers, they are also emailed consistently with offers to buy subscribers, followers, and views for their social media content. Sponsorship solicitations came up in each of my interviews, at VidCon, and is commonly referenced in YouTube content as well. Even before the *New York Times* published their exposé, many beauty vloggers used authentication services to verify that they had not bought followers, and then proudly shared this information with their audiences across their social media outlets. But just because they did not purchase followers does not discount the possibility that others had; in fact, their need to publicly proclaim their innocence suggests this behavior is widespread.

In reaction to the *New York Times* piece, Ian Bogost wrote a piece for *The Atlantic* on the topic of fake followers. Here, Bogost critiques the importance of visibility and influence on social media and interrogates the idea that all followers are fake. He laments, “The problem with Twitter – and with social media in general – isn’t that influence can be faked. It’s that it is seen to have so much significance in the first place.” Buying followers is not the problem for Bogost. He sees followers, at a base level, as all simply representing a number on a profile for an influencer. He digs deeper, and questions why markets of influence have gained traction in contemporary culture. Where does the pressure to appear influential stem from and why is influence so essential? He bases his conclusion on similar logic to the hypotheses discussed in Chapter Two related

to “the attention economy.” Bogost concludes that it is “marketplaces of attention” (rather than those around ideas or products or services) that enables the existence of a thriving “black market” for buying followers. Followers beget attention and influence, and influence is social and cultural currency in today’s social media landscape.

In this chapter, I intervene in scholarly conversations about influencers and social media influence. This literature (Abidin 2015, 2016; Duffy 2017; Duffy and Wissinger 2017) often utilizes the term “influencer” at face value and does not interrogate what social media influencers, like the beauty vlogger, are able to influence beyond commodifying and monetizing their lives, as discussed through the concept of the microcelebrity in Chapter Two. The term influencer has become ubiquitous in contemporary media culture, and authors increasingly use it as a catchall term with no specific definition or referent. In this chapter, I argue that the beauty vlogger, when understood as an influencer, is more than the one-dimensional product pusher (or sell-out) that scholars and journalists describe. Rather, she harnesses the influence she has attained through her audience in order to take on the role of an advocate for issues she cares about, within and beyond the beauty industry. The beauty vlogger uses the attention and currency her public-facing lifestyle affords her and uses it to make a positive difference in the world around her. That difference can be as small as making an audience member feel better about herself or can have a much larger scope, as I will discuss as this chapter develops.

The beauty vlogger is nothing without her audience. But that is not to imply that her audience are passive dupes consuming her content or that they buy anything and

everything she recommends. Rather, the influence the beauty vlogger garners is the result of a specific relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience. Building on my argument in Chapter Two about authenticity and microcelebrity, I engage and update the mass communication concepts of “parasocial relations” (Horton and Wohl 1956) and “personal influence” (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) as they apply to the figure of the beauty vlogger. I engage the concept of “parasocial relations” in particular by following the lead of scholars (Abidin 2015, 2016; Marwick 2015; Marwick and boyd 2011) who have used the concept to explain the experience of intimacy online. I am aware that these two concepts exist at odds with the cultural studies framework that informs this dissertation. Thus, I utilize them through frameworks set forth by social media scholars like Abidin, boyd, and Marwick, who have recuperated these mass communication concepts for cultural studies work. With these concepts in mind, I unpack the relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience as one that appears to be two-way, but in actuality is a one-way interaction from the beauty vlogger to her audience. This relationship is not as vacuous Bogost’s description illustrates; it is one-way, but the beauty vlogger is not the only party who benefits. The beauty vlogger takes on the role of a “trusted friend” in relation to her audience members, educating her consumer audience about beauty products they are buying or plan to buy. The beauty vlogger’s influence is grounded in the engagement,²² or interactivity as Pham (2015) calls it, that she fosters with her audience through her content (Meyers 2018). The number of followers the beauty vlogger

²² This engagement is about more than subscriber counts or views. On YouTube, “engagement” is linked to “watch time.” This metric is made available to creators through YouTube Analytics. Views are less important than for the time a viewer devotes to given video. If expressed as a ratio (watch time vs. length of video), the higher the ratio, the better the vlogger’s engagement.

has is important, but it does not always-already overshadow the connection she works to cultivate with people who take the time to engage with her content, namely through liking and commenting on her posts (Pham 2015, 126).

The beauty vlogger uses the influence she garners through her audience's engagement with her content in order to gain brand deals and sponsorships within the beauty industry. Following the lead of beauty vloggers who came before her, she also uses her influence to diversify her portfolio of content beyond the scope of beauty industry. Her audience provides her with a form of social currency that people outside of the beauty vlogging realm can comprehend, mostly through her metrics (subscribers, views, etc.). This currency translates to other media industries like publishing, podcasting, product development (cosmetic and otherwise), and more. The influence that she has established as a beauty vlogger, on YouTube and across other social media platforms, translates into opportunities to pursue and monetize other creative projects, because her audience views her as a "trusted friend" and will presumably follow her and become supporters of her endeavors beyond the realm of beauty vlogging.

Perhaps the most important intervention in this chapter is examining the influence a beauty vlogger gains when she uses the platform she has created for herself around beauty and lifestyle to advocate for social and cultural issues that extend beyond the beauty industry. Popular culture holds beauty vloggers (and other influencers) up as thought and opinion leaders because of the wide audiences they reach through the content they create. The beauty vlogger is not a traditional celebrity, but people (especially young girls, as I witnessed first hand at VidCon) admire and even idolize the beauty vloggers

they connect with and follow. Hence, when a beauty vlogger speaks up for social or political causes she believes in – from LGBTQ and women’s rights to bathroom bills designed to exclude transgender people – she uses her influence for more than commercial gain within the beauty industry. Her advocacy does not exist completely outside of her commercial life as a beauty vlogger, and this commercialized context mitigates this influence to a certain extent – for example, a video about social issues is likely still monetized. This commercial context matters and is important to keep in mind, but I do not believe that it completely undermines the intention of this non-beauty content. The beauty vlogger educates her audience about issues that they may not be aware of or knowledgeable about, rather than using them as a form of currency that allows her to leverage her vlogging success into other projects. She acts as an advocate and an activist, using her voice and her platform to speak about topics that are important to her, and that her audience may otherwise never hear about.

The Beauty Vlogger and Her Audience

Without her audience, the beauty vlogger would be irrelevant; she would not have a job as a beauty vlogger. Beauty vlogging, and other forms of influencing, would have no traction without an audience, as the audience is the object of influence. Researchers who study social media, including those who look at influencers (Abidin 2015, 2016), have reclaimed the theoretical concept of “parasocial relations” from mass communication scholarship to help understand the relationship between the influencer and his or her audience (Marwick 2015, Marwick and boyd 2011). By looking at the relationship of the influencer and audience through this lens, it becomes apparent that the

influencer (in this case the beauty vlogger) has much more to gain from her audience than they do from her. Yet, on the surface the relationship between the two may not appear this one-sided.

In Crystal Abidin's (2016) work on influencers in Singapore, she notes how "Influencers mobilise different modes of intimacy labour ... in order for followers to feel a sense of closeness" with that influencer (89-90). In essence, in order to take on the role of the "trusted friend" to her audience, the beauty vlogger performs intimacy with her audience. The beauty vlogger's performance is often marked by sharing personal details about her life, as discussed in Chapter Two, and through her use of direct address in her content (Burgess and Green 2010). This idea builds on Abidin's (2015) work, in which she engages Horton and Wohl's (1956) definition of "parasocial relations:"

They [Horton and Wohl] "posit that television and radio personalities produce one-sided interpersonal connections and an illusion of intimacy with their audience through conversational small talk that appears informal, casual, and responsive" ... "without any reciprocity involved."

The "parasocial" is an important mode for understanding the relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience, as it is not a reciprocal relationship (Marwick and boyd 2010, 2011). The beauty vlogger can post one video, one Tweet, one Instagram post or story, or one Snapchat and make her audience feel as though she is interacting with each one of them individually. This position is not reciprocal or reversible (depending on the beauty vlogger), as comments and direct messages in response to those posts often go unanswered by the beauty vlogger. As such, the relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience is mostly one-way, from the audience to the beauty vlogger. Alice Marwick (2015) further expands on this relationship by engaging the work of David C.

Giles (2002), noting “in parasocial relationships, a fan responds to a media figure as if he or she were a personal acquaintance” (139). The one-way relationship between the audience and the beauty vlogger is not comparable to celebrity and fan, but more to a relationship between friends, again transforming the beauty vlogger into the “trusted friend” figure in relation to her audience.

When looking at “parasocial relations,” it is important to go back to the original source, which in this case is an article by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl published in 1956. In this article, Horton and Wohl theorize the parasocial relationship, imagining it through the mediated format of the television. They note the relationship that develops between the performer and his or her audience/fans. Much like the relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience, television “give[s] the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer” (215). Horton and Wohl posit that the use of direct address to the audience is partially responsible for this illusion, and is the same way the beauty vlogger addresses her audience on YouTube (215). The pair continue: “The interaction, characteristically, is one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development (215). Here again Horton and Wohl emphasize the one-way relationship between the performer and audience. Power is in the hands of the performer, just as it is in the hands of the beauty vlogger, who gains “influence” from her audience but performs intimacy and caring for her audience much more than she enacts it. She thanks her audience for making the opportunities she gets possible and asks for feedback and video requests from them, but still reaps monetary and other benefits from her audience’s engagement (Affuso 2017). Interestingly, Horton and

Wohl note the importance of media technology in enabling this parasocial relationship between performer and audience. They note, “the technical devices of the media themselves are exploited to create illusions of intimacy” (218). For Horton and Wohl, television moved visual media into the home, where it had previously existed in public spaces like movie theaters. The intimacy fostered by watching media content and performers in one’s own home created a new context for audience connection with performers. Similarly, when thinking about the beauty vlogger, laptop computers and mobile devices like smartphones allow the audience to connect with the beauty vlogger on demand, across YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat. But importantly, this interaction is with a real person, rather than with the fictional characters Horton and Wohl theorize. And this interaction can be fostered across multiple media platforms rather than the singular television. Despite the immense changes in media distribution between 1956 and today, Horton and Wohl’s performer and the contemporary beauty vlogger both do not physically see their audience; their relationship with their audience is mediated through the technology of the time.

It is through a parasocial relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience that the beauty vlogger grows and maintains her status online by engaging with her audience, or more aptly, by providing a space for her audience to engage with her content. The beauty vlogger needs subscribers, likes, comments, and other markers of viewer engagement in order to make her living. And the audience knows this fact. Many have witnessed the shift from AdSense income to a brand sponsorship model for YouTubers’ main form of compensation and know that their favorite beauty vloggers

cobble together income from multiple streams of revenue (as outlined in the Introduction). Thus, the parasocial relationship between the beauty vlogger and her audience is a calculated one, even though she appears to be a “trusted friend.” It is not that she is *not* a “trusted friend,” but that she also has ulterior (monetary) motivation to produce a regular stream of content. Her audience is increasingly aware of these motivations.

The beauty vlogger exploits much of this “trusted friendship” through the persona that she creates for herself online, as discussed in Chapter Two. Here, I use the word “persona” decisively, because I return to Horton and Wohl’s (1956) theorization of “parasocial relations.” The pair note how the “performer” is “developed into a persona” because, through television programming, “the persona offers, above all, a continuing relationship. His appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life” (216). Extrapolating from Horton and Wohl demonstrates why consistency in uploading and posting content is so important for the beauty vlogger. Like the persona of the performer, the beauty vlogger needs to enter her audience’s daily routines, and they tend to engage more regularly with her content if they know when she posts it – through a schedule she keeps or various forms of notifications. Horton and Wohl continue: “In time, the devotee – the ‘fan’ – comes to believe that he ‘knows’ the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he ‘understands’ his character and appreciates his values and motives” (216). This shift in audience attitude is the moment when the beauty vlogger becomes the “trusted friend” – her audience feels as though they know her closely, and this seemingly intimate and

personal connection becomes the basis from which the beauty vlogger influences her audience, to different degrees within the realm of beauty and beyond it. The beauty vlogger shares enough of her life publicly to foster engagement from her audience and to feed the sense of intimacy the audience desires in order to be compelled to engage with a beauty vlogger's content.

An audience does not connect with just any beauty vlogger, especially in a social media marketplace where beauty content is abundant. The engagement a beauty vlogger receives from her audience must be earned – the audience must feel a personal connection to a particular beauty vlogger based on her content and her personality. A lot of this perceived connection is related to the “persona” that the beauty vlogger creates for herself online. In order to explain what makes a specific beauty vlogger appealing to someone who chooses to engage with her content, I draw from Elihu Katz's and Paul F. Lazarsfeld's (1955) work on “personal influence.” The pair notes that exposure, access, and attention tend to be variables that help media (in this case the beauty vlogger and influencers more generally) connect with the masses (in this case the beauty vlogger's or influencer's audience) (21). By posting content online, the beauty vlogger gains exposure and attention. By maintaining a presence on multiple social media platforms, she gives her audience access to her, though this access is mediated through the parasocial relationship she maintains with her audience. When discussing personal influence through who emerges as opinion leaders, Katz and Lazarsfeld note that “by definition, opinion leadership is everyday and casual” (234). It cannot be forced. If it is *too* calculated, it loses its sense of spontaneity and authenticity, returning to my argument in

Chapter Two. Taking this claim further, Katz and Lazarsfeld explain three “factors” that they call “the ‘specific’ influentials” of personal influence: life-cycle, social status, and gregariousness (234). In this analysis, gregariousness stands out as the most useful term to describe how I see “personal influence” relating back to the beauty vlogger. It is this sense of socialibility that makes the beauty vlogger’s personality come through to her audience, and allows her to adopt the role of the “trusted friend” in relation to those who view her content and choose to engage with it.

These markers of “personal influence” differentiate which beauty vloggers the audience chooses to spend their time watching. There is not enough time in the day to watch all, or even a small fraction of the beauty content posted across social media daily. In this saturated content market, who the audience chooses to watch and how much content they watch is completely up to the audience – the beauty vlogger cannot control this engagement directly. Viewers subscribe or unsubscribe to channels on YouTube with one simple click. Therefore, the personal connection an audience member feels with a beauty vlogger drives engagement with that beauty vlogger’s content. This personal connection can be based on a myriad of factors including shared beauty preferences and interests, skin type, makeup style, channel content (tutorials vs. reviews, for example), and more. For the viability of her self-brand and her channel’s status, the beauty vlogger must keep those personal connections alive and foster an intimacy with her audience that gets each audience member to come back to see more content. On YouTube, the beauty vlogger needs her audience to like her videos and be subscribed to her channel. She reminds her audience to turn on notifications for her videos since the YouTube

subscription feed is unreliable and video content does not always go into a user's subscription feed when it is posted (as I discuss more in the Conclusion). She needs them to watch a full video she posts, not just a few minutes of it. On Instagram, she also needs likes and comments on her content to get her content seen by as many people as possible, particularly since Instagram moved from chronological posting of content to an algorithmic model. The beauty vlogger also promotes all her content across all her social media platforms to make her dedicated audience aware of her content – she posts an Instagram story that she has posted a new Instagram picture or YouTube video and she Tweets both posts as well. The few beauty vloggers who regularly use Facebook will also post about their newest video on their Facebook page.

The beauty vlogger's audience functions as proof that she is a worthy investment. In the online blogging and vlogging industry, the beauty vlogger's metrics become currency that can afford her opportunities within the beauty and vlogging industries (sponsorships, collaborations, etc.). One would assume in this online space that size matters. The higher the metrics, the bigger the opportunities. While that has been the case previously for online video, as the business model for monetization has moved toward sponsorships, size of audience is not *as* important as before. Advertisers who work with beauty vloggers want to capitalize on the engagement of the beauty vlogger's followers, and thus a beauty vlogger with 4 million subscribers is perhaps not as appealing as one with 10,000 or 100,000 subscribers. This line of thought follows the emergence of what scholars call the "micro-influencer," a content producer who does not have millions of

followers,²³ but has a niche audience and is therefore believed to be “more credible and relatable” (Meyers 2018). For advertisers, the return on their investment in paying a beauty micro-influencer to promote a product is likely to be high due to the personal connection and trust the smaller beauty vlogger fosters with her audience.

As influencers have gained traction within the digital media and online video industries, services have emerged that are designed to connect content creators with sponsorship opportunities. These services are a way to centralize sponsorships, which online content creators rely upon for income. My interviewee Arianna uses two such services, Famebit and Grapevine Logic. She explained the process of matching for a sponsorship:

Usually they'll put their product out, what they're looking for, and you'll send them a proposal and say, "Hey, yeah, I would love to work with you. I want to create this separate video." And then they'll approve it or deny it.

On these platforms, the selection for sponsorship deals is a two-way interaction between the influencer and the brand. The influencer applies to potential brands for sponsorship, and the brands use these platforms to find influencers to partner with and promote their products. Arianna told me that approval or denial of sponsorships is partially based on follower or subscriber count – she mostly engages in sponsorships on Instagram and YouTube. To be able to use platforms like FameBit and Grapevine Logic, an influencer needs a minimum threshold of subscribers.²⁴ This mode of gaining sponsorships is appealing to Arianna, especially because many companies reach out to influencers via e-

²³ Cynthia Meyers (2018) notes that micro-influencers have between 10,000 and 100,000 followers.

²⁴ FameBit requires at least 5,000 followers/subscribers on either YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, or Facebook and Grapevine Logic requires 10,000 subscribers on YouTube or 10,000 followers on Instagram, and the creator must post regularly – according to each company’s website.

mail regarding partnerships. Arianna explained to me what she sees as a pitfall of connecting with a sponsor via e-mail:

The only problem with emails is if you have to really check to make sure it's a credible company. A big thing for me is typos because I don't want to get scammed. I don't want to represent a company that's going to scam my subscribers or anything like that. So you just have to be a little bit more careful and do your research and be really picky with who you choose based off of just email alone.

Trust, again, is extremely important. Arianna does not want to be tricked by a company who appears to be legitimate, and she also mentions the importance of her subscribers who she wants to protect as well. She understands the implications of accepting a sponsorship and promoting products through such a business arrangement. Arianna does not want to promote something that proves to be a “scam” because it could cause her audience to lose trust in her, and her audience provides her the opportunity for these sponsorships in the first place. Hence, she is drawn to centralized platforms like FameBit and Grapevine Logic as the sponsorships are legitimate, and she as a creator is protected:

[...] there's a middleman, too. There's a representative with Grapevine Logic [...] that way if something happens with a collab[oration], then you have that person to talk to. Or if a company's being weird, you can talk to them and they can work things out. When it's just email, it's just you and that person back and forth. You don't really have someone else that can actually see the messages and see what you're doing. It's a little bit safer in general. [...] With people that have a huge following, their manager will be the middleman so they can do all the email stuff. But just for me since it's just me, I'd much rather be safe.

Arianna notes the difference between herself, as more of a micro-influencer, and those influencers with a bigger following (hundreds of thousands to millions of subscribers) who have managers and agencies that handle the terms of sponsorships, contract arrangements, payment, and more. With 69,000 YouTube subscribers and no manager,

Arianna is mostly on her own in finding sponsorships that allow her to monetize her YouTube content beyond what AdSense pays her. She is affiliated with the multi-channel network (MCN), AwesomenessTV, and her assigned channel manager can help her with brand collaborations as well. Yet, as an individual vlogger, FameBit and Grapevine Logic appeal to Arianna's desire to monetize her content while also protecting her from any untrustworthy sponsors or potential scammers.

In addition to the shift in online video monetization structure toward sponsorships, it is important to note that beauty brands are moving toward longer-term partnerships (rather than shorter-term sponsorships) with beauty vloggers. While a lot of initial sponsorships were one-off,²⁵ beauty brands seem to have found that working with a beauty vlogger on a longer-term basis augments the return on investment they receive by working with a beauty vlogger with an engaged audience who sees the beauty vlogger as a “trusted friend” and source for product recommendations. One of the earliest long-term partnerships I witnessed on YouTube was in 2014 between Ingrid Nilsen (previous channel name: MissGlamorazzi, she had about 2.8 million subscribers at that time) and CoverGirl. Nilsen was named a CoverGirl Glambassador, and through this partnership she created content for CoverGirl's YouTube channel as well as her own (Denton 2014). Nilsen has since forged similar partnerships with beauty brands such as Bare Minerals and Simple. Partnerships like these are mutually beneficial for the beauty vlogger and the brands she partners with, as beauty vloggers like Nilsen can create a more predictable and regular stream of revenue for themselves through steady work for a major brand and the

²⁵ This is not to say that sponsorships are all longer term now. There are still plenty of one-off sponsorships within the beauty vlogging space. Arianna's sponsorships, for example, are one-off.

beauty brand can leverage a specific beauty vlogger's audience as consumers over a longer period of time. When entering these long-term partnerships, beauty brands utilize the beauty vlogger's personal influence by using her as a conduit to sell products to her audience, with whom she has cultivated a trusting, albeit one-way, relationship.

Shifting focus from the beauty vlogger to brands who use beauty vloggers to promote their products, I engage my interviewee Jess' perspective on influencer marketing. Jess's direct-to-consumer skincare brand depends on word-of-mouth and influencer marketing substantially.

Influencer marketing has been part of my brand since day one. Back in the day, though, because I launched in 2011, it was different [...] It's built in now. If you sell things, you need influencer marketing. [...] But in 2011, it was still a very new concept, and because it was so new, it was way more genuine. It was just the interacting with vloggers and with even influencers then, it wasn't the same as now. It was just such a different landscape. [...] So, for years I've had blogger friends that really feel like they're very genuine relationships. And I've had literally thousands of offers for collaborations, and for sponsorships, and for this, and for that. It's gotten to the point where I just don't even respond to most of those emails.

Even in the seven years that Jess has been in business, she has directly experienced the changes in online and social media marketing for beauty products. Partially because Jess's brand is small and indie, and because she runs the business completely on her own, she does not engage in large-scale influencer marketing. She is extremely decisive about which influencers she chooses to engage and how that relationship functions to benefit her brand:

For me, if I really genuinely like the person, and can see myself interacting with them a lot, then I want to be doing collaborations. But otherwise, I don't have time. And it might just make my brand look bad, if I'm being reviewed by every single person. You know? As a sponsored post, or whatever, it looks bad.

Jess wants to avoid engaging with influencers who want free product from her, but will not provide any return on her investment. Jess's intentionality in her relationships with influencers is not the norm within the beauty industry, especially with larger beauty brands with more people and resources. But despite size or scale, Jess's scrupulousness is indicative of a larger pattern in the industry. The online beauty community has become a skeptical and critical space as it has become increasingly commercialized, as discussed in Chapter Two. Sponsorships are seen as bad by the beauty vlogging audience. While they benefit brands and individual vloggers, the audience has come to distrust product recommendations that are accompanied by compensation for a beauty vlogger. Additionally, as Jess mentions in the above quotation, beauty brands often send the same PR to multiple beauty vloggers who then all feature those products on their channels around the same time. Thus, even if this product promotion is not an overt sponsorship, the brand is trying to promote its product(s) and if the audience follows many beauty vloggers, they will see the same products featured across many outlets. This exposes the PR and advertising mechanisms used to get beauty vloggers to promote their products, which they have often sent to the beauty vlogger free of charge, and gives audience's a negative perception of a beauty vlogger's authenticity.

In our conversation, Jess addressed the volatility of influencer marketing, and how just like the models of beauty product marketing and advertising that came before it, it is becoming unsustainable:

Something is going to change, because people don't like influencer marketing like they once did. There's a lot of distrust now. [...] There's a lot of, well, that was sponsored, so how can I trust you? That's so rampant. [...] This was supposed to

be the next generation advertising, and now people distrust it as much as they distrust an ad in a magazine.

As Jess clearly addresses, the audience for beauty content online is distrustful. I addressed this claim at length in Chapter Two with regard to authenticity and sponsorships. When a brand buys a sponsorship, they of course exchange money with the beauty vlogger, but that exchange does not automatically invalidate a beauty vlogger's review. Influence is complex, involving parasocial relations between the beauty vlogger and her audience, and the beauty vlogger's personal influence. The distrust influence provokes is just as complex, as it is not simply distrust at one specific point in time, but distrust seeping into the relationship that the beauty vlogger has built and fostered with her audience. The relationship is precarious and can be broken with one misstep, off-brand partnership, or simple oversight.

Influence Within the Beauty Industry

Within the broader marketplace of influence, the beauty vlogger first and foremost influences her audience's purchases of beauty products. Through the interaction she fosters with her audience, becoming their "trusted friend," the beauty vlogger functions as part of the advertising and marketing mechanism for the beauty industry. As Jess mentioned in our interview (cited earlier), consumers do not respond to magazine ads like they once did. While there is distrust around influencer marketing, it has become commonplace within the beauty industry.

Yet the beauty vlogger is not simply a cog in the beauty industry machine and to view her as such would be reductive and an oversimplification of her role vis-à-vis the beauty industry. While she partners with beauty brands for some of her content, she is not

beholden to the industry or these specific brands beyond the terms of her sponsorships and thus many beauty vloggers do not respond positively to the term “influencer,” and/or do not identify themselves as such. UK-based beauty vlogger Lily Pebbles (472,000 subscribers) has lamented the label on more than one occasion. On August 15, 2017, she tweeted:

Just heard the term ‘micro-influencer’ – how awful! The things they come up with. I refuse to play along. Content creator. Size irrelevant.

And on November 15, 2017, she tweeted:

I’m gonna try to bring ‘content creator’ back. Maybe if we all refer to ourselves as that, ‘influencer’ will gradually disappear. Who’s with me?? #firstworldproblems

Pebbles wants her job title to emphasize the content she creates and posts, not to be lumped together with all those people, within and beyond the online beauty community, who fall under the umbrella of the term “influencer.” Given the monetization structure of YouTube content, one can presume that Pebbles does care about her metrics, but in terms of how she self-identifies and wishes other to label her, she is insistent that she is a content creator.

My interviewee Sandra had a similar perspective on the term “influencer” in relation to her personal image and her content. When I asked her if she considered herself to be an “influencer,” she responded:

I don't. I see myself as a content creator. I share my experiences with beauty and personal style in a creative and (hopefully) engaging manner with my audience. I still see myself as a consumer, albeit maybe a more educated and involved consumer than the typical target of brands.

Sandra focuses on the content she produces and the information she shares with her audience through that content. As this “more educated consumer” who tries and tests

more beauty products than the average consumer, Sandra gives grounded recommendations to her audience and shares what products worked for her and may also work for particular segments of her audience. Sandra sees herself as an educator who shares her experience of products with her audience in order to help them. I continued my questions to Sandra by asking for her reaction to the term “influencer:”

I don't really relate to it. I am not trying to deliberately influence a purchase. I'm not a salesperson. I want to share a story and an experience with a product, and I want my audience to process that information, participate in the conversation, and make their own purchasing decision.

Sandra very much believes that her audience is autonomous in their purchasing decisions. Her content shares her experience with particular products, but not with the explicit intention of selling that product to her audience. Sandra is not working at a beauty counter, for example, where her sales are directly reflected in commission. This impasse is where the concept of “influence” and “influencers” gets complicated. While Sandra does not intend to influence purchases, she does. Beauty vloggers like Sandra take on thought and opinion leader roles within the online beauty community, like Katz and Lazarsfeld discussed back in the 1950's. Sandra's audience connects with her through engaging with her content. And thus, the products she promotes by featuring them in her videos as well as her direct recommendations come to bear on the investments her audience may consider making while watching her content. This process is how influencer marketing succeeds – an audience member connects with a beauty vlogger on a personal level, then the audience member comes to trust that beauty vlogger and her recommendations, and finally that audience member takes those recommendations into account when making a beauty purchase. This influence is powerful, as the

recommendations a beauty vlogger makes do indeed drive purchasing decisions. Their power becomes especially visible when many beauty vloggers talk about a product at the same time, particularly around new beauty launches. The buzz that beauty vloggers' recommendations garner creates what is called "hype" around a specific beauty product or beauty brand. My example in Chapter Two about Fenty Beauty is an instance of "hype" around a newly launched beauty brand. The "hype" was so powerful that the foundation sold out extremely quickly when it launched. Consumers wanted to try the products that their most trusted beauty vloggers were raving about.

The beauty vlogger's influence within the beauty industry situates her not only as monetarily and emotionally tied to her audience as I have discussed, but as accountable to them as well. When highly-anticipated products such as the Fenty Beauty line launch, the beauty vlogger is pressured to be among the first to review the product in question (Dunn 2016).²⁶ This pressure to be first is part of why beauty brands will send new launches as PR to beauty vloggers in advance of an official launch, though this practice is dependent on the brand, whether the beauty vlogger is on that brand's PR list, and other external factors. The beauty vlogger's audience wants to see reviews of a new product, but more so they want *her* review. In the role as the "trusted friend" who has recommended other products previously, the beauty vlogger's audience wants her trusted review of the latest launch. This situation creates conflicting pressures for the beauty vlogger as she wants to get her review posted quickly, but also needs her review to be thorough, well-executed, and accurate to both her first impression and longer-term opinion of a product. To

²⁶ This pressure can be internally imposed by the beauty vlogger herself and/or externally imposed by audience requests.

mitigate this pressure to produce content quickly, some beauty vloggers have adopted the practice of doing a first impression review of a product (or group of products as a “haul”) and then recording a follow-up video later to give a more longitudinal perspective. No matter what approach she takes, the beauty vlogger must be accountable to her audience by acquiring (via PR or personal purchase) the newest beauty launches and providing her opinion of their value and efficacy.

Additionally, the beauty vlogger is accountable to her audience through the content she produces. As discussed in Chapter Two, the beauty vlogger’s audience expects coherence from her content, and for her content to be and remain “on brand” with the beauty vlogger’s self-presentation online. This is not to say that beauty vloggers have not changed the direction of their channels – they have. Yet, the initial foundation of the influencing relationship – centered on beauty products – between the beauty vlogger and her audience remains intact. For example, many beauty vloggers now categorize their content as more aligned with lifestyle generally than just about beauty. This shift allows them to talk about beauty while also growing up alongside their channels. Many of the beauty vloggers I observed as part of this dissertation have entered their late-twenties or thirties and over time their priorities have changed – they are buying homes, getting married, and starting families. With a more lifestyle focused online presence, these beauty vloggers allow themselves to intersperse content about the new things in their lives with more standard beauty vlogger fare like “get ready with me” videos, hauls, reviews and first impressions, and monthly favorites. This shift allows these beauty vloggers to keep the lines of influence between themselves and their audience active as

they have not abandoned making beauty content altogether. It also diversifies the content that a creator produces, which helps foster their creativity, increases their personability-quotient with their audience, and gives their viewers the “backstage” access to their lives that they want, as discussed in Chapter Two.

That said, this diversification of content is not always a wholly positive or smooth shift for a beauty vlogger. My interviewee Arianna expressed the pressure she feels to continue to create natural hair videos though her YouTube channel does not focus as much on beauty now as it used to. As an African American vlogger, Arianna built her audience through her natural hair videos. When she began to shift her content she told me:

I keep the beauty around just because a lot of my subscribers, they came for the beauty and they came for the hair tutorials and stuff like that. So I don't want to slice that cold turkey.

Through our conversation it was clear to me that Arianna was aware of her audience and their video preferences. She was attempting to strike a balance between the content she wanted to make and the content her audience wanted to see. She was working hard to maintain her viewership by weaving beauty content in with her music covers, comedy sketches, and storytime videos. When I asked her more specifically about her hair videos, she told me about the pressure she feels to make that content:

As for hair videos, I definitely feel pressure to make natural hair videos. I'll post a [song] cover or a vlog and a lot of the comments will be just about my hair. People constantly request hair routines but my routine doesn't change up much. I do enjoy trying new products, but I don't enjoy just making those types of videos all the time. And if I don't upload a hair video for a while, my viewership and subscriber count goes down. So I try to throw in hair videos every once in a while just to keep my viewers happy, even when I don't feel like it sometimes.

Arianna sees the direct effect of not uploading hair videos through a decline in her viewership and a downturn in her subscriber count. And these negative metrics materially affect Arianna and her ability to monetize her content. Even when she is happy with her personal natural hair routine, and it may not have changed since her previous video on the topic, she knows she needs to “update” that video regularly. These videos may not be the videos she wants to post, but her audience makes it clear that these videos are what they want to watch. In an online video landscape with intense competition for viewership, Arianna recognizes that this will help her channel, and it is something that she is willing to do for her channel, even if she is not effusively passionate about continuing to create the hair videos she posts to her channel.

Using One’s Voice to Push For Changes Within the Beauty Industry

The beauty vlogger, with her influence, is in a position of power. She wields power in terms of the advertising and marketing function she provides for the beauty industry, but she also has the potential to use her voice to speak back to aspects of the beauty industry that she finds to be unsettling or problematic. Both Jackie Aina (2.6 million subscribers) and Deepica Mutyala (previous channel name: deepicam, 204,000 subscribers) used their voices to speak back to Tarte about the Shape Tape foundation launch’s flagrant lack of inclusion of consumers with darker skin tones, discussed at length in Chapter Two. In this situation, the onus was on two beauty vloggers of color (as it all too often is) to speak back to this brand about their failure, but nonetheless, their ability to use their channels and platform as beauty vloggers with a substantial following was commendable. This ability to speak back to power is afforded to those beauty

vloggers who are privileged to be in a position where they have a fair amount of autonomy and can go against the status quo, even if it means losing subscribers, being removed for PR lists, or other consequences. Additionally, in order to be listened to when addressing the beauty industry's shortcomings, the beauty vlogger needs to have a large enough audience to incentivize brands to listen.

Even so, not every instance of a beauty vlogger pushing the boundaries of racial inclusion within the beauty industry is uncomplicatedly positive. One particular example that has stayed at the front of my consciousness since it happened in February 2017, was beauty vlogger Ingrid Nilsen's partnership with Bare Minerals. This partnership involved Nilsen becoming "the face" for the brand's Original and Matte foundations, as well as a collaboration on a curated kit, the "Be Your Best Self" kit, that included the foundation, a highlighter, and a limited-edition brush all in a makeup bag designed by Nilsen²⁷. The partnership itself was not out of the ordinary, but the marketing around it and Bare Minerals' positioning of Nilsen was eyebrow-raising. This partnership was catalyzed in part by Bare Minerals expanding their foundation shade range to be more inclusive. Nilsen emphasizes the importance of the shade expansion by sharing that she now has a match within the range as a bi-racial (half Thai, half White) woman; previously she had had to mix multiple shades to have a match in the Bare Minerals range. On Instagram, she announced the partnership with overwhelming positivity:

Being your best self is about accepting who you are, even on the days when you're not feeling so great. It's looking in the mirror and saying 'This is who I am

²⁷ This information was gathered through screenshot-ing the announcements on the Bare Minerals Facebook page, going to the Bare Minerals store in the Mall of America to see the marketing material in person (and taking photos of it), and screenshot-ing Nilsen's announcement of the partnership on her Instagram page.

today and I'm okay with that.' It's having the courage to push through when everything is stacked against you. But most of all, it's about you – your joy, your pain, your grief, your success, your voice. That's why I'm so proud to be announcing my new collection with @bareminerals that is officially available today. It reflects the essence of authenticity and resilience that I believe we all possess. I designed this kit with thought and care in every detail. The big things, like making sure all the products work on every skin tone, and the little things like the zipper on the bag. Every piece in this kit is made to remind you that makeup is a powerful creative outlet. It's that time in the day that's just for you, so seize the moment and have fun with it! All of you are a HUGE reason that my gay, bi-racial woman self is here today. You've kept me going, you've lifted me up, you've challenged me and I'm eternally grateful. Thank you. I hope this kit (even if you're just looking at it) feels like a big hug from me to you.

Within this effusive announcement, Nilsen promotes and encourages self-love and self-acceptance, while also promoting a saleable good. She especially positions herself as positively aligned with Bare Minerals – they got the “big thing” of shade range inclusivity right. By being the face of the foundations in addition to promoting her limited-edition kit, Nilsen is using her bi-racial identity to promote Bare Minerals' dedication to inclusivity as proven through their shade expansion. I take issue with this brand positioning by Bare Minerals and self-positioning by Nilsen. Yes, Bare Minerals is being progressive by making their products *more* inclusive than they had previously been. But until this point in time, Nilsen had not openly discussed her racial identity in her online content. Through this partnership, Nilsen was not only discussing her bi-racial identity but was using it to her benefit – financially and otherwise. She uses language of authenticity and resilience in her Instagram announcement, but these ideals are undermined by the fact that Nilsen was compensated over \$500,000 by Bare Minerals, according to *Women's Wear Daily* (Strugatz 2017). Nilsen, in this moment, is taking on the identity of what Ralina Joseph (2009) has called the “‘post-identity’ everywoman” in

her critique of Tyra Banks (238). Joseph explains that this positionality is both colorblind and specific, and “ultimately showcases race and gender as malleable forces, deployed for strategic gain” (238). While Nilsen is using her voice and her platform to promote the ideal of inclusivity within the beauty industry, and lauding Bare Minerals for its progressiveness on this front, I question to what end Nilsen is using her voice as an influencer when we consider the sheer amount of money she made through this partnership.

I unpack the details of this partnership not because I want to shame Nilsen or presume to understand her motivations, but because I find this example illustrative of how racial identity is deployed in our contemporary, post-racial cultural context. Scholars (Hasinoff 2008; Joseph 2009, 2013; Thompson 2010) have discussed how people of color have used ethnic or racial identity to their strategic advantage in similar ways to what I see in this example with Nilsen. When discussing *America's Next Top Model*, Ralina Joseph (2013) notes that the winner of any given cycle is intended to mirror Banks herself, embodying a “malleable and marketable spokesperson” (127). The winning model must follow Banks’ advice, recounted by Joseph (2009): “Be racially specific enough to connote difference, desire, and exoticism, but enough of a colorblind, blank slate to acquire success in the commercial, white-desirous marketplace” (242). This advice illuminates the very fine line that these models, and Nilsen, must navigate as non-White women in public-facing careers. Mary Thompson (2010), like Joseph, looks at *America's Next Top Model* in her post-racial analysis, noting that “on *ANTM*, ethnicity is commodified as a style or fashion accessory that should be turned on and off according to

the particular demands of neoliberal ideology in any given situation as it affords the individual model ‘cultural capital’” (342). In line with this logic, Nilsen has “turned on” her ethnic identity through her partnership with Bare Minerals, and this action is mutually beneficial for Bare Minerals, who are able to capitalize on the influence Nilsen wields, and Nilsen. Nilsen accrues “cultural capital” as an influencer by partnering with such an established beauty brand – and the monetary compensation is not a deterrent either. What are we to think of this partnership? Nilsen has shared her voice, her identity, and her influence with Bare Minerals, but to what end? Thompson notes, “Above all else, ethnicity is represented [on *ANTM*] as a choice, an option, which the individual can choose to strategically but selectively deploy” (347). Nilsen has done just this; she deploys her bi-racial identity strategically, playing it up through her partnership with Bare Minerals because, at least partially, it benefits her financially.

Influence Beyond the Beauty Industry

The influence the beauty vlogger establishes within the online community and beauty industry is important because it has allowed her to grow her portfolio of content beyond YouTube and other social media platforms. The influence the beauty vlogger has accrued, most often measured through the metrics I have discussed previously like follower and/or subscriber count, becomes a form of social and cultural currency that allows her to take on projects that are outside of the scope of her work as a beauty vlogger. As an entrepreneur, these opportunities prove important for the beauty vlogger, as they allow her to diversify her content and her flows of income and revenue.

The power of her influence enables these other opportunities to emerge for the beauty vlogger. The close (albeit parasocial) relationship that she has developed with her viewers functions as a form of proof that she has an audience that is loyal to her and will follow and support her other endeavors. We can see this at a micro-level when a beauty vlogger releases merchandise. Merchandise has become a relatively common mode through which the beauty vlogger diversifies her income stream. Monetization through merchandise works under the assumption that a beauty vlogger's loyal audience will be so excited that she has released these shirts or tumblers or other commodities that they will want to support her by making a purchase.

Beauty vloggers have used their influence to expand their personal brands in seemingly infinite directions. Some have written books, others have collaborated on jewelry or clothing lines or opened online clothing boutiques. Some have created podcasts, and one, Tati Westbrook (channel name: Tati, previous channel name: GlamLifeGuru, 4.4 million subscribers), released a beauty supplement. None of this would be possible without other industries recognizing the value of influence built online. In my interview with Gaby, we discussed how her comedy channel, *Just Between Us*, with her partner Allison Raskin, opened up many opportunities for the pair, and for her alone:

Yeah. I think it's opened a lot of doors for us. We would just be another two girls in show business out here. We can walk into a room and we have this following and that has allowed us to get meetings for other projects. We sold our novel on a pitch. That's unheard of. We had a bidding war for our book that hadn't even been written yet. That was primarily because we had a YouTube channel. Our advance was pretty good for that [...] split between the two of us, [it] was like a yearly wage.

The pair's YouTube channel made them appealing to publishers because the publishers believed that the audience of *Just Between Us* would follow Gaby and Allison and buy the book. Not only did the pair get the book deal, but they were positioned advantageously because publishers did not feel as much risk associated with the project Gaby and Allison pitched. The same line of thought applies to the beauty vloggers I engage in this dissertation. The non-beauty endeavors that they take on are possible because other industries they work with, like publishing, see value in their dedicated followers and influence.

Even Gaby, who has launched her online career on the basis of her status as an "influencer," has qualms about the term:

I don't mind being called one, but I also don't know what it means. I feel very disconnected from it. People will say that in pitches and stuff. They'll be like, "Oh, this brand should work with Gaby and Allison because they're influencers." I'm like, "I guess." I think it gives me a leg up. If I want to make a short film and they're like, "Who's going to watch this?" Exec's are stupid and they'll go, "Oh, numbers. We like numbers." That's nice in terms of having any sort of influence. I can get something made, which is cool, but I'm not so popular that ... I mean I'm popular, but I'm not a person who's like, "Buy this handbag," and then everyone does. I don't really have that kind of sway. I wore a *Twin Peaks* shirt in a video and everyone was like, "Where did you get that shirt? We love it."

Gaby makes an important point about the importance of numbers and metrics to executives who are green-lighting projects pitched by influencers. While she may not be influencing product purchases like the beauty vloggers I am studying, her influence has allowed her opportunities beyond the book deal with Allison. Alone, she runs a podcast, *Bad With Money*, that is in its third season, and she sold a book on her own based on the podcast. She is the first to admit that none of the opportunities would have been possible for her – or Allison – without the influence they built running *Just Between Us*.

Like Gaby, the beauty vlogger has expanded her entrepreneurial identity through taking on projects that fall outside of her role as a beauty vlogger. In an online space that is oversaturated, and in which the content can seem to be repetitive, the beauty vlogger has welcomed new opportunities for creative expression and audience engagement. Through these endeavors she finds new modalities to share content with her audience and develops new skills. When Lily Pebbles (472,000 subscribers) and Anna Newton (channel name: The Anna Edit, 459,000 subscribers) launched their podcast, *At Home With...* in Spring 2017, both beauty vloggers expressed their excitement about learning a new form of media production across YouTube and their other social media content. Both beauty vloggers run YouTube channels and blogs, so learning how to use a solely auditory media platform was a new and exciting adventure for the pair. With the help of their management team, Gleam Futures, they were able to produce their podcast, which premiered its second season on July 4, 2018. Other beauty vloggers who have started podcasts include Estée Lalonde (previous channel name: essiebutton, 1.2 million subscribers) with *The Heart of It* (2017) and Ingrid Nilsen, along with fellow vlogger Cat Valdes (channel name: Catrific, 683,000 subscribers), with *Ladies Who Lunch* (2016 – 2018).

Another upside for the beauty vlogger associated with launching these non-YouTube and non-social media endeavors is that she moves away from the precarious, algorithmically designed modes of monetization for her content. Podcasts tend to be monetized through advertising, but projects like books pay a fixed amount agreed upon by all parties involved, as Gaby explained to me. Before her book deals, Gaby shared that

Just Between Us broke even between income from Google AdSense and brand deals and the cost of production, as they use a small crew. For this reason, a common refrain in my interview with Gaby was that she never wants to feel “married to” or dependent on YouTube as a platform – it is too unpredictable. Gaby sees YouTube as the conduit she is using to share her creative content with her audience for now, but she does not have strong ties or allegiances to keeping her content centralized on YouTube forever. Regarding the difference between how she was able to monetize her work before and after the book deals, Gaby explained that though she and Allison were elated that they were breaking even, the first book deal changed everything:

We sold the first book and that was a really big help. I was able to put money in savings, and put money in retirement. Without agencies, management fees, obviously those took a large chunk out of it, and Allison and I split it. The advance for the novel was \$125,000. Then we ended up each making \$50,000. I've never seen that amount of money in my life. I was shaken to my core by that number and still I have a bunch of it in savings. I'm like, "I don't know if I can touch this." I don't even know what to do with it. I'm happy to have it, but also like what the f*ck. Then on the heels of that, right after that, I sold the *Bad With Money* book by myself. Without managers and agent fees taken out obviously, but the advance for that, which will be less because my managers and agents go to get paid. I haven't seen any of this money yet because I haven't turned in the first draft, but the advance was \$150,000 for that book. That all happened one, two punch. For 29 years I made no money. Then in three months I made all of that.

Such is the unpredictability of these creative industries, but Gaby is in a much better financial position managing these advances than trying to cobble together her rent money between various other forms of revenue from *Just Between Us* and her individual endeavors. This desire for a firmer sense of financial stability, in the form of a book advance, translates to the beauty vlogger as well. If she is able to leverage her influence to take on projects that challenge her creatively and provide a more stable form of

income, why wouldn't she? Some beauty vloggers who have released books are Fleur Bell (channel name: Fleur DeForce, 1.4 million subscribers) with *The Glam Guide: How to Feel Fabulous from the Inside Out* (2015) and *The Luxe Life: Everyday Luxuries for Lovers of Beauty, Fashion & Food* (2016), Estée Lalonde (previous channel name: essiebutton, 1.2 million subscribers) with *Bloom: Navigating Life and Style* (2016), and Lily Pebbles (472,000 subscribers) with *The F Word: A Personal Exploration of Modern Female Friendship* (2018).

Not all of the endeavors the beauty vlogger takes on outside of her beauty content are as intensive as launching a podcast or writing a book. Another common partnership I have witnessed in the beauty space are collaborations with established brands on products like clothing, jewelry, homewares, and other commodities. In particular, the jewelry line Mejuri has partnered with multiple beauty vloggers on designs and mini-collections. These vloggers include those I have previously discussed such as Allana Davison (previous channel name: allanaramaa, 494,000 subscribers) and Ingrid Nilsen (previous channel name: MissGlamorazzi, 3.8 million subscribers), as well as Claire Marshall (previous channel name: heyclaire, 976,000 subscribers), Jamie-Lee Burns (channel name: mademoiselle, 54,000 subscribers), and Arden Rose (1.4 million subscribers). This type of partnership is much less labor intensive for the beauty vlogger when compared to writing a book or recording a podcast, and Mejuri capitalizes on the influence of these beauty vloggers and the aspirational lifestyle that they promote. Partnering on a few pieces of jewelry with an established company so that followers are able to wear a piece of jewelry that the beauty vlogger had a hand in creating provides an easy and material

way for the beauty vlogger's audience to feel connected to a beauty vlogger. This non-beauty venture is another mode of relationship building between the beauty vlogger and her audience, with low stakes for both parties. The beauty vlogger gains monetarily from this partnership and promotes it on her established social media platforms for increased visibility and sales, and the investment from the audience is optional, and if opted for, a one-time purchase.

These non-beauty related undertakings through which beauty vloggers have expanded their self-brands, are just a few of the potential paths for these content creators to widen their modes of creative expression and revenue streams. Yet it is important to remember that these opportunities are possible because of the influence the beauty vlogger has cultivated, often for close to a decade, through her beauty content. Her audience is dedicated to her and has proven their willingness to follow her beyond YouTube and social media. This built-in audience provides her with a currency that non-digital video industries can understand and affords her opportunities that would otherwise be closed to her or would have higher barriers for entry, as we saw with Gaby and Allison selling their novel on a pitch alone.

From Influence to Advocacy

Beyond using influence garnered online to engage in creative endeavors beyond the scope of the beauty industry, the beauty vlogger has the opportunity to use her online platform to spread awareness about issues in the world she is passionate about. Beauty vloggers do not often act as advocates for social change, but the examples I present in this chapter push the idea of “influence” beyond the commercial and material, toward the

ideological. In order to make such a leap, the beauty vlogger must be able to afford to take a risk with her content and her self-brand more broadly. These moves are not without consequence, whether that is losing views or subscribers or something more immediate and material. Thus, the beauty vlogger needs a sense of security about her audience, and income, before she makes political statements through her content. Coming out in support of a divisive social issue, like women's reproductive rights, is not only outside of the realm of beauty content, but also polarizes the beauty vlogger's audience, who likely do not all share her stance or beliefs. Using her voice to share this information is critical, but in this iteration of the beauty vlogger's influence, unlike the commercial influence she wields in promoting products and consumable goods, the beauty vlogger potentially alienates her audience and brands/potential sponsors.

I began thinking about what influence means for the beauty vlogger beyond her commercial entanglement with the beauty industry through my conversation with Gaby. When I asked Gaby about how she felt about the term "influencer" and if she identifies with it, the end of her response resonated with me:

I don't know how much influence I have other than I try really hard to represent the LGBT community positively. That's where the influence comes in.

Gaby does not hide her bisexuality from her audience – she even highlighted it in the tagline of her Instagram profile for a period of time, describing herself as a "noted bisexual." For Gaby, her influence is not linked to material goods as much as it is to representation of the LGBT community and self-representation. She shapes her online life, and her character in *Just Between Us*, in a manner that reflects herself. She makes herself and her sexual orientation visible. The audience for *Just Between Us* is young,

according to Gaby, and therefore showing bisexuality and removing some of the stigmas and stereotypes her sexual orientation is of the utmost importance to her. Through *Just Between Us*, Gaby is able to be the character she longed to see represented in any media when she was younger:

[It's] been great because we have such a young audience. To be able to be the character that I wanted to see at that time, and needed to know existed, it's really nice to me that my character is bisexual and slutty, but also happy. That's never a problem. There's never any heart-wrenching thing. There's no consequences to her behavior. It's incidental. She's super happy and there's no tearful PSA episode. You know what I mean?

Gaby consciously tries to avoid stereotypical associations with bisexuality through her characterization on *Just Between Us*. Yes, her character is “slutty,” as she describes her, but the audience also gets to see a more unfiltered and unvarnished representation of bisexuality because the characterization is consistent rather than tokenized. This visibility, without the dramatics that accompany LGBT representation in popular culture, is important to Gaby, but it does not please everyone. She explained:

I get sh*t from people being like, "Of course the bi- one is slutty." I'm like, "I don't want to play respectability politics with you." It's been cool to have that kind of influence. It's less of an influence around, buy this product and then they do, and more of, I say that bisexuality is cool and then people go, "I guess it is."

Not everyone is going to like Gaby's character or *Just Between Us*, and Gaby recognizes that that. Through our conversation it became clear to me that it was more important to Gaby to represent bisexuality and make it visible through her work than it was to please everyone. Yes, the bisexual character on *Just Between Us* is also the slutty one, but the two things are not causally linked. Gaby uses her influence to represent bisexuality as

well as she possibly can. It is not perfect, but she recognizes that she has influence in normalizing what bisexuality is and means through her comedy show.

Gaby is not a beauty vlogger. Given this fact, how do beauty vlogger's engage this mode of influence that is less about product and more about influencing her audience's beliefs, attitudes, and/or opinions about issues larger than those in the online beauty community? Again, I focus on Ingrid Nilsen (previous channel name: MissGlamorazzi, 3.8 million subscribers) as an example to explore these ideas, initially sparked through my conversation with Gaby. Beyond her partnership with Bare Minerals, Nilsen has aligned herself with many social and cultural issues. This social engagement has seeped into her YouTube content, her brand partnerships, the opportunities afforded to her, and more. The issues she champions are not singular – she is dedicated to women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ visibility, and trans* bathroom rights to name a few. Nilsen has been able to intersperse this advocacy content alongside her beauty content on YouTube and has been doing so since publicly coming out as a lesbian in June 2015 (“Something I Want You To Know (Coming Out)”). This moment seemed to catalyze her advocacy agenda; her public role as an activist, and not just a beauty vlogger, was concretized by her coming out as well as through her interview with President Barack Obama in January 2016 (“Ingrid Nilsen Interviews Obama”). She was one of three YouTubers to be offered this opportunity, and was the only female. It is important to remember that she is able to create these opportunities because of the resources afforded to her as a multi-million-subscriber beauty vlogger. While I use Nilsen

as an example here, it is critical to remember that her positionality is not the norm for a beauty vlogger.

By coming out as a lesbian publicly on YouTube, Nilsen has disrupted common stereotypes about lesbians, representing herself as a femme lesbian to her audience. After coming out, nothing really changed about her gender performance, and by remaining visible, and being out, her presence worked to dispelled myths and assumptions equating lesbianism with being butch. Her short-lived livestream series, “Taco TuesGAY,” addressed topics specific to the LGBTQ community, and the lesbian community specifically, through discussions of topics like femme invisibility within the lesbian community. Additionally, by addressing her sexual orientation publicly, which some critics initially dismissed as a publicity stunt, Nilsen pointed directly to the tacit assumption of heterosexuality within the online beauty community, and within culture more broadly (West and Zimmerman 1991). Nilsen had dated men prior to coming out, featuring them in her “follow me around” vlogs, which she has since stopped producing – hence the assumptions about the publicity stunt and the reluctance to take her coming-out at face value. Nilsen is proof to her younger viewers that it is never too late to come out (she came out in her mid-twenties, which is not *late* by any stretch). With her success as a beauty vlogger so tied up in her personal identity, she took a risk by coming out publicly, and in doing so showed her audience that being true to herself was worth the risk. She could have kept her private life private and hid this huge part of her identity from her audience, but she decided not to do that. Her bravery has surely helped those who have witnessed her journey, particularly the consequences in her personal life she has shared

that have been the result of her coming out. She grew up in a conservative area of Southern California and has alluded to being cut off from most of her family.

Additionally, Nilsen has created content speaking about the intersection of her racial identity as half-Thai and half-White and sexual orientation as a lesbian (“Being A Gay Asian Woman: My Experience | Ingrid Nilsen”). In this video, she unpacks the expectations she experienced growing up, and in her adult life, about how she was supposed to act and behave. She sheds light on growing up in a multi-generational home and how the Thai side of her family reacted to her coming out. Nilsen created this video to draw attention to the low visibility of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) people, particularly women and lesbian-identified women, and add her voice to a limited conversation about these intersecting identities. By sharing her experience, she aims to bring light to issues that often remain undiscussed in Western, White, and presumed-heterosexual culture.

In addition to discussing personal issues, Nilsen has used her platform to educate her audience about broader social issues and taboo subjects like menstruation and bathroom bills. She has made a series of videos about periods, breaking down the myths about them, discussing different options for managing menstruation, speaking out against the luxury tax placed on women’s hygiene products, and the like (“What Should You Use for Your Period? Ingrid Nilsen,” “Period Myths! What's True + What's Not | Ingrid Nilsen,” “My Period Must-Haves | Ingrid Nilsen,” and “10 Things You May Not Know About Your Period | Ingrid Nilsen”). On more than one occasion, she has discussed donating women’s hygiene products to homeless shelters, explaining that they need pads

most because women who lack these products do not always have access to clean restrooms, laundry facilities, and the like. She even assembled kits on camera that she was going to bring to a shelter, showing her audience how to do so and urging them to follow her lead. Additionally, through her work with the United Nations as a Change Ambassador for Gender Equality, Nilsen created a video on gender-segregated public restrooms (“What if YOU Couldn’t Use the Bathroom? #ownyourvoice”). Part of the work she does in this video is to unpack the common misconceptions people have about gender identity and sexual orientation, which are often conflated. Here, she advocates for gender equality regarding bathroom access, while also educating her audience about the systemic issues that cause bathrooms to be segregated, and gendered, in the first place.

Lastly, one of the most profound ways that Nilsen has positioned herself as an activist and advocate is through her interviews with influential people like President Barack Obama and Bill Gates. She was one of three YouTubers, and the only female, invited to interview President Barack Obama in January 2016, on the heels of his annual “State of the Union” address. Prior to her interview, she made a video on her channel announcing the opportunity and asking to hear what her audience wanted her to ask, to function as a “vessel for [her audience’s] message (“I’m Going to the White House!!!”). In her sixteen-minute interview, she asked the President challenging questions about the state of terrorism, women’s health issues and the luxury tax on feminine hygiene products, preventive medicine and access to healthcare, LGBT issues (particularly focusing on marriage equality), and the advances in cancer treatments. With Bill Gates (February 2018), Nilsen discussed the state of the world and the misconceptions that we

have in our Western, first-world context, that inhibit our understanding of the biggest global issues impacting those in less privileged geographical locations (“How Much Does the World Suck? A Quiz with Bill Gates | Ingrid Nilsen”). She and Gates addressed questions about global poverty, health care, and women’s issues. Through their conversation, Nilsen’s audience learned that extreme poverty has halved globally, the child death rate under five-years-old has fallen by half (due to vaccines and better access to health care), schooling for women has increased, and that over 50% of women globally have a bank account and thus financial autonomy. Prior to their conversation, Nilsen had polled her Twitter followers on the questions she and Gates discussed, and universally, her followers believed our progress toward resolving these issues was less advanced than it is in actuality.

As a public persona and an influencer, Nilsen utilizes her platform on the Internet to teach her audience about social issues that are important to her, sharing not only her opinion, but facts and experiences to help her audience understand these issues and be better informed citizens of the world. While taking on social issues is controversial and many beauty vloggers avoid talking about issues like politics (especially post-2016 election and Brexit), Nilsen is an example of a beauty vlogger who demonstrates that she is interested in and personally invested in much more than just beauty products. Her influence extends beyond commercial, profit-driven ventures, and thus her activism complicates what it means to have influence and be an influencer in the contemporary social media landscape.

Conclusion

The beauty vlogger's influence is only possible through her audience's engagement with her content. Yet it is up to the individual beauty vlogger to decide how to use her voice and influence, within and beyond the beauty industry. In this chapter, I unpacked the idea of influence and the many ways in which beauty vloggers engage with it. The beauty vlogger is part of the advertising and marketing apparatus of the beauty industry, but she also has an individual voice, and an audience who considers her a "trusted friend" and wants to hear her thoughts. She takes a risk in making her opinions known, whether they are critiques of the beauty industry or not related to the beauty industry at all. And this self-positioning, as she well knows, opens her to critique and perhaps renders her unpalatable to the broadest possible audience. She must weigh that cost, experienced through subscriber loss and view decreases, alongside the positive potential of spreading awareness and sharing information about the LGBTQ community or women's reproductive rights and health that members of her audience would otherwise hold incorrect assumption about or simply not know.

While the beauty vlogger exists within the commercial sphere of YouTube content creation and the beauty industry, her influence is not only tied to the consumption of material goods. Her influence is also tied to ideology, beliefs, opinions, and values – her own and those of her audience. Her influence depends on the relationship that she continuously fosters with her audience. And once we consider beauty vloggers like Ingrid Nilsen's engagements within and beyond the beauty sphere, we come to see that the

beauty vlogger's influence is much more complex and nuanced than the commercialized term "influencer" suggests.

Conclusion – Looking Beyond the Individual Beauty Vlogger

In the preceding chapters I have examined three identities that the beauty vlogger inhabits – her role as a female entrepreneur and laborer, her public persona, and her positionality as an “influencer.” In this conclusion, I want to shift focus away from the individual beauty vlogger and toward the social media ecology in which she functions. I do so primarily because of the increasing popular press coverage of the social media platforms to which the beauty vlogger posts her creative content and the collective dissatisfaction content creators have expressed about these social media platforms. As social media platforms shift and optimize, people who utilize them for their work, like the beauty vlogger, must continually re-strategize how to engage with each social media platform they use. This process is taxing for the content creator and many of the changes enacted by social media platforms, as I detail in this conclusion, actively disenfranchise the content creators who made social media platforms popular and profitable in the first place.

In this dissertation, I have been careful to refer to “the beauty vlogger” rather than “the YouTube beauty vlogger,” as the beauty vlogger’s social media engagement spreads beyond YouTube onto Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat.²⁸ At the present moment, I see YouTube functioning as the central node of the social media ecology of the beauty vlogger, as I discussed in the Introduction. The centrality of YouTube is not fixed or permanent, and its dubious control of the market has been the topic of many conversations within the online video sphere in the past few years. These conversations

²⁸ Snapchat has lost a lot of popularity since the introduction of the story function on Instagram, around August 2017. These are not the only social media platforms on which the beauty vlogger engages, but they are the primary and most mainstream ones.

have escalated in popular press, and among YouTube content creators, in the wake of the January 2018 events when Logan Paul (channel name: Logan Paul Vlogs, 18 million subscribers), a top creator on YouTube, posted a video from the Aokigahara Forest of Japan featuring the victim of a suicide (Gillespie 2018).²⁹ I will return to this incident later in this conclusion, but the conversations around this video, YouTube's insufficient and slow response to it, and the aftermath of its posting are indicative of much deeper and longer-standing shortcomings of YouTube as an online video platform.

As discussed in Chapter One, the beauty vlogger's labor is contingent and precarious as she work for herself within the neoliberal and post-Fordist economy. This positionality affords her great flexibility as a laborer, but does not guarantee her long-term job stability. Additionally, social media platforms are ever-changing and evolving. In an interview with Henry Jenkins (2016), Stuart Cunningham and David Craig called the online space a "volatile environment," noting that each social media platform is marked by precarity (Part One). Cunningham and Craig explain that one of the reasons why social media platforms are precarious is because the profitability of each platform, particularly for the content creator, is uneven and unpredictable (Part Two). Social media platforms change quickly, for both users of the platforms and content creators. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) note that YouTube specifically continually "scales up" (91). The pair also questioned the sustainability of growth on the platform nearly a decade ago (104). The combination of this precarious labor by content creators and the

²⁹ The video in question was posted on December 31, 2017. All the reaction and controversy began in January 2018.

volatile platforms where they post content results in an unsustainable situation for full-time content creators like the beauty vlogger.

In this conclusion, I am going to focus on the way that changes on YouTube, before and after Logan Paul's controversy, have left content creators confused and disenfranchised by a platform that is not serving their needs. In her piece on beauty vloggers, my interviewee Gaby Dunn (2016) notes: "YouTube prides itself on being an egalitarian platform" (3). Yet this equality exists only at the surface; once the curtain is pulled back it becomes clear that certain content creators are privileged over others on YouTube. This disparity is particularly salient in terms of monetization on YouTube. Brooke Duffy (2017) notes that across social media platforms there is an "industrial rhetoric of meritocracy" but in actuality "the monetization system is rigged in favor of high-profile bloggers" (146). YouTube is exemplar of this reality. As Dunn (2015) puts it, "YouTube has a basic supply and demand problem." This problem is tied most obviously to the monetization program, AdSense, which pays content creators in the YouTube Partner Program based on display ads that run before, during, or after a YouTube video, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One. As a reminder, in the early days of YouTube, AdSense money was what content creators lived on. Sponsored content became necessary when the view- and click- based income from AdSense became unstable. This instability was most directly attributed to more content creators posting on YouTube who all wanted to monetize their content (Dunn 2015). The AdSense pool of money is a fixed amount; therefore, when more channels began to utilize AdSense, the amount allocated to each individual creators got smaller and smaller

(Dunn 2015). Thus AdSense became unsustainable as the only form of income for content creators like the beauty vlogger.

AdSense money alone is unsustainable for full-time income, but additionally, YouTube demonetizes content creators' content with the explanation that it is "not suitable for advertisers." Videos can be demonetized for a multitude of reasons – within the beauty community it has usually been because of the mention of prescription drugs like Differin³⁰ and Accutane, used to treat acne. Skincare expert Caroline Hiron (156,000 subscribers) reflected on this demonetization in a blog post she wrote in October 2017, noting that six of the previous eight videos she had posted were demonetized, and each took about 48 hours to be reinstated after she made appeals to YouTube to re-monetize them. In her case, even though her videos were reinstated, the time it took to do so was the window during which her videos get "literally ALL their traffic," and thus she made no money from those six videos. She asks an important question in the title of her blog post; given this demonetization that completely froze her revenue stream from her YouTube content, "is YouTube worth the hassle?" She is disheartened with YouTube and its constant demonetization of her content. She notes that she considers Facebook and Instagram as more worth her time and engagement, especially with the introduction of live videos, stories, and other add-ons that directly compete with YouTube. In light of making no money from six videos, each of which took her two to three days to produce, she asks, "If YouTube is making life difficult, and the other platforms have bigger audiences in the long run, why am I working so hard?"

³⁰ Differin is not distributed over the counter in the United States, but has still caused videos, like my interviewee Sandra's, to be demonetized.

Demonetization is not the only issue that has plagued YouTube. Additionally, issues with the platform itself and its algorithm have affected content creators. In our interview, Gaby explained to me:

YouTube's algorithm f*cking sucks. There's no rhyme or reason to any of it. We [her and Allison Raskin, her comedy partner] can't figure out why some stuff does well and some stuff doesn't. I talked to my friends and they're like, "Yeah, nobody gets any views anymore."

There is no predicting if a video will get views or not, so posting on YouTube has become increasingly futile for content creators who expect some form of compensation for the labor associated with creating the content they post.³¹ It is impossible to attribute causality to the decrease in views across the board on YouTube, but between the algorithm shifts and other platform issues, the situation is not improving. By platform issues, I am referring to issues on YouTube where 1) people are being unsubscribed from channels they watch without doing so themselves, 2) videos are not going into subscriber's subscription feeds on YouTube, and 3) when a content creator uploads a video, they lose subscribers, making channel growth pretty much impossible (in our interview Gaby confirmed that this happens on the *Just Between Us* channel). Even with YouTube's addition of the option for a subscriber to turn on notifications for a specific content creator's channel, this opt-in does not guarantee that this subscriber will see that user's content on their subscription page.

If YouTube were invested in *all* of its content creators, presumably the platform would take further measures to protect and advocate for those people who supply the platform with its content. Instead, these systemic issues provide evidence for claims that

³¹ Herein is a major appeal of sponsored content as it guarantees compensation for a video.

YouTube is only truly invested in its largest content creators, as those are the people who provide profit for the platform. In our interview, Gaby expressed:

YouTube doesn't do a good job of helping people. It doesn't do a good job of promoting it's creators. It doesn't do a good job of protecting creators. It incentivizes people to make hateful videos because that's what hits the algorithm.

Gaby expressed this sentiment months before the Logan Paul controversy, referring more to the demonetization of LGBTQ videos, including videos on *Just Between Us*. These critiques of YouTube are echoed by Aymar Jean Christian (2018) in his piece in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* titled, "How YouTube Blew It." This piece was published in response to Logan Paul, but sheds light on the longer-standing issues with YouTube that allowed for this controversy to occur in the first place. Christian explains: "In the wake of the platform's disregard for its own talent, multichannel networks (MCNs) stepped in." Yet, "the networks (MCNs) only invested in the top two to five percent of its creators, leaving everyone else with minimal support." Christian makes clear that the MCN filled a void that YouTube was not handling, but even these MCNs cannot not help everyone equally as is clear when looking at my interviewee Arianna who is affiliated with an MCN, yet still uses external platforms to connect with sponsors for her content, as discussed in Chapter Three. As Christian notes, MCNs are "best at serving top creators." YouTube's goal remains clear: "YouTube's primary goal is increasing revenue, not catering to new and smaller creators" (Christian 2018). YouTube wants profit. Their algorithm is designed to promote their company's growth, and through their neglect of their content creators, the biggest creators like Logan Paul (and not beauty vloggers) were the ones who were seeing concrete, monetary rewards, and other preferential treatment

for the content they produced. Christian boldly claims, “There’s no denying that YouTube has, to date, failed to develop itself into anything beyond a repository for a wide-ranging number of videos and creators whose fans care little about YouTube itself and are more invested in the talent they love.” Content creators, like beauty vloggers, have been forced to diversify their content beyond YouTube, as their audience will follow them across these platforms. Herein lies the opportunity for other online video platforms to step in where YouTube has not to support creators.

The Logan Paul controversy did anything but urge YouTube to pay more attention to its creators. Logan Paul apologized, first in a written format and then in a video, and removed the video in question from YouTube (Gillespie 2018). YouTube did not take the video down, Paul did, and in the interim the video was watchable.³² Views are currency for Paul, and as Tarleton Gillespie explains, this incident illuminated the fact that “economic incentives” for YouTube “encourage platforms to be more permissive than they claim to be, and to treat high-value producers differently from the rest.” Ten days passed after the upload of the video in question before Paul experienced any consequences (other than a lot of online hate) for his actions. Even then, ads were only “temporarily suspended” on his YouTube channel – this action was not insignificant as Paul’s ad revenue was estimated to be more than a million dollars a month at the time (Levin 2018, Dixit 2018). Additionally, Paul took “a self-imposed hiatus for 22 days” and “Google terminated business deals with him” including his membership in the Google Preferred advertising tier and his starring role in season four of the YouTube Red series *Foursome* (Dixit 2018, Gutelle 2018). The fallout of this video controversy did affect

³² From what I have gathered, the video was up for roughly twenty-four hours.

Paul, but it also affected smaller content creators who never had the privileges Paul had previously experienced.

Following the controversy, YouTube tightened restrictions about who is eligible to be part of their Partner Program, which is the only way to gain access to AdSense revenue. Creators who had previously been able to monetize their videos were kicked out of the Partner Program as of February 20, 2018, if their channel had less than 1,000 subscribers AND less than 4,000 hours of views in the previous year (Levin 2018, “YouTube Partner Program Overview”). In essence, this policy shift affected the smallest content creators, who stood to benefit from monetization, even if they made \$100 or less per month. As many content creators were quick to point out, especially on Twitter, this policy shift does not seem to address the fundamental issues surrounding how and why Logan Paul was able to post a video of a suicide victim without his online video career being completely ruined.

This controversy is just one more example of why content creators cannot depend on YouTube-tied revenue for their labor, and why the sponsorship model for monetizing content has taken hold so strongly for content creators. Gaby reflects, “Sponsorships exist because good channels can’t survive on ads alone” (2016). Yet it is important to also note alternatives to this monetization structure, for beauty vloggers and general content creators alike, that YouTube’s competitors have established, to varying degrees of success, in recent years. In 2015, for example, Vessel tried to fill the gap where YouTube’s AdSense revenue was “tanking” (Ulaby 2015). Vessel was a service that, for \$3 per month, gave users exclusive access to a content creator’s YouTube videos “a few

days” before they were posted to YouTube (Ulaby 2015). Vessel provided revenue for the content creator through its subscription fee. Yet the service, as many experiments within the online video realm, did not gain enough traction to remain viable. Another service that has gained much more traction is Patreon. It follows the same subscription logic that Vessel did but allows content creators to create Patron-exclusive bonus content, rewards based on the level of patronage, and more. Patreon had a large presence at VidCon, selling itself as the Netflix or Hulu of online video – we pay for those streaming services and gain access to those libraries of content, so why shouldn’t we pay for the content we watch on YouTube from creators that we genuinely enjoy and want to support monetarily?³³ Lastly, content creators have been posting their content elsewhere, off YouTube. At VidCon, I learned that Facebook was in beta testing for its monetized native video through a panel that featured comedian Laura Clery (she has 3.5 million follows on Facebook). Los Angeles-based beauty vlogger Claire Marshall (previous channel name: heyclaire, 976,000 subscribers) also had a weekly show on Facebook called “Ready in Five,” which ran for twenty-one episodes from October 2017 to March 2018. Since late April, Marshall has seemed to shift her content back to YouTube, though she does not post very frequently – she has posted five YouTube videos since the end of April.

No matter where content is posted, or how it is monetized, it is always important that content creators are flexible with the fast-changing pace of online video. In our interview, Gaby provided an insightful perspective about content creation and platforms.

³³ In the name of full disclosure, I do support my anonymous interviewee on Patreon. For \$7/month, I get access to an exclusive video each month. Additionally, through the collective contributions of all her Patrons, my interviewee has been able to upgrade her equipment and most recently, as of June 2018, has committed to post two “follow me around” vlogs to YouTube per month, as well as increase the number of Patron-exclusive livestreams that she hosts for that tier of Patron (of which I am not a member).

She believes that she and her comedy partner Allison Raskin have been able to make YouTube viable for their show, *Just Between Us*, because they are not tied to YouTube. In response to the increase in young people who want to become YouTubers, Gaby responded:

I always tell people that say that I'm like, "No. You don't want to be a YouTuber. You want to be a writer or an actress, a personality, a host, a producer. Don't say YouTuber. YouTube's the conduit for the stuff that you're going to make."

[...] Allison and I were always like, "YouTube could shut down tomorrow, and then what would we do?" We would be okay.

By framing their engagement on YouTube around skills, rather than platform, Gaby and Allison have adopted a unique to online video mentality where they are not, as Gaby phrased it in our interview, “married” to YouTube. As online video continually shifts, the pair will find the appropriate place for their content when YouTube is no longer the right platform for them.

All of these issues with YouTube and the extremely volatile nature of the online video industry makes a career like that of the beauty vlogger unsustainable, especially in the long-term. Duffy (2017) notes that is the “always-on” nature of these professions that make them unsustainable, and I agree (196). When the beauty vlogger must be “always-on” across YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat – and her Instagram engagement is spread across her grid, her stories, and her IGTV feed³⁴ – there is a point where it is just too much to produce. The production quality expected of beauty content on YouTube has increased over the past few years, and thus that content takes more time to produce and cannot always be produced as a one-woman show, as discussed in Chapter One. UK-

³⁴ IGTV is a native video platform embedded in Instagram, launched on June 21, 2018. I discuss it in more detail at the end of this conclusion.

based beauty vlogger Anna Newton (channel name: The Anna Edit, 459,000 subscribers) reflects on the changes to the beauty vlogging industry since she began blogging and vlogging in March 2010 in a series on blog posts. She explains what she calls the “luxury of time” – she does not have time to engage on all the platforms all the time, so she picks and chooses where she puts particular content based on how much audience engagement she experiences on that particular platform (“My Top Blogging Tips...”). About YouTube specifically, she notes that the platform “has undergone a makeover from people recording videos on their laptops that sound like they’re about to take off any minute, whilst sitting on their bedroom floors, to an industry that’s glossy and pro and everything is filmed on cameras that cost four times more than your monthly rent” (“A Chat About Where YouTube Is At...”). And now the community finds itself at a crossroads, where that “glossy” production value is contributing to a communal sense of burnout and nostalgia for what YouTube used to be. Newton notes that in the past year, she and others have been moving back toward simpler video production: “more and more I see others switching down to this gear too. It’s almost like we’re all doing a three-point turn to take it back to the place where YouTube began for a lot of us. Just chatting away that feels like you’re having a good ol’ catch up with your mate. I’m all for it.” Like Newton, Allana Davison (previous channel name: allanaramaa, 494,000 subscribers) posted a series of videos to YouTube at the end of May 2018 where she too reflected on missing when “people [beauty vloggers] sat on the floor and chatted and put makeup on their face” (“Let's Talk About Some Things | allanaramaa”). As a beauty vlogger, Davison shares that she feels relieved that across the board “people are going back to the

more casual setting” that Newton described, and that beauty videos are “a couple of friends sitting and chatting about what makes them happy” (“Let's Talk About Some Things | allanaramaa”).

Where does all this information leave us in terms of drawing conclusions about online video generally, and the beauty vlogger specifically? The platforms are volatile. The expectations for content are unsustainable. YouTube is not an ideal place for content creators. A year ago, when I was at VidCon, it seemed like YouTube had already lost some of its power in the industry, especially when I learned about Facebook’s moves with native video content. Stuart Cunningham, David Craig, and Jon Silver (2016) had already predicted that “Facebook was YouTube’s biggest threat” (381). And Gaby shared a similar prediction in our interview:

Yeah, we're [she and Allison] very interested in once Facebook gets its sh*t together what's going to happen to YouTube. [...] I feel like as soon as Facebook gets its shit together YouTube is f*cked. Facebook is buying scripted content and launching its own platform where you can watch half hour shows, and you can watch actually good content whereas YouTube Red is f*cking floundering.

All roads were predicting that Facebook would de-throne YouTube. But it has been a year and that has not happened. What has happened is Instagram. Owned by Facebook, Instagram’s story feature directly competes with Snapchat, and has drastically reduced Snapchat’s popularity since its inception. Instagram’s live feature centralizes the “live” capabilities on YouTube and Facebook in one place. And as of June 21, 2018, IGTV has created a home for native, long-form video content (up to one hour) that lives on the Instagram platform as well. It is too early to tell if Instagram, and IGTV, will become a

new home for content once posted to YouTube.³⁵ What is for certain is that, once again, content creators like the beauty vlogger are faced with a new platform and must redistribute their content accordingly. Just as she always has, the beauty vlogger will continue to exist in some iteration for years to come. Before online video the information she shares circulated in private spaces like the hair salon and through magazines, as outlined in the Introduction. Online video, and specifically YouTube, has afforded the beauty vlogger reach and influence, as discussed in Chapter Three, that we could have never imagined, but also has engendered so many avenues through which to share content that she, and her audience, are overwhelmed. As online video continues to shift and optimize, it will be illuminating to trace the continued trajectory of the beauty vlogger, as this dissertation has done up until the present moment.

³⁵ At the present moment, IGTV is not widely used. Part of this lack of popularity has to do with the fact that IGTV only supports vertical video, which is not conducive to long-form content. Other than length of post, not much else seems to differentiate IGTV from Instagram's story function.

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