

BEAUTY VLOGGING: PRACTICES, LABOURS,
INEQUALITY

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the practices and labours of beauty vloggers (video bloggers) and the inequality sustained by these labours and practices. Beauty vloggers regularly produce videos on themes including hair, beauty, fashion and relationships for their own stable, self-contained, branded YouTube channels. The literature on beauty vlogging has examined the presentations of individual vloggers. In this thesis, I problematise the conception of beauty vlogging as a solo endeavour, situating beauty vloggers in a wider vlogging industry, in the specific geographic context of the UK. Through the lens of feminist political economy, I ask how the organisational (macro) structures, in addition to (micro) frictional interactions between industry stakeholders co-produce beauty vloggers' symbolic content.

Analysis is informed by a wider three-year ethnographic study of British 'A List' vloggers on YouTube, conducted between 2015-2018, drawing from the "messy web" of research sites (Postill & Pink, 2012: 125). Ethnography thus encompasses digital, and offline elements, that make up the complexity and embodied nature of long term analysis of spaces contingent to platforms. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with beauty vloggers and stakeholders.

Through 'zooming out' from analysis of the independent beauty vlogger this thesis considers how YouTube's multisided markets, algorithms and their interpretations, the subjective decisions of talent management organisations, relationships with advertisers, authenticity discourses and alignment with existing creative industries and intermediaries all shaped the content that becomes visible on YouTube.

Very few women are able to create a sustainable career through YouTube production, although YouTube is increasingly promoted as a pathway to creative employment. In this thesis I counter YouTube's self-definition as an 'open platform'. I argue that organisational structures and interactions between stakeholders assign visibility and reify existing lines of societal inequalities, in addition to rewarding the production of commercial and feminised content in the vlogging industry.

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Preface

It's Sunday at 7pm: I settle in with a snack to track this weekend's new beauty vlogging video uploads. Many YouTube videos are announced on another social media platform, the video sharing application, Instagram. Vloggers often promote their videos use the feature Instagram Stories, a reel of ostensibly ad-hoc images and short videos disappearing after 24 hours. The instant nature of Instagram Stories means vloggers have been increasingly utilising the feature to draw their audiences' attention, the moment their videos are uploaded to YouTube. Attaining a sizable audience from a video's publication is widely believed to have a positive algorithmic impact, ensuring videos will be shared by widely by YouTube. In other words, getting eyeballs from Instagram onto your YouTube content means it will be amplified to a more significant audience. It is in this context that beauty vloggers are hustling for as many views as possible, as quickly as possible. While scrolling through these promotional videos, anxiety is palpable. Throughout my field work I have witnessed a sharp increase in vloggers' increasingly inventive and even desperate pleas for views. If it ever was enough to simply earn a living by beauty vlogging and uploading it to YouTube, it is no longer. I empathise with these young women who are trying to fight for attention in an increasingly saturated space. Ultimately, beauty vloggers are reliant on, and must be adaptive to, the whims of the social media platform YouTube for visibility. These whims are "black boxed", meaning the platform's inner workings and logics are unavailable for study and scrutiny (Olden & Jackson, 2002). Saffron Barker (2018), a teenage beauty vlogger with a long blonde ponytail, publishes an Instagram Story impelling her audience to "swipe up for my new video!!! (you won't regret it) Replying to <3 emoji's". In response to her requests for <3 emojis, hundreds of viewers have posted purple hearts, hoping for a

reply from Barker. This request is strategic: engagement (including comments) are a time-sensitive positive metric within YouTube's algorithm. If this request is successful it will positively affect the video's promotion on the platform.

Although these cheerful outputs, which call attention to freshly uploaded YouTube videos, may seem everyday or banal, they represent temporal dedication, strategy and a significant volume of labour. The requirements for algorithmic attention are intertwined with the necessity for beauty vloggers' content to be personal, intimate and authentic, and moreover for beauty vloggers to look beautiful within a narrow and fixed aesthetic. Throughout my field work I have found that many have left their jobs or education to undertake content creation as a full-time job. However, changes to the YouTube algorithm and industry insecurity has caused the employment situation of even the most followed YouTubers to be increasingly precarious. My unease watching the Instagram and YouTube videos is heightened by the fact that marginalised people are disadvantaged in the beauty vlogging ecology in numerous ways. Although these videos are spaces of creativity and production, I also view them as spaces of panic, inequality and unevenness.

At 8pm an Instagram Story is published by InTheFrow (2018a), a London based beauty vlogger with a sharp, modelesque aesthetic and a white-blond hair. Her Instagram Stories post invites viewers to view her newly uploaded YouTube video detailing her "sunglasses collection" in which she will unpack tens of luxury sunglasses and assess their suitability: "spoiler... theres a lot [sic]". In the video she wears a relaxed ponytail and gymwear. She is makeup free, but her skin appears flawless, dewy and fresh, her ponytail is slick. She films in her bedroom: a bed, carefully positioned pot plant and a cowhide pillow are visible in the

background. InTheFrow vigorously empties several drawers full of sunglasses: out falls Dior, Valentino and Versace. On the one hand, the volume of designer sunglasses she owns is quite shocking: pair after pair are held up, dissected and commented on. There are 57 in total. However, the tone is light, and the video is pieced together haphazardly: she tells her audience that she has just returned from the gym, and this is a “very, very impromptu, spontaneous video”.

Although showing an audience 57 pairs of high-end designer sunglasses could be alienating, InTheFrow labours to curate a perception that this *authentic* and *relatable*. The gymwear, her makeup free face, the lack of preparation leads us to believe this is her typical Sunday night. Her boyfriend’s sunglasses are mixed in with her own, she chastises him for his poor organisation as she pushes them out of the way. She jokes, “Ray Bans in the mirrored frames, they’re unbelievably stiff, they need some WD40!”. She peers into the camera as she solicits feedback “some more Miu Mius... big, big round Miu Mius... they’re cool but are they me?”. The domestic *mise en scène* of the vlog, the rough handling of the sunglasses as she rattles them around and throws pairs onto the bed, connotes a spontaneity and accessibility. She stops talking because she “needs to apply lip-balm”, we wait as she walks to the other side of the room, digs a lip balm out of her drawer, applies it, walks back to her seat. The video prompts questions of legitimacy that will run throughout this thesis: who can make videos in their gymwear, who can make a successful video in which they throw Miu Miu sunglasses around for 30 minutes, who has a viable vlogging bedroom? Ultimately the video demonstrates how visible beauty vlogging videos are often carefully generically constructed, and in particular how authenticity is a performance, strategy and labour.

Next up on my Instagram, Estée Lalonde (2018) publishes an Instagram Story, putting her audience on high alert. A YouTube video is imminent. In the Instagram Story, she rests her chin on her hand, relaxed: “I am just sitting at my desk now, uploading a brand-new video, it’s going up in 45 minutes so make sure you check it out on my channel”. The YouTube video advertised is a diary of Lalonde’s beach essentials. In the video, Lalonde sprawls on the floor next to her stylish tan sofa, sheepskin pillows scattered behind her. She is excitably listing the beauty, hair and skincare items that she brought to the beach on a recent holiday, withdrawing them from her beach bag as she discusses them in real time, rummaging around she asks herself “so what do we have in here?”. She tells us that she loves the beach, she misses the sun, and she is upset that some of the beauty products are retrieved with specks of sand remaining in their lids. Beginning methodically at bag and hat, Lalonde takes us through to sun screen with a friendly and instructive tone: “sun screen is essential”, “let’s talk hair, because at the beach your hair can get *all sorts* of messed up”.

Halfway through the video, Lalonde promotes the Lancôme “Monsieur Big” mascara. She cuts her relaxed couch-based discussion with close ups of mascara application, she describes how she gets so many compliments when she wears this mascara: “I love the original Monsieur Big, every single time I put Monsieur Big mascara on people are like what mascara are you wearing, and it’s always Monsieur Big”. Although this segment is indistinguishable from the remainder of the video, on closer inspection we can see that it is sponsored. Light pink lettering to the bottom right of the video momentarily flashes up with “AD FEATURE”. This moment in which Lalonde discusses the mascara, ostensibly rustled up from her beach bag, makes visible the tensions between performances of authenticity, forms of governance and the requirements of brands who will sponsor videos. The Code for

Advertising Practice released specific “vlogging advertising guidelines” in 2015, however there still has been no consistent guidance as to the labelling of sponsored content (ASA, 2015). There are many loopholes to avoid advertising disclosure, brands hope that vloggers will parlay their trustworthiness into sales. By extension, these brands hope vloggers will not make advertising content clear. Lalonde technically has labelled the sponsored portion of the video, although the colouring and temporary nature of the labelling is ambiguous. Although this mascara is explicitly sponsored, many of the other products Lalonde includes will be provided as part of longer running deals with organisations, ambassadorships, gifted products and from overflowing goody bags at events.

I have to admit I actually purchased this mascara at the airport prior to my holiday this year, on Lalonde’s recommendation. As we will see throughout this thesis, the affective pull of the beauty vlogger is strong: I have purchased several high-end items that as a PhD student I definitely could not afford, having seen them repeatedly applied, celebrated, highlighted and lauded in beauty vlog after beauty vlog. I have worn these cosmetics to industry events, and I have still not felt like I fitted in. I have questioned why, when I follow the step by step tutorial, these products don’t look right. I have asked myself whether I need better makeup brushes, a better moisturiser, a seven-step skincare routine. This made me feel bad. However, my thesis is not a work of moral panic, it is not about whether the genre of beauty vlogging is any different, or ultimately ‘worse’, than the decades of cosmetic conglomerate-funded media that I have already been consuming since I purchased Girl Talk magazine age 7, Smash Hits magazine at 11, Seventeen and later Cosmopolitan and Vogue. Growing up I listened to the Spice Girls (and purchased their body spray), I watched Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen films (and purchased their

makeup line), I tried on glitter eyeshadows in Boots, in my bedroom with my friends, on weekends and in the summer holidays.

In this thesis I ask how the funding of YouTube content by gendered brands and advertisers shapes the media that becomes visible on YouTube and influences the practices of those hoping to become visible. I outline the labour involved in 'authentically' constructing content around sponsorships, and how vloggers are required to afford connotations of relatability and trustworthiness. I probe the beauty vloggers that are selected and hired by organisations to promote their products. I also consider the invisible nature of new digital intermediaries in online spaces and study the laborious drive for visibility and inequalities that this engenders. This project has informed my thinking on women's media as it is anchored in domestic space and prompted questions about what it means to be authentic, to be feminine and a woman, while striving for visibility online.

Chapter One: Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, I will outline the key themes that underpin my argument. The first section of this introduction is titled 'A List vloggers and the vlogging industry'; herein I establish the elements of beauty vlogging as a genre. I define my case study in more detail, in addition to mapping the wider industry in which beauty vloggers are stakeholders. The concept of beauty, as it is utilised in this thesis, is unpacked and specified. In the following section I call attention to this thesis as a work of feminist political economy. I situate my work within the traditions of political economic thought and delineate what I argue is at stake by missing gendered analysis within this field, suggesting how this thesis addresses these gaps. The third section concerns the platform-specific context of this thesis: namely, while the scope of the ethnography moves across platforms, this is a work that centres on stakeholder relationships with YouTube. I define key concepts used in this work, including algorithm, platforms and visibility. I make a case for the urgency of my work, which is a feminist analysis of platform-based labour, demonstrating how individuals' relationships with platforms afford little power or influence, are often unstable, and are experienced highly affectively. I call attention to relationships between industry stakeholders and platform organisational structures, which contribute to the gendered nature of symbolic production. Lastly, I contextualise this thesis in relation to the state of the UK creative industries during the period 2015 - 2018. Although vlogging on YouTube is an international phenomenon, the beauty vloggers in this thesis work on YouTube in the socio-economic context of the UK. I introduce how digital employment, such as vlogging, is being presented as a key opportunity for those aspiring to work in creative industries. In

response, I will provide a robust critique of how beauty vlogging sustains raced, classed and gendered inequalities, exacerbated by platform structures, in addition to the subjective decision-making practices of gatekeepers and intermediaries. Having outlined the key concepts themes within this thesis, and addressing theoretical gaps, I lay out my research questions. I then summarise each Chapter of this work, setting out how each responds to these questions and supports my arguments.

A List Vloggers and the Vlogging Industry

The case study for this thesis is a group of 'A List' beauty vloggers, broadly defined as the tiny fraction of British beauty vloggers in the UK who become extremely successful on YouTube, often accruing millions of subscribers each. The 'A List' beauty vloggers have significant capital on the platform, but also appear in fashion magazines, offer merchandise, makeup lines, and hold book deals. The A List vloggers ostensibly *individually* operate cosmetic and fashion themed YouTube channels which are often supported by a textual blog and a heavy social media presence. They film in domestic space, in their bedrooms, but in practice are often represented by high profile digital talent agencies. They parse a performance of girl-next-door likeability into makeup tutorials and an amalgamation of other highly feminised video content, including fashion look-books, boy-related chat, lifestyle guidance, healthy eating and baking demonstrations. In contrast, the most popular male vloggers adhere to diverse (albeit masculine) genres. They document their travels, pranks, release comedy music videos, make gaming videos, and lecture about science and technology. In this thesis, I use the term 'vlogging industry' to illustrate the group of stakeholders involved in the production of the beauty vlog. This includes, but is not limited

to: YouTube, vloggers, digital intermediaries including talent agents and managers, brands, marketing agencies and vlogging event organisers.

The question of how many followers actually makes an A List vlogger has no easy or straightforward answer. In practice, there are often broad and blurry lines between micro-celebrities, and aspirant participants to this ecology. Marwick and boyd (2011) observe that, in part because of social media platforms, “celebrity practice as a continuum that can be practiced across the spectrum of fame rather than a schism” (Marwick & boyd, 2011: 141). This statement does speak to the fluid definitions and embodiments of fame on social networks. However, in the context of the UK vlogging industry, a certain group attain a significant market share of attention. They are the most subscribed to women on YouTube in the UK who represent themselves as friends (#teaminternet), consistently work with the most high-profile beauty and lifestyle brands, are featured in magazines, and headline vlogging conventions and win vlogging awards. They have traversed what Abidin (2015a) terms “microcelebrification”, as their positioning as celebrities is calcified through recognisably traditional markers, including brand deals, management by talent agents and their coverage in gossip tabloids (Abidin, 2015a: 1). A List vloggers could also be accurately conceptualised using Abidin’s definition of influencers:

Everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with following in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating advertorials into their blog or social media posts.

(Abidin 2015a: 1)

This description certainly matches the self-presentations, behaviours and generic conventions of A List vlogging. However, I argue due to their platform-specificity, and their overwhelming YouTube market share in the UK context, they necessitate a further qualification. Hence, I have borrowed from Hollywood's celebrity popularity demarcations to ring fence a subset of A List beauty vloggers for this analysis. The criteria used, and an indication of vloggers included in my sample, are outlined in the subsequent Methodology Chapter. In short, I selected UK based beauty and lifestyle vloggers with over 10,000 subscribers, although I have also taken into account other forms of capital in this ecology, such as management by an elite talent agency.

Beauty vlogging content involves instruction in beauty practices, which are the various processes, products and procedures that are undertaken, with an aim to become beautiful. Additionally, visible A List beauty vloggers *are* beautiful, in that they are physically attractive. They consistently represent and conform to beauty norms. But, what are beauty norms, exactly? In a recently published edited collection by Elias, Schaff and Gill, entitled "Aesthetic Labour: Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism", the authors claim their aim is to "mark out a new intellectual terrain in beauty studies" (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017: 5). In their introduction, they speak of many categories and typologies of beauty in culture, including "youthful beauty" (4) "beauty norms"(5) "politics of appearance" (6) "unrealistic beauty ideals" (8) "Euro-American beauty ideals" (11) " "clear patterns relating to beauty" (19) "(hetero)sexual attractiveness" (25) "beauty imperative" (25) to "look good" (29) and "female beauty" (31). Ultimately, though these norms, ideals, patterns and styles of beauty

are often unclear and undefined. What are, for example, “European-American” beauty ideals, and what is “heterosexual attractiveness”? At the most basic level, what does it mean to “look good”? Speaking to these gaps, this thesis outlines the limited, but arguably culturally representative, performance of beauty within the vlogging industry in the UK. At a broad level, I argue the aesthetic architectures of beauty in the vlogging industry as hegemonic beauty. Bennett defines Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as “moral, cultural, intellectual and thereby, political leadership over the whole of society” (Bennett, 2006: 95). Building on this, I define the oft-used/rarely-explained, concept of *hegemonic beauty* as the temporally and geographically determined, dominant cultural standards of beauty. In this vein, access to physical attractiveness and beauty are stratified within existing channels of structural power, stratified by class, race, age and gender. In the following section I argue it is helpful to think of beauty vloggers through the cultural lexicon of the Disney Princess, who serve as extreme examples of societal touchstones, representations of normative and hegemonic beauty.

That beauty vloggers share more than a passing resemblance to Disney Princesses has not gone unnoticed. MTV ran a feature in which they hired illustrators to draw popular beauty vloggers as Disney princesses, drawing from the *Snow White* canon by stating, “we would happily watch a feature length film of Tanya Burr doing a makeup tutorial and instead of using foundation brushes and stuff, birds applied her brushes instead” (MTV, 2015a). Burr is a UK based beauty vlogger, cosmetic entrepreneur and actress with 3.6 million subscribers on YouTube¹. MTV also published a piece about the most popular beauty vlogger in the UK,

¹ As of 2/09/2018

Zoella, who has 12 million subscribers². The article is entitled “9 reasons Zoella is basically a real life Disney princess” explaining that this is due to her red lips, her eyes being the “size of mars” and that “her hair is always flawless” (MTV, 2015b). The Telegraph observes “[Zoella] looks like a Disney Princess” (Audley, 2014) and lifestyle blog The Debrief called her “a pint size Disney princess made flesh” (Tsjeng, 2015). Historically, Disney Princesses illustrate societal hegemonic beauty, the attractive women in popular culture at their particular time. *Snow White* draws from a flapper girl aesthetic mixed with Betty Boop, *Sleeping Beauty’s* Aurora is reminiscent of 1960’s Brigitte Bardot and the then-newly released Barbie doll, and the Little Mermaid parallels Jennifer Grey in *Dirty Dancing* (Do Rozario, 2004). Bell (1995) argues “Disney artists sketched the flesh and blood on these folktale templates with contemporaneous popular images of feminine beauty and youths” (Bell, 1995: 110). However, despite drawing from the (very slightly) diverse beautiful women of their times, the Disney Princesses become transformed by a specific Princess *look*. The princesses adhere to “a common set of feminine beauty norms, regardless of their individual ethnicity: hourglass-shaped body, glossy hair, long-lashed eyes, and heart-shaped face; hair colour and style are emphasised as the primary distinguishing feature” (Wohlwend, 2009: 23). In other words, despite Princesses being of apparently diverse ethnicities, the Disney princess look is ultimately raced European and white.

Similarly, the A List beauty vloggers in the study are painted from this very narrow palette of beauty: saucer-shaped big eyes, small button noses and heart-shaped faces. They embody what I describe as a healthful *glow*. Borrowing from Deleuze, McRobbie observes

² As of 2/09/2018

“luminosities are suggestive of post-feminist equality while also defining and circumscribing the conditions of a status... within this cloud of light, young women are taken to be actively engaged in the production of the self” (McRobbie, 2009: 60). Similarly, the cloud of light beams around the healthful and glowing beauty vloggers. A glow can be constructed and managed using products and lighting, however, the ability to perform this glow as *authentic* and *natural* is stratified by skin colour: light skin will always glow brighter.

Throughout this thesis, I have found researching beauty to be personal, difficult and unpleasant. Beauty can be deeply uncomfortable, as Nguyen (2011) suggests, because it forces us to recognise its unequal distribution, and the omnipresent existence of ugliness. To interrogate beauty forces us to recognise that we live in a world of “aesthetic unevenness”, in which we are located and implicated (Nguyen, 2011: 363). As much as we appear to hold our object of analysis at arm’s length, beauty and styling affects our positioning, experience and marketability significantly. Although it is awkward to admit, this is particularly true within academia: we are often on public display (see: Brown, 2017; Donaghue, 2017). As feminist scholars we can shock-drop the popularity of procedures like labiaplasty into analyses with abject horror (Felski, 2006; Jones, 2017; Negra, 2009) and equally we can reason with ourselves that wearing lipstick to a conference isn’t totally submissive to patriarchal structures. To talk about the meat of beauty, as we all live in the meat-space of real life, is to discuss something that is unchangeable, and something we ultimately cannot resist. The affective experiences of ethnographically traversing a world defined by a specific form of beauty are attended to in this thesis’ methodology. To be blunt: it was not very nice. However, it was essential to engage in both online and offline spaces with beauty vloggers, and feel these currents and hierarchies, the fissures that

determine acceptability and legibility in these ecologies, marketplaces and economies.

When we render beauty invisible, we may miss the fine lines that draw beauty into being.

What is at stake here is that we miss a significant organisational element, which contributes to the political economy of beauty vlogging, and underpins the gendered economy of work and visibility in creative industries and beyond.

Feminist Political Economy

Key questions in this thesis are why the most visible young women on YouTube are hegemonically beautiful, why the A List vloggers produce content informed by beauty, and who has access to legibility, visibility and expertise as a beauty vlogger. To suggest a response, this thesis turns to feminist political economy. Feminists and cultural studies scholars have argued a political economic ontology bypasses the micro everyday interactions that produce media symbols, in favour of privileging a “jet plane” view that overwhelmingly discusses ownership structures and organisational concentration (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009: 239). Building on these critiques, I propose a feminist political economy that critically attends to how organisations, and media production, have become decentred from traditional organisational structure. Within this thesis, I draw from feminist perspectives to account for pleasure, inequality of representations and spaces of social reproduction. However, I ask what is the *political economy* of a significant and lucrative industry, that (at least at first look) primarily consists of women making media in their bedrooms.

Political economy is concerned with the uneven distribution of social relations, resources and power in capitalist society (Meehan et al., 1993; Mosco, 2009). My project investigates

how monopoly structures of platform ownership, a small pool of influential intermediaries and gatekeepers, advertisers' funding, regulatory silos and creative industries policy all shape the gendered dynamics of the UK vlogging industry. At first blush, political economy approaches to studying media communications are highly compatible with my research ontology. For example, McChesney (2000) states political economy investigates how "economic factors influence politics and social relations" (McChesney, 2000: 110). Similarly, Mansell (2004) observes it "insists on examination of the circumstances that give rise to any existing distribution of power and of the consequences for consumers and citizens" (Mansell, 2004: 99). Questions offered by Hardy also underpin my approach to this project: "how do media relate to power sources in society? Whose interests are represented? Whose are represented in media?" (Hardy, 2014: 14).

On closer examination, however, it is unclear whether these theorists, and by extension the field of political economy they illustrate, takes questions of identity politics and social justice seriously enough to offer the framework, or to provide the grounding orientation for this analysis. Indeed: ownership, governance and participation are central to this thesis, but what is also needed is close attention to micro, and affective experiences of power as they flow through media industries, and shape symbolic production. An approach taking into account the experiential and the affective in the study of media texts is often positioned as a cultural studies approach, and dismissed by political economists. Hardy (2014) provocatively observes that "it has been an unfortunate characteristic of radical 'left' movements to engage in often bitter and arcane sectarian divisions amongst themselves" (Hardy, 2014: 20). He is unable to resist pointing out, however, that he believes cultural studies theorists have been well meaning but have *gone too far*: "in some areas of enquiry,

what began as an informed criticism of economism and reductiveness in analysis ended up as an evasion of problems of power in all but the most micro of contexts” (Hardy, 2014: 20). Wasko (2014) makes a similar point, arguing that cultural studies scholars often miss structural and contextual issues, and afford too much weight to the notion that audiences’ textual readings could be “politically liberating” (Wasko, 2014: 265).

Theorists aligned with cultural studies have critiqued political economy for privileging news and newsroom analysis, and affording an uneven focus towards the “larger level operation of media institutions” that misses the role of everyday media employees, including tensions, resistance and negotiations within their practices (Havens et al., 2009: 236). Many researchers, especially those who are concerned with discrimination beyond class, have proposed frameworks that take the complex processes of media production into account. Saha (2018), for example, puts forward an approach that encompasses “macro questions that deal with power, history and structure, and micro issues dealing with labour, agency and texts” (Saha, 2018: 6). Other theoretical proposals are more thoroughly introduced in Chapter Three (D’Acci, 1994; Havens et al., 2009; Negus, 1999). I draw heavily from these cultural studies aligned perspectives in this thesis, particular from “industry lore”, a concept introduced by Havens to demonstrate how “industry insiders imagine television programming, its audiences and the kind of approaches that can and cannot be profitable” (Havens, 2014a: 40). Applicable beyond broadcast industries, this theory captures the central role that interpretations of structural conditions play for those who have decision-making roles in media industries. It recognises that media workers are not passive sponges of capitalist ideology and facilitates an interrogation of the role of the imaginary, in

production processes. It highlights the tacit, affect-driven nature of media industries work, it enables and constrains beauty vlogging practices and visibilities.

Critical industry studies perspectives are central to this thesis; a more complete literature review of these works is found in Chapter Three. However, here, I want to politically claim this as a work of *feminist political economy* of new media. As Riordan points out, feminist theorists may have kept political economy at arm's length as "historically women have been unwelcome in overt political and economic domains" (Riordan, 2002: 3). Women have also been specifically excluded from industry access that affords the study of the political economy of media. In 2016 an AHRC funded research group I am a member of, promoted as an innovative synthesis between industry, policy makers and academics, and then launched their group with ten speakers: all men. One possible cause of this, the gendered barriers to networking for industry access, will be discussed in my methodology Chapter. For now, I argue feminist political economy must centre consumption as an economic practice, rather than exclusively a cultural one. However, studying the economic must encompass "individual experiences rather than focus primarily on macro-level, institutional and structural analyses" (Riordan, 2002: 4). Furthermore, we must examine how "corporations limit and constrain cultural representations" (Riordan, 2002: 8). In this vein, a feminist political economy also calls attention to how the body can be called into legibility by organisational structure. An example of research demonstrating the production of bodies from a political economy perspective is offered by Entwistle & Wissinger (2006) whose work centres on working freelance models. The authors demonstrate that modelling is a laborious job that requires managing weight and body shape, style and ensuring bodily abjections (toenails, body hair) are stripped, plucked and kempt. Moreover, models' bodies are sites of

production: what is the *right* body shape, style, hair length required for clients and agencies are a product of the frictional and productive decision-making processes and relationships between stakeholders, managers and intermediaries. The acceptable feminine body is shaped by organisational structures.

The visible beauty vlogging aesthetic is in part determined and produced by stakeholders and intermediaries in the vlogging industry. Those with the right 'look' are signed up by digital talent agents, invited on press trips, featured at vlogging events. A political economic perspective also affords an examination into how the *right look* is partially determined by the organisational structures of YouTube and enacted by machine learning algorithms. That the face is included in the video thumbnail (or cover image) is a ubiquitous trope within the beauty vlogging genre: the face sells the video. This is made clear in discourse from beauty vlogger Helen Anderson, who hosted an educational event for the Creative College Network, Access to Media, in June of 2018. She addressed an audience of young women, all dressed approximations of her standard polka dot and leopard print garb. Anderson showed some of her favourite and inspirational Instagram and YouTube channels. She described how she chose her thumbnail (video cover) images, stating that she often includes her face because it is likely to push her up in the algorithm, and ensure she becomes visible to more people:

There's a lot of pictures of myself, but only because... right, this is when my business head comes on... they get the most likes! it's not a case of being vain, it's a case of... I want people to see what I'm posting, and if people are liking and engaging with pictures of my face, I'll keep posting pictures of my face... because it will keep me high up in the ranks (Helen Anderson, beauty vlogger).

This example demonstrates how the manipulation and display of the body, the meat of beauty, intersects with the collation and construction of audiences and visibility. Similarly, The YouTube Creator Academy, a learning resource provided by the platform, encourages beauty vloggers to centre their face in their thumbnail image: “that fabulous final result may inspire viewers to take the plunge and watch the whole video” (YouTube, 2018a). A video’s thumbnail image, namely the video cover image, is read by YouTube’s algorithms in order to determine the video’s potential for visibility. Who does YouTube, and their decision-making processes, believe has the right face for a beauty vlogger? How does a beauty vlogger’s eye shape determine my search results for ‘smoky eye’? What skin types are made more visible than others? Analysis of machine learning algorithms shows that beauty is often coded highly normatively, and the following section will demonstrate how platforms (and algorithms) make organisational decisions that are often discriminatory (Elias & Gill, 2018). Ultimately, this thesis argues that the emotional, financial and temporal dedication that is required to reach appropriate self-presentation is stratified by gender.

Some feminist scholars, however, are decidedly unsympathetic towards the aesthetic labour demanded in the fashion industry. Critiquing Entwistle and Wissinger’s piece (cited in the previous section) McRobbie (2011) argues “[the authors] struggle to persuade the reader as to the plight of ‘high end’ models, especially when saying that they are ‘less mannequins than they are CEOs of their own corporations’” (McRobbie, 2011: 70). Elias et al. qualify that there has been an uneven focus on forms of “aestheticized culture work” in feminist scholarship (Elias et al., 2017: 5). However, as we will see, participation for all on new media platforms hinges on aesthetic work, and aesthetic self-presentations. For A List beauty

vloggers, the ability to participate in entrepreneurship on YouTube as a platform is overwhelmingly stratified by the requirement to perform within feminised genres. It is in this vein that I challenge the statement that fashion and beauty labour is disproportionately recognised in critical works, and defend the urgency of critically understanding the beauty vlogging industry in the UK. A feminist political economic perspective also makes room to study questions of gender and structure within organisations. In this thesis, I centre questions of power, particularly attending to gender, to study of the scarcity of attention, visibility, and creative freedom in the UK beauty vlogging industry.

Algorithmic Visibility, Attention Economy, and Gender

The visibility of a YouTube video, as it is recommended through platform architectures, playlists and search, is determined by algorithmic signals. Technically, algorithms are “a structured sequence of steps [which] create an output from an input through the mechanical application of a series of operations constrained by logical operators and conditionals” (Berry and Fagerjord, 2017: 47). Put differently, algorithms lay out the guiding processes for mechanical decision making. In the context of this thesis, algorithms are defined as the codified step by step processes implemented by YouTube to afford or restrict visibility. They enact processes that ensure audiences see what YouTube intends audiences to see, which is in turn informed by their organisational mission and business model. As van Dijck (2013) puts it “algorithms infiltrate a social (trans)action by means of computational data analysis, upon which the outcome is translated into a commercial-social tactic” (van Dijck, 2013: 31). Although at their basic level algorithms are automated transactions, they are also informed by user engagement, and beyond that, the meanings their ‘decisions’

create are social, complex, and contested. In this vein, I am concerned with what is promoted on YouTube and why, but also the perception, understandings, and affective relations that YouTube's algorithms afford, support and sustain for its users, audiences and stakeholders.

To work on YouTube necessitates achieving visibility. YouTube is an "attention economy", a term which captures the relationship between the abundance of information online, and the comparative scarcity of audience attention (Goldhaber, 1997: 1). Attention then, becomes a rare and valuable commodity, a "potential driving force of a very intense economy": in many cases "money flows along with attention" (Goldhaber, 1997: 1). The structure of online visibility predictably follows a "power law", a bell curve in which a small number of videos, sites, images receive a significant degree of attention whereas a majority (the 'long tail' following the curve) receive far fewer, netting a small numbers of views and engagement (Adamic & Huberman, 2001). The distribution of the attention economy is, at first glance, incompatible with the promises of *platforms*. Platforms often market themselves as "open, flat and neutral spaces", facilitators of visibility, while making specific decisions about "content, availability, organization and participation" that have real consequences for both audiences and participants (Gillespie, 2010: 358). Platforms' business models inform the designed *algorithmic* choices about what will, and will not, be rewarded with visibility. If a YouTube video is promoted by the platforms' algorithms it is much more likely to receive a greater number of views. Like a rock gathering moss, the more views a video receives, the more visible it is likely to become to wider audiences. The videos that are promoted on advertiser funded platforms such as YouTube must satisfy their audiences, but also their commercial partners (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; van Dijck,

2013). It will become clear that, although YouTube must balance satisfying each of their stakeholders carefully, their business models hinge on successful relationships with commercial partners.

Attention, then, is required for economic survival on YouTube. The image of youthful, dewy eyed, suspiciously healthful YouTubers looking hopefully into the camera as they achingly implore their audiences to “like and subscribe” has been parodied heavily in popular culture³. The call often operates as a shorthand for the desperation and fame-hungry nature of “micro celebrity” (Senft, 2008). However, beyond parody, this request was also ubiquitous throughout my online ethnography; beauty vlogging videos close with calls to “subscribe if you’re new” (Murphy, 2018), “don’t forget to subscribe to my channel to see more” (Gabriella ♡, 2018). Even Zoella (2018), a beauty vlogger with over 12 million subscribers, ends her videos with the plea: “if you haven’t yet subscribed, please do go down below and press the subscribe button, it’s free... it doesn’t do anything, it just means you see my videos every time I upload”. The motivation for beauty vloggers to gain subscribers on YouTube is manifold. Firstly, metrics carry significant weight on the platform, and the volume of ‘subscribers’ a user has procured is particularly salient. Attaining a subscriber at an instrumental level means a user has signed up to receive notifications whenever a video is uploaded. However, at the symbolic level, subscribers are “popularity markers”, that connote longevity of users’ relationship with a creator, an intention to watch and to continue watching that ultimately contributes to users “positioning and legitimacy as a successful YouTuber” (García-Rapp, 2017a: 233). Subscribers have community value, they

³ Examples include the BBC3 comedy ‘Pls Subscribe’, the 2012 documentary “Please Subscribe” and myriad gifs and memes. There are also several entries in the Urban Dictionary, for example “A phrase used by the average YouTube that is really annoying”.

are a “social currency” on the platform (Postigo, 2014: 7). Moreover, subscribers are especially important to cultivate for “entrepreneurial vloggers” seeking to demonstrate their “embeddedness” in and outside of YouTube culture (Burgess & Green, 2009a: 100). Subscribers are a key determinant in assessing channel value for marketers, talent agents, and YouTube. The platform distributes resources by subscriber volume: access to studio resources, events and some forms of support requires 10,000 subscribers. Subscribers are not only synonymous with attention, but with the desire for further attention, they indicate users’ intention to watch more.

For beauty vloggers, YouTube’s proprietary algorithmic processes and recipes are “opaque” (Sandvig et al., 2014: 3). The information provided to users by the platform suggests making *good* or *engaging* content, with little developed definition. For example, a video published by the platform in 2017 utilises twee stop-motion style animation to ostensibly define “The Algorithm” for aspirant and established vloggers (YouTube Creators, 2017). A friendly voiceover enquires “OK, how can I get the algorithm to like my videos? Pretty simple, get the audience to like your videos”. What this statement, and the wider video content obscures, is that algorithmic signals are not only more complex than is suggested here, but also highly changeable (Bucher, 2018) This has real implications for beauty vloggers who hope to make a sustainable living on the platform, which practically must be attained through algorithmic visibility. Herein, I return to subscribers, a platform “affordance”: a term that encompasses how the “material qualities of technologies constrain or invite practices while also accommodating emergent meanings” (McVeigh-Schultz & Baym, 2015: 1). The subscriber feature, in a material sense, allows audiences and fans to receive updates from a beauty vloggers. Moreover, it provides a resource through which to build stability for

Youtubers in the face of algorithmic uncertainty. The promise of this affordance is that *at least* their subscribed audience, a dedicated signed-up fan base, will be notified of the content they create, despite the chance for wider invisibility within the platforms' architectures. However, this promise of stability was shaken in May 2018. At this time, YouTube informed creators that the subscriber inbox would no longer be sorted by chronological order, videos would be instead prioritised by personalised algorithm. In other words, YouTube declared that they would now determine video visibility within subscriber inboxes through variously weighted algorithmic signals, in some cases unsubscribing audiences from channels that platform deemed them no longer interested in. This change presented manifold risks for beauty vloggers: that viewers would miss videos, watch less often, and forget about channels that had previously subscribed to. Would anyone notice if they disappeared?

This announcement shook the beauty vlogging community, with many expressing public disappointment with YouTube. The change was arguably unsettling not only because it proposed a risk to vloggers' financial stability, but it made visible the significant power imbalance between cultural producers and platforms. Many vloggers reacted productively, requesting their followers go to additional steps to be notified about their new videos. For example, A List beauty vlogger Lily Pebbles tweeted "Don't forget to change the settings on your YouTube subscription page. For Some MENTAL reason @TeamYouTube have changed it so you only see highlights" (Pebbles, 2018). Similarly, beauty vlogger Saffron Barker posted in an Instagram story; "PLEASE READ – YouTube have changed everything... so unless you click this bell you LITERALLY won't see my videos/vlogs anymore". Although these individuals mutually benefit from a symbiotic relationship with YouTube for their income,

YouTube can change the rules of the game with very little warning. This example highlights the uneven nature of power in vloggers' relationship with YouTube. It shows how cultural production could be conceptualised as becoming increasingly "platform dependent", in which content, and by extension content creators, are "contingent", meaning compliant yet agile, flexible and attentive to platform changes (Nieborg & Poell, 2018: 3). To be a cultural producer in 2018 is to hone your positioning as an "anticipatory, speculative self", to always be ready for forthcoming (algorithmic) changes (Hearn, 2017: 74). That women shape themselves towards highly feminised performances according to organisational structures is not new. In *The Managed Heart* Hochschild (2012: 33) demonstrates how organisations take a curatorial approach to their staff, who utilise "deep acting" to satisfy organisational needs: often to be pleasant, attentive, and happy. The result is that individuals are ultimately alienated from their own emotions. I argue, to ready oneself for platform visibility engenders the individualisation of this process. Through research, theorisations and imaginaries, vloggers attend to the exigent requirements of platforms as they move forward, hoping they will continue to be kept on for the ride.

In this thesis, I argue a *feminist* investigation of platform and algorithmic content curation is missed in the extant literature. In this vein, I present a case study of the practices, strategies and affects of platform-complementary symbolic production, from a feminist perspective. A process of "platformization" means that "producers... are impelled to develop publishing strategies that are aligned with the business models of platform" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). I ask: when platforms offer a curatorial and governing role how are opportunities for visibilities and participation distributed? Feminist researchers have contributed to theorising the highly problematic relationship between new media and gender. A valuable body of

work demonstrates how beauty vlogs specifically position bodily labour as a source of empowerment towards producing a specific kind of feminine self, ready for a neoliberal marketplace (Marwick, 2015; Nathanson, 2014; White, 2015; Wotanis & McMillan, 2014). In particular, Duffy (2015, 2016, 2017) demonstrates how online feminised spaces of cultural production, foreground *consumption* for women. She contextualises this media within historically classed and gendered definitions of entrepreneurship, investigating the highly normative, realities of “aspirational labour” in these industries which hinge on young women’s participation in “commodity capitalism” (Duffy, 2016: 13). For Banet-Weiser (2017), beauty vlogs both impel young women to “discipline themselves in conventional hetero-feminine ways”, they also position participants as “self-empowered and entrepreneurial” (Banet-Weiser, 2017: 267). These works ask pertinent questions about visibility, that both align with considerations of representation in media, and moral panics over young women’s usage of social media. Dobson (2015) points out that young women are impelled to brand themselves as “heterosexy” on social media, which she attributes to narrowness of available tools of expressing femininity: she argues these self-presentations often manifest as a defensive process of “defining and defending the postfeminist self” (Dobson, 2015: 159). These works outlined above specifically address social media, but they draw heavily from the feminist analyses of historical, social and political disenfranchisements in media more broadly, and in society (Among others: Ahmed, 2017; Biressi & Nunn, 2016; Dosekun, 2016; Genz, 2015; Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2016; Harris, 2004; Keller, 2014; McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Nunn & Biressi, 2010; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Skeggs, 1997; Storr, 2003; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Tate, 2015; Tyler & Bennett, 2010; Wood & Skeggs, 2011). I am indebted to these perspectives and use these works heavily in this thesis.

What is missed, however, is how the specificity of market structures, industry stakeholders and platform organisational structures specifically contribute to this gendered nature of symbolic production. Why, when they could produce *anything*, are young women making hours upon hours of beauty content, in which they utilise six different cosmetic products to draw their eye into being? Or, to flip this perspective, why is highly feminised content associated with consumption the most visible, to both researchers and wider publics? Herein, I synthesise feminist theorists' powerful observations with work addressing the specific injuries, imbalances, invisibilities, practices and femininities that are afforded and sustained by new media such as YouTube. A thread that runs through this work is the salience of binary gender to social media platforms. Gender is central to the design of platforms, because it is a central concern of the markets they serve. For platforms, including YouTube, segmenting and targeting audiences based on binary gender is *always* an option: platforms are "demographically obsessed with gender" (Bivens, 2017; Bivens & Haimson, 2016: 6; Cheney-Lippold, 2011, 2017). Our gendered categorisation shapes what we see on social media platforms and what media we consume. This work demonstrates that imagined and theorised *gendered* audiences inform vloggers' understandings of algorithmic visibility, and their audiences, and shapes the behaviours of intermediaries and stakeholders in the vlogging industry.

It is important to recognise that vloggers' precarious and uneven experiences with platforms, and the wider vlogging industry, are highly affective. In the context of this work, affect is defined as "a general feeling of movement subjectively experienced, an overall sensation of something that is in the making" (Papacharissi, 2015: ix). Emotions are delayed reactions to being affected; affect is a jolt, a stirring, it is a pull. Affect, as it centres

“intensity” and refuses emotional binaries or diagnoses, is a particularly good lens through which to study experiences of algorithmic visibility, which are contingent and infinite (Hillis et al., 2015: 2). Algorithmic visibility is affective because it is unresolvable, always in process, and always requiring *more*. Producing a video and uploading it to YouTube involves releasing an object to gather visibility. The video object, and its producer, correspondingly gather static from the platform atmosphere, atmosphere meaning a murky shapeless force that is somewhat entangled with an affective state. Throughout this thesis I argue that YouTube is often an object, within an atmosphere of anxiety, and “anxiety is sticky”, attaching itself to whatever objects are near (Ahmed, 2010: 40). Visibility on YouTube can be experienced positively, but what is felt more often is its absence. It is these *gaps* outside of visibility that are saturated with anxieties and panic (Ahmed, 2010: 33). Experiences of (in)visibility are often (but not always) highly productive – and correspondingly affect and inform symbolic production.

A second point energising this thesis is that algorithmic decisions create very real consequences for their users. One oft-cited example involves a PR crisis for Hewlett Packard, when in 2009 their facial recognition package did not recognise black faces. This technology became a “vehicle for embedded human social dynamics (racism), which it could then perpetuate” (Sandvig, 2016: 4973). There are myriad other examples to demonstrate how algorithmic errors and biases affect and shape the experience of marginalised people: a man downloading the gay hookup app Grindr was recommended ‘related’ application called “Sex Offender Search” (Ananny, 2011) and in 2017, YouTube’s supposedly child-friendly Restricted Mode feature equated a slew of banal, benign and everyday LGBTQ+ content with mature or adult themes (Chokshi, 2018). Not only are these so-termed ‘errors’

inconvenient, they are highly affective, shaping how audiences view themselves and their relationships with technology. In her analysis of racist and sexist politics of Google search, Noble argues search results consistently return the “kinds of hegemonic frameworks and notions that are often resisted by women and people of colour” (Noble, 2018: 24). It is through this critical lens that I examine how beauty vloggers become visible on YouTube. The politics of YouTube as a platform, the politics of promotion and search, informs the structures of visibility. I argue it is essential to critically engage with the architectures of YouTube, and its relationships to stakeholders, to theorise the symbolic production and representations within beauty vlogs.

Creative Industries

In January of 2018, UK newspaper The Metro reported that “social media and gaming” was the fourth most popular future career choice of the nation’s schoolchildren (Nagesh, 2018). This survey was conducted by the Times Educational Supplement, the National Association of Head Teachers, UCL Institute of Education and OECD Education and Skills. A representative said: “while it may be argued that this new YouTube-based ‘celebrity’ culture may be an issue or problem, these careers (vloggers, professional gamers and game designers) are increasingly valid career options for children and young people” (Nagesh, 2018). This section will posit that the individualised nature of beauty vlogging makes it attractive to policymakers, and its positioning as a *dream job* means a lucrative marketing opportunity: now training for a vlogging career is ‘sold’ by private organisations. This thesis draws from an emerging body of literature, which situates forms of online content creation within broader spheres of precarity, individualised calls to entrepreneurship, and a mandatory requirement to brand the self to market to potential employers (Banet-Weiser,

2017; Duffy, 2017; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hearn, 2017; Marwick, 2015; McRobbie, 2015). I present an ethnographic study of UK-based beauty vlogging that is rooted in an approach informed by *UK based* creative industries policy, initiatives and public discourse. Although vlogging on YouTube is an international phenomenon, the beauty vloggers in my thesis work on YouTube in the socio-economic context of the UK. It is particularly important to attend to this specificity, as the UK context serves as an exemplary case for creative employment. This is firstly because the UK provides a blueprint for how cultural industries have been deployed as place-making and economic strategies, and secondly as software industries and informational technologies have been increasingly enveloped into definitions of creative industries in UK policy. The vlogging industry aligns with, intersects with, and interlinks the specific initiatives, policies and discourses of employability in the UK creative cultural industries. Discourses of creativity have been strategically used to underpin and promote the widespread short term, insecure contract work, weakened trade unions, decreased employment benefits and increased insecurity and inequalities of what has been termed the new 'precariat'.

Although creative industries are often positioned as a meritocracy, this is far from the case. *Panic!*, a 2018 AHRC funded project on the creative economy found that the UK arts represent unequal participation and financial compensation along the lines of ethnicity, and social class, and that women are severely underrepresented in many cultural industries (Brook, O'Brien, & Taylor, 2018). In this report, and in wider publications, the authors also make clear that, for those working in cultural and creative industries unpaid internships and other free labour is rife, opportunities are more widely available to middle class individuals and opportunities are disproportionality located in London and the South East (Oakley,

Laurison, O'Brien, & Friedman, 2017; Oakley & O'Brien, 2016). Feminist research has also attended to how the experience of creative work is gendered. Women are more likely to be excluded from social networks in technology industries, they are more likely to work from domestic space than in co-working spaces, the lack of benefits (such as maternity leave and childcare provision) means freelance creative careers are less sustainable for women (Gill, 2002; McRobbie, 2015).

For the Government and policymakers, the pathway to solving some of these inequalities lies in advancing *digital employment*. To address this gap, myriad publicly and privately funded events promote the necessity for young people to develop digital skills. Take ERIC Festival, an alternative career events organisation, funded by a UK Creative Skills Council. A typical ERIC event, funded by the Mayor of London, took place at Bloomberg's offices in central London in February 2018. Following a rousing speech from Mayor of London Sadiq Khan dissecting the "digital skills shortage", attendees trialled VR headsets, were entertained by rapper Yung Filly, and walked away with goody bags stuffed full of cans of organic cola and branded smartphone battery packs. A summary of the event on the Mayor of London blog included the advice "the knowledge that you have around technology and social platforms is invaluable – have confidence that they actually want you" (London.gov.uk, 2018). The point here is that digital expertise, especially that is specific to platforms, is coveted by organisations.

This event, and wider initiative, are symptomatic of a policy trend towards prioritising digital skills. For example, in July 2017 the Department for Cultural Media and Sport (DCMS) was rebranded as the Department for *Digital*, Culture, Media and Sport. This move followed the

launch of the UK Digital Strategy, the objective being to foster “strong collaboration between the public, private and third sector to tackle the digital skills gap”, through partnerships with private technology companies including Microsoft and Google (Gov.uk, 2017b). The document outlined the government’s intent to partner further with technology companies such as Google, to increase provision of digital skills to decrease social inequalities, and to encourage disadvantaged groups to close perceived skills gaps through learning and upskilling (Gov.uk, 2017a). Google, YouTube’s parent organisation, is represented among a small number of key creative employers on the Creative Industries Council, branded as a forum between Government and business, alongside representatives from BBC, the Publishers Association and the Design Council. The high valuation of expertise from the fields of innovation and technology, as applied to social problems, such as inequality, has been called “rendering technical” which refers to the way “experts imagine and conceptualise the worlds into which they plan to intervene as both intelligible with, and amenable to, the instruments they have on hand or are designing” (Sims, 2017: 13). This thesis will show that UK’s Digital Strategy, and at vlogging events, rendering technical manifests literally, in that private sector companies promote upskilling through the education and instruction in the use of their *own tools*. In these cases, failure is supposedly because individuals have not been using these tools correctly.

Working in the vlogging industry presents the same foundational challenges as working in creative industries more broadly. The vlogging market is saturated, depressing payment rates and necessitating many participants to work for free to build their ‘reputations’ (Duffy, 2017). High-quality filming equipment is required to be promoted by YouTube, but it is expensive. Starting up often requires family support. As a beauty vlogger based in London,

Lucy suggested “some of the most successful creators are actually quite successful because their parents encourage them”. Jo, the creator manager at Twitter similarly told me that a lot of successful vloggers have had “parents behind them, business people... they’ve been very smart”. Whilst most beauty vloggers I interviewed believed the algorithm favoured uploading videos regularly, beauty vloggers who have second jobs and caring responsibilities told me that they find their available filming time severely reduced. As Lyndsay, a vlogger who had quit the platform, put it “I didn't have enough to talk about when I made the videos, because I spent eight hours a day at work, and that's a whole chunk of the day I can't talk about”. Not being able to afford activities that are fun, engaging and suitable for YouTube was also cited as a barrier to content creation.

Chapter Four of this thesis examines how closed social networking practices, coupled with the subjective decision-making practices of ‘new’ digital talent agents, means that individuals who are middle class and often highly normatively feminine become more visible in the vlogging industry. Kristabel a fashion and lifestyle vlogger, succinctly tweeted about high profile fashion vlogger The Blonde Salad: “If [she was] featured on a podcast about her success for example, there's only so much I can take from that. Looks, wealth and conforming to mainstream beauty standards can be a factor” (Plummer, 2017).

Moreover, we will see that talent agents mostly have occupational backgrounds within ‘mainstream’ creative industries, bringing with them subjective and discriminatory ideals of *talent*. Vloggers represented by top management groups are provided with extended and increased support, including access to financial negotiations, legal teams, stylists, and literary agents. As Irish beauty vlogger Melanie put it in an interview: “the people who don't have managers are *getting screwed*”.

Ultimately, this thesis will draw attention to how barriers to participation in beauty vlogging are reminiscent of the historical barriers to participation in broad creative industries. They exist along the lines of financial and parental support, access to equipment, availability of social and industry networks, the subjective decisions of gatekeepers and feelings of belonging. Beauty vloggers' experiences are intensified by a reliance on a commercial social media platform to make them visible. What is extremely troubling is how vlogging, as part of digital skills training more broadly, is being promoted as a pathway for inclusion in UK creative industries. Chapter Six in particular calls attention to how vlogging is being positioned as a pathway to creative employment, through private and publicly funded initiatives. Utopian ideals of technology as a balm for societal inequalities obscure the reality of working in these industries.

Thesis Proposition and Research Questions

The proposition of this thesis is that the YouTube genre of beauty vlogging has not yet been considered within an industrial and political economic context. In cases where the political economy of vlogging is considered this is rarely studied in a manner that is compatible with feminist analysis, or gendered implications are at the very least overlooked. This thesis suggests several robust critiques of how relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry sustain societal inequalities. This is exacerbated by platform market structures, in addition to the subjective decision-making practices of gatekeepers and intermediaries. My research questions are:

1. How do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging?
2. How do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes? How are these practices gendered?
3. What are the broader implications of uneven politics of visibility on YouTube for labour in the UK, particularly within what is termed the creative industries?

Thesis Outline

Following this introductory Chapter, I outline my methodological approach to the thesis, a mixed methods approach that draws from an ethnography grounded in the theoretical tradition of cultural studies. While YouTube is an extremely important field site, my methodology encompasses three years of immersion into a “messy web” of vloggers’ participation on numerous social networks, and in ‘offline’ spaces (Postill & Pink, 2012). The body of my Methodology Chapter, Chapter Two, will detail the justification for each of the methods used in this project. They include semi-structured interviews, online ethnography across platforms, ‘offline’ ethnography conducted at vlogging events and qualitative analysis of YouTube’s promotional materials. I have also conducted analysis of ancillary media including trade press, blogs, news media, magazine articles, stakeholder and intermediary marketing literature, websites and social media content across platforms.

The body of this thesis features four analysis Chapters: Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six. Chapter Three is titled “Beauty vlogging, rationalization and industry lore”. In this Chapter I interrogate how the specific industrial context of the UK beauty vlogging industry informs beauty vloggers’ production of feminised and commercially orientated vlogs. In this Chapter, I use the “audience commodity” as a starting point, to theorise the detailed and complex role of media industries in attaining, legitimising and realising the value of the audience (Meehan, 2006; Smythe, 1977). Macro organisational structures are informed by the desire to manufacture valuable audience commodities. However, production is also affected by the micro, namely the ambivalent and negotiated understanding of audiences held by media institution employees, and in the case of this thesis, ostensibly independent digital cultural producers (namely, beauty vloggers). I particularly draw from interview data, underpinned by ethnographic data, to demonstrate how uncertainty about organisational structure informs decision making practices. Uncertainty, and risk, causes symbolic producers to pre-emptively produce media that they imagine is aligned with the desires of platforms. This point is salient, when gendered audiences continue to be highly valuable for social media platforms. YouTube have demonstrated the high valuation of beauty vlogging on the platform, by providing explicit and focussed training in producing this genre and espousing the opportunities for visibility. Secondly, they promote beauty vlogging as an opportunity for brands, by promising the feminised and consumption orientated audiences that it engenders, and that it is risk-free and safe for brand messaging. Through the high valuation of hegemonic and normative femininity, I demonstrate that platform structures refract and sharpen existing societal bias by privileging those who are able to conform to these ideas. In turn, I also demonstrate how beauty vloggers use creative, affective and laborious methods as attempts to forge sustainable and stable careers on YouTube.

Chapter Four is titled “Digital intermediaries and co-producing inequalities”. In this Chapter I examine and highlight the role of the intermediary in the vlogging industry, namely the talent agent or manager. I apply Bourdieu’s concept of cultural intermediaries to digital talent agents to examine how these actors have deployed symbolic and cultural capital to ascribe legitimacy in a new and pre-reputational industry (Bourdieu, 2000: 325). The talent agents’ practices, and the constitutive role they afford, have been largely missed in existing scholarship on beauty vlogging. I parse out the significant role of this intermediary. Through interviews with beauty vloggers, managers, agents and industry experts, through ethnography at vlogging events and on YouTube, trade press and social media content, I became increasingly aware that the A List beauty vlogger is often the front person, who is often representing a team. Of course, the young woman who is talking to a camera in her bedroom does often convincingly appear to have produced this content by herself. Although this is complex and ambivalent, I argue it is incomplete to analyse beauty vloggers’ self-presentation without investigating the presence of industry stakeholders. Put differently: here, I *zoom out* from the image of the young woman sat in front of her bed. I examine the stratifying role of the intermediary in developing and sustaining hierarchies and inequalities of visibility in the vlogging industry. Probing the tensions between intermediaries, including YouTube, agents and brands, can be productive in revealing how content, norms and markets are produced and calcified within the vlogging industry. I firstly consider the full-service talent agency, organisations that provide full time dedicated management support to vloggers. I outline the backgrounds of these influential cultural intermediaries, and their existing relationships with industry. I look to how talent spotting practices, subjective values and industry lore become intertwined with subjective definitions of vlogging talent. I argue

diverse models of management afford uneven support, financial compensation and social capital. In other words, I ask *who* is provided with *what* levels of support by each digital intermediary. Finally, I argue that intermediary talent organisations in the UK co-produce content that fits a specific *gendered* genre of YouTube, and that reaches a *gendered* audience.

After zooming out to consider industry stakeholders in Chapter Four, I zoom back in to consider specific and generic beauty vlogging practices in Chapter Five. This Chapter is entitled “Beauty, authenticity and entrepreneurship in the Get Ready With Me video”. The Get Ready With Me (GRWM) video is a real time documentation of a beauty vlogger assembling their face and body prior to entering public space. In this Chapter, I offer a magnifying glass to the hairline cracks that can make the difference between visibility and invisibility in the wider UK vlogging industry. During my field work, the term *authenticity* was invoked in press, vlogs, social media content, and during industry events and panels. Its usage was slippery, sometimes contradictory. The use of authenticity is also “sticky”: uneven visibilities in the vlogging industry could partially be examined through who authenticity sticks to (Ahmed, 2010: 40). This Chapter probes the concept of authenticity as it is classed, raced and gendered within the beauty vlogging ecology. I outline authenticity as firstly, a very specific style of performance, and secondly a form of labour. Through this lens, I problematise just which social actors have access to undertaking a convincingly authentic performance. I utilise theory on the presentation of self by social interactionist Goffman (1990) to provide a context to underpin this Chapter’s interrogation of performance. I also draw from internet studies and feminist work, to piece together a critical examination of how authenticity is intertwined with femininity, and the wider logics

of branding, in the context of social media platforms. I then problematise authenticity through the lens of work: strategic, intentional and laborious in nature. Following this theoretical grounding, I highlight beauty vloggers self-presentations as oppositional to glamour and excess, and the classed implications and hierarchies that flow through binaries between inauthenticity and authenticity are constructed. I also examine how A List beauty vlogging's' authenticity is ideologically centred around a specific middle class and white femininity (Ahmed, 2007; Shome, 2001), which operates in opposition to stereotypical themes of black and working-class body excess. In other words, "authenticity labour" (Genz, 2015: 548), in this context both makes visible and naturalises the exponential emotional and aesthetic labour required to discipline the body, both as authentically beautiful and as respectably middle class.

In Chapter Six I probe how creativity is used to temper the significant labours and inequalities that flow through the vlogging industry, with a focus on beauty vlogging. I argue that efforts to sell vlogging as a career through the discourse of creativity is essential to study in the current moment, in the context of the expansion of the creative industries, as this is accompanied by a withdrawal of funding that makes the 'do it yourself' logics of social media platforms attractive for policy makers to promote. I examine the self-presentation of the vlogging industry through the lens of an ethnography of UK and European events and initiatives concerned with educating, informing, training and supporting aspiring creatives through advocating vlogging on YouTube. I argue networking events could be considered a "figured world", in which imaginations, behaviours and narratives inform and constitute the world participants exist in: in other words, we behave "as if" a cultural world is a certain way, and so it is (Holland, 2001: 52). At networking events, vloggers continuously behaved

“as if” they were professionals being scrutinised by potential talent agents and brands, experts behaved “as if” they knew how to break into the industry, and organisers behaved “as if” their event offers a new, or disruptive, pathway into creative employment.

Throughout the Chapter I contest the reliability of each of these representations, and frame them as optimistic at best, and total falsehoods at worst. Ultimately, I argue it is fruitful to examine how a practice such as beauty vlogging becomes positioned as an accessible and attainable career path in the UK. It is also important to understand that events are often organised by for-profit corporations, and function as platforms to promote other merchandise. I demonstrate how events were promoted for their ability to assist, support and train aspiring vloggers to break into this industry. I call attention to how the pervasive narrative sold by many stakeholders of the vlogging industry is that vlogging is a participatory, accessible endeavour that can be easily taken up within one’s own private, domestic space. I demonstrate how vlogging is positioned as an outlet and opportunity for widening participation in the creative industries for disadvantaged minority groups such as women and BAME participants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I argue this is hardly the case. Rather, vlogging on YouTube further stratifies participation in creative industries along entrenched existing socioeconomic and gendered lines and calls for pervasive labours, that often lead to little or no compensation for significant quantities of work. Ultimately, it is the stakeholders in the vlogging industry, and YouTube in particular, who profit from event participation and labours.

Together, these Chapters examine the complex, ambivalent nature of the symbolic production of a genre of new media. While visibility is so important, this visibility hinges on

an individual's legibility to the organisational structures and the business plans of monopoly platforms. Shaping symbolic production within these unclear and changeable conditions is an affective and unstable process. These Chapters also illustrate how identity performances are central to success within new platform ecologies, necessitating performances of authenticity and beauty that are unevenly available to those hoping to participate in these industries. Ultimately, this thesis introduces a feminist political economic approach to studying new media, and new media genres. In the following Chapter, I will discuss my methodological approach, and outline the research methods I have used.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The production of media texts is influenced by economic, social and cultural processes. In this vein, the experiences, self-presentations and labours of YouTubers are not exclusively represented in content posted on their YouTube channels. While YouTube is an extremely important field site, which warrants a standalone methodological consideration in this Chapter, my methodology encompasses three years of immersion into a “messy web” of vloggers’ participation on numerous social networks, and in ‘offline’ spaces (Postill & Pink, 2012). The body of this Chapter will detail the justification for each of the methods used in this project. They include semi-structured interviews, ‘online’ ethnography across platforms, ‘offline’ ethnography conducted at vlogging events and qualitative analysis of YouTube’s promotional materials. The fictional tension between *online* and *offline* research will be problematised. I have also conducted analysis of ancillary media including trade press, blogs, news media, magazine articles, stakeholder and intermediary marketing literature, websites and social media content across platforms. Ultimately, this thesis utilises a mixed methods approach that draws from an ethnography grounded in the theoretical tradition of cultural studies. As Gray points out “texts and practices are both products of and constitutive of the social world” (Gray, 2003: 12). She advocates for a holistic approach to studying the production of culture, through approaches including “textual analysis, observation, different ways of gathering knowledge and information from individuals and groups, different kinds of interviews and participant observation” (Gray, 2003: 12). Beauty vlogging is a research object that is in motion. I required a strategic and agile methodology to capture the relationships between gender, labour, economy and visibility on YouTube.

This project is informed by both cultural studies and a critical feminist discourse analysis. These approaches were deployed to centre questions of power within the research process, and to address the untenable concept of neutrality in methodology (Koelsch, 2012; Skeggs, 1994). Feminist methods are used “to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007: 142). To identify hegemonic power relations necessitates a close, analytical approach to data collection and analysis, that is politically and theoretically informed. In other words, this thesis is not approached in a vein that attempts to be ‘neutral’, as it takes into account “all knowledge is socially and historically constructed and valuationally based” (Lazar, 2007: 146). As Lazar puts it, work that acknowledges the socially constructed nature of ideological categories, such as gender, could be seen as *more* objective than work that does not acknowledge how such inequalities structure interaction in society. This work acknowledges that gender and sex are socially constructed categories (Butler, 2004). In this vein, I deconstruct how hegemonic, embedded and internalised gender roles are routinely carried out and performed in ‘new’ media through close analysis of interview transcripts and ethnographic data. This methodological approach takes into account how the experiences of women across historical, institutional and cultural contexts are deeply specific, that “gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere” (Lazar, 2007: 149). In this project, I do not seek to reveal ‘truths’ about women’s universal experience, rather I analyse and compare definitions and representations of femininity, visibility and labour through a bricolage of interviews and ethnography. I have practiced analysis by using the “voice centred” data analysis method,

in which I read the text *for myself* placing my own “background, history and experiences in relation to the respondent” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003: 419). For example, my own specific history of feminist scholarship and research, coupled with a background in marketing industries, has informed my theorisation of beauty vlogging content. As McRobbie (2000) puts it: “our own subjectivity can add to the force of research, just as our precise political position will inflect our argument this way or that, as will our private fascinations, our personal obsessions and our odd erotic moments” (McRobbie, 2000: 131). My political positioning as a feminist researcher meant I was occasionally shocked by the increasing steps and products used in beauty videos. My digital marketing industry background helped me identify the, often sophisticated, techniques used by beauty vloggers to diagnose algorithmic signals. As a feminist work, this thesis does not, and cannot, present a full or objective picture of the vlogging industry.

To understand the labours, practices, and inequalities of beauty vlogging, analysis must be underpinned by a grounded study of industry, informed by consideration of the monopoly ownership structures of platform capitalism, but also taking into account how agency and power ‘flow’ through the micro interactions between actors. This project captures a moment when norms and practices were being formed and professionalised in the vlogging industry: they were in flux. My methods were therefore selected to capture the experiences of vloggers, platform structures, the shapeshifting role of disparate stakeholders, media texts, representations and contested definitions of terms such as algorithms, visibility, beauty, creativity and talent. Through this feminist ontology I examine the political economy of the vlogging industry. For Hardy, critical political economy “describes a tradition of analysis that is concerned with how communications arrangements relate to goals of social

justice and emancipation” (Hardy, 2014: 4). He observes “a great variety of research methods are used, although documentation analysis, historical research, textual and media content analysis, economic, statistical and market analysis are the most prevalent” (Hardy, 2014: 7). The methodological approaches documented by Hardy here focus on investigations of the ‘macro’ structures of ownership and broad economic relationships, which tend to minimise agency within organisations. They ignore how power is productive, how it is embodied, and flows through relationships and interactions. Critics have observed that political economic approaches fail to attend to the “complex interplay of economic and cultural forces” which are at play within media industries, rather they have a “jet-plane” overview (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009: 235). I argue rigorous consideration of the political economy of social media platforms, informed by intersectional feminist theory, is desperately needed to understand representations, practices and inequalities in symbolic production.

In this Chapter I will first outline my mixed methods approach, attending to how each method informs the other, and were stitched together to answer my research questions. In this section, I critique a hierarchical valuation of data that places interview data as more ‘authentic’ or ‘backstage’ than textual or online data collection. I will then discuss how I identified and monitored my field sites and recruited participants for interviews. I will then outline the process of data collection and archiving practices across ‘online’ and ‘offline’ field sites, and in interviews. I discuss the process of data analysis, and then set out the “uncomfortably reflexive” approach (Pillow, 2003) I have used to account for my own subjectivity and lived experience as it flows through, and shapes, my data collection and analysis.

Mixed Methods Approach

This project takes a synergistic and multi-modal approach to data collection. In many cases, each of my research methods informed the others. One example that captures this methodological loop is how the range of industry intermediaries, stakeholders and gatekeepers became visible to me through ethnography at vlogging industry events.

Although this thesis will demonstrate how talent agents, and other intermediaries, are prevalent in the vlogging industry, their role is often minimised in beauty vlogging video content, which practically speaking makes these actors (and their roles) difficult to identify (Abidin & Ots, 2016). It was through ethnography at vlogging meetups, conferences and conventions that I witnessed the hard physicality of intermediaries in *meat space*. They flanked their clients at meet and greets, spoke on panels, politely grimaced while taking questions from excitable aspiring creators. Becoming aware of their intermediary positioning meant I could approach these actors for interview, follow them through my online ethnography, and parse their role and relationships in the vlogging industry more fully.

I draw from the above example to demonstrate a paradox within this project: namely, it is difficult to understand just who, and what, is invisible when conducting analysis of the uneven structures of visibility in online spaces. Textual analysis, and attention to the flows of media on YouTube are incredibly important, but methodological bricolage must be deployed to illuminate gaps that are obscured in an uneven attention economy. A second example that exemplifies this point also occurred during a vlogging event. In a workshop on the YouTube algorithm, a young woman raised her hand and informed the facilitator that

she ran a science channel on YouTube. This woman told the audience that at first, she had shared the channel with friends and on Facebook, and it had garnered an even-gendered audience. However, upon launching the channel officially on YouTube, her analytics software indicated that audiences had moved from a 50/50 gendered audience to a 90/10, split in favour of men. Her question to the workshop leader was whether this was a product of YouTube's algorithms, and how she could rectify it, to attract more women to her videos. It is of note to this thesis that the workshop facilitator, a consultant and 'algorithmic expert', dismissed her question by stating that women are simply uninterested in science. More broadly however, the question provoked and informed my reflexive necessity to consider my own flattened experiences on YouTube. How does who I am, or who YouTube thinks I am, affect what I see? Moreover: how can other approaches; interviews, ethnography, wider textual analysis and the feminist political potential of gossip (McRobbie, 2000), help to make visible what is not visible to me as I conduct ethnography on the platform?

I have been very critical of the emphasis on interviews within what I termed 'feminist internet research' (Bishop, 2018). For example, I take issue with some aspects of research projects on fashion blogging and vlogging, that have bypassed textual and content analysis, in favour of near-exclusively utilising interviews data. Duffy (2015, 2016; 2017) has conducted a hugely valuable project mapping the work of fashion bloggers, vloggers and Influencers in the US through interviews. Interviews were able to make visible the labours, precarity, insecurity and anxiety that was felt by participants, but they did not capture how these experiences are tied to overarching economic factors, and the structures of social media platforms. Therefore, this work arguably misses questioning *who benefits* from precarity, and detailed analysis of how this is sustained. In a piece published on her

methodological process, Duffy describes her analysis of participants' meaning making processes, in this case she focussed on the user generated advertising campaign 'Dove Campaign for Real Beauty'.

*It was only through listening to the experiences of participants in their **own voices** that I was able to tease out themes of creativity, authenticity, and professionalization in ways that broke down the binary between empowerment and exploitation. This experience taught me first-hand the value of feminist research methods that reject sweeping generalisations about social groups in favour of individual interviews, oral histories and modes of participant observation that use reflexivity in an attempt to minimize researcher-subject hierarchies. (Duffy, 2015a: 712)*

I am troubled by in this statement because interview data becomes problematically linked with participants' *own voices*, which are then positioned in a binary opposition to textual data, which is presumably constrained in some vein. The statement recalls outdated perspectives that interviews afford researchers' "direct access" to participants "subjectivity and lived experiences" (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003: 423). Interview data has been extremely valuable to my analysis, but, I argue that it does not provide any more of a *backstage perspective* than vlogging content, social media posts, press interviews, public talks and non-verbal performances and representations. Each of these performances is for an "imagined audience", whether this is a researcher, fans, potential talent agents (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The vlog may even be viewed as sharing a common ancestry with video diaries used by feminist researchers to capture their emotions, experiences, and expressions (Jackson & Vares, 2015). Both media are often filmed in private domestic spaces, such as bedrooms, capturing ostensibly real-time emotions and reactions. The fact that responses

are underpinned by commerciality (for profit, on commercial platforms) does not automatically make these responses less “authentic”, a perspective that falls into the trap of constructing binaries between commercial Neoliberal culture, and some sort of more natural inner truths that exist outside of this space (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Although participants’ talk in interviews should be taken seriously, so should the everyday and banal experiences that are framed in vlogs, tweets, blogs, press interviews, on panels. Media and cultural studies tend to overwhelmingly focus on “sexy” sites of subculture, and pass over the “ordinary working people who have been coping and surviving... who are subjects formed in the complexities of everyday practice” (Walkerdine, 1998: 21). In short, good or impressive access to interview participants does not necessarily provide good data, or good analysis.

One excellent example of a feminist and cultural studies approach to research media industries, that has been influential to this project, is D’Acci’s (1994) study of the female-centred police drama *Cagney and Lacy* (Orion, 1982-1988), conducted during the 1980s. D’Acci’s project draws together ethnographic data from the show’s production, interviews with production staff, television network employees, audiences and numerous distinct interest groups - alongside analysis of media content - to theorise how the category of woman is both contested and unstable, and highly socially and historically contextual. This work is unique in how it centres questions of power, gender and of industry, and affords “an inquiry into network’ prime time’s norms and conventions for women characters and into the crucial places of audience women and screen women in the overall function of night-time TV” (D’Acci, 1994: 7). This work demonstrates how meanings are contested and fluctuant, but highlights the power of the construction of audiences, and the subjective

opinions of stakeholders, in shaping symbolic production.

The Vlogging Industry: People and Places

In my online ethnography, conducted between September 2015 and September 2018, I identified and followed upwards of 30 UK based beauty vloggers, in addition to industry ‘intermediaries’ and stakeholders including talent agents, ‘experts’ and journalists who were assigned to a YouTube beat, across social media platforms. Following vloggers across platforms allowed me to study the themes, genres, relationships, content and track ‘scandals’ in vloggers’ content. Communities very rarely stay, and their experiences are very rarely experienced on one site, platform or space. Research must account for the mobility of users and audiences across different offline and online spaces (Caliandro, 2017; Kozinets, 2010; Postill & Pink, 2012). To this end, Caliandro (2017) states:

The main task for the ethnographer moving across social media environments is no longer that of identifying an online community to immerse into or follow but to map the practices through which users and devices construct social formations around an object on the move. (Caliandro, 2017: 20).

Although follower numbers fluctuated across platforms, I followed beauty vloggers who had attained a minimum of 10,000 subscribers on YouTube. I selected 10,000 subscribers as a benchmark for several reasons. This number determines a minimum requirement for engagement with YouTube’s creator services and affords access to facilities such as the YouTube Space Creator Café and Creator Days. Beauty vloggers with 10,000 + subscribers are therefore legitimised as monetizable content creators by YouTube, and numerically have

achieved a status that signals their 'A List' visibility. Subscribers hold a high currency within the YouTube industry, as they point to individual career sustainability, whereas other visibility metrics such as *views* are seen as fluctuant and easily inflated (García-Rapp, 2017a). *Subscribers* are also visible in the platforms' architecture and are thus bound up with beauty vloggers' brands on the platform as subscriber volume affords symbolic capital for disparate stakeholders in the 'vlogging industry'. For example, beauty vloggers are introduced by panel chairs at events by their subscriber volumes, talent agencies display the subscriber volumes of their talent on their digital talent agency profiles and beauty vloggers celebrate subscriber milestones in a manner akin to birthdays, with cakes, giant numerically shaped balloons and dedicated themed videos. Although there is a small possibility subscribers are *purchased*, this is heavily policed within the industry. I corroborated subscriber volume with other metrics of engagement, for example video comments, likes and shares. I also monitored vloggers' participation in the wider beauty vlogging community through event attendance, talent representation and collaborations with other vloggers. As we will see throughout this thesis, however, a beauty vlogger can be popular online, and excluded from these spaces and opportunities through the policing of social norms and boundary-making strategies enacted by talent management, elite vloggers and brands.

In this Chapter, I have occasionally drawn a practical distinction between my 'online' data collection methods and those conducted 'offline'. However, in this wider thesis and its analysis a distinction cannot be realistically drawn between 'offline' and 'online' data. As Postill and Pink put it, "social media practices cannot be defined as phenomena that take place exclusively online", rather, one can study an "internet-related ethnography" (Postill &

Pink, 2012: 125). My data collection and analysis is born from the “messy web” of clusters of digital, and offline elements, that make up the complexity and embodied nature of long term analysis of spaces contingent to platforms (Postill & Pink, 2012: 125). Through immersion in these so-called *online* strains of ethnography, I was able to parse a calendar of public events and spaces that were meaningful and relevant to A List beauty vloggers. Some of these events were promoted openly by vloggers, some events I became aware of through representation in vlogging content and social media coverage. In other words, they came to my attention through continued participation in this wider ecosystem. I could then ‘look out’ for when these events would happen next, whether it was seasonally or annually. Although I initially attended public vlogging events to recruit participants for interviews, these spaces became an important primary source of data, namely, they became an unexpected fieldwork site.

Participants’ verbal and non-verbal expressions, event structures, speakers and *mise en scène* contributed to a representation of how beauty vlogging communities defined themselves. In my field notes, and analysis, I have paid particular attention to discourse in the panels, lectures and talks which were geared towards teaching aspiring beauty vloggers how to beauty vlog. These pedagogical activities imagine, reproduce, calcify, and draw boundaries around, vlogging community practices. Moreover, the public discourse at events about what it means to practice beauty vlogging, be a beauty vlogger, and the challenges therein, offered an opportunity to analyse the self-presentation strategies of beauty vloggers in a professional context. I attended the Creator sessions at VidCon EU, a European offshoot of the US conference and convention that attracted 26,000 attendees at its Flagship LA event in 2017. VidCon is firmly embedded in vlogging culture, sponsored by

YouTube (VidCon, 2016). I also attended the UK equivalent, the YouTube convention event, Summer in the City. Secondly, I took part in three Blogosphere networking events, part of a calendar of functions regularly hosted by the blogging and vlogging industry glossy magazine, Blogosphere. These events were the “Blogosphere Valentines Tea Party”, and the “Blogosphere Christmas Festival” and also “BlogCon”. The events were ‘billed as “brand and blogger networking” and “an opportunity to network and learn”, and often included a schedule of chatting to brand reps, panels and lectures that included many perspectives on YouTube production (Blogosphere, 2018) . Thirdly, I attended ERIC Festival , the “Careers in Fashion Event” aimed at 16-25 year olds in the UK (ERIC Festival, 2017). ERIC Festival is funded by Creative Skillset, a charity heavily subsidised by the Department for Digital Media Culture and Sport, and uniquely attendance was therefore free. Fourthly, I attended the Twitter Creator Day, an industry ‘day’ designed to sell Twitter’s own talent networks to UK YouTube influencers. I also attended a lecture and workshop by Access Creative Colleges, in a which beauty vlogger Helen Anderson promoted their media course. Lastly, I attended several events and ‘hung out’ at the YouTube Space in London, one of nine ‘YouTube Spaces’ maintained by Google. The others are located in media cities across the world: Rio, New York, Berlin, Paris, LA, Toronto, Mumbai and Tokyo. The Space is located on two floors of Google’s UK office complex, and incorporates three film studios, two editing suites, an equipment rental hub, classrooms, a busy events programme and a networking space with free drinks and snacks known as the Creator Café. I conducted participant observation at the YouTube Space between late 2017 and the early months of 2018, including a tour, attendance at events, and periods of ‘hanging out’ in the Creator Café.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen vloggers, experts and intermediaries in total. Within this sample, I interviewed nine vlogging industry intermediaries, all of whom were white. Of this sample, five were women and four were men. Within this group I interviewed three CEOs/Directors of digital talent management organizations with mid-size rosters of thirty and fifty talent, two founders/CEOs of personal digital talent management companies with small rosters of between one and three talent. I also interviewed two founders of UK based 'multi-channel networks' (MCNs); one remained the head of their company and the other had since departed. In addition, I interviewed Twitter's Community Manager for the UK and Europe, who "works with creators worldwide alongside top brands to develop authentic and resonating branded content" (Niche, 2018). Finally, I interviewed the Director of the Internet Creators Guild, an international organisation intended to promote and support full time content creators.

In addition to those I have defined as intermediaries, I interviewed ten British beauty and lifestyle vloggers. There is very little distinction between 'beauty' and 'lifestyle' beyond vloggers' self-definition: lifestyle tends to signal the inclusion of more fashion, homeware and everyday content. In practice the themes of these channels did not vary significantly: each made videos about beauty, hair, fashion, day-to-day life, entrepreneurship, relationships and diet. All of these vloggers identified as female, nine were white and one was black. Six of the beauty vloggers I interviewed worked as beauty vloggers full time: YouTube income, sponsorships and related activities provided their sole wage. Three of those I interviewed had vlogged full time previously, but currently attained a part time wage from their vlog. They maintained another occupation alongside this work to support themselves. Two of the three leveraged their following and expertise to achieve careers in

social media and digital marketing industries, one freelanced as a beauty and wellness adviser. One vlogger I interviewed deleted their YouTube channel during the course of my research project as she did not have time to upload. Trying to keep up was “messaging with [her] head”. Anxiety and panic sustained by YouTube channel maintenance will be studied throughout this thesis. I also interviewed one vlogger who had ceased producing content on YouTube for a number of years and has identified as having left the platform.

Data Collection: ‘Online’ Data Collection

Throughout my ‘online’ ethnography I maintained several research diaries, or ‘journals’ that noted and reflected on events, moments and temporally contingent happenings in my field site. I also grew and maintained a corpus of screengrabs of tweets, Instagram posts and YouTube videos in addition to a folder of news articles, magazine coverage and industry blog posts. These were archived in thematic folders on my personal computer. Analysing media texts across platforms afforded an attention to the wider “meaning-construction” of beauty vlogging (Du Gay et al., 2013: 13). These representations afforded an analysis of multi-layered “semantic networks” and “discursive formation” (Du Gay et al., 2013: 15), which the researcher can make visible to strengthen understandings of culture, or a cultural artefact. In addition to ethnographical analysis of disparate sites of social media engagement, this thesis presents a case study of young women who engaged specifically with the platform of YouTube as a career – they are vloggers who utilise YouTube to make money. Therefore, the institutional context and platform specific architectures (design) and *affordances* of the YouTube platform should be considered. Postigo defines affordances as “how technological features designed into YouTube create a set of probable uses/meanings

for YouTube, most of which are undertaken as social practice” (Postigo, 2014: 2). In my wider analysis, I problematise such a straightforward line drawn between affordances and social practices on YouTube. However, a platform’s architectures and affordances do influence how vloggers and audiences engage with the platform, and thus this necessitated a focussed analysis. To this end I have adapted and used the “walkthrough method” (Light, Burgess, & Duguay, 2018). This method involves a systematic and exhaustive documentation of a researcher’s engagement with software interfaces, considering design, text, symbols, the limitations and opportunities afforded by applications and software.

The researcher registers and logs into the app, mimics everyday use where possible, and discontinues or logs out while attending to technical aspects, such as the placement or number of icons, as well as symbolic elements, like pictures and text. This process is contextualised within a review of the app’s vision, operating model, and governance. (Light, Burgess, & Duguay, 2018: 3)

I also employed the walkthrough method on the desktop and mobile versions of YouTube, both logged in as ‘myself’ and logged out as an unidentified user. I made notes from the point of the login screen (for example observing the information required to access content), to points when and where I encountered marketing communications, observing what content was recommended to me on given days, where this was positioned, and so on. I followed playlists, algorithmic recommendations and trending topics to piece together analysis of beauty vlogging as a stable genre, and a cultural ecosystem on YouTube. The value of this guiding approach was the ability to contextualise vloggers’ YouTube videos as they would be experienced on the platform, rather than as stand-alone objects. Although

video content is essential to consider, users do not experience this in a vacuum. The platforms' context: algorithms, advertisements served, and how beauty vloggers linked to others' content are highly relevant to my research questions and analysis. This approach also advocates for an analysis of design and symbols on the platform (for example exactly what is meant by the 'up next' feature, or 'subscribers', 'views') and the significance of their visibility or invisibility at certain points of engagement.

Data Collection: Participant Observation

The data collection process I undertook at vlogging events could be described as 'participant observation', however this comes with some ethical caveats and limitations. Participant observation is defined as "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 1).

The calendar of vlogging events was a space in which beauty vloggers came together to socialise, network and identify themselves to brands and talent agents. All events I attended were public - anyone could book or purchase tickets online - and I sought permission from the event organisers to attend as a researcher in each case. Those in attendance at events tweeted, blogged, and filmed their day, and I also tracked and analysed this data. I identified myself as a researcher to event organisers, and to any person I met at events, and offered them the opportunity to participate in a recorded interview with me (with written consent given). I have not relayed conversational snippets or personal interactions at events without explicit informed and written consent. I documented the events I attended through maintaining descriptive field notes, in addition to recording images and video. There is no expectation of privacy at these public events, but as a precaution images and videos have

been stored on devices that I have sole access to and that are password protected, they are purely for my own records and have not been included within this thesis. I have not identified individuals in this thesis. As an extra precaution I have anonymised those giving public talks and lectures at these events.

Keeping in depth records was essential for data collection: “observations are not data unless they are recorded in some fashion for further analysis” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 158).

When attending events I took jot notes, and expanded this as soon as possible after leaving events to ensure my notes did not get “cold” and included “description of the physical context, the people involved, as much of their behaviour and nonverbal communication as possible” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 165-166). My field note taking process was subjective, field notes are “simultaneously data and analysis” and constructed by the researcher based on their subjective experiences (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011: 159). However, to build the most complete picture possible I undertook “thick description” which involves a rigorous process of field note writing, intended to capture the “multiplicity of complex contextual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit” (Geertz, 1973: 10). Such attention has also been phrased as taking notes using a “wide angle lens” (Spradley, 2016: 58). I mapped the events’ locations, layout, decorations, attendance fluctuations throughout the day, participants’ engagement (or disengagement) with panellists, spatial manifestation of hierarchies, behaviours, body language, the temporal construction (timetabling) of events, the gender, race, sartorial choices of participants, explicit and implicit dress codes, amongst many other fragmented, expected and unexpected events, behaviours and expressions. These considerations are central to critical feminist methodology. As Skeggs put it, ethnography allows the researcher

insight into how institutional structures are lived and reproduced: “by showing how structures are inhabited through cultural forms emphasis is placed on how structures are lived as well as spoken about” (Skeggs, 1994: 77). Feminist informed attention to the seemingly banal can make visible the locations, relations and articulations of power as experienced by research participants.

Data Collection: Interviews

In interviews, I asked beauty vlogging participants about their career histories, experiences of YouTube and the YouTube community at large, their beliefs about the YouTube algorithm, their involvement with the wider industry, and how their YouTube channels had changed over time. I asked industry specialists about their career backgrounds, the state of the industry, how they define talent, how they ‘spotted’ YouTube talent, the YouTube algorithm and the state of the industry. Interviews afforded me the opportunity to follow up and expand on themes that had arisen during my ethnography, and ask specific questions about themes that I believed needed ‘filling in’, or that would benefit from further definition (Marwick, 2013a). Semi-structured interviews also allowed me flexibility in following topics of interest for my participants. For researchers using semi-structured interviews “the aim is to invite informants to talk at length about matters that are broadly relevant to the research, with the interviewer following up to encourage more elaboration, detail, or exemplification where necessary” (Hammersley, 2013: 12). This approach meant occasionally surprising topics arose during interview. For example, although discussions of algorithms represented a small theme in vlogging content, the suspicions and ‘gossip’ about algorithmic preferences that were relayed to me during interviews revealed this theme represented a significant determining factor for those making their living on YouTube. Thus,

my line of questioning altered to become more focussed on the perceptions and theorisations of the YouTube algorithm and industry over the course of my project. My interview topics were also informed by emerging themes such as a diversity of labours, affective relationships with platforms, and the gendered inequalities in the wider vlogging economy.

All interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours and were recorded with consent. I provided all research participants with a 'Participant Information Form' which outlined my background information, why I was undertaking the project, the advantages of taking part, where the data would be used, and how they could withdraw from the study (at any time). This is included in Appendix B. Participants then signed a written consent form indicating their data could be used for the project and resulting publications, although they were informed that they could withdraw at any time, without giving me a reason. This form is in Appendix C. All participants had the option to be anonymised, and three requested this. The coding process I used will be attended to in the proceeding 'Analysis' section of this Chapter. Interviews took place in person, over Skype and over the phone. A strong element of self-branding for those in marketing and vlogging industries is performing busyness, and practically speaking vloggers are often on the move. Although in-person interviews were preferred, to capture body language, I took a flexible approach due to the availability of the participant. Where possible, I took notes on verbal and non-verbal expressions during the course of my interviews (Galletta, 2013). I then personally transcribed the interviews and coded them manually. They were stored on a password-protected computer that only I had access to. Transcripts were stored separately from any identifying details for those who chose to be anonymised.

Uneven Power in The Interview

Feminist researchers in particular have emphasised the value of the peer-like nature of semi-structured interviews, in which tangents, questions and queries are all acceptable and even encouraged - even if they do not directly answer interview, or even research questions. Oakley advocates researchers adopting an emphasis on processes of meaning making, such as answering participants' questions and developing personal relationships (Oakley, 1981). Many beauty vloggers did ask me questions: one beauty vlogger asked how I had located her vlogs, and several questioned whether my publication would give them exposure. Although these questions were useful, as they often served as prompts for lines of questioning around visibility and algorithms, the fact participants were hoping to gain visibility through my research presented an ethical quandary. Questions such as whether participating would support visibility foregrounds the in-built inequality of interviews. This was pertinent for me to consider as a feminist researcher; feminist ideals of the parity between researcher and participant have been heavily critiqued, in particular by intersectional feminists (Dosekun, 2015; Hunter, 2002; Kirsch, 2005; Pillow, 2003). An approach that promotes the minimisation of hierarchies in feminist interviews has been considered "optimistic"; power hierarchies cannot be minimised when an institutionally sanctioned researcher is speaking to participants about their own personal lives (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006: 40; McRobbie, 2000; Skeggs, 1994). To be clear, I am a researcher and lecturer from a *higher education* institution and many of my participants were recent graduates. To minimise inequalities, I answered participants' questions directly and honestly, that for the moment their answers would be published in a dissertation, with the potential for a book and journal articles that would largely reach an academic audience.

I coded my data set in an instrumental sense, namely to summarise, identify and organise themes and genres in the corpus, field notes and interview transcripts. Examples of codes included discursive content including beauty, 'get ready with me' videos, authenticity, anxiety, depression. This also included setting and production, including pre-roll bloopers, genres of music and use of lights. The subjective and curatorial nature of coding has been identified as a problem for content analysis of social media, and more broadly. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002: 242) observe, many researchers simply say their themes "emerged" through the wilderness of their data sets. They offer the "high-inference categories" as a descriptor for code that arise from "knowledge of cultural insider meanings" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002: 247). After spending the initial months conducting this ethnography I created a loose set of codes that allowed me to organise my corpus according to my research questions. This approach could be defined as an "ethnographically informed content analysis", in which context serves as essential grounding for both coding and analysis (Abidin, 2017: 3).

Inequalities in Interviewing

The ways that researchers frame their questions, ask questions and analyse data is influenced by their lived experience, at the intersections of their gendered, classed and raced identities. Bearing this in mind, is not a question of *whether* there are power inequalities in interviews, the researcher must "consider *how* power influences knowledge production and construction processes" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006: 40). Feminist scholars should also note that power imbalances fall along lines of gender, class and race, and each

of these strains of lived experience inform data collection and analysis. Hunter argues that “all research questions arise from previously existing ways of knowing about race and racism that limit or make possible ways of understanding the problem” (Hunter, 2002: 131). In this vein, my participant recruitment, questions, and interview strategies were often born from my own social networks, experiences and privileges. My reflexive approach for accounting for this in my data analysis will be considered in the following section.

Much of the interview data I gathered from vloggers and intermediaries was aimed towards constructing and maintaining a commercially orientated “self-brand” (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013b). Similar discussions that arose in interview data were often articulated elsewhere in their filmed and social media vlogging content. I do not think this is due to my failings as a researcher; vloggers and intermediaries are adept at controlling a narrative, it is their job. Negus (1999) articulates a similar focus on marketing and public relations speak in his interviews with record company executives and music artists in the UK music industry. He observes “interviews are not about ‘extracting’ information or truths that are waiting to be revealed. Instead, an interview is an active social encounter, through which knowledge of the world is produced via a process of exchange” (Negus, 1999: 11). In a similar vein, my motive as a researcher was not to trip my participants up, to goad them into telling me about a malevolent business strategy or reveal a bitter hatred of their fans. Rather, through reflexively attending to power dynamics and hierarchies and an interview’s context, and through an analysis of self-presentation strategies and vloggers’ utterances, I could weave together an understanding of the practices, labours and structures of visibility undertaken by those making a living on YouTube. Interviews provide one strain of data for my analysis, but I argue this is the most valuable when it is underpinned and strengthened by

ethnographic data.

Societal inequalities were also replicated in the construction of interview data, for example during my participant recruitment. This has influenced my data significantly. Upon embarking on field work, I soon realised a significant majority of visible beauty vloggers are inundated by requests for interviews for academic work, often by undergraduate students. At one point in April 2018 (close to dissertation deadlines for third year undergraduates) a beauty vlogger told me that she had received 5 requests for phone interviews, by students in higher education, on just *that day*. Many vloggers list their unavailability for academic interviews on their websites, for example beauty vlogger Grace Victory' states "please note due to the high demand of university surveys and coursework enquiries I receive, I can no longer respond to everyone" (Victory, 2018a). Victoria of InTheFrow (who herself holds a PhD in fashion) states "I'm so so sorry but I unfortunately no longer have the time to answer coursework surveys and questions" (InTheFrow, 2018b). To recruit participants, I sent out hundreds of emails to beauty vloggers, their managers, attended myriad networking events, mined my online and offline contacts and those of my friends, and "snowball sampled" from participants (Alasuutari, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The saturation of vloggers' inboxes provided the context for my own limited responses, and I had the most success through my own networks.

Of those who were receptive to interview, almost all had experience of higher education, and so had some level of sympathy for what I was going through. For example, Melanie and Astrid told me that they had also written their undergraduate dissertations on vloggers and empathised with me because they had found it difficult to connect with potential

participants. Lucy told me that she didn't respond to undergraduate requests but was happy to support my PhD as she believed it was "original research". To hold this perspective, however, necessitates a familiarity with the hierarchies of academia, which Lucy was privy to as she had just graduated with a BA. This skewed my sample greatly: many A List beauty vloggers in the UK have not attended University, but 7/9 of those I interviewed were graduates. Interview participation is stratified by temporal availability, which is likely to be restricted for some, for example those with caring responsibilities. Vlogging events, such as meetups and conventions were a source of interview participants, but often took place on evenings and weekends and did not provide childcare. Thus, I rarely encountered potential participants with children: one vlogger I interviewed had children, and none had other caring responsibilities or dependents.

The section above briefly illustrates how the process of participant selection constructed my sample and influenced my data. It is worth pointing out that the managers and CEOs of talent agents were much more receptive to interview. Managers, agents and industry intermediaries were keen to discuss the industry with me, especially when I informed them of my own industry background and experience. Three out of four of the CEOs and Directors of talent agencies I spoke to were men and had (female) assistants organise the interview on their behalf. They were confident when speaking to me and were also keen to control the narrative on behalf of their clients. However, I was unable to speak to many talent managers who work with talent day to day, with the exception of two talent managers with their own small organisations. Day to day talent managers, assistants and PR professionals were more often women who work in the "pink ghetto" of supportive roles in digital and creative industries (Duffy, 2017: 33). I was unable to speak to these employees, probably

because they did not have the time or possibly did not feel they had permission at their level to speak to a researcher. These women's perspectives would be valuable, as they take on the affective and emotional labour of supporting vlogging talent, rather than espousing a broad vision for the organisation.

Reflexivity

My own reactions cannot be divorced from the complex layers of meanings attached to signs, and my experience of wider entrenched hierarchies in society. However, my own experiences can be reflected on and incorporated into data collection analyses in a productive manner through reflexivity. In this vein, Hunter argues "by exposing the often hidden assumptions of racial epistemologies, researchers may be better able to reflect on their own assumptions about racism, acknowledge them, and account for them throughout the research process" (Hunter, 2002: 123). In order to make visible the classed, gendered and racist epistemologies, as I have lived them I have utilised Pillow's definition of uncomfortable reflexivity: "to be reflexive.. not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced" (Pillow, 2003:178). In her writing, Pillow advocates caution against practicing reflexivity as a form of "sanctioned ignorance", in which the researcher provides a laundry list of their failings as a form of "catharsis" before swiftly moving on with their project, rather, she advocates for "uncomfortable reflexivity", which is in its nature messy and contradictory (Pillow, 2003: 192-3). She invites researchers to ask the important question *who* gets to do reflexive research? This a pertinent problem to probe when considering the difficulty in accessing vloggers and

industry stakeholders. I had a distinct 'way in' as someone who had worked with beauty bloggers and vloggers in a digital marketing agency between 2012-2014, on behalf of prominent and recognisable clients including Harrods and L'Oréal.

Firstly, my industry positioning assisted me in finding research participants; I created a snowball sample from my personal networks obtained from working in the digital marketing industry. I was afforded introductions to vloggers and digital talent agents by mutual friends who continue to work in the sphere of digital marketing, directing me towards 5 of my participants. Secondly, my industry experience meant I possessed online capital such as 'mutual connections' with prominent industry figures on LinkedIn, which arguably signalled trustworthiness to prospective participants, in particular talent agents. When I cold-emailed talent agencies I invoked my work experience, in addition to providing a link to my website and LinkedIn profile. Furthermore, my email footnote offered signposts to my Twitter and YouTube channel, which both prominently feature a video of me discussing my research under the tongue in cheek moniker "Doctor Vlog". Thus, although the emails were ostensibly 'cold' or 'blind', they were given credibility as I was fairly obviously encouraging potential participants to look me up, so they would be assured I was one of them. Indeed, my online presence reveals I am white, precocious, educated young(ish, now) woman, who is familiar with, and moreover a stakeholder in, their industry.

To make clear that I was hoping potential participants would recognise this is uncomfortable, but essential to acknowledge in how it shapes my interview data. In his ethnographic research on talent agents in Hollywood, Zafirau (2008) recognised a purposeful change in his self-presentation as he embarked on his fieldwork:

Trying to appear as though I belonged in this world led to some strategic decisions about how to present myself as a researcher. These included leaving my 1987 Nissan Sentra parked at home when I went to do fieldwork and borrowing my spouse's much newer car, as well as taking several trips to the mall to update my wardrobe.

(Zafirau, 2008)

He goes on to qualify that he was afforded some access partially because managers simply did not realise that he was in proximate space, asserting “in Hollywood talent firms, interns are often quite invisible. They are typically undergraduate students or fresh college graduates who perform routine office work for the chance to gain experience in the talent industry” (Zafirau, 2008: 107). However, in his work Zafirau does not recognise the privilege afforded to those who look like they *should* be there. In addition to possessing the temporal and financial privilege affording him the ability take an internship, to go and buy nice clothes, and the relative luck in netting a partner with a nice car, he does not reflect on the access he is afforded as an ‘invisible’ white man. This reflection is especially pertinent as he observed consistent misogyny and sexist talk in the talent agencies, something he would have arguably experienced himself, as a woman. In my field work, I inhabited my own invisibility as a white woman who could easily adopt the smart/casual style of digital marketers, however the majority of male talent CEOs were aware of my feminist approach to my PhD, and this could have affected their responses. A possible example of how discomfort influenced data was one informant retrospectively dismissing his original intention of creating an online ‘lads mag’, telling me “it was stupid really, a stupid idea” despite the fact it was, in fact, extremely successful. However, ultimately, I felt comfortable

in using my networks and know-how to attend industry networking events, where talent agency staff were present scouting and speaking. Although this did not afford me any interview participants directly, I was able to observe the industry and talk to both practitioners and vloggers, fleshing out my list of agents to speculatively contact.

In the introduction to my interviews, I declared my vested interest in the emancipatory and entrepreneurial potential for vlogging. I was hesitant to directly bring up the critical aspect of my research, as many of those I interviewed were already wary of me. In particular I was cautious when interviewing the CEOs of the most prominent talent agencies, for example Dom Smales. Smales is omnipresent in the industry as the CEO of one of the most successful and visible digital talent agencies, Gleam Futures, and a well-known industry 'personality', evocative of the strong links between tech entrepreneurship and a kind of 'celebrity' status in social media cultures (Marwick, 2013b). Moreover, he is a figure in pop culture. The BBC3 sitcom *Pls Like* is set in a digital talent agency rather conspicuously titled "Beam" (BBC Three, 2017). In the show, comedian Tim Key plays an evil, parasitic CEO called "James Wirm", who is able to deftly neutralise his competitors in the industry. Like James Wirm, Smales was friendly, but sceptical and guarded when speaking to me, and at times appeared to be attempting to put me on edge. At one point, he questioned which other digital talent managers I had interviewed, asking me to repeat and spell out their names as he wrote them down. This behaviour seemed odd, particularly as Smales is ingrained in the industry, thus arguably familiar with these names. Furthermore, he offered no justification for wanting to write them down, and this ambiguity did make me feel nervous. There is a strong possibility that this led to more soft-ball questioning.

The moment in which I was interviewing digital talent managers was particularly fraught as the industry had recently been subject to severe criticisms for its overwhelming whiteness (The Drum, 2016; The Independent, 2015). Arguably, this context could have contributed to participants' wariness in discussing race and inequality. The interviews were often relatively short, and I hoped to build strong rapport in order to glean information about participants' relationships with YouTube, an insight that was a priority as I felt I was only really able to access this information through personal interviews. I did not want to bring up controversial or critical topics at the start or the middle of my allotted time, and risk them pulling away from the interview. As a way in to the topic of representation, I asked participants who they look for when looking for talent, intentionally leaving a silence for a couple of seconds after the participant finished talking, in the hope that participants would speak more on this subject. Some did take this question as a prompt to discuss race, class and gender, and this is included in my analysis. Some beauty vloggers and younger talent managers tended to be more likely to bring up identity politics, as did the one ex-CEO who was no longer involved in the industry. However other participants did show signs of finding this line of questioning frustrating, responding with evasiveness. For example, Dom Smales started by insisting "we're not looking for a man or a woman or someone who's tall or short or blonde or you know..." and later, became audibly annoyed, "for us it's whether we think they have something special and *I can't really define that any more for you*" (Dom, CEO Gleam Futures). Ultimately, I compromised probing subjects on topics such as participation, gender and race, by using my YouTube questions as my controversial *last question*, after which the subject often hurried to complete the interview. From the lessons learned here, I hope to continue this work. Building on the experience of this project, and future capital as a 'researcher' (rather than a PhD student) I hope to confidently be able to question industry

professionals on issues of social justice. As is evidenced in this thesis, I was able to patchwork data attained through diverse methods to critically centre questions of race and gender in this thesis. With time, and reflection, I know I can do more!

Summary

This Chapter has outlined my methodological approach to this thesis. I have articulated how this project is informed by both cultural studies and a critical feminist discourse analysis.

These approaches were deployed to centre questions of power within the research process, and to address the untenable concept of neutrality in methodology (Koelsch, 2012; Skeggs, 1994). I argue that a process of methodological bricolage can make visible participants' encounters with power in their daily life. By taking seriously vloggers' production, and acknowledging the co-production of interview data, I have reflexively interpreted and analysed the beauty vlogging industry. Through ethnography at industry events, semi-structured interviews and an extended 'online' ethnography, I have closely attended to the macro industrial context of beauty vlogging. Furthermore, I have made visible the micro, the way that power structures individuals' experiences, practices and perceptions.

In data collection and analysis a distinction cannot be realistically drawn between 'offline' and 'online' data: in this vein I have attended to the "messy web" of field sites that circle and informs the vlogging industry (Postill & Pink, 2012). What could be considered online data collection informed the offline in a way that cannot, and should not, be disentangled. Through my 'online' ethnography I discovered vlogging events, and when at events I observed previously 'invisible' talent intermediaries who I then followed on Instagram. I

monitored Twitter backchannels during vlogging events and on the bus home, parsing out both impromptu and event-sanctioned hashtags. I watched published vlogs of events in which I was featured in the background. I ran into friends at the YouTube Space who connected me with interview participants, who I messaged over Facebook and interviewed over Skype. Moreover, while YouTube was a key field site, this thesis does not offer a ‘hygienic’ analysis of content on YouTube. By employing the “walkthrough method” I was able to analyse how beauty vlogging communities experience the platform, and how content becomes tangled together with advertisements, and recommended following other disparate videos, in a vein that influences both consumption and production, in addition to representations (Light et al., 2018). The meaning-making processes and social norms that participants formed *about* YouTube were key to my analysis, and thereby informed the norms and practices of the vlogging industry and symbolic production therein.

This Chapter has outlined the difficulty in accessing industry stakeholders for interviews, and the tendency towards repeating marketing communications during interviews. As we live in a society where arguably we are all consistently “self-branding” there is little value in espousing a dichotomy between a commercial and authentically true self (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013b). Rather, I have drawn from self-presentation strategies aimed at numerous audiences to contribute towards an analysis of the vlogging industry, its intermediaries, structures of visibility, practices and inequalities. These data sources were then stitched together and analysed to answer my research questions, in a vein that is informed by my subjectivities and political positioning, and thus could never be (and I argue should not ever be considered) neutral.

Chapter Three: Beauty Vlogging and Visibility

In this Chapter I theorise the complex role of the vlogging industry in attaining, legitimising and realising the value of the audience. In answer to Research Question One, “how do the relationships between stakeholders in vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging?”, I will argue that YouTube’s business models and algorithmic structures reward vloggers who pursue valuable ‘commodity audiences’. In short, vlogging practices are informed by the understanding of the value of an audience in a specifically institutional context. In answer to Research Question Two “How do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes?”. I investigate how the imaginaries, theories and assumptions about the desires of audiences, industry intermediaries and the YouTube algorithm, shape and influences beauty vloggers’ symbolic production. When beauty vloggers speak about algorithmic visibility, this does not ultimately mean visibility and legibility for machines, or for code. The algorithm is a means to an end: to be visible to an audience, an audience that is correspondingly sought by advertisers. In examining the second part of Research Question Two “how are [beauty vlogging] practices gendered?” I look to how feminised genres are theorised by vloggers as being more likely to be made visible by the YouTube algorithm. Decisions to produce beauty content are aligned with a desire for visibility, that beauty vlogging is a pathway to being seen. I look to publicly documented moments of bias and discrimination in YouTube’s algorithms to understand how moments of ‘breakage’ are negotiated. Lastly, in answer to Research Question Three, “what are the broader implications of uneven politics of visibility on YouTube for labour in the UK, particularly within what is termed the creative industries?”, I explore how

YouTube's software architectures, in addition to assumptions, theories and strategies that are developed in response to YouTube's opaque and proprietary algorithms can disadvantage many vloggers along existing axis of power, especially affecting those who are outside of the 'A List' and belong to marginalised groups.

Feminist theorists have discussed beauty vloggers' highly feminised content and self-presentations (eg: Banet-Weiser, 2017; Jerslev, 2016; Nathanson, 2014). However, this work can miss a platform specific context, meaning the symbiotic relationship between content, platforms, and wider institutional cultures that provide the context for these outputs. What remains unsettled in each of the approaches cited is a detailed pathway to understanding how the logics of media industries shape symbolic production, when the product is the self, and more specifically a feminised self. For example, Banet-Weiser (2017) valuably identifies beauty vlogging as complementary to the feminised, and corporatised, 'confidence' and 'empowerment' movements, in which vloggers demonstrate cosmetic use as the pathway to empowerment. She argues "the aesthetic labour of the beauty vloggers is reproductive labour, working to continually reproduce a conventional, idealised definition of beauty" (Banet-Weiser, 2017: 273). However, this does not explain why the genre of beauty vlogging is so pervasive on YouTube, besides drawing a straightforward line between the genre's commercial viability and its success (Banet-Weiser, 2017). Commercial viability does not explain that beauty vloggers choose not to monetise some videos, or how distinct genres (besides makeup application) have become calcified within the genre of beauty vlogging. Rather, vlogging genres, and YouTube visibility should be investigated by looking to the relationships and frictions between multiple stakeholders in the vlogging industry, including agents, YouTube, events, and 'industry experts'. An examination of the wider industry, and

the stakeholders therein, can explain engagement with genres on YouTube beyond a wilful or naïve subjectification of one's body to consumer culture.

In this Chapter, I will study how assumptions, theorisations, information and understandings of algorithms inform cultural production. Building on the definition in the introduction to this thesis, I argue platforms' algorithms are "encoded procedures for transforming input data into a desired output, based on specified calculations" (Gillespie, 2014: 167). They are "opinions formalised in code" (O'Neil, 2016: 19). These definitions highlight the institutional grounding of algorithmic processes, that they are step-by-step processes engineered to conduct subjective tasks that produce and build the maximum audiences, with commercially relevant interests, for commercial platforms. This Chapter is concerned with the organisational decisions made by platforms, and how these decisions are understood and negotiated by the everyday stakeholders who work in these organisations. For example, macro organisational structures are informed by the desire to manufacture valuable audience commodities, and algorithmic architectures enact the macro-level business plans of platforms. However, algorithms are negotiated through the micro everyday and strategic practices undertaken by vloggers. Production is also affected by the micro, namely the ambivalent and negotiated understanding of the commodity audience held by media institution employees, and in the case of this thesis intermediaries and beauty vloggers.

To theorise the political economy of beauty vlogging, I firstly introduce the institutional context during which my project took place, between 2015-2018. This was a period of instability for YouTube: there was a crisis in negotiations between advertisers and the platform, which was widely reported in trade and mainstream media (Solon, 2017;

Wilkinson, 2017). YouTube acted to maintain their standing with top level advertisers, which has had real consequences for the many stakeholders in the vlogging industry, including beauty vloggers, who make their living on the platform. I introduce the concept of ‘rationalisation’, which often comes across as neutral, organisational common sense, but often contributes to a normalising and flattening of cultural production (Meehan et al., 1993; Saha, 2018). I argue that for beauty vlogging, *self-rationalisation* involves shaping oneself to a genre, or output, whose desires are fundamentally unknowable. I recognise that it is important to acknowledge vloggers, industry stakeholders and intermediaries as active participants who use information to negotiate, contest, and configure their strategies and content in the UK vlogging industry. The concept of “industry lore” thus becomes useful to highlight how an assemblage of information, assumptions and risk-management strategies make up the very productive organisational common sense (Havens, 2014a: 40). I then argue beauty vlogger’s *algorithmic lore* makes up imaginaries, beliefs and assumptions, which shape their content. Beauty vloggers’ algorithmic self-optimisation is informed by intermediaries, algorithmic imaginations and feedback loops that in turn shape algorithms and their outcomes.

In the forthcoming analysis I look to understandings of the algorithm as ‘broken’. Here, the algorithm becomes something of a straw man: the narrative that the YouTube algorithm is ‘broken’ deflects attention, and absolves some responsibility, from YouTube. Secondly, I demonstrate how beauty vloggers rely on community, friends, Facebook groups, and their own folk-developed processes of ‘reverse engineering’ and audience testing to parse out information on algorithmic changes and updates. I argue uncertainty around algorithmic updates is often highly affective, and engenders a feeling of anxiety, panic and fear from

YouTube vloggers. I demonstrate how beauty vloggers use creative, affective and laborious methods that can be read as attempts to forge sustainable and stable careers on YouTube. I demonstrate how the necessity for inclusion within a genre provides a rationale for creating beauty content, as it offers the possibility for visibility, beauty vlogging production appeared a strategic and rational pathway to career sustainability. I argue many vloggers perform myriad unpaid, and rather expensive, labours on behalf of commercial brands, that engage with certain brands that hold a promise of algorithmic visibility.

The Commodity Audience

In this Chapter I use the “audience commodity” as a starting point to understand content production: how the construction and value of audiences can influence and shape symbolic production within media industries. Smythe (1977) introduced this theoretical concept to address the “blind spot” in Marxist communications theory, which for him was a materialist approach to the development of mass communications in monopoly capitalism. He corrects the view that the commodity of mass media is “messages, information, images, meaning, entertainment, orientation education and manipulation” (Smythe, 1977: 2), suggesting the commodity produced by mass media is audiences, whose labour (i.e. time spent consuming communications) is valued, and sold to media companies. In return they receive the ‘free lunch’ of entertainment:

[Time] is not sold by workers but by the mass media of communications. Who produces this commodity? The mass media of communications do by the mix of

explicit and hidden advertising and 'programme' material, the markets for which preoccupy the bourgeois communication theorists. (Smythe, 1977: 2).

The unpaid labour and consequential exploitation of audiences is of central interest to Smythe, as his analysis is underpinned by the works of Marx, in particular *Grundrisse* (1939). Today, the concept of the audience commodity has influenced a significant number of critical works by theorists who are concerned about the amplified labours, coercion and exploitation of social media audiences. For example, Fuchs (2015) argues social media practices such as liking, sharing and linking are labour. He argues they purely engender surplus value generation for capital. Users are therefore doubly exploited through generation of data: "users of commercial social media platforms have no wages ($v=0$). Therefore the rate of surplus value converges towards infinity" (Fuchs, 2015: 714). Lee applies Smythe's concept to Google, arguing that audiences labour for the free lunch of search data, generating the commodity of demographics and analytics commodities sold by search engines to advertisers (Lee, 2011). Developing this theory, Jarrett (2017) argues that the exploitation of the commodity audience in social media should be understood using Marxist feminist work, which adds critiques of domestic reproductive labour. She argues Marxist feminist perspectives afford critiques of the circulation of affect, whilst engendering reproductive immaterial and disciplining labour, and generating surplus value for capital (Jarrett, 2017). Although these works account for the productive, and exploitative, nature of social media labour, they do not satisfactorily address the employment or practices of beauty vlogging, at least for A List vloggers. Each of these accounts rests on the idea there is no economic payment for social media labour, whereas A List vloggers do get paid by a platform and other stakeholders, sometimes significantly. Theorisation of user generated

content is often insufficient in the wake of what is ultimately highly formalised industrial production (Burgess, 2012).

Smythe's arguments lie at the start of a theoretical trajectory that leads us to Research Question One in this thesis, namely, how stakeholders in the vlogging industry *produce* the audience commodity. Smythe argues that the owners of TV and radio stations work in tandem with an array of intermediaries and producers including, amongst others, "advertising agencies, talent agencies, package programme producers" (Smythe, 1977: 5). Although he provides an offhand list of audience commodifiers, Smythe fails to develop their roles and motivations. Caraway (2011) addresses this gap, arguing that surplus value only becomes realised when a product is sold, as this is ultimately the point when consumers pay for advertising costs. Thus, it is the competence of marketers, manufacturers and advertisers who actually generate surplus value, whilst "it is the job of the media owner to create an environment which is conducive to the formation of a particular audience. Speculation on the size and quality of the audience determines the rent charged to the advertiser" (Caraway, 2011: 701). It is *this* transaction that I am interested in. The detailed and complex role of the media in attaining, understanding and realising the value of the audience. To study this I have broadly drawn from an approach that Havens et al. (2009) have defined as "critical media industry studies", advocating a focus on "micropolitics" at the level of industrial practices, as they argue assumptions about industry practices are often "shoehorned" into cultural analyses (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009: 235 - 283). This approach strives to make room in a tradition of political economy concerned with media ownership, to capture the ambivalence of everyday frictions, and micro-level disruptive practices, of those who work in cultural production.

I have also been influenced by researchers who have advocated for an industrial analysis that promotes a focus on the 'micro' elements of industries. For example, Du Gay and Pryke (2002) suggest a "cultural economy" approach, recognising that "economic discourses", such as everyday meaning making by marketing and accounting professionals, construct and influence culture (Du Gay, 1996: 2). However, this account insufficiently accounts for the unique aspects of media industries, namely that they are concerned with symbolic production. In this vein, D'Acci (2004) suggests the "circuit of media" study, which calls for a conjectural analysis of the materiality of production and reception, in addition to a focus on the cultural artefact itself and its socio-historical context. More recently, Saha (2018) has promoted a "cultural industries" approach. For Saha, a cultural industry approach affords a focus on "tensions between commerce and creativity in cultural production, specifically the tensions between symbol creators and their aesthetic, political aims and the political aims of executives and shareholders" (Saha, 2018: 47). My central concern is how the commodity audience is understood, constructed, valued, coveted and sought by producers and stakeholders within the vlogging industry, and how, in turn, this shapes symbolic media production by diverse industry stakeholders and stratifies and reifies the inequalities that are of central concern to this thesis.

The Political Economy of YouTube 2015-2018

It is of value to this Chapter to briefly outline the political economic conditions of YouTube, particularly for the period of my project. Significant changes have been implemented by YouTube during this period, which are in response to a public crisis in negotiations between

advertisers and the platform. Their actions have been undertaken to stabilise and reassure advertisers that their programming - the media 'mix' (of videos) that they provide - is safe from extremist, sexual or violent content, in other words advertiser friendly. YouTube has publicly sought to maintain their relationships with top level advertisers, which has had real consequences for individuals who make their living on the platform. I do not have the space to provide an exhaustive history of YouTube's position as a platform and cultural intermediary, but this is outlined in several works (e.g. Burgess, 2012; Burgess & Green, 2009b; Snickars & Vonderau, 2009). However, here I introduce and contextualise the temporally specific political economic conditions of YouTube during my study, which was a key time for the platform for a number of reasons. I historicise this moment to illustrate how the construction of the commodity audience on YouTube has supported the development, popularity and inequalities in beauty vlogging.

During several public relations appearances throughout February 2018 the Chief Business Officer of YouTube, Robert Kyncl, consistently referred to YouTube as an "open platform" (CaseyNeistat, 2018; Rosney, 2018). This turn of phrase works hard to obscure the fact that social media platforms, like YouTube, do not (or cannot) recommend or make visible videos neutrally or evenly (Adamic, et. al., 2001; Halavais, 2009). In an oft-cited 2010 piece, Gillespie reflects the semantic weight carried in the term "platform", noting the application of the term can reveal how platforms, like YouTube, position themselves to stakeholders. He argues "'platform' is not simply a functional shape: it suggests a progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it" (Gillespie, 2010: 359). Gillespie complicates the implied "open, neutral, egalitarian and progressive support for activity" (Gillespie, 2010: 352). Gillespie's piece was written almost ten years prior to this

case study, yet, YouTube's public relations rhetoric in 2018 is consistent with the style of talk he cites.

The historical relationship between YouTube, media owners, advertisers, and everyday users has been contested and volatile. YouTube was purchased by Google in 2006, and during its formative years battled with media corporations for the repeated copyright violations, and the amateur and often scatological content of its users (Burgess & Green, 2009b; Jenkins et al., 2013). YouTube users uploaded "clips of *The Family Guy*, news footage, and favourite videos ripped from television" but this content "swirled around with homemade cat videos, footage of stupid stunts and amateur bedroom musical performances" (Burgess, 2012: 5). Despite YouTube being generally celebrated as an open, democratising and transformative resource, many advertisers remained unconvinced, deeming YouTube content as poor quality, offensive and pervasively supportive of copyright infringement. Andrejevic (2009) adds an additional explanation for advertisers' reticence, arguing in 2009 "even if user-generated content were to succeed in attracting the proverbial eyeballs prized by advertisers, it would do so in an environment over which they had limited control – and are hence reluctant to participate in" (Andrejevic, 2009: 412). Here, Andrejevic accurately predicted the extended control that YouTube would offer advertisers to draw them to the platform.

How YouTube explicitly, and implicitly, shapes users' content in accordance with advertisers' desires provides one of the central questions of this Chapter. This desire for message control has intensified over recent years, as advertisers have become displeased with YouTube, in part due to several high-profile media investigations into the platform during

2017 and early 2018. In March, advertisers including Pepsi, Walmart and Starbucks withdrew from the platform over YouTube's failure to moderate hate speech, homophobia and White Nationalism (Solon, 2017). In November, the BBC and the Times investigated a rat's nest of pedophilic comments, tangled with exploitative and predatory videos of children, many of which had re-roll advertisements by high profile brands (Wilkinson, 2017). Unilever, the conglomerate who produce Marmite, Ben & Jerry's and Dove, made public statements disavowing poor moderation on social media platforms in February 2018. However, they merely *threatened* to withdraw from the site, giving YouTube an opportunity to demonstrate that the platform could "win trust back" (Lomas, 2018). In the same week, Unilever told Marketing Week it is "stepping up" investment in digital media, which will receive a significant portion of their \$9 billion annual spend (Vizard, 2018). Indeed, despite the media fanfare, many advertisers withdrew temporarily from the site, using the bad press as an opportunity to negotiate for better rates and more control over messaging. The initiatives since launched by YouTube to soothe advertisers' concerns, and make the platform hospitable for commercial messages, have significantly influenced the landscape, affordances and vernaculars of the platform and the wider vlogging industry. In their blog on advertiser-friendly content, YouTube outline advertisers' desires as a source of tension, and a direct determinate of creators' financial success: "there's a difference between the free expression that lives on YouTube and the content that brands have told us they want to advertise against... advertiser confidence is critical to the financial success of our creators" (YouTube, 2017a).

To attain partnership⁴ (monetisable) status, and to generate a proportion of advertiser revenue from a YouTube channel, content creators must firstly adhere to Community Guidelines (YouTube, 2018b). These regulations place limits on nudity, dangerous content, hateful content, graphic and violent content, cyberbullying, spam, threats, copyright, privacy, impersonation, child endangerment, profanity and channel inactivity. Violations of Community Guidelines are flagged by machine learning algorithms, and an increasing number of paid human reviewers and platform users who use the 'report' function (YouTube, 2018c). However, simple adherence to Community Guidelines does not ensure eligibility for revenue sharing. In 2018, YouTube introduced an extra layer of "advertiser-friendly content guidelines" (YouTube Help, 2018a). They delineate "content that is not suitable for most advertisers" and mostly provide extended *contexts* for the Community Guidelines. For example, depictions of nudity and sexual content are against Community Guidelines, however *conversations about sex* are against advertiser-friendly guidelines. In Community Guidelines, violent or graphic content is permitted for "educational, documentary, scientific or artistic purpose", although this content may be age-restricted. However, in advertiser-friendly guidelines, it is outlined that "videos about recent tragedies, even if presented for news or documentary purposes, may not be suitable for advertising".

Indeed, despite YouTube's ostensive openness, much in this list can be crossed with the "big six" that advertisers consider red-flags in US network *television* "sex, violence, profanity, drugs, alcohol and religion" (Richards & Murphy, 1996: 22). Many YouTube users have critiqued the ambiguous nature of these guidelines, arguing that a complex determination

⁴ YouTubers must apply and be approved for partnership status on YouTube, necessitating 4000 watch hours in the past 12 months and 1000 subscribers. Approved partners receive a fluctuant percentage of advertising revenue on their channel videos.

of context, as decided by machines, means it is near-impossible to determine whether their videos would be monetised or otherwise. In response, YouTube launched a 'monetisation icon', which glows green for a monetisable video, yellow for limited advertiser suitability, or grey for videos ineligible for monetisation (YouTube Help, 2018b). Beauty vloggers hoping to extract value from their audience commodity must ensure their videos are monetisable: they must see this icon glow green. The challenge is that YouTube, informed by advertisers, defines what is 'monetisable', which influences and shapes content produced by those who aspire to *make money* using the YouTube Partner Programme.

Feminist Political Economy

YouTube, as an advertiser funded platform, hopes to build quality commodity audiences in order to attract advertisers. In the following section I present a feminist analysis of YouTube's political economy, arguing that audiences of 'female' consumers are attracted and constructed using the genre of beauty vlogging.

Beauty vlogging is a highly feminine mode of self-presentation and content production. Feminists have explained feminine self-presentations in public life as 'masquerade', for example Riviere (1929: 306) identifies "womanliness is worn as a mask" to obscure the masculine traits of professional competence, and public intellectualism. The masquerade is updated by McRobbie in her definition of the post-feminist masquerade, a "mode of feminine inscription, an interpellative device, at work and highly visible across the commercial domain as a familiar (even nostalgic), light hearted (unserious), refrain of femininity" (McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism, during the time this piece was written, was

often characterised as the 'ironic' nature of this engagement with over the top femininity, which in the early-mid 2000's manifested as hyper-girlish dress and behavior that was knowingly, even ironically, hyper-feminine and flirty. McRobbie uses the masquerade to explain how young women continue to dress, and behave, in hyper-feminine ways. As young women apparently free to represent themselves on YouTube *however they desire*, the masquerade can be invoked to understand the prevalence of highly feminine content. Analysis of YouTube content should be crossed with platform motivations and affordances, and commercial relationships, that explicitly and implicitly call women to produce highly feminine content if they wish to be visible. Beauty vlogging is privileged in YouTube's ecology because it is advertiser friendly, focussed on consumption and *safe*. Put differently, advertisers' concerns outlined in the previous section provide a rationale for the promotion of beauty vlogging videos by YouTube's algorithms and YouTube's industrial cultures. I make this point by deploying the rather limited body of feminist political economy work in media studies, by using the work of Eileen Meehan and Julie D'Acci. Despite this work's concentration on the analysis of broadcast and network television, their fruitful sketching of the productive and tense relationships between advertisers, broadcasters and content producers are fitting to apply to a case study of beauty vlogging.

Meehan (2006) argues rating services (for example Nielsen), advertisers and television networks constrain and enable content production through their subjective valuation of 'quality' audiences. The valuation of audiences informs how techniques of measurement, and the development and scheduling of programming. Ratings companies and networks prioritise constructing a "commodity audience" of "bona-fied" consumers to sell to advertisers in prioritised categories, for example white male audiences with disposable

income in desirable locations (Meehan, 2006: 315). As Meehan puts it “as *the* audience, the white male commodity audience had a “higher quality” for which advertisers willingly paid” (Meehan, 2006: 318) . Meehan argues that women are often devalued as a commodity audience, or are treated as niche, leading to reduced advertising cost on women’s programming. She demonstrates how assumptions about women’s habits and desires can affect programming; as ‘working women’ became more valued as a targeted category by television networks, some “female friendly” elements were introduced to prime-time programming to attract women (Meehan, 2006: 319). The introduction of these ‘feminine’ elements are based on ideologically discriminatory assumptions about what women want to watch, in a patriarchal industrial context.

In her extensive analysis of the networks, writers, and audiences of the female-fronted cop show *Cagney and Lacey*, D’Acci (1994) argues that woman as a category is consistently made and remade by industry stakeholders according to their own goals and motivations. She shows that *Cagney and Lacey* was originally launched as a vehicle to attract a “working women” audience, and successfully accomplished this throughout its early outings as a TV movie, and in its early seasons (D’Acci, 1994: 69). However, concerns about homosexual undertones prompted concerns from advertisers, and caused a cast-change and ‘feminisation’ of the characters. D’Acci argues that despite attracting the ‘audience commodity’ that they originally desired, advertisers actually wanted something more, namely reassurance that the content would be ‘safe’ and adhere to their ideal representations of femininity.

[CBS and advertisers] finished by proclaiming that the women's audience, when all was said and done, wanted only traditional depictions and was indeed turned off by any deviations from this norm. CBS's advertisers, who thought of the audience simply as clusters of 'consumers' were not especially interested in what it 'wanted' but only in associating their products with a 'safe' noncontroversial programme (D'Acci, 1994: 73)

This statement is especially salient because it demonstrates that ideas about what women want (supposedly feminine and traditional depictions) often take precedent over their own held and articulated desires. Although the Cagney and Lacey (1981-1988) example may seem outdated here - the last episode broadcast 30 years ago - I find relevance in these arguments (not only because D'Acci's account is one of the few works addressing the construction of female audiences in such detail) but also because Cagney and Lacey was produced in a time of instability and technological development. This is akin to now, a time of uncertainty for YouTube, with the platform's public priorities set to soothe advertisers' reticence. Uncertainties about audiences are at the heart of tensions between mutually dependent broadcasters and advertisers, and are often extremely productive (Ang, 1991). As we will see in this Chapter's analysis, and in the following section, solving the problem of uncertainty pertaining to audience practices continues to be extremely productive in new media industries, such as for YouTube.

Calling for Beauty Vlogging

Some theorists have predicted that audiences would be increasingly targeted by advertisers based on a multiplication of micro 'lifestyle' categories (Turow, 1997). However, a binary and normative conception of *gender* stratifies the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry. Bivens (2015: 881) has called attention to how gender becomes "embedded and materialized" in software design, arguing that "design decisions for profit-oriented companies encapsulate broader monetisation strategies" (Bivens, 2015: 885).

Some platforms have offered a multiplication of genders, for example Facebook's introduction of identities such as Two-Spirit and non-binary. However, advertisers' pervasive requirements for targeting consumers based on binary gendered means *algorithmically inferred* gender binaries are generated to address the needs of advertisers. Bivens & Haimson (2016) 'walked through' the ten most popular social media platforms from the point of view of users and advertisers. They observed that all platforms with custom or 'write in' gender options respond to advertisers' requirements to gender their users according to a binary. All platforms they studied afforded gender targeting options: "from an advertiser's perspective, targeting gender is always a possibility" (Bivens & Haimson, 2016: 8). Beauty vloggers' performances are contingent on, and informed by, platforms' design, motivations and logics, and in this vein, they are dependent the processes which construct (and serve content to) commodity audiences on platforms. In practice, this supposedly untethered, statistically inferred, algorithmic data becomes interweaved with embodied and gendered representations, with material effects for these social actors who make their living on social media platforms.

YouTube both explicitly and implicitly court the creation of beauty vlogging content. The implicit, algorithmically inferred, calls to produce beauty vlogging are discussed in this

Chapter's analysis. In this section, I will outline how YouTube's marketing materials call for beauty vlogging production. This is firstly evidenced in the YouTube Creator Academy, an extensive online resource, that has been identified as part of the "formalisation" of YouTube (Burgess, 2012). It is an open portal of learning resources and online 'guided lessons' for content creators, each lasting several hours, with diverse learning goals. Sample courses in the Academy include "brand deals", "get discovered" and "production skills" (YouTube, 2018d). The exclusive standalone course advocating participation in a YouTube *genre* identified by the Creator Academy is to "Develop a Beauty Channel" (YouTube, 2018d). The course features advice on how to incorporate "existing strategies and formats" into your content while maintaining a "unique approach" that helps you "stand out from the crowd". The unique approach is defined as "personality", namely the very slight variation that vloggers apply to the strict guidelines outlined in the course.

In its design and language, the resources in the Creator Academy are aimed at *aspiring vloggers*, rather than those who have already achieved high levels of visibility on YouTube. However, the Creator Academy is an example of YouTube's self-branding, the stories they tell about themselves, discourse informed by the Creator Academy is distributed by actors at the YouTube Space, including partner managers and producers. The clear prioritisation of the beauty genre, and its attendant cultures, can be seen as an example of "rationalisation", defined as industrial processes that often comes across as neutral, organisational common sense (Saha, 2018: 11). Rationalisation is often used to manage the unpredictability of cultural symbols, but in turn often contributes to a normalising and flattening of cultural production (Saha, 2018). Processes of rationalisation flow through the Creator Academy, discourse by industry experts and talent agents, YouTube representations and content.

Rationalisation is the process that leaves young women feeling like producing beauty content is a 'common sense' media, or pathway, for them. Of course, YouTube's articulated preference for beauty vloggers, is matched with their architectural one. As we will see in the following analyses, making beauty vlogs is an effective strategy for women hoping to achieve visibility on YouTube.

The course informs aspiring vloggers that they must get to know the "culture" of the beauty community on YouTube, and create within the top six genres of beauty: "how-to, tutorial, hair, haul, beauty and give away". The guide outlines the minutia of the video format, including how to construct a thumbnail, the 'cover' image of a video, in which they advocate displaying the "fabulous final result" of a makeover and including the beauty vloggers' face. Knowledge is tested at the end of the course. YouTube invites the audience to select the answer to questions such as "what video formats are popular among beauty and fashion channels?". The *incorrect* answers include "outfit of the day, let's play and tutorials", and "haul videos, seasonal trends and workouts". These answers' similarity to the "correct" answer delineate the narrow boundaries of acceptability within this genre: "haul videos, tutorials and outfit of the day". For YouTube, beauty vlogging *should not* include workout or gaming content. Analysis of the Creator Academy is useful because it highlights YouTube's branding strategies and desires for content, in other words how they want creators to engage and learn with the platform. YouTube also runs events at their national studio and editing Spaces, for beauty vloggers that provide networking, advice and support (Wiseman, 2014). During an event I attended London YouTube Space, the Creator Academy served as a centralised resource that was pointed out by YouTube employees as the platform strived to maintain a consistency of information for aspiring vloggers.

The potential for beauty vlogging to construct and reach young, *female audiences* is widely promoted by YouTube. For example, YouTube Advertisers channel, which has 233,000 subscribers, features a video entitled “The Audiences You Care About Are On YouTube”, which has attained 3.6 million views (YouTube Advertisers, 2017a). Backed with upbeat music, graphics promote the gendered audience groups that YouTube addresses: a longshot of a muscled man doing a backflip in a park is labelled “where sports fans go to watch”, a close up of a woman using highlighter on her face is titled “where beauty lovers go to watch”. The language use is also gendered, a later shot promotes “where fashionistas go to watch”. In addition to promoting the audiences that they construct, The YouTube Advertisers portal also promotes ‘profiles’ of top beauty vloggers such as Bethany Mota, emphasising their influence (YouTube Advertisers, 2014). Bethany’s vlogs, in which she models skirts, applies makeup and discusses hair products, are juxtaposed with shots of young, female, screaming fans. The implication is that these young female fans, as they chant “Bethany, Bethany!” outside a clothing store, are a willing, exploitable market. The video depicts girls begging to consume Bethany, and by extension the products she recommends.

In a further video on the YouTube Advertisers Portal, titled the “Evolution of Beauty on YouTube”, two glamorous female presenters directly invite beauty brands to work with YouTube (YouTube Advertisers, 2017b). The video is on-trend as it highlights beauty vlogging’s political and transformative potential, saying “beauty really bonds people together... make up can be used as a tool to connect people around self-confidence and courage”. Although *women* are not mentioned in this video, the intended object of

discussion is clear. The body confidence movement seeks to repair the broken confidence of young, white women has been critiqued by feminists such as Gill & Elias (2014) and Banet-Weiser (2017). They argue feminist discourse is often transmorphed into branded messages, that ultimately generate profits for those who are invested in maintaining women's broken relationships with their bodies. In the video, illustrations of beautiful, feminine faces applying mascara and lipstick are linked to morality, activism and cosmetics. The video ends with the call for brands to "create the next beauty challenge". Essentially, YouTube's messaging in these videos is that beauty vlogging is not only commercially viable, but as risk-free and safe for brand messaging. In the face of critiques about poor quality 'unsafe' content, the young, beautiful beauty vlogger is the shining "A1 girl", the "subjects *par excellence*, and also subjects of excellence" (McRobbie, 2009: 15). Like these girls, and like the "can do girl", young women bear the responsibility for change and social progress (Biressi, 2018; Harris, 2004). The hope of the nation, and in this case YouTube, rests on these young women's' ability to perform appropriate, responsible, and feminine self-presentations. They are ambassadors.

Beauty vloggers I interviewed had been selected as shining examples to demonstrate platform safety to brands, at YouTube's request. For example, Melanie told me that she was invited by Google to speak to Clarins, a beauty and skincare brand.

I literally did a talk at Google London last year, for Clarins, do you know that brand Clarins? And I did a talk for their senior management last year to try and explain Influencer marketing... I hate the word influencer... and I was trying to explain how you can find a woman who is in her 30s who already likes your brand, who will, then

talk about some new product in a video and just explain, I'm working with Clarins on this video... this is their new thing.... I have been using them for years. and their audience are going to be like that exact demographic (Melanie, beauty vlogger).

In this quote, Melanie discusses being invited to espouse the clear value of her audience, but also as a representative of YouTube's ideal type of symbolic producer. As a beautiful and slim young woman, who regularly produces high-quality videos on commercial themes, she represents the ideal YouTube content that the platform hopes to promote. Other interlocutors had been invited to similar opportunities, for example a fitness vlogger had been invited to Google to speak to a popular yoghurt company. YouTube promote beauty vloggers in this vein to represent their platform's investment in responsible and good femininity. These young women promote the quality, niche audiences that can be reached through YouTube. The high valuation of A List beauty vloggers, and their audiences, provides the context for this Chapter. I argue this becomes crossed with algorithmic architecture, assumptions and cultures for vloggers, who are interpellated into creating beauty content should they wish to become visible on YouTube.

Demographics and Audiences

The UK vlogging industry is informed, and shaped, by the intersections of algorithmic categorisations of data (demographics and audiences), and the normative stereotyped understandings of gender held by platforms, engineers, industry intermediaries and brands. Cheney-Lippold (2011, 2017) demonstrates that audiences are formed and made readable and measurable as "algorithmic identities", that bear little relation to our embodied and

lived social experiences. He argues gendered typology “disavows traditional conventions of gender” (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 63) and is “beholden only to algorithmic fit, not the disciplinary confines of political identity” (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 66). An internet users’ designation by Google as ‘male’ has little to do with gender or sex, rather it is determined by the science, automobile and news websites that you have previously visited. For Cheney-Lippold (2017) these categorisations are often incorrect and abstract, a gender categorisation like “woman” is merely a “placeholder”, albeit a placeholder with high value for advertisers (Cheney-Lippold, 2017: 74). However, I argue this analysis of the dynamic gendered categories deployed by web analytics organisations, does not account for the stubbornness of the high value of reaching embodied (self-identified) women, by brands whose products that are designed to discipline, shape and contribute to objectification of the body (Bartky, 1990; Elias et al., 2017). Targeted gendered spheres of advertising and marketing are political and sophisticated techniques of governance.

On YouTube, algorithmically constructed audiences meet the materiality of gender binaries. An illustrative example is the All Things Hair YouTube Channel, part of an award-winning marketing campaign by beauty conglomerate Unilever (2018). Lauded as where “big hair meets big data”, the channel uses search data to identify popular hair search term queries for example “mermaid braid” or “prom hair”. After gathering this data, Unilever contracted beauty vloggers to make videos that answer the queries, hosted on a centralised YouTube channel managed on behalf of Unilever. Razorfish, the agency who initially produced the YouTube channel, state that the channel is targeted at “women” (Campaignlive, 2014). The category of *woman* may be dynamic, abstract and algorithmically inferred online. However, it is significant, as the beauty vloggers contracted to produce the videos responses self-

present as highly feminine women. Whether the initial audience searching for advice on how to French braid their hair were self-identifying ‘women’ or not, the search terms are cheerfully answered in videos by beautiful, mostly white, highly feminine women. In this vein, we see echoes of the stabilising logics of constructed and imagined audience demographics as they influence media production (Ang, 1991; Meehan, 1986). As we will see later in this Chapter, many of the vloggers I spoke to were well versed in the demographics of their audience, as translated by analytics software provided by platforms. However, this was but one factor that informed their experiences, compensation and visibility on YouTube. Intermediaries, such as talent agents, brands and YouTube make decisions about which beauty vloggers to work with, and promote, based on the demographics of their audience (which may be ‘quote unquote women’ rather than women). How *talent* is defined, and how it intersects with raced, gendered and classed stereotypes, will be explored more completely in Chapter Four. For now, it is important to recognise that self-presentation, hegemonic beauty, performed identity, and decisions pertaining to the ‘quality’ of content are all influenced by long-held gender stereotypes.

Rationalisation and Self-Rationalisation

This section will examine how an apparent disruption in media production industries and markets can contribute to the stabilisation of genres and practices within media production. For Meehan “rationalisation” means how production re-employs what are seen as successful patterns of casting, genres and representation, due to fears pertaining to the unstable, and risky, and unpredictable nature of cultural production (Meehan, 1986: 452). In a similar use, Saha (2018) draws from Ryan’s (1992) analysis of the corporate production, to

argue rationalisation often comes across as neutral, organisational common sense, but often contributes to a normalising and flattening of cultural production; it is how “counter narratives of difference are governed” (Saha, 2018: 178). In this vein, common and pervasive representations of gender, disability and sexuality can be examined by looking to industrial practices of rationalisation. Negus (1999) also highlights a process that is akin to rationalisation in his work on music industries and record company cultures. He describes how messy, cross-genre, or strange musical acts are wrestled into saleable, marketable genres through myriad processes and strategies employed by record labels. This constrains cultural products that are “potentially fluid, multiple influences and genre crossing” (Negus, 1999: 6). The concept of ‘rationalisation’ highlights the importance of the ‘sure bet’ for media industries, and demonstrates how risk, uncertainty and industry turmoil, often engenders a doubling down on genres that are ‘stable’ and that can theoretically ‘work’.

Although analysis of these processes have been applied to ‘traditional’ cultural industries, (overwhelmingly music), there is little literature on how rationalisation takes place as contingent to platforms. I argue that processes of rationalisation can be applied to the practices, logics and processes of the vlogging industry and its intermediaries. We will see that the vlogging industry is highly bureaucratised: strict guidelines are maintained and policed by YouTube, talent agents, industry experts and vloggers. Furthermore, through their structures of algorithmic visibility, and wider institutional context, YouTube encourages a *self-rationalisation*. YouTube’s statements, and algorithmic culture, contribute to beauty vloggers’ understandings of what content is permissible and advertiser friendly (“bureaucracy”), what genres and styles of videos may become visible (“formatting”), how vlogs are branded and aestheticised to achieve visibility (“marketing”) and how they are

positioned through their thumbnail, metadata and promotion (“packaging”) (Saha, 2018: 130). Unwillingness to rationalise oneself to commercially accepted genres will lead to algorithmic punishment, or invisibility. However, this experience is subtle, unknowable and never fully articulated by YouTube. In other words, rationalisation often involves shaping oneself to a platform’s desired genre, or output. At the same time, these desires are fundamentally unknowable.

Here, there is a clear link here to Foucault’s analysis of Bentham’s Panopticon, a circular prison in which inmates are consistently surveilled by a guard at the centre. Foucault (1991) found this an apt metaphor as to how surveillance is complementary to disciplinary society: “he is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication... And this invisibility is a guarantee of order” (Foucault, 1991: 200). Feminist theorists have taken up this theory of self-surveillance to explain how disciplinary practices produce a docile feminine body (Bartky, 1990) or how women closely police each other’s performance of femininity through the “gynaeopticon” (Winch, 2013: 25). For beauty vloggers, content is consistently, yet invisibly, surveilled by YouTube’s algorithms.

Underpinned by this knowledge of surveillance, the process of self-rationalisation means consistently readying ones’ brand and micro and macro-level performances to ensure it is complicit with YouTube’s structures of visibility. Crossing theorisation of *institutional* rationalisation with accounts of *individualised* self-surveillance and self-rationalisation to analyse cultural production on social media platforms can make visible the everyday logics of rationalisation at work in this space, namely how one becomes visible to audiences, often by using specific performances of femininity. Furthermore, although vloggers take on a process of self-rationalisation, I view beauty vloggers as *media producers*, and as one

stakeholder in a cultural industry, in which all stakeholders are hoping for visibility.

Industry Lore

The “cultural industries” approach outlined earlier enables a focus on constraining and enabling practices by, and as experienced by, stakeholders and producers (Havens et al., 2009; Saha, 2018). I draw from these approaches, centring questions of power in analysing how information and assumptions of algorithmic visibility and understandings of audiences become, how they are circulated and to what extent they inform and shape beauty vloggers’ logics of visibility. Vloggers, industry stakeholders and intermediaries are active participants who use information to negotiate, contest, and configure their strategies and content in the UK vlogging industry. Havens’ (2014a) concept of “industry lore” thus becomes useful to highlight how an assemblage of risk-management strategies make up the very productive ‘organisational common sense’:

Media intermediaries serve as one of the prime vehicles through which organizational priorities find their way into representational practices, specifically through which organizational common sense – or what I call ‘industry lore’ – which marks the boundaries of how industry insiders imagine television programming, its audiences and the kind of textual practices that can and cannot be profitable

(Havens, 2014a: 40)

Havens theorises the middle ground between structure and agency: industry lore recognises structural relationships to wider industry but does not over-state the vlogging industry’s determining role in shaping vlogging content. Ultimately, the post-structural grounding of

industry lore can account for why A List beauty vloggers reproduce a narrow range of hegemonic, and highly feminised, content even when they appear removed from dominant, hegemonic media organisations. Industry lore is also valuable as it is often informed by the inherent uncertainty and risk of the creative industries, and addresses the productive nature of assumptions and interpretations in media success, visibility and audiences.

The concept affords room to examine how industry assumptions may not be verifiable, but they are productive. In an example of how this manifests, Lotz argues in her study of network media buying practices that “the greatest influence likely comes not from advertisers but from perceptions of what advertisers desire that have been internalised by network executives” (Lotz, 2007: 562). Here, Lotz demonstrates how advertisers do directly pressure network executives, but it is mostly *imagined* and theorised concerns about advertisers’ desires that shape the production of media symbols. Dobson operationalises the concept “media as practice” to theorise digital postfeminist cultures through questioning how young women think, engage and work with media that offers representations of young femininity (Dobson, 2015: 19). For Dobson, persistent and sustained gaps in representation, or mis-representations, can illustrate a corresponding effect on the media landscape. If many people are choosing to stay away from genres of content that will not engender visibility, or engaging with beauty content more regularly to attain visibility, this will arguably influence not only audiences but strengthen the reproduction of the beauty vlogs on YouTube. Therefore, the high industrial valuation of beauty genres arguably exasperates the gendered genre divide on YouTube, by encouraging a continuation and expansion of an entrenched feminised genre for entrepreneurial vloggers.

To this end, throughout this thesis, we will meet numerous intermediaries who are informed by, but also reproduce, industry lore through their day to day practices. As Havens draws from Foucault to note “discourse is... both the expression of world view and the application of power/knowledge to human society” (Havens, 2014a). Put differently, discourse is productive. For example, this Chapter examines how uncertainty pertaining to audiences and algorithmic visibility leads beauty vloggers to develop sophisticated, but normalised, visibility techniques based on assumptions, interpretations of available information, and wider generic vlogging practices. In Chapter Four, we will see how digital talent agents spot talent based on *brand fit*, namely signing talent based on assumptions of vloggers that advertisers will want to work with, but in turn providing these actors with superior support, and increased access to advertising opportunities. In Chapter Five I demonstrate how interpretations of advertisers’ and audiences’ high valuation of ‘authenticity’, as it is crossed with classed and raced notions of ‘respectability’, can influence vlogging content in creative and far-reaching ways. In the final Chapter, “industry lore” at vlogging events is examined. In one example, we will see that producers who work at YouTube allow some vloggers to use their studio and social facilities if they do not have the required volume of subscribers. In this vein, intermediaries’ subjective assumptions about who will ‘fit in’ at YouTube stratifies access to production support, and in addition opportunities, yielded by developing close relationships with YouTube.

Visibility and Algorithmic Self-Optimisation

In this section, I deploy the concepts I have introduced in the previous section: “commodity

audiences”, “rationalisation” and “industry lore” to emphasise how algorithms, and understandings of algorithms, inform and shape beauty vloggers’ content. The term algorithm is powerful, even “fetishized” but discussions of algorithms can be confused (Crawford, 2016: 89). In practice, the vocabulary can be applied to organisations, human actors, code, and software design (Seaver, 2017). Although I here focus on algorithmic optimisation strategies, these strategies that cannot sufficiently be defined as strictly algorithmic, or designed for algorithmic visibility. A point of central importance in this work is that these discussions are often a synonym for *commodity audiences*. In other words, when beauty vloggers speak about algorithmic visibility, this does not ultimately mean visibility and legibility for machines, or for code. The algorithm is a means to an end: to be visible to an audience, often one that is correspondingly sought by advertisers. As Havens puts it, in the age of big data “the audience remains the central obsession of the commercial media industries” (Havens, 2014b: 5). Although the intermediaries suffer a semantics shift in platform-based content creation, the powerful positioning of the audience, and how they are discussed, sought and centralised through processes of rationalisation and developed through industry lore, remains salient to this Chapter.

Algorithms are engineered to conduct subjective tasks on behalf of *someone else*, often organisations. Gillespie calls for researchers to “unpack the warm human and institutional choices that lie behind these cold mechanisms” (Gillespie, 2014: 169). Put differently, researchers must account for the fact that algorithms are engineered by humans who are informed by “industry lore” as they work at media organisations (Havens, 2014b: 40). However, algorithms are also informed by the actors that use them, who develop and respond with their own lore. Herein, I highlight the context for the focus of the remainder of

this Chapter; beauty vloggers' development and adherence to algorithmic lore. Havens (2014) acknowledges how industry assumptions about television audiences may not be verifiable, but they are productive. I argue beauty vlogging's algorithmic lore makes up imaginaries, beliefs and assumptions, which shape their content. Put differently, the generic formation of beauty vlogging is informed by the macro, platform affordances, algorithmic lore, which in tandem shapes the micro: it nudges and influences speech, video titles, thumbnails, wider content and channel themes. Algorithmic lore includes the far reaching, and often sophisticated, strategies used to make oneself and one's content visible to the YouTube algorithm. This term is informed by "visibility labour", a term introduced by Abidin to define the "work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self- conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favourable end" (Abidin, 2016: 5). This broad definition was originally intended by Abidin as both distinct from algorithmic visibility, and as undertaken by Instagram *followers* rather than elite users. However, her account of fans' laborious and tactical uses of Instagram's affordances, such as mentions, tags, liking posts to gain visibility in a crowded attention economy, means visibility labour is a useful lens through which to understand self-optimisation strategies.

Applied algorithmic lore can also be described as algorithmic self-optimisation. This borrows from search engine optimisation (SEO), defined as "the process (and industry) of creating pages that will receive more visibility on large search engines" (Halavais, 2009: 198). Since 2009, SEO has become ubiquitous for individuals and organisations hoping to be found through search engines, including video on YouTube. I chose 'self' as a prefix to highlight the pervasive and individualised experiences of the algorithm for beauty vloggers. The use of 'self' borrows from Goffman's dramaturgical lens: this lens reveals performances of

particular selves are often used strategically according to situation, to be easily processed by the intended audience (Goffman, 1990; Robinson, 2007). A performance that is consistent with audience's expectations is a valuable tool used to build a credible "front stage" performance, and similarly valuable in self optimisation tactics (Goffman, 1990). The 'self' was also chosen to highlight the individualised nature of self-optimisation, as 'self' branding highlights how marketing logic has trickled down from organisations to become a "set of practices and a mindset" for individuals (Marwick, 2013b: 166). Gillespie refers to such a process as making oneself "algorithmically recognisable" in which "those interested in having their information selected as relevant will tend to orient themselves toward these algorithmic systems" (Gillespie, 2017: 2). However, it is also important to recognise how there is not a straightforward line between platforms' algorithmic requirements, and the optimisation practices and strategies used by stakeholders. Rather, beauty vloggers' algorithmic self-optimisation is informed by intermediaries, algorithmic imaginations and feedback loops that, in turn, shape algorithms and their outcomes.

The assemblage of algorithmic information pieced together by vloggers is always underpinned by an "algorithmic imaginary", defined as "the way in which people imagine, perceive and experience algorithms and what these imaginations make possible" (Bucher, 2017: 31). The imaginary does not mean that information gleaned by users is necessarily incorrect, but highlights how ordinary users develop their own understandings of the algorithmic systems they engage with every day. Imaginaries are highly affective, which amplified for vloggers, for whom successful algorithmic self-optimisation and visibility is often directly proportional to income and opportunities. The imaginary became clear in interviews, in which vloggers described underpinned algorithmic strategies with the results

of their own micro-tests and experiences, as they developed their own logics of algorithmic visibility. A final tenet of algorithmic self-optimisation is what Gillespie (2014: 183) describes as a “recursive loop” between algorithms and self-optimisation practices. In other words, the practices that are undertaken by users in the name of self-optimisation often shapes algorithmic outcomes and design. Gillespie compares algorithmic recognition strategies to that of the Hollywood studio system: producers develop films through the logics of archetypes and genres to make their content recognisable for studios, which then calcifies the dominance of certain genres in the marketplace. Like the promotion of beauty vlogging on YouTube, Hollywood use of generic archetypes is a rationalisation strategy, used to offset and manage risk in an unpredictable market (Saha, 2018).

On YouTube, there is no static or centralised home page visible to all viewers: in playlists, on the ‘trending’ page, or on the platform interface. All content that becomes visible does so through personalised algorithmic recommendations. These pathways to algorithmic recommendations are specific to YouTube, and to YouTube’s structures of visibility. Recommendation algorithms serve ‘relevant’ content to viewers, informed by the platform’s definition of relevancy. The need for cultural producers to be visible according to platforms’ rules has been termed “platformization”, in other words how “producers... are impelled to develop publishing strategies that are aligned with the business models of platforms” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018: 8), how the production of content is structured by what is and what is not permitted on platforms, and ultimately how “cultural producers are transformed into platform complementors” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018: 13). This is a valuable perspective, but it concentrates on a ‘top down’ model of platform dominance, side-lining the cultural imaginaries, contestations, frictions and ambivalence of cultural production by platform

stakeholders. Returning to “structuration” within the concept of industry lore can foreground how the discursively circulated and debated information, snippets and scuttlebutt shape YouTube production. Industry lore is so useful as it enables us to bypass determinism. To be sure, the high commercial value of visibility on monopoly search engines cannot be overstated: businesses that are algorithmically relegated on Google do become bankrupt (Gillespie, 2017), and similarly beauty vloggers relegated to invisibility can lose their income. However, analysis needs to account for the productive gap between analysing platforms’ (and audiences’) desires, which are often fundamentally unknowable, and analysing users’ beliefs and theorisation about platforms and audience desires, how these are developed, and how they shape cultural production.

Algorithms and Discrimination

For beauty vloggers, understandings of visibility for algorithms, and audiences, were confused, interweaved and entangled. In the following section I analyse how vloggers’ discussions of ‘algorithms’ obscure the roles of, and the tensions between, actors, stakeholders and platforms. Panic within algorithmic lore is informed by examples of how algorithms refract, and sharpen societal bias. This is of real concern when algorithms increasingly structure our access to media and services. To give a brief contextualising example, researchers at Google found biased word-pairs within the Google News algorithm: running the query “*man=computer programmer woman=x?*” returned the result “*woman=homemaker*” (MIT Technology Review, 2016). The algorithm equates homemaker to woman within its search and recommendation functions and subsequently informs what are deemed relevant news search results for its users. But to say an algorithm is ‘sexist’ is misguided. Algorithms replicate the “geometry”, or the broad shape and patterns, of the

data set they draw from (arXiv, 2016). The researchers who discovered this bias in Google News despaired of journalists who wrote the pieces, writing “one might have hoped that the Google News embedding would exhibit little gender bias because many of its authors are professional journalists” (arXiv, 2016). However, scholars of gender studies, and many other everyday observers, could quickly correct this ideal about unbiased journalists, demonstrating journalists often construct news narratives in ways that draw from cultural stereotypes and sustain inequalities (Berkowitz, 1997; Meyers, 2004).

To return to the point, algorithmic culture can work to refract and sharpen existing societal bias, but it should also be recognised that algorithms do not exist outside of culture. The ‘bias’ that is generated by, and that in turn shapes, algorithms should be urgently studied. This loop is of particular importance to how algorithmic culture, and algorithms as culture, structure the experiences of marginalised groups online (Seaver, 2017). Discourse surrounding algorithms often takes the form of “seductive drama”, but rather than over-inscribing agency to algorithms we must ask how the “figure of the algorithm” is interacted with in culture (Ziewitz, 2016: 5). Beer demonstrates the risk of divorcing algorithms and dissecting them in isolation from wider culture: “as well as being produced from a social context, the algorithms are lived with, they are an integral part of that social world; they are woven into practices and outcomes” (Beer, 2017: 4). Analysis should therefore account for how algorithms can work to intensify bias, but are also fraught, contested and slippery.

What we think about algorithms, or more accurately what we believe about algorithms, often only becomes visible at the moment when we perceive them to be ‘broken’. However, this theorised breakage is often based on imagined aims and practices. To illustrate this

point, I turn to a widely covered instance of ostensive algorithmic malfunction on YouTube, which took place in early 2017. Some LGBTQ+⁵ vloggers found content verbally discussing, or tagged with, LGBTQ+ themes became demonetised on YouTube. This content was thus no longer eligible to earn a portion of advertising revenue through the Partner Programme, it was deemed unsuitable for advertisers. Many vloggers reacted publicly to this. The reaction falls into two camps: some blamed the demonetisation of LGBTQ content on an algorithmic flaw for the platform to fix, and some took it as evidence that YouTube is discriminatory. Vlogger Gabby Dunn told feminist blog Autostraddle “the platform seems to hate the content we make – LGBT and mental health videos ”(Priddy, 2017). In another example, vlogger Shannon Beveridge observed that her video was flagged as eligible for limited monetisation, only after she attached the tag “LGBT”. She tweeted the following response to YouTube:

literally the SECOND I added 'lgbt' to the tags on my new video it got demonetized... @youtube... WHAT ARE YOU DOING??? How have you not fixed this problem?? Do you not care at all ?????! (Beveridge, 2017)

Vloggers’ reactions echoed Bucher (2017: 36) findings that many users whose experiences of algorithms do not match their expectations consider the algorithm to be “broken”. By blaming this demonetisation on either YouTube or the algorithm, the vloggers cited here miss a focus on YouTube’s relationship with their advertisers.

⁵ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning. The ‘+’ signifies extended queer communities such as gender queer, intersex, 2 spirit, intersex and asexual.

Laura Cherinkoff, Director of the Internet Creators Guild, reframed the argument.

Contrasting with some researchers' observations that YouTube's business model is disruptive to the existing media landscape (Cunningha et al., 2016), she identifies the algorithm is not 'broken', it is correctly identifying LGBTQ+ content that some advertisers do not want to fund or be associated with:

Now that brands and advertisers are getting savvier and demanding more tools from platforms, and have the power to advocate, and can throw money, and do a boycott... they are demanding more, you know, individualised options in terms of what their ads show against, and they.. it almost seems like it's kind of, like returned to where TV is very boring, because they have to go safe for advertisers, and there's been this kind of delusion that YouTube's not like that... anyone can flourish especially diverse voices. Then I see some creators really go through a culture shock In this new paradigm, that a brand could choose to not advertise against LGBT content, and that technically that is an option that YouTube is offering (Laura , ICG)

There is a historical precedent for this, for example in the US advertisers have anonymously pulled valuable commercials from content with LGBTQ+ themes, with campaigns often spearheaded by Conservative interest groups (Fahey, 1991; Richards & Murphy, 1996; Turow, 1997). What is particularly interesting about Cherinkoff's quote is how she captures the 'culture shock' from those who make their living on YouTube, and highlights their unwillingness to believe their commercial relationships could be influenced by brands who are not willing to advertise next to LGBTQ content. The algorithm here becomes something of a straw man: the narrative that the YouTube algorithm is 'broken' deflects attention, and

absolves some responsibility from YouTube, who elsewhere explicitly state their willingness to demonetise content to appease some commercial partners. These public examples contribute to negotiated understanding of what is monetisable on YouTube and informs, structures and shapes the decisions beauty vloggers, their managers, YouTube producers, event organisers, and brands make about symbolic production.

Understanding the YouTube Algorithm

Many commercial search engines, such as YouTube, release limited information on how their algorithms function: values that inform visibility and promotion are often obscured. Some have termed algorithms “black boxes” due to this industrial opacity (Olden & Jackson, 2002; Striphas, 2015). However Bucher (2016: 100) views the concept of the black box as a “red herring”, arguing that if we stop at the application of ‘black box’ as a critique, this can preclude further research into algorithmic practices. Writing all processes off as unknowable prevents us from investigating the information that may be available, and prevents us from questioning why knowledge is withheld (Bucher, 2016). Furthermore, there is a spectrum of information available on algorithmic processes, from organisational literature, tests and through pervasive use.

In interviews and content, beauty vloggers represent the algorithm as a highly unpredictable and unstable force that wields significant influence on their visibility, and thereby their financial security and career sustainability. YouTube tweaks, amends and tests their algorithms regularly, meaning vloggers are required to work out the alterations and play catch up to ensure continued visibility. The anxiety that this affords is captured in influencer research conducted by Twitter. This showed that full-time creators’ biggest concern for the

future was “adapting to changing social media platforms” (Twitter, 2018). All vlogging industry stakeholders I interviewed described their concern at the perceived lack of communication from YouTube, both on algorithmic updates and on ongoing issues pertaining to algorithmic visibility. The vacuum caused by uncertainty about algorithmic changes has been filled by numerous actors in the vlogging industry, with diverse motives. The drama of doubt around algorithms has provided the context for a vast SEO industry, that has been developed to address uncertainty and insecurity. In the face of limited organisational transparency, information that is accessible about algorithms is mediated by a number of self-styled algorithmic consultants who write papers for trade journals, and run workshops at YouTube conventions and industry events. They provide users with analyses and research, claiming they can assist interested parties in gaining visibility. Events I attended at VidCon of this vein had names including “7 Algorithm Hacks to Grow Your Audience” and “How the YouTube Algorithm Works”. My interviews and data collection showed that beauty vloggers used a patchwork of information from these papers and workshops, Facebook groups, hearsay, gossip and industry scuttlebutt, YouTube information, YouTube events and peers’ content. Studying the under-explored strategies used by beauty vloggers to become visible means the proliferation of highly feminised media genres on new platforms can become much clearer.

The ICG is a non-union, non-profit organisation established in 2016 to provide support to full time and part time vloggers hoping to develop sustainable careers on YouTube. In an interview, ICG Director Laura Cherinkoff told me that YouTube’s lack of transparency has been a major concern for the ICG during their formative year, telling me “in general creators, I think feel like they aren't empowered, they really don't understand why YouTube

does certain things or have a say, or get their questions answered, get their problems”. The ICG addresses these issues through informing members about algorithmic and platform changes, they circulate emails and maintain a “Platform Changelog” that’s accessible to those who have paid the membership fee. However, beauty vloggers I interviewed told me that they could not afford the membership fees: Lucy explained that whilst she was aware of the ICG, it was not an option available to her when she first began her channel:

I haven't paid because when it first started I had no money. I was a student and I wasn't doing it full time so I was like... sorry guys! Can't do anything Yeah... so... oh yeah I'm not a part of ICG, I don't know anything about algorithm changes if they happen. (Lucy, lifestyle vlogger)

When Lucy, and other vloggers I spoke to, found the fees for the ICG were untenable, they relied on their community and their friends on YouTube videos to discuss algorithmic updates and information. Beauty vloggers without the support of a wider organisation developed their own strategies to negotiate algorithmic uncertainties and attempted to parse out information from individual and communal experiences. Amy, a part time beauty vlogger told me she gleans information on the algorithm from her friends, as YouTube often denies or minimises problems, meaning they are as “useful as a chocolate teapot”. Full-time beauty and fashion vloggers Melanie and Kristabel informed me they gathered information on the algorithm through informal Facebook groups, set up for this purpose.

In these groups, vloggers post issues, experiences and discuss the success or failures of their recent videos. Lifestyle vlogger, Astrid told me “YouTubers talk to each other a lot, and we'll

be like, are you having a terrible week.. and so it's like OK, and that's kinda how we talk to each other about it". The approaches that my interlocutors cited consistently involved informal conversation with peers about temporally specific algorithmic experiences, either between friends or in a wider Facebook group. This approach can be seen as an informal take on the research technique of "reverse engineering", which is defined as evaluating algorithmic input and output to determine how the "recipe of the algorithm is composed" (Kitchin, 2017: 24). Vloggers 'work backwards' to understand whether there has been changes to the algorithm. They discussed the changing relationships between the videos they have posted and the number of views and engagement they received. They could then collaboratively build their own theories which can be circulated throughout support groups. In this vein, assumptions and narratives about algorithmic experience become calcified into a form of algorithmic lore which informed strategies, content, and self-presentation in the genre of beauty vlogging.

In interviews, beauty vloggers informed me how the algorithm works with some authority. Their theories were developed based on their experiences, and often explicitly negotiated, or diverged with information provided by YouTube. Theories and experiences ranged from positive to negative, positive experiences skewing towards the vloggers that were often the most privileged in my sample: white and middle-class beauty vloggers. One beauty vlogger self-consciously told me she believed that she had been 'white listed' by the trending tab, meaning YouTube often promoted her videos on the homepage. Other vloggers believed that YouTube favoured certain kinds of content or caused one video to do particularly well. Similarly, Amy told me that an algorithmic update had been "favourable" to her content and caused one of her videos to skyrocket to half a million views. Similarly, Melanie told me that

she had also been regularly featured on the ‘trending’ page, and that she is often promoted alongside two other vloggers, who are her friends. However, these beauty vloggers were also burdened with determining *why* successful content had been successful. Put differently, in addition to the negative risk of algorithmic invisibility, self-optimisation prompts vloggers to analyse how their videos had travelled positively, so elements of this content can be revisited and re-employed. A flexible, and analytical frame must be continuously maintained to ensure optimised self-presentations and content.

In her book, *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble (2018) expresses her concern about Google’s algorithmic bias, particularly towards women of colour, arguing prioritisation of commercial and advertising needs often conflicts with Google’s positioning as a media, news and information source. She argues “what is missing from the extant work on Google is an intersectional power analysis that accounts for the ways in which marginalised people are exponentially harmed by Google” (Noble, 2018: 28). For Noble, the lens through which Google’s algorithms operate locate whiteness as normality and thus black women’s representations, experiences and self-presentations become othered. To this point, we can analyse the work of Grace Victory, a mixed race ‘A List’ vlogger who has produced several videos discussing her negative experiences with the YouTube algorithm. In one video, entitled “Does YouTube Discriminate” Victory answers a fan question about barriers on YouTube. In the video, Victory expresses her delight at this point, raising her hand and crying “Yes! Yes, yes, yes”, going on to explain:

If you look at the top 50 YouTubers... the majority if not all of them are white middle class people. I don't even think other people can't afford the stuff, it's just YouTube pushes them through the algorithms, and one person can make a video and the other

recommended is people who look and talk like them. (Victory, 2018b)

Victory here articulates her frustration with Google's recommendation algorithms, which she argues prioritise and sustain the links between white users' channels, reinforcing white visibility. Race and social justice are key themes on Victory's channel, and her videos are charged with affective responses to her everyday experiences of being mixed race. In an earlier video, she describes recent changes to the algorithm as having affected her channel significantly. She says "with where I'm at mentally at the moment it just wasn't good for me to... daily vlog and stuff, so... I've been falling out of love with YouTube for years, it's just become a place that's very over saturated and I just find it very, very hard fitting in somewhere" (Victory, 2017a). In the video, Victory goes on to discuss her anxiety and depression as it links with her lack of visibility and the "negative comments" that she receives among very few positive engagements. Although she does not explicitly discuss race here, the video sticks out in the genre of beauty vlogging for its melancholia. She contradicts the upbeat 'positivity' and performed gratitude that runs through beauty vlogging genres by openly discussing her lack of visibility, views and comments. To read the significance of Victory's acknowledgement and discussion of 'lack' we can turn to Ahmed (2010) who links a kind of melancholia with a consciousness of racism. Ahmed captures the circular link between being unhappy, and being othered, in predominately white spaces: "to be not happy is to be not in the eyes of others, in the world of whiteness, which is the world as it coheres around white bodies" (Ahmed, 2010: 82). Victory embodies this point, as her pathway to visibility rests on this performance of this melancholia, which is not 'commercial' or within the specific bounds of a self-performance of 'authenticity' embodied by 'A List' vloggers. It is left to Victory to understand how this self-presentation affects her visibility on

YouTube, income and 'A List' status.

While heightened through her willingness to publicly discuss an experience as a mixed race, plus size, female vlogger, Victory's affective experience of producing content on YouTube is not unique. Many of those I interviewed described anxiety, panic, disappointment and depression caused by (in)visibility. A List beauty vlogger Lily Melrose tweeted "Okay I almost cried for a second thinking less than a hundred people had watched my new video but it glitched out went back up again. I really really try not to get hung up on numbers but wow I was like ☹ ☹ ☹" (Melrose, 2018). Similarly, a beauty vlogger, Ellie Adams, posted about experiencing physical symptoms regarding algorithmic instability. In the tweet, she describes being 'shadow banned' on Instagram, meaning that she believes her photos are non-discoverable for those outside of her existing audience (this practice is not confirmed by the platform, contributing to wider atmospheric paranoia). Her responsive post, published in 2018, is ostensibly to highlight how far she has come personally in managing algorithmic invisibility. She notes "TBH, 2017 Ellie would've been stressed to tears, heart palpitations, totally devastated. Now I'm like lol but where's my family sized galaxy [sic] bar and chips and dips?" (Adams, 2018). To take this tweet at face value, it is shocking that 'past' Adams would have had heart palpitations because of her content's visibility, and even as she signals her strong current feelings about the ban through her wish to comfort eat. However, this tweet, can also be read as public performance, in other words an example of "visibility labour" (Abidin, 2016). For example, Adams may publicly discuss her anxiety as a reminder to her fans to check on her Instagram posts. The practice of discussing anxiety to contribute to a valuation as authentic will be considered in Chapter Five, where I address the consistent, strategic and specific performance of mental health discourse in beauty

vlogging.

In interviews, some vloggers described an abject fear of YouTube's algorithms that underpinned their ability to produce and publish content. For example, Maria, a beauty vlogger, told me that she had been initially reluctant to start posting on YouTube. Her primary platform was Instagram, on which she had grown a sizable following through amassing a good knowledge of the algorithm and culture. She told me that although she knew how to gain visibility on Instagram, moving platforms to YouTube felt perilous. Maria told me that other successful Instagrammers who had ventured to YouTube had attained poor visibility on the platform, and this risk of invisibility and unfamiliarity with YouTube made her "very scared" to post. Somewhat ironically, Maria finally surmounted this fear because a change to the *Instagram algorithm* meant she found her Instagram content becoming less and less visible, in other words she had experienced a severe drop in engagement. The lack of comments, likes and shares risked making her career as a content creator on a single platform untenable, and pushed her to "diversify" her income streams through creating YouTube content, despite her concerns. Algorithm changes caused some to quit YouTube altogether, such as Lyndsay, a lifestyle vlogger who cited an algorithmic alteration as a final push for her to leave YouTube during our interview. Similarly, algorithm changes, or uncertainty, had caused some to have a break in uploading content. In a blog post beauty vlogger Em Sheldon described avoided posting on YouTube for years. She wrote that she is currently struggling with the YouTube algorithms, "It feels as if they're favouring certain accounts to promote and push out at the moment and it can be soul destroying when you've created content and you can see that your reach has been capped" (Sheldon, 2018). For each of these vloggers, the risk of invisibility was a serious consideration when

deciding when, what and if to post. Anxieties that the videos would not be promoted to their audiences underpinned their strategic creation of content. Risks were amplified by the fact that many algorithm changes are not shared by platforms, meaning vloggers have to piece their understanding of changes together using the techniques outlined in the previous section.

Folk-testing the Algorithm

Based on predictions that become entwined with the peer knowledge sharing, personal histories and industry advice, many vloggers in my case study developed their own algorithmic lore to manage the instability and unpredictability of a career on YouTube. This lore was a strategic attempt at engendering financial consistency in the face of an uneven and precarious career on YouTube. For example, for Irish beauty vlogger Melanie, part of this lore involved monitoring, and trying to theorise the success of diverse styles of packaging: “definitely I'm getting a lot more aware of how much my title thumbnail and thumbnail affects the bloody views... which I *hate*... but... if you want to keep doing it, you have to get people to see your stuff”. Lore assisted in the development of predictions of how content would be promoted by YouTube’s algorithms, and afforded a strategic mapping of an expected audience engagement. In other words, beauty vloggers theorised an expected visibility for particular genres, content themes and self-optimisation techniques. However, the unstable nature of YouTube’s algorithmic cultures pushed a reliance on lore to its limits. The majority of vloggers I interviewed described regular depressive and anxious feelings when a video did not reach their expected audience. They experienced drops in visibility in highly affective ways. For example, Amy, a part time beauty

vlogger, told me in an email “It's so disheartening when you see a video you poured 2 weeks of long nights into, barely hit 1k views”. For Amy, this number is low, although metrics are subjectively experienced by each beauty vlogger. A key thread running through interviews was growth – getting more views, audiences and subscribers. Simply maintaining one’s audience reach was insufficient. Lifestyle vlogger Astrid highlighted the platform’s role in distributing content to audiences, “sometimes I get more frustrated with the platform than anything else. Like... I'm like OK... I don't believe that somehow overnight 10,000 people don't want to watch this anymore”. For Amy, Astrid and others, content creation was risky because there was no guarantee of visibility. Views wildly varied: highly personal and time-costly projects could receive far fewer views than expected, causing doubt, anxiety and ambivalence about career sustainability.

Algorithmic theories prompted deep introspection on channel growth, and even (arguably wholly justified) paranoia. Many of the beauty vloggers in my case study held anxieties that their videos were not being promoted to their audience through the ‘subscription boxes’. Put simply, they were worried their subscribed audiences were not receiving a notification when new videos were published, leading to a loss of views, and therefore revenue in monetary or brand-value terms. Although rarely officially announced by Google, vloggers I interviewed and industry ‘experts’ informed me that YouTube was consistently altering algorithmic video promotion, ultimately erasing the certainty of features that vloggers relied on, for example subscribers’ notifications. To counter the platform’s ambivalence towards these announcements, beauty vloggers addressed the issue of subscriber notifications productively. They experimented through ad-hoc ‘algorithmic auditing’, which could be read very loosely borrowing from “field experiments in which researchers or their confederates

participate in a social process that they suspect to be corrupt in order to diagnose harmful discrimination” (Sanvig et al. 2014). This is work that is highly necessary and time consuming. Beauty vloggers used their secondary platforms to conduct audience research and assemble information. In the case studies examined below, beauty vloggers used Twitter and Instagram to consult their audience on whether they had received a notification of a YouTube video’s publication. Through using diverse platforms, each with their own diverse algorithms and algorithmic priorities, vloggers attempted to patch together the perspectives of their potential audience, as they hoped each would make up for gaps in visibility. This is a strategic dimension of the labour of producing YouTube videos.

An Instagram Stories post by fitness and lifestyle vlogger Carly Rowena in June 2017 presented an awkwardly composed image of Rowena’s dog being washed in a bathtub. The camera appears to have been placed on the side of the bath as Rowena sprays her struggling dog with a detachable showerhead. Above the image, Rowena has employed a ‘poll,’ a technical feature of Instagram stories that allows viewers to publicly ‘vote’ on numerous options. In this example Rowena has asked viewers of her Instagram story to vote on the answer to the question “Was [this video] in your sub box?”, with two reply options: “Yes!” or “I didn’t see it!”. The background image of this poll, the seemingly spontaneous post image of a dog being given a bath, affords a reading of the post as a spontaneous and authentic capture of the everyday realities of owning a sweet, yet hygiene-adverse, dog. However, the poll, and the data generated, are also techniques of audience measurement, and exemplify a strategic use of secondary platforms to cross-reference and monitor algorithmic visibility for diverse audiences. Balancing an authentic self-presentation with the economic and industrial implication of audience research, is precarious. The tensions between these two motivations are evidenced by Rowena’s use of everyday imagery to

'offset' and neutralise the poll. A tweet published by beauty vlogger Rachel Levin, takes a more direct approach, saying: "Tweet me pictures of your subscription boxes from like 12 PM today if you're subscribed to me" (Levin, 2017). This tweet returned 41 fan image replies, with some tangential from the initial request, for example "It's my birthday", and many people translating Levin's announced time into their own time-zone. Levin's followers also attempted to reassure her or expressed annoyance at YouTube, tweeting images of her video, with personalised messages such as "my favorite YouTuber" or "hope it helps". Some people replied regarding a lack of the video, for example "I never got a notification".

Algorithmic auditing techniques have been developed to address an ostensibly 'black boxed' algorithmic culture, and rely on labour from beauty vloggers who in turn source this work from their (often young and female) fans. The practice of smoothing and neutralising algorithmic precarity through posts and votes can certainly be thought of through the lens of "immaterial labour", which Terranova borrows from Automatist Lazzarato to define as "a form of collective cultural labour that makes [music, fashion and information] possible" (Terranova, 2000: 42). However, the affective nature of this work recalls the figure of the "digital housewife", coined by Jarrett (2017). In this work, Jarrett argues we must examine content creation through the lens of historically gendered reproductive labours, namely women's domestic work. The digital housewife is not necessarily a woman, rather they are involved in the "feminized sphere of social reproduction in new media" (Jarrett, 2017: 71), and "works within the social factory, generating immaterial products that can be associated with inalienable use-values but which nevertheless may be integral to the reproduction of capital" (Jarrett, 2017: 71). Techniques used by vloggers firstly impelled their audience into providing user generated content to a platform, which ultimately profits from these

responses. This labour is reproductive and highly affective. To be sure, it could be argued that it is pleasurable for fans to send screenshots to their favourite vlogger, and they may be rewarded with recognition and community membership. Furthermore, celebrities have historically benefitted from fan labour, for example as their fans market their products through word of mouth, bolster their image by waiting outside of stage doors with placards and write in to magazines with their love letters and so on. However, in the case of YouTube, fan labour stands in for a commercial service as YouTube fails to provide vloggers with insights into how their videos travel through the algorithm.

In sum, beauty vloggers use creative, affective and laborious methods that can be read as attempts to forge sustainable and stable careers on YouTube. This section has outlined the strategic, affective and creative use of available resources by beauty vloggers to develop and maintain an understanding of algorithms. A lack of information provided by platforms pertaining to algorithmic alterations and updates creates a vacuum that is filled by third party actors, informal gossip, and online support networks. For full time beauty vloggers, this dearth of information can mean fear, anxiety and disappointment, especially when their videos do not obtain the engagement that they hope and strategise for. Consistently, the algorithm becomes a figure of affect. Content 'favoured' by the algorithm offers no reprieve, and is continuously monitored and analysed to understand the reasons for its success. Through interviews and online ethnography, I found that vloggers' descriptions and understandings of algorithms can be contradictory, and highly subjective, however together they formed an algorithmic lore that shaped and informed content production. In the following section I will develop this point, to argue the imperative to build and inhabit a

'universe' on YouTube contributes to a multiplication of commercially friendly beauty content over other creation within genres.

Beauty Vlogging: A Universe

Beauty vlogging can be thought of as YouTube universe. The universe is a loop of videos that become recommended between each other for users on the platform. They are linked either because they deal with related themes, feature the same groups of people, or are generically similar. For YouTube audiences, a session begins with a single video selected by a user, and the session is extended by related videos (from diffuse YouTube channels) rolling on a playlist automatically or advertised to the right in the 'side bar'. Smoky eye videos lead to videos on smoky eyes, hair curling videos to diffuse hair curling tutorials. Feminised genres also are linked to feminised genres. Throughout my ethnography I was recommended videos on beauty, break-ups, boys, fashion, gossip and anxiety. These topics are the stalwarts of bedroom culture; where the personal meets the commercial, where one's bodily flaws (flab, hair, wrinkles) are diagnosed and cured using products advertised (McRobbie & Garber, 2000).

The universe illustrates the visible yet permeable boundaries between video content that becomes linked, suggested and served to viewers. If my very cursory understanding of astronomy is correct, the universe metaphor aptly symbolises a loosely sketched mass in which videos are either included within, or invisible from view. According to Wikipedia "whilst the spatial size of the entire Universe is still unknown... the Universe has neither an edge nor a center" (Wikipedia, 2018). Like our own Universe, the YouTube universes of

related videos do not have defined borders, they are growing, and the centre is dynamic.

The videos that are visible, recommended between and among themselves on the platform, make up the 'observable' part of a universe. I study the YouTube 'beauty' universe, but more specifically the A List beauty universe. I use this universe of high profile beauty vloggers, whose content is linked to and made visible, to call attention to, and theorise, the pervasive tendency for vloggers draw from a small range of themes and genres.

Furthermore, I examine now the necessity of being included in the universe contributes to a gendered (particularly feminised) nature of YouTube content, and contributes to continued prevalence of white, middle class social actors in the vlogging 'A List'. The need to be included leads to rationalisation, content homogenisation, and punishing diverse and original content, that cannot be easily rolled out on playlists.

The entrenched feminised nature of YouTube content has implications for beauty vloggers who believe their content should fit within a pre-existing YouTube universe. One beauty vlogger, Melanie, told me in an interview that she had initially decided to make beauty content because she thought it would become more visible and because she thought that was what 'girls do on the internet'.

I was doing beauty videos, even though that is not an area where I have... not been interested in that at all, I just thought that was what you had to do if you were a girl on the internet. And then, it's so weird, I've actually talked to so many girls who also agree with me... even the likes of Hazel [Heyes, a filmmaker], she did fashion videos and stuff back in the day, and that's not her passion (Melanie, beauty vlogger)

Here, Melanie describes starting her YouTube career by producing beauty content, in part due to representations of women on YouTube, and on the wider 'internet', but also, as she went on to say, because she "just wanted to do any videos that were performing easy". Although she argues she had many other 'passions', beauty production appeared a strategic and rational pathway. Similarly, a beauty vlogger called Sarah spoke about creating feminised content on YouTube at an event I attended. A panel moderator asked if Sarah always produces content that *she* wants to make. She said "I feel like this is something I really, really struggled with when I first started my channel... I did the same old kind of shit... like what's in my handbag. I don't care what's in my handbag, I really, really don't, it's full of crap". The 'what's in my bag' video genre is a popular beauty genre, in which vloggers film themselves removing and identifying cosmetic items from a handbag. This is a highly feminised and commercially viable video, as it allows the inclusion of sponsored content (products that just happen to be *in one's bag*) in a manner that is indistinguishable amongst organic content. It is an entrenched, and stereotypical 'beauty' genre, shorthand for the beauty Universe on YouTube.

Melanie and Sarah's statements position engagement with beauty, and certain highly commercial genres, as a deeply strategic or even a naïve choice. To suggest content is produced for visibility purposes would, at least on the surface, counter beauty vlogging's generic underpinning discourse of 'love', passion and authenticity. Put differently, these statements undermine the significant tenets of the beauty vlogging brand, which rests on the neoliberal pillars of "passionate work" as identified by McRobbie (2015: 74) or the "do what you love mantra" identified by Duffy (2016: 13). At first blush, Sarah and Melanie's candid statements make visible the myriad labours involved in launching a YouTube channel

for young women. Indeed, they document an ambivalent process of rationalisation, as Sarah and Melanie engaged with beauty content production due to a narrowness of wider representations, as they yearned for visibility. However, the vloggers' self-presentations here are complex, as they also make visible a significant and pervasive pull towards cosmetic and beauty content for women on YouTube in a wider context. Despite publicly distancing themselves from beauty content, both Melanie and Sarah continue to produce highly commercial and feminised content. Their channels in 2018 feature make-up and haircare tutorials, and the majority of their vlogs focus close attention to their bodies and faces. In this vein, the lines they have drawn between the beauty content they 'used to' produce, and their current content appear fairly arbitrary.

To make sense of statements in which these A List vloggers seemingly distance themselves from beauty, we can refer to what Keller defines as the "porous" nature of postfeminist culture "whereby feminist politics can and do appear within popular media texts" (Keller, 2014: 4). Keller argues porous moments can account for moments of critique and feminist self-reflection in postfeminist media. She argues that while feminism may poke through in otherwise stereotypically feminine texts, media success and visibility are contingent on performance of an individualised and savvy self-brand, and rely on the possession of whiteness, social and cultural capitals and hegemonic beauty. Although Sarah and Melanie's stories can be read as a critique of YouTube, they can also be read as accounts of their personal journeys towards finding themselves, and their truly authentic content. Their use of narratives, or discussions of their journeys for personal reflection, are evocative of the normalisation of "therapeutic discourse", the performance of suffering that leads to realisation and ultimately, triumph. For Illouz "the narrative about the self quickly becomes

a narrative in action – a narrative about the process of understanding, working at, and overcoming (or not overcoming) one’s problems” (Illouz, 2008: 196). Therapeutic discourse is thus highly productive and is how social actors are called to “build coherent selves, procure intimacy, provide a feeling a of competence in the realm of work, and facilitate social relations in general” (Illouz, 2008: 20). Tying these threads together, this journey allows Melanie and Sarah, who continue to maintain careers as beauty vloggers, to build a highly affective narrative, in which they have struggled with stereotypes of femininity which they have overcome. They *now* conduct truly passionate work. They renounce the strong call to make beauty content on YouTube, for visibility and commercial viability, and rationalise their continued participation in this Universe.

However, this is discursively neutralised as A List beauty vloggers produce beauty and fashion content to afford inclusion in the ‘beauty universe’ on YouTube. In a further example of this practice, Astrid, a lifestyle vlogger who predominately produces vlogs about books, told me that she occasionally makes beauty videos to amp up her popularity and visibility. Although her videos are mostly unrelated to beauty, even occasional inclusion in the beauty universe is beneficial to her channel and boosts her video engagement significantly. In the quote below, Astrid is careful to explain that she doesn’t dislike making this genre of content, but that she does employ it strategically, as beauty content often reaches an audience 5 times the size of her book and lifestyle videos.

A: So I make the stuff in general that I want to make, I do it however I want to do it, and from time to time I do videos that I know will do really well... that I will enjoy doing anyway... but it's like a what's in my bag video... a room tour video... it's the

stuff that I know has 5 x more views than anything else I do... but it's sort of like seeing, like is there more content that I can do... like it's not like I wouldn't want to make it, but I know that I will give it a little boost hopefully.

SB: And it's because people are searching for those?

A: And it like blends into the beauty community.

Astrid does articulate that making these videos is enjoyable, but also that the boost is also valuable to her and her channel, meaning she strategically produces these videos regularly. In other words, Astrid believes that making videos along these themes is more lucrative than vlogging about books, prompting an adjustment in her content production to this end. The importance of 'fitting in' to an existing universe or genre for channel visibility is an essential tenet of algorithmic lore. Through subjective experiences, Astrid believes making regular beauty content is important. That this is unconfirmed by YouTube is not important as this is the lore that continues to inform her symbolic production.

The Lush Haul: A Case Study

The haul genre is a popular beauty vlogging genre, which involves a beauty vlogger conversationally showing and telling a list of products, which were ostensibly recently purchased. The vlogger evaluates their suitability and points out their benefits and drawbacks. Hauls are often grouped under one brand, affording heightened visibility. A popular 'haul' genre is by UK based cosmetic and bathroom product company Lush: AKA,

the Lush Haul. Lush is a clear choice for video creation on YouTube: its kooky branding, seasonal product launches, and extensive product narratives provide myriad opportunities for regular videos. A search for Lush Haul on YouTube in May 2018 yielded 850,000 videos, providing a case study to illustrate how algorithmic lore shape symbolic production on YouTube, and secondly how branded and sponsored content becomes replicated for free, through a process of rationalisation.

A List beauty vlogger Zoella, the beauty vlogger with the distinction of being the most followed in the UK, produces Lush Haul videos seasonally. Recent outputs include “Halloween & Christmas LUSH Haul” (Zoella, 2015a), “Lush Haul & First Impressions” (Zoella, 2015b), “Easter LUSH Haul” (Zoella, 2016). The most recent Lush Haul published by Zoella was in Christmas 2017, entitled “HUGE LUSH HAUL & HEELLO LONDON” (MoreZoella, 2017b). In the video, Zoella sits cross legged on her bathroom floor, wearing a fluffy elf outfit next to three sizable brown cardboard boxes. She struggles to open the first cardboard box with nail scissors and pulls out a card from inside “Zoe and Alfie, here are some little Christmas presents from your pals at Lush PR” she laughs “little is in quotation marks”. For the duration of the 26-minute-long video she pulls out bath bomb, after bath bomb, alternating between shouting “I love that”, “oh they’ve put two in here... oh my god thanks so much, there’s another one! Jeez”, “god I love the smell of that”. In between these statements she wipes bath bomb dust out of her eye and periodically hacks and chokes on bath bomb dust.

The affordance of regular content creation is essential to ubiquity of the Lush Haul on the platform. Regular production of Lush Haul videos is complementary to the tenet of algorithmic lore that YouTube's algorithms favour frequent and scheduled content publication, a statement I heard at industry events, in interviews with beauty vloggers and with industry stakeholders. In interviews with vloggers, this was regularly crossed with anxieties about not posting sufficiently, for example lifestyle vlogger Kristabel informed me that sporadic posting was one of the primary reasons that her channel had not grown further. Similarly, beauty vlogger Sasha told me that a posting schedule helped your audience find and watch your videos quickly:

Everyone just says be more consistent as the main thing... so since I haven't always achieved that fully I think that is the main thing I need to try... I know that the algorithm favours you uploading at least weekly (Kristabel, beauty vlogger)

A lot of how well a video does, is part of how many views has it had, and how much engagement you've had after it's been posted. And you can stick to a schedule it probably helps (Sasha, beauty vlogger)

The idea that regular video posts affords channel growth and visibility is pervasive. Fashion vlogger, Zoe London tweeted to her audience, asking to "grill her" should she not produce regularly enough:

I need your help. if you've seen I haven't uploaded and my video is missing from your sub box... grill me as to why! i know i need to work harder, i've been really slacking the last two months with uploads on my channel and then i wonder why it doesn't grow. The answer is it's me! (London, 2018)

This tweet highlights the imagined straightforward link between upload frequency and growth. London calls for fan labour to help her 'work harder'. Such statements provide the context for algorithmic lore, that algorithmic design affords opportunities for visibility and growth, and all that is needed is to work harder, upload more frequently, learn more and respond with more optimised content.

The Lush Haul video genre is firstly valuable because of its seasonal replicability, namely product launches afford four videos per year for Easter, Summer, Autumn and Christmas. A secondary benefit is the promise of inclusion in a universe, as outlined in the previous section: there are 850,000 videos that are related to the keywords 'Lush Haul'⁶. When a viewer begins a watch session with a Zoella Lush Haul video, YouTube automatically follows the video with Lush themed videos, often from other beauty vloggers. The promise of the Universe is that of visibility to those with divergent subscriber numbers. For example automated playlist that begins with Zoella's "Lush Haul & First Impressions"(Zoella, 2015b) is followed by "HUGE LUSH OXFORD ST. HAUL" by Jaclyn Forbes a vlogger with 116,373 subscribers. The next video is the "Lush Oxford Street Tour – Summer 2017" by

⁶ As of 9/9/2018

Lushie_4_life (469 subscribers), LUSH Boxing Day Sale Unboxing by oxlusaloux (23,000 subscribers) and “HUGE Lush Haul” by Tanya Burr, who has 3.6 million subscribers. The possibility of inclusion within this particular Universe is a key opportunity for visibility, thus providing the context for the creation of more Lush Hauls.

Although Zoella reads out a letter from Lush PR in her video, meaning they have (at least) provided complementary products, many vloggers pay for their own Lush products to take a gamble on inclusion. However, voluntary participation in this space is expensive, as a haul video by definition includes a significant quantity of product, on average upwards of ten items. Engaging with these video genres can be thought of through the framework provided by Duffy (2017) of “entrepreneurial brand devotion”, which she defines as when “social media creators visibly align themselves with certain commercial brands as they pursue income and recognition” (Duffy, 2017: 139). More than investment in one’s portfolios, however, engaging with certain brands can also promise algorithmic visibility. The Lush Haul universe becomes a murky space in which paid-for advertising is looped with non-paid vlog content, which replicates and mirrors beauty vlogger branded content. It stands to reason brands may begin to exploit this algorithmic side effect; sponsoring one prominent YouTuber will inevitably lead to a much greater volume of content promoting their products, hoping to follow a sponsored video during a watch session. For those who have not reached the levels of visibility required for sponsorship, the purchase of haul products required to participate in this genre is expensive but offers a chance to be featured in a playlist, which is really a lottery. The seasonality of this video genre additionally creates a pressure to keep up; to afford maximum potential for visibility one must produce a spring haul, festival fun summer haul, a warm and cosy autumnal haul surrounded by pumpkin

kitsch, and of course the crescendo of a Christmas Haul (often undertaken as part of *Vlogmas*, during which beauty vloggers post every day to maximise advertising revenue).

The flip side of algorithmic visibility is algorithmic threat. In addition to *inclusion* within the Lush Haul Universe YouTubers experience the persistent threat of algorithmic *punishment*. The potential threat is outlined in “Reverse engineering the algorithm” a paper published on trade blog TubeFilter. Based on extensive research on their own channels, authors Matt Gielen and Jeremy Rosen assert that terminating a viewing session during a video provides a negative metric to the algorithm, in other words, this action signals that this channel and video should not be promoted: “**session ends** relates to how often someone terminates a YouTube session while or after watching one of your videos. This is a negative metric to the algorithm” (TubeFilter, 2016). The risk of an old vlog being circulated is great, as it may be seasonally irrelevant, included outdated products, or be of poorer quality. Such a perspective leads to a financial and emotional pressure; vlogs have to ‘keep up’ with the preceding videos in the watch session and they must be relevant to the interest of the viewer. Although the assertions in this work have not been confirmed by Google, Gielen presented this work regularly at VidCon, an annual YouTube sponsored conference and fan events hosted in Europe, North America and Australia. The threat of the session ends metric is therefore widely held and is not required to be confirmed by Google as it shapes and affect symbolic production. This is algorithmic lore, as assumptions and ‘research’ on the YouTube algorithm are discussed at events, shared between friends, posted on Facebook groups and written up in trade papers, they shape how beauty vloggers see, and engage with the platform.

Summary

In this Chapter I developed the concept of ‘algorithmic lore’ which foregrounds the productive nature of uncertainty, assumptions and interpretations in terms of media success, visibility and audiences. I have argued that YouTube’s industry lore and informational silos means an implicit valuation of beauty content. Beauty vloggers learn from, and develop, what I have termed *algorithmic lore* and self-rationalisation to offset risks of algorithmic, and by extension audience, invisibility. The algorithm was cited by beauty vloggers as a huge source of anxiety, instability and a source of career unsustainability on the platform. I argue beauty vloggers’ self-rationalisation and self-optimisation techniques are informed by algorithmic lore, namely imaginaries, beliefs and assumptions, which shape their content. Furthermore, to be ‘algorithmically visible’ is often a means to an end, beauty vloggers are not intent on making themselves visible for a machine. In this vein, I argue ‘algorithms’ are often a synonym for *commodity audiences*. Put differently, the generic formation of beauty vlogging is informed by the macro, namely platform affordances, which in tandem shapes the micro: they nudge and influence genres, video titles, thumbnails, and wider content and channel themes.

The particular context for my case study, namely the withdrawal of advertisers over the course of 2017-2018 provided amplified conditions for panic, anxiety and confusion towards what YouTube wanted from content creators. In response to the “black box”, or the perceived black box, beauty vloggers laboured to piece together theories and strategies towards algorithmic visibility. This was achieved through Facebook groups, peer networks, gossip, and through self-defined audience research. In this Chapter I have argued that the

methods engaged with by vloggers could be considered folk approaches to research techniques such as “reverse engineering” (Kitchin, 2017) or “algorithmic auditing” (Sandvig et al., 2014). I make the point that these techniques are at once affective and laborious, not just for beauty vloggers but occasionally for their fans. Beauty vloggers’ theories, or algorithmic lore, were all complementary with a feminisation of vlogging output. Theories informed by algorithmic lore included uploading beauty content to become visible to a universe, producing content more regularly, making feminised and commercially orientated content, performing more passionately and authentically, fitting in with commercially successful and advertiser-friendly genres. These findings complicate an engagement with highly feminised identities as a “masquerade” or even a “post-feminist masquerade” demonstrating how the production of beauty content can be self-conscious and strategic. Furthermore, I have argued that it is insufficient to argue beauty vlogging is popular because it is commercial, platforms’ architectures, affordances and vernaculars play an essential role in defining content creation. Rather, the beauty vlogging genre has developed through a complex and ambivalent process of self-rationalisation and through vloggers’ engagement with industry lore, and more specifically, algorithmic lore.

The success of beauty vlogging is not only contingent on successful self-rationalisation and algorithmic visibility on YouTube. Indeed, A List beauty vloggers can accrue social, cultural and economic capitals outside of the YouTube platform. In the following Chapter I will explore how two models of media intermediary, namely full-service talent management and multi-channel networks, are stratifying visibility through subjective talent spotting practices. I investigate how a small concentration of powerful talent agencies, with strong links to ‘traditional media’, have a significant effect on the UK vlogging landscape. I analyse their

practices and roles in the vlogging ecology and argue that we should examine the formations of new industries that vlogging production has engendered. This view point affords us to 'zoom out' from analysis of individual vloggers in their bedrooms. Rather, it allows a focus on beauty vloggers as one stakeholder, alongside multiple intermediaries, as they co-produce media symbols for a commodity audience.

Chapter Four: Digital Intermediaries and Co-Producing

Inequalities

The previous Chapter documented the experiences of beauty vloggers as they strive for, and negotiate, visibility on YouTube. In this Chapter, I examine the role of the digital intermediary in the vlogging industry, namely the talent agent or manager, in stratifying visibility on the platform. In response to Research Question One, “how do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging”, this Chapter will explore the hierarchies of support that beauty vloggers receive from intermediaries, who hold subjective definitions of what talent is. Although anyone can upload content to YouTube, those with talent agents are connected to a menagerie of experts, lawyers and consultants, and are supported with commercial brand deals and administrative tasks. In response to my second research question “how do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes?”, I argue that beauty vloggers often orientate their content to become visible to prospective talent agents. As talent agencies are often organised along gendered lines, I argue this additionally supports the proliferation of highly gendered genres such as beauty being equated with visibility on YouTube. Finally, in response to Research Question Three “what inequalities does YouTube contribute to, and sustain in the beauty vlogging ecology?”, I argue that subjective talent spotting practices, definitions of talent and the use of social networks contribute to full-service talent agencies supporting near-exclusively white, middle class beauty vloggers. I study more democratic

models of online talent support, but argue many of these models are can be predatory and exploitative.

The talent agents' practices, and the constitutive role they afford, have been largely missed in scholarship on beauty vlogging. From a practical point of view, this may be because the role of the talent management team is ordinarily obscured, minimised or strategically 'offset' by beauty vloggers: the participation of a 'team' contradicts an authentic and amateur self-presentation that is essential for 'A List' vloggers to maintain. Additionally, the talent agent has become more central to the vlogging industry as the industry has become more "formalized" (Burgess, 2012). Through interviews and vlogging events, trade press and social media content, I became increasingly aware that the A List beauty vlogger functions as the front person, who is often representing a team. Of course, the young woman, who is talking to a camera in her bedroom does convincingly appear to have produced this content by herself. This is more convincing as beauty vloggers' brands are contingent on, and intertwine with, performances of an 'authentic' self. Yet, it is incomplete to analyse beauty vloggers' self-presentation without investigating the presence of industry stakeholders. Put differently: in this Chapter, I *zoom out*. I examine the stratifying role of the intermediary in developing and sustaining hierarchies and inequalities of visibility in the 'vlogging industry'. Probing the tensions between intermediaries, including YouTube, agents and brands, can be productive in revealing how content, norms and markets are produced and calcified within the vlogging industry.

The definition of micro celebrity appears applicable to beauty vloggers, in that they include building an audience, treating this audience as a fan base and regularly serving them

“authentically” produced personal and intimate content (Marwick, 2013b: 114). However, the strict line drawn between micro celebrity practices and traditional celebrity is increasingly permeable: traditional and micro celebrities are not opposite, or even incompatible, yet they are often invoked as encompassing distinct characteristics and activities. Senft emphasised this division in her work on Cam Girls, by stating “micro-celebrity sometimes looks like conventional celebrity, but the two aren’t the same” (Senft, 2008: 25). In a work mapping the journey “from celebrity to influencer” Hearn & Schoenhoff (2015) outline that influencers undertake their celebrity work solo;

Traditional celebrities do not have to go in search of opportunities to sell their views and opinions; they have agents to do it for them. Traditional celebrities have legal ownership and control over all aspects of their public persona, while micro-celebrities on social media do not. (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015: 2018).

The implication is that social media influencers are producing themselves, promoting themselves, negotiating their own brand deals, conducting their own media training and negotiating their own transgressions and indiscretions. Influencers’ self-branding is considered distinct from traditional understandings of celebrity responsibility, for whom labour is undertaken by a team of professionals, typically including agents, talent managers and publicists (Marshall, 2006). However, this binary between is in reality, tangled and blurred; I argue the slippage between these two typologies of celebrity is worth problematising.

To ignore the complexity of the entangled relationship between commercial stakeholders in vlogging risks a focus on “newness” which ultimately renders “attempts to probe clear connections with the past somewhat unfashionable” (Holmes, 2005: 18). In this vein, the historical role of the talent agent, publicist and manager as cultural intermediaries must be re-visited to understand the extensive work undertaken to construct beauty vlogging authenticity. The role of the agent and manager is far reaching within ‘traditional’ celebrity industries, although it difficult to assess the nature and involvement of a team to the construction of a celebrity persona. Although ‘backstage’ media including gossip magazines, talk shows and interviews have historically revealed the *true* celebrity and what they are *really* like, they are actively negotiated by a publicist and the talent agent, who bargain with producers and journalists over what questions can be asked and how their talent is represented (Dyer, 1979). It has been ventured that we live in the era of the “pseudo-event”, when the celebrity interactions we see are *all* “planned, planted or incited” as a public relations strategy (Boorstin, 1992: 11). Although this perspective is somewhat pessimistic, the seemingly ‘authentic’ celebrity persona is at least somewhat strategically co-produced by third parties, including the Hollywood studio system, talent agents and publicists (Biressi & Nunn, 2016; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015). It is well documented that talent agents and publicists build their celebrity clients’ ‘authentic’ reputation alongside a dedicated and skilled team. For example, modelling agents dictate the permissible hair stylists, restaurants and bars for their clients to be ‘seen’ at (Wissinger, 2009); Hollywood agents often contract a mandatory number of ‘charity work days’ to ensure their clients appear kind and grounded (Boorstin, 1992) and of course there are the carefully orchestrated ‘spontaneous’ paparazzi set ups, to authenticate the celebrities’ given agenda at the time (Gamson, 2006). Authenticity construction online has been defined as the

practice of “comparing current actions against past [actions] for consistency” (Marwick, 2013b: 120). Similarly, ‘traditional’ celebrities are similarly invested in synthesising brand and behaviour, as film actors’ agents and managers consistently “try not only to establish a link between the celebrity and the vehicle but also try to line up their celebrity’s public personality with the celebrity’s character and tone in that vehicle” (Gamson, 2006: 700). A full definition of authenticity in the vlogging industry can be found at the outset of Chapter Five. In this Chapter, however, I answer Research Question Two, concerning the gendered practices, genres and themes of YouTube by mapping the work undertaken by diverse stakeholders vlogging industry. I investigate how cultural intermediaries strive to create, co-produce and maintain branded consistency on behalf of their clients.

In the preliminary section of this Chapter, I apply Bourdieu’s concept of cultural intermediaries to digital talent agents (Bourdieu, 2000). I use the term digital cultural intermediaries to capture the breadth of job titles used in this Chapter; this encompasses both digital talent agents and managers, and those who work in Multi-Channel Networks (MCN), whose role diverges from ‘traditional’ management responsibilities in numerous ways, which are explored in this Chapter’s analysis. In the following section I outline literature on intermediaries and gendered inequalities in cultural industries, focusing on talent management organisations. I point to a gap in the literature for feminist cultural industries work, or in feminist political economy, to add to an understanding of the complexity of gendered representation in cultural production in media industries. I then consider the ‘full-service talent agency’, organisations that provide full time dedicated management support to vloggers. I outline the backgrounds of cultural intermediaries, and their existing relationships with industry, and how talent spotting practices and how

subjective values and industry lore become intertwined with subjective definitions of ‘talent’. I explore how the ‘full-service’ talent agency often informs and supports inequalities, visibility and practices within the vlogging industry. I then probe the structure of the multi-channel network (MCN), and the disparities of support, financial compensation and intermediary capital afforded by each of these models. In other words, *who* is provided with *what* levels of support by each digital intermediary. Finally, I argue that full-service talent agencies and MCNs in the UK manage vloggers specialising in content that fits a specific *gendered* genre of YouTube, and that reaches a *gendered* audience.

Cultural Intermediaries

Cultural theorists have applied Bourdieu’s well-worn term “cultural intermediary” to wide-ranging cultural gatekeepers including bloggers (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013), Instagram users (Carah & Shaul, 2016), accountants (Negus, 2002) and even algorithms (Morris, 2015). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu writes;

By control over the mass media, the new cultural intermediaries (the most typical of whom are the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of quality newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers) have invented a whole series of genres between legitimate culture and mass production... assigning themselves the impossible and therefore unassignable role of divulging legitimate culture – in which they resemble the legitimate populisers.

(Bourdieu, 2000: 325)

According to this definition, the cultural intermediary functions as a *self-assigned* broker between production and consumption. Intermediaries hail popular culture as desirable, as worthy of consumption, for skeptical audiences and use their cultural, social and symbolic capitals to construct hierarchies of taste. Bourdieu asserts cultural intermediaries ensure that “the petit-bourgeois spectators know they have no need to be alarmed: they can recognise the ‘guarantees of quality’ offered by their moderately revolutionary tastemakers who surround themselves with all the institutional signs of cultural authority” (Bourdieu, 2000: 326). In other words, the cultural intermediary thrives when situated within new media devoid of a legacy of hierarchy or high cultural inheritance. As vlogging is a *new* media, it is the agent or manager who inscribes legitimacy to commodities for the ‘petit-bourgeois’, who in the vlogging industry manifests as reticent brand representatives, marketers, journalists and audiences. Hesmondhalgh (2006) has admonished media theorists for what he believes to be a misreading and misapplication of the term. He argues that Bourdieu intended the term “cultural intermediary” to mean *critics* who are associated with “cultural commentary in the mass media” (Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 226). His belief is that the term has been over-applied to all *cultural producers*. However, in this Chapter I purposefully build on “cultural intermediary”, as introduced by Bourdieu, as I centre the critical function of the new *digital* cultural intermediaries, and their position as inscribing legitimacy to culture that has no legacy, and more specifically no legacy of taste definitions and hierarchies.

Digital intermediaries described the saturation of the vlogging market, and their guiding role for relatively bemused brands, mainstream media and book publishers. Through applying their expertise as “cultural entrepreneurs” (Featherstone, 1987: 66) picking, advocating for,

and promoting certain talent (in addition to co-producing content) intermediaries leverage their capitals to invent and legitimise genres, and more broadly, culture. Particularly important for talent agents was the use of “symbolic capital”, which is defined as required for those whose occupation is “sale of cultural services to a clientele” and relies on an “acquisition of a reputation for competence and image of respectability” (Bourdieu, 2000: 291). Despite the focus on business expertise, intermediaries make decisions based on “value judgements and cultural beliefs” (Negus, 1999: 88). In new media industries, which are often outside of the view of policy makers and regulators, this point becomes particularly essential (Lobato, 2016). Therefore, this Chapter will demonstrate how talent agents who work with digital talent use social networks, expertise and symbolic capital from previously held careers in ‘traditional media’ to position themselves as ‘experts’ in vlogging industries. The role of the digital cultural intermediary stratifies the visibilities, practices and inequalities on YouTube, and their role in the vlogging industry should be urgently studied.

Intermediaries and Inequalities

This Chapter is concerned with *how* access to visibility, and media production, is shaped, augmented and set by the perceptions and practices of intermediaries. Feminist media studies considerations of creative labour are useful in highlighting how gendered role segregation is prevalent within cultural industries and organisations, including talent management. Theorists detail how this inequality often leads to pay inequalities, the devaluing of roles and talents perceived to be feminine, and the cementation of stereotyped gendered difference in cultural commodities (Gill, 2002; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; McRobbie, 2015; Wissinger, 2012). This work often pays close attention to the

segregated nature of job roles in creative organisations; women work in lowly paid feminised positions, for example as assistants or in public relations. These spaces have been defined as pink ghettos (Duffy, 2017; Gill, 2007a). Feminised roles in media industries often privilege stereotypically feminine qualities such as “instinct and intuition” and “communication skills” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008; Hill, 2014: 149). Men, on the other hand, take up the strategic, ‘creative’ or managerial roles (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Duffy, 2015b; Gill, 2002). Zafirau (2008), for example, conducted ethnographic work in two major Hollywood agencies, and observed the talent agents were overwhelmingly male, masculinity was prized and the agents often “denigra[ted] attributes commonly associated with femininity”, calling each other “pussies” during moments of perceived weakness (Zafirau, 2008: 120). Male talent agents often took control and ownership of the office space and in one colourful passage, Zafirau observed a top agent repeatedly screaming that a high-profile film actress was a “bitch”, after she had hung up on him during a call. As we will see later, the CEOs of full-service digital talent agencies are overwhelmingly male, whereas women are more likely to undertake day-to-day caring responsibilities for talent.

Some believe a gender segregated environment normalises and sanctions gendered stereotypes and division in the media they shape: for example, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2015: 35) observe “work segregation by sex draws upon, and in turn contributes to social stereotypes which limit women and men’s freedom and recognition”. *Recognition* becomes imperative when a role involves the highly subjective practices of determining and selling ‘talent’. When stereotypes such as ‘women’s work’ are prevalent within the culture of a talent agency, then this is part of an organisational culture that stratifies the recognition and deployment of ‘talent’ by intermediaries. Gender stereotypes influence who gets hired, and

who gets put to work: Bielby and Bielby (1999) demonstrated female Hollywood screenwriters were near exclusively put forward by their male-dominated agencies for projects in 'female' genres such as romance and drama, and rarely found themselves submitted for work on blockbusters or action films. Also valuable to talent spotting practices is the concept of "homosocial reproduction" wherein "insiders replicating themselves by selecting new colleagues with similar backgrounds and demographic characteristics" (Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012: 12). This is a significant point to consider in cultural industries that are often informal and dominated by men in management roles, and in which the tendency towards informal working environments and late-night networking events creates temporal and social barriers for women. This recognition of uneven visibilities could be read as an implicit call to political economy, or as Gill puts it a "forensic" analysis of "how feminism materialises in different ways in contemporary media culture" (Gill, 2016: 619). This thesis uses the vlogging industry as a case study to contribute a perspective on why the most visible beauty vloggers are those who espouse a particular version of femininity, and feminism in their discourse and practice. I strive for an account of how beauty vloggers produce media and become visible, in a vein that centres both structure and agency. In this work I emphasise the ambivalent, frictional and affective role of intermediaries that continues to a multiplication of highly feminised content production.

Critical Media Industry Studies

To undertake this project I have drawn from a "critical media industry studies" approach, which focuses on "micro level industrial practices" (Havens et al, 2009: 235) and addresses the neglect of the "quotidian practices and competing goals, which are not subject to direct

and regular oversight by cultural owners” (Havens et al., 2009: 236) in traditional political economy research. A vital question is how talent managements’ complex, contradictory and leaky positioning between structural power and individual agency have implications for “social and cultural processes of representation and power” (Havens et al., 2009: 249). This theoretical framework is heavily influenced by the work of Hall, who in turn draws from Williams to observe “the culture is those patterns of organisation, those characteristic forms of human energy which can be discovered as revealing themselves – in ‘unexpected identities and correspondences’ as well as in ‘discontinuities of an unexpected kind’” (Williams, in Hall, 1980: 60). Hall finds value here in the emphasis on human interaction, and rejection of determinism. Picking its way through this trajectory, this Chapter is indeed concerned with centralising “praxis” which Hall defines as “general human activity and energy” (Hall, 1980: 60). I draw from “critical media studies” concepts that develop the theoretical trajectory of the “cultural intermediary”, and thus are of value to this Chapter (Havens et al., 2009). Firstly, the concept of “discerned savvy” explains how cultural workers reproduce “similar discourses and modes of address” to their managers, broadly how their “superiors’ preferences, affects the creation of media content”, even when cultural workers see their roles as “unbounded” (Draper, 2014: 1121). This concept is useful in examining how hegemonic themes manifest in media texts in a seemingly ‘bottom up’ vein, even when not directly instructed by media managers. However, this concept does not account for the origination, and pervasive nature of, sustained inequalities as experienced by those working in media industries, particularly through class, gender, and race.

Next I turn to “industry lore”, which was introduced in Chapter Three to illustrate how assumptions, theories and strategies about algorithmic and audience visibility inform

symbolic production for *beauty vloggers* (Havens, 2014a: 50). However, this term also holds specific value for the consideration of talent intermediaries. The role of the digital talent agent is to offer expertise and guidance through market uncertainty, on behalf of both vloggers and brands. As we will see, their service is to *both* of these parties and thus their sense-making strategies (where, they believe, their finger rests *on the pulse*) are productive within the vlogging industry. For Havens, industry-lore is a “catch all term that refers to any *interpretation* amongst industry insiders of the material, social, or historical realities that media industries face” (Havens, 2014a: 50). This is of particular importance to my case study: despite some level of professionalisation over the course of my field work, many of my interlocutors described the state of the industry as a chaotic Wild West. As the ostensive experts, talent agents’ determination of industry lore informs their decision-making processes in the face of continued risks and uncertainty in the vlogging marketplace. It informs *who* intermediaries believe is a monetisable vlogger that deserves to be recognised as talent, *how* talent intermediaries work to co-produce vlogging content, and *what* strategic partnerships talent agencies build with brands. As a concept, “industry lore” does have the potential to examine and account for how ideological and hegemonic power flows through media industries. Foucault’s conception of “discourse” is relevant to this theory, namely “the expression of a worldview *and* the application of power/knowledge to human society” (Havens, 2014a: 50), it is within digital talent managers’ discursive power to sell vloggers as legitimate culture. In the following section I will introduce the two structures of talent intermediary in the ‘vlogging industry’ which will serve as the case studies for this Chapter, namely the ‘Full-Service Talent Agency’ and the MCN.

Full-Service Talent Agencies and Multi-Channel Networks

I have termed the first category of intermediary the 'full-service' digital talent agents.

Organisations in the second category are widely referred to as MCNs. I have borrowed the term 'full-service' from creative agencies: a 'full-service' creative agency is a 'one stop shop' for all clients' needs. In the context of this Chapter, full-service refers to both the high temporal dedication to clients, and the wide range of activities encompassed by the talent managers in these companies, including procuring sponsorships, data and analytics, branding, supporting collaborations and merchandising. In the UK, this style of digital management company is overwhelmingly based in traditionally media-centric areas of London, and maintains a small talent roster of 10-50 clients. Within the organisation, talent managers work with a strictly limited number of digital talent and are in contact with them daily. It is worth noting briefly that the labels 'agents' and 'managers' were often used interchangeably in my interviews. In a US context this distinction would be important, as the roles of the talent agent and the manager are strictly separated by law - talent *managers* are not legally permitted to procure employment on behalf of their clients, rather they are responsible for day to day activities including advising, scheduling and promotion (O'Brien III, 1992). However, in the UK, no such legal division exists, hence the already blurred line between the talent agent and the talent manager is almost non-existent

The majority of intermediaries I interviewed define themselves and their companies as specialising in talent management. However, some management organisations self-defined as multi-channel networks (MCNs), which are often YouTube sponsored third party networks. In opposition to the closely kept talent rosters of full-service talent organisations,

MCNs sign hundreds, or even thousands, of YouTube channels in order to aggregate advertisement income and distribute sponsored content. Whereas talent management companies work closely and directly with vloggers to grow their careers, MCNs offer mostly automated support in the practical endeavours of generating advertising revenue, improving content and brokering sponsorship deals (YouTube, 2017b). The theoretical work on YouTube intermediaries has near-exclusively focused on MCNs due to their relative novelty: researchers have been enamoured with their scale and their ‘innovative’ marrying of technology with the subjectivity of more ‘traditional’ and ambivalent forms of cultural intermediary. Cunningham, et al.(2016) define US based MCNs as an uneven and turbulent marriage of NoCal (‘internet’ companies) and SoCal (talent organisations) through their offering a “creole mix of talent agency, big data analytics, public relations and marketing” (Cunningham et al., 2016: 377). Similarly, Lobato (2016) observes “the automated and scalable nature of their activities means that the MCN industry operates in radically different ways from other intermediaries and without the regulatory frameworks that have grown around them” (Lobato, 2016: 350).

In total, there were 17 UK based digital talent agencies and MCNS operating in the UK over the course of this research project. Due to the volatile and fluctuating characteristics of ‘start up’ culture these numbers changed constantly; managers regularly splintered off and re-formed their own organisations (Marwick, 2013b; McRobbie, 2002). As I was contacting participants for interviews, email addresses became obsolete, agencies were shuttered by their owners, and some undertook severe strategic re-branding. Many talent management companies are less than two years old at the time of writing; Gleam Futures is the oldest standing digital talent management company in the UK, founded in 2010 (Burn-Callander,

2015). In interviews, I found that in a rapidly growing vlogging industry, terminology and responsibilities of management companies and MCNs are in flux. MCNS develop dedicated management arms, and some so-called management services operate a 'hands off' approach that could land them being labelled as MCNs. The nuanced differences between full-service agencies and MCNS, as they apply to beauty vlogging, will be explored in detail in my analysis. For now, it is important to point out that, although work on MCNS has emphasised how new forms of promotion and product placement have been integrated into scalable models, little consideration or critique is paid to examine *who* has access to these services and how this stratifies vlogging production. It is this gap that this Chapter will illuminate.

The Digital Cultural Intermediary

Digital cultural intermediaries often have extensive background and work experience in 'traditional', or 'mainstream' media, production or talent management. Put plainly, intermediaries who are shaping the supposedly 'new' media ecology are informed by the conventions, strategies and techniques of 'traditional media'. All of my interlocutors had backgrounds in television and radio talent management, in addition to television production, advertising and music management. One exception was a young female talent manager who had previously worked at a large MCN, that was taken over and subsequently shuttered by a media conglomerate. Sensing a sinking ship, she poached a couple of clients; as she put it she had the "contacts in the YouTube world" to open her own talent organisation. However, for most others, contacts in the "YouTube world" were secondary to their relationships with brands. Many digital talent agents defined their role as interpreters

or translators who sold their expertise in 'new' media and digital talent to creatives and brands, who were nervous of dipping their toes in to the 'social talent' pool. Intermediaries discussed mining their contacts in the advertising world; the Twitter community manager Jo described one of her first major achievements as personally communicating the "power of the digital creator working in partnership" to Nike. Barney, founder of Channel Flip described this process of ransacking his 'little black books' to sell talent to hesitant brands;

I started going to media and creative agencies, and saying 'hey look at the state of these guys they've got wildly popular followings... they are much loved... and there is an opportunity for you to tap into that'. So we started talking to these brands about ways we could generate content, and us being the intermediary was key to this.

(Barney, ChannelFlip)

Barney felt his position was valuable here as a well-connected and recognisable intermediary who soothed the fears of brands, who were hesitant about working with pre-reputational and unfamiliar media. In addition to expertise, intermediaries characterised their relationships with advertisers and brands through an ease and informality. This evokes the organisational culture of many 'new' digital industries, in which connections are made and strengthened through networking practices that are intertwined with informality and sociality (Gill, 2002; Marwick, 2013b; McRobbie, 2002; Neff, 2012; Neff et al., 2005). Digital intermediaries discussed their role as "facilitating" or "chatting", sometimes "connecting" with brands, one digital talent manager told me "the brands come to us". My interlocutors had career histories in industries that have been characterised by inequality and uneven representation, however they possessed the "great cultural capital of familiarity and a social

capital of 'connections'", and were able to get in the door of lucrative brands with their talent in tow to sell the power of vloggers (Bourdieu, 2000:360). Existing connections meant that communication channels with brands had apparently been non-existent for digital intermediaries, or were minimised in interviews.

Although intermediaries positioned themselves as experts, few explained this in terms of qualifications, or by clarifying the source of their expertise. Discourse often evoked the "myth of the entrepreneur", in which entrepreneurship is an "inherent personal attribute that cannot be taught" while minimising collaborations and legacies of development, and drawing from stereotypes of whiteness and maleness (Marwick, 2013b: 260). In a typical example of this mythology, Dom Smales, CEO of prominent digital talent agency Gleam Futures told a journalist that he had an epiphany during a health scare which prompted him to found the company (Jackson, 2016). Talent agents were invested in maintaining their identities as experts and industry barometers, with many speaking regularly to press and at vlogging industry events. They were also often keen to inform me of their latest diagnoses of trends, which were often varying and contradictory. Barney, who has a fraught relationship with the MCN he founded and left, was particularly anxious to inform me of the irrelevancy of YouTube in favour of SnapChat, which he mentioned over 10 times during our interview. The following section will consider how intermediaries apply their expertise to 'talent spotting', how they subjectively diagnose who is talent and sign them to their organisations.

Spotting Talent

In this section I consider the talent scouting practices of full-service digital talent agencies, MCNs practices will be discussed in the following section. The websites of full-service talent organisations spotlight individual headshots, biographies of talent and their credits.

Websites are showcases evocative of the glossy 'casting books' prevalent in Hollywood (Marshall, 2006). Talent managers see their expertise as pertaining to sorting through 'legitimate' talent from the an increasingly saturated vlogging market on YouTube. In this vein, CEOs of talent organisations, and their trained teams, are discursively represented as both highly naturally skilled, and uniquely equipped to mine YouTube for talent to add to their rosters. Talent scouting on YouTube is a competitive and time-sensitive endeavour. Desirable vloggers get snapped up quickly, and there is pressure to break the next new star. The talent managers I interviewed discussed a need for looking beyond the already visible YouTubers who already have representation, including looking to school age creators to break them before anyone else;

The talent with the million plus following rarely do not have management now... more and more it's important that we are searching and engaging with new young creators and helping them grow (James, AAA Talent)

So the challenge is to kind of find new people, that aren't the new people that everyone's talking to and everyone gets in touch with and everyone works with (Lizzi, PolkaDot Talent)

There is no real relationship between age and the potential for large follower numbers: young and school age creators may well have a significant following on YouTube. However, resting on the idea that the most visible talent on YouTube have been ‘mined’, these statements demonstrate the willingness of talent management companies to work with beauty vloggers beyond those with a significant following, through “helping them grow”.

Metrics appeared to be fairly negligible for talent agents, as Dom from Gleam Futures put it “the criteria for taking on talent, has nothing to do with putting on subscriber levels”. These statements are backed up by the talent that are displayed on agency rosters, each of which list managed talent with subscriber numbers in the 1000’s, 10,000’s, 100,000’s and 1,000,000’s. That new and small creators are managed by the biggest digital talent management organisations contradicts the assumption that talent agencies and managers exclusively work with established or recognisable talent. This point departs from previous works on brand relationships that describes vloggers as responsible for growing their channels, that “every YouTube creator, whether they’re earning big bucks or not, started as an amateur, a hobbyist” (Cunningham & Craig, 2016). These amateur origin stories are becoming less accurate, as intermediaries co-produce some vloggers from the conception of their channels. Vloggers are thus visible as ‘amateur’, or without management, for a narrowing window of time on the platform. Rather, they are grown by agencies with access and connections to expertise and strategy. The work that is undertaken by intermediaries to co-produce vloggers will be reflected on in the following section.

For success in any market, one must manufacture scarcity. In interviews, managers highlighted the rarity of discovering ‘talent’, and by implication, their own unique ability.

Bourdieu describes this skill of cultural imparting as a “social flair, allowing its owner to steer through difficult situations when the landmarks are missing” (Bourdieu, 2000: 362). Possessing this flair endows staff with the ability to diagnose the banal from the sublime. Dom (CEO, Gleam Futures) suggested that his staff scan for talent consistently, and they only contract four new vloggers per year:

We have an internal messaging system at Gleam and everybody's looking and watching talent all day long... and occasionally someone really outstanding pops up and we reach out.. and that doesn't happen that often.. like once every three or four months I guess (Dom, Gleam Futures)

The practice of ‘discovering’ talent through watching YouTube, until you ‘stumble’ across someone who is a star, evokes the amateur and democratic origins of social media production. However, Dom also centres himself in the UK vlogging industry in a vein that betrays a more strategic hand in selecting and poaching clients. Two beauty vloggers I interviewed told me that they had been invited to Dom’s agency for an informal ‘chat’, to determine whether they were Gleam Futures material. Lucy, a lifestyle vlogger, was excited but pragmatic about her interview opportunity, telling me “[Gleam] have meetings with a lot of people, just to establish a relationship”. Although she downplayed the meeting, Lucy was desperate to get out of her current under-supportive agency. It represented a significant opportunity to sign with an agent that would give the “time” and “help” she felt she needed.

In interviews, talent managers initially talked up the innateness of talent. However, in further conversations, talent's commercial viability was cited as a priority. When discussing the talent scouting responsibilities imbued within their roles, many managers described qualities they were looking for as largely undefinable: they looked for "broad talent", an "individual style", "personalities" or "something special". Managers stated that they could not put into words the specific attributes they would hope to find in a beauty vlogger, rather, 'talent' held an ethereal and indeterminable quality. However, they also overwhelmingly discussed the importance of scouting talent with *brand fit*. Dom from Gleam Futures noted "we are looking for people that can be [brand] partners at creating media content on social media platforms". The challenge is hiring people to work with the very specific demands by brands who, as Lizzi from Polkadot Talent puts it, continue to look for the same kinds of content creators: "I think... the more established brands are sort of sticking with what they know". Brand suitability requires that beauty vloggers ensure legibility within this brand-centric ecology, and to ensure they are able to be recognised for good opportunities that fit desired markets. Each talent agency has a particular 'flavour' and reputation. For example, the difference between the 'Gleam Futures' girl, who is impeccably behaved, 'elegant' and professionally produced, and the 'Red Hare' girl who is more 'glamour' focused, is discernible to an informed outsider. The classed implications of such loaded terms as glamour will be unpacked in Chapter Five. However, for now, I will analyse Gleam Futures, and their representation of 'talent' as it affects the wider UK vlogging industry.

Gleam Futures

Gleam Futures manages the most followed beauty vloggers in the UK. They have a defined reputation within the UK vlogging industry as embodying the 'A List', in other words their talent are "like proper celebrities" in the industry (Jo, Twitter). The beauty vloggers they manage are the most beautiful, but their beauty is also crossed with a broad social conservatism and advertiser friendliness: as The Guardian put it, they "avoid controversies others have fallen into" (Guardian, 2016). Ultimately, to be to be #TeamGleam is to radiate light. Their brand is underpinned by a domination of magazine covers (Cosmopolitan and Vogue), the very best brand deals, and their own fan festivals away from the rabble of other conventions and events. They host exclusive and extravagant parties. Parties have ethereal fairy-tale themes, for example "I'm Gleaming of a White Christmas" and "Midsummer Night's Gleam". These events are fawningly covered by YouTube fan blogs who last summer proclaimed "The MidsummerNightsGleam party happened and it was LIT" (Wells, 2016). Gleam beauty vloggers reflect a "dominant beauty paradigm" (Tate, 2009: 301). They are slim, blonde, glamorous women pose together in images tagged with #BFFGoals, posting exclusive snippets of these parties, related content dominates A List vlogging channels for weeks after. The weeks following these parties reinforces just who is and isn't #TeamGleam.

The rows of brightly lit headshots featured on the Gleam website gleam and sparkle with whiteness: they belie just who 'Gleams', and who is entitled to a 'Future' on YouTube.

Kearney describes such "sparklefication" where "white middle-class female youth" glimmer under a "racist epistemology of light, [that has] long idealised and promoted white women's 'glow' (Kearney, 2015: 264). Not all talent managed by Gleam Futures are white, but all are light: they possess the social capital of European beauty in that they are light skinned with straight hair and European features, their giant eyes are accented with a perfectly placed

'glint', framed with a flutter of impossibly long soft eyelashes, that most importantly *look* natural (Tate, 2009, 2015). Sparklefication and advancement of luminosities is in the very fabric of many talent management companies' branding work; other feminised digital talent agencies in the UK are branded as AAA Media, Gleam Futures and Glow. Talent managers have an ability to hand pick and guide the *right* talent into the gleam of the spotlight. The Gleam Futures *look* is strengthened by the fact that managed talent are socially and genetically tied. In our interview, Dom described expanding Gleam Futures through this clients' social and family connections; "I met Sam and Nic Chapman and they started asking lots of commercial advice, and then I started advising their brothers girlfriend who became Tanya Burr, and [their brother] Jim Chapman, and the other brother... and it went on from there". In addition to the Chapman/Burr family mentioned here, In 2017 Zoella is managed by Gleam Futures and so is her brother (Joe Sugg), her boyfriend (Alfie Deyes), his sister (Poppy Deyes) and his sister's boyfriend (Sean O'Connor). Mining and reifying social capital within existing vlogging networks is a hugely valuable process for talent agents; collaboration videos with high profile vloggers can grow channels exponentially. Jo, a talent manager who works at Twitter, told me that a single collaboration with the right talent can significantly expand a vloggers' commercial fees, and James from AAA Media described YouTube collaboration videos as "one of the simplest, most important ways of growing your channel".

The need for talent managers to find 'genuine' connections between talent and their 'friends' recalls the "homosocial reproduction" that is prevalent within cultural industries, as vloggers widely collaborate with others who hold the same demographic characteristics as themselves (Smith et al., 2012). It is "industry lore" that characterises how 'chemistry' and

'fit' are evaluated (Havens, 2014a; Saha, 2018). Intermediaries' decision making practices are ideologically charged and informed by stereotypes about who is 'social' and 'nice': namely, white girls who gleam (Wissinger, 2012). Black women, who often are stereotyped as a "killjoy" or "angry black woman" may find themselves outside of the gaze of the talent spotters looking for *nice* or wholesome collaborative young women (Ahmed, 2010: 67). In an illuminating example of how these stereotypes inform the racializing logics of cultural industries, Balaji demonstrates how black women are "formatted" into "urban" genres by record labels, where urban is often synonymous with "wild, raunchy, and 'dirty'" (Balaji, 2009: 231). This work emphasises the subjective role of intermediaries in selecting and packaging artists. I argue that similar assumptions of markets inform the logics of the vlogging industry.

In Chapter Three, I outlined the process of rationalisation, the commodification process through which "creative managers deal with the inherent unpredictability of the cultural market" (Saha, 2018: 130). Through examining the case study of full-service talent managers, I argue it becomes clear intermediaries mitigate risk and uncertainty by looking for 'talent' that fits a very specific blueprint of femininity and brand compatibility. It should be pointed out that what 'brand compatibility' means to each talent agent is often imagined or second guessed, this too is based on a theorised "industry lore" (Havens, 2014a). The lore has affective implications for beauty vloggers, who are responsible for parsing why they fall outside of being defined as 'talent' by talent organisations such as Gleam Futures. In one example of such a reflection, I asked Kristabel, a black British fashion and lifestyle vlogger why she did not have talent representation. In addition to her channel's relatively small following, Kristabel told me that a lot of UK vloggers fall into a more "wholesome" category

than she does. Kristabel here sets herself up against A List beauty vloggers managed by agencies such as Gleam Futures, whose reputations are very carefully managed. Their very specific reputation is that they do not often drink alcohol, discuss sex or money. Vloggers must attend to the logics of the industry, and try and locate, define and rationalise their own positioning within it.

The affective nature of these themes are articulated by Grace Victory, a mixed raced plus size vlogger. In one vlog, published 2015, Victory talks about feeling excluded from YouTuber culture. In the video, Victory lies on her bed, tearing up as she recounts visiting a music festival in which she encountered some vloggers who are managed by Gleam Futures. She sobs: I don't want to bring race into it... is it because I'm like not white... everyone's so cliquey, a lot of YouTubers it appears, can't collab[orate] with you unless you're in the same management as them (Victory, 2015). In part, Victory makes sense of her exclusion from the vlogging industry by reflecting on the role of management organisations. She diagnoses an extra layer of exclusion in the vlogging industry, that serves as one of the roots of her outsider status. Talent agencies, as Victory sees it, disproportionately support people who have a "good background" and are "well spoken". Talent who are managed by these agencies, then sustain these gaps in visibility, as they are only permitted to work with others that are managed by the same agency. In critically interrogating and questioning the logics of visibility, inequalities and practices within in the vlogging industry, researchers must try and 'fill in' the role of these agencies and their role within the vlogging 'industry'.

Although many talent intermediaries did not discuss race or intention of inclusion, diversity language was sporadically invoked in my interviews. The "language of diversity" operates as

a desirable attribute for an organisation to proclaim themselves, without the ‘stickiness’ of critiques aimed at company practices or a wider industry (Ahmed, 2012: 13). Ahmed argues that “diversity... is a buzzword... potentially, then, the buzz of diversity might be how it cancels out other noise such as racism” (Ahmed, 2012: 61). For example, Jo, who runs Twitter’s in-house talent agency noted, that when looking for digital talent she as consciously attempted to promote diversity:

I like to be around those type of people, so when I came here one of my main goals was to build a really diverse community and I've stuck to that. I've placed a lot of people from different backgrounds, and different types of content, and different gender... and all on campaigns and I'm quite proud of that (Jo, Twitter)

The use of “diversity” here could be taken in myriad contexts; in this slippery statement it is unclear just what he means. However the ‘buzziness’ of the phrase “promoting diversity” affords a reading in that it is directed at something to do with increasing the representation of minorities in talent management. There is no mention of the challenges or strategies for actioning this.

In the quote below from Lizzi, of Polkadot Talent, the terminology of diversity is simultaneously applied to building a roster with variegated channel genres in addition to ‘background’:

I am trying to get as diverse a range of people as possible, whether that is the kind of videos they make and their background... which is also hard... There's that bit of me

where we have to make money, there is the financial side of it, and there is the other side whereas there is that bit where I want to find more diverse people and I want to help promote that (Lizzi, Polkadot Talent).

The language of diversity here allows Lizzi to describe her well intentioned desire to help content creators who can be excluded or obscured by YouTube, without challenging or accusing the platform that provides her clients' (and by extension her) livelihood; such statements circulate intention without pledging any specific action. The use of the vague term 'backgrounds' in tandem with 'diversity' further hazily encompasses class, race and geographical brackets. For Saha, 'diversity' initiatives often reproduce whiteness; he observes "whiteness is the invisible frame in which stories on minorities are produced" (Saha, 2018: 91). Diversity initiatives often "maintain racial distinctions by constructing and policing boundaries" (Saha, 2018: 91) . In this vein we should reflect on Lizzi's statement, about considering the "financial side of it", which is positioned as opposite to signing more 'diverse' talent to her rosters. The implication here is that, to sign more 'diverse' vloggers would be a move that could be antithetical to profitability, instead it would be charitable, towards social good. The assumption and developed theories of an unprofitability of minority vloggers throughout the vlogging industry is demonstrative of "industry lore", and highlights how such lore can stratify and influence symbols produced (Havens, 2014a). This kind of talk reinforces the idea of 'diverse' vloggers as unprofitable, and side-lines them, positioning them outside of a day to day talent search.

The initial section of this Chapter was in answer to my first research question: I mapped the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry by examining how digital

intermediaries define and seek out certain ‘talent’. I now focus on my second and third research questions: how is this support gendered, what other inequalities are provoked and sustained when huge advantages are afforded to a small number of vloggers in a saturated and competitive economy, and what are the broader implications for creative industry employment? To answer these latter questions, I will examine the active role intermediaries play in optimising and growing the channels of their talent.

Co-Producing Talent

For full-service talent agencies, existing audiences are not necessarily a pre-requisite. When scouting for talent, digital talent agents informed me that they take into account potential for growth and development, and provide their clients access to many forms of mentoring and expertise. Agencies, then, actively shape and mould the vloggers they work with. They provide access to myriad services for both beauty vloggers with significant followings, and brand-new vloggers hoping to ‘make it’. As Dom (Gleam Futures) told me:

We have a suite of experts available so the talent manager can access on the talents' behalf as well, so we have a literary department... a live department... a content ID⁷ account development department for TV and movie formats... legal and business affairs departments with experts in the space.. lawyers on hand, that kind of thing (Dom, Gleam Futures).

Similarly, James from AAA Media informed me of a menagerie of other “experts” with

⁷ A YouTube system that allows creators to protect their content through copyright.

whom the management companies can “bridge the gap”.

One founder of a full-service management company working primarily with child vloggers described the success that her company had had in growing the channel of one of their clients. She prefaced the description of the channel’s growth with comments about the child’s parents, highlighting their working-class background, and relative lack of experience in organisational tasks. Speaking about the preparations for her client’s recent appearance in another country, she told me:

The parents are saying ‘will you make sure they are on the same flight as us’... and they live in [the Midlands]... and will you make sure you do all our tickets... these parents were security guards and care workers... they’ve never been treated so well.

(Laura, Viral Talent)

This intermediary was keen to point out that by directly mentoring not only the child involved, but her family, she had been able to achieve more views. She said, “we took on [the channel], that was only last May, she was on 600,000 subscribers. We started to mentor her and we taught the family and we worked with the brand etc., and now she is on 3.5 million”. The ‘mentoring’ here was extended to ‘managing’ the parents’ behaviour in a professional context. Through a process of transferring her own social and cultural capital, she taught their parents how to ensure their child was successful on YouTube, but also was in the process of supporting them to learn how to fly on planes and travel internationally. However, through these somewhat disparaging comments, it is apparent that this talent manager does not believe that the family will ever fully fit into a world of flying business class. Speaking of the pedagogical role of cultural intermediaries McRobbie (2004) points out that there is never any implication that makeover recipients “will ever truly belong to

the same social group as their improvers”, rather their social and cultural capitals have a protected status and are “separate, hence unachievable” (McRobbie, 2004: 104). To come into a talent organisation already middle class is less risky. In this vein, intermediaries build distinctions between their talent managed, which may inform who they believe to be *truly* A List.

Managing talent requires temporal dedication, support and expertise. Vloggers without management must attain this dedicated support by other means, often through family or friends. Some vloggers employed their parents or other family members, who could offer significant temporal dedication their businesses. For example, Elizabeth is a full time beauty vlogger managed by her mother and boyfriend, who both possessed time and negotiating skills that would otherwise be provided by an agent. Beauty vloggers without negotiating support risk being exploited. Melanie, an Irish A List beauty vlogger, informed me that her peers without management were often paid less:

I talk a lot of other YouTubers... we will talk about money and what we got for different jobs and especially when we all worked on the same campaign. And I feel like the people who don't have managers are getting screwed. (Melanie, beauty vlogger)

The risk in entering negotiations without support is heightened as the vlogging industry has very little regulation or standardisation. It is saturated with hopeful influencers hoping to ‘make it’, and are willing to take low rates to ensure relationships with brands. In these relationships, influencers often found themselves with little power as depressed

compensation and working for 'exposure' is the norm (Duffy, 2017: 138). Gendered concerns around being identified as greedy or underserving underpin many vloggers interactions with brands, as they accept working for lower wages or free, especially for brands with some prestige (Duffy, 2016; Duffy, 2017; Pham, 2011).

Digital Cultural Intermediaries and YouTube

The relationship between YouTubers and advertisers, which became intermittently rocky and fraught over the course of my project, have been outlined in the previous Chapter. In the face of algorithmic instability, heightened by YouTube's desire to soothe advertisers' fears, I described how beauty vloggers rely on their own informal Facebook groups, scuttlebutt and gossip, ad-hoc research conducted with their fans and industry events to develop and theorise an 'algorithmic lore' that informs and stratifies their symbolic production on YouTube. In this section, I will outline the relationship between digital intermediaries and YouTube, and the implications for beauty vloggers and their content.

YouTube support digital intermediaries through providing dedicated account managers to organisations. In interviews, CEOs of the more sizable talent management companies described their relationship with YouTube as a constructive partnership of equals, highlighting the quantity of views that their talent bring to the platform. Dom (Gleam Futures) affirms "we have a relationship with Google of course, they are big partners of ours". Although talent managers from the biggest organisations attempted to highlight the influence they wield on YouTube, I argue that their insider knowledge is not as clear as they would perhaps like to make out. As intermediaries hold limited legitimised cultural capital,

their pathways to their positions are often reached through the “serendipity of the autodidact”, thus their positioning as experts are risky and investment in self-promotion is “more severe, more intense” (Bourdieu, 2000: 265). Put differently, digital talent agents can only take limited challenges to their legitimacy. Although they promoted strong relationships with YouTube in interviews, even those employed by YouTube to manage digital talent accounts themselves do not have a detailed overview or understanding of the mechanics of the platform’s algorithm. Stakeholders have access to limited fragmented information fed to them intermittently. The tension between striving for legitimacy, and being held at arms’ length by the platform, can go some way to account for an ambivalence towards YouTube. For example, talent from Gleam Futures very rarely attend YouTube sponsored events such as VidCon. Following the advent of the YouTube Creator Store at the YouTube Space, a shop in Google’s office that sells merchandise by YouTubers, talent managed by Gleam Futures set up their own online Creator Store selling their merchandise. Later in our interview, Dom was also keen to inform me “I don't think [our talent] ought to be tethered to a specific platform”.

Luann, the CEO of a mid-size talent agency described the process of trying to acquire information about algorithmic changes on the platform:

I will ask one person at YouTube a question and I will get one answer, and I will ask one person at YouTube the same question and get a different answer... there is not a single person that I have ever spoken to at YouTube that knows the whole picture (Luann, MCN).

Talent managers from and small and medium sized agencies told me that they considered the YouTube algorithm important, but also a mysterious and ultimately un-knowable entity. In one illustrative example, Josh, talent manager for vlogger Dodie Clarke told me “my relationship with YouTube is very good”, informing me that he had just been on the phone to YouTube prior to speaking to me, but went on to say “the algorithm is something that is so interesting to me because no one really knows what on earth it is... but it *exists* and it *does stuff* and you know, in terms of the kind of engagement you get per video”. Through constructing and maintaining highly fragmented departments within their organisational structure, YouTube dually maintains a connection with intermediaries such as talent management, but maintains the proprietary nature of their algorithm. Leadbeater (2000) terms this corporate structure “distributed intelligence”, in which highly individualised human nodes within an organisation specialise in specific tasks (Leadbeater, 2000: 88). YouTube appears to function as a segregated knowledge system, their departments operating as informational silos. YouTube is able to institute a remove from responsibility and culpability. The account managers role is simply to translate the what is often positioned as the ‘natural’ weather of the algorithm.

Algorithmic anxiety is not erased or even mitigated to a significant extent by talent management representation. In fact, many vloggers with talent representation have been punished by the YouTube algorithm. Some talent managers questioned the fairness of the YouTube algorithmic visibility; Laura at ViralTalent stated “it’s very evident that [YouTube] have their favourites and there’s nothing we can do about it unfortunately” and James from AAA Media referred to the algorithm as “political”. Despite their professed ambivalence, it is important to bear in mind that digital intermediaries manage talent who are dependent on

YouTube for their audience and income. They are just one node in the “platformization of cultural production”, in which intermediaries and cultural producers must ensure their production is compliant with monopoly platform’s architectures and strategies (Nieborg & Poell, 2018: 14). Talent managers then, are invested in producing their own strains of algorithmic lore, and to strategise with their talent to become visible on YouTube. Talent managers consistently informed me that they are developing and growing their talents’ brands away from YouTube through mainstream and traditional media: on television, or through book deals.

The tension underpinning this discourse, however, is that beauty vloggers’ audiences on YouTube anchors and define their brands. In one example, James from AAA Media told me “their digital heritage... they’re going to continue to do that... but can we make them entertainers, singers, broadcasters in their own right”. However, James’s clients’ forays into mainstream media have been contingent on their success within digital media. In the interview James cited his client, Grace Victory, as a success story due to her transition towards a career that is entirely separate from YouTube; “she is a really credible, TV presenter, journalist... and if suddenly YouTube switched off she could still continue doing what she does for TV”. However, her brand and self-presentation is anchored towards situation on YouTube. Victory presented BBC3’s (2016) “Clean Eating’s Dirty Secrets”, an expose on wellness vloggers. The documentary is filmed largely through first-person ‘vlogging’ segments set in Victory’s bedroom, in a style that is often indeterminable from her YouTube channel. Furthermore, BBC3 centralises the specificity of the ‘vlogging’ input in the show’s blurb “[Grace Victory] vlogs her attempts to change her diet and meets with dieticians, YouTubers and those whose desire for health has become an unhealthy

obsession” (BBC3, 2016). So, while it is accurate to say that vloggers can accrue success on other platforms, their branded performance of amateurism and authenticity requires their multi-platform success to be offset with an emphasis on their digital and vlogging roots.

Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs)

I will now turn to the role of the multi-channel network (MCN) as a distinct talent management model within the vlogging industry. There are important discrepancies in the opportunities afforded by digital intermediaries, such as the quantity and quality of support provided to the vloggers managed. In this section I will sketch out the role of the MCN in the YouTube ‘industry’ - their roles, narratives of discovery, their similarity to ‘crowdsourcing’ models, and the resulting inequalities and potential for exploitation. YouTube defines the MCN as an intermediary that works to develop and monetise a YouTube channel. They are often licensed by YouTube, who define them as: “third-party service providers that affiliate with multiple YouTube channels to offer services that may include audience development, content programming, creator collaborations, digital rights management, monetisation and/or sales” (YouTube, 2017b). Vonderau (2016) conceptualises the MCN as a YouTube franchise, that enables YouTube to delegate responsibility for channel monetisation within localised geographic markets. In this role, MCNs have been enthusiastically supported by YouTube: they ‘manage’ YouTube channels to ensure content is appropriate and high quality, soothing brand concerns about advertising with the platform. The MCN diverges from full-service management organisations on the creator side, much of the support provided is automated and rarely personalised (Lobato, 2016). MCNs do not offer career development, rather they maximise revenue generation on YouTube. Furthermore, they do

not come with the legitimising stamp of cultural intermediaries such as full-service talent agents. Full-service talent agents inscribe the legitimacy from their own social and symbolic capitals to talent, to reassure reticent brands and other stakeholders, however this is not offered by MCNs.

In turn, MCN representation is more attainable than exclusive talent management rosters; there are many MCNs, and each represents hundreds or even thousands of YouTube channels. MCNs allow many channels to submit themselves for consideration, and in turn they represent more marginalised social actors including vloggers of colour. For example, the fashion and beauty MCN, StyleHaul, foregrounds more YouTubers who are of various ethnic backgrounds, contrasting starkly with Gleam Futures' roster. The disparity between representation on talent management rosters and MCNs is important to recognise, as this further feeds into wider pay and visibility inequalities that are epitomised within each structure. The differences between the full-service talent agency, and the MCN remain unexplored; what has been unsettled in previous accounts of this model is a critical exploration of the subjective nature of talent spotting. In other words, *who* is provided with *what* levels of support by digital intermediaries. In this section, we will see that MCN crowdsourcing models offer less specific support. For example, rather than having contact with a dedicated full-service manager, interactions with MCNS are largely automated, through online support forms. A full-service talent agency may have a roster of up to fifty talent, whereas in the case of MCNS, hundreds or even thousands compete for opportunities. In terms of financial compensation, brands' budgets are absorbed by the MCN writ large, meaning there is less transparency over pay. Dedicated talent management companies and managers often have clear legal contracts with fixed percentage cuts, agreed

on by both parties. These discrepancies often lead to increased exploitation, micro-payments and lack of support for vloggers.

Full-service talent managers describe a time-consuming process of fine-combing YouTube for vloggers possessing ‘something special’, however, MCNs do not promote star “narratives of discovery”, in which talent is positioned as an “innate quality” revealed when “discovered by industry talent scouts” (Turner, 2014: 96). The discerning judgement of a cultural intermediary (‘we know it when we see it’) is done away with, vloggers simply submit their own channels to a MCN by filling out a form. StyleHaul, the most successful beauty and fashion MCN, hosts a typical form on their website: they request vloggers to submit their channel standing (in other words whether they have had any YouTube complaints or community strikes against them) and detailed analytics of their channel demographics and engagement (Stylehaul, 2017a). The online form also asks YouTubers to select the genre of their YouTube channel, including the highly gendered options “beauty”, “fitness”, “lifestyle” or “mom”. This categorising process impels vloggers into fitting highly gender specific genres: MCNs extend YouTube’s project of building gendered “commodity audiences”, which correspond to ‘niche’, and often gendered markets (Meehan, 2006). MCNs such as StyleHaul represent their talent roster as homogenous, explicitly through a valuation of their audience. StyleHaul manages over 6000 channels that have all been submitted through a largely automated process, who are marketed as a consumable whole, effectively erasing the individual talent channels they represent. Through their in-house multi-faceted digital creative agency, StyleHaulShop, brands working with StyleHaulShop can literally ‘shop’ the influence that has been amassed by StyleHaul creators. Individual talent are not identified, rather StyleHaul market the amalgamated reach of their combined talent: for example a

prominent tag line “500m community reach! 2bn monthly views! 76 female! 74 millennial!” (Styehaul, 2017).

Financial Compensation

Opportunities for compensation are limited and competitive in MCN structures. Brand deals, sponsorships and opportunities are circulated on a first come first serve basis to those who fulfil each brief. Josh, talent manager for vlogger Dodie Clark who was previously managed by MCN ChannelFlip, described the nature of this opportunity distribution process in an interview. He said:

They just provide you with brand deals and they say can you do it or can you not, and everything else is left to the talent. Whereas with a management company you are working with somebody to make something happen. (Josh, Personal Manager)

Josh constructs the role of the dedicated talent management as oppositional to the MCN as more productive and ethical, an attempt to “make something happen” through mutual long-term investment. Indeed, the organisational, and financial structure of full-service talent management is often akin to traditional agents, a percentage fee is mutually signed into contract by both parties. The financial transactions within MCNs are much more opaque: the MCN absorbs an undisclosed brand fee, and distributes this in micro-payments to a quantity of vloggers that they deem to be appropriate to the campaign. Barney, the founder and ex-CEO of ChannelFlip compared a ‘new’ breed of transactional MCNs to crowd sourcing models, namely “micro-payments... it’s Ebay-isation”. Transactional MCN models

can be usefully tied with the concept of crowd sourced “microwork”, defined as the process of breaking projects down into smaller tasks and distributing them through platforms amongst a sizable digital workforce (Bucher & Fieseler, 2016; Irani, 2015). Microwork is frequently characterised by under-payment and exploitation, and affirms entrenched hierarchies between the celebrated creative tech ‘innovators’ and the anonymised workforces that undertake so-called ‘menial’ tasks en-masse, in other words, online factory labourers. ‘White collar’ luminary creative talent are dedicated and nurtured by their talent managers, whereas ‘blue collar’ talent managed by MCNs are near-anonymously recruited to deliver pre-written homogenised branded content. Of course, true and exploitative microwork often pays less than \$1 per hour, and is overwhelmingly performed by workers in the Global South, which is perhaps not comparative to privileged women producing beauty and lifestyle content, who are paid multiple hundreds of pounds for their labour. Still, the pay inequalities between those managed by talent agencies, and MCNs for the same labour, are pertinent and important to consider.

The workings of financial transactions are often hidden within MCN management models. In the following quote, Josh describes how much of the brand fee is absorbed by the MCN, with little actually passed on to the vlogger “like you don’t know how much they’re making in terms of the money itself... they will just be like here’s £12,000 but they won’t say it was originally £40,000 or whatever, whereas a manager is very clear on that (Josh, Personal Manager). For Josh, talent management models afford more clarity and transparency. Conversely, Jo, who runs Twitter’s in-house MCN, Niche, defined the MCN process as *more* transparent, as the talent know upfront what their fee is, and can plan accordingly.

So we're super transparent about the cost, what we can sometimes do... we give a flat fee, so let's say £5000 for one video. And in that we would expect the creator to budget what they need to make that happen (Jo, Twitter)

Informing a creator of a fee upfront is transparent in the sense that talent are then able to make an informed choice: take it, or don't. However, in this situation the vlogger is hardly empowered. Power in this relationship falls onto those who dictate the prices and hire the content creators, it is skewed unfavourably against the vlogger. This is firstly because the proportion of the initial budget to go to the content creator is hidden, or at least not stated, by the MCN. Secondly, in a saturated vlogging industry, vloggers take on more responsibility as they take on myriad roles in producing complex content for big brands. In our interview, Jo outlined one the motivations for international brands to turn to *vloggers* to create content is that these organisations no longer want to pay the required rates for hiring videographers, editors and talent. Using an agency or employing these experts in house is increasingly expensive. However, should an A List vlogger take on the project, they absorb and take on all of these roles for a competitive fee, from which Twitter's in-house agency, in their role as an intermediary, claim an undisclosed percentage. Many creators without managers have little to no frame of reference of standard compensation for various forms of labour. Vloggers do not have access to trade unions, such as the acting union Equity, or the Guild of British Camera Operators. There are no standardised pay rates. One can see why the ability to work with international brands for multiple thousands of pounds upfront may initially appear generous. However, fees are often well below market rate, and are depressed as the vlogging industry becomes more saturated.

The potential for the exploitation of vloggers is compounded by the simplicity and ease of the MCN sign-up process. MCNs such as StyleHaul explicitly target young or inexperienced vloggers, who are looking to earn pocket money through their YouTube channels. With the effortless act of filling out a simple form, MCNs can lock vloggers into exclusive contracts for many years. Lucy, a lifestyle vlogger, had been locked into a Style Haul contract since she was a teenager.

I am locked into a fucking StyleHaul contract and have been for 4 years! I think I only have a month or two, and I need to send them an email to be like "release me!". They've been taking 30% of my Ad Sense for 4 years... um... I am unable to negotiate it. They've done nothing for it. I'm earning nothing, I'm earning pennies... but overall they will have made so much money off me. And it's just like ughhh... (Lucy, lifestyle vlogger)

If a vlogger's channel eventually grows, strict contracts often mean they lose out financially in the long run. Signing up to an MCN means they forfeit the freedom to negotiate higher rates with advertisers, and must continue to accept micro payments through the MCN. Some YouTubers have published videos in which vloggers describe their experiences: "I never had a stable rep... I was with them for 2 years and I never really got *any* brand opportunities" (Cheyenne, 2015), "they never came to me and said here's ways to grow... nothing... it was incredibly hard to contact anybody" (TheSarahSalvini, 2017). The lack of regulation in this space means that those with negative experiences of MCNs have little power or potential for recourse against these bodies. The significant contracts signed also mean a waiting period before they are able to leave.

In sum, vloggers are able to ‘democratically’ submit their channels for consideration to MCNs, meaning they are able to source representation. However, MCNs are unregulated and opaque. Vloggers signed into these models are ultimately compensated in micropayments for their labour, and are locked into obscure, long term contracts that can hinder future income for meaningful periods of time. The proliferation of exploitative MCN models, and the lack of power for those who sign to them, has been a significant finding during this research project. Although scholars have paid attention to MCNs, a focus on the disruptive and structural aspects of these organisations has missed the everyday experiences of those who are signed to them. An awareness and attention to these organisations, including in policy and regulation, is a recommendation that I believe is imperative for me to take forward following this PhD project.

Gendered Markets and Digital Intermediaries

Full-service talent agencies and MCNs in the UK manage vloggers specialise in content that fits a specific *gendered* genre of YouTube, and that reaches a *gendered* audience. The literature on MCNs has highlighted that MCNs often sign YouTube channels that aggregate “niche” audiences (Cunningham et al., 2016: 7; Lobato, 2016: 351; Vonderau, 2016: 363). What is missed is that, feminised *niche* markets are in fact commodified by gender. In Chapter Three I outlined the continued marketing preoccupation with gender, demonstrating that targeting gender was *always* an option on social media platforms (Bivens, 2017; Bivens & Haimson, 2016). The gendered dynamic of market construction and commodification has been historically missed in many accounts of media industries (Hardy,

2014; Havens & Lotz, 2017; Havens et al., 2009; Negus, 1999). Gendered commodity audiences have been traditionally cultivated through genres of television programming. In a similar vein, digital talent intermediaries like Red Hare and Gleam Futures have cultivated rosters featuring beauty and lifestyle vloggers with majority female audiences (Meehan, 2006). In other words, intermediaries forge a reputation of expertise, and value pertaining to gendered markets. Conversely, intermediaries specialising in male-dominated video gaming and male 'prime time' audiences include Endemol Shine owned talent management companies OP Talent and FlipSide. MCNs are similarly organised along gender lines; StyleHaul is a beauty MCN that boasts "74 female audiences", whereas gaming MCNs such as ChannelFlip and Disney owned Maker Studios cater to primarily male audiences (Stylehaul, 2017b). Many MCNs are founded with the intention of the curation of a gendered demographic. Barney discussed how the MCN he founded, ChannelFlip, was initially set up to be an online 'lads mag'. He observes "we were trying to make an online version of Nuts or Zoo... and because it was guys, and a lot of the brands with whom we worked were gaming brands". Much of the market construction, and commodification enacted by intermediaries aligns to the performance of desirable genres on YouTube. Intermediaries work to support content that YouTube supports. Through assumptions about platform desires crossed with their own lore, they judge the 'correct', or 'monetisable' performances on YouTube that align with gendered markets.

Intermediaries are invested in consistently sketching out vlogging industries as authentic, but this arguably obscures those who are cast aside in the talent spotting process, for example those creating divergent content incompatible with desired markets. Not only must vloggers perform gender in a way that is consistent with legibility for the YouTube

algorithm, they must adhere to gendered genres as they must 'fit' within talent agencies and MCNs. To be recognised by talent agencies and MCNs, their consumable brand must be developed and performed consistently in videos and must be easily translatable into branded content. To increase the urgency for entrepreneurial vloggers to ensure they are recognisable through genre adherence, talent management companies are increasingly using new algorithms to find talent. Software such as PEG algorithmically search YouTube for vloggers producing genre-specific content. It is used by Dom (Gleam Futures), and Lizzi (PolkaDotTalent), who described how the software has assisted her in building her roster;

Software like PEG shows you who is doing what in different categories, and I have found a few people that way. You search for beauty vloggers between 100,000 and 400,000 subscribers and every now and again someone new will pop up (Lizzi, PolkaDotTalent)

The genres offered by the software pertain to gendered markets such as "beauty and fashion", "political", "gaming" and "comedy". The latter three are coded male. Using PEG, and selecting 'political' genre alignment returns overwhelmingly male channels, with only one out of the eighteen top listed channels helmed by a woman (Peg.co, 2017). Those not adhering to these highly gendered genre designations will be overlooked by this software, locating vloggers outside of visibility and discovery by talent agencies.

Summary

This Chapter has argued that influential intermediaries in the vlogging industry are likely to have established themselves in entertainment industries, hold valued forms of symbolic and social capital, and have maintained links to so-called 'mainstream' media industries. Full-service talent agencies sign talent that are hegemonically, and heteronormatively beautiful, as defined in the Introduction to this thesis. The Gleam Futures girl is often white, but certainly light: they possess the social capital of European beauty in that they are light skinned with straight hair and European features. They *look* beautiful and *naturally* put together they act according to industry agreed definitions of poise and dignity, they are safe for brands to work with, they command a large fee. The Gleam Future girls *know* each other, they are friends, sisters, pose around a luxurious pool for group photographs, Tweet each other congratulations on their accomplishments. Although they hold disparate follower numbers, they have the *right look*, they fit the subjective definition of talent. These young women are provided with extensive and dedicated support by their exclusive organisations. Talent managers assist them in growing their channels, support them with advertising and branding ventures, in addition to providing them access to 'experts' including literary agents, lawyers, stylists and production assistants. The amalgamation of expertise accessed by talent contributes to greater chance of employment opportunities, higher earnings and increased visibility on YouTube. Talent agency staff are provided with account managers at YouTube and are privy to privileged information and expertise pertaining to their clients' analytics and algorithmic changes. However, the fragmented nature of the platform's bureaucracy affords account managers with highly limited and specific expertise. YouTube's employed account managers do not possess an understanding of the algorithm, or its volatility and adjustments, thus vloggers with representation

continue to experience 'algorithm panic' through their precarious positioning on the platform. The power, it is important to recognise, continues to lie with the platform.

On the other hand, the model of the MCN may be thought of as more democratic: it allows vloggers to submit themselves for consideration, leading to a wider representation within managed channels. Perhaps because of the open nature of channel submission, MCNs are less visible as exclusively white spaces in the YouTube industry than elite talent management companies. However, by filling out a simple and short form, vloggers are also locked in to fixed legal contracts, often for several years. Contracts may come with limited, or non-existent, opportunities for reprieve. However, MCNs offer far less support than talent agencies, and can even be harmful for vloggers hoping to participate in the vlogging industry. These organisations do not provide personal support, and are rarely concerned with vloggers' long-term careers outside of the YouTube platform. Contact is sporadic, and often automated. In the case of MCNs, opportunities for sponsorship and campaigns are often hugely competitive. Most creative and marketing decisions are designed and disseminated centrally by brands, with the original brand fees paid to the MCN hidden from the vlogger in person. The signed vlogger retains a flat fee, with no indication of the initial payment: there is no transparency. The number of unregulated MCN organisations is multiplying, and many of my participants pointed out that their content creation fees from brands are declining. In one example of this trend, YouTube purchased Famebit, a MCN platform in 2016. Touted as a content creator marketing marketplace, Famebit allows vloggers to under-cut other content creators while bidding for work. The marketplace enables vloggers to present proposals at attractive rates for brands, who reflect on what is offered and pick the most cost-effective options. As the vlogging industry grows, and

becomes more saturated and increasingly competitive, I argue urgent attention should be paid to these organisations and strongly recommend regulation.

MCNs and full-service talent managers are oriented towards curating gendered markets, often featuring vloggers performing specific gendered genres on their rosters. Some of these organisations were explicitly founded with the intention of cultivating specific markets: for example, the co-founder of the gaming and comedy MCN ChannelFlip described being inspired to found the company as he wanted to create an online 'lads mag'. In the UK, Gleam Futures, RedHare and StyleHaul specialise in managing highly feminised beauty and lifestyle vloggers. Although talent managers insisted they prioritised 'talent', all described a central requirement to hire and sign vloggers that fit with branded sponsorship and advertising opportunities. It is these subjectively determined 'advertiser friendly' YouTubers that are given further support by agencies, and are more likely to become visible to audiences. In addition to making highly feminised beauty and fashion content to optimise for YouTube's algorithms, entrepreneurial vloggers must create a legible 'self-brand' to be both visible and viable to stand a chance of representation by talent management companies and MCNs. Furthermore, algorithmic digital talent discovering software further limits the visibility of those who do not make content within the highly gendered genre categories they operate within, including politics, gaming, and beauty and fashion. The informality of both startup and cultural industries continues on in digital talent agencies, whose talent scouting processes are highly subjective. These subjective scouting practices also engender a reliance on mining their talents' friendships and social networks, leads to discrimination and homosocial reproduction within talent management companies. Some talent managers invoked the "language of diversity" in interviews (Ahmed, 2012:13).

However, none explicitly critiqued classed, raced or gendered discrimination on YouTube, or discussed a specific commitment to address their hiring practices to speak to this documented lack of class, race and gendered diversity on the platform.

In this Chapter I have defined how subjective definitions of talent affords and stratifies success, visibility and legibility within the vlogging industry. Chapter Five will define authenticity, and look to how it is performed and deployed as both a practice and a labour. Like 'talent', authenticity is a subjective descriptor that is raced, classed and gendered. However, achieving and performing authenticity successfully is essential to beauty vloggers' self-brands to achieve visibility on YouTube.

Chapter Five: Authentic Beauty

The previous Chapters have examined how the macro and micro relationships between vlogging industry stakeholders shape and stratify visibility, and influence content production on YouTube. In this Chapter, I *zoom in* to articulate and locate the specifically gendered nature of ‘authenticity’ within beauty vlogging content. During my field work, I was told time and time again that building a successful beauty vlogging brand is contingent on a convincing performance of ‘authenticity’. The term was invoked in press coverage, vlogs, social media content, and during industry events and panels. It became clear that, although it was used in ways that were ambivalent and changeable, authenticity discourse is important in the vlogging industry. Authenticity may mean different things, but it clearly signifies something. In response to Research Question One, “how do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging?” I will investigate how stakeholders in the vlogging industry, such as media and fans, define authenticity, and what happens when beauty vloggers fail at authenticity. Speaking to my second research question “how do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes?”, I examine several popular beauty vlogging genres, and study how the tropes of each of these genres are laborious, strategic and gendered. The performance of acceptable and respectable authentic femininity is very finely attended to by vloggers using the, often resourceful, techniques described. Although YouTube necessitates the regular upload of differentiated video content to attain visibility, beauty vloggers could be seen to utilise creative justifications to offset looks that could be judged as ‘excessive’. My third Research Question is “what are the broader implications of uneven

politics of visibility on YouTube for labour in the UK, particularly within what is termed the creative industries?”. Speaking to this question, I conceptualise how authenticity is both classed and raced, it is often meshed classed ideals of restraint and respectability. I argue that the need to be authentic impels marginalised vloggers in particular to labour to be recognised as authentic in specific ways.

In the vlogging industry, ‘authenticity’ has several definitions. Firstly, authenticity is used as a synonym for consistency: how beauty vloggers had maintained stable identities in the face of the professionalisation of the vlogging industry, that they had not *changed* by money, success or professional achievements. That their content was not professionally scripted or filmed, nor their makeup professionally applied. For example, in a feature, Blogosphere magazine ventured Zoella’s authenticity was bolstered by her “consistency of character” (Audley, 2016: 22). A beauty vlogger speaking during panel on ‘authenticity’ during an event proudly informed the audience that her content had not changed in four years. Secondly, the term is used to praise vloggers whose content is anchored in displaying an apparently un-edited and even un-mediated version of her life. Google’s advertising portal describes Zoella’s success as down to her “authentic, honest approach about her anxiety issues to the bloopers at the end of her videos” (Google, 2014). In this case, authenticity means an expansive view into ones’ backstage, being candid, listing ones’ flaws generously. In its third, and related usage, authenticity was also utilised to signal normality, being everyday, and unexceptional. As Cosmopolitan describes Zoella’s ‘authenticity’: “Is she beautiful? Yes. But no more than the prettiest girl in your English class? Is she charming? Polite is a better word” (Lumsden, 2016: 35). To be authentic in this case signifies not commanding too much attention, sticking out too much, being gauche, loud or obnoxious. This use in particular is

classed, raced and gendered: this will be explored in-depth throughout this Chapter. Lastly, the term is used as a binary to commerciality. Beauty vlogger InTheFrow posted the following on her blog:

I have received a number of comments on my social media channels on posts that are not sponsored, where someone is doubting its authenticity. All I say is that, if they followed me fully, and knew my principles and practices on the matter, they shouldn't need to doubt me. (InTheFrow, 2016).

InTheFrow has experienced doubts about her authenticity that often centre on the inclusion of sponsored content within her channels. In this case, to be inauthentic means to have included paid for content and adverts, especially without labelling them as such. There is a tension here that will be probed within later analysis: between representing oneself authentically, and attaining the necessary sponsorships in the beauty vlogging industry to survive financially.

There are specific, narrow lines that enable and constrain authentic performances within the UK vlogging industry. How stakeholders in this ecology define authenticity is how they define viability. To be inauthentic in the context of the vlogging industry is to have sold out, to have betrayed those who invested in you, it is an extremely serious criticism. Failing at authenticity presents a risk to one's suitability and longevity in the UK vlogging industry. At the level of the A List vlogger, inauthenticity renders you prone to being the victim of barbed opinion pieces in popular press. The harshest criticisms levied at Zoella are often that she has broken the promise of authenticity; a promise has been made explicitly and

implicitly through her methodology of self-presentation. A typical subheading from a Sun article: “she promises fans authenticity and honesty and instead manipulates them with plugs for products backed by giant corporations” (Glass, 2017). The Independent wrote on a significant scandal, in which it was revealed that Zoella was using a ghost writer: “Zoella, yes using a ghostwriter matters when your whole brand is built on being authentic” (Hunter Johnston, 2014), popular feminist blog XO Jane asks “Am I the only one who sees that as these girls grow more popular, they become more strategic, less honest, and less real?” (XO Jane, 2015). To avoid such accusations, vloggers face an unenviable balancing act: refraining from changing their content or their personality, but being perpetually honest and unfiltered. Such a performance is incredibly difficult to negotiate: it involves being reflexive, constantly checking over one’s shoulder, presenting content as ‘new’ and ‘engaging’ for audiences, while constantly dropping a trail of breadcrumbs to an origin story. Being distinctive without being too much. Shining, but not too brightly.

In the context of the beauty vlogging industry, authenticity is divorced from what it may mean in a philosophical sense. Pondering one’s authenticity does not mean reflecting on whether we have an inner soul that is free from the tentacles of neoliberal culture. Rather, it is firstly, a very specific style of performance, and secondly a form of labour. Many scholars examining digital cultures, reality television and influencer industries have commented on the pervasive use of “authenticity”, and have questioned what it actually means (among others: Abidin, 2017; Allen & Mendick, 2013; Banet-Weiser, 2012; García-Rapp, 2017b; Genz, 2015; Marwick, 2013b). What remains unsettled in their arguments, is a characterisation of both the gendered, highly classed and raced nature of ‘authenticity’, particularly in the specific context of the vlogging industry. Through this lens, I problematise

just which social actors have access to a convincingly authentic performance. The use of 'authenticity' is slippery, sometimes contradictory and often sticky: uneven visibilities in the vlogging 'industry' could partially be examined through who authenticity "sticks" to (Ahmed, 2010: 121).

In this Chapter, I firstly utilise 'self-presentation' theory by social interactionist Goffman (1990) to provide a theoretical context to underpin the interrogation of performance. I also draw from internet studies and feminist work to piece together a critical examination of how authenticity is intertwined with femininity and the wider logics of branding in the context of social media platforms. I then problematise authenticity through the lens of work: its strategic, intentional and laborious nature. Following this theoretical grounding, I highlight beauty vloggers' self-presentations as oppositional to glamour and excess, the classed implications, hierarchies and binaries between inauthenticity and authenticity are unpacked. I also examine how A List beauty vlogging's authenticity is ideologically centred around a specific middle class and white femininity (Ahmed, 2007; Shome, 2001), which operates in opposition to stereotypical themes of black and working-class body excess. In other words, the specific performance of authenticity makes visible and naturalises the exponential emotional and aesthetic labour required to discipline the body, both as authentically beautiful, respectably middle class and white. Through a close analysis of beauty vlogging videos, particularly those by beauty vlogger Patricia Bright, I identify the often hairline cracks that distinguish what is authentic and non-authentic, including the use of shine, glitter, make up colours and hair volume. In this Chapter I offer up a magnifying glass to the hairline cracks that can make the difference between visibility and invisibility in the wider UK vlogging industry.

Authenticity as Performance

In his seminal work *The Presentation of the Self In Everyday Life*, Goffman introduced the concept of impression management through social performances:

*The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity, the expression that he gives and the expression that he **gives off**. (Goffman, 1990: 14).*

Goffman argues that both of these impression management techniques are often intentionally constructed by the individual. The first, the expression one “gives”, is what they are saying, their verbal expression. The second (what is “given off”) is used to define action, appearance and gestures. These expressions are “more theatrical and contextual” and can be “purposefully engineered or not” (Goffman, 1990: 16). Both social actors and audiences often act as if these given off impressions are outside of their “concern or control” (Goffman, 1990: 18) although the social actor may “exploit the possibility” that his impression is convincing and “[guide] the impression he makes through behaviour felt to be reliably informing” (Goffman, 1990: 19). However, Goffman also acknowledges that some roles are defined by the ability to foreground actions that are processes of impression management.

Some of the acts which are instrumentally essential for the completion of the core task of the status are at the same time wonderfully adapted, from the point of view

of the communication, as a means of vividly conveying the qualities and attributes claimed by the performer (Goffman, 1990: 41).

To illustrate this statement, Goffman gives the example of policemen and violinists, whose performances are underpinned by their ability to express their roles in highly dramatic ways. Through an excessive manipulation of the bow, violin players convince the audience that they are, in fact, playing the violin, and at the same time presumably entertain them to some degree. Convincing performances are contingent on the dramatisation of expressions, which are executed in a vein that makes the inner workings of the role obvious to their intended audience. I find the self-presentation strategies defined here useful to examine 'authentic' self-presentations within the genre of beauty vlogging. Just as a violinist moves their bow excessively to dramatically signal their musicality to an audience, beauty vloggers dramatised their amateurism and authenticity. It is a specific performance of authenticity that makes up what Goffman would define as their *core task*, namely A List beauty vlogging, within the specific logics of the UK vlogging industry.

Self-presentations are always intended for a specific audience. On social media platforms, scholars have pointed out that this audience is often "imagined" (Boyd, 2010; Litt, 2012; Litt & Hargittai, 2016; Marwick & boyd, 2011). The potentially unbounded nature of social media audiences means that "we need a more specific conception of audience than 'anyone' to inform online identity presentation" (Marwick & boyd, 2011: 2). The authors here highlight that authenticity is contextual, that is to say, authenticity needs to be convincing for the community we are invested in convincing. The risk is that we suffer "context collapse", where expressions that would convince one imagined audience travel

beyond contexts than we expect, and subsequently fail (Baym & boyd, 2012: 322). Strategic self-presentations for beauty vloggers are widely underpinned by the fact that they must serve two primary audiences, with (at least on the surface) diverging requirements. They must maintain a beautiful and stylised self-presentation and aesthetic expertise that is *advertiser-friendly*. However, these expressions must be (ostensibly paradoxically) underscored by a performance of authenticity, namely ordinariness, candidness and intimacy so they can attract an audience, and by extension build their *market*.

The circulated discourse within the UK vlogging industry is that if you are actively looking to *make money*, then this is inauthentic. The specific tensions that such a perspective engenders, when vlogging industry is sold as a career, will be considered in the following Chapter. For now, it is fruitful to bear in mind that authenticity means a performance as non-economically motivated, spontaneous, relatable, and at the same time, ensuring one's self-brand is legible and acceptable to brands. Commerciality and authenticity have been traditionally positioned as in binary opposition: Banet-Weiser points out that many thinkers, such as Marx, have considered authenticity incompatible with capital, there is a perception that we have "pure" *inner selves* outside of our highly branded culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 10). However, in terms of this thesis, what is more relevant to Banet-Weiser, and to me, is how "authenticity itself is a brand" (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 11). Authenticity, in the beauty vlogging industry, is a lucrative and commodifiable attribute. More broadly, calls to authenticity are embedded in the promise and architecture of social media platforms. To this point, Dobson argues "social media self-presentations make explicit and implicit claims to truth and authenticity on multiple levels, and this makes them vitally important to critically analyse as media texts" (Dobson, 2015: 12). Dobson examines how performances

of authenticity are often gendered; she observes how young women use gendered “random” and “inconsistent” claims about their personality on social media sites, for example indicating their sweet nature, but also noting that they will “punch you in the face” (Dobson, 2015: 114-115). Such assertions work to signal the porous, contradictory and unstable nature of the human personalities. The ‘spontaneous’ use of emotion to connote authenticity now make up the “broader grammar” of broadcast television (Biressi & Nunn, 2005: 19). However, spontaneity is complicated when applied to beauty vloggers whose particular definitions of authenticity must be *authentically brand friendly*. The risk-management strategies intertwined within the branded logic of the vlogging industry mean that authenticity in the context of A List beauty vlogging is dependent on a performance of reliability, evenness and stability. In this vein, a performance of “normative distinctiveness” is valuable, meaning that an individual’s self-brand stands out somewhat, but is legible in terms of a genre, and relatability (Winch, 2013: 3).

Authenticity as Labour

Hochschild (2012) draws a distinction between *surface acting*, the often-cynical performances as described by Goffman, and *deep acting*. Deep acting is when we make “indirect use of a trained emotion” (Hochschild, 2012: 42). It is deep acting, in particular in industrial and commercial contexts, that often estranges social actors from their feelings. It is in this context that Hochschild introduces the famous concept of “emotional labour”, which she defines, as it “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (Hochschild, 2012: 7). This concept highlights the effort required in emotional management, and how many

occupations demand the management of feeling. I argue that authenticity construction is an extremely time-consuming task, that ultimately takes a lot of specialised expertise and hard work. Abidin (2017) introduces a concept of “calibrated amateurism” to capture the laborious nature of managing ones identity as an influencer. She defines calibrated amateurism as follows;

Calibrated amateurism is a practice and aesthetic in which actors in an attention economy labour specifically over crafting contrived authenticity that portrays the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice. (Abidin, 2017: 1)

In this definition, Abidin captures the affective and stylistic efforts undertaken by vloggers, consciously and unconsciously, to ensure their performed identities and outputs *appear* as relatable, amateur, consistent, spontaneous and uncommercial. The strategic efforts to appear amateur have also been highlighted by Jerslev (2016) who points out that A List beauty vlogger Zoella often performs authenticity by strategically ‘forgetting’ the name of certain make up brushes in her tutorials. This is confirmed in my own field work, Zoella squints as she tries to make out the name of products in her videos, she reads the name out, slowly and with uncertainty “Ka...bu....kui”, then confirming it fast and cheerfully “oh it’s the Kabuki Sigma!”. Whilst the slow pronunciation connotes a struggle that is aligned with lack of preparation, the side-effect is an incredibly clear pronunciation of a brand name. In the UK beauty vlogging ecology, windows are left open to generate faint background noise, sunlight moved across the frame, pets and partners wander into the background. ‘Bloopers’ such as the vlogger ‘accidentally’ being caught singing, dropping a

makeup brush or playing with their hair are included as an introductory sequence to videos, and set to plodding comedic music. Returning to Goffman (1990), one could argue that the processes of impression management are foregrounded in these videos. In other words, it is the dramatisation of authenticity that offers pleasure and performance of normality for the viewer, offsetting the professional connotations in the performance of expertise.

Authentic performances are also amplified when a commercial element is introduced; beauty vloggers must not appear financially motivated. Within the beauty vlogging industry the risk of having un-pure motivations manifests through the introduction of sponsorship, or product placement. In short, the inclusion of commercial content presents a risk, which must be carefully negotiated and managed. For example, beauty vloggers often include a 'new' or unopened product, to add a seemingly spontaneous 'review' element to their videos. They assert that they are trying these products for the first time, often maintaining that they know little about the merchandise or the brand prior to its application. This style of performance enables the vloggers to capture a quasi-live or 'real time' reaction, and affords an implication that their views are un-mediated, directly opposed to the wooden and scripted connotations of an advertorial. For example, in one GRWM video, an A List vlogger from Brighton, Gabriella, integrates products that she has recently been gifted into her 'routine' make up application; "I got this foundation sent to me...ooh, that's quite nice..." and later, cracking a blusher palette out of its packaging "I'm trying out some new brushes today that I've been sent... honestly *so good* for blush ([Gabriella ♡, 2016](#)).

In a further (ludicrously overt) performance of authenticity labour, Scottish A List beauty vlogger Jamie Genevive is filming a make up tutorial vlog, when her doorbell loudly chimes

in the background. The viewer is left watching an empty chair, anticipating her return. Out of breath, she is back, carrying back three boxes of Tarte make up products, ostensibly just delivered by her postman. As she returns to her seat, we are reminded that luckily she has not applied her lip colour yet! She straightforwardly integrates the new delivery into her video, applying one of the lip glosses and crying “this lip colour is stunning” (Genevieve, 2016). Although a significant portion of the video is thereafter dedicated to discussing and trialling Tarte’s new (freshly delivered) Christmas themed range, this segment is represented as entirely spontaneous. It is certainly fortuitous for this company that they are given this airtime in a video with over 110,000 views. Ultimately, authenticity strategies afford a spontaneous and ‘natural’ presentation that allows vloggers to mix gifted, sponsored and non-sponsored products. As beauty vloggers use the pretext that they are ‘just getting ready’, to go out, this affords the inclusion of a significant number of paid and unpaid products, in a rotation that often proves difficult to disentangle.

It would be inaccurate to view these moments as deliberate deception. Rather, authenticity is a generically specific, and commercially informed self-presentation strategy. Indeed, Banet-Weiser argues that being read as authentic is often achieved through a managed and extremely cautious use of “self disclosure”, often borrowing from established branded logics and techniques (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 60). Throughout this Chapter, we will see how vloggers can pastiche these commercial techniques and logics which are acceptable to brands, and repurpose them in a vein that communicates authenticity to their audience. Authenticity, then, offers consistency, relatability and a very specific performance of intimacy. Part of this consistency affords staying *real*. Duffy (2017) shows that influencers’ performances of authenticity hinge on relatability, which practically means performing

authenticity in a way that is largely attainable in the lifestyle one leads, and the products one displays on their channels. Relatability, of course, is not available to all. Advertisers value certain markets over others, therefore, beauty vloggers are arguably performing relatability for a viable, desirable audience.

In sum, the work used to successfully manage these contexts is extremely laborious for beauty vloggers and significantly influences symbolic production. Advertisers are averse to uncertainty, especially in a media ecology which is already underpinned by risk (Andrejevic, 2009). Therefore, authenticity in this industry is underpinned by *consistency*: “it is not about how much one reveals or conceals, but about being measured against an ideal of honesty, that the information revealed has a constancy” (Marwick, 2013b: 121). Moreover, the specific and gendered nature of the vlogging industry must be attended to as it interpellates beauty vloggers towards a performance of intimacy with their followers (Abidin, 2015b). For beauty vloggers, authenticity *is* about how much one ‘reveals or conceals’, albeit along very specific lines. An authentic intimacy does not necessarily mean sharing one’s innermost secrets, rather, it entails giving the impression that one is sharing *enough* to evidence and corroborate one’s impression management. I will now consider the implications of this laborious authenticity work, which ultimately stratifies who can be considered authentic in the beauty vlogging industry.

Authenticity as Classed: The Opposite of Excess

Authenticity in the vlogging industry is underpinned by the politics, conditions and logics of a particular market. As I outlined in Chapter Three, YouTube as a platform continues to be

invested in communicating its viability to its stakeholders, namely, advertisers. Through processes of risk management, or rationalisation, YouTube fosters a market in which visibility is stratified by distinct performances of advertiser-friendliness which limits talk on, among other topics, sexuality, politics and 'profanity'. In Chapter Four, I discussed the role of the intermediary in legitimising beauty vloggers for brands underpinned by subjective definitions of 'brand friendliness' and avoidance of risk. Shaped by these organisational pressures, many visible beauty vloggers are eloquent, poised and meticulously groomed, evocative of McRobbie's earlier writing on "A1" girls, defined as "subjects *par excellence* and also subjects of excellence" (McRobbie, 2009). They are also the "can do girls", ambitious, confident but without the sassiness, or the sexuality, of the Girl Power era (Harris, 2004). In the following section, I argue beauty vlogging cultures' overpowering valuing and performance of their specifically *authentic* aesthetic can be read as an aggressive positioning within the habitus of popular, conservative middle class culture.

Beauty vlogging authenticity diverges from definitions of postfeminist authenticity. Firstly, there is a separation from overtly sexual, desiring self-presentations towards performances of an aggressively middle-class conservativeness and modesty. For Gill, a key component of the postfeminist sensibility was a move from "sex object to desiring sexual subject", in which women are presented as desiring subjects, emphasising that it is their choice to present as "up for it", who "play with their sexual power" and who curate self-presentations as stereotypically sexually alluring (Gill, 2007b: 151). The definitions of postfeminist authenticity, which are often built on Gill's work, define authenticity as underpinned by a willingness to connote sexual playfulness, a "heterosexy" femininity (Dobson, 2015: 63).

Keller argues that “postfeminist authenticity” is often highly individualised, confessional and “located in the body” (Keller, 2014:148) including through “breasts, buttocks, and hair” (Keller, 2014: 151). For Genz, women are impelled to create postfeminist, authentic self-brands within the “limiting script of consumer culture circumscribed by specific gender, class and sexual norms”, contributing to a specific “commodified authenticity” through the lens of class and gender (Genz, 2015: 457). Genz cites the journey of glamour model-cum-tabloid star, Katie Price, whose authenticity, she identifies, rests in her working-class ordinariness, coupled with entrepreneurship, which is at once hardworking, and at other times a brash and tasteless “sexual subjecthood” (Genz, 2015: 549) However, we will see in the following section, the specific authenticity performed by beauty vloggers cannot be constructed using these tools within the political economy of the vlogging industry.

Authenticity provides individuals with a vehicle through which to stake a claim for a right to a particular identity, or inclusion in a community (Marwick, 2013b; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Taking this into account, it is important to consider that ‘taste’ is often weaponised in a similar vein. As Bourdieu observes “explicit aesthetic choices are in fact often constituted in opposition to the choices of the groups closest in social space, with whom the competition is most direct and most immediate” (Bourdieu, 2000: 60). Brand value is accrued through beauty vloggers forging and maintaining a distance from performed or lived *working class identities* (Skeggs, 1997). In an examination of mostly male vloggers in the UK, it has been pointed out that on YouTube, “authenticity can operate as a form of class distinction”, the binary opposition of ‘authentic YouTube’ is reality television stars (Morris & Anderson, 2015: 6). A recent spate of reality television has focussed on the ‘workless poor’, for example Geordie Shore, Jersey Shore and the Only Way Is Essex (Grindstaff, 2011; Woods,

2014). These shows foreground stereotypes of excess femininity, the 'girls' have "excessively long 'mermaid hair' extensions, extended false fingernails, eyelashes, high-definition and exaggerated eyebrows, some breast augmentation and deep orange tans" (Wood, 2017: 45). Class disgust for the excess engendered by these figures has roots in the "fear of a newly mobile class" (Biressi & Nunn, 2016: 39). This is pertinent, as beauty vloggers operate within a similar period of social change, they also represent a potentially disruptive newness. These young women present a risk, which must be mitigated through branding. Reality television has its own specific logics of authenticity, which are also underpinned by honesty and consistency. However, their embrace of spectacular leisure and excess is in binary opposition to the middle class, responsible and respectable authenticity and femininity that is performed by A List beauty vloggers.

For beauty vloggers, a primary *risk* is that spectacular application of beauty and cosmetic products could mark them as 'excessive', and therefore working class in contradiction to the required tenets of authenticity that construct brand value. A-List beauty vloggers possess the symbolic capital that permits them to bear authentic *respectability*, as Bourdieu notes, for the middle classes, "[beauty is]... as much opposed to the abdications of vulgarity as to ugliness" (Bourdieu, 2000: 207) . For Bourdieu, "vulgarity" is defined as what is natural, aligned with necessity, it is "easy and common" (Bourdieu, 2000: 179). The focus on the performance of a highly stylised authentic performance of 'natural' beauty is therefore implemented as a rejection of the body's natural state of 'vulgarity', its unboundness. Beauty vlogging authenticity thus encompasses a disciplined and managed authenticity, that runs contrary to the white working classes' "perceived excess of (bodily) materiality" which also evokes the natural, the undisciplined, the abject (Tyler et al., 2008:9). To refer to one

relevant example, White (2015) observed that many beauty bloggers temper and strictly sanction their use of glitter products to ensure respectability, femininity and appropriateness. Various technologies and strategies were deployed to navigate the risk of excess, for example layering several clear polishes on top of glitter nails to dull their sparkle (White, 2015).

A List beauty vloggers use a high quantity of cosmetic products, often upwards of 15 per 'look', however the majority of content is themed around a performed 'natural' or 'everyday' aesthetic. Examples of this trend include Zoella videos titled "Everyday Winter MakeUp Routine", Tanya Burr's "My Spring Morning Routine", and Niomi Smart's video entitled "My No Make Up Make Up Routine". In their embrace of the 'natural' and 'everyday', beauty vloggers embody the fresh faced beauty of the commercial or catalogue model, traditionally targeted towards manufactured audiences of "conservative middle-class people with mainstream taste" (Mears, 2011: 163). Beauty vloggers' routine language patterns consistently promote restraint and limitation. For example, in a 16 minute long video, "My Make Up Routine for Problem Skin Days" Zoella (2017) directs her viewers to apply "a little bit" of product 8 times and to use "a tiny bit" 6 times. To ensure one is using make up both responsibly and respectably is to refrain from spilling over the understood boundaries of the face, the understood quantities of what is appropriate. What is 'too much' is never specified but it is *known* implicitly, through the social capital and knowledge of middle class taste that enable vloggers such as Zoella to claim restraint in the application of often 15 individual products. The interpellation to follow instructions closely injects a moral imperative; vloggers preach the importance of ensuring the *correct application* of the make-up purchased, in responsible amounts. The lines between too much, and not enough

are fine and perilous, every brush stroke is potentially imbued with a sense of risk. The risk of excessive application are often articulated, infused with class tinged stereotypes, around the overuse of blusher “I’m not trying to look like I’ve been on holiday for a week”, or too much highlighter as it can “accentuate bumps and spots” (Zoella, 2017a).

Authenticity, Not Glamour

For UK based A List beauty vloggers, authenticity also rests in eschewing the use of bold, heavy or dramatic make up, a style hereby defined as glamour. As Skeggs asserts, glamour often exists on a knife edge between femininity and sexuality, “it is a way of holding together sexuality and respectability, but it is difficult to achieve” (Skeggs, 1997: 111).

Conceptions of glamour are complex and ambivalent when intersected with the theorisation of taste and class. McRobbie notes “glamour carries all the marks of hard work” and argues it is often synonymous with working-class failures to achieve elegance, fashion and chicness (McRobbie, 2009: 132). Moreover, glamour is “always read as 'degrading' unless 'protected' and defended by other marks of middle-class respectability (such as education or wealth)” (Pearce, 1995 in Skeggs, 1997: 110). In neoliberal society that is concerned with viewing the life course as a journey or project, the feminine subject in particular is recognised as at risk of “constantly failing”, to construct themselves convincingly as feminine, to be self-actualised and self-realised (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008: 229). The ability to present natural and beautiful make up runs a significant risk of rupture and offers a potential for the failure of both femininity and respectability. There is a risk being that the ‘glam’ spills over the culturally drawn lines of middle class acceptability and overflows into excess. Being on the right side of the line that divides stylishly minimal and monstrously excessive cosmetic

looks is important to a vloggers' visibility, success and financial viability. However, the physical manifestation of these boundaries can be seemingly arbitrary, even amongst longstanding participants.

One strategy deployed by vloggers to negotiate this precarious positioning is vlog narration, in which the vlogger verbally describes the cosmetic application process, and announces its intended effect. This description of makeup application could be viewed as "speech acts" (Goffman, 1981: 67), in other words, beauty vloggers' attempts to transfigure and legitimise their 'look' through utterances. As A List beauty vlogger Rachel Leary describes her makeup as "minimal, matt and basic", she attempts to call it into being as thus (Leary, 2017). Of course, her audience may not believe this description. Depending on the accompanying context and physical act, speech acts have the potential to be unsuccessful, in that they fail to convince or to be deemed as trustworthy by their audience. Goffman argues, "contexts might be classified according to the way they affect the illocutionary force of statements made in them", the "illocutionary force" in this context "is the intention of the 'speech act', which has the potential to either succeed or fail in its reception, depending on the context of its use" (Goffman, 1981: 67). I argue the success of the speech act is contingent on the cultural capital of the vlogger. A lack of cultural capital can cause uncertainty, but its possession can be mobilised and exchanged for visibility, legitimacy and financial capital.

A performance of authenticity and accessibility remains essential for this positioning: "for the middle-classes, authenticity has moral and exchange- value, but also offers protection against accusations of pretentiousness" (Skeggs, 2003: 23). A strategy deployed by vloggers to negotiate risk and maintain respectability within make up use is through deploying the

occasional application of glamorous cosmetics, which are dark, glittery, shiny, obvious and recognisable as makeup, alongside a neutralising narrative of heterosexual romance. Thus, I argue to temper the application of glamorous makeup, it can be applied in the context of a long term, monogamous amour. Beauty vlogger Tanya Burr (2017) only dares to instruct in something so risqué as a smoky eye in her “Smoky Valentines Date Night Make Up Tutorial”. Similarly Estée Lalonde (2016a) offsets the dangerous allure of scarlet lipstick by demonstrating how she would wear it on fictional dates with her long term boyfriend to the museum, dinner and plant shopping⁸. Indeed, in the rare instance ‘A List’ vloggers do produce glamorous looks, the representation of glamour is overwhelmingly limited to appropriate events where the presence of a well-known male companion neutralises this glamour. The fear of surplus runs through vlogging videos, an awareness of the monstrosity or working class connotations of ‘too much’ make up, when this is not culturally sanctioned or appropriate. For vloggers this is often anticipated and pre-policed, through reflexively commenting on what their “imagined audience” may say (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In one video, A List vlogger Rachel Leary applies a Barbie-esque pastel pale lipstick shade, but notes “*you guys* are probably going to say that it is super pale, and I was well aware, so I do go back in with the pencil to make it a bit less bright” (Leary, 2017). Speaking to her audience as if she has already anticipated their criticisms is symptomatic of how self-surveillance becomes intertwined with an awareness of the regulation of the “girlfriend gaze”, a “homosocial surveillance” which takes the form of “loving meanness” that arises from distilled neoliberal individualism and mutual governance (Winch, 2013: 28).

⁸ Lalonde and her partner broke-up in late 2017, and she has since refrained from any ‘evening’ makeup content, choosing instead titles such as “Self Loving Skincare Routine”

Fashion industries, and cosmetics marketing, consistently position makeup use as a free, artistic or creative pursuit. The term 'creativity' used in this vein can work as a 'cure all' buzz word to promote freedom and pleasures that mask a reality of precarity and individualisation (McRobbie, 2015). This theme extends to beauty vlogs, for example Zoella regularly describes her job as creative and artistic, for example in 2014 she tweeted "makeup is fun & creative" (Zoella, 2014). Similarly, Tanya Burr has told press she started her vlog as a "creative outlet" (Barns, 2014). The link between vlogging and creativity will be fully explored in full in the following Chapter, which centres on beauty vlogging as a pathway and realisation of employment. However, for now, creativity discourses intersect with the vlogging industry's' promise of recognition for those who rise to visibility as skilled and dedicated creative entrepreneurs. The architectures and culture of YouTube impels beauty vloggers to use make up somewhat creatively. To ensure longevity in the 'vlogging industry' one must regularly create and upload ostensibly fresh content. Regular uploads ensure the continued algorithmic visibility of YouTube channels in an overcrowded attention economy. As Bartky (1990) argues, however, it is necessary to problematise the idea that this make up use could be 'free' or symptomatic of 'self-expression':

While some variation in make-up is permitted depending on the occasion, making up the face is, in fact, a highly stylized activity that gives little rein to self-expression. Painting the face is not like painting a picture, it might be described as painting the same picture over and over again with minor variations (Bartky, 1990: 100).

Building on this point, rather than a free-for-all of high-art make up concepts, beauty vlogs can be understood as a rotating demonstration of 'appropriate' makeup variations. They

involve reciting the steps towards acceptability and respectability, demonstrating their understanding and expertise of what look should be employed, when, and how. For example, A List beauty vlogger Rachel Leary creates content symptomatic of the GRWM genre in that she opens her videos by explicitly outlining the reasons that her look is suitable for her intended location. She provides an introductory assessment of whether the occasion or event requires 'glam', or whether she has a responsibility to be more natural, or to perhaps wear a 'glam face' but to temper it with a more casual outfit. For her 'wedding guest' look she notes, "I'm just going to be a guest, I'm not going to be a bridesmaid or anything like that... so I thought this would be appropriate", for a concert, "it's a glam look, and kind of like casual...in the clothing but kind of like a full beat face", date night "a soft glam makeup look... it makes an impact without being too heavy", birthday make up "it's for the daytime so nothing too crazy", simple summer everyday makeup "something, minimal matte and quite basic".

As trends shift and move, the distinction of the 'A List' vloggers is maintained through their apparently innate knowledge of the lines and demarcations of good taste, which must also shift to envelop a distinguished application of the seasons' new products and techniques. A video genre that reflects the seasonality of performances of acceptability, and how this is managed, is the 'Reacts' video genre, in which a YouTuber watches their older video output, offering commentary and 'cringing' at their makeup, hair styling and sartorial choices. In one video Zoella looks at her old photographs and scrutinises her past fashion and beauty mistakes (Zoella, 2017b). Examining one statement gold necklace she cries "what was that necklace all about though? Seriously, what was that?", on her long curled hair "my hair's so long and like, straggly", and pertaining to her thinly kept eyebrows (a 1990s and 2000s

trend, and a source of much hilarity in vlogging) she laughs, crying “my eyebrows, where are my eyebrows!?”. The lines drawn between appropriate and inappropriate conduct are essential to recognise, but at the same time present a challenge as they are kinetic and thin. In what remains of this Chapter I reflect on how these lines actually manifest (in the current moment), and how they are mobilised. I identify the often hairline cracks that distinguish the acceptable and non-acceptable in cosmetic application and beauty techniques, including the use of shine, glitter, make up colours, hair volume and so on. One of the clearest lines that marks authenticity is drawn around whiteness. Although all beauty vloggers labour to ensure their content is seen as authentic, black women, and other women of colour have a more ambivalent relationship with this term. In the following section I will examine how authenticity labour is raced. In the section I provide a wider platform context, and then examine the raced demarcation of visibility labour, through making visible the whiteness of authenticity in the UK vlogging industry.

Managing Race: Creators For Change

I have outlined how beauty vlogging authenticity engenders a specific middle class respectability, but in this following section, I argue successful authenticity in the vlogging industry is also underpinned by a fixed performance of raced femininity. Ahmed (2007) observes that whiteness is constructed through ‘habits’ that in turn construct public spaces; “contours of the space could be describes as habitual”, moreover, “white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated ‘towards’ it” (Ahmed, 2007: 156). As the A List vlogging industry is a white space, such “spaces are orientated ‘around’ whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen” (Ahmed, 2007: 147). Whiteness being viewed as invisible is

systematic in society, but race-making, as it shapes cultural spaces is common within cultural industries, within which people of colour must often act in specific ways to achieve visibility (Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013; Negus, 1999; Saha, 2018). In particular, A List vloggers are “good girls”, a label that taps into racist logics as it is unevenly associated with innocence and the social order and societal and media representations of whiteness (Biressi, 2018). With this in mind, I will now contextualise the forthcoming section on the beauty vlogging industry as raced. First, I demonstrate how a diversity initiative offered by YouTube, entitled the Creators for Change programme, is used to manage charges of prejudice against the platform while containing cultural production by people of colour. I argue this initiative works to ‘other’ non-white vloggers, and as it reinforces and reifies the boundaries of white visibility on the platform.

Saha (2013, 2018) observes that people of colour who work in cultural industries must often perform their race in a way that is expected, and legitimised, by hegemonic culture. He argues “part of the value of non-white people in a particular setting is tied to their non-whiteness, which they are subtly – or not so subtly – encouraged to perform in a way that meets the approval of the dominant culture” (Saha, 2018: 92). One example of vloggers of colour being othered in a vein that reproduces the broad whiteness of the UK vlogging industry is the YouTube Creators for Change project. The annual project was awarded \$4.5 million in funding in 2018, for YouTubers who perform a marketable brand of ‘social good’, namely “creators who are tackling social issues promoting awareness, tolerance and empathy on their YouTube channels” (YouTube, 2018e). Despite the whiteness of popular YouTube, Creators for Change is more broadly representative of the racial makeup of UK society. However, the creators’ racial background, and the role they play in, what is often

euphemistically defined as their ‘communities’, underpins and stratifies their inclusion in the initiative. For example, the 7 British creators include Humza Productions, a Pakistani vlogger who produces videos about “extremism, diversity mental health and gang violence”; Nadir Nadhi of BENI whose channel highlights “young people from diverse backgrounds through meaningful and visually engaging content” and Riydah K, an Iraqi-Irish vlogger who produces content aligned with “comedy, equality and anti-bullying” (YouTube, 2018e). In these descriptions we can see how the initiative is symptomatic of “diversity initiatives”, as it is intended to “provide a positive, shiny image of the organisation”, which in reality obscures systematic and significant inequalities within the vlogging industry (Ahmed, 2012: 72). A brand-able and ‘acceptable’ performance of race informs visibility within the context of the project and their wider channels.

Creators for Change is a pathway through which YouTube have committed to funding an extended group of YouTubers, outside of the white A List. However, those included must perform their race in a manner that is legible, respectable and focussed towards ‘social good’ and ‘impact’. Although those selected for the Creators for Change programme are awarded funding and mentorship, these resources are limited in that they must be utilised to support social impact projects that are informed by participants as racial minorities. These individuals are set aside from the mainstream vlogging industry and impelled to create content that is within the remit of the project. Furthermore, the Creators for Change project is located outside of commerciality; the initiative borrows from the language of charity, and success is measured through “yearly reports” rather than metrics and advertising dollars (YouTube, 2016). The programme looks outward towards community issue, of hate-speech and bullying, rather than looking inwards to the platforms’ own

inequalities. This is symptomatic of many diversity initiatives which “transfer responsibility for persistent inequality to external causes” (Mellinger, 2003: 131). Arguably, it is significant that Creators for Change funds creators of colour *outside of* the market ecology of branded sponsorships, and outside of the talent agencies conceptualised in the previous Chapter. This plays into, and strengthens, the “industry lore” that minority beauty vloggers are less commercially viable (Havens, 2014a). I will now specifically concentrate on the content of one UK based black beauty vlogger: A List vlogger Patricia Bright. I study the ambivalence around the labours and performances at the intersection of race and labour, authenticity and respectability.

Authenticity as Raced: Patricia Bright

Patricia Bright is the London-born daughter of Nigerian parents who vlogs on themes aligned with beauty, fashion, and haircare. Bright is one of the few black A List vloggers to have traversed the boundaries of traditional celebrification: she has 2.5 million YouTube subscribers⁹, has been featured on the cover of Glamour magazine, and was announced as a L’Oréal ambassador in 2017. In her own content, Bright promotes authenticity through articulating labour and entrepreneurship, secondly through mitigating the use of glamour through medicalising discourse, and thirdly through the performance of respectability. As one of the first black UK beauty vloggers to be contracted by the organisation, she is represented as honest and real. In L’Oréal’s slickly produced announcement video for Bright as ambassador, she interweaves the brand’s famous brand slogan with her own brand of authenticity. “because we’re all worth it, *means truth*, and I’m glad someone’s saying it”

⁹ As of 09/09/2018

(L'Oréal Paris UK & Ireland, 2017). However, in addition to authenticity, her visibility as a L'Oréal ambassador is imbued with a deeper meaning. Emotional strings swell as she concludes the video, "it's so important for every little girl to see a face that looks like them to let them know that they are worth it". Bright's self-brand is underscored by a very specific, and strategic, performance of authenticity that draws from a dramatisation of honesty, entrepreneurship, labour and morality.

Black vloggers are sought by those hoping to attain access to divergent and 'niche' (minority) markets, and in this vein Bright has questioned her *relatability* for mainstream (white) audiences. In a YouTube interview for the UK fashion and beauty rag, Glamour magazine, she articulates her concerns when she started out that "not everyone would know where I came from or necessarily relate to me" (Glamour, 2018a). This quote is striking in the context of Bright's inclusion as a Glamour magazine cover star, of the issue that this YouTube video is promoting: Bright is the *cover star*. However, she features as just one of three covers of the same issue, the alternatives being white beauty vlogger Zoella, and the other being Iraqi-American beauty Instagrammer Huda Kattan. Audiences thus have the option of 'opting out' of picking up a cover featuring a woman of colour (Bright or Kattan) by selecting the cover featuring Zoella. Glamour's promotional coverage of Bright is marked by her by her race, as she inhabits a binary beauty to white beauty, which is, "the dominant beauty paradigm which privileges white/light skin, straight hair and what are seen to be European facial features" (Tate, 2007: 301). In the magazine issues marketing she is described as "shaking up" the beauty industry, and as holding "the industry to account" due to a lack of "black role models" (Glamour, 2018a).

Whilst Zoella's coverage in the same issue takes up themes such as her relationship and her anxiety disorder, Bright's coverage often rests on her race. She is asked questions such as "as a young black woman growing up in the UK today do you believe opportunities were open to you?" (Glamour, 2018a). Her responses to these questions are often highly individualised and focussed on confidence and drawing from within: "I think one of the barriers is sometimes not believing you can necessarily do it... you can break through it". Bright communicates authenticity through strategically demonstrating the work involved in building her brand. Bright is the "can do girl" in that she is "individualised, resilient, self-driven and self-made" with a drive towards "flexibility and self-actualisation" (Harris, 2004: 16). However, there is an ambivalence here: Bright has described the realities of existing within the vlogging industry: "one of the white content creators shared with me how much money she was making. Even though we had the same number of subscribers, I wasn't even making a fifth of what she was making" (Weatherford, 2018). Such a statement, however, is rare. Through demonstrating astute and creative consumption, or as she puts it, "making it work", Bright has assured her audience and brands alike of her position as a young woman who can straightforwardly negotiate challenges.

In her videos, she consistently highlights her passion and productivity, for example by articulating her drive to labour beyond the bounds of the 9-5 working day: "I come home at the end of the day, or the weekends, and I'm the kind of person, like hmmm what work could I be doing, what could I be creating, what ideas do I have?" (Bright, 2016). This kind of talk symptomatic of "do what you love" discourses, in which precarious, unstable and piecemeal employment are idealised in online marketplaces, in which individuals "internalize, and even glamorize, various employment risks" (Duffy & Hund, 2015: 2). The

relationship between discourses of passion, entrepreneurship, creativity employment is explored fully in Chapter Six. For now, it is worth considering how Bright draws from these discourses, in addition to articulating the specific labour required as a black beauty vlogger, for example, by discussing the difficulty in finding matching cosmetic products for her skin tone.

Like many other black beauty vloggers, Bright's journey to YouTube visibility came through raced hair videos. Indeed, hair videos are one of the primary, and sometimes the sole, ways black beauty vloggers can achieve sponsorship and visibility on YouTube. For example, Avery, a black beauty vlogger from London, said at a beauty vlogging event: "for most of the black community... and for me, my way in was hair, hair reviews". SunKissedAlba the only black beauty vlogger listed on talent agency Gleam Future's roster is promoted through her haircare focus "Alba is best known for her natural hair videos" (Gleam Futures, 2017). Bright has stated "I started on YouTube by sharing hair care", although she has publicly described her ambivalence with her labelling as a hair expert, for example publishing a blog post entitled "I AM NOT MY HAIR" (Bright, 2017a). The dominant themes of haircare in black beauty vlogging may be thought of politically, as a method for women to access "a sense of agency and reclamation of diasporic identity" (Sobande, 2017: 668). These videos can function as an often community-generated resource for hair care advice and product recommendations. However, we should question the fact that white women have access to a plethora of sponsorship opportunities, while black YouTubers' potential for authentically reaching a market is constructed by their 'otherness', a specifically raced market. I argue that it should not be overlooked the difficulty for black vloggers to make visible content outside of the bounds of hair.

Bright's strategic narration of her work makes visible the excess labour necessitated for black women in terms of purchasing beauty products, as many products are overwhelmingly designed for, and catered to white skin, bodies and hair. Speaking on Kim Kardashian's new range of lipsticks, she notes "sometimes you've got to make it work, as a woman of colour... we've been making it work for a long, long time" (Bright, 2017b). Her statement here draws attention to the creativity and industriousness that are required of black beauty vloggers. It is work to find, mix and appropriate the limited cosmetics available in suitable palettes, in addition to developing skills and expertise in order to use the products in specific ways. Upon trying Jennifer Lopez's new line Bright cheerfully addresses the paleness of the products, and demonstrates how she will mix the cosmetics with darker colours available from other brands. She states: "I have a feeling some of these items are going to be a *little* bit ghostly on me, so I'm probably going to go ahead and mix that with some HUDA beauty" (Bright, 2018). Bright here normalises a process necessitating resourcefulness and expertise, in which multiple products must be mixed together before they can be applied to black skin. The products, in their un-doctored state, are unusable. This work, in addition to the rejection of 'laziness' and 'excuses', are a key theme in Bright's videos (Harris, 2004). Supplementary labour and expense are required for Bright to successfully negotiate the aesthetic and entrepreneurial risk of being unable to access products, which would jeopardise her claims to expertise. As discussed in Chapter Three, vloggers are required to be flexible, responding to popular and trending keywords. Failing to optimise content in accordance with the popular, and widely covered, releases of Jennifer Lopez's and Kim Kardashian's trending products suggests a risk of platform invisibility.

In beauty vlogs, black bodies are intensely surveilled and reflected on, as they are at risk of being othered in ways that white women's bodies are not. Black beauty vloggers must therefore foreground their authenticity more carefully and deliberately, within narrower bounds of what is acceptable. For Bright, being authentically beautiful is not about what is visible or attractive to others, it is intertwined with discourses of health, wellness, confidence and self-respect. Despite frequently using weaves and wigs, Bright discusses the importance of keeping her 'natural' hair in good condition through various labours, noting "just because I wear weaves and extensions it isn't an excuse to let it turn into a dry crusty mess" (Bright, 2017c). In other words, even if you are the only one who is aware your hair is 'crusty' you are letting yourself down. This extensive scrutiny of the microcosms of the self is typical of a trend towards laser-focussed hyper surveillance in beauty culture, with brands offering more and more technological solutions which tackle a tinier, specific minutia of issues (Elias & Gill, 2018). Although much of Bright's content concerns hair extensions and weaves, the excess and glamour of 'fake' hair become a hurdle to negotiate in terms of an authentic performance.

To mitigate the risk of fake hair, Bright's hair-themed blogs and vlogs are also sponsored by purveyors of hair technologies. Brands include SugarBearHair multivitamins, Nice 'N Easy Colour Enhancer and cosmetic company Benefit in one sponsored video, which includes 14 individual eyebrow products and tools. Indeed, Bright's videos are also symptomatic of the vlogging industry's trend towards incorporating a greater number of products and steps, as the genre matures. As Dosekun (2016) observes, "beauty [is] now thoroughly technologized and commodified, hence with sufficient effort, skill and disposable income beauty [is] attainable albeit iteratively" (Dosekun, 2016: 170). Partly in a quest for fresh and new

'content' more steps are added to beauty routines and the goal posts of achievable beauty are moved again and again: beauty necessitates *one more* product, the addition of one more step. In turn, more and more technologies are often deployed to mitigate the risk for bodies from engaging in these often harm-causing practices, including the use of weaves, false nails and hair-bleaching. Beauty vlogs regularly include the promotion of myriad makeup removing oils, balms, waters, moisturises, barriers, hair masks, oils and so on. So, in addition to the purchase of more products to apply to the skin, face, hair and nails, participation in beauty vlogging necessitates the purchase and use of enhanced products or technologies to mitigate the risk to bodily harm.

Patricia Bright: Authenticity and Respectability

Although Bright does utilise glamour, authenticity labour and performance is deployed to mitigate connotations of fakeness. As this Chapter has argued, beauty vloggers are invested in performing an authentic beauty that is shot through with relatability: they must be pretty, but not too pretty, distinctive, but not shine too brightly. Shine, like glamour, comes with the markings of "hard work" (McRobbie, 2009: 123). Shine is risky: misplaced shine becomes excess, then it becomes grease, and then it is ultimately dirt. As Douglas put it, "dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (Douglas, 2005: 36). In this case 'inappropriate' matter is misplaced glitter powder and highlighter. Dirt is antithetical to respectable femininity respectability necessitated by the vlogging industry. The beauty vlogger must avoid what has been termed "the age-old lexicon young working class women

as unruly and unclean” (Biressi & Nunn, 2016: 41). Cosmetics must stay inside the lines.

However, shine is brighter on black skin, and thus more hazardous.

To address this, Bright articulates a pathological need for shine, due to her ‘overall dryness’, which is normalised and raced: “as a woman of colour I have been more crusty than not” (Bright, 2017c). In this video it is shine, moisture and ‘glam’ that are offered as a panacea for this general malaise/dryness, therefore this video provides an interesting example of how of ‘shine’ and ‘glam’ can be justified in the GRWM genre, in this case as a pathological solution or cure. Nguen (2011) argues that the call to beauty, as it is intertwined with ideas of dignity, health and wellness, is an extension of control over bodily health that Foucault recognises as an “biopower”:

Through instruction on the proper care of the self, [the] makeover imperative produces normative notions about what counts as healthy versus pathological bodies, converting social and moral statements into truth statements about the self.. validated then by the signs of parascientific expertise. (Nguyen, 2011)

To lend legitimacy to this process, the ‘glam’ and ‘shiny’ cosmetic products used are described using pseudo-scientific terminology, for example “hydra veil”, “lash sculpt”, “visible plumping” (Bright, 2017c). Pathologising discourse detaches these products from connotations of sexiness. However, even with their medical implications, the various risks of excess in wearing these products are also closely managed by Bright, who continues to warn against the use of *too much* shine, beseeching her audience “please do not look at my extremely overly moisturised lips”, and using a primer to stop shine, that mainly “stops you

from being oily”. The use of shine is ambivalent within the beauty vlog and must be monitored closely and used in extreme moderation. The performance of acceptable and respectable authentic femininity is very finely attended to by vloggers using the, often resourceful, techniques described. Although the YouTube platform necessitates the regular upload of differentiated video content to attain visibility, beauty vloggers could be seen to utilise creative justifications to offset looks that could be judged as ‘excessive’, including this example of Bright’s ostensibly medically sanctioned use of cosmetic shine.

Bright’s instructional vlogs are often centred on the body, in how to present oneself *respectably*. To this end, I will now concentrate on the video “HOW TO BE SEXY WITHOUT BEING NAKED????” (Bright, 2017d). Although the video is clear in its intention of linking excessive sexuality with nakedness, Bright notes she does not set out to “slut shame”:

Isn't slutty a horrible... word. In this video we are not about to slut shame, or criticise or judge anyone for the decisions they want to make... however I'm not going to sit here and lie and pretend I'm not a teeny-weeny bit tired of seeing under boob and vagina walls... I'm tired of seeing so many girls' butt cracks, and this is not the only way... to be sexy (Bright, 2017d)

These opening segments draw from what Gill (2016) terms “post-post feminism”, the commercial repurposing, detachment and dilution of, of feminist terminologies. Ultimately, the content of the video is far from radical, and doubles down on instruction of acceptable and respectable feminine and authentic behaviours. Bright gives instructions on how to be sexy without showing your “butt crack”; through good personal hygiene “being stinky is not

[sexy]”; appropriate body language “babes straighten that back up”; dressing modestly “sometimes leave some things to the imagination”; maintaining direct eye contact without looking frightening “you can look scary if you are far too beady”; showing ‘some’ skin if it is appropriate (but only if you have the “boobs” or “bum” for it); reading and learning about a specialist topic “being sexy doesn’t mean being an airhead”; but ultimately Bright insists really, being sexy is about being happy with yourself (Bright, 2017d).

The talk in this video echoes the ‘Love Your Body’ discourse’s emphasis on the health of one’s psychic life, as they often increase subjectification of women to mandate a “beautiful mind” in addition to a beautiful body (Gill & Elias, 2014: 185). Bright’s insistence on being happy and confident has a strong moral imperative. In the video, she articulates the intensified pressures on women to be poised, attractive and to spend their time ‘making over their minds’ in addition to applying cosmetics. Ultimately, it should be recognised that every instruction Bright gives is in direct contradiction to the “fairly consistent characterisation.... of people of colour as undisciplined, unrefined, primitive, exotic, inappropriately sexual, emotional, and unstable” (Shugart, 2007: 118). Bright positions herself in strict opposition to these stereotypes, offering up herself as an example of how to be both sexy and respectable, regularly inviting viewers to be like her, or by actively demonstrating the instruction. To be authentically poised, or as Bright states “permanently posing” necessitates a significant amount of strict emotional and physical labour. This involves constant awareness, surveying and disciplining of the body. Here, I do not intend to position Bright as a cultural dupe who is blindly reciting the politics of white respectability. Rather, I seek to highlight the performative ‘authenticity’ self-branding work Bright is undertaking, as she situates herself in opposition to stereotypical themes of black and

working-class body excess. This work is similar to that performed by Zoella discussed earlier in the Chapter, as she impels her audience to apply cosmetics in smaller and responsible amounts. However, Bright's video both makes visible and naturalises the exponential emotional and aesthetic labour to discipline the whole body, both as authentically beautiful and as respectably middle class through the dominance of traditional discourse within new media platforms (Joseph, 2009; Wissinger, 2012). In the following section, I reflect on the specific labour used in the face of a scandal or transgression, studying the example of the 'anxiety video' genre.

Restoring Authenticity and the Anxiety Video

In YouTube anxiety videos, the beauty vlogger discusses their personal experiences of generalised anxiety disorder, social anxiety or depression. This video genre is often used to restore the beauty vloggers' authenticity following a public transgression. The strategic performance of emotion has a history in celebrity industries. As Nunn & Biressi (2010) observe, celebrities often publicly discuss a "tragedy or serious disfunction" following a scandal, this is a form of emotional labour, used as a "means of attempted self-validation and often rehabilitation of the damaged celebrity persona" (Nunn & Biressi, 2010: 50). Due to the hyper-classed and gendered nature of authenticity required by the beauty vlogger, the range of acceptable and available scandals are limited. Their young audience, and requirement towards respectability mean that drugs, booze or discussions of more serious forms of child abuse are out. Anxiety disorder, however, is on the table.

The fragility and domesticity evoked by white, middle class, female anxiety is the ultimate return to days of more acceptable (white) femininity (Biressi, 2018; Shome, 2001). Often, the anxiety video pathologizes, thus justifies and neutralises, failings and transgressions that can threaten a beauty vlogger's designation as authentic. Some of these videos clearly signpost this content by featuring "anxiety" in the title; examples include "Dealing with Panic Attacks and Anxiety" (Zoella, 2012) and "Anxiety Chat!" (Tanya Burr, 2015). Other beauty vloggers reveal their anxiety disorder under more cryptic titles including "STUFF YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME" (Lalonde, 2016b) and "The Big Chat" (Sprinkleofglitter, 2014). The anxiety video is essentially a heartfelt and intense reflection on one's own mental health, almost exclusively performed by *female* beauty vloggers, in the domestic space of the bedroom. The anxiety video genre fits neatly within a feminised neoliberal "self-help culture": discussion is often pathologised and pedagogical, instructive and normalising (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Beauty vloggers suggest that they are revealing their own struggles with anxiety as a means to *help* their viewers with similar issues. However, they are often published during an instance of a public transgression. In these cases, beauty vloggers draw on the anxiety video to signpost, and support their self-branding as authentic. The deployment of these videos is strategic, utilised against a charge of 'fakeness', a high-risk accusation that can deflate a channel's popularity. An illustrative example is a video entitled "Honesty", published by white, Brighton-based beauty vlogger Gabriella in 2016 to address several scandals that threatened the longevity of her brand.

The story begins in 2013. During this time, Gabriella participated in several popular YouTube collaborations with Zoella, thrusting her into the spotlight and A List status. However, her success was soon jeopardised by her designation as an online bully. She occasionally replied

curtly to negative comments on her social media platforms, and she also blocked the viewers who were posting such comments. Audiences publicly performed their disappointment with her actions by posting on forums such as Guru Gossip and on social media platforms. This was a high-risk moment for Gabriella, whose carefully built brand was in jeopardy. In 2015, Gabriella's followers began attacking the commercial organisations she was working with. News articles about her collaborations with the clothing brand Primark were flooded complaints about her online conduct. In one example, she is both unfavourably compared to Zoella (a 'positive role model'), and designated a bully;

Of all the youtubers [sic] Primark could have picked they picked Gabriella? Only reason why I can think is that Primark couldn't get Zoe so they chose Gab before they had fell out. By no means am I a fan of Zoella, Tanya et.c, [sic] but at least they are positive role models for young girls unlike this idiot. (Barns, 2015).

This comment, and many others like it, are contingent on a belief that Gabriella's behaviour was inappropriate, and a form of bullying that should not be condoned by a deal with a brand such as Primark. Audiences actively labour to prohibit brands from working with vloggers they deem to be inappropriate, whilst protecting vloggers who they assess to be good role models. This vitriolic response from audiences, and the real possibilities of considerable harm to a vloggers' brands, demonstrates the risk involved when a vlogger speaks out critically, or performs anything other than authentic femininity that also conforms to industry norms, prioritising the protection of brands. The anxiety genre provides opportunities to reset, to reposition the beauty vlogger as a point of identification and to remind her viewers 'I'm just like you'.

Gabriella's anxiety video (entitled "Honesty") was published shortly after the negative backlash she experienced, in a direct attempt to address her transgressions ([Gabriella ♡, 2015](#)). Gabriella used the anxiety video as an attempt to redeem her personal brand from being labelled as a bully, shifting it back to an authentic and flawed beauty vlogger. Rose begs for forgiveness for being outspoken and critical, she apologises profusely for calling out people using Instagram and Twitter, saying "I had a lot of strong opinions... much stronger than I do now... and I was so unhappy within myself". Gabriella apologises for posting her negative emotions online, expressing guilt about burdening her fan base with her depressive thoughts. She says "I'm trying to be a lot happier.... I'm trying to control things that I say and how I do things on the internet". As is typical for a video of this genre, Rose begins the video with an allusion to reveal a true identity, however she is explicit about the ends she is hoping to achieve. She states "I don't want to keep things in anymore ... I would rather you just know things... and then hopefully you can get back to liking me" (Rose, 2015). Here, Rose makes clear that she has to labour to present herself in the manner that is required for her job as a vlogger. However, ultimately the negative feelings alluded to behind this surface are described as unnatural and dark; it is only someone who was in a *bad* place that would speak out against negative comments. Rather, Gabriella states she is on a quest to improve herself. She states "I don't want that in my life, I'm trying to do things to make myself happy, I just want to live a healthy lifestyle and be happy with what I do again" ([Gabriella ♡, 2015](#)).

Gabriella's anxiety and depression are inscribed as an individual burden, as her responsibility. As discussed earlier, some social performances are contingent on the

dramatisation of expressions, which are executed in a vein that makes the inner workings of the role obvious to their intended audience. In this vein, she demonstrates her emotions in an orchestrated and prosaic manner: the thumbnail image is of a single tear, running down her cheek, the video edited roughly, she rambles and her voice breaks, her window is open and background noise floods the video, the sun moves across her face. In the video, she ultimately discusses her experiences with mental illness to explain her failings, in what can be viewed as a strategic and laborious deployment of affect. It should be considered that, whilst a debilitating and serious mental illness, anxiety disorder can be represented as 'socially acceptable' as experienced by white middle class social actors. This is especially true of young white middle class women, who experience intense media and societal scrutiny on their levels of 'confidence' (Gill & Elias, 2014). Anxiety is normalised, perhaps even idealised, when experienced by white middle class bodies who have the luxury of time and resources to treat it. The vulnerability and amateur quality within these genres trade on a performed binary opposition to representations of confidence, opulence, wealth and glamour. Anxiety videos are humanising and vulnerable. Therefore, beauty vloggers borrow from the aesthetic of the coming out video in the anxiety video. This amplifies and strengthens a performance within the very specific bounds of middle class authenticity that have been outlined throughout this Chapter. In the following section I will discuss a further beauty vlogging genre that has been utilised to strengthen authenticity of performance: GRWM video.

Authenticity and the Makeover Narrative

The Get Ready With Me (GRWM) video genre involves a 'real time' documentation of a vlogger getting ready to leave the house to enter into public space. The locations and events that vloggers are getting ready to attend vary from the banal to the highly-glamorous. They all, however, include a certain degree of whimsy that make for an appropriate editorial backdrop: the beach, a seaside walk, a date, attending prom, but not the opticians or the supermarket. I will firstly discuss how the GRWM video genre foregrounds a construction of authenticity in beauty vlogs, through establishing ordinariness and relatability; bare faced, towels on, these young women are *just like us*. Secondly, however, I will examine how the GRWM genre anchors vlogs towards authenticity in the context of the vlogging industry (and advertiser-friendliness). This is achieved through instructing in, and performing, respectability, through managing the body.

GRWM videos employ a fixed narrative arc, the pleasures of the video genre lie within the drama of the transformation. Therefore, the *introduction* of the vlog situates the protagonist as un-glamorous and ordinary as possible. She does not wear makeup, and her hair is messily scrunched or pinned back. She is dressed in a well-worn, even slightly scruffy, dressing gown, towel or pyjamas. The everyday styling, including authenticity 'props' such as mugs of tea, increases the potential for viewer identification. That young women are called to participate in this manner recalls the concept of "interpellation", as audiences are ideologically "hailed" towards the myriad possibilities for their own transformations (Althusser, 2014: 191). This 'before' look is foregrounded within an introductory sequence that is evocative of the makeover narratives of lifestyle television which has also made use of a 'before' reel, showcasing the so-called "victim" in their natural environment such as supermarket shopping, or at work (McRobbie, 2004: 99). However, in the GRWM video, the

lifestyle expert is rendered redundant. The vlogger embodies the expert and victim at once, as they police and produce each look. This is symptomatic of a “postfeminist sensibility” which is partly characterised by “a shift from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze” (Gill, 2007b: 151). Men are very rarely mentioned in these videos, even in abstract. Rather, ‘getting ready’ is a normalised every day transformation. The space of the beauty vlog is underpinned by a policing female homosociality, part of which is “women promoting the interests of women who promote the interests of men” (Storr, 2003: 51). Female vloggers ‘help’ other women by instructing them in the application of makeup products. The labour, expense and naturalisation of this practice contributes to “maintain[ing] the unequal status quo of male dominance” (Storr, 2003: 50). This is underpinned by the fact that the outings that beauty vloggers are attending following the ‘get ready’ portion of the GRWM video genre are often recreational activities which are also reproductive labours: shopping, drinks with the girls, family events and weddings.

The makeover narrative is classed. In UK based makeover television, for example, the middle classes are often legitimised and positioned as presenters and ‘experts’, and the working class contestants/participants as ‘lacking’, either in style or moral aptitude, often represented as “unproductive, lazy, non-disciplined, non-self-investing” (Skeggs, 2009: 630). However, rather than documenting the transformation of a subject who is represented as either ignorant or unwilling, in the beauty vlog the emphasis is shifted to a policing, rectifying and transforming a social actor’s own look or aesthetic. To perform this effectively, however, beauty vlogger requires legitimisation as an expert through a possession of middle classness and femininity. As Biressi and Nunn (2016) argue, the makeover narrative enforces and underpins the link between “older social values, upper

and upper middle-class comportment and sanctioned forms of femininity” (Biressi & Nunn, 2016: 138). Expertise in performances of class and gender become intertwined within the instruction of the beauty vlogger.

To be authentic in the context of A List beauty vlogging is to be relatable, thus, A List beauty vloggers must performatively reflect on their flaws. In this vein, A List beauty vloggers regularly levy insults against their faces and bodies. Gabriella (2016) applies foundation to her “big old forehead”, Patricia Bright (2017c) describes her ‘before’ no-make up look as “dry and crusty” and her hair as a “bush”. Grace Victory (2017b) points out her “moon face”, in the same video, she cries “I *hate* my hair”. Assertions such as this often involve the vlogger tugging and prodding the offending body part as if they would like to remove the object attachment to their body. In a further GRWM, A-List beauty vlogger Sophie Clough (2017) leans extremely close into the camera and physically pokes and stretches her skin. She implores her audience to “ignore this spot and my eye bags”. The vloggers appear disgusted. However, they are also invested in highlighting their faults, to demonstrate the skill involved in concealing them within their finished ‘look’. The sanctioning language that vloggers turn towards themselves is often evocative of the harsh and cruel insults launched by middle-class lifestyle television experts in the UK, particularly in the late 1990s, during which a spate of prominent television hosts deployed their ‘expertise’ against their working class so-called ‘victims’ in makeover shows (McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). McRobbie argues the common use of insults and harsh language within this genre sanction and normalise class-based and symbolic violence: “the effectivity of ‘harmless’ programmes like these is to give legitimacy to the uttering of injurious words and ‘hate speech’ well beyond the confines of ritualised television genres” (McRobbie 2009:

137). For beauty vloggers, signposting their awareness of their monstrous natural bodies reassures viewers that the makeover transformation is in progress. It is understood that the aberrant feature should be, and will be, under control by the end of the video. The skill involved in being able to minimise one's 'giant' forehead with makeup, to paint an illusion that removes inches from a 'moon face' double chin, demonstrates creative, industrious, and entrepreneurial techniques of self-presentation that fits as ideal within neoliberal postfeminist society.

Breaking Authenticity: Gazing the 'After' Montage

A key generic convention of the GRWM video is the stand-alone section documenting the finished 'look' of the makeover': for the purpose of this section I have termed this phenomenon the 'after sequence'. Rocamora (2011:417) describes the "full frontal" gaze of the vlogger, the direct to camera mode of address which has been describe as saturated with the possibilities for identification. The after sequence is the moment this breaks and is starkly differentiated from the body of the GRWM process: it is situated at the very end of the video to highlight the drama of the transformation. The section predominately features a long, and almost uncomfortable, close up of the vloggers' face accompanied by upbeat or folky music, added post-production, as importantly, the 'after sequence' never involves the vlogger speaking aloud. Beauty vloggers adopt a slow string of 'fashion' poses, often opening with a pout, looking down through their eyelashes and gazing downwards, turning their face to show off their cheekbones, resting their heads gently on their shoulders. That they do not look outwards in the 'after' sequence is significant in the context of the norms of respectable and authentic beauty. The nice girl does not 'look', she is the bearer of the

look. "The "nice" girl learns to avoid the bold and unfettered staring of the "loose" woman, who looks at whomever she pleases (Bartky, 1990: 97). The 'after sequence' luxuriates in the spectacle of the vlogger looking away: it is remarkably long, often running for 20 or 30 seconds. This is jarring and unsettling, it is at times difficult to ascertain if the vlogger is moving incredibly slowly, or this sequence has been slowed down using editing software.

The steady and deliberate nature of the sequence can fruitfully be analysed through the lens of the "male gaze" - in her seminal work, *Visual Pleasures of Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1989) argues that film is structured to empower a male subject, the camera always takes his position: "going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself" (Mulvey, 1989: 122). As the appearance of woman "freezes" the action in cinema, it is worth thinking about how the 'after sequence' holds up the bustling action as the vlogger slowly rotates herself to be examined, scrutinised and savoured (Mulvey, 1989: 26). The chatty, active application of make up to ones' face abruptly gives way to a slowed pattern of poses, occasionally zooming in to frame fragmented close ups of eyes, lips, hair, cheekbones, feet, hands and limbs. The convention of 'after sequence' is an example of how vlogging's postfeminist context ensures young women "enthusiastically perform patriarchal stereotypes of sexual servility in the name of empowerment" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 3). That the enactment of the ideal final product, the 'after sequence' involves the vlogger's silence speak volumes. Ultimately, it is essential to understand that pathways to success in the beauty vlogging genre should be recognised as hegemonic, heteronormative and conservative. As has been asserted in the two previous Chapters, those who become visible do so because advertisers and brands approve of, and choose to promote, their content. This complicates assertions

of agency and participation in the beauty vlogging industry and opens up spaces for nuanced analysis of symbolic production in this context.

Summary

The boundaries of 'authenticity' are liquid. They move over time, they are dependent on cultural context (García-Rapp, 2017b; Gledhill & Dawsonera, 1991). Authenticity is a slippery term, that can afford us insight into norms, practices and inequalities when we closely examine how it is applied and understood. In this vein, I have argued that what has been unsettled in the preceding literature on authenticity in vlogging industries is that it is a performance, and labour, that is specifically classed and raced. In its conservatism and investment in middle class, white femininity, authentic self-presentations diverge from definitions of "post-feminist authenticity" that have been pointed out by feminist media theorists (Genz, 2015; Keller, 2014). Visible beauty vloggers *become visible* through a performance that is aggressively middle class, and underpinned by ideologies of conservativeness and modesty. Furthermore, beauty vlogging authenticity is contingent on disciplining and managing the body. It runs contrary to the white working classes' "perceived excess of (bodily) materiality" which also evokes the natural, the undisciplined, the abject (Tyler et al., 2008). The ideological white femininity of A List beauty vlogging means scrutiny of vloggers of colour: they are at risk of being othered and sexualised in ways that white women's bodies are not. They must foreground their authenticity more, within narrower bounds of what is acceptable.

Authenticity is a capital that is hugely valuable to beauty vloggers; it is where their value lies, what sets them apart from wider media content. Authenticity is what is valued by brands and audiences and building relationships with both sponsors and markets underpins the potential to make money on YouTube. The ability to achieve platform legibility and visibility are filtered through those who achieve this very *specific* authentic performance, that affords respectability, femininity and advertiser-friendliness. Authentic performances are contingent on the dramatisation of amateurism and ordinariness, which are executed in a vein that makes the inner workings of the role obvious to their intended audience. This is underpinned by consistency and intimacy: communicating the impression that one is sharing *enough* to evidence and corroborate their authenticity. I have investigated the brand of authenticity for beauty vloggers, and the strategic performances used to construct these brands. Examples included capturing 'real time' reactions, performed spontaneity and the use of the 'anxiety video' to communicate a stable inner identity. These performances are laborious, and they require very specific understandings of the logics and politics of the beauty vlogging industry.

The political economy of the vlogging industry provides the context for authenticity, namely the relationships between industry stakeholders and YouTube mean vloggers must pastiche branded logics in a vein that appeals to advertisers and fans. The stakes in which these performances take place in are increasingly high. In the following section I examine how vlogging is being increasingly positioned as a pathway to creative employment. The pervasive narrative sold by many stakeholders of the vlogging industry is that vlogging is a participatory, accessible endeavour that can be easily originated from domestic space. The following Chapter will examine how creative events and policy promote an ability to assist,

support and train aspiring vloggers to 'break into' creative industries. However, this Chapter problematises these claims, and has foregrounded the extensive labour, and the strategic understanding, necessary in order to be considered 'authentic' enough to break into the UK vlogging industry.

Chapter Six: Creativity and Selling the UK Vlogging Industry

This thesis has argued that access to visibility in the UK beauty vlogging industry is distributed unevenly. This is in part due to the instability of the platform's ecology and of the wider vlogging industry. Stakeholders in the vlogging industry attempt to mitigate insecurity through rationalisation, or risk-management. This process supports a specific performance of 'authenticity' as it conflates with 'advertiser friendliness', informing and shaping symbolic production. In this Chapter I probe the way in which creativity is used to temper the significant labours and inequalities that flow through the 'vlogging industry'. I focus on beauty vlogging conferences and events, arguing that it is essential to study how vlogging is sold through a discourse of creativity. This focus is particularly urgent in the current UK context, due to both the expansion of digital creative industries, and the withdrawal of arts funding by UK Government that makes the 'do it yourself' logics of social media platforms particularly attractive.

Firstly, this Chapter addresses Research Question One: "How do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging?". Vlogging industry events support explicit and implicit hierarchies that are sustained by organisational structures and determine who is 'in' and 'out' of the vlogging industry. I study how gatekeepers stratify access to key resources and make subjective decisions outside of 'official' decision-making guidelines. These "sanctioned counter-practices", afford increased access to some individuals in the vlogging industry based on subjective definitions of talent and fit (Sims, 2017: 133). Secondly, this Chapter answers Research Question Two: "How do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and

understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes?”. I respond to this question through documenting the tensions between events’ organisational structure and community practices. Many events are feminised, further supporting recurrent promotion, normalisation and stabilisation of feminised online genres. Beauty vlogging events are professionalised along very strict lines: those hoping to fit in must perform ‘professional’ femininity in very specific ways. This Chapter’s primary focus is my third Research Question: “what are the broader implications of uneven politics of visibility on YouTube for labour in the UK, particularly within what is termed the creative industries?”. In answer to this question, I argue vlogging on YouTube is being increasingly positioned as a pathway to creative employment by public and privately funded initiatives. This is problematic, as the genre of beauty vlogging further stratifies participation in creative industries along entrenched socioeconomic, classed, raced gendered lines. I review emerging tensions when a platform is positioned as inclusive but calls for pervasive labours that often lead to little or no compensation.

Beauty vlog production on YouTube falls at the intersection of practices encompassed by ‘traditional’ creative industries in the UK, straddling “symbolic, expressive and informational production” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008:101). Indeed, a career in vlogging encompasses videography, performance, directing, marketing, modelling, web design and advertising. The creative industries have been romanticised by academics and policy makers as a panacea for youth unemployment, in addition to geographic, racial, classed and gendered inequalities (Cairncross, 2001; Florida, 2004; 2014). They have also been criticised for their unequal representation of women, non-white and working class participants (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008; Oakley & O’Brien, 2016, 2016).

Furthermore, many have countered creative industries' representation as 'good work', observing that employment in these industries often comes with personal responsibility, long hours, lack of benefits, insecurity, low pay, and expectation of unpaid participation in internships (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Gill, 2010; Gill & Pratt, 2008; McRobbie, 2015). These challenges, especially pertaining to low pay and long internships, fall unevenly onto feminised industries such as fashion (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Perlin, 2012), and as I will venture in this Chapter, beauty vlogging. Alongside job insecurity, ethnographers have critiqued digital creative industries' reliance on informal networking, both for employment and career advancement. They reveal that networks exclude many aspirants, both in terms of access to practicalities such as childcare and financial costs, as well as stereotyping and pervasive sexism and through the murky concept of cultural 'fit' (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Gill, 2002; Marwick, 2013b; Neff, 2012). In this Chapter I take up and extend these critiques and apply them to the UK vlogging industry.

I chose to examine the vlogging labour through the events and initiatives cited here because they are sites where the material inequalities and wider representations of the vlogging industry get made, re-made and become calcified. The networking events could be considered a "figured world", in which imaginations, behaviours and narratives inform and constitute the world participants exist in: in other words, we behave "as if" a cultural world is a certain way, and so it is (Holland, 2001: 52). At networking events, vloggers continuously behaved "as if" they were professionals being scrutinised by potential talent agents and brands, experts behaved "as if" they knew how to break into the industry and organisers behaved "as if" their event offers a new, or disruptive, pathway into creative employment. Throughout the Chapter I contest the reliability of each of these representations, and frame

them as optimistic at best, and total falsehoods at worst. Ultimately, I argue it is fruitful to examine how a practice such as beauty vlogging becomes positioned as an accessible and attainable career path in the UK. My ethnography of YouTube events speaks to the unique aspect of the vlogging industry; namely that it supports the development of skills that are to be deployed for one organisation, YouTube. Although accounts of more diverse ‘influencer’, Instagrammer and blogger events are useful, it is fruitful to focus solely on advice and training as it pertains to YouTube, and this platform’s cultures and affordances. All events were promoted for their ability to assist, support and train aspiring vloggers to ‘break into’ this industry. A complete list of events attended is provided in my Methodology Chapter and Appendix A.

The events I attended were aimed at those looking to work full time within vlogging, or to increase their following and professionalise their channels. Events took place on weekends and heavily blurred leisure and entrepreneurial themes. For example, they often took place in luxurious locations and had a cultivated festival, or ‘tea party’, theme that was coupled with panels, seminars, workshops and networking. The hybridisation of education and training with pleasure and fun was often called upon explicitly, for example ERIC Festival’s slogan; “TED Talk meets Glasto” (ERIC Festival, 2017). The proliferation of networking, social and learning events are in keeping with McRobbie’s observation that creative industries now blend with the logic of the business school, meaning employability and training events are often now positioned as leisure activities and are taken up with the fervour of attendance at pop concerts (McRobbie, 2015). Certainly, many vlogging events I attended booked DJs, often with space provision to dance. This provided some moments of confusion for event attendees, as educational and networking events are *not* pop concerts. The

ambivalence for vloggers performing identity work and self-branding in these confusing spaces will be attended to throughout my analysis.

The pervasive narrative that surrounds the vlogging industry is that vlogging is a participatory, accessible endeavour that can be easily taken up within one's own private, domestic space. Vogue proclaims "today's vloggers are bonafide entrepreneurial wizards with staggering earnings (and yes, they all started by filming themselves in their bedrooms)" (Petter, 2017); The Radio Times invites us to "meet the internet vlogging sensations carving out careers from their bedrooms" (Doran, 2015); the Sun says of Zoella "through videos she makes in her bedroom.... she has transformed herself into a social media starlet with more YouTube subscribers than Beyoncé" (Glass, 2017). However, the significant attendance at these events confirms that many vlogging industry participants feel it is insufficient to simply make videos from your bedroom to ensure a successful YouTube channel. Thus, this 'offline' component of the vlogging industry deserves further critical attention. Some writing on vlogging events has originated from Asia and North America, which has a significantly more established, or 'grown up' scene of events for aspiring influencers, bloggers and Instagrammers (Abidin, 2013; Lopez, 2009). Duffy (2015a, 2017) observes many fashion bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers feel like they have to attend conferences to advance their careers as an "investment in a (future) self-brand", but notes that many events have prohibitive entry fees and take place in expensive media cities (Duffy, 2017: 84). The UK has fewer of these events, but the industry is becoming more established. An increasing number of brands and organisations are now carving out their space on the event circuit, therefore, I provide a UK and European angle to this analysis.

It is important to understand that events are often organised by ‘for profit’ corporations, and function as platforms to promote other merchandise. Blogosphere Magazine regularly run events in London that also work to promote their magazine and VidCon organises annual events across Europe, North America and in Australia during which they profit from merchandise, food and drink, and ticket sales, which cost up to €299 for creators and €825 for industry delegates. All events I cover in this Chapter, including ERIC Festival and those organised by the YouTube Space¹⁰, are heavily sponsored or subsidised by brands, which both generates profit and legitimises their presence in the vlogging industry.

In the preliminary section of this Chapter I introduce the vlogging industry’s self-representation as a creative industry by stakeholders including event organisers and marketers, talent managers and vloggers. I then situate vlogging within a current UK socio-political context, building on existing research on UK creative industries, and current strains of Government policy. Following this, I frame workshops, events and initiatives aimed at aspiring beauty vloggers as a risk management strategy and an example of entrepreneurial labour. In the final section of this Chapter, I critique several key components of the vlogging event. Here, I consider how networking spaces, the role of brands, financial discourses and gatekeepers can calcify and remake inequalities in creative industries. I then conclude the Chapter by drawing together threads on creativity, participation and managing insecurity in the vlogging industry. Finally, I demonstrate how vlogging is positioned as an outlet and opportunity for widening participation in the creative industries for disadvantaged and

¹⁰ The Space is located on two floors of Google’s UK office complex, and incorporates three film studios, two editing suites, an equipment rental hub, classrooms, a busy events programme and a networking space with free drinks and snacks known as the Creator Café. Entry is tiered, with different levels of access afforded to YouTubers with 1000+, 10,000+ and 100,000 subscribers.

marginalised groups such as women and minority participants. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I argue this is hardly the case. Rather, vlogging on YouTube reinforces inequalities creative industries along existing axis of power. Ultimately, it is the stakeholders in the vlogging industry, and YouTube in particular, who profit from event participation and labours.

Beauty Vlogging and Creativity

Vlogging is often discursively aligned with creativity: more specifically, the act of *creating* is a consistent theme across YouTube's promotional materials and online resources. The platform refers to vloggers as 'creators', YouTube presides over a 'Creator Store' and an online collection of resources entitled the 'Creator Hub'. In a YouTube promotional video several popular female vloggers are described as "incredible women on YouTube sharing their passions and creativity without compromise" (YouTube, 2017c). The Government funded charity Creative Skillset's career outline for "blogger/vlogger" simply lists "creative" as the desired "personality type" (Creative Skillset, 2017a). Similarly, vlogging is positioned as a valuable skill to learn at ERIC Festival, the "Creative Careers Festival" aimed at 16-25 year olds (ERIC Festival, 2017). During interviews, talent agents also referred to vloggers as creatives, and positioned their *own* creativity as valuable to the vlogging industry. Dom Smales, CEO of digital talent agency Gleam Futures, told The Guardian "this talent is creative talent, it is making content" (Guardian, 2016). In our interview, Dom positioned the relationship between the talent agency and the talent as a creative partnership "we are looking for people that can be partners at creating media content on social media platforms". Another talent manager, Laura, also extended the focus on creativity to her staff, whose role includes the task of developing ideas for brand collaborations: "one of our

guys in the office... is really creative, so he comes up with some really good ideas. And nine out of ten, the brands love it, these ideas". Throughout my field work and interviews, discourses of creativity - of creating and being creative - were used to define the work that vloggers, and other industry stakeholders undertake, in addition to the kind of people employed within the wider vlogging industry.

Creativity and creative tasks were often positioned in a dichotomy with their other more monotonous, laborious admin tasks, and especially with activities linked with revenue generation. In our interview, Elizabeth, an A List beauty vlogger described undertaking emails in the morning, and then for the rest of her time "creating content all day". Following this, Lucy, a lifestyle vlogger exasperated by emails and paperwork, said her ambition for the coming year was to "spend more time doing creating than I do doing admin". In a similar vein, Stephanie, a prominent beauty vlogger, told an eager and receptive audience at a vlogging event, "sometimes you're speaking to marketing...but... no offence to marketing [they are] all about numbers and sales, and we're about creative and content, it's completely different". Stephanie is somewhat unique in the vlogging industry, due to her dual occupation as a beauty vlogger and a fashion brand manager. This positioning elevated her status somewhat within the event, as the attendees hoped to simultaneously glean insights from both an experienced vlogger and into the organisations that they were hoping to work with. Her insights on 'marketing' were taken seriously, as she explained she regularly worked with marketing teams as part of her fashion role.

How creative work was distanced from financial and strategic decision making is highlighted effectively in a high-profile controversy surrounding A List beauty vlogger Zoella, and a

product in her Zoella Lifestyle range, the “Zoella 12 Days of Christmas Advent Calendar” in November 2017. The controversy centred around the £50 price tag of the calendar, a steep cost that apparently correlated negatively with the low value of the products it contained. Disappointed fans and annoyed parents aired their grievances through tweets, comments and reviews on retailer websites, which were picked up by news outlets. The representation of the scandal could be examined in terms of a “media event”, in which fans reactions towards the advent calendar were “amplified, retextualised, transposed onto other dimensions where... significance could be debated or contested” (Couldry, 2002: 285). In this vein, a narrative was constructed through the recirculating of comments and negative retail reviews posted by disappointed fans and parents. These comments were taken up, represented and framed in mainstream media, including *The Daily Mail*, *The Mirror*, *PR Week* and *Forbes*. Each outlet contributed to the event’s ostensive “liveness” (Couldry, 2002: 287), by reporting near-daily on updates, and ensuring to use highly searched for keywords such as “Zoella Advent Calendar” and “Zoella Scandal”. News outlets utilised the scandal as an opportunity to reflect on societies’ values (Dayan & Elihu Katz, 1996). The event meshed effectively with anxieties around beauty vloggers being too young, too rich, lazy and exploitative, and an ongoing scepticism towards YouTube celebrities.

The event was also covered widely on YouTube. The calendar was heavily ‘reviewed’ by satirists and gossip vloggers: antagonistic YouTube gossip vlogger JaackMaate capitalised on spikes in search traffic by releasing three videos related to the Zoella calendar over the course of one week. The first video features JaackMaate ripping open doors of the product, shouting “it’s shit... it’s so shit”, “it’s fucking grim mate”, and suggesting the Christmas Cookies Candle inside smelled like the exploitation of Zoella’s young audiences (JaackMaate,

2017). Zoella responded to the Advent Calendar controversy in a brief segment nestled awkwardly within a video on her second channel.

In Zoella's apology, which was again widely quoted in the media, she cited the creative nature of her involvement in the product's development as the reason she was not involved in dictating the high price of the project:

There has been some upset, disappointed people in the Zoella advent calendar... I am all about the creativity, I am all about getting it from a design to a product. Where my input ends is there. Once that product is done and I am happy with it, the retailer can decide how much they sell that for. That is completely out of my decision making. I don't have the right to make those decisions. (MoreZoella, 2017a)

We could take issue with Zoella's assertion that, as the current Director of Zoella Products Limited, she is unable to set a Recommended Retail Price. Her response to this controversy displays the trappings of 'authenticity labour' defined in Chapter Five. Authenticity labour involves strategic aesthetic choices and techniques, utilised to make a video appear more amateur, intimate and ordinary. This style of labour is often invoked to repair a vlogger's self-brand against charges of 'fakeness' or to offset accidental disclosure of business savvy. In this particular example, authenticity labour manifests as the apology segment is edited awkwardly following the end segment of a distinct video. Zoella's camera is positioned at an unflattering low angle, a departure from her usual direct to camera style, as she swivels nervously on an office chair, her voice cracks with emotion. Ultimately, what is interesting about Zoella's apology is how creativity is positioned as distinct from business and

marketing responsibilities, such as pricing. The accusations of exploitation of her young fans are so risky, and so tantalising to media outlets, because they are at odds with Zoella's branding as more authentic and more trustworthy than large fashion media conglomerates. They have more value when levied against an everyday girl next door, rather than celebrity or director of a company. It is interesting, then, that what Zoella turns to is creativity: creativity negates not only her involvement in pricing the project, but also her profits from the sale of the calendar.

Creativity and Commerce

The style of talk utilised by beauty vloggers which distances bureaucracy and finance from authentic production fits within a history of positioning markets as antithetical, or hindering, to the pure authentically artistic moment of 'creation'. Distinguishing entrepreneurial and bureaucratic tasks such as emails from more 'creative' pursuits speaks to stereotypes about the uncommercial and aesthetic singularity of creative work and artistic endeavour. Creativity and cultural production have historically been thought of within logics of authenticity, value materialises through a "unique creative act" (Newman & Bloom, 2012: 1). Similarly, Benjamin argues that for works of art, "the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical—and, of course, not only technical—reproducibility" (Benjamin & Arendt, 1986: 22). For Benjamin, reproduction squeezes an artworks' original "aura", its histories and conditions of creation. When reproduced and sold in the mass market, the "aura" of art becomes instead the "phony spell of the commodity" (Benjamin & Arendt, 1986: 231). Although Benjamin would almost certainly have thought of YouTube commodities as valueless, the idea of moments of creation as possessing an aura outside of

the market is useful here, in understanding how authenticity is positioned as antagonist to economic and financial logic. Creativity as authentic is drawn upon consistently by beauty vloggers themselves and resonates throughout this analysis of their work.

Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno decried “standardized” systems of cultural production (film, radio, broadcasting) in their essay, *The Culture Industry*, originally published in 1948 (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2011: 42). They argued that the homogenisation of culture occurred, in part, because artists were no longer supported by governments and private benefactors, leaving them self-employed. For Horkheimer and Adorno “what completely fettered the artist was the pressure (and the accompanying drastic threats), always to fit into business life as an aesthetic expert” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2011: 46). This perception, that non-creative tasks and responsibilities inherent in self-employment “fetter” artists (and in this case creativity) is echoed throughout vlogging events. However, writing fifty years on, and far more optimistically, creative economy champion Richard Florida, who purports to have identified the *Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2004; 2014), offers a different perspective. In documenting the attributes of creative work that make it so attractive and desirable to workers, Florida discusses the ‘no collar’ atmosphere, and all that this metaphorical loosening implies. The creative class enjoy “flexible schedules, new work rules, management methods”. They also reject micromanagement and dress codes: the new creative class “dress to express themselves” (Florida, 2014: 102). Florida suggests members of the creative class are allergic to bureaucracy, or, administration is positioned as a kryptonite to all creativity. Florida vividly illustrates the experience of one of his ‘creative class’ research participants, who left a secure job in a big company because they asked her to photocopy and answer phones. However, even as he emphasises the downfalls for

freelance creative workers, or as Florida terms them “free agents”, name-checking job insecurity, lower pay and reduced benefits, Florida misses the administrative deluge that befalls a typical freelancer (Florida, 2014: 90).

Florida’s assertions here are symptomatic of the “mythologies of creative work”, which often use discourses of “fun, authentic self-expression and creative freedom” to define creative occupations and activities (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017: 4657). It is in this context that vlogging and blogging labours are positioned as ‘dream jobs’ (Duffy, 2017; Lopez, 2009; Pham, 2011). However, the celebration of the emancipatory nature of online creative work masks the implicit insecurity and risk in these industries. This style of talk is both common in press attention to vlogging, is a theme throughout vloggers’ own content, and bleeds into advice given at vlogging events. As Duffy and Wissinger (2017) put it “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 these enterprising careers” (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017: 4663). Elsewhere Duffy (2015, 2016;2017) documents the pervasive call for vloggers to be passionate about work, to work twenty-four hours, to be ‘always on’, and how these insecurities can be glossed over in self-branding strategies that suggest individuals are “*doing what they love*”. In this Chapter, I argue that the extensive inequality, labours and risks that are embodied by vloggers are masked within vlogging events through the promotion of vlogging as open, inclusive and participatory, and creative *good work*.

Creative Industries: Good Work?

Cultural studies scholars have observed that the move from the language of 'culture' to that of 'creativity' in public policy and public life symbolises an attempt to remove 'culture' from radical histories of labour struggle and social justice (Gilbert, 2008; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; McRobbie, 2015). Garnham (2005) argues that the supplanting the word 'creative' in place of 'culture' nudges cultural policy towards knowledge work and economic value generation. He identifies *creative* industries as characterised by an "artist-centred supply-side" approach, promoting education as opposed to culture, underpinning policy with an emphasis on a competitive supply of human capital, rather than developing and bolstering culture and the arts (Garnham, 2005: 27). Discourses of creativity have been strategically used to underpin and promote the widespread short term, insecure contract work, weakened trade unions, decreased employment benefits and increased insecurity and inequalities of what has been termed the new 'precariat'.

'Creativity' is often used as a placeholder in discourses of entrepreneurship and innovation, meaning creative industries become synonymous with technological advancement. At the same time, creative work often also remains aligned with art, passion and enjoyment, which hold residual connotations of emancipation and authenticity. As Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) succinctly phrase it "neo-liberal incitements to entrepreneurial initiative have been skilfully tailored to fit with the still-resonant autonomy of artistic labour" (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009: 418). Ultimately, through their ties to such 'artistic labour', UK creative industries are known as 'good work'; they are advertised as relatively unscripted, more engaging and rewarding professions (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008). Creativity is viewed as autonomous and fun, which masks the precarious, demanding, and often exploitative reality of creative labour.

Those who undertake knowledge and cultural work are often associated with these highly precarious working conditions. Ross identifies the erosion of benefits and long term contracts, as “contingent employment”, identifying a rise in these precarious working conditions across industries that ultimately impelling actors towards “juggling their options, massaging their contacts, managing their overcommitted time, and developing coping strategies for handling the uncertainty of never knowing where their next project, or source of income, is coming from” (Ross, 2009:4-5). Although positions in creative industries are marketed using attractive terminology such as “free agents” (Pink, 2001), the “creative class” (Florida, 2014) or “being paid to do what you love” (Duffy, 2017) many experience significantly reduced, or absent, benefits and support, are subsumed into fields that necessitate constant labour including upskilling, pitching and self-branding. In her work on Silicon Alley (the content creation hub of new media companies in New York), Neff addresses the interweaving of creativity as it is used to promote the instability of new digital economies. She coins the phrase “bohemianization of industry” in which themes of counter-cultural creativity can be used to underpin company’s justifications for risky, unstable or uncertain moves that often lead to employee insecurities (Neff, 2012: 62). The language and representations surrounding precarious work often mean that risk and labour is romanticised, or apotheosised, within cultural and creative industries.

Organisations, governments and platforms have weaponised discourses of creativity with many aims. Discourses of artistry and creativity are often deployed in Post Fordist working environments to temper or even glamourise initiatives that increase insecurity and reduce employer responsibilities (Gilbert, 2008; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; McRobbie, 2015). As Weeks (2011) points out, initiatives that promote creativity in

strengthening a designation of work often mesh seamlessly with initiatives designed to increase productivity. She draws parallels between productivity and creativity: “the language of creativity is in some instances deployed as a synonym for labour... even non-work can be imagined as a disciplined practice directed toward a laudable goal” (Weeks, 2011: 82). In other words, the language and initiatives that are supposedly aimed towards increasing creativity are used to minimise and neutralise the unpleasant qualities and quantities, of labour, and has contributed to the wider de-politicisation of work and workplaces. It is in this vein that the emancipatory potential for creativity is emphasised and branded by the stakeholders of the vlogging industry. Endeavours often conceptualised as creative escapes from monotonous jobs actually mean more work, more risk, more pressure and more responsibility (Duffy, 2017; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). For participants in creative industries, the failure to succeed at ‘creatively’ pulling together precarious employment is positioned as a personal failure to work hard enough (McNay, 2009). When creativity is deliberately disentangled from entrepreneurship, as we saw Zoella attempt earlier, it is often highly productive. As we will see throughout the analysis in this Chapter, the vlogging industry impels aspiring vloggers to be highly active.

Risk and Labours in Vlogging Events

Throughout my field work I witnessed aspiring creatives launching their YouTube channels, attending weekend seminars on working with brands, swapping cards with beauty reps and vigorously taking notes whilst watching panels about time management, all under a headline of building a ‘creative’ career. The permeable line between leisure and labour at workshops, events and initiatives participated in by aspiring beauty vloggers can be understood as highly laborious methods of portfolio building, networking or learning to

offset the risk of unemployment. These labours are symptomatic of a culture that has accepted that long-term work has now given way to people making their living from, ultimately feminised, short term, insecure, and unpaid contracts (Handy, 2002). Beck points out that many people manage unemployment, or the risk of unemployment, through undertaking a portfolio of diverse activities, some paid and some unpaid, which become intermixed with leisure activities (Beck, 2000a). As Beck captures this trend – which was well underway prior to the financial crisis of 2008. Foraging for work through entrepreneurial strategies has become even more apposite in today's context.

Uncertainty is now perhaps heightened by the threat of *risk* from Brexit, the 2016 vote to leave the European Union. Since the vote took place in June 2016, there has been a near-constant media representation of risk, uncertainty and cultural anticipations of a further financial crisis. Typical headlines include, from *Reuters*, “UK employment falls by most since 2015 as Brexit nears” (Schomberg & Shirbon, 2017) and *The Independent*; “UK will be worse off in every possible scenario after Brexit, concludes Government analysis” (Banyes, 2018). As Beck points out in his updated thesis on globalisation, in “risk society” the “past loses its power to determine the present. Its place as the cause of present-day experience is taken by the future, that is to say, something non-existent constructed, and fictitious” (Beck, 2000b: 65). For Beck, the construction and dramaturgy of risk affects social actors in various ways, although rarely in a manner that points towards meaningful, or lasting societal change. In this vein, political and economic uncertainty overshadow vlogging events that I attended. There was little critical attention paid to the political or economic structures that had caused uncertainty in the first place. In fact, as we will see, much of the advice given to attendees actually reinforced inequalities and invited attendees towards techniques of self-

exploitation.

ERIC Festival, for example, positions itself as a fun alternative to the multitude of careers festivals today's aspiring creatives and graduates are supposedly attending, in order to work in creative industries. On their website, the organisers proclaim:

ERIC educates & inspires young people on the realities of the different creative industries, the breadth of jobs within them and provide relevant advice on how to get your foot in the door. But most importantly we do this in an engaging, exciting, immersive and fun way through our festival vibe. So no more boring stands, men in suits but think live music, stages, workshops and lots of free give aways! (ERIC Festival, 2017)

The logic informing this copy seems to be, if you are going to be spending all of your time attending career festivals anyway, you may as well choose ones that feature Radio One DJs, and free cans of organic cola. ERIC Festival, and the myriad initiatives, events and organisations discussed are aimed at (mostly young) people who understand they should be doing *something* to ensure employment. The spectre (or threat) of precarity haunts each of the initiatives and events discussed in this Chapter. I argue, the motivations for attending these events are informed by “myths of entrepreneurship”: that leisure and work are indistinguishable for entrepreneurial labourers, work should be passionate and a priority, entrepreneurial work should make up a significant portion of one's life, especially in the early years of establishing yourself, and those who fail simply did not work hard enough (Marwick, 2013b: 246). (Gendered) myths about what it means to be an entrepreneur underpinned the culture and norms of the vlogging events, which were often held over

leisure time such as holidays, weekends and evenings. They all featured an indistinguishable link between pleasurable relaxing activity, socialising and networking.

Vlogging Creativity – YouTube in Creative Policy

In 2018, YouTube's parent company Google is a significant employer in what is termed the creative industries in the UK: Google's managing Director, Ronan Harris, sits on the Creative Industries Council, branded as a forum between Government and business, alongside representatives from BBC, the Publishers Association and the Design Council. The Creative Industries Council is an initiative of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the branch of Government responsible for invigorating a creative economy, widening access, to "make England the World's Creative Capital" (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009: 416). The DCMS was introduced as the re-branded Department of National Heritage by Tony Blair's New Labour government in 1997, and is widely considered a pioneering approach to foregrounding self-organised creative industries in national policy (Ross, 2009). McRobbie points out that the DCMS has shrunk significantly following the loss of the Labour government in 2010 and has been relegated back to the "shadows of Government" (McRobbie, 2015: 62). It has also been observed that the DCMS has since been wrangled away from funding artistic and less-measurable strains of creativity and creative work, rather valuing 'hard' evidence of creative outcomes, moving towards discourses of accountability, technology and innovation (Mattocks, 2017).

In July 2017 the DCMS became the Department for *Digital*, Culture, Media and Sport. This move followed the launch of the UK Digital Strategy, which aimed to foster "strong

collaboration between the public, private and third sector to tackle the digital skills gap”, through partnerships with private technology companies including Microsoft and Google (Gov.uk, 2017a). This document outlines the Government’s intent to partner further with technology companies, such as Google, to increase provision of digital skills to decrease social inequalities, and to encourage disadvantaged groups to close perceived skills gaps through learning and upskilling (Gov.uk, 2017b). The high valuation of expertise from the fields of innovation and technology, as applied to social problems, has been called “rendering technical”: this refers to the way “experts imagine and conceptualise the worlds into which they plan to intervene as both intelligible with, and amenable to, the instruments they have on hand or are designing” (Sims, 2017: 13). In the context of the UK’s Digital Strategy, and at vlogging events, rendering technical manifests literally, in that the private sector companies promote upskilling through the education and instruction in the use of their *own tools*. Failure is positioned as being due to not using these tools correctly. For example, the opportunity to grow one’s career, business, or fanbase was promoted through events at the YouTube Space, and through YouTube’s online Creator Academy. Online classes on the YouTube Creator Academy promise attendees they can “find long-term success by building a loyal fanbase” and “build a business on YouTube” (YouTube, 2018d).

Vlogging is legitimised and encouraged as a creative industry by Creative Skillset, a “strategic skills body” whose aim is to increase training and skills in creative professions across the UK (Creative Skillset, 2017). Creative Skillset are a charity with diverse revenue streams (including partnerships with media organisations), however, they also received £13 million of Government Funding in 2016: £11.5 million of this funding was designated to “support skills and talent development in the creative industries” (Creative Skillset, 2016:

36). Creative Skillset are also legitimised by the Government in terms of their influence, for example a representative from Creative Skillset sits alongside Google as a member of the DCMS Creative Industries Council. Creative Skillset founded, and continue to fund Hiive, a networking platform for freelancers and creative professionals. In turn, Hiive are one of the primary funders of ERIC Festival, the Creative Careers Festival for 16-25 year olds cited earlier.

ERIC Festival runs events for those hoping to get into Broadcasting, Fashion and Marketing, with diverse and relevant 'experts' attending each, culminating in an annual mega-festival in central London. The format of the festival includes panels, workshops, stalls and booths, each significantly inspired by the 'festival' theme. For example, at the Fashion event I attended the interior of the private members club where it was based was decorated for the festival; muslin tents in a variety of pastels were draped from impressively ceilings, their interiors primarily consist of tastefully scattered cushions and blankets. During workshops in the tents, a menagerie of creative 'experts' lectured rows of (mostly) young women sitting crossed-legged on the floor amongst a sea of shopping bags and *Pret A Manger* coffee cups. Walking through the tents you can see experts moving around; two young black men tweaking a mannequin's scarf as a group of girls vigorously scribble notes, an older white man wearing a cravat extolling the virtues of conducting your brand's 'energy' through Instagram, his attendees shifting on their cushions, confused. Experts use props such as MacBooks, projectors and screens. Brand representatives on the booths show off new products, clothing and advertise apprenticeships; they cheerfully fill in attendees' information using their iPads, a queue of eager young women loading up their emailed QR codes on their phone. In the main auditorium, the panels are packed, standing room only,

with young women lining the floor, taking notes and sipping complimentary organic colas. Attendees are regularly offered commendations for attending, and staying, all day on a Sunday. Speakers included entrepreneurial stylists, social media reps from brands, and fashion buyers from Net-a-porter and Urban Outfitters. I was at ERIC Festival primarily to attend the ‘blogging and vlogging’ workshop, which was held every hour in a luxurious board room decorated with plush green leather seats and hundreds of mini terracotta soldiers. The sessions were delivered by enthusiastic reps for a new student magazine, each pointing out that they had acquired these positions due to their own successful blogging or vlogging ventures. These ‘experts’ informed us that because of their online presence they were not required to submit CVs for the job. To achieve similar results, we were urged to start a vlog, as soon as we could.

In addition to promoting events such as ERIC Festival, Creative Skillset’s polished website prominently features a Careers and Jobs Board, which aims to list the ‘expansive’ job opportunities in the Creative Industries. The jobs board allows creative individuals to find their ideal career, through searching the database using information such as “personality types” and qualifications required. The entry for “blogger/vlogger” caught my eye, due to its encouraging and optimistic (read: delusional) oeuvre. Creative Skillset suggests no qualifications are required to follow a career in vlogging and that starting a blog or a vlog can lead to TV and radio presenting opportunities.

Finding a unique voice that is relatable and fun is always a must, and making sure you research any facts you want to say, as you want to avoid your credibility being damaged. From there, it’s a case of making sure your content is seen – posting it in

online circles for your subject matter is a good start – and making sure you are updating regularly. While it can sometimes take a little while, great and original content usually finds its way into a large audience (Creative Skillset, 2017a).

The implication here is that an aspiring blogger or vlogger simply needs to utilise an authentic voice that is both “relatable and fun”, develop some good content and audiences will ensue, even if it takes a “little while”. This Creative Skillset job database entry strikes an increasingly techno-utopian tone as it contrasts with the entry for “Actor”, which cautions readers about job insecurity and lack of guaranteed progression (Creative Skillset, 2017b). Throughout this thesis I have attempted to problematise vlogging as a meritocracy, in other words, the narrative that the best content will *naturally* rise to visibility on YouTube. In Chapters Three and Four I have countered such assertions to make the uneven nature of visibility clear on YouTube: there is a strong requirement for vloggers to self-optimize along advertiser friendly lines and talent agencies and multi-channel networks provide resources and economies of scale that widely influence and structure visibility in the UK vlogging industry. In the previous Chapter, I examined vlogging through the lens of authenticity labour and the aesthetic economy, showing that not every aspiring beauty vlogger can be considered ‘authentic’ or beautiful. I have also demonstrated the gendered nature of the vlogging industry, and the necessity to purchase expensive equipment and undertake significant conspicuous consumption, as well as the temporal commitment required in order to make a successful YouTube channel.

I do not wish to overstate the emphasis on taking up vlogging as a career by Government and associated bodies: I do not mean to suggest that Creative Skillset exclusively mandate

taking up vlogging over acting, film making, video game development or industry apprenticeships. Initiatives concerning these areas, and more, are alive and well. However, it is clear that YouTube is being increasingly invoked as a pathway to employment through philanthropic bodies associated with creative skills. Two further examples include the creative skills charity The Media Trust (2017), who offer free vlogging workshops in partnership with YouTube, and the British Interactive Media Association who promoted beauty vloggers as ambassadors within their annual Digital Day in schools (BIMA, 2015). Furthermore, the youth unemployment support charity The Princes Trust have also partnered with vlogging industry events, for example by running a booth at BlogCon London.

The growing promotion of vlogging as a pathway to employment in creative industries is symptomatic of a techno-utopian approach which has previously supported the celebration of television and radio for their potential in democratising education, attainment and the creative industries (Sims, 2017). Therefore, I believe it is important to critique techno-idealistic views of new media industries - such as the vlogging industry - as they are evoked as disruptive in private and public events and initiatives. New media innovations, including vlogging, often reinforce old structures of inequality. In the following section I investigate how vlogging events can be read as key to participation in the UK vlogging industry. They often explicitly lecture attendees in the very specific self-presentations necessitated for participation, but also serve as a window into the norms and materialities of the vlogging industry. I extend the literature critiquing informal networking practices in creative industries, demonstrating how networking events create and support barriers to participation for aspiring vloggers.

Networking

The potential for visibility and channel growth through networking is a lucrative promise of many of the events discussed in this Chapter. The significance of ‘networking’ events, and representations of networking in popular media, have grown alongside Web 2.0 and have strong connections with digital media work sectors such as Silicon Valley. Effective networking is directly connected with employability, promotions and job stability in creative industry literature. However the accessibility of networking events for women and minorities has been complicated and critiqued by researchers in their ethnographies of digital industries (Benkler, 2006; Gill, 2002; Marwick, 2013b; Neff, 2012). The term is inextinguishable. Provision for networking was a stubborn theme of each event I attended: emails from the organisers of ERIC Festival simply proclaimed the strapline “NETWORKING!”. VidCon hosted a lounge with free coffee and charging stations, inviting attendees to “hang out in the Creator & Industry Lounge to swap ideas and make friends with creators and online video professionals from around the world”, the first day of the convention culminated with a networking reception (VidCon, 2017a). Similarly, Blogosphere magazine events encouraged networking over cocktails and cupcakes. The YouTube Space’s networking events also featured DJs and open ‘café’ curated to encourage informal meetings and discussion, with free coffee, open tables and a surprisingly diverse variety of relaxing designer rocking chairs. In this section I will investigate what is promised by these ‘networking’ initiatives and spaces at UK vlogging industry events and explore the realities of how this is experienced by event attendees as they move through these spaces.

In the vlogging industry, community events aimed at fans are emphasised as distinct from vlogging industry networking events aimed at aspiring vloggers. However, such distinctions can become fraught, as creator and fan events often take place at the same physical location. Often, events introduce procedures to concretise the somewhat ambivalent and permeable divide between people creators and aspiring creators. Take for example, VidCon EU, a European offshoot of the US convention that attracted 26,000 attendees at its Flagship LA event in 2017. VidCon is firmly embedded in vlogging culture, founded by famous 'vlogbrothers' John and Hank Green, and sponsored in part by YouTube (VidCon, 2016) . In 2017, VidCon EU took place in one of Amsterdam's biggest Conference Complexes and offered a three-tiered entry system, for "Industry" (Marketing professionals and influencer networks), "Creators" (aspiring vloggers) and "Community" (fans). Over the weekend, Community ticket holders (fans) gathered in the vast main floor of the conference centre with loud pop music blasting and high-energy, Converse-wearing, mostly blonde presenters hosting competitions on various booths and stages.

For these Community ticket holding audiences, VidCon EU was spent undertaking the curious, yet indisputably leisure-centred activity of waiting in huge lines for meet and greets with their favourite YouTube stars, buying merchandise, taking Taco Bell sponsored selfies and playing on an inflatable slide that took up half of the room. For those with Creator tickets, however, the atmosphere was considerably more sombre. A short journey up two escalators from the confetti cannons in the main hall gave way to a corridor of traditional looking smaller, carpeted conference rooms equipped with chairs, note paper and projector screens. There, a crowd of Creator ticket holders grasped notebooks, vlogging cameras and business cards as they attended seminars and workshops from 9am-7pm over a Saturday

and Sunday. The overarching theme of the presentations was “break[ing] into the industry”, as promised by VidCon’s marketing communications (VidCon, 2017b). Some of these attendees attempted to attract attention using conspicuous self-branding techniques. For example, one family with young children wore matching T-shirts in an ostentatious pink hue, prominently decorated with their YouTube channel name. I overheard another young girl ask, “mum why are you dropping all of our paper?” as her mother scattered family vlogging flyers on coffee tables and chairs. By the end of the weekend the Conference Centre’s toilet doors were covered with branded channel stickers. Some younger attendees skipped down the corridors, rucksacks bouncing, others shyly approached each other at the networking lounge, and many slumped against the walls next to power outlets, charging their phones and cameras, looking exhausted.

Creator ticket holders attended VidCon EU to glean wisdom from panels and seminars run by industry professionals and successful vloggers with the distinction of being ‘Featured Creators’. Featured Creators were furnished with status and an increased level of access, including a green room and parties. Anyone could buy a ‘Creator’ ticket, but Featured Creators were invited; in other words, they had *made it*. This status disparity contributed to an ambivalent atmosphere for Creator ticket holders who also considered themselves professionals. There were rumblings of discontent as panel audiences were forced to remain seated until the high-status Featured Creators had been escorted from the rooms by staff, to ensure they were not bothered for selfies and autographs. In these moments the distinction between the Creators and Featured Creators were emphasised, although during the panels many Featured Creators minimised their celebrity and treated the audience as peers. They chit-chatted about their own lives, provided practical advice and even turned

the tables to ask the audience questions. During one session I attended, an incredibly popular and high-status American vlogger, Joey Graceffa, asked the audience “wait, does YouTube value HD content now?”. The fact that YouTube’s algorithm does value HD content is arguably widely known. Graceffa performed authenticity and minimise his celebrity, a hugely valuable attribute in the vlogging sphere.

The performance of the parity between audience of ‘Creators’ and the platformed ‘Featured Creators’ was also emphasised by panel organisation: A List vloggers spoke on the same panels as relatively small channels (albeit with tens of thousands of subscribers). Smaller featured vloggers often expressed gratitude to established YouTubers, in disbelief they were at the same talk. Mixed panels, in addition to marketing communications and event presentations, support the mythology that anything can happen over the course of a convention: you can meet someone who can change your life through a friendship, and grow your channel through the resulting collaboration. The mythologised significance of vlogging events for networking partly stem from their place in YouTuber folklore as spaces where many high profile vlogging collaborators first met. However, although this may be the case for a lucky few YouTubers, it will not be a reality for the hundreds of Creator ticket holders in 2018. Laura Chernikoff, who worked for VidCon between 2010 and 2016, told me in an interview:

I think it's worth reminding people that this space is getting so saturated, it's so much crazier than it was five years ago. But we are still all holding up the illusion that anyone can do it, and you just need the right, you know talent and luck and you'll hit

it off... that's turning into a bit of a fallacy at this point because there's so much content out there. (Laura, ICG)

As Laura points out, the already minimal chances of success have decreased further in recent years, in parallel to the huge influx of aspiring vloggers into the industry.

Notwithstanding, events such as VidCon benefit from their legacy as catalysts for some of the vlogging industry's most famous friendships and relationships: beauty vlogger Zoella very publicly met her boyfriend and collaborator Alfie Deyes at a convention. Likewise, popular UK Vlogger Lucy has discussed meeting friends and frequent collaborators Dodie and Evan through conventions and vlogging festivals on her vlog and Twitter. However, in our interview Lucy complicated her promotion of Summer in The City as a space for networking, by commenting on the professionalisation of the industry: "SITC is basically a selling merchandise convention now, which is quite sad". Here, Lucy provides a comment on the hierarchy of networking events, during which access is influenced and stratified by follower numbers, management and social connections.

Established and popular vloggers, including Lucy, are inaccessible to most aspiring creators, aside from opportunities to buy their merchandise. Vloggers who have 'made it' often conspicuously demonstrate participation in high status circles - at one Blogosphere networking event, the group of vloggers I was chatting with articulated their annoyance with a vlogger who had experienced significant channel growth and was now reluctant to associate with them. She was now spending her time during the event with a group of higher status established vloggers. Even when there is no green room or official separation of space, a physical separation displaying the hierarchy happens 'naturally'. A List vloggers

gather around the stage area, appearing more relaxed, greeting those they know, and confidently making introductions. Newcomers and those with a low-following (AKA me) chat nervously around the event peripherals, anxiously swapping cards with each other. Event norms dictate that vloggers who are low status, are not to approach or bother A List vloggers. The few incidents I witnessed that broke these norms were met with a patient pleasantness by the A List vlogger, but the interaction was often short, and on occasion frosty. My experience as an outsider at vlogging events recalled my first forays into academic conferences as a PhD student, bringing up overwhelming feelings of anxiety. However, rather than feeling simply poorly connected and intellectually inferior, my presence at vlogging events was also underpinned by feelings of panic due to my aesthetic presentation, as status was also dictated by a performance of heteronormative and hegemonic beauty and style.

The significance of networking in media industries has been widely observed, however scholars consistently focus on one particular format and space of networking, namely through alcohol-soaked parties, bar hopping and during music festivals such as South by Southwest and Burning Man in the US. The target of these events are often young, white men. In their ethnographies of new media industries, Florida (2014), Marwick (2013b) and Neff (2012) cite the value of late night networking sociality in these industries: cementing contacts, landing freelancing gigs and advancing ones career. Critical attention has been paid to how this style of informal networking in cultural and creative industries throws up manifold barriers for women: Marwick (2013b) demonstrates women who attend networking drinks can be read as sleeping their way to the top; Scharff (2015) notes a reluctance for women to counter normative feminine self-presentations and engender

'pushy' behaviours associated with selling oneself at networking events; Wing-Fai et al (2015) argue an emphasis on long hours of compulsive sociality presents significant difficulties for those with caring responsibilities. Beauty vlogging network events do away with the ostensibly *informal* nature of clubbing and compulsory sociality, as aligned with tech-centred bar scenes. As Duffy (2017) points out, events for influencers and fashion bloggers are feminised along stereotypical lines of pleasantness and commerciality. This feminised *commerciality* made up a significant part of the events I attended, and will be analysed more completely in the following section. For now, I should point out that vlogging events fit within the highly gendered ecology of the UK vlogging industry, which is structured along stereotypical gendered themes, echoing and calcifying the gender division in brands' target markets.

Gender, Labour and Networking at Vlogging Industry Events

The vlogging events I attended were often segregated along gendered lines. Blogosphere and ERIC Festival were explicitly aimed at women, emphasising beauty and fashion. Female brand representatives, often wearing bright pink t-shirts handed out a brand of nipple cream, pink 'denim' themed body spray and sachets of liquid collagen in branded tote bags. The food and drink were also feminised: we were served cocktails and cans of pink chardonnay, and tables were flanked with trays and trays of the ultimate postfeminist girly treat, the cupcake (Nathanson, 2015; Winch, 2013). Aside from the momentary indulgence of the cupcake, however, the emphasis was firmly on wellness and our audience's presumed interest in maintaining calorie-controlled diet. Reps handed out rice cakes and vegan protein balls, alongside other portion controlled pre-packaged, low-fat snack foods. Men

justified their presence by their technical expertise, as professional photographers or talent agents. Occasionally beauty vloggers on panels humorously pointed out their 'Instagram husbands' in the crowd, an ironic term used to describe boyfriends whose role is to take their girlfriend's social media pictures and videos. These young men emerged from the shadows and would sheepishly wave when called upon. Attendees were often addressed knowingly as 'ladies' and 'girls', and as audiences, we were positioned as understanding the unique challenges, and opportunities, of femininity.

For some of the larger events, such as VidCon, macro-attendance was gender-diverse. In these spaces, gendering took place at a more micro level: specific streams, workshops and panels were aimed at, and advertised for, female vloggers. In our interview, Laura Cherinkoff, who worked for VidCon between 2010 and 2016, described her ambivalence around the smaller, and often side-lined 'girl' and women-focussed panels organised during her tenure at VidCon.

One thing I worry about is that, that scapegoats actually needing to be diverse because you put women up there to talk about being women on YouTube instead of having every panel be 50/50 or more 50/50... and it's that old thing of like we are just talking about gender instead of actually making it more equal. So that, I have no idea how to solve. (Laura, ICG)

Cherinkoff mused about whether women only panels and workshops have been harmful or helpful to female vloggers, in addition to people of colour and LGBT creators who each had their own segregated panels. Cherinkoff's reflection here demonstrates the constraining

and pervasive inequalities that flow through the wider structure of the vlogging industry, as she wonders about whether diversity is simply performed by tokenised panels. The segmentation of panels and events based on identity also facilitated some telling gaffes. At VidCon 2018 networking event for “Black Creators” was on at *exactly the same time* as the networking event for “College Students”, the implication being that these two do would not have a shared audience (VidCon, 2018a). The presence of emblematic panels at industry events (although not on the main stage) recalls Ahmed’s description of the performativity of diversity policy documents at Universities: as she puts it “the idea that the document ‘does race’ means that people can think race has been ‘done’” (Ahmed, 2012: 101). In a similar vein, ‘doing gender’ (or race, or queerness) through a panel at vlogging industry events becomes a substitute for critical attention, or action.

Sessions on women, and women’s experiences, were often intertwined with normative topics, such as building a beauty channel, branding and advertising, ‘body confidence’, and managing work-life balance. Audiences at these panels, too, were predominately female presenting. Discussions of gender, and experiences of gender, at female-only panels at vlogging events are often evocative of “post post-feminism”, in which certain representations of feminism are highly visible in culture, whilst simultaneously undermined as they are individualised and personalised (Gill, 2016). For example, at one panel during VidCon EU, four highly styled, heteronormatively beautiful, and slim vloggers discussed body shaming on YouTube, arguing that social media platforms have offered an alternative to mainstream depictions of beauty. One of the panellists, Bethany, jubilantly informed an audience of aspiring creators, “everybody has different body types and they’re all beautiful, and screw anyone who disagrees honestly, they’re crazy”. This statement was followed by

wild claps and cheers from the audience. However, this opinion is clearly at odds with the reality of vlogging on YouTube, which is structured by the performance of a very specific style of authenticity and hegemonic beauty. Those that disagree may be 'crazy', but among them are representatives from intermediaries such as brands, talent agents, event organisers and PR agencies. Ultimately, panels and events aimed at women very rarely explicitly discussed the problems and barriers that women experience on the platform. I offer two reasons for this: the commercial nature of events, in other words the product they are selling is the possibility of a career on YouTube. Secondly, the participants were constrained by the need to perform passionate work and authentic self-branding. Both of these themes will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Performing Professionalism at Vlogging Networking Events

At the vlogging events I participated in, attendees' behaviours were underscored by a consistent performance of a controlled and highly feminised professionalism. The vloggers in attendance were highly stylised, coiffed and wearing significant quantities of 'natural' make-up. Although many attendees wore seasonally appropriate 'casual' outfits, for example jeans and jumpers, these ensembles were neat, stylish and thoughtfully accented with a chunky heel or a beret. The 'casual' oeuvre of these outfits were, in fact, highly laborious: ensembles were often re-stylised throughout the day in the designated dressing rooms at event spaces. Norms were actively policed by event staff; during the first vlogging event I attended I was tapped on the shoulder by a deeply concerned event organiser, and informed that I had lipstick on my teeth. I was firmly directed to the dressing room to correct my appearance before I re-entered the space. I found my time participating in

vlogging events to be deeply uncomfortable. I agonised over what to wear, and even after spending numerous hours trying on different outfits, I always felt shabby and unpolished in comparison to A List vloggers. Ultimately, I did not anticipate that attending events that are stratified by a performance of a very specific 'authentic' beauty, even with my inherent distance as a researcher. After all, I didn't want to be a beauty vlogger. However, I still felt bad. That is to say, the norms that govern these spaces are pervasive, even with an ostensive researchers' critical distance.

The controlled self-presentational strategies are also exemplified by my field notes from one Blogosphere event, which had a 'tea party' theme and featured tables with rows and rows of intricately decorated cupcakes as the room's centrepiece. Although I saw many vloggers photograph themselves posing with the cakes, I only saw one or two people actually consume them. I asked a group of vloggers why they were throwing their cakes away following the photo shoots. One told me the event was being filmed, this being ostensibly a sufficient explanation. Another suggested that she needed her hands free to visit brand booths. The event had an open bar, but the bar was consistently empty despite the room being full, with 100-odd attendees. I was the only person who visited the bar multiple times. The barman, dressed in vintage garb (a waistcoat), lent on his elbows looking bored for the majority of the afternoon after attendees had claimed their welcoming drink. Vloggers I chatted to said they were resisting going to the bar as they didn't want to become sloppy during the event. The hesitancy to drink, or be seen drinking, runs counter to booze-fuelled sociality conceptualised in accounts of media social networking (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; McRobbie, 2015; Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005). It fits

in with the heavy emphasis on a feminised moral authenticity and the thin lines of respectability outlined in the previous Chapter.

At networking events, vloggers self-presented as ‘on the clock’. As discussed previously, the networking events could be considered a “figured world”, in which imaginations, behaviours and narratives inform and constitute the world we exist in: in other words, we behave “as if” a cultural world is a certain way, and this behaviour structures the norms, practices and values of the figured world (Holland, 2001: 52). At networking events vloggers continuously behaved “as if” they were professionals being scrutinised by potential talent agents and brands, and the events stoked this mythology through citing the industry figures, talent agents and brands that would also be in attendance. VidCon suggest creators can party with “online video professionals” if they purchase Creator tickets (VidCon, 2018b). Similarly, ERIC Festival circulated promotional emails to attendees before Blogosphere events, highlighting the high-status talent agents who would be in attendance. Agents were often associated with high status talent agencies and were billed as attending to network with attendees and advise vloggers on how to be scouted. Although they were physically present at the event, often speaking on panels to promote their agencies, there was little evidence they were there to scout for vloggers. Rather, they appeared visibly exhausted by the crowds of vloggers who would approach them following their talks. As I outlined in Chapter Four, talent agents very rarely sign new talent and predominately ‘scout’ through the friends of vloggers they have currently signed. However, their presence was consistently promoted by the event organisers, working both to legitimise their events and attract attendees.

In summary, networking was a huge component of many vlogging events, the term being used routinely in promotional materials, timetables and on event signage. Through interviews it became apparent that many people involved in event organisation, including board members, speakers and high-profile vloggers understood that there was a very limited chance for most aspiring vloggers to grow their careers. Despite this fact, meet-ups and conventions of all sizes promised opportunities for networking with high profile YouTubers and industry figures, promoting their events as chances to break into the industry. Events were not as free and open as they promoted themselves to be, and for many were difficult to break into. Although many vlogging events were promoted as fun, and marketed as parties, festivals and tea parties, many behaved *as if* they were professionals undertaking work responsibilities. Attendees' self-presentations were also influenced by the promotion of possibilities of forging connections with various brands. The specific nature of these promoted opportunities for brand networking will now be discussed in more detail.

Vlogging Events and Brands

The networking events I attended also doubled as a space for vloggers to forge connections with commercial brands. Cosmetic and lifestyle brands maintained colourfully branded stalls and booths, which often bordered event spaces, ring-fencing the 'action'. These stalls were often staffed by stylish (overwhelmingly female presenting) reps wearing slogan-splashed t-shirts, arms loaded with goody bags. For brands, this style of presence at an event or workshop is a cost-effective method to ensure products are photographed and shared by vloggers in their video content. Negotiating with A List vloggers' agents is expensive,

however sampling product at a vlogging event can lead to coverage by hundreds of mid-size vloggers, for comparatively minimal expenditure. Networking events are structured to allow time for attendees to queue up to visit stalls, to receive their quota of free product. On exit there are fresh goodie bags full of merchandise (all my Christmas gifts during my field work). Food, drinks and music are all sponsored by lifestyle brands, some offering prizes to participants who marketed their product the most attractively. Beauty vloggers are invited, and expected, to court brand reps at events. These interactions culminate with the provision of contact and YouTube details, so the representation of the gifted and sample products could be effectively monitored.

Speakers at vlogging events often emphasised the importance for vloggers to learn how to work effectively with brands. Panels and sessions I attended had names such as “Navigating Brand Deals and Sponsored Content”, “How to Win Deals with Your Favourite Brands”, “How to earn money from your social media channels without jeopardising your brand”, and “The Business of YOU”. However, although the practicalities of pitching brands were occasionally reviewed, it was the subject of juggling ‘authenticity’ with brand deals that dominated panel discussions. Experts and featured creators would consistently advocate caution when working with brands, reminding attendees in strong terms that their audiences could easily identify inauthentic promotions. This was often met with solemn nods and murmurs from the audience - the risk of maintaining trustworthiness was taken seriously in the spaces. On panels and in workshops, the imperative to integrate marketing communications naturally was communicated in manifold ways. Experts and beauty vloggers often illustrated their advice with anonymised accounts of vloggers who they felt were managing their authentic self-presentation poorly. During one lively panel, Kat, a

lifestyle vlogger enacted a lively impression of poorly integrating marketing communications, saying “I am a Stepford Wife” in a robotic voice, and performing a version of ‘the robot’ dance. For Kat, the scripted and homogenous Stepford Wife is the ultimate obverse of ‘being yourself’, although this is an interesting choice when viewed through the lens of gender politics, because domestic content is the cornerstone of Kat’s brand. However, Kat does not consider herself comparable to a Stepford Wife, as her content is performed with acknowledgements of humour, imperfection and ordinariness, bolstering a self-presentation as relatable and authentic.

Ultimately, the self-presentation strategies that were advocated by experts overwhelmingly encouraged the precise and established strategies of performing authenticity defined in Chapter Five. All events instructed in how to perform a defined and static style of ‘authenticity’ when working with brands. The four primary themes were: firstly, not to work with any brands that one did not genuinely purchase, or aspire to purchase. Secondly, that there is an established hierarchy of sponsored content and advertising; banner adverts and third-party adverts (which are often unpredictable and difficult to moderate and control), were all heavily discouraged. Thirdly, interweaving sponsored output ‘naturally’ into seemingly everyday and unsponsored content was consistently advocated. Finally, a surprisingly specific reoccurring theme was to draw up personal guidelines for how to remain authentic. I was advocated three times to write such a list. This list’s function is to essentially work as a Ghost of Christmas Past, to remind aspiring vloggers *why* they began our vlog in the first place. Experts often struggled to reconcile the advice that advocated acceptably authentic reasons for beginning a vlog (because you love it), with the marketing

of workshops and events as advisory resources to start vlogging as an entrepreneurial venture.

At ERIC Festival experts advised us against unfavourable avenues of revenue growth such as banners-ads. We were instead encouraged to proactively seek out and interact with brands. For vloggers to align themselves with brands that they could work with in the future is strategic, and a form of authenticity labour: a legacy of covering these brands *organically* means *paid* brand content will sit more naturally within video genres and themes. In this vein, the experts suggested that we produce unpaid video and social media content to catch the attention of a brands' social media staff. A version of this authenticity labour has been identified in influencer industries; Pham identified the need for proto-fashion bloggers to maintain good relationships with brands and designers (Pham, 2011) and Duffy has identified the practice of aligning oneself with certain brands in the hope of obtaining paid work, as "entrepreneurial brand devotion" (Duffy, 2017: 138). For the attendees at ERIC Festival, the activities suggested by experts were extremely laborious, for example identifying opportunities to work for free at retail events and for businesses in our local area. The suggestion to provide extensive marketing for free, is normalised due to the pervasiveness of unpaid internships in feminised industries (Perlin, 2012). Those running the workshops promoted the myriad ways that working for exposure had 'paid off' for them. One of the experts enthusiastically told us that she had created promotional content for the clothing brand *Topshop*, which had caught the attention of another popular clothing brand, eventually leading to a paid opportunity.

During a panel at a private blogging and vlogging event, one of the experts told a packed room of hopeful vloggers: “If it’s a brand that you really want to work with, do it organically first. Like, show them you’re interested in the brand, or if you go back with links and show them you have already featured them several times” (Stephanie, beauty vlogger). In other words, vloggers should pitch brands with links to YouTube videos that already feature their products in a positive light. Variations of this advice were given time and time again at events, workshops and panels. The call to feature brands that you hope to work with, for free, involves purchasing the products upfront at great personal expense. If brands do favour vloggers who have already featured their products, the people who cannot afford to partake in this practice are at a serious disadvantage. This trend is evocative of the wider norms of feminised industries. At ERIC Festival, the legitimised ‘careers’ focus meant that experts steered away from directly calling for consumption as an employment strategy, but workshop leaders did advocate volunteer work for brands for vloggers to increase and improve portfolios. Again, this stratifies participation by time, geography, responsibility and existing social connections. Each of these labours can be filed under the broad umbrella of “aspirational labour” (Duffy, 2017: 4) in which individuals take on significant work, often for large corporations, in the hope it pays off in the future. Individual career investments can also be defined as entrepreneurial labour”; which often involves strategically involves taking on tasks that may create visibility such as ‘working for exposure’, namely labouring in the hope it leads to developing networks, contacts and further opportunities (Neff, 2012). This work is often unpaid or paid very poorly.

Vlogging Events and Money

Through authenticity labour, vlogging events minimised discussions of money: money was conspicuously absent during discussions, workshops and panels. If payment was discussed, it was abstract, distanced from financial sums. Occasionally, full-time vloggers cited their individual experiences with brand sponsorships, but this discussion rarely extended towards the practicalities paying living costs. The positioning of beauty vlogging income as supplementary, or abstracted from bills and rent, recalls the historical framing of money earned by women as secondary pocket money for trinkets, second to the centralised 'family wage' earned by men (Bachmann, 2011; Zelizer, 1997). Arguably, beauty vloggers refrain from public monetary discourse because it reads as unfeminine and is crossed with classed anxieties around respectability. Explicit discussions of wealth are giveaways of working classness, those who do not have the symbolic or cultural capital do not have the tools to display their wealth in the 'correct manner' (Fussell, 1983; Leonard et al., 2015). In their unprecedented genre of fame, which is highly volatile, beauty vloggers must ensure that they distance themselves from the figure of the "Essex Girl" (Biressi & Nunn, 2016: 41) or the "celebrity chav", the reality TV star, who are defined by excessive consumption and self-presentations, and ultimately their "inability to perform femininity correctly", and who as a component of their self-brand, flaunt their newly acquired income freely (Genz, 2015; Tyler & Bennett, 2010: 381; Wood, 2017). In opposition to these figures of excess, beauty vloggers are highly invested in a performed ordinariness, a very specific style of authenticity. Ultimately though, personal experiences of money and bills, would perhaps force vloggers into the uncomfortable position of admitting they have taken work that they did not *genuinely* love, to meet various financial needs.

Refraining from discussing finances and advising on how to make vlogging a *career* is a tricky circle to square. A List beauty vloggers, serving as experts on panels and workshops, had to undertake extensive and creative identity work when advising on financial strategy. Many achieved this by describing vlogging as “passionate work”, identifiable by a “girlish enthusiasm” and provides the foundations for a highly conservative “re-traditionalization” that reinforces women’s line to unpaid, creative entrepreneurship (McRobbie, 2015: 110). McRobbie notes that for women, social mobility femininity and middle-class status depend on employment in an industry one ‘loves’. Certainly, the dictum that you should not be vlogging if you don’t love it, or are not passionate about the subject consistently arose at every event I attended. Experts and featured beauty vloggers suggested over and over again that attendees must be working for passion and should not be motivated by money.

In one instance, Rebecca - a lifestyle vlogger - vigorously defended the practice of working for free to a rapt audience on a Saturday just before Christmas in Shoreditch. She, and three other beauty vloggers sat on white leather sofas on a stage adorned with miniature Christmas trees. Rebecca’s voice cracked as she stressed, “sometimes it’s OK to do things for free! Sometimes it’s OK to do things because you love the brand! You do not need to be ‘I need to be paid for this, I need to be paid for this’”. Rebecca, described her frustration with the professionalisation of the industry, wherein many vloggers have talent agents and are demanding increased fees. The other three vloggers beside her nodded their heads sympathetically, and one went on to discuss how money is not always the only tangible benefit that can be provided by brand collaborations: they argued undertaking collaborations can engender visibility, legitimisation in the space, and can lead to further

opportunities. Despite the unpredictable nature of payment and security within such models, Rebecca informed the audience of her anxieties pertaining to vloggers demanding large fees, suggesting that they are putting off brands from working with vloggers if they do not have a large budget. These fears are symptomatic of the panic and anxiety experienced by many whose precarious careers are subject to the whims of the stakeholders in the vlogging industry, including brands, YouTube and talent agencies.

Discourses of meritocracy and individualisation in creative work can be stubborn and persuasive – in a pioneering project on early digital media workers in Europe, Gill (2002) identified that participants did not believe they were experiencing inequality or discrimination. However, she observed deeply gender divides and inequalities in working hours, project salary and in the division between working space and domestic life. She observed “individualism, combined with the ‘hip, cool and equal’ speak in and about the industry, conceals (and renders difficult to speak of) the serious patterns of inequality that are emerging in this new field” (Gill, 2002: 14). Extending these themes alongside Conor and Taylor (2015), Gill takes a broader look at creative industries. She argues inequalities therein remain “depressingly persistent”, and highlights the perceived risk inherent in challenging creative employers - for example that it is in “bad taste” to ask about money, when one is in the privileged position of being employed in creative industries at all (Conor et al., 2015: 6-8).

In this context, for beauty vloggers, taking on paid opportunities was framed as a choice rather than a necessity. Many suggested they were extremely fussy in which brands they worked with. What was interesting was that this ‘fussiness’ was often cited in relation to

how closely brands matched the themes of their vlog, rather than brand conduct, or proposed fee. In fact, attendees at vlogging events were explicitly discouraged from speaking negatively about their experiences of working with brands, both by experts and A List vloggers. Brands who were looking to pay less than the going rate were framed as abstractions - they were minimised as 'naughty' or cheeky, and positioned as in need of education, rather than exploitative. During an ERIC Festival vlogging workshop, attendees were informed not to be 'negative' when attending events, liaising with brands or indeed in their filmed content. In the session, the experts made clear that brands were monitoring mentions of their products, or even just monitoring prospective vloggers that they may work with. We were told "if you do a piece on ASOS, they will look into it". Social media monitoring was positioned as an opportunity, but simultaneously as a risk, as brands would view anything critical or negative that was filmed or posted. In other words, surveillance of vlogging channels was normalised, and even promoted as beneficial, although it was implied any critical content would hinder opportunities in the future.

The mandate to be always pleasant for brands is reminiscent of the kind of gendered "deep acting" that involves suppression of negative emotions such as anger and sadness in order to appease customers and audiences - in other words, deep acting involves "making indirect use of a trained emotion" (Hochschild, 2012: 38). Furthermore, A List beauty vloggers' self-presentations are reminiscent of the stereotypical, highly feminised performances of a 'masquerade' as first observed by Riviere (1929). In their self-presentations, beauty vloggers consistently downplayed business acumen and ambition, through positioning vlogging as a hobby or an amateur pursuit, led by 'emotion' not 'rationality' (Riviere, 1997). For example, an A List beauty vlogger panellist named Stephanie initially revealed herself as extremely

savvy when pitching to brands, informing an event audience that she pitches brands by comparing her fee favourably to the price tag of hiring a videographer, photographer, and booking a model. Stephanie's initial statement on costing brand pitches is the closest I heard any beauty vlogger come to publicly being explicit about their economic or business strategy during my field work. However, this statement was quickly undercut by her 'crisis' narrative, framed as a cautionary tale for aspiring vloggers. She told the audience that she was working with too many brands. She informed the audience that she had been counselled by her grandmother and some friends, who reminded her the true reason she had started her vlog back in the early days. She told us:

*I felt a little overwhelmed... There's amazing brands that contact you... but actually didn't start it to work with brands, **well you shouldn't be anyway**... you should start it because you're passionate about it (Stephanie, beauty vlogger)*

Ultimately, vlogging events could be seen as moments of "context collapse", as A List beauty vloggers are expected to discuss their backstage labour, whilst ensuring their 'authentic' front stage brand remained intact (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Many of the attendees looking for business advice were also fans, looking forward to seeing their favourite 'authentic' vloggers speaking on panels and during workshops. This presented a further tension that can explain Stephanie's outburst: vloggers cannot both lay bare their business practices and maintain their self-brand as if they vlog purely 'for the love of it'.

In sum, the identity work demanded of female vloggers in the vlogging industry, to be seen as 'authentic', often contradicts the real insecurity of freelance work. Self-branding

strategies must be taken into account when we reflect the stories beauty vloggers tell audiences working with brands (Marwick, 2013b). Beauty vloggers' statements tell a story about their lucrative self-brands as both authentic and non-commercial, in addition to reinforcing their ethical standpoint towards brand collaborators. This is a huge plus in an industry that hinges on convincing performances of 'authenticity'. In other words, we should look at statements on working with brands as examples of identity construction. However, to take them at surface level is problematic when used solely as *evidence* that beauty vloggers are, indeed, exclusively passionate and authentic. I argue that the reluctance to talk about money during vlogging events is symptomatic of class anxiety and a call to 'passionate work', but an unwillingness to share rates and failure to organise collectively weakens vloggers' bargaining position. The advice given to participants during vlogging events, particularly on how to manage brand relationships, fruitfully highlights many of the tensions that lie at the heart of the vlogging industry between brands, vloggers and the YouTube platform.

The YouTube Space

The previous sections of this Chapter have focussed on YouTube events, however in the following section, I will concentrate solely on the YouTube Space. The YouTube Space is a permanent resource provided by YouTube. The Space does run regular events, but in its operation as a day to day service, it provides many functions and resources for vloggers. Access to the YouTube Space is stratified by subscribe volume. A restricted level of access is available to those with 1000 channel subscribers, who can attend fan events and some workshops. Those with 10,000 subscribers can access the networking Café, some events and

workshops. The top tier, 100,000 subscribers, affords you access to all of the above, in addition to bookable time in the editing suites and film studios.

I should note that it was extremely difficult for me to gain access to the Space as a researcher. After many unanswered emails to Google, YouTube press, academics associated with YouTube, and various other contacts provided by colleagues, I eventually achieved access through my personal networks, more specifically by a director friend of mine, who mentioned my research to a receptive producer while he was editing in the Space. After I was provided access to the Space it became apparent that these supposedly rigid entry barriers are in fact more flexible if you know the 'right people'. These people were *known to the Space*. For example, my Director friend was able to spend time editing a music video at the Space, even though he does not have a YouTube channel. Even after this project had concluded, I was visiting the Creator Café one day and I ran into him 'hanging out' there with a potential collaborator, despite the free coffee, fruit and snacks being ostensibly only available to those with over 10,000 subscribers. The subscriber thresholds promoted are irrelevant to those with high degrees of social capital. Individuals who are 'known to the Space' but with fewer subscribers, or even without YouTube channels, are able to access the Space with their friends. In other words, those who are accepted as part of the defined YouTube culture in the UK, have an increased access to the Space, which contributes to its business and ensures that those in attendance look and sound right (Neff et al., 2005). Allowing non-YouTubers to use the Space to create the illusion of creativity is not company policy, rather it is a "sanctioned counter-practice", implemented by producers to bolster a self-representation as meritocratic, creative, busy and open (Sims, 2017: 133). To present

the Space as in use by creators, social actors are permitted entry if they fulfil an archetype of a YouTuber, brand or creative.

I was shown around the YouTube Space by a Production Coordinator. The role of Programme Coordinator necessitates a high level of social capital, their job is to ‘hang out’ and be ‘in the know’. The value of knowing the ‘right’ people of high status socially has been highlighted in many ethnographical accounts of digital media industries, as has the value of networking activities undertaken in ‘physical’ spaces in industries that ostensibly take place mostly ‘online’ (Conor et al., 2015; Gill, 2002; Marwick, 2013b; Neff, 2012). Programme Coordinators are essentially facilitators, looking after talent, and keeping an eye out to ensure the *right* YouTubers are afforded easy access to the Space. In this vein, Programmes Coordinators literally work as both gatekeepers and social producers at the space, making and remaking its culture. French philosopher Henri Lefebvre studied the relationship between space, and the formation of everyday interior and social life. In his work *The Production of Space* he critically explores the production of social space, asking “who produces? What? How? Why and for whom” (Lefebvre, 1991 69). For Lefebvre, space is established through the forces of production, economic structures, institutional and state superstructures:

A social space cannot be adequately accounted for by nature (climate, site) or by its previous history. Nor does the growth of the forces of the production give rise in any casual fashion on a particular space of time. Mediations and mediators have to be taken into consideration: the action of groups, factors within knowledge, within ideology, or within the domain of representations. (Lefebvre, 1991: 77)

In this context, Programme Coordinators are mediators in the Space, and their preconceived ideas about who are the 'right' people to be represented therein produce what this resource is, and who it is for. Their perception of YouTubers' current projects, YouTubers' backgrounds, their channel genre, and their regular collaborators also contributes to how other YouTubers experience the YouTube Space. For example, coordinating also involves matching creators up with advertising opportunities and potential collaborations that arise often through the grapevine, or through conversations with representatives for brands that film in the Space. The practice that benefits those who are physically present in the Space, 'hanging out', who Programme Coordinators are friends with and who they view as worthy of help.

As men are overrepresented in YouTube's most visible channels, white men were noticeably overrepresented at the Space during each of my visits, they were often the archetype of the creative class as defined by Florida (2014): young men with hip haircuts, wearing a combination of slightly dishevelled expensive shirts, no ties and jeans. These men hung around comfortably in groups, greeting each other and other YouTube staff. The equipment store and technical production staff were also young white men. They wore the production uniform of skinny black jeans, black t-shirts and one silver earring each. I rarely encountered women either employed at, or participating in the Space, aside from a handful of producers, reception staff, and the Creator Café barista. Beauty vloggers very rarely use the Space, unless they are working with brands who book the Space to shoot adverts. This is partly because of the beauty vlogging genre aesthetic, namely an authentic and consistent 'bedroom' backdrop. As outlined in Chapter Five, beauty vloggers must perform a gendered

authenticity that is also precarious and risky. The bedroom 'set' is best available in vloggers' own homes. Moreover, a clearly re-purposed set that is used by multiple vloggers would arguably not suffice as real, relatable and genuine enough to be considered authentic. During a recent re-design of the YouTube Space, the designers had replaced more intimate sets and studios with big stages and green screens that lend themselves to high-action productions, which arguably sends a message about the kinds of activities that are valued in the Space.

However, while speaking to female vloggers it became apparent that some felt uncomfortable at the YouTube Space. Ultimately, they did not believe it was *for* them. During an interview with one lifestyle vlogger called Astrid, she told me:

I don't really feel at home in the YouTube Space, I don't feel comfortable there, because the people that go to the YouTube Space very often want to do short films and big sets... and they go there and they rent out all of this equipment and I was like... "can I borrow a mic" and they were like "what kind of mic do you want". And I was like... I literally don't know... I don't think it's for people who want to do more casual YouTubing. (Astrid, lifestyle vlogger)

Even though Astrid would, by many people's standards, be considered a very technically literate person, both in her 'day job' and in her skills as a lifestyle vlogger, the fact that she did not know the 'right mic' contributed to an understanding that the Space was not 'for her'. The conflation of knowledge of microphones with technological adeptness falls along

male gendered stereotypes of what technological expertise, and what a technological expert, *should* look like.

Gill (2002) observed that female digital creative workers were more likely to work from home despite a preference for co-working spaces. Indeed, the female YouTubers and beauty vloggers who do not feel comfortable in the Space, or simply do not require its resources to shoot their videos, are less likely to be present for the informal networking, and in turn, less likely to be visible to gatekeepers for opportunities. Several (male) vloggers keep working hours at the Space every day, as one would go to an office. These men hold meetings on the designer rocking chairs and work on their laptops while perched on bar stools in the Creator Café. This practice is evocative of the creative class of Florida's imagination who benefit from their work in "creative centres" (Florida, 2014: 186). Through the examples cited here, we can see how gendered generic conventions become calcified through the production of space within the initiatives such as the YouTube Space. Indeed, the culture of the YouTube Space that prioritises big and complex shoots, and the emphasis on a certain kind of technical knowledge, can contribute to those with small-scale YouTube channels feeling unwelcome. Inequalities on YouTube are not limited to who simply enters the Space, although they are in part bolstered by who feels comfortable 'hanging out' there, for example through the provision of opportunities by Programmes Coordinators.

Summary

The events discussed in this Chapter are associated with creativity in myriad ways that are both complicated and contradictory. For example, ERIC Festival, an event with strong links

to the Government and DCMS, positions itself as a creative, disruptive and radical alternative to more traditional career festivals. This is evident within its marketing materials, for example their Festival website features a message from its founders:

Mae and Sam are appalled that there is still a lack of relevant and engaging information on how to break into the creative industries and are adamant they can disrupt this tradition. (ERIC Festival, 2017)

For ERIC's founders, Mae and Sam, the issues plaguing creative industries in the UK include both a lack of education and also the ostensibly stagnant way in which this information is delivered. By creatively re-making the *mise en scène* of the job fair, into a festival, they believe they can inspire aspiring creatives from diverse backgrounds by providing "fun stuff to see and do".

However, over the course of events the advice given to aspiring vloggers included taking on significant unpaid labour to establish oneself, avoiding many paid opportunities that you do not genuinely *love* and taking a reduced fee to be more attractive to prospective employers. This advice does not address many well-known barriers to participation for underrepresented groups, such as poverty of time, geographical location and the value of existing social networks. The advice given at events more broadly does not realistically address the challenges of the YouTube algorithm studied in Chapter Three, the uneven advantages afforded by talent agents outlined in Chapter Four, or the unequal authenticity economy of vlogging, as attended to in Chapter Five. Workshops certainly did not inform or educate hopeful creatives on how to make a living wage. I argue that at best, workshops

instructed attendees on how to make sporadic and inconsistent pockets of money, should they have the opportunity to work with a brand that they *genuinely* love. Financial remuneration was framed as choice and was abstracted from tangible economic realities such as rent payments and career development. The inequalities of participation in the vlogging industry are made visible here: vlogging is only a reality for those with financial and parental support, or a complementary job that has flexibility. Many vloggers refrained from discussing money; I posit that this is due to a perception of financial discourse as inauthentic, and by extension unfeminine, developing the points raised in Chapter Five. Male vloggers do speak more openly about money. To name one example, British/American vlogger Evan Edvinger published an article with BBC Newsbeat in which he detailed the ways that YouTubers can generate income, including estimating AdSense and brand ads (BBC Newsbeat, 2017).

Many beauty vlogging attendees of vlogging events are looking to learn and to glean insights on how to grow their channels and address risk and insecurity. From speaking to attendees, it became apparent that they had often saved up to attend, travelled widely and some had gone to significant lengths to arrange child care on a Saturday afternoon. They are engaged, they take notes, they film panels using their iPhones and ask questions. Part of the reason for their journeys is that events are positioned as opportunities to forge connections and grow ones' own profile and network. Although vlogging is widely positioned as a creative undertaking, as illustrated by the vignettes and quotes at the opening of this Chapter, I have demonstrated that attendees undertake strict and often scripted self-presentation strategies to achieve visibility in these networking spaces. Speaking to my second Research Question, it is clear here that the structure of events organises how vloggers self-present

and participate. Put differently, although billed as creative, networking events are repetitive and laborious. Attendees often behave “as if” they are on display to prospective brands and employers, meaning they rarely eat, drink and maintain a performed pleasantness with other attendees (Holland, 2001: 49). There are specific time periods and social norms, built into event schedules for attendees to liaise with brands, standardised gift sets and set processes for exchanging information between brands and vloggers at events. Time and again, vloggers were warned if they deviated from accepted behaviours then they would not be successful in the industry.

Vloggers were advised to only work with a small range of very specific brands, and to *be authentic*, meant that those giving advice struggled to reconcile their own business practices with their self-presentations within public spaces. I argue that vlogging events often reveal the contradictions and tensions between performed pleasantness, the necessity for hawkish business strategies in the competitive vlogging industry, and the coveted designation of authenticity. This is illustrated neatly in a quote from a popular beauty vlogger Hallie, during her time speaking on a panel at one Blogosphere event that I attended;

I really pride myself on authenticity, and I think that's what a lot of my channel is based on, my real life and my real feelings, um but that doesn't mean I don't sometimes censor things that I say.... Sometimes I'll type things and I do have to read it back and I'm like, is this the right thing to say, or sometimes I need to sleep on it too, it's not always an instant thing... I don't always publish everything that goes through my brain, I do have to consider that I am now a brand I guess and how I represent myself online is extremely important to the brands I work with and the

*people that follow me, so I never want to come across wrong. I think sometimes, words can be... misinterpreted, and what you might think you're saying is actually read a certain way. So I do think about it... **But most of the time I am just the type of girl who says what she thinks and hope people can understand.** (Hallie, beauty vlogger)*

In this quote, Hallie ricochets between articulating the careful and laborious considerations she gives her videos and blog posts and defining the labours inherent in performing the authenticity necessitated within the genre of beauty vlogging. She makes clear the deep influence that brands and her audience have on her content, articulating the risks of “coming across wrong” but rounds off her statement by saying she is the type of girl who “says what she thinks”. This statement captures one of the primary tensions of the vlogging event: namely, they are key self-branding opportunities for vloggers, whilst demanding an ostensibly candid reveal of channel strategies.

Vlogging is often scripted, repetitive and laborious, and fits within a legacy of romanticising jobs that are very monotonous and commercial as creative, because of their traditional associations with art and celebrity. An example from Becker illustrates this point: he suggests that we attribute ‘creativity’ to musicians in an orchestra yet their work is often mundane and tedious (Becker, 2018). Acceptable vlogging genres are limited, and the role is filled with administrative work. However, that is not my only thesis. Rather, there are several calls to labour within the vlogging industry that I find more troubling, especially when vlogging is positioned as a more open and accessible pathway to the creative

industries by the organisers of vlogging events, vloggers and charities funded by Government.

My first research question is “how do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging?”. To answer this question, I have studied the gatekeepers in the vlogging industry that are often minimised or ignored in discussions during vlogging events. Although I know many A List vloggers benefit significantly from talent management, the managers or agents were not discussed at events I attended by these vloggers. The sole occasion that the role of talent management and agencies were acknowledged was when the attendance of talent managers was cited in event marketing communications. This was designed to promote events, arguably through advertising the possibility of being ‘scouted’. The realistic potential for being discovered at an event is unlikely: as I have outlined in Chapter Four, digital talent agents do not often sign talent, and often they rely on social networks from their existing talent when they do so. Furthermore, although the YouTube Space promotes itself as a meritocratic resource, with entry stratified by subscriber numbers, in reality the Space is shaped by intermediaries and gatekeepers. The idea of who should be using the Space, and for what, is shaped by designers, planners and employees at the Space. The current lack of intimate vlogging stages lead beauty vloggers to believe that the Space is not ‘for them’. This disadvantages beauty vloggers who are not present in the Space, by reducing their access to opportunities, and excluding them from the benefits of networking. Finally, the emphasis on individualised personal experience at vlogging events does not provide any opportunity for collective organising and offsets opportunities to understand a state of the industry more broadly.

My second research question is “how do beauty vloggers negotiate, theorise and understand the structural ecology of YouTube, and how does this shape practices, genres and themes?”. Firstly, I have argued that vloggers who speak at vlogging industry events consistently and knowingly minimise labours and over-state the participatory, or accessible, nature of the vlogging industry. They encourage vloggers to cover events and review products unpaid, work with brands for free, and to only align oneself with brands you genuinely love. This is because vlogging events are selling a future: it is important to understand that events are often organised by ‘for profit’ corporations and function as platforms to promote other merchandise, and this influences the discourse at events. Moreover, vloggers review the merchandise provided them in event goody bags without compensation. I do not want to suggest that aspiring creators are cultural dupes that wholeheartedly believe in the advertised possibilities for channel growth and career possibilities uncritically. During my fieldwork it became apparent that vloggers enjoy events, they meet friends and occasionally use the advice given. However, it certainly is the case that marketing literature for vlogging events promotes an opportunity to “break into” the industry, which has been described by ex-employees, and indeed overwhelming evidence, as a “fallacy” (as described in my interview with Laura, ICG).

My third research question is “what are the broader implications of uneven politics of visibility on YouTube for labour in the UK, particularly within what is termed the creative industries?”. In response, I argue that there is a risk of positioning the vlogging industry as accessible through events and initiatives that are both private and publicly funded. However, the vlogging industry, is not accessible. The discussion of work, and freelance

employment, through the lens of personal experience, 'authenticity' and passion, negates opportunity to discuss power imbalances with brands, financial insecurity and the myriad other realities of freelance work. Reading beauty vlogging self-presentations as authentic can limit the academic, journalistic and audience understandings of the vlogging industry in the UK. Throughout this thesis I have argued that YouTube is a platform that relies on building and maintaining relationships with brands, and therefore ultimately cannot escape traditional models of inequality that are sustained by its advertisers. This is a cycle that is consistently problematised, and then remade by creative industries, particularly industries that subscribe to techno-utopianism that places hope for disruption in the next new technology and vehicle for creativity. Unfortunately, like many other new and supposedly participatory creative industries, YouTube ultimately falls short of its promise as an open platform, or as a new, hopeful, meritocratic and open pathway to employment in creative industries.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis has offered a critical examination of the practices, labours and visibility within the British A List beauty vlogging industry. The chosen case study for this thesis was a group of UK based 'A List' beauty vloggers: the tiny fraction of female vloggers in the UK who have become extremely successful on YouTube. Their content, vernacular creativities and parlance have become a shorthand for 'beauty vlogging' on YouTube, and in both the media and in public imagination. This distinction of a focussed analysis of the most visible individuals on *one platform* provides the framework and context for the originality of my analysis. In previous work, such as Duffy's (2017) extended study of bloggers, influencers, vloggers and Instagrammers, it can be difficult to parse out the significant diversities of experiences for those who work on varying platforms. Specific affordances, architectures, algorithms and communities engender specific and interlinked experiences, performances and inequalities, that have distinct affective consequences for participants. In this thesis, I have examined the articulated experiences of A List beauty vloggers within an overview of the *UK vlogging industry*. This is defined as the interlinked web of stakeholders involved in the production of the vlogging economy including the YouTube platform, brands and advertisers, vloggers and digital talent management. Throughout the thesis I have demonstrated that A List beauty *vloggers* have a very specific occupation; stratified by the affordances and architecture of the YouTube platform and moreover by their interactions with particular, and dedicated, industry actors and stakeholders. I have argued that vloggers exist within a wider vlogging industry, stakeholders and intermediaries such as digital talent agents are often purposefully rendered invisible in beauty vlogging content. Often talent agents' practices, labours and influence are masked by vloggers' intentional and laborious

performances and signposts of authenticity and amateurism, engendered by authenticity labour. Talent agents only really became visible to me at vlogging events and through conversations with beauty vloggers. There is little literature on the role of digital talent agents, even in strains of media studies concerned with online micro celebrity, and insufficient literature on how talent intermediaries contribute to industry inequalities in Media and Celebrity Studies more broadly. In response, I have provided a contribution to knowledge by mapping and interrogated the intermediaries in the UK's own distinctive vlogging ecology and industry. I begin this concluding Chapter with a brief example which demonstrates the tensions between YouTube's organisational structures and the lived experience of young women producing content for the platform. I then address each of my research questions, the limitations of this project, and opportunities for further research.

Irish full-time beauty vlogger Melanie has 556,779¹¹ subscribers on YouTube. Although Melaine does produce content that is broadly aligned with fashion and beauty she has recently started to make videos within new brands of popular feminism, for example on body image, diet and 'confidence'. However, in our interview in early 2018, Melanie described how her YouTube income has been steadily decreasing, particularly affecting the income derived from content that is not fashion or beauty related. Much of her more 'body confidence' content and videos on themes like periods have been increasingly deemed ineligible for advertising and compensation by YouTube. Melanie believes this is unfair. She told me "videos that are perfectly fine get demonetised. If I ever talk about periods for example, or anything like that, they're demonetised, and when I request a review, it's

¹¹ As of 16/08/2018

confirmed by a manual review that it's not suitable for advertising". She now earns about €1000 per month from her channel, for which, as she puts it she "might as well work in a shop in Ireland". Although producing a new wave of feminist videos has correlated with a reduction in monetary compensation from YouTube, Melanie told me that she has been able to supplement her YouTube income with other financial strains due to relationships and levels of access within the vlogging industry. She is hegemonically beautiful, stylish and articulate, and perhaps because of this she has been hired as an ambassador for Google to speak to cosmetics brands such as Clarins, instructing their marketing team on how to successfully work with vloggers. Melanie also has a dedicated talent manager who has supported her in gaining advertising deals outside of YouTube's direct compensation (AdSense), in addition to a book deal and merchandise. Her manager also assists with the vast volume of paperwork that goes alongside tertiary brand deals: she gave an estimate that around fifty emails may need to be exchanged before the content, style, text and design of a collaboration YouTube video is eventually okayed by the brand.

Melanie is able to continue making videos about periods and sexual health because she has mitigated the loss of her YouTube AdSense income through these other ventures: "there's so many random streams of income, I don't even think of AdSense anymore as an income stream, and that's why I don't care about the demonetisation thing". However, these strains are not available to everyone: Although she has negotiated the precarious nature of YouTube, at least for now, she raised the experiences of her little sister in the interview. Melanie's sister Jessie is a "new YouTuber" with no management or institutional support. She is, however, lucky to have a sibling with half a million YouTube followers. Of course, Melanie has parlayed some of her own social and symbolic capital to assist her sister

through vlogging collaborations: they have collaborated on 'get ready with me' videos together, body confidence tips, and advice on their skincare routines. Partly because of this support, her sister has grown her following to 60,000 subscribers. Although this is a significant number, it is not a sufficient volume of followers to make a living. YouTube advertising income is precarious, and Melanie's sister's videos are regularly demonetised. Small transgressions are violations of YouTube's renewed 'advertiser-friendly content guidelines', and are thus not eligible for compensation:

Loads of hers get demonetised for nothing... she might talk about like... kissing, something that's so little, and stuff. And it's making a lot of people refrain from swearing, when they would naturally swear and all sorts of things, and I think it's sad. (Melanie, beauty vlogger)

Because of these restrictions. Melanie's sister, who does not have the same levels of intermediary support, is struggling to earn a sustainable income on her channel. Her challenge now is to build an audience within the parameters of YouTube's architectures for visibility, but her content is at risk of not being financially compensated at any moment. This is a significant risk.

Jessie, in many ways, is incredibly privileged. She has the social connections, beauty, and access to industry insider knowledge that will likely afford her an advantage in the vlogging industry. As talent agents often 'shop' their talents' friends, it is likely that Jessie will attain management and other opportunities. However, the hundreds of aspiring vloggers I have come into contact at both public and private conventions, conferences and events do not

have access to this level of support and are likely in for a far bumpier ride as they try to forge careers on YouTube. Throughout this thesis I have argued that is essential to recognise the many ways that YouTube is not a democratic “open platform”. The subjective decision-making practices of stakeholders, intermeshed with the high valuation of classed, gendered and raced presentations of authenticity and YouTube’s organisational structures leads to severe inequalities within vlogging, and beauty vlogging more specifically. I have positioned production within feminised genres such as beauty vlogging as a risk management strategy: beauty content, as it fits commercially on YouTube is unlikely to be deemed ‘advertiser unfriendly’ and may engender a more straightforward pathway to visibility and financial rewards. I have also cautioned against celebrating public and private organisations that advocate production on YouTube as a pathway to employment in creative industries. This is not a moral panic about the unlikeliness that today’s youth will reach their dream jobs, reminiscent of tabloid headlines. Such panics are not new: while you read the headline “Forget being a nurse or doctor, three quarters of today’s children would rather be YouTubers and vloggers” (Daily Mail, 2017) and you may confuse it with 2009’s “Children would rather be popstars than teachers and lawyers” (The Telegraph, 2009). In this thesis I do not question the value of vlogging as employment, rather I ask how this practice and desire to become visible through vlogging concedes more of our daily lives to platforms such as YouTube, how it sustains inequalities, supports exploitation and shapes the media that we consume in our everyday lives.

Although the case study of beauty vlogging is somewhat unique, we are all often reliant on social media platforms to become visible. For example, when I produced YouTube videos on my research I was not immune to checking how often they had been viewed, and to a

certain extent this did promote an emotional response. My topic was my research and media studies, which were unlikely to be promoted through the YouTube algorithm. Should I have continued, I would have had to adjust and change my topic. More broadly, as academics we hope the conferences and calls for papers that we promote will be made visible to our colleagues, we hope that high-ranking professors will see our Tweets and recognise our work, that we will be (sometimes) 'searchable' by press and asked for comment on issues that matter to us. We must all fit the contours and demands of social media platforms, and to a certain extent they define *who* becomes visible, and how. To this end, my research speaks to wider questions about the role of platforms in our everyday lives. Like beauty vloggers, we exist on a spectrum of reliance: some of us can parlay disparate capitals and relationships that mitigate against obscurity. Ultimately though, we need to be seen, and when we are not this can be affective and frightening. In this vein, we are all at risk. How we manage this risk is up to us.

How do the Relationships Between Stakeholders in the Vlogging Industry Enable, Constrain and Influence the Symbolic Production of Beauty Vlogging?

My first research question is: do the relationships between stakeholders in the vlogging industry enable, constrain and influence the symbolic production of beauty vlogging? I argue that 'new' digital intermediaries effectuate visibility, and influence content production through their own assumptions, theorisations and understandings of talent: this

is their “industry lore”: in other words “organisational common sense” (Havens, 2014a: 40). For example, I found that digital talent agents often had histories of working in ‘traditional’ broadcast media, with well-documented legacies of inequality. In interviews vlogging was positioned as an heir to reality television stars, one CEO told me that his early agency was intended to be an online “lads mag” (Barney, ex-ChannelFlip). Intermediaries’ searches for talent are influenced by subjective assumptions about brands and audiences. Displayed on the website of top digital talent agencies, beauty vloggers embodied what I defined in the introduction to this thesis as hegemonic beauty, namely European hair textures, small features and heart shaped faces. Hegemonic beauty is coupled with what one talent agent defined in an interview as “brand fit” meaning decisions made about signed talent are intersected with imaginary and informed assumptions about brands’ desires. Although subscribers are a significant currency and capital on YouTube, A List talent agents informed me that signing talent was “nothing to do with subscriber numbers” (Dom, Gleam Futures). In interviews, the directors of talent agencies defined their talent spotting as it was informed by subjective discursive placeholders such as “broad talent” and “personalities”. Subjective interpretations of ‘talent’ intersect with markers of class, race and gender, which further stratify levels of support they receive, and heavily shaped how vloggers are recruited to talent agencies. The implication of this statement is that support by a talent agent can override YouTube’s organisational structures. It is important to point out that subscribers did matter: every vlogger on the Gleam website is identified by these numbers in their biography. Subscriber numbers may not matter at the moment of signing talent; however, talent agents described their ability to grow these numbers through mentorship and connecting vloggers to a plethora of experts.

Talent agents also ‘shopped’ their signed talent’s friendships and social networks when talent spotting, leading to “homosocial reproduction”, wherein those already employed by an organisation seek to recruit others with similar characteristics to themselves (Kanter, 1993: 63). As my interviews took place following several high-profile mediated criticisms of the industry’s lack of diversity, agents were often apathetic when I attempted to probe talent spotting practices beyond their top line talking points. These tensions surfaced in interviews, for example, Dom Smales, CEO of Gleam Futures became irritated when I asked about Gleam’s talent spotting practices, snapping “for us its whether we think they have something special and *I can't really define that any more for you*”. Others, often younger and less experienced agents, managed their speech using “the language of diversity” (Ahmed, 2012: 60). Here, talent agents described diversifying their roster as a priority, but used the word *diversity* to apply to a variety of topics in addition to race, for example by saying they hoped to sign a broader range of vloggers in terms of genre and video themes. Intermediaries made visible the boundaries and limits of diversity talk as they grappled with inequalities on the platform, but some positioned diversity as oppositional to commercial viability. Multi-Channel Networks could be viewed as more democratic and open, as vloggers could submit themselves for considerations of support. However Multi-Channel networks are frequently exploitative, and offer reduced support, transparency and symbolic capital. Full-service talent agencies on the other hand supported talent through brand deals, sponsorships, book deals. They could connect their talent to numerous on-hand experts and paired them. The practices of full-service talent agencies contributed to the production and ring-fencing of a vlogging A List.

A consistent finding across my interviews was the perceived high value of collaborations with other vloggers as a primary method and strategy for channel growth. For talent agents, the importance of 'natural' rapport between their rosters provided a further motivation to look to talent's pre-existing social networks, or to view vloggers through the lens of potential collaborations. One digital talent agent cited collaboration as "probably one of the simplest most important ways of growing your channel" although he was careful to point out to me that the talent he manages are authentically "friends anyway" (James, AAA Media). During my ethnography, in interviews and field work, it became apparent that beauty vloggers also imagined that their friendships contributed significantly to their positioning in the UK vlogging industry. Vloggers would readily place themselves as inside or outside of the beauty vlogging industry in interviews, and through their own content. For example, during an interview, A List beauty vlogger Melanie spoke about her many opportunities for collaborations, informing me she found it difficult to find enough time to collaborate with her friends, who are also popular vloggers. She described her positioning within a particular YouTube group, as she has been promoted consistently alongside several of her friends: "with the recommended I've noticed that happening a lot last year like, say, myself, Lucy, Hannah... we kept, getting put in the trending page... but we kept getting promoted alongside each other's videos". Melanie reflected on the advantages that she receives on the YouTube platform, as she and her friends are mutually made visible. However, even those who are successful or favoured by YouTube's algorithms must consistently monitor this success and ensure its continuation. As lifestyle and music vlogger, Emma Blackery told The Observer "If a video does really, really well, you're happy with that success. When that next video comes out and doesn't get as many views, you think: "What

did I do wrong?” You immediately think, I screwed up, I messed up, while it could be anything” (Stokel-Walker, 2018).

In 2018, YouTube’s Chief Business Officer repeatedly described YouTube as an “open platform” (CaseyNeistat, 2018; Rosney, 2018). This thesis has argued that many stakeholders and intermediaries enable and constrain vlogging production on the platform: talent agents in some cases can catapult some vloggers to visibility, and at the very least they connect their talent with experts and resources; beauty vloggers will collaborate with others who are like them; producers in the YouTube Space allow *some* individuals to access the Space based on subjective understandings ‘fit’; event organisers will select certain ‘Featured Creators’ according to their own imagined definition of star power and valuable audiences. Studying popular vlogging, then, is not just about who becomes visible on YouTube, it necessitates ‘zooming out’ to understand the interlinked web of stakeholders whose decisions, frictions, interactions, understandings and theories can influence who and what becomes visible on the platform.

How do Beauty Vloggers Negotiate, Theorise and Understand the Structural Ecology of YouTube, and How Does this Shape Practices, Genres and Themes? How are these Practices Gendered?

In this thesis I have argued that beauty vloggers are promoted by YouTube because discussing beauty is valuable to advertisers, and that beauty vlogging topics are upbeat, restrained and safe for work. Their content also collates and sells an audience who is receptive to consumption of fashion and beauty products. In this vein, I found the theory of the “audience commodity” as gendered extremely useful, this concept illuminates how hierarchies of audiences stratify media funding and production (Meehan, 2006). For beauty vloggers, understanding and selling audiences to brands and other stakeholders, is extremely important. One beauty vlogger gave the advice at an event: “really know your demographic and audience. Yes, I have a small following, but it’s 60 UK”. Communicating and representing audience volumes, demographics and analytics is extremely important, and ultimately stratifies opportunities and visibility in the vlogging industry. I found that the gender binary was also imperative to understand, beauty vloggers value lay in their positioning as gendered media, and in their ability to reach *women*. As Bivens & Haimson (2016: 5) put it, social media platforms continue to be “demographically obsessed with gender”. Talent organisations were also organised through their ability to reach gendered audiences, for example the Multi-Channel Network StyleHaul’s promotion of their community “500m community reach! 2bn monthly views! 76 female! 74 millennial!” (Styehaul, 2017b). Vloggers hoping to achieve visibility for YouTube, and to be supported by these intermediary organisations, must attain and build an audience that fits within these genres.

When I began this project, a primary aim was to interrogate YouTube’s algorithm. I wanted to study, identify and determine the signals that contribute to inequalities on the platform. Namely, I wanted to assess whether men are overwhelmingly promoted to visibility for a

variety of vlogging genres, and whether where women are promoted, the beneficiaries are white, middle class, hegemonically beautiful women who produce beauty content. Although I continue to believe that some engineered algorithmic signals contribute to inequalities on YouTube, it became clear that I did not have sufficient time, resources or expertise to audit the algorithm effectively in this thesis. Dissecting individual algorithmic signals is a significant undertaking that vexes a valuable industry of 'Search Optimisation Experts' and well-staffed academic social media labs. The challenge of parsing algorithmic make up is heightened by the consistent exchange and alteration of algorithmic signals. Put differently, there is no stable or fixed YouTube algorithm, rather videos become visible because of a wider algorithmic culture. In this context, the line of questioning moved towards conceptualising the "algorithm as culture"; namely assumptions, definitions and negotiations of how the YouTube algorithm works that ultimately contribute to its use and inform how they are engaged with (Seaver, 2017). This impossibility was noted by vloggers (in interviews and their content), talent agents, and industry stakeholders. It became apparent that ideas, assumptions, and information provided by 'experts' and YouTube informed the content produced by vloggers significantly, and contributes to affective anxieties, and inequalities on the platform. Therefore, I shifted my focus towards the self-optimisation techniques utilised by A List vloggers. These topics were deployed to ensure their visibility in the face of uncertainty and lack of information. Beauty vloggers and intermediaries held algorithmic theories and strategies that they deployed to negotiate visibility, or a perceived lack thereof. However, a layer of uncertainty permeated each of these understandings of the algorithm; vloggers would often question me about their theories or punctuate their theories with articulations of inquiry and uncertainty: "I think" or "the theory goes...". Assumptions and understandings of the YouTube algorithm were

patch-worked together from information disseminated at algorithmic workshops during conventions, information provided on YouTube's official blogs, events at the YouTube Space, online communities such as Facebook groups, and shared information provided by friends and other vloggers. Vloggers optimised content for 'watch time', namely the amount of time spent by viewers on the platform, and a metric that is publicised by YouTube and 'experts' as positively influencing visibility. Beauty vloggers optimise content to facilitate a YouTube 'rabbit hole', through utilising themes, genres, 'click bait', tags and referring to YouTube's cultural scripts and 'drama'. I have examined this particular strategy of self-optimisation through the lens of branded content. I have argued that content that is aligned with certain brands on the platform, including brands such as Lush and Primark, is more likely to become visible due to its fit and ability to be matched with established themes. The popularity of videos in these genres mean beauty vloggers often produce this content for free to engender visibility. Sponsored and unsponsored content, therefore, becomes impossible to disentangle through the playlists and recommended videos informed by branded genres.

In interviews, A list beauty vloggers, who by definition have achieved notable views and subscribers on YouTube, described feelings of anxiety and panic around the precarious nature of the algorithm. They all espoused the necessity of self-optimisation. Those who believed they were favoured by the algorithm expressed feelings of guilt, or concerns surrounding the impermanence of this visibility. A list vloggers often creatively represent this precarity through strategic use of video content. They discuss their perceived issues with YouTube in videos, ask their viewers if they receive notifications and updates, and request that they send them screen grabs of the lack of their videos in subscription boxes.

These folk tests, taken at surface level, demonstrate vloggers' uncertainty and represent a poor communication flows with YouTube. Perhaps more importantly, however, they signal towards the creative strategies and labours necessitated by vloggers to maintain authentic, intimate, yet visible presence on YouTube. My research participants highlighted the instability and precarity born from significant personal and professional investment in one monopoly platform. My research has confirmed that beauty vloggers are, in part, dependent on platform for visibility and income. Because of this, they weave together assumptions, rumours, personal understandings, and communications to develop an understanding of the events, that directly affect their income and cultural positioning. For example, vloggers communicated through Facebook groups, attended algorithmic workshops at events, and used their following to conduct ad-hoc tests that draw from techniques such as "algorithmic auditing" (Sandvig et al., 2014) . This requires significant temporal dedication, structuring who has access to this information. My interview participants described depression and anxiety that followed any sudden drop in views, and often phrased a generalised fear of the platform, articulating that they had been scared to initially post videos on YouTube. One of my participants left the YouTube platform following our interview because of the time it took up, as she had two young children, but also because it was "messing with [her] head". These experiences are heightened for actors who are not considered 'commercially viable', and who are left to negotiate platform (in)visibility with little support. My thesis has contributed to the body of work that outlines how precarity, risk and affective dimensions of online content creation. I argue that this is gendered: visible male vloggers are able to make content across genres, such as gaming, comedy, science or technology. My research shows how women's options are limited on platforms and in creative industries, and moreover how they are centred on the body.

It would be to fall into a trap of “newness” to suggest that the majority of beauty vlogging content exclusively exists as a genre simply because of YouTube (Holmes, 2005: 18). Beauty videos often reiterate and recirculate well-trodden themes from fashion and beauty media, and from makeover media (Biressi & Nunn, 2016; McRobbie, 2004; Tasker & Negra, 2007). The stylised repetition of cosmetic application as a long history prior to YouTube. However, it is true that beauty vlogging has gathered significant attention and visibility that is in part bolstered by the conditions of the YouTube platform, and the specific context of the vlogging industry. Beauty vlogging genres’ instruction of cosmetic application within very narrow boundaries speaks to the following passage quoted by Barky, originally published nearly thirty years ago, but of course these themes have existed long before her analysis:

In the language of fashion magazines and cosmetic ads, making up is typically portrayed as an aesthetic activity in which a woman can express her individuality. In reality... making up the face is, in fact, a highly stylised activity that gives little reign to self expression (Bartky, 1990: 100)

Beauty vlogging is commercially valuable, which is evidenced as it is the only genre explicitly promoted with a dedicated course on the YouTube on its Creator Academy. The program “Develop a Beauty channel” instructs in a narrow range of tropes that speak to Bartky’s analysis: inviting users to draw from existing fashions and styles and “create within existing formats and niches”, to centre the face and its transformation by “featuring your finished look”, to upload consistently but within a niche and by developing a stable and fixed brand (YouTube, 2018a). My analysis of feminised genres of social media entrepreneurship on

YouTube has contributed a theorisation of how gendered cultural production is refracted by the “*platformization*” of cultural industries, namely how cultural production is contingent on platforms, and platforms organisational and algorithmic structures (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). For example, creators do not receive AdSense income for videos that were not advertiser friendly; namely they feature particular themes, such as sexuality, partial nudity, sexual humour, violence and inappropriate language (YouTube Help, 2018a). Distancing oneself from these thematic risks explicitly and implicitly shapes the content that is produced, the genre of beauty vlogging avoids these topics and has myriad potential for collaboration. Beauty vlogging is not exclusively made for the contours of YouTube: those I interviewed told me that they started beauty vlogging because it’s ‘what women do on the internet’ (Lucy) or because it affords them more visibility than their other content (Astrid). Whether this is true or not, the “industry lore” that supports the desirability of beauty vlogging genres is also taken up by talent agents, who say they look for talent based on their suitability for brand collaborations, often meaning those who make content about cosmetic products (Havens, 2014a: 40). In sum, it is important to locate beauty vlogging as taking up long-held cultural scripts on femininity, and what young women are interested in.

Furthering this analysis with the study of media industries, and the particularities of social media platforms, has helped me to determine how symbolic production is negotiated, informed and structured, which influences the content that we as audiences consume. Through my analysis I have parsed out the labours, responses, efforts, and investments made by beauty vloggers, which are aimed at ensuring a sustainable career on and off YouTube. In turn, I have demonstrated how assumptions and anxieties inform symbolic production including broad channel themes, content and even micro performances of the self.

What are the Broader Implications of Uneven Politics of Visibility on YouTube for Labour in the UK, Particularly Within ‘The Creative Industries’?

Successful participation in the vlogging industry is underpinned by a call to perform authenticity labours and utilise authenticity markers. One example of authenticity labour is visible when A List vloggers, who often belong to the same management organisations, represent themselves as groups of friends. They post relax snaps ‘hanging out’ at coffee shops, posing at industry events, precariously on inflatable flamingos in pools at talent management parties. Not everyone, however, fits so comfortably inside the frame of the UK vlogging industry, or within these images. Several of my interview participants believe that some talent agents exclusively permit their signed vloggers to collaborate, which they believe puts them at a disadvantage as they were not signed by these organisations. An ex-vlogger told me in an interview that management organisation-based collaborations are prevalent in the industry, and this had contributed to her feeling like she did not belong, and ultimately to cease vlogging. Grace Victory, a mixed raced, plus sized A List vlogger with an ambivalent relationship with the UK vlogging industry published a YouTube video in 2015, during which she presented as visibly upset at her outsider status:

Everybody’s so cliquey ... a lot of YouTubers, it appears, can’t collab with you unless you have a certain number of subscribers or if you’re in the same management as them. And I’m sick and tired of feeling like an outcast. (Victory, 2015)

I became aware of Grace Victory during my time working as a digital marketing executive for global beauty brands in the early 2010s. Her journey has been particularly interesting to follow. She has been vlogging for as many years as most A List vloggers but has not attained the visibility of many of her white and hegemonically beautiful peers: she occupies a space on the peripheries of the vlogging industry.

Victory makes for an interesting case study because of her unusual strategy of being direct and critical in her content, as she reflects on failures and social exclusions within the vlogging industry, and by the actors therein. She often discusses that she has not achieved the visibility of wider vlogging circles, and that she feels alienated from the industry. As Victory refuses to adhere to vlogging's cultural scripts, as she discusses race, class and inclusion with righteous anger, she is excluded from vlogging's inner circle. She has reflected on the spaces in which white and highly visible vloggers are legitimised by their peers, and how she feels excluded. Following a YouTube award ceremony, the "British Online Creators Awards", she recorded a video, explaining her feelings during the event as there were only a handful of black people in attendance, and no black person won an award.

I feel so defeated, and so deflated and just... I'm just so like, what the fucking fuck can we do. Because I don't know, I don't even know where to begin... I don't understand, and representation matters... I want to fall back in love with YouTube but I'm really struggling to create on a platform that doesn't appreciate people who look like me. (Victory, 2016)

These feelings of anxiety, panic and despair are real implications of inequalities on YouTube. The stakeholders and intermediaries in the vlogging industry contribute to, and reinforce, feelings of anxiety and exclusion. Success in this industry is contingent on support and legitimisation from an increasingly professionalised group of gatekeepers: YouTube's algorithmic processes, talent agents, producers at the YouTube Space, event organisers and brands.

The vlogging industry is hierarchical and cliquy. This is visible in the spatial organisation of vlogging events; A List vloggers gather in green rooms, or group near the stage. Organisers speak to them and event photographers take their pictures. Although I am not seeking a career in the vlogging industry, I experienced an affective pull when congregating around the outside of event spaces. To implicitly understand your position in a hierarchy, to be excluded, is unpleasant. Although these events were sold to vloggers and the wider public as a chance to participate in the vlogging industry and to meet friends and collaborate, the tensions between low-status and high-status event attendees and A List vloggers were visible and visceral. In addition to spatial demarcation of status, some members of the A List were stratified by various textures of symbolic capital, for example 'Feature Creator' status at VidCon, or being featured panellists at Blogosphere. In contrast, the events promoted the accessible nature of the vlogging industry, so long as you're *being yourself*. One example of such discourse arose at Access Creative College, a further education organisation with locations across the UK. Access ran an event with beauty vlogger Helen Anderson, to promote their media course. At the event, Anderson made clear that you have to have "good intentions", rather than explicitly vlogging to make money. She said, "when you're genuine and you've got people's best interests in mind people really, really appreciate

that... rather than having an ulterior motive". This moralist rhetoric replayed at many vlogging events. However, a tension emerged between being authentic and genuine, and the events' purpose of being instructive to *making it* in the vlogging industry. Many speakers suggested that you had to vlog for the "right reasons". Money, or a job, would be a side effect that would naturally arise from *doing what you love*. These statements are evocative of "aspirational labour" and favour those who have time to make vlogging videos with little expectation of compensation (Duffy, 2016: 13). Aspirational labour was also suggested more explicitly: speakers at ERIC Festival, sponsored by Government funded charity Creative Skillset, advocated undertaking unpaid labour such as covering event launches for free. It is important to bear in mind that selling a career on YouTube is big business: events were often organised by 'for profit' corporations and functioned as platforms to promote other merchandise. Blogosphere Magazine regularly runs events in London that also work to promote their magazine, VidCon organises annual events across Europe, North America and in Australia during which they profit from selling merchandise, food and drink, the YouTube Space also sells merchandise and training days at the Space. All of the events I covered in this thesis, including ERIC Festival and those organised by the YouTube Space, are heavily sponsored or subsidised by brands, which both generates profit and legitimises their presence in the vlogging industry.

The field work I conducted at the YouTube Space also afforded me a real understanding of how the boundaries of the UK vlogging industry are constructed and re-made by intermediaries. Although entry to the Space is officially stratified by subscriber volume (ostensibly somewhat democratic), this can be circumvented if you are 'known' to the Space. This is evidenced by my own ability to enter the Space (through a director friend).

Producers made the YouTube Space by allowing in social actors who they believed fit the image of a desirable entrant. Furthermore, the boundaries of the Space were informed by, and further calcified the, vlogging industry's gendered dynamics. Women make, or more accurately *become visible* through, normative gendered content that is more intimate in nature and set within domestic space. There was little provision for the production of this content in the YouTube Space. In an interview, a lifestyle vlogger told me that they didn't feel comfortable in the Space due to an exclusive focus on bigger stages with complex technical requirements, in addition to the high valuation of a specific form of technical knowledge: "I don't feel comfortable there....I was like "can I borrow a mic" and they were like "what kind of mic do you want" and I was like... I literally don't know" (Astrid, lifestyle vlogger). Such an atmosphere contributed to a feeling that beauty vloggers did not feel like the Space is *for them*, therefore they did not attend events, or utilise the resources that the YouTube Space had to offer.

This thesis has mapped research detailing definitions of branded authenticity in the context of social media content production. Authenticity as "consistent" (Marwick, 2013b: 120) and "performed" (Abidin, 2017: 6). Building on these points, I have developed a definition of authenticity as it is both laborious and crossed with class, race and gender, in the context of aesthetic presentations on YouTube (authentic beauty). I used the 'get ready with me' video genre as a case study to emphasise the creative and strategic authenticity labours used to 'offset' commercial content and negotiate the increased professionalisation of the vlogging industry. These performances necessitate emotional labour, defined as the strategic suppression and summoning of feeling (Hochschild, 2012). The increased scrutiny placed on *female* content production, bodies, voices and aesthetic necessitates significant deployment

of such labour on beauty vloggers' YouTube channels. I have argued that the authentic brand value is accrued through a performance of natural, middle class, respectable hegemonic beauty that at once involves distancing from exclusionary upper class fashion houses and media, also by forging and maintaining a distance from performed or lived working class identities (Skeggs, 1997).

In their videos across genres, A List beauty vloggers use a high quantity of cosmetic products, often upwards of 15 per 'look'. However, the majority of beauty vlogging content is themed around a performed 'natural' or 'everyday' aesthetic. Glamour is used with extreme caution, and strictly limited by heteronormative occasion. The strategic authentic disclosure within beauty vlogging genres can provide opportunities to reveal the exigent aesthetic labour necessitated for beauty vloggers (and women more generally). In particular it allows space for othered women to define the resourceful purchase and blending of beauty products, products that are overwhelmingly designed for, and catered to, white bodies. However, despite these opportunities for political disclosure, A List beauty vloggers underpin their content with raced, historic, gendered performance of 'respectability'. This thesis has outlined the labours necessitated, and inequalities engendered, by the designations of 'authenticity' within beauty vlogging genre. Inclusion exists a knife edge, between glamour and 'sluttiness', between morality and excess, between authentic and fake. Beauty vloggers risk their livelihoods when their performance falls outside of authenticity, and transgressions must be managed swiftly and effectively. The thesis also explored the case study of the 'anxiety video' as an affective strategy: this video genre is deployed to negotiate transgressions, arguing that anxiety, stress and depression can be used as hyper feminine "masquerade" to neutralise accusations of transgressive behaviour

and scandal (McRobbie, 2009; Riviere, 1997). This is not to downplay the significance of anxiety and panic as very real emotions experienced on YouTube. Through my field work it became apparent that beauty vloggers are unsure about the longevity of the space, of their understandings of the algorithm, their content, their attractiveness for brands. They are dependent on visibility, and in many ways, pathways to visibility lie outside of their control.

Beauty vlogging is a precarious genre of media production that demands significant temporal dedication and labours. To be visible as a beauty vlogger depends on legibility for YouTube and its algorithms, which requires testing, research, and sharing of information between vlogging communities. Although vloggers develop an algorithmic lore, that ultimately shapes content significantly, this is often no more than a best guess. Algorithmic theories and strategies can be upended by the platform at any moment. This risk can be mitigated to disparate extents by support from digital cultural intermediaries: for example, talent agents, Multi-Channel Networks and YouTube. However, support is often distributed by individual decisions made by gatekeepers with subjective definitions of talent, shot through with their own value judgements and biases. The personal nature of production in this space means that inequalities in visibility, and unevenness of the 'A List', are often highly affective. Within this thesis I have drawn attention to how vlogging, and production on YouTube are being increasingly promoted as more democratic pathways to employment within creative industries, by private and public initiatives. This makes the timing of my thesis significant. I offer an investigation into the reality of content production, in the context of a specific platform, that takes seriously both the political economy of a growing industry and the considerable influence of gender for macro and micro relationships. In short, in my research I have found that beauty vlogging is not widely accessible as a

pathway to creative employment. The production of beauty vlogging content is informed by assumptions made about visibility, advertiser friendliness and algorithmic legibility.

Successful participation in this genre necessitates hegemonic beauty, engagement with stereotypically feminine genres, and a convincing performance of authenticity, that in itself is shaped by class, race and self-presentation as feminine.

Limitations

This project was undertaken during a time of rapid professionalisation of the ‘vlogging industry’. During the three years I spent researching and writing this thesis, talent agencies were launched, closed, taken over, and their rosters were recast as vloggers were signed and left, changed management, or quit YouTube altogether. In addition, membership to the group of highly visible vloggers I have termed the A List was dynamic and shifted slightly over the course of my project, although the demographics of the most visible vloggers remained largely the same. Such fluctuation and development presented a challenge when undertaking this work; how to map an industry that is consistently changing? In this vein, much of Chapter Three, on algorithmic self-optimisation, written in 2016, appeared outdated by the time I returned to it in 2018. However, the only way to approach this was to be responsive to the industry’s dynamism and examine changes as they were tied to the threads that remained constant within my analysis; visibility, inequalities, authenticity, the strategic use of creativity to market vlogging labour. This thesis maps and captures a cultural moment, a moment of breakage, in which the significant influence of brands and advertisers was made particularly explicit. This has afforded an opportunity to critically map the

industry's response, action and ambivalence, and examine how this contributes to, and strengthens inequalities in the vlogging industry.

A second limitation to mention is that of access. Within this project I have found gaining access to A List beauty vloggers in the UK frustrating. The challenges in accessing beauty vloggers jarred with their cultivation of intimate and welcoming identities online, which made them appear misleadingly accessible. Although I was able to access some of the more successful digital talent agents in the UK quite easily, they would not permit an interview with their talent, hinting towards an anxiety and certain level of protectiveness. Of course, it is impossible to know whether it was in fact managers who blocked access, or whether beauty vloggers themselves who were ambivalent, or did not want to participate. To this end, I also set up numerous Skype interviews with vloggers who did not meet me at the arranged time, cancelled at the last minute, or ceased responding to my emails. The difficulty in gaining access was augmented by the fact I was looking at UK based A List vloggers, my sample criteria required that my interview participants made full or meaningful part-time income from vlogging and lived in the UK. This cut my pool of potential participants significantly; one of the central points of this thesis, and a key point of the definition of A List, is that very few beauty vloggers become visible or earn a meaningful income from YouTube in this vein. To mitigate this challenge, I sourced participants at vlogging events, through networking, and through my own social networks. I also approached participants by email. This proved challenging as many A List vloggers receive a deluge of emails from PR organisations and brands, often outsourcing responses to their assistants or staff. Moreover, many of these emails are from University students requiring interviews, prompting some vloggers to specifically note on their websites that they do not

have the time to speak to students (including one A List vlogger with a PhD, I foolishly believed she would be more sympathetic!). My interview sample was to some extent determined by my positioning as a researcher, and therefore by the participants who were sympathetic to this fact. At least three of my interview participants told me of their own difficulties in finding interview participants for their own undergraduate dissertations, which had prompted them to agree to an interview. Therefore, my sample skewed towards those who had experienced higher education, which is not representative of A List vlogging more widely.

Interviews engender limitations, in particular when it comes to analyses of media industries. Talent agents, A List vloggers and industry experts are all essentially public relations experts. The challenges of interviewing these social actors is articulated by Duffy as she observes her participants' utilised self-branding techniques to cultivate a positive impression (Duffy, 2017: 238). Although interviews have provided me with some insight into the vlogging ecology, I have recognised the value in the self-representations within published online video and text (namely: vlogs). In this vein, my ethnography has been a process of bricolage: the data has been attained through interviews, discussions in offline content, events and vlogs. Video and textual diaries have been used by feminist researchers to enable vulnerable people to tell their stories (Jackson & Vares, 2015). It is tempting to dismiss video content, unless it is accompanied and sanctioned by a researcher-led interview. Such an approach into the well-worn trap of trying to disentangle the supposed binaries of *authenticity* from *commerciality*, when branded culture is both pervasive and ambivalent in late capitalism. Although vlogs are produced for a commercial platform, and they often include sponsorships, I join Sarah Banet-Weiser in advocating for "an understanding of brand

cultures as culture, complete with competing power relations and individual production and practice” (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 13). Like everything else, vloggers’ engagement with platforms is ambivalent. Just as offline spaces are rarely untinged by commerciality, commercial platforms shape self-presentation and social interaction. To address this, I have critically engaged with platform aims, affordances and algorithms, leading to an understanding of structures of visibility that give depth to analyses of beauty vlogging content on YouTube.

Further Research and Recommendations

I plan to expand my work on the engineered culture at YouTube and industry culture within digital talent agencies and intermediaries in the UK. I am inspired by developing creative approaches to ethnographic work on closed media industries that are of particular significance when commercial sensitivity promotes a barrier to access. For example, by conducting interviews with engineers at a “recommender company”, in addition to “scavenging” trade data, participant observation, and industry gossip Seaver (2017) parsed the blended social and cultural practices that comprise how these social actors view the algorithms they worked with and shaped. In a similar vein, Vondreau (2017) has also verified interview data at Spotify using “back-end” work, including the use of tools to identify the data organisations that Spotify collaborates with, and bringing an ethnologist to interview to decipher power relations between researchers and their interlocutors. In my continuation of this project my work will allow me to continue to learn from, and develop my own methodologies to extend and develop my research on the vlogging industry’s stakeholders. As researchers develop and theorise new media and new media platform, calling attention

to their cultural significance, it is important to analyse media representation, but also examine how these representations are shaped by institutional culture, power dynamics and subjective decision making.

I draw attention to two policy implications that I have identified from this research. Firstly, the breadth and diversity of new media platforms, practices and genres means a significant challenge for regulatory bodies such as the Advertising Standards Association (ASA) and their need to respond to new sponsorship practices and strategies. Although the Code of Advertising Practice has released guidelines for vloggers, there is a lack of consistency in the style and presentation of labelling of sponsored content in the vlogging industry. These guidelines outline scenarios such as “commercial breaks within vlogs”, suggesting vloggers label these breaks with “ad” or “ad feature”, however, many vloggers only include such textual labelling in videos for short periods of time, using light-colour text or small font size to reduce attention to them. When such techniques are used it is challenging to register such labels as a viewer. Many vloggers also avoid the requirement for such labels through long term partnerships that evade explicit product placement or commercial labelling. Through extended ethnographic analysis of disclosure and concealment in beauty vlogging content, I contribute a thick description of how branded content is deployed and neutralised within vlogging content. This work is underpinned by data from participant observation of industry rhetoric and practices, to build a picture of industry methodologies and future directions of sponsorship practices. The thesis therefore affords a positioning to work with regulatory bodies, such as the ASA, to offer a nuanced perspective on the trajectory of sponsored content and product placement within the UK vlogging industry. I contributed evidence to the House of Lords inquiry in to the advertising industry drawing

attention to the inclusion of un-labelled sponsored content in videos by child influencers, especially for high salt and sugar foods. My evidence was published in the House of Lords report “UK advertising in a digital age” (House of Lords, 2018). I plan to continue this work by drawing attention to the evolving inclusion of sponsorship in new content industries, offering pragmatic recommendations that speak to the challenges of vlogging, and the pressures within the industry.

Secondly, I have investigated the multiplication of ‘crowd sourced’ influencer management agencies and organisations in the UK and international influencer economies. In interviews, beauty vloggers and industry stakeholders discussed the, at times, exploitative and predatory practices of these organisations. Agencies typically sign young (often under-18 year old) aspiring vloggers for extended contracts; interview participants had been ‘locked in’ to non-negotiable contracts for four to seven years. Financial disclosure and strategies for compensation tend to be opaque, vloggers receive little support and are often provided with fewer opportunities than those advertised. Agencies often absorb fees from brands, and compensate managed vloggers with micro-payments, sometimes requiring vloggers to ‘bid’ for work, meaning a race to the bottom in order to secure jobs. Some organisations take complete control of their managed vlogger’s YouTube AdSense account. Instead of the vlogger being able to access their own channel on YouTube, they are then afforded access only through their Multi-Channel Network or talent organisation’s application or platform until their contract is broken or ends. I found the wholly unregulated nature of these organisations, and their practices, deeply concerning. There is little academic or policy research on these influencer sourcing platforms as influencer economies continue to grow in the UK. In this thesis, I have drawn attention to these exploitative practices, which I

believe should be of significant interest for policy makers in the UK concerned with child labour practices, fraud and exploitative labour. I plan to continue to use, and develop, my research to contribute to the agenda on much-needed clear, accessible regulation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Participants and Industry Events Attended

Beauty vlogging participants

Name/pseudonym	Vlog Genre	Approx. YouTube Subscribers	Date interviewed	Vloggers' Location
Elizabeth	Beauty	55,000	12/04/2017	London
Astrid	Lifestyle	180,000	24/07/2017	London
Lucy	Lifestyle	320,000	11/09/2017	London
Lindsey	Lifestyle	N/A (ex-vlogger)	01/02/2018	London
Kristabel	Fbeauty	5000	05/02/2018	London
Sasha	Beauty	N/A (since deleted)	08/02/2018	Bristol
Melanie	Beauty	550,000	09/02/2018	Dublin
Maria	Beauty	6,000	26/03/2018	London

Talent agent and intermediary participants

Name/pseudonym	Job Title	Agency info	Date interviewed
Laura Edwards	Commercial Director	Viral Talent, Full Service Talent Agency	20/01/2017
Luann	Director	Multi-Channel Network	20/01/2017
Dominic Smales	Founder, CEO	Gleam Futures, Full Service Talent Agency	31/01/2017
James Hancock	Director	Free Focus, Full Service Talent Agency	31/01/2017
Joshua Edwards	Personal Manager	Dodie Clark	02/02/2017
Barney	Founder/ Ex-Director	Channel Flip Multi-Channel Network	15/02/2017
Elizabeth Michael	Director	Polkadot Talent, Full Service Talent Agency	20/03/2017
Laura Chernikoff	Executive Director	Internet Creators Guild	18/01/2018

Jo Burford	Creator Partner Manager	Niche, Twitter's Creator Network	28/02/2018
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Industry Events Attended

Name	Event description	Date attended	Website
#blogosphere Valentines Day Tea Party	<p>Join us at a beautiful central London venue for a spot of networking, tea and cake. Lots of cake.</p> <p>Brave Bison will be giving us an insight into what it's really like managing bloggers and social media stars, discussing the types of people they take onto their books and what makes a successful influencer.</p>	04/02/2017	<a href="https://www.blogosphe
remagazine.com/event-
calendar/blogosphere-
valentines-tea-party/">https://www.blogosphe remagazine.com/event- calendar/blogosphere- valentines-tea-party/
VidCon EU Creator Day	For people who love and make online video	8/04/2017 – 9/04/2017	http://vidcon.com/
ERIC Fest, Careers in Fashion	ERIC FEST is a revolutionary new careers fair for young people. Ditch the boring stalls. Forget the free stationary. And definitely ignore the recruiters in suits. ERIC Fest is all about stages, entertainment, and speakers who can actually give you relevant, useful advice on how to find your dream creative career.	10/09/2017	<a href="https://ericfestival.com/
eric-fest">https://ericfestival.com/ eric-fest
#blogosphere Christmas Festival	<p>On December 16th we will be hosting our annual Christmas Festival at The Tab Centre, Shoreditch. The event will run from 10-5pm.</p> <p>This year it's slightly different – in addition to meeting lots of brands, we will also have various panels hosted by top bloggers throughout the day. It's going to be an opportunity to network and also to learn.</p> <p>Come along, meet some of your favourite bloggers and hear them</p>	16/12/2017	<a href="https://www.blogosphe
remagazine.com/event-
calendar/blogosphere-
christmas-festival/">https://www.blogosphe remagazine.com/event- calendar/blogosphere- christmas-festival/

	<p>give their opinions on topics including, earning money online, sharing your personal style & finding your authentic voice.</p> <p>The event will also be the perfect time to grab some last minute Christmas shopping. The brands will be putting together special gifts that you can purchase for loved ones, as well as gifting samples in the goody bags.</p>		
Niche (Twitter) Creator day	Be A Part of the World's Creators	17/02/2018	https://creatorday.splashthat.com/
Roundhouse Rising Festival Presents "ARTIST TOOLKIT DAY" Supported by YouTube	<p>This year's Artist Toolkit Day will be free, thanks to our supporter YouTube.</p> <p>Expect a special Music & Digital Technology themed toolkit day with practical advice on how to develop your audience online and maximise your work using technology and digital platforms.</p>	24/02/2018	http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/whats-on/2018/roundhouse-rising-festival/artist-toolkit-day/?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=RisingFest2018&utm_content=ArtistToolkitDay_Applicationextension
BlogCon LDN	BlogConLDN is back for the second year running - and this time it's set to be bigger and better than ever with a more expansive venue and separate masterclass sessions, a panel stage and even more brand exhibitions!"	02/06/2018	http://www.scarlettlondigital.com/blogconldn-2018/
Access X Helen Anderz	<p>Aspiring blogger or YouTuber? Want to work in the world of digital? Social media obsessed? Well, feast your eyes on this! Access is super excited to be working alongside style, beauty and lifestyle YouTuber and Blogger, Helen Anderson, this summer.</p> <p>Helen Anderson, AKA The Anderz Approach, will be joining team Access to bring you two exclusive summer workshops in Manchester and London run by the icon herself! The workshops will teach you all about content making,</p>	26/07/2018	http://www.accesscreative.ac.uk/more/access-x-helen-anderz/

	social media evolution, how and why brands work with influencers (like herself), online voice and how to make yourself stand out in the busy online world.		
Summer in the City Industry Day	The UK's Largest Online Video Festival	10/08/2018	https://www.sitc-event.co.uk/

Appendix B: Participant Information Form

UEL: School of Arts and Digital Industries

Project title: Labour, experience and entrepreneurship within vlogging

Principle Investigator: Sophie Bishop

Introduction

I am interested in the experiences of vloggers. I am looking at the vlogging ‘industry’ to gain an understanding of who is involved and what their roles are in creating and influencing ‘vloggers’, brand deals and content.

Why am I doing this project?

I am undertaking a PhD at the University of East London. I feel there is a lack of research of new media forms, like vlogging I am researching how new industries work as part of this media.

What will you have to do if you agree to take part?

- Sign and return the consent form to me.
- We will arrange a time to meet to conduct the interview, in a place that is convenient for you. We can also arrange to conduct the interview over Skype.
- I will ask you some interview questions, you can choose to not answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with. If you want to raise any points I haven’t asked about, that is also very welcome! The interview will not take longer than one hour thirty minutes.
- I will transcribe the interviews and use them in my PhD thesis. I am happy to send you a summary of some of my findings.

How much of my time will be involved?

One hour maximum interview time.

Will my name be used in the study?

I will either use your first name, and company in the study. If you do not feel comfortable with this, I can give you a pseudonym.

What are the advantages of taking part?

Very little research has been done into vlogging, especially as a strain of income. You will be contributing to understanding about the experiences of women in vlogging, and help those outside your field to gain a more accurate understanding of the realities of this phenomenon.

What are the disadvantages of taking part?

Although I do think this is unlikely, you may be asked an interview question that you do not feel comfortable answering. It is absolutely fine if you do not want to answer this question.

Do you have to take part in the study?

No, your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to give a reason and I will not contact you again. You can withdraw your participation at any point, even if you have already been interviewed.

What happens now?

If you would like to participate please sign and return the consent form to me. We can then arrange an interview time. If you do not want to participate no further contact is required from you.

Thank you for your time. This Data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy. This research has been approved the University Of East London Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher or any other aspect of this research project, please contact researchethics@uel.ac.uk.

Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

Research Project title: Labour, experience and entrepreneurship in vlogging

I, the undersigned, confirm that **(please tick boxes on right hand side of table as appropriate)**:

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet	
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
5.	I understand interviews will be recorded	
6.	I understand the data will be used in a University of East London PhD Thesis.	
7.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	
9A)	I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.	
9b)	OR I would prefer a pseudonym to be used.	
	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	

Participant:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher: Sophie Bishop

Signature

Date



Ms Sophie Bishop

40a Seymour Road
Bishopston
Bristol
BS7 9HT

10th May 2018

Dear Ms Bishop,

Study Title: Performativity and labour of young female digital entrepreneurs, focusing on beauty vloggers

Please take this letter as written confirmation that UREC has assessed your application for ethical approval and subsequent research project, and we are satisfied that appropriate measures to mitigate risk have been outlined and implemented. However, we do not follow any protocol for retrospective ethical approval. Had UREC seen the amendments requested at the appropriate time, it is likely that they would have approved the revisions. However, this does not place you in exactly the same position you would have been in had UREC approval been obtained in advance, and merely acknowledges that appropriate mitigating actions have been recorded and acknowledged. Therefore it is critical that any subsequent reference to the ethical aspects of your research make reference to and explain these considerations in an open and transparent way. We hope that this allows you to complete on your research in a timely manner.

For the avoidance of any doubt, or misunderstanding, please note that the content of this letter extends only to those matters relating to the granting of ethical clearance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lisa Mooney', written over a light grey rectangular background.

For and on behalf of

Dr Lisa Mooney

Chair, UEL University Research Ethics Committee



c.c Dr Lisa Mooney, Chair of the University of East London Research Ethics Committee

Dr Carlos De Luna, Head of the Graduate School

Dr Julia Dane, Director of Studies, Arts and Digital Industries

Professor Stephen Maddison, Director of Research, Arts, Technology and Innovation

Dr Helen Powell, Subject Head, Arts, Technology and Innovation