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Beauty work : a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's Icon Network

Andrea M. Weare
University of Iowa

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BEAUTY WORK: A CASE STUDY OF DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION AND
POSTFEMINIST PRACTICES ON YOUTUBE'S ICON NETWORK

by

Andrea M. Weare

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in Mass Communications in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Meenakshi Gigi Durham

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Graduate College
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
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To my informants, to my family, and to all dedicated to gender parity.

“The task before us, then, is not to disregard her as exceptional to the mainstream of global effects nor to ignore the ways in which globalization denies agency to many in its wake but to attune our critical gaze to the range of actors and practices on the global stage and thereby rethink the very concept of globalization itself — its roots, its forms, and its implications.”

Carla Freeman

Is Local : Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation study explored women's labor in the beauty industries of the YouTube vlogosphere, specifically beauty video production on the ICON network, the beauty and lifestyle channel of YouTube entrepreneur Michelle Phan. Via a case study of ICON's YouTube creators and their video production, this dissertation explored female digital labor by interrogating gender, ethnicity, bodies, and power to address two interconnected elements situated particularly in the YouTube vlogosphere: beauty and entrepreneurship. The study's key research questions asked: In the transnational world of digital employment, what are the material and ideological complexities of beauty YouTubers' experiences? And how do YouTubers interpret their technical production, their beauty ideologies, their power, their authenticity, and the material outcomes of their production for themselves and others? Following an analysis of ICON as a company, interviews with its management and video creators, and its video products, the case study's findings reveal that while ICON recruits beauty creators to market on behalf of its retail partners, the creators see themselves as entrepreneurs who negotiate their own stances regarding their beauty ideals, user-generated content, (post)feminisms, and online authenticity.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This dissertation study explored women's labor in the beauty industries of the YouTube vlogosphere, specifically beauty video production on the ICON network, the beauty and lifestyle channel of YouTube entrepreneur Michelle Phan. Via a case study of ICON's YouTube creators and their video production, this dissertation explored female digital labor by interrogating gender, ethnicity, bodies, and power to address two interconnected elements situated particularly in the YouTube vlogosphere: beauty and entrepreneurship. The study's key research questions asked: In the transnational world of digital employment, what are the material and ideological complexities of beauty YouTubers' experiences? And how do YouTubers interpret their technical production, their beauty ideologies, their power, their authenticity, and the material outcomes of their production for themselves and others? Following an analysis of ICON as a company, interviews with its management and video creators, and its video products, the case study's findings reveal that while ICON recruits beauty creators to market on behalf of its retail partners, the creators see themselves as entrepreneurs who negotiate their own stances regarding their beauty ideals, user-generated content, (post)feminisms, and online authenticity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2012, YouTuber Tori Lochlear burned off a lock of her hair while she was demonstrating the use of a curling iron on camera. The unintentionally hilarious video went “viral,” drawing 12 million views in five days (Ellen, 2013), and eventually, landed Lochlear an interview on the Emmy award-winning *The Ellen Show* for her social media antic (Bishop, 2013). Lochlear’s seemingly overnight success prompts the question of what online fame means in the digital era, where many with a Twitter handle or YouTube account are sharing their lives, creating a following, and even generating an income via their online activities. Fame, fortune, and an online following are manifestations of a system of women’s YouTube beauty entrepreneurship that has broken barriers as an emerging online genre yet continues to raise key questions pertaining to gender roles and the political economy of the media.

Few embody this experience better than “normal girl” beauty YouTuber and entrepreneur Michelle Phan (pronounced “fawn”). Phan, a 29-year-old American, has parlayed her popular YouTube channel into a self-branded beauty empire that includes a YouTube network company, a L’Oréal makeup line, an e-commerce beauty marketing business, and a book. For Phan, it seems the vlog, or first-person video, had the potential to unite a personal interest with a capitalist venture, a point of intersection where a YouTuber could film herself on a home computer and potentially generate serious cash flow in return.

In her meteoric career, Phan has most notably launched the YouTube network ICON. Similar to a television network, YouTube networks serve as parent companies for selective, successful, independent YouTubers who are recruited to create video content

on the networks' behalf for a duration outlined via contract. ICON describes itself as a lifestyle network and operates in a moment when online beauty cultures cater to a user's desire for the latest beauty hacks and industry secrets in the click of a play button. Prior to the Fall of 2015, ICON was named FAWN Inc. (For All Women Network) and still uses "fawninc" as its YouTube username www.youtube.com/user/fawninc, a testament to Phan's mastery of self-branding. In this dissertation, I undertook a case study of the YouTube network ICON with the goal of exploring the complexities of beauty content creation and women's online entrepreneurship in an era of transnational media.

Some might ask, *So, what's new about women talking about their appearance?* Yet, it seems that *everything* is new here, starting with who is doing the talking, where, and for how much. YouTube's booming beauty vlogosphere allows us to see what beauty and beauty work mean in the digital world, in the network world, and in the increasingly multiracial "real" world. Nearly 10 years after joining YouTube, Phan stated to *Forbes* online magazine — when the periodical featured her as one of the world's highest paid YouTubers — "I thought, if [YouTube] is going to be the global television of the future, I need to build my brand here" (Berg, 2015).

In the contemporary digital world, users don't just hope for their 15 minutes of fame, they anticipate it. And platforms like YouTube are marketed to guarantee it, allowing users to post videos for up to 15 minutes long for free. YouTube is the leading video production and sharing site. Its success has given rise to the popular use of terms like "prosumer" (the consumer who produces) and "prod-user" (the user who produces) which capture the nature of the YouTuber: an individual who creates digital videos and posts them on their free YouTube account (Bird, 2011; Toffler, 1980). Beauty YouTubers

like Phan are in many ways both: producers of video content, users who follow their own favorite YouTubers, and consumers of the beauty products discussed and sold in the community.

Such YouTubers make both videos (filmed segments edited together to tell a seamless story) and vlogs, or video logs (diary-like videos that are filmed in one take). The videos and vlogs are sometimes made for their own self-run YouTube channels and sometimes for YouTube networks that “air” their channels as well, like Phan’s network ICON. Networks can range from large (called multi-channel networks or MCNs) to small, and Phan positions her network on the smaller side since it “airs” fewer than 20 channels. But regardless of the attention a channel might receive from joining a network, YouTubers are responsible for attracting their own viewers by making eye-catching thumbnail images (the screen shot image that serves as the “cover photo” of the video before a viewer clicks “play”) and “monetizing” their channels by enabling advertisements to play while they air and featuring commercial products (e.g. L’Oréal makeup) in videos. A key to attracting viewers is also promoting their channels and their personalities as a sort of brand name across their social media platforms including Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Periscope, and Facebook. This self-made production done online, like making YouTube videos, is referred to as “user-generated content” in digital media studies and has been studied by scholars since the inception of the internet.

This study explored the processes and practices of beauty content creation as digital entrepreneurship. In an era where women continue to struggle to make gains in the workforce, beauty YouTube production appears to represent an avenue for success in a media environment very much part of a global economy. The overarching research

questions driving this study asked: In the transnational world of digital employment, what are the material and ideological complexities of beauty YouTubers' experiences? And how do YouTubers interpret their beauty ideologies, their technical production, their power, and the material outcomes of their production? Because beauty YouTube production occurs in an era of neoliberal digital entrepreneurship that is characterized as postfeminist, I began this study with an explanation of how these concepts underpinned my research questions at the end of Chapter 2.

Postfeminism and Entrepreneurship

Referenced as “commodity feminism,” postfeminism is said to have “taken into account” the feminist philosophy but promptly ruled it out as passé or irrelevant (McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism, in the U.S., is often characterized in terms of its false commitment to female empowerment and rhetoric of choice:

Postfeminism, understood in this manner, is thus a different political dynamic than third wave feminism, which is positioned more overtly as a kind of feminist politics, one that extends the historical trajectory of first- [19th amendment in 1920] and second- [equal rights amendment in 1972] wave feminism to better accommodate contemporary political culture and the logic of consumer citizens. (Banet-Weiser, 2007, p. 201)

In postfeminist media cultures specifically, these characteristics can be seen in the shift from women being objectified to subject-ifying themselves in a form of self-surveillance, such as women voluntarily sporting the Playboy logo in the late 1990s and the success of makeover police shows like *What Not to Wear* and *10 Years Younger* in the early 2000s (Gill, 2007).

This study focused on one characteristic of postfeminism: consumerism. Specifically, it explored how postfeminist self-surveillance was manifested in commodities, such as beauty products, and sold to women online via platforms such as

YouTube. Postfeminism is defined by Gill as a “sensibility” that embraces individualism, self-surveillance, and essentialism, or “natural born,” female qualities (2007). It emerged in the late 20th century as the world saw a change in the economic relations of Western capitalism. During the 1980s and 90s, U.S. political leaders loosened restrictions on business laws and policies in order to grow the private sector of business. This era of ongoing pro-private business has been dubbed “neoliberalism.”

While scholars use “neoliberalism” as a catchall phrase for many of these economic changes in the 20th century, this study defined neoliberalism as an economic and cultural ideology, or belief system,

that positions the free market as a guide for all human action...[and] also prizes individualism and individual responsibility. Individuals are regarded as rational economic actors who are expected to make choices that will maximize their human capital. To be rational, according to neoliberal logic, is to act in service of profit... There is no distinction between the economy and society; what’s best for one is considered best for the other. (Stenberg, 2015, p. 4)

The rise of private entrepreneurship — such as YouTubers engaged in the entrepreneurship of the self — is one facet of these new economic relations (Rose, 1998). As transnational feminist theory brings to our attention, changes in economic relations are *always* gendered (Eisenstein, 2010) and so is postfeminism’s embrace of entrepreneurship and all things “me!” As typified by its obsession with the individual and self-monitoring, postfeminism is itself a co-opting of feminism as orchestrated by neoliberalism. Contemporary neoliberal logic has simply “incorporated, revised, and depoliticized” feminism, wrapped it in a pink bow, and sold it back to Western women as harmless “girl power” (Stacey, 1987, p. 7). Doing so not only profited businesses as women flocked to the new colors and trends of neoliberal female empowerment, but it schooled them in how to be the new neoliberal subjects of the time: “the autonomous,

calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism” (Gill, 2007, p. 164).

To study these relationships in depth, this dissertation conducted a three-part analysis of the YouTube ICON Network by looking at 1) the production conditions of ICON 2) the “prosumers” who both create and consume the commodities (material and ideological) via ICON, and 3) their products: beauty videos.

Beauty YouTube production — part creative expression by a new generation of digital natives, part endorsement for a globalized beauty industry — is often clothed in postfeminist rhetoric which promises beauty consumption as the path to independence and happiness. Makeup application, for example, is discussed in beauty videos as a skillset. This is not unfamiliar to most women who are socialized to fear the sanctions for opting out of makeup, such as lower paying careers (Rhode, 2010). Given the proliferation and enthusiastic reception of beauty YouTube production, it is important to understand how women identify themselves on YouTube and why they produce their content — as artists, entrepreneurs, feminists (or not). Investigating these perspectives can give voice to a rising digital workforce and even illuminate the current tech sector trend of blending work and play. Unique to this female workforce is a collective of YouTubers who often work for free with hopes of stardom and is racially and ethnically diverse — even as the global beauty industry they labor for continues to market light-skinned, Anglo-featured beauty ideals to sell products (Peiss, 1998). Thus, beyond the commodification of beauty via YouTube, a significant aspect of beauty YouTube production is its position in the flow of transnational media and capital.

Global Flows of Beauty Work

In a globalized world that is permeated by the transnational beauty industry, mediated images and messages of beauty are essentially influenced by a profiting patriarchy, or male dominated society, in a capitalistic culture (Gavenas, 2002). I used the term “transnational” in this study, as opposed to “international,” to position the U.S. as part of the global geopolitical system, treating it as one among 196 other nations, as opposed to thinking of the U.S. as the center of the rest of the world. The transnational beauty industry is an industry where women are to read postfeminism as rendering their beauty pursuits empowering (Arthurs, 2003) and where they can make money in the “post-Hollywood” YouTube era from the advertising revenue generated from their online activities, such as making videos on YouTube, a website dedicated to “broadcasting yourself” (Morris, 2014, April 20). In this world, women modify their faces — sometimes simply, sometimes painfully — to mimic beauty ideals at quite literal physical and fiscal costs to themselves.

Beauty identities are typically constructed early in how we socialize children, and women especially are encouraged to perform them within even the tightest of budgets (Bartky, 1988). Women receive obvious benefits for participating in beauty work. In the public sphere, beauty is shown to increase chances for hire, and in the private sphere it reaps interpersonal praise (Rhode, 2010). But these benefits are obtained via a small set of ideal physical characteristics, usually light toned, Anglo-looking features, which effectively limit how far a woman of color can rise in either sphere (Chiyoko King-O’Riain, 1997; Hunter, 2002; Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009). In an age where women

continue to be paid less for equal work, monetary inequity is exacerbated as women subscribe to narrow notions of beauty and the rampant consumerism they necessitate.

Globalized meanings and movements of culture — including beauty meanings — travel through the pipelines of media, commodities, and formations of diasporas, or pockets, of immigrants (Friedman, 2002). Diaspora populations were salient in this case analysis, as many of ICON's YouTubers belong to ethnic and racial minority groups. The rise in the economic hegemony of transnational capitalism alongside institutional racism has, since the late 20th century, disproportionately marginalized immigrants in the U.S. to specific pockets of real estate (i.e. metropolitan ghettos like Chinatowns) and sectors of employment (i.e. pink-collar work like the hospitality, garment, and beauty industries) (Hamamoto, 1997). In addition to pink-collar labor, diasporic female labor makes up 40 percent of the U.S. electronics manufacturing industry, such as in the Silicon Valley of California (Fuentes, 1983). These stark facts indicate that life in U.S. diasporas is far from the “land of the free” if the potential to prosper is dependent on the heavy exploitation of poor female workers largely from nations of the global South, such as Africa, Central and Latin America, and developing Asia (“Did you know?,” 2015). Realistically, the modern world of U.S. diasporas remains a world that operates “with intersecting lines of power and resistance, a world that can be understood only in terms of its destructive division of gender, color, class, sexuality, and nation” (Mohanty, 1991, p. 2).

And yet within the constraints of globalization, the YouTube beauty empire ICON, for example, uses the notion of a global sisterhood to broadcast an uplifting message to its audiences around the world, staking a claim as the hub for beauty and

lifestyle stories of all. Given this rhetorical framing, it was important to ask whether beauty YouTube production is indeed a pathway to success for economically marginalized groups of women. Historically, beauty has been an avenue to entrepreneurial success for many women disallowed from participating in other types of work (Gavenas, 2002). Entrepreneur Madame C. J. Walker, for example, had a highly successful career in the early 1900s marketing cosmetics to African American women, which made her the first female self-made millionaire in America (Bundles, 2001). And Mary Kay Ash continued the trend in the latter half of the 20th century when she founded the direct sales cosmetic company that bears her name today and inspired similar companies like Avon (Stanley, 1996). Beauty YouTube production may be a digital extension of these earlier forms of feminist business strategy.

The ICON network, thus, is part of a broader historical tradition of women's beauty work in the post-WWII era where women market beauty products as individuals on behalf of retail companies. They serve as both the customer's sales person and confidant as they market products and expertise. Yet, in the online sphere, YouTube beauty marketing is distinct in that under a network, like ICON, the role of the retail company is deemphasized (i.e. L'Oréal) and the role of the individual is re-emphasized as a sort of entrepreneur who markets her own self-made brand of beauty recommendations and knowledge. This notion of the entrepreneur, then, is different than Avon ladies of the past who identified with Avon rather than entrepreneurship, and is indicative of the neoliberal climate in which their YouTube production sits — a commercial environment in which the ideal neoliberal subject commodifies the self as a brand of sorts. It is here where beauty work on YouTube sets itself apart as a new formation of beauty work while

contributing to the larger continuation of the long-standing practice of beauty work as a whole. ICON does not make beauty products, but markets beauty products on behalf of retail companies, serving as a sort of “middle man” connecting its retail partners to potential consumers. And in doing so, it “markets” its sellers — ICON YouTubers — as creative “influencers” who happen to love and market its retail partner products, embodying a surreptitious melding of entrepreneurship and marketing, distinct from the Avon or Mary Kay model. In doing so, this era of online female empowerment is indicative of a reconstitution of beauty under third wave or post- feminism, as opposed to the critique of beauty and beauty work seen during second wave feminism.

Beauty Work Goes Digital

As online activities appear to replace offline ones across many mass media, beauty guidance has, too, gone digital. Historically, subscription services like Avon cosmetic books and women’s magazines fulfilled this role of beauty education for those who desired to makeover their looks and read up on the necessary products (Arthurs, 2003). But digital media production — such as the videos found on YouTube — speeds up the rate of distribution and absorption of beauty dialogues and uniquely enables users to actively do their own beauty “work” onscreen and off. Beauty video production like that found on YouTube was classified as user-generated content (UGC) where users create their own digital media to share with others.

In the digital era, UGC has gradually melded “hard” ware and soft bodies (Rushkoff, 2013). Even the language for choosing a new look for Windows or a smartphone case are referred to as changing “skins,” taking on both metaphoric and literal meanings. Technology discourses have spurred beauty work to adopt similar

values, as opposed to embracing “human quirks over digital perfection” (Rushkoff, 2013, p. 1). Online beauty guidance yokes consumer advice to beauty advice. Pinterest.com, for example, operates by exploiting the concept of the “wish list” by allowing users to curate ideas for future beauty purchases and tips, for example, to test out later at the bathroom mirror (Chocano, 2012). With increased use of social media by the beauty industry’s top corporations like L’Oréal’s tumblr and Sephora’s Instagram accounts, social media platforms serve as liaisons to enable users to perform the industry’s desired actions — identification with brands and consumption of its products — within the provided templates of digital media outlets. The melding of technology and body is thus transformed into the melding of brand and self. Most of this online activity, such as that on YouTube, is created and designed by women for women audiences.

Situating the Case Study

Current research in digital media production studies has dissected YouTube production in a variety of ways, but it tends to focus on male experiences, such as gaming, usually from the perspectives of audiences. While these studies shed light on YouTube’s meanings to users, there are no studies looking at female media production by semi- and professional video entrepreneurs of ICON, a YouTube network. Though YouTube’s “Beauty and Fashion” video category lists hundreds of channels and counting, with subscriptions into the millions, the saturation of beauty content creation reaches much further considering those who do not categorize their channel and/or those who make videos about wellness and lifestyle topics in addition to beauty (YouTube, 2015a). For example, a keyword search for the word “beauty” in YouTube’s “search channels” search box results in 1,702,206 individual channels that use the word “beauty”

in their title, not to mention the most successful beauty channels that do not, like Phan's which is a self-titled channel called "Michelle Phan" (YouTube, 2015b).

Investigating beauty YouTuber experiences established the significance of beauty as a labor, as well as YouTuber relationships to video production and beauty consumption as extensions of the popular postfeminist myth of "having it all." Doing so also expanded upon digital video production studies which lack female producer perspectives and are less frequently informed by theories of gender. This avenue of study also added to transnational feminist media studies that seek to understand how postfeminism and raced/national identities interact with media processes and practices. This study aimed to strengthen our societal understanding of how marginalized YouTubers — such as females of racial and ethnic minority groups who create content — navigate the social media platform and the networks that "hire" successful YouTubers.

In addition, this study explored the role of beauty in women's socialization, as well as the construction of beauty norms as part of a gendered social hierarchy. The study addressed the impact of online content creation on producers, while also delving into how an everyday commodity (beauty products) can become a tool for representation and expression by individuals. Because little research had been conducted on this particular YouTube user segment, and research on beauty YouTube production and beauty media overall was still in its infancy, the study shed light on a sidelined area of both digital video and digital production that nonetheless has considerable significance given the intensive public discourse on beauty.

From consumer-produced to corporate-sponsored beauty media production, the female user's body is implicated as increasingly digitized and technological forms of the

human body heighten her assumed plasticity and alterability. In this study of beauty YouTube production as media entrepreneurship, beauty was conceptualized as labor. That labor can be thought of as a gendered and raced form of self-making, in the physical and entrepreneurial sense. Via a case study of YouTube beauty YouTubers who produce content on behalf of the ICON network, this study explored beauty work in the digital era by interrogating gender, ethnicity, bodies, and power to address the two elements interconnected in the YouTube vlogosphere: beauty and digital entrepreneurship.

To do so, this analysis used postfeminist theory as an overarching framework to look at how the following concepts are articulated, or connected: 1) globalization and transnational feminisms; 2) entrepreneurship defined by the economic/political philosophy of neoliberalism; and 3) digital video production in the evolution of UGC. First, I explored the large economic, ideological, and social structures that create user identities through beauty discourse and consumption of beauty products, and uncovered how these structures are set up in digital video production on YouTube. I explored these structures via a brief history of ICON's conditions of production as a YouTube network in the beauty business.

Second, I analyzed interviews conducted with ICON beauty YouTubers to corroborate an understanding of the above structures by asking them to articulate in their own words their beauty ideologies, production, consumption, and entrepreneurship as “prosumers”— those who are both producers and consumers of beauty videos. Via interviews, the study considered postfeminist notions of empowerment and increased upward mobility derived from subscribing philosophically to beauty as social capital, communally to YouTube's beauty vlogosphere, and financially to the necessary

technological and product consumption. To do this it was necessary to engage transnational feminism to unpack the tacit assumption that YouTube and beauty ideals are centered in the U.S. patriarchy (Grewal, 1999), as beauty YouTubers are, in fact, employed all over the globe and are creating transnational communities that operate within the global economy, which ICON sought to tap into (Ekdale & Tully, 2013).

To recap, the overarching research questions that drove this study were: In the transnational world of digital employment, what are the material and ideological complexities of the beauty YouTuber experiences? And how do YouTubers interpret their beauty ideologies, their technical production, their power, and the material costs of their production to themselves and others? To answer these questions, this dissertation is divided into three analytical parts: production history/context, prosumer practices, and their products. By interrogating beauty labor from three angles, we can better assess how postfeminism is being manifested in beauty work, both literally via products and figuratively via practices, trends and expectations.

In Chapter 2, I explicated the theories utilized to construct an interpretive framework for the analysis of the structures, practices, and discourses of postfeminism on ICON's network. In Chapter 3, I provided my methodology for interrogating the production contexts and experiences of the producers, by means of in-depth interviews and viewing a sample of their video products.

Chapter 4 constituted the analysis of the structures and practices of beauty content creation on ICON, the heart of the study. The first part of Chapter 4 examined the organizational structure of ICON work explaining how the network is set up and how YouTubers come to work with ICON. The second part of Chapter 4 traced the practices

of ICON video production through interviews with ICON beauty creators who worked for ICON by maintaining their YouTube channels. Specifically, these individuals spoke for themselves on how they imagined and negotiated their video work with both networks and their own viewers in mind, and how they interpreted beauty and power as YouTubers. The third part of Chapter 4 conducted a brief analysis of their beauty videos on their channels to cross reference their production practices with their final products.

Finally, Chapter 5 concluded considering the informant's experiences negotiating gender performance and postfeminist practices and positions as entrepreneurs versus solely ICON creators. While ICON sees its YouTubers as marketers who work on behalf of their retail partners, the creators see themselves as entrepreneurs who negotiate their own stance on beauty YouTube production. Taken together, the five chapters presented a continuum of both a virtual (passive) and interpersonal (active) engagement with one network of the YouTube beauty community to examine the political meanings of beauty labor. Studying its engagements shed light onto a fundamental problem of our times: the persistence of global female inequity.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

This dissertation study used postfeminist theory, or “commodity feminism,” as a lens to look at the flourishing beauty vlogosphere on YouTube (Tasker & Negra, 2007). By keeping this lens on at all times, I delved into the three angles that influence each other in beauty content creation as outlined in Chapter 1: institutions (like YouTube and multi-channel networks), prosumers (like ICON’s creators), and products (like beauty videos). The postfeminist lens was also used to take a second look at other concepts playing out in beauty content creation such as the beauty myth and how we are socialized to “look,” cosmopolitanism and what global citizenship means, and, of course, user-generated content (UGC) and the realities of online labor.

Early new media studies scholars anticipated that digital production — such as YouTube video making — would be a tool for a “new style of consumerism” that flourished in both the world of globalization as well as in “grassroots dialogue with mass culture” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 456). Though some of these ideas about what digital production could become have been revised since, the rhetoric of global capitalism and individual liberation, on the one hand, continues to weigh heavily against critical thinking about structures, on the other hand. Because this study focused on beauty discourses produced by and for women, its theoretical framework primarily engaged feminist media studies, specifically the values of postfeminist consumption, to critically assess what was happening in YouTube’s beauty vlogosphere.

In general, feminist media studies are conducted within a bricolage, or collection, of theories from Marxist perspectives of power to sociological perspectives of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Theoretically, feminist media studies focus on dynamics

rather than top-down influences, the how and why rather than the good or bad, and audience analysis rather than reifying texts (van Zoonen, 2006). A tenet of feminist media studies is that media consumers are not dupes but have complicated experiences with media, and ethnographic approaches to speaking with them about these experiences enrich our understanding of media (Meyers, 1999; van Zoonen, 2006). Early mass communication research questions often asked what media did *to* women, but contemporary feminist media studies research questions tend to ask what women, and individuals in the margins, do *with* media (van Zoonen, 2006).

Scholars are continuing to consider women as consuming subjects of media and producers of media, as well as analyzing their representations in media. Meyers (1999) pushed beyond the outdated “symbolic annihilation” metaphor of women in media. Instead, she re-created a new metaphor of women as having “fractured” media representations, bringing to light that these fractures — improvements or not — are taking place during a growing era of neoliberalism where individualism and emphasis on appearance are key (p. 135). For example, magazines in the neoliberal era began to more frequently highlight the lives of working women, such as the professional accomplishments of Georgia O’Keefe and Meryl Streep as featured in *Reader’s Digest*, but their interviews often emphasized their home lives and family relationships as conventional so that “readers are constantly reassured that the featured women are not shirking their duties as females” (Meyers, 1999, p. 51). Concepts such as fractured representations in feminist media studies were important in undertaking this dissertation research on beauty YouTube production as no single YouTuber is solely postfeminist or

not, but rather may find herself somewhere on the spectrum of gendered experience and practices.

Because the focus of this study was on practices and processes of beauty work, it was necessary to consider the concepts of beauty and production, transnational aspects of digital beauty work (because YouTube circulates globally), the performance of race and ethnicity in media representation, and YouTube as a digital labor environment where beauty work takes place. In order to explore these interrelated dynamics, my research was based on a case study of the YouTube network ICON — specifically ICON’s attempt to take up ideologies of globalized beauty to create a transnational media product — and offered fertile ground for exploring the problematics and issues at stake in this multimillion-dollar emerging online genre. The case study drew on theoretical approaches that illuminated the multifaceted workings of beauty YouTube production, and these are explicated in the following sections.

Beauty Work

To understand beauty YouTube production, it was necessary to recognize beauty as performed labor. Cultural narratives historically tend to set the discourse about what is beautiful, but they are often presented as entirely reliant on what women “want”:

The absence of formal institutional structures and of authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural...No one is marched off for electrolysis at gunpoint...Nevertheless, insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a ‘subjugated and practiced,’ an inferiorized body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. (Bartky, 1988, p. 74)

This results in a process of women laboring to be beautiful, and — important to this study — “in spite of unrelenting pressure to ‘make the most of what she has,’ women are

ridiculed and dismissed for their interests in such ‘trivial’ things” like makeup” (Bartky, 1988, p. 74). Positioned in a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” deadlock, women’s responses to cultural pressures are not bizarre obsessions with being beautiful but rather “the logical (if extreme) manifestations of anxieties and fantasies fostered by our culture” (Bordo, 1993, p. 139). Various beauty looks are thus mere carriers of how women should discipline their bodies accordingly. The concept of “beauty” itself as an ideology stems from pervasive social myths, such as the beauty myth.

Beauty as myth

Beauty images in the media are inherently not real, in the sense that they are constructed and manipulated, yet members of societies buy into their realness and “etch on our bodies” the goals and motivations of beauty marketing especially (Bordo, 1993). The sales pitch for body modification in a digital age is uniquely transformative in that the model of the ideal — the woman whose image is used in the print ad or magazine cover — herself is often a simulacrum (or fictive copy) of an aspirational ideal made up of a digital composite of facial and body features (Kilbourne, 2010). Yet consumers make adjustments and modifications accordingly to mirror such images — contributing to a \$62.5 billion cosmetic industry in the U.S. alone (Statista, 2016).

On YouTube, beauty YouTubers similarly smooth over the flaws and “mistakes” of beauty (and video) production to present beautiful looking “after” results, but unlike print advertisement models these YouTubers are flesh and blood bodies. The ideals about beauty, however, still translate. Understanding beauty utilizing Wolf’s (1991) “beauty myth” gave this study a grounding from which to understand the institutional power behind women’s disempowerment through mediated discourses of beauty. Wolf (1991)

explicated a materiality-based beauty myth following industrialization: “Most of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about ‘beauty’ date from no earlier than the 1830s...For the first time new technologies could reproduce — in fashion plates, daguerreotypes, tintypes, and rotogravures — images of how women should look” (p. 15).

As Bordo (1993) noted, “these homogenized images *normalize* — that is, they function as models against which the self continually measures, judges, ‘disciplines,’ and ‘corrects’ itself” (p. 25). While the “new domesticity” — seen in the return of homemaking trends like crafting, cooking and farming — has inspired all-natural, DIY, even anti-industry approaches to beauty work, most YouTube beauty videos invoke the intense commercialization and even medicalization of beauty, which have more institutional impacts on women’s bodies — for example, surgery (Matchar, 2014). With the role of technology in evolving the notion of beauty, the myth continues to dominate in the hyperreal space of the internet:

Why does the social order feel the need to defend itself by evading the fact of real women, our faces and voices and bodies, and reducing the meaning of women to these formulaic and endlessly reproduced ‘beautiful’ images? Though unconscious personal anxieties can be a powerful force in the creation of a vital lie, economic necessity practically guarantees it. (Wolf, 1991, p. 13)

The success of beauty images, in particular, relies entirely on securing an audience gazing at, or yearning for, an image, since the images themselves are only effective economically if they interpellate the audience to eventually become consumers. Since the industrial revolution, beauty has come to symbolize capital, with rags-to-riches stories of the most beautiful people proliferating (Meyers, 1999) and poor women facing the severest sanctions for not participating in beauty work, or for opting out of it (Bartky,

1988). Capital, and its concomitant class differentiations, are at stake in the business of beauty. Its power rests in part on its ability to capture the consuming gaze, and this is a process that is learned.

Learning to look: Female spectatorship

We learn to look in a specifically gendered way. Art historian John Berger (1972) developed a theory for how the artistic image compels us to look at it. Using examples of nude paintings from 17th century Europe, Berger claimed that women in the paintings are looking out at the painter, while the men in the painting are looking at the women. In this design “men look at women, and women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger, 1972, p. 47). But this is not the case, however, in paintings from comparable time periods in India or Africa, for example; the “male gaze” is peculiarly Western. Berger’s analysis was the start of the now well-known concept of “the male gaze,” which Mulvey (1992) coined in her study of Western filmmaking. Using examples from Hitchcock films and a psychoanalytical lens drawn from Freudian and Lacanian theory, Mulvey demonstrated that filmmaking could be seen as an extension of patriarchy by encouraging active masculinity and passive femininity. Mulvey’s piece was highly influential, showcasing the role of media in socializing the relations of “looking,” though responses to her conclusions questioned her theory for being too fixed on Freudian binaries of male/female and not adequately recognizing female spectators (Stacey, 1994).

The complexities of gazing via the media were taken into account in this analysis of beauty YouTube production because audiences and producers are engaged on the basis of the gaze. In the case of beauty content creation, women are both objectifying themselves to be gazed at and acting as gazers themselves, so YouTube affords women

an opportunity to spectate. Supporting a theory of women as gazers, Stacey (1994) repositioned women as not the passive byproducts of gazing in the Mulvey sense but as active spectators who participate in gazing for escapism, identification, and consumption. Scholars have since studied female spectatorship among black women (hooks, 1992) and black lesbians specifically (Nataf, 1995), for example, indicating women are very much doing things with media, not simply having media happen to them (van Zoonen, 2006). The active/passive tensions of female spectatorship move to the forefront in beauty YouTube production, necessitating close attention to relations of gendered looking in this research.

Female spectatorship happens in online video communities like YouTube. Girls, for example, have used YouTube to perform normative standards of femininity in front of the camera and then judge each other's brands of femininity by returning the gaze and interacting in the comments section: "Self-branding is a layered process of judging, assessment, and valuation taking place in a media economy of recognition, such as YouTube, where everyone has their *own* channel" (Banet-Weiser, 2011, p. 277). Banet-Weiser noted that female spectatorship begins in girlhood, which is especially the case for contemporary teenagers and young adults who grew up watching postfeminist children's programming such as the TV network Nickelodeon's hit show *Dora the Explorer* (2007). The TV show features Dora, "the intrepid, seven-year-old, Latina hero...poised as a global citizen in the New Economy" who embodies a highly marketable "postfeminist, pan-Latino persona" that viewers can consume both on TV and in toy stores (Banet-Weiser, 2007, p. 201). While scholars have explored female gazing in traditional media, few have considered production and spectatorship with a

postfeminist lens as Banet-Weiser has on YouTube, and none have done so in the beauty vlogosphere. This study considered female production and spectatorship on YouTube as both a characteristic of a postfeminist culture at large and as an individual method of self-branding for YouTubers professionally.

Postfeminist beauty

As noted earlier, women claim to exercise “choice” when they willingly sign up to be “made over” figuratively and literally, a perspective that aligns with contemporary discourses of postfeminism. Gill’s interpretation of postfeminism was as a “sensibility” which operates uniquely in an era of neoliberalism characterized by a return of gender essentialism (e.g. *Mars v. Venus* books; retro “battle of the sexes” reality television), individualism (i.e. “Get yours!” culture) and increased self-surveillance (e.g. *What Not to Wear* fashion police-style shows) (2007). The popular TV drama *Sex & the City* exemplified a postfeminist sensibility where consumption was a path to beauty, pleasure, and power in a world of convergence culture where TV show meets the glossy magazine (Arthurs, 2003). The postfeminist sensibility is increasingly “rich” in relation to consumption, according to Arthurs, yet poor in other ways since postfeminism creates a narcissistic relation to the self in an era where social morals and religion are on the decline with nothing to replace them except capitalism (2003).

In the practices of YouTube beauty production examined here, commoditized and mediated beauty work is yoked to the pleasures of making over the self as well as to financial profit and entrepreneurship. A key trope in the vlogs and videos produced for ICON is authenticity: viewers as well as vloggers and video producers prioritize the value of an “authentic” self behind the channel’s “brand.”

Contemporary feminine identity possesses a certain plasticity, in keeping with the contemporary postmodern era: the feminine “self” is an unstable concept, produced in part via physical makeovers that rely on mediated images of homogenized beauty in order to be achieved. In this sense, mainstream feminine beauty is the copy without an original; there is no “real me.” Yet, women continue to mentally and physically commit to manifesting it. As McRobbie (1985) notes, the “real me” “is a social and political requirement, a form of enforcement, a means of regulating legitimate ways of being, legitimate ways of understanding the self and the world” (p. 71). The fictive postmodern “real me” indicates a potential identity crisis among some females online. The postmodern concept of the “real me” proposed by McRobbie (1985) allowed this study to consider beauty YouTube production as a sort of digital simulacrum, modeling — and at times defying — hegemonic femininity and its inherent body modification and consumption. In the modern era, the “real me” meant that women possessed an essential, natural self; a natural femininity that women were biologically destined to. In the postmodern era, the “real me” is a masquerade; in some views, another tool of patriarchal social control valuing conformity and homogenized influence on femininity (McRobbie, 1985, p. 439) — yet also the basis for the success, self-fulfillment and subject positions of the beauty producers and their audiences.

Using McRobbie’s theorization of the “real me,” this study read YouTube beauty production using authenticity as lens on a pre-existing historical social obligation to make one’s self fit a “real” (the copy) woman. It is here where authenticity comes into play on YouTube as ICON’s creators represent both ICON’s sense of what is authentic video

production and their own sense of being authentically themselves; the quest for authenticity was a significant aspect of online beauty work.

In an analysis of the TV reality show *The Swan*, an extreme makeover contest utilizing plastic surgery, Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer (2006) considered how the traditional beauty pageant and modern reality TV show coalesced into postfeminist programming focused on finding “inner” beauty through self-modification invoking McRobbie’s concept. *Swan* contestants were often poor women looking to find their “true” selves. Typical of the postfeminist sensibility, the show espoused female liberation, independence, and strength via body alteration without invoking actual gender politics. In this way, the postfeminist sensibility is tricky because it is not a result of neoliberalism, but collaborates *with* and influences it (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). Rather than engaging theories of power, such as feminism, postfeminism labels all women as inherently “girl powered” by adopting, re-writing, and depoliticizing feminism as a shiny new commodity (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006).

In addition to the trend of objectification, postfeminism also operates on the basis of a rhetoric of “choice,” such as that of 1990s *Roseanne* actor Sarah Gilbert “choosing” rhinoplasty at age 17 to remedy her too large (read: ethnic) nose so she could have more time to focus on other things in her career (Bordo, 1993). Gilbert’s language was reflective of 1990s postfeminist notions of empowerment as individual reworking, eliding or erasing the power structures that imposed the standard of imperfection to begin with. Postfeminism is complexly involved on YouTube where some individuals identify as reaping the benefits of neoliberal entrepreneurship as an outcome of self-directed “body work,” including beauty YouTubers, the focus of this research. While identifying as

feminist is increasingly passé among contemporary young women, a sense of female empowerment and financial independence is very much in, sustaining the neoliberal economic ideology of postfeminism (LearnVest, 2015).

Yet, with overarching themes of consumption as the key to possessing power and feeling pleasure, socialist feminist scholars like Haraway (1991) would question the real liberation postfeminists experience. In her groundbreaking *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway created a theory of socialist feminism asserting that the only way to achieve true liberation was ending both cultural (patriarchy) and economic (capitalism) sources of oppression because gender and class work in tandem to keep women oppressed (1991). Possessing enough money to do all the beauty work one desires is not the same as emancipation from patriarchal and economic oppression.

More specifically, Haraway critiqued the false multicultural notion of an international “sisterhood”; sharing a gender does not mean all women are a cohesive political unit — which Black and transnational feminisms had long theorized (Crenshaw, 1995; hooks, 1981; McCall, 2001; Mohanty, 1991). Haraway’s radical call for the end of gender is as relevant as ever to the consumerist and narcissistic tenets of digital postfeminist “girl power” especially. If the fiscally responsible entrepreneurs of the beauty vlogosphere were privy to the financial inequalities of patriarchy which oppress them and their “sisters,” might the historically political aims of feminism no longer seem old fashioned?

The “right” face: Beauty rules

The historic context of Western beauty determined its meanings as well as its “rules.” While beauty is often marketed, and described by its users, as a creative process

or an act of self-expression, few feel the freedom to put mascara on their cheeks, for example. As is typical of many female rituals, acts of beautification are rarely *actually* empowering. Beauty rituals are often aligned with conformity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). But even rituals performed inside of the “rules” are inflected by other axes of identity and power and indicate some negotiation. For example, Darling-Wolf (2004) highlighted nuances of colonialism in modern beauty trends among Japanese women. While the women she interviewed identified as using Western-esque tools and styles inspired by their favorite fashion magazine models, their practices were not simply mimicking Western styles; rather they “reinscribed” the West into a local nationalist feminine discourse that, at times, was in resistance to *both* Western and Eastern patriarchies demonstrating that power can flow in the opposite direction of its apparent tendencies (Darling-Wolf, 2004).

Beauty work as private work upholds dominant ideologies of race as it privileges certain skin tones, facial features, and hair textures over others (Bordo, 1993; Grewal, 1996; Hunter, 2002). As beauty work continues to proliferate as important work to be done, will the rules change to incorporate more non-white characteristics? How might this influence who the face of America will be in the future, as *Time* magazine asked 20 years ago (Berlant, 1997)? How could this shift play out with regard to the global media environment and its connections to class, citizenship, wealth, and social justice? According to Bordo (1993), the postmodern plasticity of race actually sustains racial hierarchies when the path to finding or “re-membering” the real and “essential” self begins by recognizing the self in the mirror as deficient (p. 283). These racial underpinnings of beauty work have implications on a transnational scale.

Transnational Feminism

Cosmopolitan citizenship

As beauty work engages with hierarchies — in the U.S. and globally — what is considered beautiful is not just transnational but also a process of cosmopolitanism, or connecting people through consumption (Grewal, 1999). The cosmopolitan citizen is the global consumer who can recognize global brand names, such as a Chinese-American beauty YouTuber who uses and recommends both U.S. and Chinese cosmetics to her followers. In this way, “the diaspora and the home have become connected in new ways in the new economic climate” (Grewal, 1999, p. 800). Srinivasan (2012) posited that individuals of the diaspora sometimes find citizenship in consumerism and cosmopolitan lifestyles, as opposed to defining citizenship in terms of geography. The diaspora subject becomes key to both the global economy and the nation state as “cosmopolitan practices are thus a crucial part of the formation of subjects in transnationality” (Grewal, 1999, p. 824).

Scholars have studied the rise of cosmopolitan citizenship among Indian beauty queens (Parameswaran, 2004), Chinese-European beauty queens (Chow, 2011), Japanese-American beauty queens (Chiyoko King-O’Riain, 1997), and more recently Asian-American brides (Lieu, 2014). In many of these studies, the boundaries of race and nation are simultaneously troubled by and reasserted by beauty myths. Chiyoko King-O’Riain denounced the possibility of a post-race society after studying Japanese-American beauty pageant contestants noting that mixed race personhood only “intensifies race work” in academia because an individual’s lineage becomes a marker of “whole” and “half” ethnic makeups (1997). At the California-based Cherry Blossom Queen

Pageant, for example, contestants who “did not look completely Japanese” or “whole” worked twice as hard in the kimono competition she found, which models Japanese womanhood “to reinforce their connection and be granted ethnic membership” (Chiyoko King-O’Riain, 1997, p. 113). Experiences of multiculturalism more broadly were useful in exploring beauty YouTube production as the website’s tagline encourages users to “Broadcast Yourself” in ways that cross and blur multiple boundaries: physical, national, and material.

The racial bricolage foregrounded in the founding of Michelle Phan’s ICON Network specifically called for an interrogation of these very boundaries. ICON’s contracted YouTubers represent multiple racial and ethnic identities from Vietnamese-American (Phan herself) to Japanese-Brazilian, Russian Canadian, and Filipino-Mexican to name a few (ICON, 2015). ICON also crosses national boundaries, contracting with YouTubers from Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and South Africa, as well as two sub-networks added to the “ICON Family” in 2015: ICON UK and UNICON (France) (ICON, 2015). Phan created her “For All Women” network (FAWN) in an effort to unionize women across such boundaries in the name of a shared love for beauty and makeup consumption. And she unionized in the name of postfeminism considering her public denouncement of the feminist philosophy in a 2015 interview with *Cosmopolitan* magazine: “When you read about the real history of where feminism comes from, it came from a very political point of view. I don’t believe in bringing any politics to an idea like feminism” (Marotta, 2015). Though Phan did not invoke feminism as part of her personal politics or professional brand, this study considered what gender-related concepts her

YouTubers invoked in their own interests for video production “for all women” and themselves — feminist, postfeminist, or a negotiation of many feminisms.

While Wolf noted that “the beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” (1991, p. 13), beauty is also situated within a racial hierarchy that is gendered. The historical underpinnings of the Cult of True Womanhood have always implicated women differently within its hierarchy, placing light-skinned beauty at the top (Hammonds, 1997). This study addressed the connection between beauty and materiality in a transnational feminist lens to deconstruct the relationship of race privilege in the global marketplace. The transnational feminist lens was necessary when Phan references her Vietnamese heritage and identity as key to her beauty work (Phan, 2016b). In light of her transnational self-positioning and its commodity effects, it was vital to consider experiences with beauty through migration. The impacts of globalization can also be explored in these experiences.

Concerned with the multicultural beauty experiences of women in the U.S., this study used transnational feminist theory for its conceptual aims of: 1) interrogating agency and choice rhetoric in Western feminisms (including postfeminism) 2) highlighting women’s nation-state and migratory identities as they relate to beauty work, 3) studying materiality in addition to representation, and 4) decentering the patriarchy and the U.S. by focusing on women’s global entrepreneurship. Utilizing these heuristics unpacked the assumption that beauty is conceptually centered in the U.S. and prevents superficial conclusions about “all women’s” beauty experiences, which Darling-Wolf (2004) summarized as at the core of understanding female disadvantage, nationally and globally:

Developed as a means to spur domestic as well as global consumption, [beauty] constructs a class-specific ideal of upwardly mobile ‘modern’ femininity — of female liberation through consumption — which not only ignores and/or individualizes the struggles of lower-class women, but is also more likely to benefit national and international capitalist interests than women themselves. (p. 329)

Thus, a transnational feminist reading of beauty supported an institutional understanding of beauty as an industry that is culturally contextualized and implicated with global flows and disjunctures.

Neoliberalism and women’s labor

The rise of neoliberal global capitalism has given impetus to transnational feminist scholarship, especially since “feminism” is still associated with imperialism in many parts of the world (Eisenstein, 2010). Responding to Western feminism’s historic overemphasis on textual analyses of body image, identity, and representation, transnational feminist scholars of the 1980s and 90s called for more material explorations of women’s lives to de-center the West and, by extension, decolonize feminism. Early transnational feminist work demanded an antiracist, anticapitalist, socialist feminism that would focus on justice, not just representation (Alexander, 1997). Amidst a growing rhetoric of the “global sisterhood” among liberal international feminism, transnational feminism claimed that by not tackling material issues, liberal feminism was complicit with neoliberalism. Neoliberalism of the 1980s and 90s “sutured” antiracism to state policy creating an apparent multicultural, post-racial world, but such policies did not question global capitalism or acknowledge alternative economic structures such as socialism (Melamed, 2006).

Neoliberalism, thus, portrayed Western women moving into the workforce as empowering in and of itself — an elitist point of view considering women of color had

long been working, often in backbreaking manual jobs (Eisenstein, 2010). Moving from the “patriarchal family to the patriarchal factory” was not necessarily an indicator of feminist progress if workplaces operated in similar structures of oppression, with men supervising women and racial hierarchies maintained (Eisenstein, 2010, p. 413). Realistically, most of the world’s women were (and still are) in need of an alternative to global capitalism for true liberation from sexism and racism (Eisenstein, 2010).

Still, the contemporary picture of globalization is full of various shades of difference. As transnational feminism evolved, so did its positions on the experiences of women who operate within globalization. Alexander and Talpade Mohanty (2010) suggested that many women are not just simply oppressed by or resisting it, but rather redefining themselves within it. For example, Freeman (2001) discovered in her interviews a young woman named Danielle, a Caribbean transnational seller of goods, who did not see herself as oppressed by globalization but rather as inhabiting a new womanhood characterized by increased physical mobility and a business acumen. Transnational feminist approaches are lessening the binary of local/global and feminine/masculine to encompass more experiences of using globalization (Freeman, 2001). While globalization and rape scripts have historically shared a common language (i.e. “penetrating virgin territories”), newer perspectives in transnational feminism enlighten scholarship by indicating that some women self-identify as more empowered in the globalized world nevertheless (Talpade Mohanty, 2002, p. 1014).

In the current environment of neoliberal global capitalism, beauty YouTube production develops the concept of beauty ideologically as both a means of self-expression (i.e. creativity) and a means of upward mobility (i.e. learning professional

video production; learning makeup looks to climb the career ladder). ICON, for example, possess a savvy that indicates its founder Phan is no dupe, but, like Danielle, is redefining herself by maximizing and strategically using the tenets of globalization. In applying the lens of transnational feminist theory to assess ICON beauty video production, my study aimed to show how beauty YouTubers are representative of the way young women participate in globalization and digital convergence culture as entrepreneurs. Because beauty YouTubers identify as empowered, this study hoped to analyze the rhetoric of choice among digital producers to get at meanings behind such umbrella terms.

While Freeman's (2001) analysis of Danielle indicated many women use globalization to their benefit and even pleasure, digital media scholars like Terranova (2000) question global entrepreneurship, such as digital media production, since it is hegemonic and interpellates digital media producers into an existing system of capitalism and power within which the internet operates. Therefore, this study provided a critique of global capitalism and YouTube as a sub-economy within it alongside experiences of self-identified empowerment and beliefs of "bucking" a sexist system. In short, this study detailed production experiences, acknowledged the constraints of YouTube and networks, and explored how YouTubers navigated them to suit their interests.

User-Generated Content

Digital media production scholars position the roles of structure, agency, and power in very different ways. Some posit that digital media production is a path to individual empowerment and social liberation while others question unpaid "work" done online and warn of a surveillance-based online global capitalism. While early research about user-generated content (UGC) struggled over "Are they, or aren't they?" questions

of empowerment, contemporary interdisciplinary approaches have expanded into multiple viewpoints on the digital media production continuum. This study drew from various points of UGC scholarship to develop an effective and realistic look at user production accounting for 1) the ever-changing rules of the online landscape via critical theories of digital labor studies and 2) user experiences of pleasure and empowerment via participatory culture theories of audience studies. Beauty YouTube production is UGC in that it is content created by individual users. Yet, it is simultaneously not UGC in that it is sometimes created on behalf of corporate retailers (via ICON, sponsorships, or affiliations). Nevertheless, YouTube beauty production exemplifies the increasing blurred boundaries of what counts as UGC and how digital media studies position it as an emerging online genre.

The YouTuber is characteristic of the contemporary digital media concepts of “prosumer” (the consumer who produces) and “produser” (the user who produces) as an individual who creates digital videos and posts them on their public YouTube channel to be viewed and interacted with in the comments section by all (Bird, 2011; Toffler, 1980). Bird (2011) critically questioned the increasing valorization of user, especially fan, research studies in academia wondering if it grew in popularity simply because digital data was so easily attainable online. While online data may be freely available, the digital DIY style of UGC only explains part of the picture since not everyone is online (Bird, 2011). More importantly, in the contemporary digital media landscape, corporations are learning to discipline UGC, so agentive capabilities that scholars like Jenkins (2003) claimed early on are more nuanced. As corporations became savvier to the “pleasure” users experience in creating UGC, the rules changed. van Dijck (2009) noted this is

typical of a neoliberal economy in which the internet operates. As with any hegemonic structure, those in power change the rules, redraw the boundaries and user-generated work can more easily be appropriated.

The structure of online privacy, for example, rests on neoliberal ideas about individual responsibility and accountability (van Dijck, 2009). Rather than overthrowing Facebook's ever-changing rules of its privacy settings, users adjust begrudgingly and discipline themselves to learn the new changes. Yet, more important is the notion that in the UGC world only a few produce, a few more interact, most spectate, yet *all* are potential consumers (van Dijck, 2009). While it may be pleasurable for users to participate in Hollywood contests to create new movie trailers, for example, in hopes of "shaping" real Hollywood content democratically, the real information being obtained from fan labor is user-generated data which corporations collect. Corporate producers want all of the user-generated data without any of the user-generated content (van Dijck, 2009). User-generated data — largely demographics and online use patterns collected from computer IP addresses — is far more valuable information to sell to advertisers than any content a user could produce since advertisers pay high prices for certain sets of "eyeballs" on a particular webpage (van Dijck, 2009). This information — age, shopping habits, Facebook friends — is a user's real labor according critical scholars like van Dijck (2009), and it is collected for free often without a user's knowledge let alone compensation.

In this vein, Terranova stated that online labor is not a break from capitalism: neoliberal logic does not appropriate online labor, it "nurtures, exploits, and exhausts" it (2000, p. 51). What began as a "gift economy" (i.e. users voluntarily creating open source

software for anyone to use) has since evolved into a “social factory” (Terranova, 2000). This metaphor of the social factory is one which Andrejevic (2013) supported because in creating an internet that increasingly operates through surveillance (i.e. mining IP addresses) we are betting on a future of real consumer behavior manipulation.

Yet corporations work hard to make this seem less so. By clothing this “work” in the rhetoric of “play” (i.e. Facebook and Disney games), the labor of data becomes hidden. This makes it challenging to bring up labor rights issues, as Andrejevic explained, if we are just talking about online shopping or socializing (2013). And media workers share these labor burdens. From newspaper to IT employees, web 2.0 is an increasingly globalized neoliberal world of fluidity where media workers fear job loss, irrelevance, and easy replacement (Deuze, 2007). Boundaries between public and private, on and off, work and play blur as more work is done from home via laptops, cellphones, iPads, etc. It is not that we cannot re-draw the boundaries between these worlds, it’s just that “they have lost all consensual meaning” (Deuze, 2007, p. 44). In the digital work world, “the individual, not the firm, is the organization” as this is a world of individual choice (Deuze, 2007, p. 84). But these “choices” and rewards come with assumptions of working round-the-clock, and they ultimately benefit the corporations more than the workers.

This case study separated the notion of digital labor, as discussed above, with digital employment. While digital labor studies largely discuss work done by users, this study was concerned with work done by digital workers, specifically digital entrepreneurs like ICON’s creators. In this way, digital entrepreneurs see themselves as independent with highly individualized practices. Their notion of work reflects Foucault’s

“entrepreneurship of the self” (1988), specifically with regard to neoliberal practices related to beauty work online, such as portraying (and finding) your true self via YouTube video discourses. As Foucault described it, this form of entrepreneurship entailed “getting to work” on the self, specifically as a consumer, by crafting a better self, a consuming self (1988). This work sentiment is expressed in YouTube production where entrepreneurship is married with consumer culture superficially to create YouTube channels as self-brands, which is discussed below.

“Broadcast Yourself”: YouTube production

YouTube, the video uploading site, is one such medium ripe for analysis based on the media labor conceptual framework, as it relies on the labor of both producers and consumers to survive. YouTube.com was a creation of former PayPal employees in 2005 purchased by Google in 2006 for \$1.6 billion (Burgess, 2009). While not a producer of content but a platform for and aggregator of content, YouTube publishes user content and is comprised of an embedded video player, a list of related videos, an email share link, and a comments section (Burgess, 2009). It remains particularly popular among young people for its low-level of technical entry, easy circulation of production, a network of mentorship, and a sense of contributing meaningfully to a community (Chau, 2010).

Yet, YouTube has always openly courted professional partners as its founders stated early on it was always going to be an engagement with — not an interruption of — corporate partnerships (Burgess, 2009). Within the first year of Google ownership, YouTube signed 150 international corporate media partners in an unabashedly capitalistic move (Burgess, 2009). In a study of YouTube identity-making and profitability among Chinese and Japanese American YouTubers, Guo and Lee (2013) posited that YouTubers

attempted to expand notions of Asian American identity, but due to the demands of YouTube's "LOL or Leave" climate of clicks, the YouTubers tapped Asian stereotypes for more laughs and subsequent sponsorship deals, such as a tee-shirt line. Like many social media, YouTube's potential for bottom-up success operates within the boundaries of "othering" — even oneself — for laughs (Guo & Lee, 2013).

But this is anticipated by many YouTubers who have learned which video aesthetics garner the most views, especially among tutorial videos such as beauty how-to videos. In a study of 250 instructional videos, characteristics such as faster speaking rates, inclusion of background music, and higher resolution were attributed with the highest popularity as even user-created videos mimic commercial ones, a trend seen to be increasingly popular among female-created and female-targeted videos on YouTube (Hove & van der Meij, 2015).

Postfeminist branding on YouTube

It is within this intersection of identity-making and structures of power that this study was conducted. Studying the postfeminist sensibility online, Banet-Weiser's 2011 account of postfeminist self-branding in girls' YouTube production (largely singing and dancing to music videos) represented a theoretical framework this study expanded upon. Banet-Weiser shed light on the use of YouTube's "Broadcast Yourself" tagline to self-brand and self-express in a participatory culture. She indicated that web 2.0, neoliberalism, and postfeminism all operated in terms of the ideology of the self-entrepreneur. Postfeminism is characterized by connecting empowerment and consumption, and YouTube is arranged to communicate this where girls have low-entry access to self-expression, pleasure, and collaboration as YouTube brands. The comments

sections in these videos, in Banet-Weiser's study, served as a literal ratings system for the commodities sold (a YouTuber's brand) with comments sometimes celebrating and sometimes scolding expressions of girlhood sexuality (Banet-Weiser, 2011).

YouTube studies on fashion have found similar trends in the commodification of the self as aligned with brand culture. In a study of 62 fashion "films" found popularly on YouTube and Vimeo (a similar video website), luxury brands (e.g. Gucci, Prada, Armani, etc.) that produce such videos use them as "experimental marketing" to connect with the consumer through audiovisual narration (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016). The study found that the videos constituted a special type of branded content that focused on exclusivity — as opposed to ICON's "everygirl" approach — but aimed to build a sense of authenticity by attempting to "dematerialize products" and reimagine them as tools that, if purchased, can become "a real subjective element with their own life and personality" as neoliberal individuals (Soloaga & Guerrero, 2016, p. 50).

Even non-entrepreneurs are using YouTube to re-brand their work as a sort of entrepreneurship. In a study of cosmetic surgery YouTube videos, researchers found that most were filmed and posted by cosmetic surgeons who were aggressively using social media platforms like YouTube to market their medical practice (Wen, Chia, & Hao, 2015). Additionally, most of the surgeons' videos emphasized the benefits of cosmetic surgery with only a few videos mentioning the involved risks (Wen et al., 2015).

Even amongst avidly feminist YouTube videos, the subjectivity of neoliberalism is present. In a study of the 22 most popular home birth YouTube videos, YouTubers identified as part of the feminist health movement and saw their at-home birth as an act of self-governance outside the medical mode of birth (Mack, 2016). But in their video

discourse, they framed their birthing around the terms of being “self-made moms,” or birthing entrepreneurs of sorts (Mack, 2016, p. 55).

There are numerous YouTube videos illustrating a connection between consumption, empowerment, and pleasure, but this study was focused on the popularity of beauty videos and its producers. In a postfeminist world characterized by self-surveillance and reflexivity, beauty YouTubers’ experiences are complicated. Using a transnational feminist analysis to consider digital postfeminism, this study asked YouTubers how they saw themselves as UGC producers and how YouTube served as their platform for making a living. In doing so, it considered how postfeminist ideals such as self-branding, entrepreneurship, and identifying with corporations (i.e. recommending high-end products) were interlaced throughout their production. The study contributed to digital labor and participatory culture analyses utilizing postfeminism as a new lens to understand marginalized online workers.

The subject of beauty is now more than ever fraught with meaning, and scholarly research ought to dig deeply into “the trivial” (McRobbie, 1985, p. 4). Doing so requires attention to YouTube as a “hegemonic institution that presents the capitalist and patriarchal order as ‘normal’ by obscuring its ideological nature and translating it into ‘common sense’” (van Zoonen, 2006, p. 27). On the other hand, for marginalized women, YouTube and its global reach may offer the potential for strategic uses of globalization for self-empowerment and pleasure. It is here where postfeminism played out on a global stage and where this study filled a gap regarding the nuances of gender, labor, and pleasure.

Online labor and global materiality

Even in the digital era of “post-everything” (Talpade Mohanty, 2013, p. 970), the corporeal still matters (Durham, 2011). Digital media studies scholarship ought to show how the virtual is always connected to the material. According to Fuchs (2014), labor has always been the blind spot of cultural studies and is why Marxist theory is in a renaissance regarding digital media production and consumption studies. As Karl Marx’s literature sells out in bookstores again and socialism grows in presidential candidate talk, light is also cast on the seedier aspects of the digital labor world where Silicon Valley laborers do not just work non-stop hours, but many in the global South mine at gunpoint for minerals used in computer parts (Fuchs, 2014). Contemporary Marxist-inspired theoretical applications to digital media labor show how the internet is used by the new U.S. working class from the first East Coast Occupy Wall Street campaigns to West Coast McDonalds wage protests.

Nevertheless, Bird (2011) warned of Eurocentric approaches that over-determine the role of class in digital labor at the expense of other sites of oppression such as nation, gender, and ethnicity. Following Bird (Bird, 2011) and van Dijck (2009), this study utilized an interdisciplinary approach to digital media labor via transnational feminism. Therefore, how are the lives of women and other marginalized individuals physically impacted by the digital labor of the online beauty industry where ICON sits?

Research Questions

In light of the problems, issues, and concepts explored here, the following research questions were posed to investigate ICON as an exemplar of beauty YouTube production in the global marketplace:

RQ1: How is postfeminism invoked, ignored, or negotiated as part of ICON beauty creator entrepreneurship and self-branding?

RQ2: How do ICON beauty creators position themselves as laborers who produce UGC?

RQ3a: How do ICON beauty creators' experiences with identity shape their online personas? RQ3b: How do their concepts of race, ethnicity, and place impact their engagements with communities and audiences?

RQ4: How do issues of transnational capital and global audiences intersect with ICON's beauty video production?

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Context of the Case Study

The research questions were explored by examining a single case: the YouTube network ICON founded by Michelle Phan. While YouTube is teeming with beauty YouTubers — via amateur webcams to professional videography — few have experienced the on- and off-screen success of Phan. Described as “a young digital pioneer,” Phan’s videos made her “one of the most watched talents in the digital space” (BrooksGroups, 2015). Her YouTube channel “Michelle Phan” has 8.5 billion subscribers, and she has parlayed her talents into subsequent developments: the ICON network, e-commerce beauty product company “ipsy,” cosmetic line “em michelle phan,” a book, and a new production studio for fellow YouTubers called Ipsy Open Studios (BrooksGroups, 2015). Many internet sites estimate Phan’s net worth is \$5 million (Sherman, 2013).

The case of Phan and her fellow ICON YouTube creators provided a useful platform to explore this study’s research questions about YouTube production and beauty work. In particular, the analysis of video production offered insight into postfeminist sensibilities online, highlighting the ways in which neoliberal entrepreneurship by women used conventional gender practices to bolster a popular online identity, connect with fellow entrepreneurs and fans, and earn a living. Phan and her YouTubers’ identity positions online and off augment feminist digital media studies by illuminating what gender, ethnicity, and bodies mean on YouTube and how power shapes their constitution on this platform. The study’s multi-method approach shed light on who rises up the YouTube ladder, what ideas are profitable, and which material entailments result from

digital beauty work. Overall, this was a study about production: the conditions of YouTube network production, how and why beauty YouTubers operated ideologically and fiscally, and what they produced, all while also considering this production at a micro level (in terms of body modification and gendered discipline) and macro level (with regard to global capital).

Historically, women's bodies have been spatially restricted by social rules regarding the body — from Eastern foot binding to Western corseting — as women are socialized to take up less space such as crossing their legs on bus seats and side-stepping men on sidewalks (Young, 1990). Online, however, space *appears* limitless — even referred to as the “cloud” — where users can operate their bodies digitally via video recording without bounds, aside from the frame size and 15-minute time cap of a default YouTube video. While the internet seemingly opens up “space” for female bodies to occupy, the beliefs and values of offline social life are frequently adopted online, such as gender performance (Banet-Weiser, 2011). YouTube, for example, is host to many videos of users recording the opening of new consumer products for the first time. Among these, men opening “male” products (i.e. the new Xbox 360 gaming console) are often titled “unboxing” videos, while women opening “female” products (i.e. the new Urban Decay eye shadow palette) are referred to as “hauling” videos. The language of the two video types implies a gendered value judgment, with “unboxing” seeming customary or even value neutral, while “hauling” implies binge shopping and greed.

Some scholars might suggest Phan and her fellow YouTubers have fallen into stereotypical female interests — like makeup — while others may suggest they are far from being YouTube dupes (Meyers, 1999; van Zoonen, 2006). Feminist media studies

theorists, in particular, have demanded more ethnographic-inspired studies focusing on 1) interviews with actual people rather than just studying texts, 2) women's own media production, not just their consumption and 3) the trivial; the everyday; the banal (McRobbie, 1985; van Zoonen, 2006). The advent of the postmodernism movement, for example, accord to McRobbie was not a "decline into meaninglessness" but an opportunity for feminist studies to think deeply on the sociocultural importance of the trivial, such as beauty habits (1985, p. 4). Phan's beauty empire provided a site for the close examination of these aspects of women's digital media practices.

Strategy of inquiry: Case study

A case study, which is a form of qualitative methodology, was most suitable to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 2 since case studies are designed to fulfill the three pieces of ethnographic-inspired analysis described above by van Zoonen (2006). The case study method was especially effective when used to "holistically understand exemplary 'cases'," such as a "model" case of a widespread trend (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). In this instance, I studied ICON as an exemplar, or model case, of the emerging trend of beauty entrepreneurship spreading across YouTube networks. Doing so via a case study enabled me to explore both the organization and the individuals who embody ICON and to look at their relationships within the community (Yin, 2003).

Because "case studies are of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation," this study's case advanced post- and transnational feminist theoretical lenses in assessing digital cultures like YouTube (Stake, 2000, p. 448). The dissertation was conducted as a case study of online culture and gendered practices that were tied to female identity ideologies in YouTube production. Because case study

research aims to understand the dynamics of events in a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989), this case study was set upon the production of ICON within its YouTube presence and plans for expansion beyond YouTube. While case studies are not equipped to be all-encompassing conclusions about a social phenomenon, they are able to illuminate exercises of power, systematic processes, and decision-making (Newcomb, 1991). In doing so, the case study illustrated how broader social, cultural, and economic issues influencing a media industry like YouTube were experienced at a real-life level (Lotz, 2004).

There are many types of case studies which can be utilized to answer qualitative research questions. This dissertation project employed a combination of the “explanatory” case study and “descriptive” case study as defined by Baxter and Jack (2008, pp. 547-548). The case study of ICON was an explanatory approach in that it answered questions “that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies” and a descriptive approach meaning the case was “used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, pp. 547-548). Specifically, because “the purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Stake, 2000, p. 448), this dissertation was limited to an in-depth analysis into ICON beauty production by Phan’s contracted creators.

Phan, an American of Vietnamese descent, markets herself as an expert, a brand, a hybrid-subscriber to Eastern and Western beauty ideologies, and is best known for makeup tutorials of icons and celebrities (e.g. Barbie; Lady Gaga) and situational female characters and experiences (e.g. anime girl; summer makeup). Phan’s production alone was worthy of scholarly analysis as a YouTube-marketed success story of a “model

minority” rising from Florida restaurant hostess to global beauty icon and entrepreneur (Phan, 2013). But it was her founding of ICON and subsequent recruitment of fellow beauty YouTubers that provided an in-depth look at YouTube beauty production and management at the network. The case served as a timely opportunity to further analyses of women’s digital media production paired with a deep examination of the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and place in public online discourse about beauty, bodies, and becoming “best selves,” which ICON aims for across its marketing: “We’re dreaming big and so should you” (FAWN, 2015a, 2015b).

Phan’s YouTube beauty marketing has been popular among young women who see little variation in skin tone representation in mainstream U.S. beauty advertising. But Phan’s appeal extends widely and has secured her major publicity spots in media outlets like *Glamour*, *InStyle*, and *People* magazine (BrooksGroups, 2015). Born and raised in the U.S., Phan regularly references her Southeast Asian mother and influences from East Asian beauty culture from Anime to K-Pop, situating herself as a member of a larger fluid U.S. diaspora of women like her. Her cosmetics line, em michelle phan, was named after the Vietnamese term of endearment for “little sister, girlfriend, or elder” suggesting Phan as a universal “big sister” on makeup for YouTube’s female crowd (BrooksGroups, 2015). Based on ICON’s own video coverage and interviews with fans during Phan’s recent book tour, Phan’s fan base has strong representation by South and East Asian-American girls and women in addition to a myriad of young women of varying skin tones and ethnicities standing in line to meet and hug “Mish” (Michelle) (FAWN, 2014).

ICON has a history of featuring YouTube creators who vary in their own racial/ethnic identifications such as Korean-American RAEview in California to self-

identified “Flipixican” (Filipino, Native American, and Mexican American) Charisma Star in Alaska. Considering the migratory nature of contemporary U.S. society, a transnational feminist analysis was suited to incorporate both the migration of beauty ideologies and beauty producers. Phan, herself, attests to growing up in the family nail salon where her mother worked (Phan, 2014). As of 2010, .5 percent of the U.S. population reported as Vietnamese and of those, 32 percent worked in service labor (Bureau, 2012). Forty-three percent of nail technicians nationwide are Vietnamese, yet this jumps to 80 percent in California (Tran, 2008). While Phan’s mother’s experience aligns with this statistic, Phan has had a much different path. By contrast, the language of digital enterprise promised Phan and other YouTubers a sense of limitless freedom online where “You” can rise up and — by extension — away from the bounds of hotel, restaurant, factory, subcontracting, and family firm labor (Lowe, 1991). This is a true narrative for Phan who praises YouTube for enabling her to follow her passion and very comfortably support herself and her family (Phan, 2013).

Feminist Methodology

My research questions lent themselves to a qualitative methodology that shed light onto human experiences and built an understanding of ICON via grounded theory (Lindlof, 2010). Because my questions delved deeply into the complexities and nuances of ICON in terms of its conditions of production, the grounded experiences of its prosumers, its videos, and its material implications, my study called for a methodological approach that allowed for flexible inductive investigation. My research questions were addressed through a combination of analyzing ICON’s conditions of production,

prosumer practices, and the video products themselves; my research design and methodological protocols are explicated in detail later in this chapter.

More specifically, a feminist methodology complemented these goals since it aims to understand gendered lives. “Reflexivity is the heartbeat of the qualitative research project” (Lindlof, 2010, p. 72), and especially so in the feminist research project since positionality of the researcher is important in providing context to the project itself. In particular, it demands that the researcher have a political and ethical commitment to her informants and acknowledge various sites of oppression such as ethnicity, region, or class by utilizing related theories of power in an interdisciplinary approach to the research questions (Ramazanoglu, 2002). It also requires that researchers practice reflexivity by acknowledging their methodological tools for thinking are Western and, therefore, shape how knowledge is produced (Ramazanoglu, 2002).

I, thus, acknowledge that I am most certainly a product of the very postfeminist sensibility I interrogated in this study. As a child and teenager socialized in the U.S. during the 1990s, I both see myself in and am critical of my informants’ affiliation with “having it all.” I am intimately familiar with postfeminism’s habits of self-surveillance and self-objectification under the rhetoric of individual “choice.” Having been raised during the neoliberal MTV girl-power era of the Spice Girls and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I, too, dabbled in high school with the idea of entering the makeup artist profession to work in a creative industry, see a world beyond the Midwest, and “empower” other women through product transformation. Although parental influence and university coursework happened to show me down a different career path, I acknowledge this to show just how nuanced paths leading to beauty work — in all forms

— can be, and that for many young women postfeminism can “feel like” feminism if you are not alert to the differences — principally, political equity as well as consumer equity.

The feminist methodology applied in this study aimed to “avoid textual appropriation of the researched” by not characterizing ICON YouTubers without actually speaking with them (Opie, 1992, p. 53). By recognizing my feminist ideology as informing my own views, I was able to better show my informants’ various experiences, including pleasure (Opie, 1992). Experience of pleasure, as Opie suggests, does not necessarily negate potential exploitation, but merely shows the nuances of the complicated human experience. Overall, I aimed to allow my informants to self-define their experiences on YouTube. Additionally, people exist in time and space, so by using the methods below, I showcased my informants as not just existing online but as a living, breathing individuals comprised of many roles in many spaces beyond their YouTube roles (Hine, 2013).

Methods

In a digital age of globalization, digital media bypass many nation state borders just as definitions of beauty do. Transnational and post- feminist theories as well as a critical cultural humanism informed this study’s methodology to consider the material and ideological implications of issues affecting women from a range of backgrounds and ethnicities. Triangulation served as part of the case study’s strategy of inquiry to answer the research questions. Doing case study research “means identifying a topic that lends itself to in-depth analysis in a natural context using multiple sources of information” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 16). And “triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Stake, 2000, p. 443).

Thus, to produce results that were broad, original, and in-depth, this study utilized a multi-method approach performing 1) an analysis of the conditions of production of ICON as a thriving digital company, by studying its corporate structures, financial situation, and labor practices, mainly via documents and paratexts offering insights into the company and its workings ; 2) a prosumer analysis by interviewing ICON beauty creators about their lived experiences with subscribing philosophically to the beauty myth, mentally to online beauty video consumption, and financially to video production and product consumption; and 3) a product analysis of their own YouTube videos to evaluate finished products against producer intentions.

This three-part design was partly inspired by feminist media studies scholar Janice Radway (1984) who, in the process of her triangulation, unexpectedly found sites of female negotiation and resistance adding greatly to media studies scholarship on women's reading habits. This study uncovered real, lived female experiences with beauty YouTube production and the adoption, negotiation, or rejection of prescribed female identities. The approach was influenced by ethnographic projects which sought to interpret local language by following the flows of discourse and communicating them in an understandable and microscopic way (Geertz, 1973). This was done through a "thick description" throughout Chapter 4 that illuminates contradictions, nuances, and hierarchies as opposed to a "thin" one that is merely literal (Geertz, 1973). By considering the larger contexts at play surrounding femininity and bodily discipline, a thick description of ICON enabled beauty YouTubers to define their experiences in their own words (Madison, 2011). Overall, my methodological aim was to do no harm to them

or their careers, to be transparent with my research questions, and to maintain their dignity above all (Madison, 2011).

Analysis of the company's conditions of production

Method rationale.

In order to position the ICON network as an up and coming digital corporation, I conducted a production analysis by combing business media and entertainment media publications to assess the company's public image and self-described practices. This approach to studying organizations enabled this case study to understand ICON's partnership with Endemol Beyond USA, the institutionalization of ICON as a YouTube network, and the various ways work is organized there as modeled by Lutz and Collins' assessment of *National Geographic* magazine's corporate relations (1993). Doing so provided answers to RQ4 especially ("How do issues of transnational capital and global audiences intersect with ICON's beauty video production?") as well as how ICON sits as a digital company within economic and social structures at large. Analyzing media records and organizational documents is, as Esterberg noted, a way to "study human behavior unobtrusively" that helps makes sense of and brings richness to other — sometimes more intrusive — methods such as interviews, which are also detailed in this chapter (2002, p. 121).

Conditions of production: Data selection and analysis.

To understand the conditions of ICON's production, I studied the publicly available documents on the company, utilizing the business information and research tool Factiva to inform ICON's corporate position. The Factiva database is a Dow Jones & Company product and aggregates content from both free and licensed sources to provide

companies with business research capabilities. Factiva's access spans more than 32,000 sources from the Dow Jones newswires, Reuters newswires, *The Wall Street Journal*, major news and business sources, and press release wires on more than 22 million public and private companies (Factiva, 2016). Factiva calls itself "the world's leading source of news, data and insight, helping today's executives make better business decisions faster," and has been utilized in critical/cultural media studies research as a methodological tool for collecting news trends (Foster, Cook, Barter-Godfrey, & Furneaux, 2011).

Factiva searches were conducted via access through The University of Iowa Libraries for the keyword combination "'ICON Network' AND 'michelle phan'" within the last five years. The search produced 47 results, with 10 excluded as duplicates, totaling 37 reports assessing Phan's small company and partnership with Endemol Beyond Shine USA from leading business and entertainment industry publications. The 37 reports were printed to PDF, read and classified for key events (e.g. "Michelle Phan to host ICON Summit for YouTube Creators"), and compiled to create a company picture for Chapter 4 detailing Phan's various annual revenues of her companies, deals with various beauty corporations and other industry relationships.

Analysis of producers

Method rationale.

To fully grasp the dynamics of ICON's beauty video practices, it was necessary to speak with ICON YouTubers about their intentions for their audiences as well as how they imagine and negotiate their beauty work. Conducting interviews with ICON YouTubers ensured I understood them by capturing both their feelings and the facts through "exchange and empathy" (Franklin, 2001, p. 102). The method of interviewing

was selected because it was best suited to answer the research questions which inquire about personal experience (Berg, 1989). According to its channel page, ICON's YouTubers dedicated to beauty in the fourth quarter of 2015 totaled 11, all of whom I attempted to engage. To do so, I obtained the required approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak with human subjects to collect their experiences through interviews. The questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

There are a variety of ways to conduct interviews in internet studies such as email, instant messaging, and Skype (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Skype interviews were well-suited for these YouTubers because they were already comfortable with online communication — most were digital natives — and it was convenient for them as busy entrepreneurs (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Though the method is not self-transcribing like emailing, Skype interviewing prevented the transcription labor from falling on the informants and allowed me to connect with them visually to capture their nonverbal communication that was meaningful to contextualize their verbal expressions (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Email interviews sufficed for follow-up questions and when Skype was not suitable. From a logistical standpoint, I respected the amount of time informants provided and avoided asking “yes” or “no” questions by, instead, getting at structures and narratives (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Specific analytical protocols for the transcribed interview data are detailed in the next section.

Producer data selection and analysis.

Initial contact was made with Phan herself over the summer of 2015 but after no response, I contacted her press agent Kelly Fobar Davis of KFD Public Relations, LLC.,

who, after two attempts for an interview request with Phan in September 2015, denied noting Phan's lack of availability:

Its [*sic*] truly a matter of her time. Know she would love to help with these types of things, but please understand we get multiple requests like this EVERY single day. She simply cannot get to everything:(([*sic*] We really appreciate your understanding. (personal communication, 2015)

A follow-up with Davis requesting an interview with herself to gain insight into strategic communication for a digital company and CEO was also unsuccessful.

Thus, a small sample consisting of ICON YouTubers and the vice president of programming at ICON's parent company were interviewed to answer the research questions. The YouTubers provided insights into beauty labor production. Their channel names were: Natalies Outlet, Jamie Greenberg, and Kelsey Farese. (Details about these informants are provided later in this chapter.) A fourth interview with Endemol Shine Beyond USA Vice President of Programming Leslie Morgan was conducted to provide insight into ICON's management point of view and long-term vision as a digital business. Over the course of the fourth quarter of 2015, contact was made with the other seven ICON YouTubers who produce beauty content but denied participation despite three attempts to recruit each of them for interviews. Their channel names were: SunKissAlba, CloudyApples, JkissaMakeup, friedia, Morgan Lynzie, STYLE ME GRASIE, and theycallme_mo.

I first contacted informants via the "Send message" feature on the "About" webpage of their YouTube channel to explain the project and interest in the online beauty industry. I then followed up via email for those unresponsive to the first invitation, which were provided in their "About" sections of their channel webpages. With success via email, I answered questions regarding the study and arranged an interview time. Once a

Youtuber agreed to participate and read the emailed consent letter, I arranged a Skype interview. I contacted Morgan via her publicly available Gmail account published on allthepeople.net profile and conducted the interview over two email conversations at her request.

Interviews were digitally recorded capturing both video and audio on Skype with informant permission, and a casual and conversational tone with detailed prompts was used to ease natural interview anxieties. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I asked informants to provide personal background information, their concept of beauty, their digital production, and their assessment of the impact of being active ICON YouTubers. The research questions guided data collection and secondary inquiries and probes were used to clarify points, ask for elaboration, and establish more trust over repeated contacts. To create a balanced sense of power and disclosure as key to feminist methodology, a conversational data collection guide was used to discuss beauty work with informants.

Skype interviews were transcribed for analysis and referral throughout the study. Notes from each interview and email exchanges, combined with the transcripts, created a data set for each informant. Data analysis began following each Skype interview. “Procedural memos” were used to keep track of the evolving coding plan as well as any ideas or key words that characterized a specific theme (Esterberg, 2002). Interview data was coded modeling Esterberg’s (2002) analytical protocols for finding underlying themes in discourses. Following transcription, I re-read the conversations to steep myself in the discourses of attitudes, beliefs, and practices surrounding the research questions. This protocol lead to the discovery of repetitions of patterns of specific metaphors and

certain linguistic devices used to describe their experiences (ex. “empowered”; “self-conscious”; “happy”). These patterns were then analyzed to further surface themes into concepts (ex. “postfeminism”; “body”; “community seeking”). Concepts were then rigorously analyzed and validated in relation to the theoretical framework that guided the case study. If an interpretation was in question, the informant was contacted via email for clarification.

By visiting informant channels and ICON regularly before interviews, I gained insights into online beauty work. Informants needed to see my familiarity with the beauty vlogosphere during our conversation to feel assured in my ability to interpret their experiences accurately. The goal of qualitative research can be compromised if informants perceive a wide social distance between them and myself. In order to prevent this, I watched videos frequently and even participated alongside YouTuber Kelsey Farese in making a Snapchat video for her followers adopting the rules of the vlogosphere as opposed to “lurking” silently. In particular, the researcher-informant distance was bridged during interviews by sharing my experiences with beauty work and being open to continued communication after the study. Feminist research, after all, aims “to work toward human emancipation” and these methodological protocols were put in place to allow theoretical analysis to do so (Esterberg, 2002, p. 17). By juxtaposing interviews, coding and exploring themes, and telling the “whole story” using theory (Hine, 2013), the study illuminated ICON and its YouTubers as a case of contemporary digital beauty media production in an increasingly transnational world that impacts many.

Producers.

Natalies Outlet.

Natalie Alzate was a YouTuber and ICON creator with 914,750 subscribers to her channel “Natalies Outlet.” She was 21 years old at the time of the interview and described her ethnicity as Columbian. Though she was born and raised in Chicago, she had lived in Florida for the past 10 years and had a serious male partner. Alzate received her Associate’s degree from Valencia College where she was involved with the campus activities board and was selected for the First Student Spotlight, a notable honor on campus. She was, at the time, a full-time Bachelor’s student at the University of Central Florida majoring in marketing with a minor in international business. She was an active member of UCF’s Professional Selling Program and hoped to graduate in 2016.

Kelsey Farese.

Kelsey Farese was a YouTuber and ICON creator with 3,698 subscribers to her channel “Kelsey Farese.” She was 25 years old at the time of the interview and described her ethnicity as “very Italian.” She was born and raised in Mississippi and had also lived in Tennessee during her childhood, but had lived in Los Angeles for the past four years with her serious male partner. She finished her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of California Los Angeles in 2012 after transferring from the University of Memphis and majored in English and creative writing. She was involved in performance baton twirling at University of Memphis, which inspired her move to L.A. to pursue acting professionally, though she was still very passionate about education and hoped to work again with schools in the future.

Jamie Greenberg.

Jamie Greenberg was a YouTuber and ICON creator with 34,294 subscribers to her channel “Jamie Greenberg.” She jokingly noted her age was 21 before stating her age range was between 30 and 40 and described her ethnicity as Jewish. She grew up in Maryland, outside of Washington D.C., but had lived in Los Angeles for the past 10 years with her husband and children. She was a full-time celebrity makeup artist of her company Jamie Makeup under The Wall Group. She played college women’s soccer and earned her Bachelor’s degree in film and photography from Ithaca College in 1999 after having taken classes previously at New York University. She had a client list including Hollywood actors Kaley Cuoco (*Big Bang Theory*), Kirsten Dunst (*Spider Man*), Rashida Jones (*The Office*), and Tracee Ellis Ross (*Blackish*).

Leslie Morgan.

Leslie Morgan was the Endemol Shine Beyond USA Vice President of Programming. Prior to her current role, she was the Executive Producer of FAWN (now called ICON) and before that worked in film and TV running her own production company with a partner before the American economic recession. She had worked as a consultant for BermanBruan (now Whalerock), EQAL, Revision3/Discovery Digital Network, and with a variety of brands including Kraft, Clorox, Unilever, and more recently L’Oréal, Victoria’s Secret, Nintendo, and eBay on behalf of ICON. She had also worked with talent including basketball star Kobe Bryant, Food Network personality Paula Deen, and Hollywood actor Sherri Shepard. Morgan was from upstate New York but had lived in Los Angeles for 13 years with her husband. She received her Bachelor’s degree at State University of New York (SUNY) Oneonta majoring in theater and

creative writing, and her Master's degree from Emerson College in media arts with a concentration in TV/film.

Analysis of the products

Method rationale and data selection and analysis.

This study also relied on a small sample of beauty videos to gain a basic understanding of the techniques of video production utilized by ICON's beauty YouTubers in their quest for followers and a brand identity. A brief analysis of videos was key for this particular case study since YouTube, like Hollywood, is self-reflexive in that it lays bare its user ideas about best practices for video production (Caldwell, 2008). Studying ICON products created a truer picture of its operation as a mini-world where YouTubers and viewers agree on certain aspects of social life, common sense, and relations of power (such as product consumption leading to self-enhancement). This sense of a common view or shared community depends, to some extent, on the YouTubers' uses of production techniques such as camera angles, color, sound, and sponsorships which were coded for analysis (Morain & Swarts, 2012).

The data for the product analysis was comprised of three of the "most recent" (a YouTube video category) videos of each of the ICON creators interviewed, totaling 9 videos viewed, coded, and analyzed. All videos collected were from 2016. Access was gained using my existing YouTube account. The videos were pooled, viewed while taking notes, and assessed using digital media theories to consider UGC (Burgess, 2009; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), values of YouTube production (Morain & Swarts, 2012), and processes of YouTube self-commodification (Banet-Weiser, 2011). Overall, the assessment considered Banet-Weiser's guidelines for analyzing YouTube video texts

regarding their postfeminist production qualities. Specifically, I tracked how the sample of videos “support and perpetuate a commercial post-feminist discourse in which...young women are ostensibly ‘empowered’ through public bodily performances and user-generated content” (Banet-Weiser, 2011, p. 278). While this did mean that I, like Banet-Weiser, “am looking at only one kind of production practice out of the multitudes that take place via digital media and only one subgenre of video that is posted on YouTube,” the case study was particularly concerned with self-branding in YouTube entrepreneurship, a key component of the postfeminist sensibility (2011, p. 279).

I coded the nine videos by tracking four specific descriptors —aesthetic ideology, sound and music, text and color, and dialogue — to keep the focus on analyzing channels as brands as suggested by Banet-Weiser (2011). The data was compiled and compared to determine themes that reflected values of individual production, as well as the extent to which they conformed to ICON’s overall value set of embodying the “everygirl.” Direct quotations from videos were examined as representative of a creator’s product and were fully assessed utilizing the theoretical framework. This descriptive analysis of production techniques did not constitute a critical textual analysis but, rather, it revealed the technical strategies through which the creators created an aesthetic and an identity to convey a particular personal brand.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

This case study analysis examined the conditions and practices of production of ICON as a growing global digital business rooted in women’s entrepreneurship and the culture of beauty. The chapter is divided into three parts. In Part I, in order to fully grasp ICON’s scope and influence, I provide details of the annual revenues of Phan’s businesses, her deals with beauty and digital corporations, and other industry relationships over the past five years to shed light onto “the astonishing draw of Michelle Phan” (Jarvey, 2015c). Utilizing the business and economics database Factiva as described in Chapter 3, this section paints a company picture of ICON via publicly available documents which portray ICON’s corporate position, largely from Dow Jones, Reuters, *The Wall Street Journal*, industry publications like *AdWeek*, and Hollywood business wires.

This analysis was combined with a production interview with Vice President of Programming at Endemol Shine Beyond USA Leslie Morgan. Endemol Shine Beyond USA is the digital arm of Endemol Shine North America (owned by global parent company Endemol Shine Group). Endemol Shine North America is a production company, distributor, and joint venture of its parent companies 21st Century Fox (50% ownership) and Apollo Global Management (50% ownership) (Littleton, 2016). The digital arm Endemol Shine Beyond USA is the distribution platform for the ICON network. Morgan’s insights added depth and detail to the interview and product analyses, providing a form of triangulation and validity.

The organizational analysis is followed by Part II, which contains in-depth interviews with some of ICON’s top beauty creators, providing a close look at the

complexities and intentions at work in the practices of creation underpinning ICON's ethos and products. Finally, in Part III, I analyzed the products of their production, beauty YouTube videos, focusing on the technical skills and production modes utilized by the creators in order to create unique brand identities as well as entice and connect with audiences.

Part I — ICON: The Conditions of Production

Partnering with production company Endemol Shine Beyond USA and branding mogul Leslie Morgan

Before Phan became “the biggest influencer in beauty” and was “compared to Oprah Winfrey” (Yi, 2016), she rocketed into YouTube hall of fame with makeup how-to-videos — such as her Lady Gaga tutorial picked up by *BuzzFeed* in 2009 (Woodhall, 2015). Soon after, Phan was courted by flocking television companies desperate to sign the YouTuber who even had First Lady Michelle Obama asking her for beauty tips (Rancilio, 2015). But as a big believer in the future of the internet, Phan turned down the television offers to grow her channel and develop a YouTube network, stating that “we are the Internet generation, and we know how to speak to the Internet generation” (Novellino, 2015a; Woodhall, 2015). Considering the internet is home to 700 million beauty videos watched monthly, with only two percent coming from cosmetics company-run channels, Phan was in the right place at the right time to capitalize on the remaining 98 percent of “real” user beauty videos (MediaPost, 2015). As reporters covering her career have assessed, Phan’s choice has “changed the history of the Internet, most certainly YouTube, and the definition of celebrity” (Yi, 2016).

An accidental entrepreneur.

Boston-born Phan became an entrepreneur by accident after moving to Tampa, Florida with her family as a child. In what she has described as a “disjointed upbringing” with an absent father and struggles in poverty, Phan “was one of the few Asian kids, and I always got made fun of because I was different” (Phan, 2013). Following high school, Phan — with financial help from her mother, aunts, and uncles — attended her first

semester at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Florida while hosting part-time at a Sushi restaurant (Yi, 2016). Phan promised to repay her mother by taking care of the family; as she put it, “I just never imagined it would be through YouTube” (Phan, 2013). While in school, Phan developed a love for video production using a MacBook Pro laptop she received at school from a college professor. In an interview with *Glamour* magazine, Phan explained that “she filmed a seven-minute tutorial on ‘natural makeup — just me, my laptop, and a cup of coffee. When, a week later, it clocked 40,000 web views, I knew people were connecting with it, so I kept going. That moment changed my life” (Phan, 2013).

Though she was forced to drop out by the second semester due to a lack of tuition money, Phan embraced her new found talent of digital media production, and between a Xanga blogging account and a new YouTube channel, she created videos using the free Apple software iMovie and uploaded makeup tutorials across her social media pages which “exploded in popularity” (Yi, 2016). Earning more from her YouTube channel’s advertising revenue than at the restaurant, Phan quit to produce YouTube content full time (Phan, 2013).

Four years (and 200 videos) later, Phan signed an offer with Google to create 20 hours of original content for \$1 million and had already been making videos for makeup brand Lancôme since 2010 as their first Vietnamese spokesperson (Phan, 2013). In 2012, Phan launched For All Women Network (FAWN) as a YouTube multi-channel network (MCN) when she began hiring other YouTubers to join her empire. In 2013, Phan’s Lancôme marketing escalated into her own makeup line with L’Oréal (owned by Lancôme) called em michelle phan (Phan, 2013). And in 2014, as the biggest beauty

channel on YouTube, Phan signed a contract with Endemol to develop content and evolve FAWN into ICON, Endemol Beyond USA's lifestyle MCN, a half billion dollar enterprise (Spangler, 2015a; Yi, 2016). Since, Phan has developed an e-commerce business of sample beauty products ipsy (formerly MyGlam founded in 2011 and launched in 2012) and built Ipsy Open Studios (a Santa Monica-based production studio to support YouTubers with filming and editing) (Yi, 2016).

Today, ICON stands with an online presence on YouTube and a new digital television presence on the Roku streaming platform, and the MCN is host to 19 channels of YouTubers who create ICON content as well as content for the breakout MCNs ICON UK (United Kingdom) and UNICON (France). ICON is also home to the web video series Pretty Little Pranksters and is pursuing further TV, mobile, magazine, and music presences detailed in the coming section. ICON, as a YouTube network, is located on YouTube under the URL of <https://www.youtube.com/user/fawninc>. The banner across ICON's channel page features a composite image made of up photograph snippets including painted nails holding a coffee cup, a woman standing in front of a lake, an up-close lipstick application, and an opened laptop computer collaged in various shades of blue, purple, and pink. ICON's logo is a plum-colored box with ICON centered and written in white, and the mathematic sign for infinity (∞) encircles the "c" and "o" of the name, a nod to ICON's global expansion in the coming years.

ICON's YouTube looks like a typical YouTube channel homepage with tabs from right to left for "Home"; "Videos"; "Playlists"; "Channels"; "Discussion"; and "About". From top to bottom, the channel features video categories for "Uploads"; "Life Hacks"; "Throwback Beauty"; "Face the Movies"; "More ICON Shows"; and "ICON Around the

World.” On the far right column, the channel links to “The ICON Family” channels (e.g. “Jamie Greenberg”) and below it are “Related Channels” (e.g. “ipsy”).

As an example of the production structure within ICON, YouTuber Greenberg has her own self-titled channel which she began in 2013. After attracting ICON’s interest, Greenberg’s channel remains in its original form, but is now also featured on ICON’s channel homepage under “The ICON Family” category on the far right. Viewers can come across ICON’s channel via Greenberg’s channel (under the category “My Friends and Faves!” on the far right of her page), or viewers can come across Greenberg’s channel via ICON’s channel (under the category “The ICON Family” on the far right of its page). In this network arrangement, Greenberg *always* creates videos that air on her own channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/jamiemakeupgreenberg>) like how-to makeup videos, and Greenberg *sometimes* creates videos that air just on ICON’s channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/fawninc>) like ICON’s Pretty Little Prankster’s series which she hosted. Greenberg could also have sponsors (outside of her ICON contract) who she also made videos on behalf of on her own channel by featuring their products, as well as affiliations with brands that she might “plug” by offering discount coupons in the Comments section. Other ICON channels operate similarly.

ICON is distributed by Endemol Shine Beyond USA, part of Endemol Shine Group, a newly launched global content creator, producer and distributor of media content. After meeting with former Endemol Shine Beyond USA President Will Keenan, Phan stated “they blew me away because I saw the value they brought to production” as “the fastest growing premium content provider in the world” (Newswire, 2015; Novellino, 2015a). Though Keenan has since moved on, recruiting Phan is said to be “his

biggest catch” while at Endemol (Spangler, 2015c). A legendary name in the YouTube sphere, Phan picked up name recognition offline as well as one of YouTube’s featured stars in television and billboard advertising campaigns for the popular website (Castillo, 2015).

Phan, a cosmopolitan entrepreneur of multiple ventures made the prestigious *Forbes* magazine list of “30 under 30” young entrepreneurs in 2015 and was called “a formidable beauty mogul” headed “toward unicorn status” (Adams & Solomon, 2015). *Fast Company* followed a year later noting that Phan was “changing the marketing playbook for makeup” (Laporte, 2016). Though Phan is estimated to bring in \$84 million a year in revenue from her pursuits (MediaPost, 2015), she insists “money hasn’t changed me — it has inspired me to build more beautiful things” (Woodhall, 2015). And that she has, developing a makeup line, writing a book, and founding ipsey and Ipsy Open Studios all while maintaining her original YouTube channel “Michelle Phan” (Woodhall, 2015). Most recently, Phan bought ipsey from L’Oréal in October 2015 (the company originally backing it) and it now grosses \$150 million a year, rivaling its largest competitor, New York-based Birchbox which also sells \$10 monthly beauty sample packages (Woodhall, 2015; Yi, 2016).

Phan sees herself as a creator first and has pointed out that “people often times see me as talent, which is fine, but what I’m very good at is strategy and marketing” (Rancilio, 2015). Tapping her marketing skills, Phan launched ICON in the U.S and U.K. in March 2015 under the Endemol name. Marketed as “the new global destination for the empowerment of viewers through inspiration, premium lifestyle content and conversation,” ICON is specifically described as a “hub featuring YouTubers who’ve

become tastemakers in fitness, food, DIY and wellness and who are being mentored by Michelle into power brands” (Woodhall, 2015). By recruiting “the hottest new YouTube stars from both sides of the Atlantic” ICON aims to attract millennials near and far (BCST, 2015).

Over the past five years, Phan’s YouTube brand evolved from small start-up FAWN Inc. to a globally expanding beauty marketing empire ICON under the direction of Endemol Shine Beyond USA Vice President of Programming Leslie Morgan (Endemol Shine, 2015). Prior to ICON’s new name and ownership, FAWN received its backing from Google from 2011 to 2013, and, under Morgan’s direction, worked with a range of traditional legacy brands including L’Oréal, Victoria’s Secret, Air New Zealand, Contiki Travel, Nintendo, and eBay (Endemol Shine, 2015).

Morgan, who oversees all Endemol Shine Beyond USA lifestyle programming including ICON, has had a history of creating such brand partnerships, having worked with Kraft, Clorox, and Unilever, among others in the digital space, and creating award-winning video campaigns and online communities (Endemol Shine, 2015). She also has consulting experience in entertainment programming with talent including celebrities. I first contacted Morgan via email and interviewed her over email at her request due to her busy work schedule over the 2015 – 2016 holiday season. Our conversation took place over several emails from mid-December to early January. My questions addressed her work with Phan, Endemol, and her vision for the ideal ICON creator, among other aspects of her professional background. Morgan was not an ICON creator herself, but rather molded its creators and recruited new ones on behalf of ICON.

Morgan's education in theater studies and professional work in, as she put it, "film and TV running my own production company with a partner" genuinely represented the digital entrepreneurial spirit that is the trademark of ICON's founding and brand message. As a manager of ICON, Morgan embodied female online entrepreneurship, which played a role in how she recruited similar online personalities looking to tell unique stories in the digital space. YouTube as a platform seems to attract such personalities through its ability to showcase self-performance and self-entrepreneurship (Banet-Weiser, 2011). Digital media scholars have found that "viral" videos on YouTube tend to be produced by commercial groups as opposed to individuals (Kim & Viall, 2010). For this reason, Morgan was well positioned to merge the corporation and the individual with her background. With Morgan's commercial marketing skills and Phan's YouTube household name, the two were well-matched to capitalize on the postfeminist YouTube trend of women's self-commodification via video production (Banet-Weiser, 2011).

Morgan expounded on how her path in the film industry led her to grow small companies in the digital space. She said that

the writer's strike happened, and the recession happened back to back, and two of our films that had funding no longer did due to the recession. A colleague of mine at BermanBruan (now Whalerock) asked if I could produce a digital project with them. I agreed and never looked back from digital.

At that time, Morgan began working with Phan and her budding company FAWN. She acquired the title of Executive Producer and assisted Phan with the growth of the MCN. "I met Michelle's team while I was working at another company. Her team met with me and then I met Michelle and it was a fit," she said. After Phan and Morgan joined forces with Endemol Shine Beyond USA to build FAWN into ICON, Morgan

earned the title of Vice President of Programming and continued managing ICON for Phan. Today, she said, “ICON is a partnership between Michelle Phan and Endemol Shine Group’s Beyond division and as such is its own business.”

Though her title is now under Endemol, Morgan’s philosophy as a digital worker is true to her entrepreneurial roots: “I would say I am an entrepreneur in that I am helping grow a business inside a core/established business. Therefore, I certainly believe it is key to have an entrepreneurial spirit when growing any new business venture,” she said.

While her current work for Endemol keeps her active working for ICON’s global expansion, Morgan has running “passion projects” of her own, which is characteristic of ICON’s leaders and creators as is discussed in the coming section. She said, “I absolutely see myself as an entrepreneur and not in the literal sense that I am working on my own projects. Though, certainly, I will always have passion projects outside of my current day-to-day that I hope to take on,” such as her prior life’s work running her own production company and managing films.

Morgan’s identity as an entrepreneur, as well as Phan’s, are not surprising considering the timing of neoliberalism’s “do it yourself” and postfeminism’s “brand yourself” culture meet in contemporary YouTube’s “Broadcast yourself.” By maximizing the convergence of traditional and new media, companies like ICON are tapping millennials’ desires to work and play in the same space (Deuze, 2007). But, digital companies are hardly the “interrupters” they claim to be when they still require the validation of traditional corporations to partner and make a profit. Digital media companies seem to also adopt the work habits of traditional media companies with their laborers working round the clock, a trend media studies scholars indicate can pose serious

concerns for wellbeing and sustainability (Andrejevic, 2013; Deuze, 2007). As Morgan experienced during the recession, the digital age is characterized by unpredictability of jobs resulting from the merging of production and consumption in the supercharged communication information era (Deuze, 2007). As Morgan and Phan subscribe to such a work philosophy in the Silicon Valley their non-stop work explains their lightning-speed success, but this 24-hour work ideology does not trickle down to all ICON creators as is revealed in Part II.

Turning influencers into marketers: Phan's mentees

With a clear talent for new media branding, Morgan was well positioned to bring Phan's vision for a "premium" YouTube network to life with "a different look than the webcam in the bedroom style of Phan's earlier work" (Richwine, 2015). To develop a framework for how ICON operates, it was first necessary to understand the strategies Phan used to assemble her roster of talent, starting with her network's mission to remain intentionally smaller than the more traditional MCNs which first debuted on YouTube, such as MCN giants StyleHaul or Fullscreen. This section explains Phan's strategies for recruiting and shaping YouTubers into mentees who market on behalf of ICON's retail partnerships.

In an attempt to be an anti-MCN, Phan developed ICON to "mentor and nurture talent, and help them build their powerful brands" (Shields, 2015). According to Pixability, a technology firm specialized in web video ads, ICON was "entering the market at a time when creators are getting increasingly critical of MCNs. They are unsatisfied with the deals and level of support they're receiving" (Shields, 2015). Phan said she never believed in MCNs because generally "they are not well liked in the

universe of creators” due to struggles over getting noticed, for example, among others explored in Part II (Shields, 2015). By keeping her talent roster small, Phan was able to provide more resources and mentoring to her YouTubers. While Phan’s network is technically “multi-channeled” since her network hosts just under 20 individuals’ channels including her own, her philosophy in press interviews is to seem like a smaller network in order to control the ICON image and build existing talent. But, in network terms, ICON is most certainly multi-channeled. Time will tell whether Phan intends to maintain ICON’s current size, but with increased growth of her current channels and turnover of those not growing, it is perhaps ICON’s destiny to “grow up” into a traditional MCN.

Phan and Morgan’s focus on recruiting YouTube creators with a strong following and unique moxie was key to developing a small but powerful network roster. As Morgan said: “It’s about telling great stories in the lifestyle space with passionate creators...It’s really about finding great personalities who want to tell their stories.” Regardless of a creator’s interests, Phan simply looked “for the real deal” and knew it when she saw it within five minutes of watching a YouTube video:

What I care most about is developing power brands behind each talent. We want to find different talents, whether it’s cooking, DIY, being a mommy blogger. Lifestyle is so broad [that it can include those who] want to do a clothing line, a make line, develop their own TV series or even a movie. (Novellino, 2015b)

Placing high stock on individualism as well as “marketability,” the Phan and Morgan duo recruited a diverse set of online influencers each with their own unique qualities, including ethnicity. By matching creators with retailers, Phan ultimately seeks to establish channels as brands:

I’m meeting with potential partners, big retail partners and working with them on the lifestyle area because a lot of retail stores, they are struggling because of Amazon, because of online shopping. They want to have a point of difference,

and so how can they have that point of difference? Making things more interactive. (Novellino, 2015b)

Some of ICON's creators-turned-marketers include Ann Le (AnneorShine), Sonya Esman, Kassie Isabella (Cloudy Apples), Jessica Standley (JkissaMakeup), Promise Phan (dope2111), and celebrity makeup artist Jamie Greenberg (Castillo, 2015; Newswire, 2015). Also on the roster are up-and-comers Natalie Alzate (Natalies Outlet) and Kelsey Farese who were interviewed alongside Greenberg in Part II.

While Phan's founding on YouTube has remained a favorable platform for her to grow her brand and her presumed reach to a global audience, some scholars have posited that YouTube possess too many constraints to enable great expansions of ethnic identity, such as Asian American identity, online. In a study of popular YouTubers Ryan Higa (a Japanese-American from Hawaii) and Kevin Wu (a Chinese-American from Texas), Guo and Lee found that the young men's heavy obligation to entertain their viewers left them to resort to tapping Asian-American stereotypes of laughs in YouTube's clicks culture (Guo & Lee, 2013). Yet, YouTubers themselves can have other plans for their online identities.

Phan, herself, has amassed an MCN built on a multicultural platform representing women of color via a diversity of female creators who market to women across the spectrum of appearance. Her brand is deeply invested in being racially diverse and ties diversity into its commodification of beauty as attainable "for all women." In press interviews, Phan draws from her own "American dream" story to market herself to audiences (to inspire young women like herself) and perhaps future business partners to join her diverse beauty empire. Popular press coverage of Phan's rise often references her story as a child of immigrant parents. And Phan, too, uses her platform to validate her

mother's dream to see her thrive crediting beauty work for her professional success: "See, Mom? I'm a doctor now," she said upon receiving an honorary doctorate of arts degree in 2014 from her alma mater Ringling College of Arts and Design (Yi, 2016).

But Phan's message is not confined to a subset of women or physical features. Rather, ICON addresses beauty as the great "entry point" in connecting all women. While some videos specifically teach how to care for curly African hair, for example, most hail women to uncover beauty's "secrets," marketing beauty generally as information, or a skillset, that all women should be privy to, such as "mastering the art of oils," as one of Phan's 2016 videos promises (Phan, 2016a). The oils video features women of a variety of skin tones and hair textures who use oils, indicating that oil is a necessary product for all women, regardless of ethnicity — again underscoring beauty work and its related commodities as the unifying factors among women, via YouTube consumption.

Media studies scholars have over the years revised their stances on the liberating capabilities of digital media platforms like YouTube, most notably Henry Jenkins. Though, Jenkins, like others, had aspirations for YouTube to bring power back to the people and disrupt corporate domination of popular media production — seeing populist reappropriations of popular culture as a type of "third market" — he has since stated that disruption is not necessarily a guarantee, considering the heavy co-opting of YouTube by commercial company channels using it for marketing (Jenkins et al., 2013). But Jenkins' thesis remains hopeful that UGC may still possess a strength needed for transnational cultural understandings, especially UGC created "locally," which Phan has successfully tapped:

While commercial distribution can strip media content of all markers of its originating culture, these more grassroots practices often require a deeper

knowledge of where the content originates, motivating some people to master local languages, say, in order to continue to fan-based translation projects...Such contact zones may generate forms of culture which seem 'impure' when read through a lens which values preservation of distinctive local cultures, but they may be highly generative insofar as they facilitate new kinds of understandings among people who are being increasingly shoved toward each other through other globalizing forces. For the moment, this deep cultural empathy may be largely the stuff of the utopian imagination, yet...perhaps our greatest hope for making such understandings a lived reality. (2013, p. 290)

YouTube loves to emphasize its success stories, such as Phan, convincing users that anyone can become its next star (Phan, 2013). Phan's story is certainly unique in that her timing and chameleon talents with makeup situated her to tap the rising user-beauty market. But she will be the first to tell you that to be successful on YouTube you have to possess that certain "something," an uncanny audience appeal, which she seeks now as a recruiter of up and coming protégés. Banet-Weiser, too, studied such characteristics in her survey of girls' music video production on YouTube finding that the YouTube platform served as a rating system which sold the girls as commodities to be judged in the comments sections (2011). Phan, too, seems to actively commodify her influencers to market on behalf of the larger retail companies she has partnered with. Specifically, she creates learning environments, such as the 2015 ICON Summit conference, to shape her creators' understandings of themselves as not just influencers but marketers in retail.

#iconsummit.

In an innovative and perhaps opportunistic turn to attract future creators and mentor existing one, Phan hosted the first annual two-day YouTuber boot camp called the ICON Creator Summit in L.A. with 16 attendees of YouTube presence large and small (Lindsey, 2015). "As part of ICON we have an ambassador program where we literally are hand-picking smaller, up and coming creators who, like Michelle said are the

diamonds in the rough,” Morgan explained (Lindsey, 2015). Phan added, “Especially Melanie [Murphy], she’s from Ireland. She literally said, ‘I live in the middle of nowhere!’ But we found her” (Lindsey, 2015). As part of ICON’s recruitment for up and coming YouTubers, the network’s management, led by Morgan, contact YouTubers who show growth (i.e. views and subscribers) and meet the criteria to be an ICON creator who can work with ICON’s brand partners (specifically, they must be “passionate about lifestyle [video content production], upbeat, positive and a desire to tell their stories beyond their own platforms,” Morgan said). The Summit was created to “bring together creators from around the world for educational workshop and original content production” as well as meetings with brands, which press releases deemphasized but was detailed by Summit attendees in Part II (Jarvey, 2015b).

In response to a lack of creative meetings-of-the-minds outside of video awards ceremonies like VidCon, Phan created the conference to be “a family environment, a community where a creator like myself could connect and vibe with other creators without feeling competitive” (Jarvey, 2015b). In interviews, Phan commonly notes that she “wished” she had a community like ICON when she was beginning for resources like communal support and basic video filming equipment:

I was on my own and it was really hard because I didn’t have anyone that could mentor me, I didn’t have the resources I needed. My first video was shot on a webcam! Today I shoot with incredible cameras and sometimes even my phone but the fact is I have access to all these resources. It made my life easier.
(Lindsey, 2015)

Summit attendees live-tweeted throughout the day using the hashtag #iconsummit to connect with each other and their fan bases about what they were learning. Their stay included access to video filming studios with production equipment and editing software

similar to Phan's own Ispy Open Studios, built as a physical location for L.A.-based YouTubers to make videos rivaling even YouTube's own studios with its state-of-the-art technology (Yi, 2016).

The 16 invitees at the two-day conference were either existing ICON creators or possessed a hopeful relationship with the network for future collaboration. All the invitees met the criteria Morgan described for being "passionate about lifestyle," but Phan often encourages any want-to-be YouTubers in press interviews to use their available resources to become creators like those on ICON:

Go online and research. This is what I really want to shine some light on for anyone out there who doesn't feel that confidence, just research. Because the more you research and the more you know, the more confident you're going to feel and the more you're going to finally say, I'm going to do it, I'm going to film a video, I'm going to start my channel and I'm just going to start today. (Lindsey, 2015)

As indicated by Morgan and Phan's vision for the network, ICON recruitment is targeted and discriminating. By narrowing in on YouTubers who possess a large and growing following of viewers and a knack for "positive" lifestyle storytelling, the network is built to mold creators into individual marketers working on behalf of ICON's retail partners, even via training sessions on how to collaborate with brands on camera by showcasing retail products.

While Phan's rhetoric in press interviews sticks to a message of embracing creators who need support in the name of creativity, her annual summit and specific criteria for recruitment indicate her roster strategy is more market-centric than she lets on, which is demonstrated by the recent increase of ICON's top creators co-developing original TV content. Though ICON YouTuber Sonya Esman, for example, certainly draws a large audience from her own video production, her future TV content created

with ICON titled “Culture Chic,” as discussed below, also directly caters its business partner Verizon’s mission to market to millennials in the digital space.

Beyond YouTube: ICON’s original digital television programming

With Morgan at the helm, the ICON network has built strong industry partnerships with legacy brands and newer ones alike, extending beyond the realm of YouTube. Morgan said she had

been overseeing the overall business of ICON Network and mostly the programming aspect on YouTube, but also off YouTube as well like our partnership with Verizon’s Go90 and other strategic partnerships including *Nylon* [magazine] partnerships...It was my job to really build this brand from the ground up, and I have now begun to oversee other programming initiatives happening as well.

ICON’s existing video series such as its popular *Pretty Little Pranksters*, *Everyday Luxe*, the *FAQs*, and *Fascinating Women*, among others, aired on its YouTube channel and also now air on the online video streaming platform *Vessel* (ad-free, paid subscription) (Spangler, 2015a). More recently, ICON cut distribution deals to create original content beyond its YouTube presence. In 2015, Endemol Shine Beyond USA partnered with Just Entertainment Studios to bring the *Nylon* brand — an American magazine focused on popular culture and fashion — to television viewers via an e-commerce TV series of branded content titled *She’s Gotta Have It*, co-developed by ICON (Dickens, 2015).

ICON also secured three additional television shows exclusive to Verizon’s new mobile app *go90* which targets “young mobile phone users, regardless of their service providers” of the millennial and Generation Z populations (Jarvey, 2015d). The original content shows include: the fitness series *Be Transformed*, hosted by ICON creator Cassey Ho of the YouTube channel “*blogilates*”; the international fashion series *Culture Chic*

hosted by ICON creator Sonya Esman of the YouTube channel “Sonya Esman”; and the advice series A-Z Everyday Guide of “humorous, street-smart tips on navigating from college into the pitfalls of post-college life” (Jarvey, 2015a). go90 is currently ad-supported and is a video repository of both traditional and online video companies like Comedy Central, ESPN, and Vice Media (Jarvey, 2015a).

Though some critics are skeptical go90 will find an audience as a Hulu-meets-YouTube hybrid (Spangler, 2015b), it will simultaneously bring ICON into Verizon’s global territories expanding its “leadership as a premium lifestyle network” (Jarvey, 2015a). As indicated by Phan’s vision from the beginning combined with the sky’s-the-limit ethos of her creators, ICON was always and already set to reach viewers beyond the YouTube masthead. As Phan said of her mobile presence: “I’m platform agnostic. I’ve been platform agnostic ever since I went online. I’m not saying I’m jumping ship [from YouTube]. Platforms — they come and go, but storytelling is forever” (Castillo, 2015).

With her recent partnership with Cutting Edge Group to create Shift Music Group, Phan is also delving into the music industry with a recording and music publishing company that uses social media leverage to spread awareness of artists (Novellino, 2015b). Phan is also writing and drawing sketches for a graphic novel entitled HELIOS: FEMINA which, according to Phan, will be “built on female empowerment. Helios is the personification of the sun, and Femina is ‘feminine’ in Latin. It’s the feminine sun” (Yi, 2016).

Phan has gone on record stating she is not a feminist, and, to date, women around the world eschew feminism for a variety of reasons including its agency rhetoric historically protecting and catering to the privileges of Western white women (Alexander,

1997). Though Phan’s reasoning is out of concern for its exclusion of men and animals (Marotta, 2015), her creators increasingly do identify as feminists, in spite of their CEO’s public stance on the philosophy. But Phan’s stance is pertinent to this case study which brings to bear how creators are implicated in ICON’s retail-centric video production and the network’s intention to hail women around the globe to consume content and its associated products. Phan’s rhetoric of bringing about worldwide female “empowerment” without engaging any actual gender politics sounds eerily like postfeminism — “commodity feminism” — where consumption brings power and entrepreneurs rule (Gill, 2007). As transnational feminists point out, there is no global sisterhood as moguls like Phan might have us believe (Alexander, 1997). As long as capitalism is intact, many transnational feminists claim there cannot be liberation for women around the world who do not reap its rewards as Phan and her influencers do (Eisenstein, 2010). Phan’s position may become further complicated as she takes her brand global.

ICON’s territory expansion

Phan’s ICONic brand is set to reach a variety of screens stateside and, as Morgan explained, has “always” had plans to go global, which is seen in how ICON describes its global creators via ethnicity and geography such as “Brazilian-bred bronzed beauty” friedia. In the coming years, Morgan anticipated further transitioning for the booming empire as it welcomes to what is to come via other industry partnerships. In thanks to growth the last few years, ICON can now be viewed on the streaming platforms go90, Dailymotion, Roku, Twitter’s Periscope, and Pluto TV as well as future syndications with other digital distributors (Richwine, 2015). But certain on the horizon is also ICON’s expansion into additional global territories, 11 to be exact, which was at the forefront of

business this past year with the launch of UNICON in France and plans “to roll out across Western Europe and Asia” in the summer and fall respectively (Castillo, 2015; Richwine, 2015). Morgan said that

Michelle has a global footprint as many know her outside the U.S.. And, of course, Endemol Shine Group is a global production company, so it felt very organic to expand. The goal is to be in 11 territories in 2016...My goal is to continue to grow a successful digital business in the U.S. and work with our global partners in other territories to make sure they can launch effectively.

As a woman who sees herself as a global citizen, Phan’s brand, too, aims to target niche markets of the traditional beauty industry, which unarguably has historically idealized Western, Anglo-looking models and facial features (Peiss, 1998). ispy, on the other hand, as an e-commerce brand aims to be an “interrupter” of traditional beauty marketing with its low-cost, low-commitment monthly trial-size products and heavy digital presence. Under Phan’s direction, it shows promise for tackling previously ignored beauty topics of niche populations, such as Phan’s concern for what she considers sparse Asian eyebrows: “What if someone created some sort of eyebrow pencil that was revolutionary and that was made specifically to help eyebrows look more realistic?” (Yi, 2016). Phan’s desire to cater to the beauty concerns of women of color is important, but her business model nevertheless rests on the assumption that women possess beauty deficiencies in need of fixing.

As ICON expands into additional cultures, its mission to provide lifestyle content “for all women” may become muddy as “local” ideals of beauty change from culture to culture, which Phan is sure to encounter and may even anticipate considering her lineup of new TV programs, like Sonya Esman’s “Culture Chic” program. Though ICON’s territory-specific channels will likely address women’s content “locally,” its overarching

postfeminist capitalistic philosophy to market beauty ideals and products reflects a neoliberal area of Western values invasion (Melamed, 2006).

For now, Morgan also elided the use of the word feminism when asked about her personal or professional identity to “women’s issues/feminism,” though she felt part of a larger commitment to gender representation in the digital storytelling space. She said that

obviously, being a woman and running a lifestyle network I want to be able to showcase topics that resonate with women. Body image, relationships, women’s health, etc. are all things we would like to delve into more as there are certainly gaps in the marketplace where those stories are not being told.

Perhaps down the road, ICON will reassess its stance on feminisms as it seeks to have a place in the hearts of women around the globe who, alongside their male counterparts, face gender inequity in material ways.

Morgan seemed hopeful the network would eventually resonate with a diversity of viewers across the globe: “I cannot speak to women’s magazines or other networks, but our goal is to include as many types of women as possible. We are inclusive of everyone, regardless of background or skin tone... There are certainly gaps in the marketplace where those stories are not being told” (Morgan). With ICON adding content creators who identify as Japanese-Brazilian, Canadian-Russian, Franco-Chinese, Irish, South African, and more, it actively positions itself as a global brand. Yet time will tell how beauty work plays out with ICON’s talent lineup and Phan’s aspirations to re-brand beauty marketing online are yet to be determined. As Phan’s creators continue to develop their own brand sense, so, too, will ICON, as a corporate mosaic composed of individual minds. But it is important to note that its flaunted transnational and multiracial inclusivity fails to engage wealth disparities or geopolitical social justice, as these issues connect with women’s lives.

Part II — ICON: The Practices of Production

In order to illuminate the experiences of those who labor on Phan's behalf creating original content for ICON, this case study interviewed three beauty creators under ICON's masthead on their experiences with beauty work and digital entrepreneurship. Their stories provided first-person accounts of YouTube production practices generally as well as offering insider perspectives on the production processes of the ICON enterprise. The ICON creators interviewed were all currently contracted paid workers with Phan's YouTube endeavor ICON, which is one part of her half billion dollar beauty marketing empire (Yi, 2016). Natalie Alzate of Natalies Outlet, Kelsey Farese (self-titled channel), and Jamie Greenberg (self-titled channel) all maintained their own YouTube channels, worked with ICON to produce content and participated in ICON's annual summits and other encouraged gatherings such as Generation Beauty, ipsey's own beauty conference. Each had had their channel for one to two years at the time of their interviews and elaborated on the technical happenings of their YouTube work and the cultural circumstances surrounding it, such as their identification with beauty and ideological positions, including feminist politics.

This section first details their points of view regarding best practices, specifically the technical aspect of their YouTube production and business planning of their careers. It then details their perspectives on what their work means personally, specifically what it is like being on camera and how they are driven by their fellow beautytubers and strategic (post)feminist practices overall. The analytical protocols described in Chapter 3 guided the analysis of the meanings and themes which surfaced during and following conversation with the informants. In an effort to not over determine textual meanings

gained from previous analysis of ICON's conditions of production, interviews enabled the case study to showcase the negotiations of being a YouTuber and being an ICON creator, as well as best practices of beauty video production. Interviews were transcribed and coded modeling Esterberg's analytical protocols for finding underlying themes in discourses, such as repetitions of patterns, to surface concepts into themes utilizing the theoretical framework from Chapter 2.

Before beginning a discussion of what life as a YouTuber entails, it is necessary for the reader to understand a differentiation that was important to the informants of the case study: creating a "video" versus creating a "vlog." With the exception of Leslie Morgan — who did not make videos as part of her ICON work but managed their creators — all informants identified as being a "YouTuber" or "beautytuber" who occasionally made "vlogs" (video diary-like logs often shot in one take with little to no editing) but mostly made "videos" (multiple shots edited together).

As Alzate put it, when watching

a YouTube video definitely you can tell they cut some parts off. A vlog is just very raw. It's almost like, let's say we're having this conversation, let's say you leave it in there just for the heck of it because people enjoy seeing what goes on behind the screen, [or] how you really act in different situations. It's not filtering everything, not adding brightness, not trying to do your hair. Like right now I have no makeup on...Some people do it great. The vlog channel It's Judy's Life, she does it great. But to me, that's hard. It's not my personality...I've never personally done vlogs for the reason that I feel like I'm still very new to this. And also I'm not sure if I want to share everything with everyone. I feel like as a creator you still want to keep things to yourself.

Kelsey Farese created vlogs more frequently as part of her channel and noted a key difference for her in how they were filmed: privacy. Because vlogs can be produced more in-the-moment or on-the-go, she took precautions about what was visible in the background of a vlog:

One of the things I'm really careful about if I'm vlogging or something like that, if I'm walking outside my house or anything, I don't want people to be able to see what the outside of my house looks like. Make sure they don't see my address on something in the background. Those sort of things. I'm cautious about them. I haven't been vlogging that much recently, so I haven't been worrying about it that much. I don't Geotag [my real time location]. That's really important. I see this happen with a lot of celebrities sometimes. They'll put a fun little thing like "follow me on Snapchat" and they'll make that they're little geotag at the top of an Instagram photo. They don't realize that that is geotagging their location. I've done it before too. I'm like, wait, where is that actually tagging?

While there is a difference between the styles of these two types found in the beauty vlogosphere, most created by the YouTubers in this case study were videos shot from multiple angles utilizing various stages of editing, as opposed to the more personal diary entry style of a vlog. Because of this, the creation of videos requires more planning, often more resources such as products, and enlisting the help of partners and peers to make "better" videos than one can create alone. The next section details the production of making YouTube videos for the women's channels, including solo work and ICON collaboration, learning entrepreneurship, and managing product consumption and disposal.

"Being" from many places: Mobility and ethnicity of informants

The mobility of digital work was reflected in the mobility of these ICON creators. While their work took them to many places around the globe, they, too, considered themselves as being "of" many places capturing both the fluid nature of the contemporary cosmopolitan woman and digital worker. The creators' geographic mobility was tied to their flexible approaches to concepts of beauty and what is considered beautiful, which is described following this section's depiction of their sense of place and individual ethnic identities. Jamie Greenberg, who described herself ethnically as "Jewish," was from

many places. She “grew up in Maryland right outside of Washington D.C.” but had lived in L.A. for over 10 years. She specifically felt drawn to YouTube’s community because it

is a really great space for diversity. You see everything from like men wearing makeup. It’s a very free area. I think it might be one of the freest. And everyone is very accepting. Of course, you’re going to get people who comment back, but for the most part it’s a very free area to express yourself more than anything. If you pick up the magazines it’s just like a lot of white girls, and I think that needs to change. I think magazines are slowly declining anyway, but you’re starting to see it more and more. Even shows. There’s transgender roles now for people. It’s such an important movement to elevate our differences and put it in young girl’s minds that this is the way you need to look.

Alzate had lived in Florida for the past ten years but “grew up in Chicago, but just in the suburbs, not really in the city.” She said she missed the cold but was “accustomed to the hot weather now” and liked it. Her family was “from South America” and she described her ethnicity as “Columbian.” Alzate saw YouTube as “growing really great” and while she did not see a lack of diversity on YouTube “as an issue per se,” she did at times see narrow expectations regarding the topic of beauty:

Everyone has their definition of beauty. Some girls are more open and liberal to being like, you’re ugly, or, you’re really beautiful. I think, everything online, don’t take it literally. Any compliment, don’t take it to heart either. Every nasty comment, don’t take it to heart. To them you might be beautiful, you might be ugly, but what does it really matter at the end of the day? It shouldn’t be about that in my opinion. It’s more like just finding value with the creator and that relationship. That’s the important part to me. That’s what will keep me going in watching someone else.

Farese, 25, was also not from “there,” but “grew up in Mississippi and later moved to Tennessee” before moving to L.A. to “be an actor” four years ago. She described herself in her Southern drawl as “very Italian.” She said, “my dad’s side of the family were immigrants...My dad’s father did come over from Italy,” and she was “born and raised in America” to a mother of Scottish descent. As a self-described “hustler,” Farese’s family history of perseverance was an inspiration, and she drew from her

mother's life experience to sustain her belief in YouTube as the great equalizing platform for beauty content creation and marketing — not to mention the digital creative lifestyle — because

it's attainable beauty. These are real girls living real lives. Because we're sharing our lives with people and you see our personalities. It's almost saying you can have this lifestyle too. If you're kind to people and you hustle. Even if it's not [that] you want to be an influencer, it has to do with following your dreams and hustling. You can have whatever you want to have no matter what your skin tone is. No matter where you're from. If you have an accent. If you're an immigrant to America. Or you only have enough money to get drugstore makeup. Whatever. You can be beautiful no matter what.

The YouTuber profession enabled Farese to be increasingly mobile:

It's nice because you have opportunities to go and travel... That opens up your content as well to a whole different vibe... That's a great thing about YouTube. It's my life, so if I'm going on vacation with my family, we're like, that's great! That's new content! Going on the beach? Beach content. A whole week of a new vlog to do.

In addition to domestic trips to visit friends and family, which Farese vlogged about along the way, she also traveled internationally for her YouTube work to meet brand partners:

I actually just got back two weeks ago from London and Paris... There's a management company in London and L.A. called Gleam [Futures] and they represent the best of the best YouTubers. They've got Pixiwoo, Tanya Burr, Jen Chapman, Zoella. All the biggest people you've ever heard of they're part of Gleam... This weekend, I was supposed to be going to Generation Beauty in New York and meet with *Cosmo*, but I had a scheduling conflict and I had to back out of that. But I'm hoping to get up to New York maybe in November to go visit the *Cosmo* offices, which would be so cool.

Farese hoped her world-traveling brand as a digital personality could aide others lacking such mobility, such as via her giveaway contests for fans living afar:

When I can give back to somebody who may not have those opportunities who lives in Hawaii — they don't have that store there, they don't get those products—I can make their life... One of the girls I sent [a giveaway] to wore the

lipstick in her wedding. That's amazing. Another girl wore it to her homecoming dance and started blasting me on social media to all her friends.

The cosmopolitan notion of being from many places (i.e. Florida and Columbia, L.A. and New York, Tennessee and Italy) was not surprising given the mobility of young people, especially those with digital, work-from-anywhere careers like YouTubers. It is also an attractive one for many women who subscribe in the hundreds of thousands to these ICON YouTubers daily. For these women, their work enabled them to travel to cities they may have never had a reason to see before (i.e. L. A., New York City, London, Paris, etc.), and their global presence on YouTube affirmed to their fans that they were accessible, just a click away whether you were watching from ocean-locked Hawaii or land-locked Iowa. ICON's website, which markets its mission to retail partners, makes a hard sell of the company-wide cosmopolitan identity by describing the personal bios of their talent in ethnic and geographic terms: "Russian-bred, and Toronto-based Sonya Esman"; "Jkissa, is a small town Oregon girl with big city dreams"; "Sunkissa Alba is a bi-lingual beauty vlogger" (ICON, 2016).

Digital media scholar Deuze (2007) described this new workspace environment where digital workers can work anywhere at any time allowing for increased mobility and geographic flexibility. He claimed this boundary-less new work arena is a "liquid modern society" where "uncertainty, flux, change, conflict, and revolution are the permanent conditions of everyday life" and that digital media rest at the heart of these processes: "If media lead the world, it is because media follow it" (Deuze, 2007, p. 43). ICON creators, too, have gravitated toward the personal-meets-professional workspace of digital media careers where they could be professional "stars" just for being themselves and reaping the benefits of increased travel to meet other creators and brands.

Transnational feminist scholars have considered this contemporary phenomenon of the cosmopolitan woman and its intrinsic connection with businesses that tout its appeal. Critical of capitalism as an economic system for not meeting the needs of most people around the world, transnational feminism sheds light onto the co-opting of the “traveling” woman as a way to sell more products in the name of transnational capitalism from Barbie to skin creams (Grewal, 1999; Kaplan, 1995). Studies of the cosmopolitan lifestyle as seen in wedding photography among Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants in the U.S. found that the process of having highly stylized wedding photographs (i.e. posing in front of jets, Tiffany & Co., wind machines) established a couple’s capitalistic citizenship as trumping geographic citizenship (Lieu, 2014). Phan, too, draws from both her geographic identity as a woman of Vietnam, Florida, and L.A. as well as her growing status as a beauty marketing media mogul (Berg, 2015). Certainly, her vision for growing ICON internationally will no doubt bring her YouTubers along for the ride as they, too, draw from their “homes” to individualize their brand locally and internationally. It seems then that their mobility, and thus cultural hybridity, sustains the idea of capitalistic citizenship transcending national citizenship, or even ethnic categories for that matter, while strategically deploying both nation and ethnicity in the service of capital.

The inherent “traveling” identity of being cosmopolitan includes being from many places and, at times, races. While the women interviewed were of a variety of places and races, they agreed that YouTube was a location where their shared love for beauty and respected expertise reigned supreme over questions of their ethnic backgrounds such as the common question to racially ambiguous individuals, “No, where are you *really* from?” (Ang, 2001, p. 34). All three had thousands of subscribers who at times waited

with bated breath for the next suggestion of the latest and greatest solution to contour their cheeks or fix dry lips. Like Phan, their expertise and promotion from ICON granted them the esteemed level of being experts and, by extension, beautiful in their own right.

Transnational feminist studies have considered the role of racial ambiguity and mixed-race identity in beauty pageants, for example, and found that in “local” Japanese competitions held in Europe and the U.S. “full-Japanese” as opposed to “half” was most often praised (Chiyoko King-O’Riain, 1997; Chow, 2011). But on the digital landscape of YouTube, all three women seemed to win, regardless of their racial makeup, for attracting ICON to their brands in the first place and launching their careers into the global vision Endemol has for their future. ICON’s reputation as an ethnically diverse and global network has some progressive aspects, as beauty becomes a common ground for young women to meet and share experiences, especially women of color who lack representation in traditional beauty mediums such as fashion magazines. In this way, ICON represents the upside of this emerging online genre which is showcasing women who have previously not been represented offline. Yet, given that ICON as an enterprise has an endgame of commodifying beauty wholesale, it is important to keep in mind that representational diversity is also a strategic marketing tool to exploit the untapped market of beauty “stories not being told,” as Morgan put it.

Creator practices

Learning to be a creator: Video production.

YouTube production can range from simple video recordings via a webcam attached to a home computer to highly polished camera shooting that is then uploaded later onto the site. The former is an easy, more basic approach to make a video while the

latter can be a more difficult, expensive approach to making a movie-theater-ready short film, for example. Women working in digital entrepreneurship are acquiring production skillsets, which is beginning to balance the scales of male and female production expertise in the digital workforce dominated by men (Terranova, 2000). ICON provides a way for women to hone their YouTube skillsets and acquire more complex proficiencies in production editing, such as the Ipsy Open Studios hardware, they may not have possessed as solo acts.

Alzate started her channel's video production during "a monotonous time in college":

Everybody thinks [her channel's name] is a store...But Natalies Outlet doesn't mean that. I tried to explain that in one video...I wanted my creative outlet, so Natalies Outlet is a place to come in, just relax, and have it be like their own personal outlet...This is your outlet. A creative feel at home. That's the message I try to portray.

Though she claimed not to be terribly "tech savvy," Alzate had been creating content for over a year and developing her production sense:

When I started originally just messing around on my computer doing videos, I used to do the iMovie one or something like that. It doesn't give you as much. Once you get into Final Cut Pro you notice that, wow, I can do so much more! Everything that is in here (points to head) I can pass onto there (points to the screen)...I was in a TV production class, and I had never touched Final Cut Pro. I feel like when you're forced to do it [in a classroom], you don't get the creative vibes out of it. But because I started YouTube, you start to mess around with it and it comes more naturally.

Once she got the hang of the software, Alzate found a new skill she never expected she would possess: a love for editing video. Using her Apple Macintosh desktop computer, Alzate noted she liked "the filming process, but the editing is the best part...I love to edit! It just comes naturally to me. I really love that." In addition to her computer,

Alzate also most heavily used a cell phone to do her social media production which promoted her brand and her channel and that

is basically it. Everybody's always surprised that I don't have a laptop to do all my stuff, but I still haven't purchased one. I kind of like being at home doing my stuff. It's hard for me to edit out. [Having a big screen] is the best part.

In addition to her promotion via the applications Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook,

Alzate also noted that "Snapchat is really big not just because your audience feels really connected in that moment. They [your followers] feel like it's raw." And her YouTuber followers likely felt the same sense of intimacy with her since Alzate tended to shoot her videos in her bedroom:

It's funny because it's only four walls but you will see so much more. I'll make this look like something or change and rearrange things around. [People ask] how big is your room? [laughs]. It's not that big! You're seeing all of it right here. People have seen different sections. But you can do so much with such a little room...If I have to be filming something, you'll see the lights over here [pointing to a corner of the bedroom]. Where I'm going to be filming, do I have all the materials? If not, go get the materials to film. Then the lighting. I have this huge window here, but Florida is very bipolar. Some days it rains a lot in the summer. I don't know if you knew that...It's just constantly raining, so it's trying to fluctuate with the times, what days are best, and just trying to see when the daylight is the best. That's the best time for filming really. A lot goes into it.

Farese, who also had recently started her YouTube production, had a self-titled channel of her first and last name in an effort to keep her brand "searchable" online:

A few years ago, everyone had a cutesy name. It was like, sprinkle of glitter! And glamarrattzi! All these quirky little names. But I noticed as they were progressing in their careers, they were getting rid of that identity and starting to identify themselves as their name. I guess that's a good idea of branding in general. If you want to have your own cosmetics line and you your face want to be associated with the brand, it might just be easier for it to be your name. I thought to keep it simple. When people Google, if they Googled me, they would get to see my content.

Like Alzate, Farese faced challenges in both learning the technical skills required to create videos and juggling the natural and artificial settings used to create high quality videos:

When I started watching YouTube about six years ago, you could only upload in like 240 DPI [dots per inch]. It was very low quality. You didn't know it was because it was still this new thing. You were like, this is amazing. You can watch someone put makeup on. You can watch someone talk to you from the other side of the world. You didn't care what kind of quality it was. But now... We shot a video for me that's my Kate Middleton tutorial. We shot that on a RED [camera]. It's uploaded in like 4K. You could watch it in a movie theatre, which is insane... I think with my channel I eventually want to get into things looking like a short film and having a story behind them. I want them to always be in the highest quality possible because who knows? In the next few years we could be submitting things to festivals. You want things to be able to be shown big and beautiful and clear. It's definitely changing especially in beauty because you want to see what your skin really looks like, what the products actually look like... you can for real see if stuff works or not.

To make her videos, Farese mostly used an Apple Mac Book Air laptop but also has an Apple desktop computer for editing filmed content together into a single video. Over time, she had stopped using an iPad and used her iPhone to take most of her photographs and market her brand on social media simply because "it's less to lug around." In terms of her most frequently used software, Farese, unlike Alzate, used Adobe Premier because it "is more advanced... I never want to put anything up that's not top-tier quality. I'd rather just not do it at all. I'm not great at compromising on that kind of stuff." To Farese, a good YouTube video came down to two components, sound and light:

The cameras are so nice nowadays, you could film something on your computer or your phone and it would probably be fine to me. But if I can't hear it and the lighting is bad, I don't have time for it. I just skip through it even if it's someone I love. I'll be like, oh man, I can't even watch this. It's just too much. If I can't control it, I'll be hitting the buttons of my computer to turn the volume up... those two things definitely show quality to me.

Because sound and light were “the two things that are the hardest to have control over somewhere else,” Farese did most of her filming at her shared home with her male partner, but said they had shot “on location out and about in the world. That’s really fun when we get to do that.”

But for Farese, preparing for video production extended beyond just the technical aspects of a shoot and into scheduling all the filmed pieces:

I really just try to take an assessment of what needs to be done that week. That might be getting all the [beauty] products ready to film... Sometimes I’ll write scripts for myself — even though I don’t ever read a script when I film videos — just to get my ideas clear. Like, I don’t want to forget that I love this one thing about this product, [or] I don’t want to sit down and forget this... I always have a folder open on my desk where I’m writing ideas for videos months ahead. I’ll full-on be like, I want the camera here, put it here, this kind of lighting, maybe film it in a different location, I need to get this kind of clothes for it, I’m going to need some blue glitter for some reason. Whatever it is.

The learning curve for video production can be steep depending on the level of quality a creator is looking to reach, which all of the ICON informants attested to. But with practice, research, and help from peers, such as partners, these YouTubers not only flourished but came to “love to edit” as Alzate put it. Feminist scholars would reflect that these YouTubers’ new technological skillsets are obtained in the name of the new digital commodity culture of beauty product consumption, which demands bodily performance and deep pocketbooks (Negra, 2008). But in speaking with the informants themselves, their new found love for producing YouTube videos left them feeling capable in a male-dominated information technology world, even amidst getting tips from male partners here and there.

McRobbie posited that not all characteristics of the postmodern postfeminist sense of self as entrepreneur are inherently bad as young women began learning skills in new

creative workforces (1985). The 1980s postwar subculture was a resurgence in recession-proof work, including entrepreneurship, that attracted women looking to turn their roles as music fans, for example, into roles as producers and, thus, learning new skillsets, skillsets their male counterparts had long possessed (Cohen, 2003; McRobbie, 1985). ICON's beauty creators, too, were transforming their first and foremost love of being beautytube consumers into beautytube creators. But, as all informants confessed, they were not stopping there and hoped to parlay those skills into other venues whether that would be working with more brands on other platforms such as Cosmopolitan.com or building a jewelry line. Regardless, YouTube had enabled them to build a video production skillset extending well beyond the default expectations of a typical YouTube video made on a computer's webcam or cell phone.

“I don't just create content...I consume content”: The YouTube platform.

In the age of the prosumer (producer meets consumer), online users become online creators of their own content, and sometimes commercial content, as corporations discipline and co-opt user content, much in the way ICON fosters and molds YouTubers into ICON creators (Bird, 2011). Though digital media scholars like Bird (2011) debate the relevancy of the prosumer, the dual identity of being both a consumer and creator of beauty content captured the experience of the informants interviewed. YouTube as a platform afforded each of the three women the ability to do what they found they could not do off camera: join the community of digital beauty marketing and the online personalities they had been following on YouTube for years. By becoming YouTubers themselves, they could not only contribute to the larger female lifestyle conversation taking place on YouTube, but expand it into a career they loved. As Greenberg, who was

in her 30s, explained, she enjoyed the innovation coming from the YouTube beauty scene: “I just like being tapped into the younger markets. The millennials. So I can stay fresh. Not necessarily do what they’re doing but to know what they’re doing so I can stay on top of things.”

As a professional makeup artist based in L.A., Greenberg had an existing “following” through her business clientele including Hollywood celebrities but found herself searching for a new platform to expand her self-made business and work expertise:

It’s funny, I wanted to start it a lot sooner, but I just dragged my feet because I wanted to try to figure out how to do something different. I wanted to have a platform that I could connect with people and really talk to people that have problems. And I wanted to provide solutions and show them how anyone can do it.

Alzate used the platform for similar sharing purposes: “Everybody is just on YouTube to share. People are willing to share their secrets or what’s going on in their life. It’s great.” Alzate said she began watching YouTube videos in middle school, “You start watching a tutorial and you just get sucked into another video. It’s like this domino effect you get sucked into.” And her YouTube consumption played a heavy role in her YouTube production, “I watch YouTube videos all day every day...I really enjoy it. It relaxes me...I’m kind of like an addict to it really. In a good way.”

Farese felt the same way and said watching YouTube videos was “a huge hobby”:

I don’t just create content. I’m a consumer is what I always say. I consume content. Every day I watch seven to 10 YouTube videos a day. No matter what. Every day...That’s where I get a lot of ideas and inspiration obviously from my peers...You can hop on, type into your search engine. Someone might be suffering with an eating disorder. Their parents got divorced. I need help with this. Or I’ve never been on a first date before, what kind of makeup do you wear on a first date? It’s so varied. The topics are. It’s all right at your fingertips. I

think that's why women love YouTube...I always feel like magazines might be a little bit behind. I mainly just consume digitally.

Her first and foremost role as a consumer of beauty videos was the inspiration for her initial decision to begin creating them:

The first beauty video I ever watched I was at home hanging out with my mom, and my niece was really young. The J. Lo music video came on for I think "Get on the Floor" or some new song...I was like, I want to know how she got that music video makeup. That looks so good. I want the J. Lo glow. That was such an early 2000s thing. I'm still trying to find it! I Googled it and a YouTube video came up. It was the Pixiwoos who are my favorite YouTubers. I love them so much... That was how I went down the rabbit hole of beauty YouTube.

After family and friends began asking her advice on what skincare products to buy or what makeup items she herself used, Farese saw YouTube as a place for sharing her suggestions. But she still found some resistance from those back home in Tennessee about what exactly it was she did for work:

It's all over our world. All of our friends know about it especially living in L.A. But when I'm back home trying to tell people, oh you have a story you should have this kind of social media, you should be doing this. They're like, why? Oh my gosh. How do you not know that this is so important? It's changing everything. It's an amazing thing.

Digital media scholars like Jenkins (2003) claimed that platforms like YouTube were built to foster a democratic space where just about anyone can "broadcast yourself" as its tagline suggests. Jenkins' stance on the evolution of such digital media applications was hopeful that these "third spaces" (between alternative media and commercial media) could be paths to individual empowerment, to even bite back at hegemonic commercial powers such as traditional Hollywood (2003). Though his "participatory culture" stance more recently addressed the inherent power differentials of who has access and who does not (Jenkins et al., 2013), the platform continues to attract 1 billion users each *month*

around the world and offers a simple to use application for video production (Reuters, 2013, May 21).

As these ICON creators explained, the “third space,” to them, had cracked open a career that before they had only dreamed about. Having all been consumers of YouTube prior to being creators, the women embodied the notion of the “prosumer” (producer and consumer) or “produser” (producer and user) (Bird, 2011; Jenkins, 2003). But as more critical digital media anthropologists have suggested, not all media creators are making UGC, so we ought to temper our summaries of their disruptive impact (Bird, 2011). These ICON creators, too, were not just making UGC, but also “making deals” in traditional media environments with local and international women’s magazines and book publishers, for example. Though their YouTube content launched their entrepreneurial careers, it was by no means the end of their work identities: Greenberg continued her work as a professional Hollywood makeup artist, Alzate wrapped up her international business degree, and Farese set meetings with publishers and met with brands in London. Though they planned on always maintaining their YouTube channels, it was just the start of their larger, broader careers of beauty marketing entrepreneurs, living proof that creators were more than just their online personalities.

The ICONic entrepreneur: Working for a network.

Joining a YouTube network like ICON can catapult a YouTuber into not just fame and a more lucrative career, but a “family” of like-minded workers who share similar values. Alzate identified as “a creator” for ICON meaning “they have a channel. I can go and make my own...[and] I have the ability to go on their network.” Beyond the logistics of working with a successful network, Alzate noted

being a part of the network is like being a part of a family. We went to L.A. and had this [ICON] Summit with different creators. Michelle is actually the head on there. It's cool to work with people you have really always looked up to, like oh wow! You're trying not to fan girl them, but it's like, I'm this close to you! You feel like you know these people. You've watched them for so long. It's trying to learn not to be creepy, [but] it's like I know everything about you [from watching your channel]!...It's like a family.

Alzate was recruited by Leslie Morgan:

She reached out to me and was like "Hey, we're looking into bringing in a few girls to be the next trailblazers. Michelle really likes your videos." And I was like Michelle who? And she said "Michelle Phan! We really want to talk to you about this." At the time, I was a really small channel. We're talking maybe 1,000 [subscribers]. I was like wow! This is so cool! You get really excited. It's still exciting that she watches my videos. That's it, and it just started from there. They basically started talking a little bit about the network, what the vision was for it, what my aspiration for it to see if that aligned, and see if we were the right fit. And we are.

Even though ICON had been her first experience working with a YouTube network, Alzate was pleased with their relationship so far and with the opportunities partnering with an MCN had brought that she had been unable to obtain on her own:

They have all the contacts. They are obviously a bigger team. I'm only one person. They will reach out to different brands like, hey, we have this girl that wants to do this with you, would you be interested in that? They're like an extra voice for me. Less work for me as well. Also they provide the connections in general with YouTube like me flying out and being in that Summit with different creators. I would have possibly had to meet [those creators] in a line [without ICON]. It's having that personal interaction. They are really great with that building relationships. That's really valuable being in YouTube because you want to create friendships, and other people will uplift you. If you're stagnant and you're by yourself, it's going to be really hard. Some people actually see it the opposite. They'll be like, oh no, I just want to grow on my own. I want to grow very organically. But it's really hard to do it that way. You really need someone to push you, and you need to be featured in something. It's like sharing their audiences with you now. It's important. Collaborations are really important.

Even in spite of rumors about MCN nightmares and competing for attention, Alzate felt her relationships with ICON was "in a very good place":

It's only been beneficial. To me, it's only been a help. An assistance. It's less work for me...But I have heard a lot of people complain about their networks...Some networks will bring in so many people that there's no way they can fund them. There's no way they have the resources to really show them off. [With] ICON, their mission and what sets them apart in my opinion, [is] there's only like a few set of people. That's important.

Unlike Alzate, Greenberg drew ICON to her channel herself and secured them as her network:

I got very into all of that and Michelle [Phan]. After a while, I kind of stalked her producers, and I finally got in touch with them when they were back in the FAWN days. I started doing some things with them. I met her [Phan] and loved her even more in person. Sometimes you never know. She was more than I ever thought and better. They made the switch over, told me about ICON, and asked, do you want to be on board? And I was like, I'm on board! And through perseverance, and not being annoying but checking in all the time. You know, on their radar. It's going to pay off. She really is incredible. Where I work [in Hollywood] it's not always like that. I think the greatest part about it is if you have an idea, you can pitch to them and get it paid for to make it. As an artist, the hardest thing is having financial support, so to be able to have found somebody to take an interest in your ideas and fund them is really a great position to be in. I haven't really had any negative issues at all. There was another company that approached me to do some videos with them, and ICON was just supportive like, "Yeah, sure, go do it!" I'm keeping really open and free. It's really just been positive. There's nothing negative about it.

Farese also worked to attract ICON to her channel and her efforts paid off making her one of ICON's first beauty creator recruits:

I'm a hustler. It's one of those weird L.A. things where I knew someone who knew someone. I was like listen, here's my channel. If you like it, I would love if you have any friends who are in this space to send it to. I'm looking to either join a network or I just want to be part of a community that I can grow with and meet people. I really just wanted to meet other people, other creators organically. My stuff got sent to this guy who works at Endemol Beyond which owns ICON. They're TV producers and they own our network. He liked my stuff and he sent it to the head of ICON...Leslie Morgan and she really liked it and called me in for a meeting. I was like, oh my god, don't mess this up. I went in a met with her. We got along really well. We talked about what my goals were for my channel. I think she really appreciated I had a vision. I wasn't just making videos. I have other plans outside of YouTube with it. She's like, "Well, we can help you with that. We want to be part of that. We really like you." So they signed me. I think I

was the first person they signed actually for ICON. It had just opened. I was just in the right place at the right time you could say.

Farese, too, felt she had benefited from partnering her channel with a network and found the collaboration to be democratic:

They consider their talent roster. They have their own team that works there that's community managers and ideas people and all that sort of stuff. I think we can pitch ideas to them like, hey, I want to do this. Could you all help me get this funded? Could we do it under the ICON banner? That kind of thing. But, I guess we're kind of like freelancers. They call us in. I'll get a call, Hey, we have this idea for a video. Would you want to come and shoot this with so and so? It's going to go up this time. Are you available these days to shoot? And I can either say yes or no.

While her own channel was branded to herself, Farese's work with ICON entailed a different branding strategy and, thus, a different process for creating original ICON content in their studios, as opposed to her living room:

ICON is its own brand. It's their own channel. They have their own goals. They have their own mission statement. They have their own vibe. It's like stepping into someone else's world. I'm still Kelsey, but I'm living in someone else's world in their brand. Their stuff is a lot more branded for ICON, not necessarily for Kelsey. My channel is all about it's just me. It's just my brand. It's what I like, what I do. [On] theirs, I'm sort of fitting into a whole world of a brand... Obviously, everything is passed by us. Do you want this? Or, do you not want this? It's never like I have to do this kind of video for them. They have all of us and they brainstorm: Kelsey would be right for this project because they know me. I usually love anything they ask me to come in and do. It is a little bit different. I'll go in and film in their studio with them. It's their people behind the cameras, and it's their editors. I don't have quite as much control over it, which is a little bit different. But I always end up liking it.

Though her experience had largely been rosy working with a network, Farese had heard of friends who struggled with larger MCNs to get noticed by the network, get locked into five-year contracts, or face conflicts of interest when network employees were sometimes creators themselves and may or may not influence getting more spotlight. MCNs can "get 15% of everything you make off your channel" which Farese

said may be reasonable for a huge YouTuber who makes a lot of money if, for example, “they’re sending you to Dubai to work with brands and create all these opportunities.”

But for a smaller channel like herself where she was doing all the work that percentage may not be as fair. Her experience with ICON as a small network made her feel

happy with the opportunities I’ve had...ICON isn’t exactly an MCN. It’s just a network. What that means is they don’t take any of my money. I get all my ad money. Their name is on my channel. They can see my analytics...but they don’t take anything from me. I get 100% of the profits.

But she remained realistic about YouTube being a business like any other. As long as she possessed the relevancy that first attracted ICON, she felt her time working under Phan would be fruitful:

The kind of place Michelle Phan has created is a place to bring like-minded people. People can benefit as long as you meet the ideals of ICON and that you’re still living the kind of lifestyle they expect from people under their banner. Then everything is going to be okay then they’ll probably keep me. But who knows. They could drop me tomorrow. I really don’t know. It’s at their discretion. They may change gears and say, we have too many brunettes! [laughs]. It can be whatever they want...I’m on a contract with them month to month. I always have the opportunity to leave if something else came up that maybe was a better fit for me at a later date. If I evolved something else. It is nice to not be locked into a five-year contract. I have a little more control with where I’m going, which is a great peace in my mind. I can just relax.

Considering the growth in popularity of YouTube networks, such as ICON, Farese was tapped into a larger trend in YouTube channel branding and did not see an end date to her production anytime soon,

actually quite the opposite. I think traditional media stars we’re seeing [like actor] Shay Mitchell and [fashion model] Karlie Kloss they’re starting to come into the digital space because they know this is where people are consuming content on a regular basis. I don’t see myself ever leaving YouTube because it has too much work. That would be like going backwards to take yourself off of YouTube.

The role of subjectivity in both work and consumption is characteristic of becoming a digital entrepreneur, a process he calls “enterprising the self” (Rose, 1998, p.

150). Per YouTube’s well documented history, the platform was initially going to be “an engagement with not interruption from” transnational corporations as part of its mission (Burgess, 2009). In fact, prior to the Google buyout, YouTube worked to seal a final music deal with Warner Brothers to enhance its negotiation position with Google (Burgess, 2009). Though the deal fell through, Google continued the trend, and within the first year of ownership signed with 150 international corporate media partners indicating YouTube was never innately the democratic vessel scholars anticipated but always intentionally capitalistic (Burgess, 2009).

And these ICON creators were on board with the opportunities their network could afford them. Though they had been warned of the negative experiences of friends on larger MCNs, they were pleased with their ICON contracts and the legitimacy that being under the ICON banner had brought to their channels. While they may have begun their channels hoping to express their expertise and meet similar minds, they had remained for the success they had achieved for their brands via YouTube and the partnerships ICON had opened up to work with beauty retail brands. As Greenberg and Farese attested to, they worked hard to attract ICON to their channels. And as long as they maintained a “stickiness” to their content to draw in views — for their channels and ICON’s affiliated channels — they would be able to stay on board for the coming months (Jenkins et al., 2013). But doing so required collaboration with partners and each other, which the next section details.

(Team)Work: DIYing and collaborations.

In the beauty YouTube profession, Alzate, Farese, and Greenberg felt like true Do It Yourself-ers: writing, producing, starring in, and editing their own videos. The process

behind brainstorming a video, planning its execution, and producing and editing the final version was laborious for YouTubers on ICON's talent roster because the expectations and stakes were high in terms of maintaining the lifestyle that first attracted Phan as well as the pressure of rolling contracts. Alzate noted doing it all "can be a little crazy," especially with her fulltime college course load, but added that "it's manageable. It's totally doable. And everybody could do this honestly. It's very common."

Alzate reflected on one particularly hectic day:

This is basically a fulltime job. It's constant emails. It's constant editing. It's constant filming. It's constant meeting up with people...Last week I did literally from 9 to 5 emails. But I include emails with Skype and different things like that. It's a lot trying to coordinate everybody's time. And I am everything: I'm editor, planner, etc. I don't have anyone who I can say, Hey, can you schedule me at 12:15. I'm looking through trying to see if I can schedule myself. And then edit. And still keep up with a schedule.

Farese, too, had similar days feeling crazed about her work schedule, but overall she was grateful for the opportunity to take control over her career by making one for herself. After her lackluster experience working in traditional Hollywood trying to land acting roles, Farese decided to DIY her Hollywood aspirations by entering "post-Hollywood" on her own:

I haven't even had my channel for a year, and I've been able to do more [now]...than the past three years when I was just acting. I was having to work really hard to even just get small parts because there's so many people...if I have a channel and bring my own fan base I think I'll have more success in everything I want to do and any kind of entrepreneurial things I want to do. If *you* bring the fans you can get the investors. You can do all those things. You have the power, not someone else saying yes.

But the work did not always fall on one woman's shoulders. Alzate and Farese both collaborated off camera with their male partners who worked in tech careers and

assisted with behind-the-scenes production. While Alzate explained she loved the editing, she happily delegated some of the hardware research and purchase recommendations:

My boyfriend is the one that actually looked into my camera, my microphone, the editing software. All that. He does all that searching...[He] is in charge of all of that. And he likes it, so it's not like I'm putting baggage on him. He really enjoys to search for that stuff. [For example,] what's the best microphone for two people?

Farese, too, recruited her partner for help with her YouTube channel. Though she claimed to "have a love for technology," Farese said she did not consider herself "extremely well versed." She felt she had learned more and more in thanks to his assistance: "It's kind of my boyfriend's and my thing we can do together because he has another job working social media. Our YouTube [work] is something we can do together. We do it on the weekends and love it." Farese's partner was a film editor and big help with heightening the technology used for her videos:

Whatever is the most advanced of editing, that's what we use... My boyfriend does most. He helps me so much with that aspect of it because that's his passion. All the new gadgets, all the new lenses and cameras, and things like that. He teaches me about them, but they're not exactly, I wouldn't say, my passion at all. But I definitely have an appreciation for quality. I wanted to start a channel forever ago when I still lived in Memphis, but we didn't have an understanding for what kind of cameras. Do you do it on your webcam? How do you make these videos look good?...He loves that side of it, the behind the camera stuff. And I love the on camera stuff.

All three ICON tubers also participated in collaborations with their fellow ICON creators, including Phan, as well as other YouTubers in the beauty vlogosphere. Alzate had traveled to Ispy Open Studios and had also shot videos in L.A.-based studios for ICON collaborations, including a video with Phan herself:

It was a whole day shoot. It was really exciting though. It was really cool. [We] did a little segment looking into their [ICON's] makeup closet...Or I'll be in a little segment again in the Summit like, 'Hi, I'm Natalie from Natalies Outlet, this is about how I started.' And there's opportunity for me to create my own little

segments... We're working on one with me currently. They're like the backbone. They're also trying to show their audiences who the creators are. They're pretty great with that.

Farese liked to initiate collaborations with her ICON teammates, and, in addition to brainstorming her own video ideas, she kept an ongoing list for possible collaborations:

I do the same thing in my planner like, this video needs to go up by this day, I need to be filming these inserts by this day, I need to email these girls because I want to do a collab with them because I need them to say yes by this day, I need to have photos in by this day, I want to have the videos up by this day. It's so much planning ahead. I feel like that's what I spend most of my time doing. Half of it is creative. The other half is scheduling and planning.

But Farese felt like all the effort to do team projects was well worth it:

I love collab-ing. It's so fun to have another vibe with you on your channel or ICON. Just play off other people. It's really interesting. I think it's really interesting for viewers to see. Usually, it's just you interacting with the camera, so to see you interacting with other people that they may know and love on YouTube gives them a whole community vibe like we're all friends and we're all hanging out and we all like the same things. This is our little girlfriends group. I love it.

As DIYers in essence, these ICON creators were dedicated to being independent entrepreneurs in the digital space but relied on help from peers as well as collaborations with each other to create relevant and attractive content. They walked the line of “leaning in” — as made popular by Facebook corporate leader Sheryl Sandberg who encouraged women in her book in the previous year to augment female behavior to obtain success in corporate America, as opposed to questioning systemic inequality (2013). To do so, these creators leaned *way* in: writing, shooting, starring in, and editing their videos mostly by themselves. As Mann (2010) found in a study of YouTube production, doing most of the work yourself “maintained their ‘street cred’ as creators by writing and producing the content for all their social shows, and in some cases, even performing as characters” (p.

93). Being a “jack of all trades” allowed them to compete with other male YouTuber personalities they cited as exemplars like YouTuber Casey Neistat’s channel.

But, as Alzate and Farese expressed, they sometimes fell short under the pressure to work round-the-clock and compare themselves to others who had more “views.” Feminist scholars have long warned of the dangers of the postfeminist ethos of “having it all” (Arthurs, 2003; Gill, 2007). Gendered expectations for women to perform as essentialized, feminized caretakers *and* as aggressive, masculine workers leave them locked in an impossible binary (Bartky, 1988; Gill, 2007). The informants uniquely took this binary to task as they developed so-called “masculine” skillsets of negotiating contracts alongside so-called “feminized” skillsets of sharing beauty tutorials and makeup advice to thousands who idolized them. While none made videos on beauty solely, but discussed a range of women’s lifestyle topics, they possessed a determination to be seen as competent entrepreneurs in the digital work force as “a boss” (Farese) or “SHE.E.O” (Greenberg).

Perhaps this balance is characteristic of postfeminist practices professionally in that they felt obligated to keep up appearances on both ends of the spectrum of gendered behavior instead of opting-out or questioning the system that demanded so much of them (Gill, 2007). A Banet-Weiser found among girls’ production on YouTube, the videos allowed girls to display their singing and dancing (feminized) while the comments section served as a judgement space to be validated and consumed (masculine) (2011). But as this case study discusses ahead, Greenberg and Farese self-identified as feminists and were intent on utilizing YouTube to balance the gendered scales of digital worker expectations, especially since all three “loved” their work and had no intentions of

leaving the community. Though negotiating contracts is not essentially masculine, and performing on camera not essentially feminine, the informants, like Farese, felt they needed help strengthening the off-camera work whereas the on-camera work was work they felt more comfortable doing. But, in fact, the way in which the informants were handling both the business end and performance end of their careers was progressive regarding gender stereotypes and an important aspect that set apart their digital entrepreneurship.

Doing what you “love.”

Though Alzate, Farese, and Greenberg were members of ICON’s talent roster, they were in essence entrepreneurs who freelanced for the company, as Farese described earlier. All three identified as entrepreneurs who worked in the digital space first and foremost and had been lucky to be hired onto a YouTube network, in this case ICON. A big part of their entrepreneurship was single-handedly monetizing their video production successfully to a) increase views on YouTube and b) attract a network that wanted to capitalize on their existing following and expand it. But as these YouTubers described, they first saw their business success as strongly connected with the general notion of doing what they “loved.” And Greenberg and Farese especially credited strong (and “glamorous”) mothers for their longtime appreciation of all things beauty-related since childhood.

Greenberg remembered watching her mother’s own beauty practices: “I always watched her when she would curl her hair, and put on lipstick, and spray perfume when she would go out with my dad on a weekend. I remember that being an image I can’t shake.” But it was not until the sixth grade during a sleepover with a friend whose own

mother had begun doing makeup professionally that Greenberg realized her attraction to beauty work was more than an admiration:

We were playing at her house and my friend said, “Look, my mom just got all this makeup.” She had makeup kits of like 20 lipsticks, 20 eye shadows, and this was the [19]80s. I remember feeling like I couldn’t even move. I don’t think I’ve ever been more excited about anything ever. I remember thinking in my head, how can I get a makeup kit like this? How can I get involved with this?...I didn’t realize that was something you could do. I got started later than most people, but it was something that was always on my mind.

Greenberg’s interest stuck throughout childhood with her friends and family joking about her fanaticism: “I played soccer and everyone always made fun of me because I would have fake nails and red lips, my long red nails and red lips. They were like, you’re crazy! But I just love it.”

But their business success was clearly attributed to more than just having a passion project. As Greenberg put it, “I had an idea and I’ve worked hard to get there.” Once these three parlayed their off-screen beauty work into official YouTube channels, the money seemed to follow, in thanks to what Farese described as “hustling” and “being a boss.” Greenberg found collaborations — with both individuals and companies — as a key to being “smart” about monetizing a channel: “I think getting brands on board to sponsor you is a way to make money. I think collaborating with people is another way to make money because you get more views.”

Alzate resonated with the notion of being “passionate”:

I’ve always wanted to do this ever since I was little honestly. Since I was in middle school, I was like, how cool would it be to have a YouTube channel. I was always too afraid to get into it.

And she believed what she had accomplished could be obtainable by anyone:

Anyone can do this. Anyone can have a living off of this. All it takes is passion really. It’s easy to sell out, and it’s easy for people to be wound up by the money.

You really have to love it. It's not easy to be here at 3:00 in the morning finishing up a video. It's not for everyone. But anyone can do it really. It's not that hard as long as you're passionate about it.

“Loving” beauty work was in Farese’s vocabulary as well discussing her path to becoming a YouTuber. From an early age, she, like Greenberg, had “always, always loved it” growing up on the dance competition and beauty pageant scenes and confessed to “doing makeup horribly through middle school. Lots of [eye] liner. Just rimming my eye [laughs]”:

Every weekend I was competing in something. I knew what liquid liner was by the time I was seven years old. I’ve always just loved glitter...It was sort of a bonding time, too, with my mom and my sisters-in-law...My mom would be like, take that [eye] liner off, you’re not going anywhere with that on [laughs].

Before YouTube, Farese was “spending a lot of money on products because that was my passion,” but to who she communicated about those products to became an even larger source of intrinsic worth. Farese felt the biggest rewards from having her channel was “when I’m fulfilling my mission statement, which is to be a big sister and help somebody today.” From the inception of her channel, Farese wanted to serve as a mentor to other women, young and old, who had long been asking for her beauty advice off camera:

I had gotten to a point where I was consuming all this content. I had all these amazing products, and I’d go home and my friends would be like, oh my god, your makeup looks so good. Do my makeup. Go shopping with me...My mom’s friends would be doing the same thing. They’re like, why does your mom’s makeup look so good? I’m like...I tell her to do her eyeliner like this...And they’re like, teach me. So I got to a point where I was getting calls in the middle of the week from my friends at the nail salon asking, what color do I paint my nails?...I’m like, why? They’re like, I just like everything you do. I’m like, okay! It was that coupled with the realization that I’d been using YouTube to be an older sister to me to teach me how to use a curling wand and how to do winged eye liner. I feel like now is the time for me to take over that big sister role and now share from my perspective all the stuff I’ve been learning. Creating a place for my friends to get advice. I have nieces that are young teens, so they’re all

coming into that too. I just wanted to share the information that I'd been getting. I was like, I'm buying so much makeup I should tell somebody about it!...Like, you need this! It changed my life! Instead of just yelling it at every person who walks by on the street [laughs]. That's why I wanted to be that big sister.

While all three ICON beauty creators attested to doing what they loved, feminist studies scholarship has long noted that pleasure is always political (Bartky, 1988; Wolf, 1991). In this respect, the pleasure they experience is a gendered pleasure that is tied to women's self-discipline through doing beauty work (Bartky, 1988). And it is these practices that keep women occupied on the self as opposed to public engagement, upholding the hegemonic practices of the beauty industry (Wolf, 1991). As beauty corporations become savvier to the "pleasure" users experience creating content such as on YouTube beauty videos, businesses co-opt their creative outlets via networks like ICON to expand their own reach to potential consumers (e.g. "create the new L'Oréal advertisement for a chance to win a lifetime of products!") (van Dijck, 2009). In this perspective, creators are at a disadvantage as their emerging alternative media production gets swooped up by more powerful corporations via the practices of networks like ICON.

But these ICON creators seemed to have anticipated this all along. While these YouTubers all began their channels for personal expression for a lifelong "passion" and a way to connect with other creators, they, too, had always wanted to "join a network" to widen their fan base and advance their channel's monetization. Perhaps their identities as entrepreneurs made them different from doing YouTube as a hobby. It also raised a more feminist outcome of "beauty work:" rather than confining the women performing it, it launched them into the public sphere and benefited them economically. All three worked long hours daily to monetize their channels as sometimes their sole source of income like

Farese. And as they expressed above, going it alone was not always so lonely in thanks to help from peers.

Learning to be “a boss.”

Self-identifying as an entrepreneur was a newer concept for all three women who created content for ICON, perhaps because their channels were still somewhat new to them. But in our conversations, they found the title relevant and even exciting. Though Greenberg had been working the longest with an existing career as a successful makeup artist, she had just recently began identifying with the term entrepreneur: “It’s funny because I never did...I started looking at what I’ve been doing and what I want to accomplish, and yeah, I guess I am. I’m just trying to stay ahead of the game and do what I love and reap the rewards.”

Alzate also identified with catching the entrepreneurial spirit having been witness to just how large of a business YouTube really is despite appearances:

Sometimes I feel like some people take [my work] the wrong way like “Wow, that’s it? Just YouTube?” But YouTube is a huge business. You [the user] only see the creative side of things, but when I go to events like Generation Beauty, you see all of the brands, you see everyone integrating, you see it’s a huge, huge business. It’s not just beauty. It’s not just makeup. It’s also a lot of entrepreneurship and business sense.

And honing her business skills in addition to her technology ones was also a DIY experience, despite her college business education:

I’ve learned a lot more being in this and experiencing it than I have in school. A lot, a lot more. I mean it. I don’t know if it’s like a lack in the education system, but I honestly don’t feel prepared in that side of things. This [YouTube] is preparing me so much more. This is adding value to a résumé for instance. As opposed to me reading theories and doing presentations on things in the past. This is now. This is, to me, it’s really important.

Alzate especially relied on her partner to help with some managerial aspects of her business:

To be honest, contract-wise, when I see a contract I still freak out. I don't know what is being said half the time. My boyfriend is very intellectual. I'm saying, can you read this? Do you think this is the right fit for me? He is basically my manager. He's the one who reads. He does all the dirty work that I don't like to do personally. I don't like to look into contracts. I don't like any of that. I like money, but I don't like numbers honestly. I'm very creative and numbers freak me out. He deals with all of that. I'm really bad with finances to be honest. I'm terrible. I'm learning. It's an ongoing experience. I feel like you do learn with mistakes. No one can tell you. Somebody will say, that's not a good investment, that's not something you should be doing right now. But you're like, I think it is. So you'll start to learn as you go. I still need to toughen up a little.

Farese, too, relied on the experience of those close to her to assist with managing her business, especially advice from her father who, after hearing she wanted to move to L.A. to pursue acting, said, "You can go, but you're going to have to find a way to finish college. You have to go to college." And she did graduating from the University of California where she "made better grades than Memphis even though it was a lot harder. The teachers were so good." She even put her degree in creative writing and English to work having just finished writing a children's book and was shopping it around to publishers.

But her father's advice extended beyond her education and into advancing her budding business by staying true to her brand's vision:

What my dad always taught me, you always have to be willing to walk away. You can't let the money dictate. You can't compromise your brand...I don't want to work with this magazine and [because of that] not be able to work with something like a local L.A. magazine...So I have to risk saying, yes, I definitely want to work with you, but can we do this? And if not, I'm not comfortable. You have to be willing to say no to *Cosmo* [magazine]. You have to be willing to walk away from some big opportunities. Or not. You have to decide what's best for you and always keep that at the front.

Now that she felt more firmly on her feet as a “boss,” Farese paid extra attention to the business details of contracting with other brands in the YouTube space:

You have to be really careful in YouTube. A lot of contracts people want you to sign, there’s a little bit of language in there that’s exclusive. Like you’re going to need our permission to do this. Or, you can’t work with this brand. Conflicts of interest. You have to be really careful. You have to really want to work with that brand and that’s what it says. Or you’re going to have to be a great negotiator and say I want to work with you, but can we strike this part of the contract? I’m not comfortable with that.

True to her inner entrepreneurial streak, Farese had been working hard on new partnerships with Gleam Futures, a U.K.-based company that headed up many top YouTubers. She did this by maximizing her business moxie, but was not without stars in her eyes as a longtime admirer of the global company:

I’m a weasel and I got myself a meeting with them. They ended up liking me, and we were thinking about a trip out there. They were like, “Let’s get you in our UK office just to meet them so they can put a face to you and know you as well.” So I was able to go meet with them a few weeks ago which was so bizarre because I’ve seen that office on so many vlogs, countless vlogs. These people that I love watching, have been watching for years. To be in there, I’m like in their office, was like the most bizarre thing.

“Weasel” or not, Farese, like her female peers, found being aggressive at times to land business deals necessary. It is not surprising that these women adopted the language of the business world — not to mention getting help from male figures to navigate some business aspects of the work — considering the male-founded transnational corporate giant they work for, YouTube, as well as their own interests in becoming full-fledged entrepreneurs. While globalization, corporate business, and rape scripts share a common language (i.e. “penetrating virgin territories), transnational feminist scholar Freeman (2001) suggested we avoid lumping all experiences with globalization as exploitative. Women can benefit from the mobility and material profit of global capitalism just as men

can, which these YouTubers were proof of, as other transnational feminist scholars have found among women working for corporations around the globe (Freeman, 2001). While these YouTubers were gaining a new skillset and earning an income to support themselves, it is important to note that the expectations of their line of work, at times, still misaligned with their own work preferences, notably the pressure to work round-the-clock.

The 24-7 digital work life.

Part of the draw to the digital entrepreneur sector seemed to be the love/hate relationship with the 24-hour work schedule and the unstoppable work pace inherent in its lifestyle. But their role model Phan set an example of embracing the non-stop, night-owl lifestyle with her own always-on work schedule. Alzate described a particular night-long filming session when she was in California to collaborate with ICON on a video and being in awe, if not shock, of Phan's work ethic and cool on-camera composure:

She [Phan] works until like 4 in the morning. We were in the studio and she was coming in a 12ish. We're still filming. She's still on. She's still like full glam, and it's like 4 in the morning. You would never think that watching the video. That's the cool part — being behind the scenes and seeing how everything comes to life. It's really not that much in the sense that it's not that many people working on it. It really isn't. It's a small group of really creative people and passionate people that are willing to stay up at that time to put up a video.

In her time since beginning her channel, Alzate had learned a thing or two about work-life balance and maintained personal boundaries to keep herself in good health:

I don't go straight to the computer [after waking]. I do stretches. I drink water. You refresh yourself. Because I'm literally here until like 2 in the morning a lot of times, so you need a little bit of that break. Then I come on, check my email. I always have a plan of how my day's going to be going.

And Alzate wanted to note that being a YouTuber means “you're not always glammed up...Like right now, I have no makeup on...Because this is how your day really

is... You're not always with your hair [done]. This (points to self) is half the time, it's like this."

Over time, Alzate found she, like her role model and boss Phan, enjoyed the late nights and credited them with her productivity:

Once I feel satisfied [I'll stop at night]. I like to know that there's a video up if it's supposed to be up. But I do have my break days. On the weekend, I just forget about it really. In the weekdays, I'm very active. But I'm also more creative at night. I really like creating from like 6:00 to honestly 2:00 or 3:00 [a.m.]. I really like it. I feel creative. Everything is silence. There's no distractions. Everybody's sleeping. I like that.

Farese, on the other hand, actively distanced herself from the digital worker expectations of being up all night. Though she sometimes filmed at night with her partner if the video content called for it (they "have all the night lights so it doesn't really matter"), if she ran into scheduling conflicts, or if she simply did not have enough time to finish a video over the weekend, she preferred sticking to a more traditional, daytime work schedule:

I think it's also hard, again, not having that 9:00 to 5:00 and having to be in charge of your own schedule. Sometimes it's 2:00 in the morning, and you're up editing and you're like, this isn't right. Why did I do this to myself? Why is this happening? I'm not happy with this. But it's been a learning curve this last year for my channel realizing that does not make me happy. That cannot happen... I like to work mostly in the morning, in the early half of the day. By the afternoon I'm mentally spent. I need to shut the computer I need to go out into the world and go see someone and go do something... I know what makes me happy and what doesn't make me happy Sometimes people come to me and they'll be like, can you come in and film this tomorrow afternoon at 5:00? And I'll say, can we do it the next [day], tomorrow morning? I know if I'm sitting there freaking out all day that I'm going to have to film later in the day it's going to ruin my whole day, throw my week off... So I do try to set boundaries like I work in the first half of the day. [In] the afternoons I see my friends, I go shopping, I go read, I have an iced tea, you know? I relax.

But maintaining her boundaries when she first started working in the digital world was not always easy:

But that is such a practice. It's really hard when you're first starting out like I am, to say no to stuff and to stand up for yourself and realize you have any power whatsoever. It's still hard for me to even stand up for myself with other people. With myself, I'm very regimented. But when other people come into play it's really hard to ask for what you want. You feel like you don't deserve it, like I'm just starting out, I should do whatever they say. But, again, I know myself so well, I know I won't perform as well. I won't be as happy, and it will throw my week off. You realize it's not that big of a deal to ask for what you want. The more you do it, the more it's not a big deal.

Though she felt she had improved on speaking up, she still felt pressure to “be on” even off the clock, but this was usually out of her own excitement as a new

Youtuber:

Sometimes I just want to be on vacation, but... When I went to Europe I was not going to vlog. I'm not going to do it. I just want to enjoy the trip. I can do some content when I get home about it. But I was in England for two days, and then we went to Paris, and as soon as I got to Paris I couldn't help myself. I had to start vlogging.

Digital media scholars have studied the rhetoric of the digital work force and its lure for millennials especially looking to do what they love, even if that means non-stop work hours (Andrejevic, 2013; Terranova, 2000; van Dijck, 2009). The digital workforce is not a break from traditional capitalism (Terranova, 2000). Rather, neoliberal logic “nurtures and exhausts” online labor in what began initially as a “gift economy” where much of the open source software available or online chats were led by volunteers (Terranova, 2000, p. 51). But Andrejevic argued this has since evolved into “a social factory” where the internet increasingly operates off user surveillance (i.e. corporations gaining demographics from IP addresses to tailor advertisements to your screen) to secure a future of deep manipulation of consumer behavior (2013).

As both avid consumers and creators of YouTube content, these digital workers were uniquely implicated in the battleground of the digital work to stay relevant. On the

one hand, they were marketed to as much as their viewers were via the advertisements which played before videos and pop-up advertisements during videos. Corporations like YouTube work hard to make a user's "ad time" seem more like "play" tailoring them to their interests (such as beauty advertisements for women). But these women's dual identities as digital creators was taxing as well from a work standpoint in that their industry also worked hard to make their work hours seem like "play." From news website workers to IT workers, web 2.0 work implicates media workers differently. In an increasingly globalized, up-all-night, neoliberal world, digital workers face unstable fluidity of jobs, fears of job loss, post-fame irrelevance, and easy replacement by the next generation (Deuze, 2007).

ICON's beauty creators, too, speculated about when their time with ICON might come to an end, as Farese laughed off, if they simply had "too many brunettes!" But in order to stay relevant, they sometimes worked outside their personal preferences and boundaries in order to get the videos out. The boundaries between public and private, on and off, work and play were blurred in the work force of YouTube when the women often worked from home and even on vacation to get more content. While, Farese and Alzate especially noted trying to maintain work life balance, Deuze (2007) said that it is not that we cannot re-draw the boundaries between the worlds, it's just that "they have lost all consensual meaning" (p. 44). Over time, the creators had learned to be more assertive about maintaining boundaries and seemed to hope that future success — such as increased monetization of their channels — might allow their schedules to open up.

“Basically, it’s views, it’s not subscriber-based”: Monetizing a YouTube channel.

Along with the sometimes erratic work schedules, ICON’s beauty YouTubers interviewed shared a set of values on how to monetize their channels for revenue, largely through views, as well as through YouTube’s AdSense program which features advertisements at the beginning of videos and during videos that users cannot bypass. Though she worked hard to monetize her channel, Alzate said she was not able to call it her only source of income yet: “I definitely have other work. I’m not positioned to live off of it. I’m really not. People think that people get so much money...Personally, right now, I can’t, no.” With hopes of still growing her channel, Alzate noted the most important task to complete before putting up the day’s video — other than ensuring there were no spelling errors — was to make sure she clicked the “monetize” button on her YouTube page before uploading the final product so that its views would produce revenue: “I’ve had times where I was like, oh crap, it’s been a week and I forgot to check this little thing! And that’s it. You don’t get anything for it.”

In the meantime, Alzate worked hard to attract views to her videos by focusing on producing the best thumbnails. A “thumbnail” is a graphic design term for a small screenshot of a particular section of a video, in this case, that will be used as the video’s cover photo in essence, or what a user first sees when coming to her channel’s page before clicking play on a video. As the preview shot for the full video, Alzate chose her thumbnail images strategically:

When I started YouTube, [I wondered], how is it that I can condense it into one snapshot? Everything that it is? It’s almost impossible, really. That’s the hardest part. But I’ve learned that people like crisp, clean, and vibrant thumbnails. It’s a lot more effective to have one thumbnail, one capture of something, than four

different ones trying to show everything in the video. Think about it. On a phone, the thumbnail is a lot smaller, so people don't have the ability to even see that much. If it's bigger, crisper, cleaner, brighter people are more willing to click on it...It's just observing and you start to notice what gets the most clicks. You personally start to take yourself as a viewer, too. I am a viewer, so it's like what do I click on the most?

Once she found her rhythm in marketing her videos with attractive thumbnails and monetizing before publishing, Alzate understood the connection between her videos, the advertisements that played before they aired, and the income it generated back to her name:

YouTube is partnered with Google so with the whole AdSense, that's how it [payment] comes into play. Basically, it's views. It's not subscriber-based. It's views. So how integrated is your audience with you? [Users who click the] thumbs up [icon on a video] don't give you money, but thumbs up do allow you to be seen more because they [the users then] see in their [homepage] algorithm that it's favored more, so it will put you up a lot higher into the searches [for videos related to the keyword search].

With her current standing as a YouTuber, Alzate felt like the payment system via YouTube's AdSense program was fair, but she speculated that might not be the case for everyone: "I can imagine maybe for people who are a lot higher up, perhaps it does seem unfair. I'm not up there, and I haven't really seen the numbers like that. I've heard to them it is [unfair], but for me personally, no."

Farese also found it essential to her success to monetize her channel and got paid via AdSense among other venues including sponsorships. She elaborated on ICON's payment process which was extra to her AdSense earnings:

Sometimes ICON says, "We want you to come make this video, and we'll pay you x amount of money because it's going to be a series" or something like that. We'll talk about a price and agree on that. They will pay me for some content. I'm not sure I understand why sometimes they do pay me and why sometimes they don't. It might have to do with the content sponsored, if they are getting money for the video?...Everything else you make money through sponsored deals. A

brand may come to you and say if you feature our product, we want to pay you. We'll send you the product and pay you to mention it.

Even though she had seen some creators “get heat” for monetizing videos, Farese felt strongly that creative YouTube production was worthy of payment just like other means of creative work in the entertainment industry: “I see people writing that on other people’s stuff like, you’re a sellout because you are sponsored by this...But you wouldn’t ask Rihanna give you her music for free.” While Farese utilized monetizing her channel among other means to grow her business, she was hopeful she would someday be able to choose what she wanted to work on beyond just making videos. For her, “making it” meant

when I can get anything I want accomplished. I know exactly that if I write a book I’m going to be able to get that published. Or I want to have a jewelry line then I know I’m going to be able to get that done easily. I think you know you’ve made it when there’s less hoops to jump through for the projects. That’s when I’ll feel like I’ve made it...I think I’ll always want to have a space here that some form of me lives on. Maybe it won’t be all of me. Maybe it will only be certain aspects like when I’m traveling or I don’t know. It just depends on what the people want to see I guess. But I definitely think I’ll always live in here in some aspects.

Retail partnerships.

In addition to her channel being marketed via ICON, Alzate also created other partnerships with businesses on YouTube to spread her brand onto retail channels, such as hair product companies:

I’ve personally never done a sponsorship, but I am affiliated with certain brands. That’s different. I’m affiliated with Luxy Hair, so I’ll show the product [in a video], and then I’ll have a link below [the video]. If somebody wants to buy it with my coupon code and get money off, they can. If they don’t, they can just buy it separately. I get commission off that.

Farese, too, had worked with sponsors to grow her channel noting that she was “always on the grind and digging for that stuff” from writing another children’s book to

doing social media for *Cosmopolitan* magazine promoting new products. While she said she was doing her YouTube channel fulltime and did not have another job, she did not “just make videos and put them out there. I’m trying to spin that into other career opportunities.” While meeting other creators had been Farese’s favorite perk being on ICON’s masthead, it had also broadened her exposure to brands via Phan’s creator conferences like the Summit (ICON) and Generation Beauty (ipsy):

We had these people come and talk to us that are the head of fashion at Instagram, or they used to be like the fashion editor at *Lucky* magazine or own their own product line, or they’re entrepreneurs that own stores or clothing brands, or the girl who invented Shopbop[.com] came and talked to us. She’s just hanging out, and we have their emails. They’re like, come have lunch with us! I would have never have met these people. That’s the best thing about it. It’s cool to have the opportunity to be featured on their channel, to have a show on their channel, to film stuff.

Though she had not solely ever thought of herself as an entrepreneur, Farese was warming to the idea and was “going to start saying that more”:

I actually don’t think I’ve ever said that out loud before now...I’m really starting to dig into that side of me. Before, I think I thought that was too much work. I just wanted other people to say yes. But now I have so many ideas, and YouTube has shown me that when I have an idea I can see it all the way through. I know how to do that now. I know I can follow through with things and make things happen. That gets me excited to be like okay, I have this project and I really want to make this happen. I know I can. It does make me feel more like I can be a really good entrepreneur.

Financially speaking, Farese also felt happy to reach a place where she was no longer going broke in order to create new content:

I was shopping for stuff to put on my channel because you want to have the new products to showcase. I was spending a lot of money on that kind of stuff just to maintain relevancy...And now I don’t have to do that so much...Now, it’s like I have exclusive stuff. I have stuff that’s not even out yet. And I didn’t pay for it. That helps.

YouTube operates by attracting advertisers to its sites and, by extension, its billions of viewers each month (Reuters, 2013, May 21). Its AdSense program allows users to monetize videos by enabling advertisements to play before and during content to viewers watching. By remembering to “click” the monetizing button, these creators made money through ad views on their videos, as well as the additional money they made from creating content for ICON or product sponsorships or brand affiliations. All three were upfront about their intentions to monetize their channels as an extension of their larger brands as online personalities. Doing so enabled them to support themselves financially and fund their non-YouTube ventures or other future prospects that might still come.

By diversifying their talents earning via AdSense, ICON, and affiliated brands, they could become the entrepreneurs they had hoped to be, and ideally be able to afford (or receive as gifts) the products necessary to create beauty videos especially, which were expensive to purchase out of pocket. But as they became more successful and the products came more easily, they often had more products than they sometimes knew what to do with, opening up questions about abundance, waste, and the impacts of the by-products of their YouTube production.

Creator Perspectives

The “real” me: Balancing transparency, disclosure, and authenticity.

In addition to the technical aspects of creating YouTube beauty videos, Alzate and Farese especially attested to wanting to maintain their authenticity without over-disclosing all aspects of their personal lives in the process. But, as Alzate suggested, a new trend for more “realness” — however extreme — was becoming more pervasive on YouTube, and she saw both positives and negatives to this:

Things are really changing. I feel like it's turning from it used to be very organized and people were trying to be perfect. To now, trying to show your real side and be more transparent with your audience. I think people really appreciate that...But it's harder for the creator because you're very much putting yourself out there now. You're very open now, so how much is that taking from? It's different. It's also difficult...If I'm filming, and I'm in a really bad mood, people will see that. They'll be like, oh, you weren't yourself. Is something going on? No. I have bad days too, you know?

And this "more transparent" trend influenced both creation and marketing software as YouTubers look for ways to seem less polished. Alzate noted she stuck with using the Final Cut Pro software to make her videos rather than programs like Adobe Premiere partly because it was less complicated but also because of its simplicity for the viewers' sake: "People like rawness still, so if you're adding too many effects...people get lost within in it sometimes."

In line with the perception of transparency, the social media application Periscope was becoming popular with YouTubers, which Alzate had used though she preferred "to go on Periscope with someone else. But I've done it a few times [solo] and it's been a nervous wreck honestly."

Overall, Alzate saw YouTube creation "coming in to being more raw":

I don't know if you've heard of Casey Neistat? He's a pretty big YouTuber now, and he has an application now called beme. It's taking the same idea of Snapchat except that you literally just go like this [points and shoots herself]. You literally have only one take. And then it just sends off. So if you mess up, it sends off and that's it to the world. It takes on that really raw and transparent side for your audience. People like to see that.

Though she was up for the criticism, Alzate noted it can be difficult finding your authentic self online amidst her viewers' opinions. For example, if she tried something innovative, like discussing a new topic, sometimes

people will feel like it doesn't align with you. But the truth is, you only see like seven minutes of me every day, so I'm so much more than that. My interests are

so much more than that...Not everybody will understand who you really are. There's no way being on here in seven minutes [you can] tell everyone your values, your morals...There's never a correct way. When I started, I was trying to be very scripted in a sense just because you feel the pressure of being perfect. But there really is no way. You find your audience when you start to be yourself. You start to show your quirky side, or how you really are, [or if you're really intellectual, you'll start to attract those people.

In general, she found it important to remain connected to her vision while ignoring internal pressures to mirror other successful YouTubers:

I feel like you fall into little traps that you want to kind of be like everybody else in a sense. If you see that people are really liking that girl that's always showing herself off, then you feel like you want to try to be like that. But if you start to go that route and it's not you, you feel it. It's not a good feeling. It's like you don't feel like yourself, and that's the worst part.

Alzate felt she had finally found her brand once she started “experimenting with different things”:

Color is me. You'll notice in my videos there's a lot of color, and that transcends a lot to the younger audience. In my pictures, I try to make them very colorful, saturated. I live in Florida, so that's also it. It's very colorful. Happy. That's where I'm taking it. Tropical, I guess. Fitness is really big on Instagram. Their image is showing off their bodies. But if you get caught with mixing your image in too much with different things, people will see that it doesn't align. It's better not to do it.

Farese, too, wanted to simply be herself on her channel and, in line with her mission statement “to be a big sister,” she worked to intentionally have her channel image reflect genuine advice about what products did and did not work for her skin.

While she valued state-of-the-art technology to create beautiful, cinema-level videos on her channel, she wanted to keep a constant focus on the “real” look of her skin:

I still want you to be able to see really close to my face, so you use a certain kind of lens that allows you to get that effect. I always let people see because I feel like if I'm showing you what skincare I'm use, you might want to see if my skin looks good or not. I want to be able to tell you my skin looks good because I'm using these products for real. This isn't for my vanity. I really want to use my channel to

say this is what works, this is what doesn't work for me. It's about being authentic and being able to share that really clearly.

She also felt it was vital to show her real skin without makeup when necessary and, though she felt disheartened by those who "faked" it, she understood the pressure to not bare all:

When I see things like that I understand. Ok, they definitely don't want to show themselves without their eyebrows on, or they have foundation on. I get that. As long as people are up front about it. Some people aren't always up front about it. It's hard to disillusion people because of the quality [of cameras]. I'm going to be like, girl, I know you have foundation on, I know you've got your eyebrows on, I know you've got lash extensions on because I can see! You can't lie to me about that stuff. I think people are really careful about that now. They're not going to say that they don't have something on and do because they know better. They don't want to get that heat on social media...I don't think people ever get on YouTube to make videos with the intention of not being authentic. I think sometimes when you get in front of the camera it's a really odd thing. It's really hard to be yourself. It's a little intimidating when you go back and watch your footage sometimes. You're like, I don't want to put this up, I look horrible. What if my ex-boyfriend sees this? Even though you know they're not. Or this girl who didn't like me in middle school? What if she sees this, or I show someone and they laugh at me?

Nevertheless, maintaining an authentic sense of self becomes more convoluted when you are a YouTuber who earns income for marketing products on behalf of the beauty business. Even though Alzate noted that "the commercial aspect of things is going down in a sense because people are going toward more raw," a major part of a monetized YouTube channel, as the three women explained, was partnering with beauty retail to market specific brands, such as Luxe Hair like Alzate had. As entrepreneurs, this was routine work for growing their channels, but Alzate warned of the pressure to follow the money beyond your ability to stay authentic:

I would say that it's very easy to sell out in a sense. So many people will contact you and give you numbers that are very nice. If you don't really like this brand then don't take the money for it because you've already established the trust of your audience. That's huge. Once they start to see that there's been an issue with

the company that let's say they paid you for a positive review, that's really bad on your part. That looks dirty. It looks bad on your part. People will lose trust in you. And like I said, it's all based off views so if people don't trust you people aren't going to watch. Taking sponsorships and doing things that are maybe unethical to you or behind the back, yeah you can get away with it, but how long until people really start to see that every video has been sponsored. People don't like sponsorships. People do not like sponsored videos. They feel like it's another commercial. You're selling to them. No one likes to be sold. People like to buy, but they don't like to be sold things.

Farese felt YouTube attracted millennials for all the usual perks: quick money, free stuff, self-expression, ego, "that taste of fame." But ultimately, it was important for a creator's success to be transparent about the purpose of her channel:

You always have to keep it honest. I guess it just depends on what your mindset is. Is this something you want to do for a living? You want to put a lot of money into it, you want to buy the expensive equipment, you want to buy the expensive products, and you want to put a lot of your time into it? Or is this something you just want to do for a hobby? Just an outlet for self-expression. You don't even want anyone to see it. You just want to put it up because. There's two different mindsets to it.

Drawing the line: Privacy and boundaries.

Alzate said she was cautious about the image she projected on YouTube and put in place boundaries for protecting her privacy and keeping her brand "clean":

I never do anything online like taking pictures that are a little weird. I never do stuff like that. I try to keep my image very clean, and very centered to both the older audience and also a younger audience. So I never want to try to portray anything as lustful, or anything like that. That's just not my brand. I always try to keep that bearing in mind. It's easy to really slip into it because you might take a picture and have a little too much cleavage, and you'll realize it. It's just little stuff like that. People won't take that the right away. So it's really thinking about what brand you want to create. That's the hard part. The image you want others to see you as being.

With her added personality as a business student offline, Alzate said she had to manage which version of "Natalie" she needed to be:

I feel like I'm living a double life like Hannah Montana. I'm a professional business student. I go to school in a suit...I'm with employers, CEO people. I talk

to them very professionally. And then online, I don't curse or anything like that, but I'm very myself. It's having that balance, this is really who I am [versus] this is who people want me to be. It's strange.

Even with her precautions, Alzate felt challenged at times drawing the line between protecting herself and protecting others:

You don't realize you might say something that other people will take offense to. Everybody will take something you say offensively. Not everybody is going to like you, this and that. So it's hard to say something that doesn't offend everyone when you're being yourself. Because honestly there's no filter to you.

Alzate also made strategic decisions about who she included in her social media marketing to protect both her personal life and her loved ones' privacy. As a whole, "just not incorporating a lot of my relationships because my brand is me. It's not me and my boyfriend, or me and my family, because it didn't start out that way." For example, when she used Snapchat, Alzate tried

not to Snap with my boyfriend very much. Personally, he doesn't like it. Also, it kind of takes away from the experience. I find that when you're integrating too much of your relationship to the world people start to feel like they kind of own it in a sense. Like girls get kind of snotty in a sense like 'Oh, why is he saying that?' They start to get in your personal [life]. For me, a relationship is a very sensitive topic, so I try not to incorporate my boyfriend too much...But with me personally, it's okay. Throw whatever at me. It doesn't matter. It really doesn't. But with people that I love, it gets to me a little bit more.

Farese faced a similar struggle with her own brand when she first started her channel. Specifically, she said her mother was light heartedly concerned about her not offending viewers, which Farese felt she had never had a problem with. Rather, she had been much more concerned about protecting herself in such an overexposed industry. In addition to protecting her privacy and safety — "I definitely don't share exactly where I am, especially my house. If I'm out in public I'm not weird about it, but at my house I

don't want anyone to know where I live" — she also sought to protect herself mentally from the heavy responsibility of being watched by thousands of subscribers:

It's one of those jobs where it is personal. It's not like you go to work and work with some spreadsheets, and you go home. It's your life. All of it is my life. All of it is real. And that sometimes is a lot, as far as being hard on yourself, being hard on your life...Some days you may have a zit on your face. Some days you may feel bloated and ugly. Like this weekend, I filmed some Halloween tutorials. I'm just so bloated. I just feel on my period. It's real life! And I'm sitting here like, maybe I'll wait until I look skinner again on camera to film these. But I was like, you know that's so stupid. I'll just put some more contour on [laughs]. Whatever! Sometimes you just don't feel good enough to be on camera.

Farese paid close attention to what image she communicated as her mission statement to be "a big sister," especially to her younger viewers:

My content is geared toward an 18 to 30 demographic. But I always want to keep it open for younger viewers...I always keep my content clean as far as I'm not going to be doing a lot of cussing or overly sexualized content on my channel. I want it to be something that, if my nieces want to watch, they can watch. I always have a younger viewer in mind. It's changing so quickly because of Snapchat and things like that. They are checking in with me. They do have those things. They are watching me. I don't want to be a bad influence on them or their friends. It's not really my lifestyle to be those things anyway, so I'm not hiding a side of me or anything.

The process of being "real" on YouTube is a convoluted one. Wanting to balance transparency with privacy was at times tough to do, in addition to the pressures to perform femininity in beauty videos. McRobbie (1985) considered the concept of the "real" self as indicative of a postfeminist identity. She suggests that there is no "real" essential, natural self, but that the great hunt for finding the "real" self is a patriarchal tool of conformity to make one's self fit the "real" woman and demonstrate it to others, usually by performing traditional femininity (1985). This search for the self is, thus, a mechanism for peer pressure and creates an urgency to conform, which Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer found among beauty contestants on the Fox TV show *The Swan*.

Canceled for audience pushback against its prolific use of plastic surgery, the show's contestants were quoted saying they "just want to be me again" by embracing surgery as a way to return to their true selves (2006). The "true self" is thus a function of external expectations and culturally driven adaptations.

Alzate and Farese addressed their own search to be themselves on YouTube. While both faced pressures to do what others were doing for more views, they wanted to stay true to their "brands" and their own personalities. But, as Farese explained, it was always an effort to be natural on camera. Alzate and Farese had found ways to perform beauty work while rejecting the postfeminist practices of overtly sexual gender performance. Neither included sexually suggestive material or camera shots (e.g. "showing cleavage") because it was not part of "their brand." As Alzate put it, "that's just not me."

While they had each found ways to embrace their personalities, like Alzate's vision to be seen as visually colorful, they also found it important to be transparent with their viewers that their channels were for-profit. By being upfront about the brands who sponsored them or they were affiliated with, they hoped their viewers would not hold their monetization against them. Past digital media studies have considered this balance of authenticity on YouTube, most notably the exploration of lonelygirl15, an infamous YouTube account that posed as "real" but was very much a scripted narrative (Christian, 2009). While some viewers of the channel exploded in the comments sections that the lighting seemed *too* good, the storylines *too* scripted, and lonelygirl15's appearance *too* attractive, other fans did not care if it was real or not, but found the videos themselves pleasurable regardless. This led Christian (2009) to posit that perhaps "authenticity" was

becoming obsolete in the digital age of video production meets entertainment industry. Yet some notion of “authenticity” — at least in terms of a brand identity — grounded the ICON creators’ approaches to their online presentation.

“I’m a SHE.E.O”: Feminism and equity politics in the entertainment business.

While their CEO had gone on the record declaring herself not a feminist (Sherman, 2013), some of the ICON beautytubers interviewed declared the opposite. Greenberg noted that she

definitely believe in feminism. I think that I live in a world, in my world, that’s how it should be. It’s really important to me. It’s important for me to let women know that they are never stuck in a situation. There’s always a way out if they use their brain and they work hard. One hundred per cent.

Farese also aligned herself with feminism and its efforts to address political inequity:

I don’t really think I do talk about it that much out loud. I definitely have my own opinions about it. I feel like what feminism means to me is: feminism is for women. I feel like if I really break it down, obviously, yes, I’m a feminist. I’m for women.

Greenberg and Farese both seemed to have felt a debt owed to their female-friendly upbringings by supportive mothers and fathers and credited their beliefs in gender parity and liberation from oppression to their upbringings. Greenberg “grew up in a family where my dad made all the money, my mom was a stay-at-home mom,” and Farese had a similar upbringing with “a stay-at-home mom” and a lawyer “dad [who] was definitely the breadwinner.” Farese she said she felt uniquely inspired by her mother’s life and modeled her entrepreneurial spirit “to do anything and everything” like her mother had:

My mom has accomplished so much in her life. She’s a pilot...She was the head of an advertising firm. She’s been a teacher. She owns a store now. She’s one of

those people I've seen who has been able to do what she...always wanted to do and not always with the support of a man. I feel like that is what empowers me and seeing that I deserve whatever I want out of life. She's been the one who's always been like, yes, you do, you can have anything you want. I've never really felt suppressed being a woman, and I guess that's why it's important for me. When you hear that other people do feel that suppression you're like, no! You can have whatever you want!

While these ICON creators flourished under the upbringing of supportive parents, they learned the rest of the world was not necessarily built for female success, especially in the entertainment industry in which they worked. In the process of balancing both the contractual obligations of ICON and other businesses along with managing the monetization of their videos, the women parsed the gendered aspects of working in the YouTube industry. During the time of these interviews, media coverage of the U.S. wage gap was increasingly prevalent in mainstream news coverage, especially the gap in Hollywood, and this was raised by Greenberg and Farese in their interviews. Greenberg uniquely had a foot in both traditional Hollywood as a makeup artist and “post-Hollywood” as a YouTuber. For her, being the boss went hand in hand with being a self-identified feminist:

I've been calling it I'm a SHE-E-O of my business. It's in the news a lot now. The differences of pay of women in Hollywood. It's always been such a double standard...It [the press coverage] is great. I feel like women have been oppressed for so long. I think it's important that women make their own money and don't feel like they need someone to thrive, to survive.

Farese, like Greenberg, had her hand in traditional Hollywood as well having moved to L.A. originally to pursue acting and picked up on the unique gender expectations of the entertainment industry. But she was hopeful that YouTube might become the great equalizer of pay:

Do I believe that we have to work harder for things than men do? Absolutely. That's not even an opinion. That's factual. You can look in the entertainment

industry women that are just as successful, just as powerful, have just as much influence in the box office as men, and they're making half the wages. That's just a way to see it on this glamourized scale. I think it's happening in every aspect of the work force except for maybe YouTube. We might be the one place that we are demanding top dollar and getting it. That might be part of what the draw is too. This is where we have power.

Though she came from the South where she felt more pressure to conform to gender norms, since living in L.A. she had felt freer as a young 20-something to not have to settle down into marriage right away:

I was in this place about a year and a half ago where I couldn't even think about getting married. I was like, I want to work on my career. I want to be a girl boss. I don't see how that plays into this. This career...The entertainment business feels really weird about family life. I don't know why. Living in L.A. it's so different. No one's married. No one has kids.

Nowadays, Farese thought she and her partner would likely marry in the next few years, but she seemed glad for the time leading up to this point to develop her interests and share them with him. Overall, she was hopeful that YouTube could become an equalizer for content producers in the new creative industry online: "You can use it to make your career. You can use it to make money. You can use it to change people's lives. It's not this big scary monster in your closet. It's something that's kind of amazing."

While the informants were optimistic for prosperous careers ahead, they were realistic about the gender discrimination they may face in the YouTube industry like that seen in the entertainment industry since YouTube likely reflects other corporate institutions where women make less than men systemically (Hegewisch & Matite, 2013). Nevertheless, the ICON producers wanted to serve as examples for other women interested in making a career on YouTube in the beauty vlogosphere. While they were pursuing other ventures to advance their brands, they felt that as far as communities go, YouTube had been a welcoming place for them and other want-to-be entrepreneurs

looking for a crowd to hang with, especially women. In this way, feminism for Greenberg and Farese was a philosophy of solidarity, one they shared in online especially as entrepreneurs, which feminist scholars have found increasingly present on the internet around the world, including among women of color (Khamis, 2010; Nunez Puente, 2011).

“You can sit with us”: Ditching the fashion movement for the YouTube movement.

Alzate expressed a similar sentiment to Greenberg and Farese regarding what YouTube could offer women philosophically as opposed to traditional women’s mass media outlets, such as fashion magazines. To her, YouTube beauty videos — even as comparisons for product advertisements — were still more transparent for consumers, “and they have to be because they don’t have all these lights [like a professional magazine photo shoot]. They’re not to the production level” of traditional media. Unlike fashion models, YouTuber’s were “not going to put foundation on prior to showing you how to put foundation on like it would be on a normal commercial. That’s refreshing to see,” she said. By being upfront with her relationships with certain products and how they worked for her, Alzate seemed to hope that her channel not only entertained but also prepared viewers to be more empowered consumers, perhaps even becoming DIYers like herself, the ultimate way of sticking it to the big beauty corporate players by opting out altogether from product consumption.

And Farese, too, felt YouTube was a more productive platform than traditional women’s fashion magazines which she saw as running rampant with Photoshop editing. On YouTube, rather, she found more realistic looking beauty role models, and she hoped

to be a realistic looking beauty role model to her viewers as well. Living in L.A., she had seen her share of Hollywood celebrities around town but felt far more fanatical about and inspired by the YouTube stars she modeled herself after:

I can see whoever at the Chateau Marmont and not care. It's like, oh that's a movie star. But if I see a YouTuber it's like, oh my god! She looks just as pretty in person!...I assume that the models don't really look that way. Like when I see pictures of them in magazines, I know that they're going to really expensive dermatologists and getting laser treatments. It's so unattainable that I almost am not interested in it. But when I see real girls on YouTube have really good skin, I know I can probably afford whatever they're using. And they'll tell me. I don't like that guessing game with models. It's sort of annoying to me.

Living in L.A. had opened Farese's eyes to complicated stances on beauty when surrounded by casual talk and frequent examples of widespread plastic surgery among young women. In line with the postfeminist rhetoric of body plasticity, she "understood wanting to fix things you don't like about yourself, your nose or something like that," but concluded that

all this enhancement stuff, it's aging. It just doesn't look good. It's ruining girls who are already beautiful, just enjoy it...I see so many people where I think, that's a beautiful girl, why did she get her boobs that big? Why did she get her lips done? It ages you. That's what people don't realize.

Overall, Farese felt like YouTube's open-to-all "broadcast yourself" philosophy allowed her to stay true to her brand's mission, which was to "help someone today":

I made a difference in someone's life today. I know that that is not an empty statement because I've been on the other side of that. Someone has helped me. Someone has made me feel better about myself before. When I am on the other side of that, I truly understand what big of a deal that is even if it is just one person. That's so rewarding. Even if no one is watching my videos and one person comments or writes on my Instagram or whatever it is, it's just the greatest thing ever. That was worth it. That was worth the camera shutting off in the middle of me doing that and whatever happened wrong that day.

Because Farese had been embraced by the beauty community on her end as a consumer, she felt strongly that she could lift others up, too, now that she was a creator.

And, for her, YouTube was designed to accommodate overall inclusion:

Remember when the shirts came out that said, ‘You can’t sit with us.’? Then people started coming out with shirts that said, ‘You *can* sit with us.’ I feel like that’s what YouTube is saying. That’s what I’m saying on my channel. You *can* sit with us. Come... You can look however you want to be. You can express yourself however you want to express yourself. There is no right. There is no wrong. Everybody’s cool basically. That’s what I’ve been learning on YouTube. Everybody’s cool. We all come from different backgrounds. Some of us were really shy in high school. Some of us were extroverts and had other lessons to learn in life. We can all touch on different things that might help somebody out there. We’ve all gone through different things. That’s the great thing about YouTube.

She felt YouTube was an especially welcoming and communal place for women because “we have a lot to say. I also think women, we want to get back to that idea of community.

We want to get back to that idea of helping each other and empowering each other.”

In addition to keeping company with more realistic beauty role models online, Farese had also found an unexpected — arguably postfeminist — avenue offline for physical exercise in the company of realistic body role models in a city full of plastic ones by joining a pole dancing class. Having attended for six months at the time of our conversation, Farese said “it sounds really weird, but...

It’s all about female empowerment. It’s very supportive. You give love to everybody for doing whatever they’re doing. Yeah, girl! You do that. I love being in that kind of environment where you are cheering people on. Because sometimes in L.A. it gets to be a little, ‘I’m prettier than her. I’m cooler than her, more friends than her, more social media followers than her’...So it’s nice to take it once a week where you’re just celebrating yourself and other people for being beautiful and brave and confident.

Young women are flocking to “empowering” female-targeted exercise classes like pole dancing, lap dancing and stripping. Though Farese took her class for the

cardiovascular benefits and not to learn “how to” pole dance as a paid profession, some feminist scholars would take issue with the root of the act of pole dancing when not couched in exercise benefits terminology: dancing for the entertainment of a male audience. Yet other feminist scholars would argue that Farese’s class was literally empowering her in that the exercise physically made her stronger.

Gill, among others, found that young women are increasingly embracing some of the self-objectification of postfeminist culture, such as so-called ironic clothing choices showcasing Playboy bunny and porn star logos (2007). And these trends complement Rose’s (1998) notion of the entrepreneur of the self. By using one’s body to sell video content, the ICON creators used their faces and bodies quite literally as canvases for their “art,” and Banet-Weiser (2011) notes that YouTube exploits this process: “The site’s dynamic capacity for individual public performances and viewer’s comments and feedback, it has become an ideal space to craft a self-brand” (p. 278). Thus, beauty marketing not only enabled the young women to create their own brands but also to either sustain or interrupt the discourse of what is considered beautiful.

Though they felt YouTube was a place of self-acceptance far more than they had experienced with magazines, as beauty experts they still shared some expectations about beauty practices (i.e. learning to “contour” a large nose with makeup to make it look smaller). It is worth noting that noses in need of correction are often in reference to non-Anglo-looking noses (Bordo, 1993), indicating that some narrow beliefs about what is and is not considered beautiful is pervasive even on YouTube where women call out fashion magazines for Photoshopping. This case study aimed not to generalize beyond the case of ICON’s beauty vlogsphere, and it also did not aim to individualize single

YouTubers. Farese's choice of pole dancing for exercise or Greenberg and Alzate's videos on learning how to contour a nose are in no way end-all-be-all conclusion that they share a postfeminist sensibility, but rather practice it opportunistically. In speaking with these women, some of them very much self-identified as attuned to feminist concerns of the political economic structure of which they are a part. Therefore, postfeminism and feminism were both at work in their personal and professional lives, rather than just one or the other.

The women interviewed had hopes for YouTube becoming the ultimate platform equalizer for men's and women's video content creation. Perhaps YouTube may become further co-opted by its top creators from the hands of larger corporations, in this case the transnational beauty corporations that are controlling the discourse of what is beautiful, as they hoped. By illuminating the broader cultural practices of which these ICON creators were a part, we can see these women's experiences as examples of something bigger at work, a piece in the puzzle of the contemporary female experience doing beauty work on YouTube. Their stories bring nuance to some of the main themes emerging from the case study on video aesthetic, diversity, and feminism, and lead to the third and final analytical lens which looks at the end products of their production: videos.

Part III — ICON: The Products

As indicated above, the ICON beauty creators gained technical skills through their experimentation with DIY videography and YouTube participation. These production techniques were strategically deployed to sustain particular brand identities and visual rhetorics that connected with their audiences. This section details video techniques used in making videos via a product analysis of a small sample — nine videos total — of three videos from each informant. Videos were selected per Chapter 3’s protocols of being a) a “most recent” video on their channel homepage and b) being on the topic of beauty (as opposed to lifestyle generally). As the concluding step in triangulating this case study of ICON production, this section provides exemplars of beauty video creation to showcase the production practices at work in how their final products appear on YouTube. Specifically, it describes how ICON and individual YouTuber branding is embodied and negotiated in production choices, such as the homemade versus Hollywood aesthetic. This analysis considered four key production techniques—*aesthetic ideology*; *sound and music*; *text and color*; and *dialogue* — and evaluated them against the informants’ brands and ICON’s brand. It then considered the production choices from a theoretical point of view as an emerging online genre in digital media studies.

Homemade v. Hollywood: Aesthetic ideologies

Each informant had a different approach to the overall aesthetic of their video production which was visibly represented in basic behind-the-scenes choices such as type of camera, shooting angles, lighting and editing, as they discussed in the previous section. While some possessed a more “homemade” look like Phan’s early tutorials, others resembled Phan’s more recent “viral” video looks which were highly stylized with

costume, music, and heavy editing. Farese, unlike her creator counterparts, said in her interview that she intentionally sought to make such highly stylized videos as part of her brand. Using top professional recording equipment in thanks to recommendations from her male partner, her videos represented a Hollywood aesthetic centering her as the main character of a short film in essence as she explained. In her explanation of her tutorial for the Duchess of Cambridge Catherine Middleton's makeup look, for example, Farese said she was shot on a professional RED camera on a sandy California beach at sunset as she walked the shoreline solo, debuting her royal-inspired makeup and windblown hair (indicating the video was shot with the help of a partner as opposed to being shot on a tripod or webcam). In this way, Farese's videos most closely resembled Phan's later video production where she took on a character look and tied in a dramatic narrative with her own voiceovers.

More recently however, in her video "Day to Night Makeup in 3 Easy Steps" (4:12 minutes), Farese was shot in what is assumed to be her living room with a couch and coffee table adorned with flowers and a candle in the background, as well as a few cameos by her dog roaming through. This "homey" atmosphere was typical of ICON creators who tend to record in-home by inviting viewers to join them in a moment of female community. The other two videos "March Favorites 2016" (13:30 minutes) and "My MAC Lipstick Collection & Swatches" (4:40 minutes) were shot in the same room, as opposed to the on-location videos of 2015. Farese's most recent videos reflect ICON's style of "just me and you" on the screen. All three of Farese's latest videos utilized one front-facing camera angle, with a second angle to show close-up lip applications such as a zoom into her face, and were shot in daylight with additional lighting to highlight her

face. Her “MAC Lipstick Collection” video also utilized close-up shots of the lipsticks themselves to show their color against the backdrop of her hand. The camera angles were specifically geared to showcase the sponsored product as the “homey” atmosphere deflected attention from the hard sell of the video.

Greenberg, unlike Farese, almost always stuck to a homemade aesthetic in her video production and routinely featured friends, family, and Hollywood colleagues to discuss various topics related to beauty and lifestyle. While her videos were edited together to seamlessly tell a story and used a variety of camera angles and daylight shooting, they did not attempt to be high-end short films. Greenberg’s most recent beauty videos were typically shot from what the viewer can assume is her home. In “Debunking Beauty Hacks with Shanna Malcolm” (10:38 minutes) Greenberg and Shanna Malcolm sat at Greenberg’s kitchen counter where a refrigerator was visible in the background covered in family photos and magnetic chip clips, typical of a family kitchen (Greenberg is a mother). Though the video did not explain who Malcolm was, most YouTube viewers recognize her as Jamaican born and raised YouTube star heyyoshanna turned Hollywood actor. Her video with Malcolm was shot entirely at the kitchen counter during daylight with additional lights to highlight their faces and expressions. The video was also shot from one angle, similar to the bedroom, webcam style of early Phan videos.

Greenberg’s “Top 5 Favorites of March” video (5:21 minutes), on the other hand, used a few different camera angles to show close-ups of her applying lipstick or foundation to the back of her hand, but all angles were shot against the same kitchen cupboards. Her video “Final Rose Ceremony Makeup Tutorial with Bachelorette Ali Fedotowsky” (8:27 minutes) also stuck to few camera angles and was, too, filmed in front

of the kitchen counters. The camera angles switched back forth from showing Fedotowsky's face to showing the products against a white screen displaying their titles, for easy purchasing by viewers. While Greenberg's own Hollywood credentials and Hollywood featured guests bolstered her industry-connection for ICON, her homemade video aesthetic was wholly representative of ICON's "real world" brand that represents and communicates to the "everygirl."

Alzate, an intentional DIYer in some of her beauty product work, used a mostly homemade aesthetic in her shooting, no RED camera work present. All three videos appear to be shot in her bedroom (which she confirmed in her interview) showing a desktop computer in the background and colorful bedroom décor on the walls. The videos, similar to Greenberg's, relied on a single-angle of Alzate sitting in front of the camera, but she also employed close-up shots of painting her nails or applying a product to her face. These were then seamlessly edited together, and she used her fingers waving in front of the camera to create a transition from scene to scene, hinting at her homemade playfulness which she explained in her interview was part of her brand.

While ICON may grow more "commercial" looking as a company producing various TV series in the future, its beauty creators still very much represent the webcam style shooting that brought ICON popularity to start. ICON is a booming lucrative business but intentionally, perhaps, still possess the "just me and you" camera style of many of its creators. Digital media scholars have long considered how commercial companies have co-opted individual UGC for its own gains and the case of ICON is exemplary of this trend (Burgess, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2013). But what is interesting is ICON's state-of-the-art resources, and some creators' high-end camera uses, deployed to

make perhaps intentionally low-budget looking videos. Whether this is to appear approachable as a company, or is just technological choice among its creators, it nevertheless communicates a message of “anyone can do it” marketing.

From Muzak to electronica: The use of sound and music

Greenberg played a generic electronica track in the background of her videos which fit her colorful, upbeat personality. And a similar sounding track was heard across her other two videos, also accompanied by a few audio effects when the camera transitioned from her face to the white screen of products and titles. Because her videos rarely included silent moments, they were filled with the electronic beat in the background, especially when the film fast forwards to speed up an application of eye makeup on *Bachelorette* guest Fedotowsky, for example. Only in “Debunking Beauty Hacks with Shanna Malcolm” did a Greenberg video feature a silent moment, when she exclaimed that many beauty hacks were “bullshit” as she bleeped out “shit” and no music played in the background, emphasizing the humor of the “real Jamie” moment.

Farese, also, used background music which was softer during her speaking parts of a tutorial, for example, and louder during non-speaking parts. The sound was more of a Muzak-inspired sound, typical of elevator and retail atmospheres, as opposed to Greenberg’s electronic beats, which embodied Farese’s attempt to create her “classic” brand of beauty and style, as opposed to Alzate and Greenberg’s more playful brands. Farese did not employ sound bites and instead stuck to the generic piano meets rhythm and blues sound across her videos. But she did use silent moments to show comedic on-camera mistakes, or bloopers, showing off her own humorous side. In her “MAC Lipstick Collection” video, she began with a “blooper” moment dropping lipsticks on the ground

and incorporated a “beep” sound indicating the camera humorously started over for “take two.”

Alzate used the most music and sound in her video production. In addition to background music behind her videos, Alzate incorporated sound bites to highlight transitions of camera angles, humorous mistakes, and other comedic moments she shared with viewers. Depending on the moment, Alzate would switch music from the introduction, to a demonstration, to her closing to her viewers. Her music most closely resembled Farese’s Muzak-sound perhaps to keep the focus on Alzate herself and her demonstrations.

Again, while ICON aims to be the network by and for the “everygirl,” its creators’ videos, though simply shot, employed both music and sound to bring a more commercial sense to the final product. All three had similar techniques for creating background noise and humorous sounds. It is difficult for the viewer to discern whether these are YouTube best practices or ICON-specific trademarks learned from the network’s experts at ICON Summit or the Generation Beauty conference hosted by ipsey. But the addition of sound, as digital media scholars have explained, elevates their single-shot production to a more appealing, commercial final product more likely to be “spreadable” on the internet (Jenkins et al., 2013; Morain & Swarts, 2012). Using sound is another demonstration of the skills gained in being YouTube entrepreneurs and learning not only to successfully commodify themselves but their videos (Banet-Weiser, 2011).

“Color is me”: The use of color and text

Greenberg who, like Alzate, identified as loving all things colorful and “crazy” packaging, highlighted products in her “Top 5 Favorites of March” (5:21 minutes) video

that were visually appealing noting “there is a theme to this video, and it’s design,” she said. As part of this ethos, Greenberg’s videos were simple yet colorful. All videos began after her introduction with their title in white and purple block lettering, and the products featured popped on a white background to showcase their attractive packaging. She did not often use text overlays, but when she did they were in white font which popped on the colorful background. In “Debunking beauty hacks with Shanna Malcolm,” the only video of the three to show text overlays, one text overlay was used to show the price of extra virgin coconut oil as they discuss affordable options for eye makeup remover. Additionally, Greenberg wore color in her clothing on camera, such as a lime top with Malcolm, and when she did wear black in another video it was decorated with a gold screenprint.

Farese, on the other hand, used few text overlays and less color in her graphics. In her “Day to Night” (4:13 minutes), the only text overlay is the video’s title which is shown after her introduction and in black and white. The placement and font style was nearly identical to Greenberg’s video style, whom she said she was heavily inspired by in her interview. This style, similar to her generic music style, seems typical of Farese’s attempt to be more “classic,” using mostly black and white, as opposed to color, in her videos. Her on-camera clothing also tended to be in neutral colors, with the exception of one coral top.

As Alzate explained in her interview, she *is* color, and color played a role in her branding materials and video production. In her video “10 Weird Beauty Trends” (5:51 minutes), Alzate embodied color with teal streaks in her hair. Alzate also used the most text overlays providing written instruction to her viewers on screen while she spoke, such

“30 minutes later” on her “Weird Test It Out! Peel Your Face Off!” video (4:40 minutes). As part of her approachable, colorful personality, Alzate championed her “weirdness” and encouraged viewers to do the same: “Thumbs up for weird people because they make the world go round...doing something out of the norm that doesn’t conform with society,” she said. Alzate went outside beauty’s norms the most of the three creators demonstrating unexpected uses of products, such as putting glitter on her arm pits, but also stuck to conformist beauty scripts noting that “it looks good on some girls” online, but not on her.

While ICON videos vary, a common theme to its production style was visible in individual creators’ videos, especially through the use of color, less so via text overlays. Perhaps this is what drew Morgan and her team to creators like Alzate and Greenberg whose personalities reflect their self-described obsession with colorful products and personalities, as Phan’s own channel does. While the creators themselves and their videos depict beauty work as an artistic or creative expression, feminist scholars have long complicated this argument as a possible cop-out for making patriarchal pressures pleasurable (Bartky, 1988; Wolf, 1991). Though all of the creators in their videos described beauty work as “self-expression” and a way to be an “individual,” beauty application has rules. While you might be innovative to use lipstick as an eye shadow “hack,” you cannot acceptably put mascara on your cheeks, for example. Even Greenberg and Malcolm “debunked” some non-traditional uses noting the only reason anyone would need to use public toilet seat cover paper, for example, as oil blotting paper would be if you were “homeless” and that women should buy oil blotting paper for “like a dollar from MaryKay like a regular person,” in a clear case of classism, a running theme in

ICON beauty production. Bartky (1988) has explained that very few can opt out of female performance in Western society since but doing so comes with great social sanctions even for the homeless. The use of color was a feature of the video production that contributed to the distinct brand identities delineated by each of these producers; color works as a signifier of “personality,” in combination with sound and narration, and seemed to artistically distract from the more concerning ideologies on-screen such as the exclusion of poor women who cannot afford ICON’s retail partner products.

Shout outs: Addressing viewers and sponsors

Greenberg, in all three of her beauty videos, addressed her audience with “Hey, guys, it’s Jamie Greenberg!” She spoke freely to her viewers as a makeup guru who could break down industry talk, such as “Because I’m a makeup artist, I know that…” and “Tarte corners the market in lip. Their colors are genius.” She combines both a sense of humor and a sense of industry expertise to be the big sister-meets-guru her viewers seek. But this was not an end all be all role for her, as she always closed her videos asking viewers to give back to her by commenting in the comments section below the video and officially subscribing to her channel. Though she sometimes encouraged viewers to also visit her guest’s channels like Malcolm’s, she comically concluded the segment with “She doesn’t really need any more subscribers, but whatever!” In her “Top 5 Favorites” video she concluded enthusiastically, “Comment, subscribe! Comment, subscribe! Comment, subscribe!” asking her viewers to become followers of her channel and by extension, the brands she markets. In some videos, Greenberg clearly stated which products were “sent to me,” mostly in “Top 5 Favorites of March,” but in other videos viewers are left to think that Charlotte Tilbury foundation or Dior mascara is merely her

personal preference, such as when she said that Dior Show mascara was “an oldie but a goodie” (a mascara which costs nearly \$30).

Similarly, Farese began each of her three beauty videos with, “Hey, guys. Welcome back to my channel” welcoming viewers to her brand specifically, as opposed to ICON’s overall brand. Notably, Farese was the only creator to speak to her international viewers when she recommended a fitness chain that was also available in the United Kingdom. Regarding brands, Farese’s “March Favorites 2016” video (13:31 minutes), published after Greenberg’s, also plugged certain brands whom she recommended, even using the “oldie but a goodie” expression Greenberg had when showcasing a skincare product she had rediscovered. Though she did not state in her videos which products were “sent” to her by brands, her interview explained that many come her way. Yet, from watching the videos alone, it is difficult for viewers to discern which products are a retail plug and which are Farese’s actual favorites.

Alzate, also, began all three videos with, “Hello there!” keeping a consistent opening to her viewers. She rarely spoke of brands by name, but heavily encouraged her viewers to follow her on social media, often at the beginning of videos, rather than the end which was typical of Greenberg and Farese. Perhaps this is credit to her huge following compared to her informant counterparts (917,356 subscribers as of May 2016). She also spoke to her viewers the most directly, “I want to get to know you guys. I want to see your faces!” Her video “10 Weird Beauty Trends Tested” (5:50 minutes) had 663,487 views and spent nearly a full minute on “asks” of her viewers to follow her affiliated social media, more than Greenberg and Farese did.

ICON creators, like Greenberg, are sent products due to their individual fame, which Farese also described being sent. But it was less clear which videos or which products were arranged through ICON's retail partners. While these creators all closed their videos by asking viewers to subscribe and comment to their channels, they were, by extension, inviting viewers to join the ICON community as well and participate in the beauty consumerism that is its economic engine, but never blatantly. ICON may assume that the more subscribers their creators have the more visits to its ICON homepage and related channels, but from the dialogue of the creators themselves, they were far more concerned with their individual analytics, which Morgan and her team track. Individual analytics were essential to maintaining ICON's interest in them as viable marketers so they could remain on the talent roster for another contract month, as Farese detailed in her interview.

In either case, the creators themselves were experts in commodifying themselves by asking their viewers to "Subscribe, comment! Subscribe, comment! Subscribe, comment!" as Greenberg closed in one video. Whether they learned to do so at ICON Summit or on their own over time, they were masters in speaking directly to their viewers, casually name-dropping their sponsors, and developing on-camera relationships with both for the sake of their brand's relevancy on YouTube. Though digital media scholars anticipated that YouTube was always going to be in bed with corporations, perhaps they would never have guessed that individuals would voluntarily work on behalf of brands to make a living online (Burgess, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2013). In this emerging online genre, the beauty creator is, in essence, a neo-Avon or MaryKay seller, who no longer travels from door to door, but screen to screen recommending products and

introducing women to upcoming beauty trends in an era of digital entrepreneurship. Though this method extends a long historical tradition of women doing beauty's work, the emphasis on entrepreneurship, as opposed to identifying directly with Avon or Mary Kay, is distinct on YouTube where YouTubers see themselves as selling their take on beauty marketing as professional seller and personal confidant, a credit to the unique neoliberal climate within which their beauty work sits as they commodify themselves as brands. Banet-Weiser (2011) studied such a phenomenon of women's self-commodification on YouTube, but the act has become more complex in the last five years as brands enter the scene, such as those promoted by ICON creators, and creators volunteer their own bodies and the bodies of their guests to perform beauty work for pay.

By comparing creator experiences producing within, and in some ways against, ICON's structure as an enterprise, this case study offered a more negotiated understanding of the conflicts and contradictions of digital entrepreneurship, and feminisms, in the contemporary transnational digital labor market of beauty work. Through the analysis of ICON's corporate structure and recruitment strategies, networked channels, and the final video products, this chapter provided an overview of a new model of female-driven digital entrepreneurship that shunned the traditional MCN structure. By delving into the individual perspectives and experiences of three successful video producers who were part of the ICON "family," the complex perspectives and practices of beauty YouTubing were revealed.

On the one hand, the video producers saw themselves as independent free agents. Yet ICON hired and mentored them to be individual salespeople working on behalf of their retail partners in the beauty industry. Nevertheless, the creators took pleasure in

their work and the technical and business skills they had acquired that allowed them to flourish in a neoliberal economy. Even as the digital workforce became increasingly 24/7 — a pressure they felt daily — they worked hard to show off their sense of public authenticity while maintaining a private sense of self with their partners, family, and friends. And their production techniques, as described above, sustained the definition of their channels as individual brands exemplifying their discourse of commodifying themselves, as well as products.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Arguments Developed in the Study

The overarching research questions driving this case study asked, in the transnational world of digital employment, what are the ideological and material complexities of beauty YouTubers' experiences? And how do they interpret their beauty ideologies, their technical production, their power, and the material outcomes of their production? Based on this case study of production, which involved interviews with ICON creators and Endemol Shine Beyond USA Vice President of Programming Leslie Morgan who oversees ICON, as well as an economic analysis of ICON as a growing digital business and product analysis of videos, the study illustrated, with real-life examples, how systems of power — capitalism, patriarchy, and multiculturalism — are articulated in the YouTube beauty vlogosphere, within which beauty creators negotiate their position.

To contextualize these dynamics, this case study began with an analysis of the discursive position of Michelle Phan in business and economics coverage of her role as a beauty mogul and her empire as a beauty marketing game changer, including the rhetoric of Phan's "empowering" YouTube network model compared with larger multi-channel networks (MCNs). Second, the study focused on the grounded experiences of Phan's creators as media prosumers, investigating the ways in which their assertiveness and vision in their daily practices and production choices manifested a post- and feminist positionality about their role in the entertainment industry and a mission to "empower" other women who watched or longed to become creators themselves.

This chapter reviews the arguments developed in the case study, and based on these arguments, proposes a theoretical approach to understanding beauty labor and the implications of this for future feminist media studies research on YouTube and women's production. The chapter closes with the study's limitations which may guide future research in this realm of women's digital entrepreneurship.

Gender politics and malleable bodies

In addition to race and class issues, this study explored how traditional patriarchal values concerning the female body interlaced with gender politics — specifically, their notion of feminism and practices of postfeminism — to constitute the complex social conditions that both enhanced and undermined their ability to negotiate power. To answer RQ1 (“How is postfeminism invoked, ignored, or negotiated as part of their entrepreneurship and self-branding?”) and RQ3a (“How do their experiences with identity shape their online personas?”), this study rested on a theoretical foundation of postfeminism as a contemporary context for female entrepreneurship in the YouTube vlogosphere.

While some of the women outright self-identified as being feminists personally, they simultaneously practiced postfeminism professionally to ensure the viability of their channels as brands. Their production choices and business acumen necessitated that postfeminism be alive and well in video production and ICON, which as a company openly courts beauty brands and depoliticizes gender politics in press interviews. All of the women identified as entrepreneurs in an industry built upon female self-improvement and reflexivity, characteristic of postfeminism (Gill, 2007). The postfeminist expectations

to consume can also not be ignored in the inherent nature of their work to create videos advertising both themselves as YouTube brands and retail brands traditionally.

Even as the feminist politics of some of the women served as a guidepost for how they wanted to direct their careers and help other women along the way, feminist scholars would question instances when they used their “power” to become physically malleable, plastic, and accommodating on camera for a beauty industry largely founded and operated by men (Gavenas, 2002). Historically in the U.S., where the informants grew up, cultural discourses have sought to discipline women’s bodies and minds (Bartky, 1988). All of the women explained that their love for beauty and the community of women accompanying it began at an early age with mothers, sisters, cousins, and friends as part of their sense of beauty comradery. Now, they made YouTube videos performing the same rituals for subscribers in the hundreds of thousands across the globe. Though their end game was different now, the work was the same as they used their bodies to peel, prime, and paint their way to more beautiful looking selves in front of an audience. Dominant cultural values of female surveillance had penetrated the women’s lives, as they do *all* women’s lives, and influenced their thinking online or off, as informant Farese suggested when she began doing her makeup even when she was home and off camera for the day, a nod to the panopticon of sorts (Bartky, 1988).

Yet, as their narratives attest, these women never stopped negotiating with these same dominant cultural values. For this, they are proof of the blurring between the division of postfeminism and feminism. In an effort to avoid “are they?” or “are they not?” conclusions of gendered oppression, this study is more useful as a snapshot in time of the complicated experiences of these particular individuals balancing the question of

oppression for themselves by constantly negotiating where they stood as creators and women. Their stories were full of instances when they opted out of some patriarchal expectations for feminine performance, such as acting “sexy” on camera. Rather than blindly mimicking the more popular beauty YouTubers who used sex appeal for more views, these women intentionally took other paths for self-representation on camera in an outright rejection of postfeminist self-objectification (Gill, 2007).

In general, they worked within dominant social standards for female performance but carved out spaces to maintain their cultural uniqueness, such as informant Alzate’s use of color, not bare skin, in her graphic design choices, and they used cultural stereotypes creatively for their own interests, like Greenberg poking fun at the proliferation of plastic surgery in L.A. where she lived. In these women’s narratives, both top-down societal pressures and bottom-up individual innovation held true, which cautions me from proclaiming any reductive, binary conclusions of their versions of feminism.

That said, though all of the women felt “empowered,” they were not blind to the public debate taking place regarding Hollywood’s wage gap which they felt part of as YouTube personalities in the entertainment industry. Though this study did not definitively compare their YouTube earnings with their male counterparts, such as YouTuber Casey Neistat whom informants Alzate and Farese referenced as a YouTube exemplar, it would be negligent to assume that the patriarchal practices of valuing and compensating men more than women — as is the reality offline — does not also occur on YouTube. In a 2014 *Business Insider* article, 20 top performing YouTubers were ranked by income, 18 of whom were men, with Swedish video game YouTuber PewDiePie

ranked number one making an estimated \$8.47 million a year after Google's 45 per cent cut on his income (Jacobs, 2014). The most lucrative YouTubers are deemed the “best” as generated income remains the bar for success.

Nevertheless, all of the women felt YouTube was the most important place to be as digital entrepreneurs. They believed in the skillsets they had gained off camera — both technical and financial — and were using them to further their careers beyond YouTube. Yet it is also important to note that their concerns with gender inequity were restricted to compensation and capital. Broader feminist concerns — such as reproductive rights, sexual assault, family leave policies, or even the lack of women in technical fields — were largely unaddressed in these interviews.

Neoliberalism, cosmopolitanism, and race

As the creators' narratives indicated, the global beauty hierarchy of what is considered beautiful both framed and frustrated their senses of self as beauty experts and cosmopolitan women. To answer RQ3b (“How do their concepts of race, ethnicity, and place impact their engagements with audiences?”) and RQ4 (“How do issues of transnational capital and global audiences intersect with video production?”), this study examined their location in neoliberalism and their role as creators under Phan's purposefully multicultural beauty empire.

Their feelings about YouTube's beauty vlogosphere were both liberating and paralyzing at times. On the one hand, they had earned a public following by knowing how to contour a large nose, DIY a face lift, or create “rich girl” hair, sustaining highly traditional beauty myths. On the other, they exclaimed that while there were always “haters” in the comments sections, YouTube offered the most welcoming place for

people of all looks and skin tones and the freedom to be “colorful” as opposed to overtly “sexy,” unlike the directives they encountered in traditional women’s fashion magazines. Additionally, for these women, YouTube was an entry point, rather than an end goal, which would lead to success, followers, and financial backing for the numerous other “passion projects” they hoped to pursue in addition to maintaining their channels.

As Phan described, her talent roster included creators who wanted to share their unique self-brand and help retailers do the same in a visible example of postfeminism’s embrace of the marketplace. By marketing certain products on behalf of ICON, creators became individual salespeople as they both sustained a capitalist system which has historically worked against women’s interests in the U.S. (Melamed, 2006) and embraced it as digital entrepreneurs themselves. In this way, they both re-instilled the tradition of the Avon and Mary Kay mode of beauty work in the past and reinvented it by commodifying themselves as entrepreneurs, true neoliberal subjects in the time period of their production. Similar to the story of transnational jewelry seller Danielle highlighted in Chapter 2 (Freeman, 2001), these YouTubers’ experiences working for themselves and on behalf of brands is an example of the economics of globalization Mohanty (2013) has argued exists. They long for independence as creators, but need the validation from traditional brands to make the money to do so. Phan’s corporate mission to use the digital space to “interrupt” traditional beauty marketing by using YouTubers to reach consumers is its own embrace of neoliberalism as she works to reign the beauty empire on YouTube. Accordingly, her creators were getting an education in doing the same by participating in the annual Summit and Generation Beauty conference, meeting traditional brands’ corporate representatives and incorporating products into their own videos.

The interplay between creator and corporation exemplifies Jenkins' (2013) concern that the YouTube is far from being a great emancipator. YouTube was always going to be in relationship with global corporations, and as corporations have learned to co-opt UGC, the democratic potential becomes lessened (Burgess, 2009). Just as corporate-sanctioned contests have learned to co-opt fan art, so, too, have beauty networks co-opted beauty tutorialists into laboring on behalf of L'Oréal, for example. In this way, YouTube networks like ICON increasingly enable traditional corporations to sell to viewers on its platform, so creators are not the "interrupters" Phan claims, but more like MaryKay or Avon door-to-door salespeople in digital clothes.

As explained in Chapter 2, the cosmopolitan citizen is the consumer who can recognize global brand names, as exemplified by Phan who recommends both U.S. and Pan-Asian cosmetics to her followers (2012). Phan's identity as a Boston-born Vietnamese-American who went to school in Florida and now lives in L.A. and New York City embodies the "from many places" ideology of cosmopolitanism — as do her ICON creators coming from a variety of backgrounds and cities — in the name of multicultural beauty which grounds the Phan brand. Defining what is beautiful is not just a transnational process but also one of consumption (Grewal, 1999). Phan's YouTube network is thus a place where diaspora and home become connected in "the new economic climate" of cosmopolitan citizenship (Grewal, 1999, p. 800). While Phan's creators hail from a range of locations across the globe, they are united under the ICON banner of beauty marketing and consumption.

But as long as the "right" nose excludes women born with larger or wider nose bridges, darker skin, or epicanthic eye folds, such discourse only sustains a beauty myth

of exclusion which fuels beauty industry advertising and marketing. This beauty work merely reasserts the social hierarchies of the past when dominant ideologies of race privilege certain skin tones, facial features, and hair textures over others (Bordo, 1993; Grewal, 1996; Hunter, 2002). Even as the beauty work of YouTube proliferates a variety of faces, the thesis of its work — facial maximization — limits its aims for inclusivity. The postmodern plasticity of race actually sustains racial hierarchies when finding or “remembering” the real, “essential” self begins by recognizing its deficiencies (Bordo, 1993, p. 283). While large lips are “en vogue” this year, small lips may debut next year depending on what products are set to sell via traditional beauty advertising and its retail YouTubers like ICON’s creators. As Farese noted, the beauty vlogosphere says to viewers, “You can sit with us” at the proverbial high school lunch table. But when the table conversation largely addresses how to “maximize” appearance, the “rules” of beauty myths stand, including some and excluding others.

Yet, the women’s narratives in this study proved that their internalizations of what was beautiful did not preclude constant acts of negotiation. They had developed a sense of vigilance against being boxed into traditional beauty norms, such as their dislike of women’s fashion magazines. Because of this, some of their understandings of beauty derived from the digital texts that they co-produced, eschewing fashion models for YouTube’s “real girls.” Specifically, they saw themselves as “real girls” on YouTube and tried to separate themselves from the non-“real” girls who claimed to be barefaced in “before” shots, but were secretly made up, as informant Farese described, with false eyelashes and drawn-on eyebrows, “we can see!” she said.

Characterizing McRobbie's criticism that there is no "real" or essential self, just a societal, gendered longing to re-claim a deficiency (1985), the women nevertheless perceived YouTube as a means to create one and categorized other YouTubers as "real" or not, bringing added nuance to the presence of certain facial characteristics as more "real" than others, such as sparse eyebrows or under eye circles as markers of authenticity or realness. This is especially complicated considering the multicultural makeup of Phan's selected creators, who vary greatly in their own facial characteristics, some with darkly pigmented eyebrows and some lighter. In this way, the women individually reflected and produced as a whole ICON's racial bricolage to represent multiple identities across national boundaries, but still occasionally were tripped up by the boundaries of "real" or "natural" onscreen selves. Their use of the words "real" and "reality" remain obscure, referring in some nebulous way to an end result that counters naturally occurring physical characteristics, but the benchmark for that "reality" was undefined.

Access, privilege, and discursive absences

To answer RQ2 ("How do they position themselves as laborers who produce user-generated content?"), this study examined the women's experiences of maintaining their channel's relevancy for material survival under the YouTube algorithm of views; their privilege, manifested in their access to Macintosh computers, home internet, and the editing software and hardware to produce videos; and their strong sense of digital entrepreneurship. The women across the board saw themselves as the Do-It-Yourself-ers of the YouTube era, specifically as video producers who, as informant Alzate put it, "loved editing" and the technological components of their digital labor.

Their stories also vividly displayed how the gendered division between off-camera skills (traditionally masculine) and on-camera skills (performed as traditionally feminine) played out in their production routines. Most of them received technical assistance from the men in their lives and happily handed over those duties, but still felt mostly confident in their abilities to film and edit their own videos. Their working experiences illustrated Banet-Weiser's criticism that YouTube is arranged to connect postfeminism's articulation of empowerment and consumption with gendered on-camera performance (2011). They, at times, put up with the long hours and round-the-clock deadlines to produce content in hopes of sustaining their following and relevance for their tentative network contracts, which was characteristic of Deuze's (2007) argument of contemporary work conditions of digital labor in neoliberalism, specifically: it is not that we cannot re-draw the boundaries of work and life, it is just that "they have lost all consensual meaning" (p. 44). Their collaboration with male partners enabled them to do this successfully but may have also abbreviated their potential to gain further technological expertise if they desired so.

Yet, the women had opinions that also stood in sharp contrast to the notion of letting male influence run their businesses. While they received some assistance here and there, such as negotiating legal contracts, they largely kept their channels about their own expertise to both protect their partners' privacy and maintain their sense of self as female entrepreneurs. In a time of heavy media debate surrounding the pay of male and female actors in Hollywood, they felt strongly that women should earn their own money and have their own work, perhaps because of or inspired by their childhoods with stay-at-home mothers like those of Greenberg and Farese.

Across the board, the women felt strongly that anyone could learn to be a YouTuber and were encouraging of others who wanted to try it out. Their narratives showed that although their experiences becoming YouTubers had at times been frustrating and lonely, they had reached a level where the community of their vlogosphere and the income generated for their work was beginning to pay off literally. In line with this thinking, they rhetorically reflected the ethos of Phan's own bottom-up success. Framed as a classic "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" story, Phan herself is frequently framed in media coverage as the child of an immigrant success story. Though her skyrocketing success is surely due to her hard work and timing of the YouTube beauty marketing boom, media scholars would caution against the "anyone can become famous" attitude, such as Bird (2011) who reminded us that most people around the world do *not* "produce" UGC for a variety of reasons, including lack of access. While the notion of anyone possessing the moxie to be the next ICON star is appealing, it is dependent on a certain amount privilege to obtain the hardware, software, and mobility of ICON's creators.

As the women's experiences attested, their YouTube work was not the end-all-be-all of their entrepreneurship, but rather a stepping stone to other possibilities such as working with *Cosmopolitan* magazine, creating a jewelry line, or strengthening an already successful Hollywood career. By learning to manage YouTube's political economy, the women had an intimate understand that web 2.0, neoliberalism, and postfeminism all operated in terms of the ideology of the self-entrepreneur and were hoping to use it opportunistically for their own gains (Banet-Weiser, 2011). They viewed themselves more as independent YouTubers than just ICON creators. All had YouTube

channels prior to partnering with ICON and understood the partnership would only last as long as they possessed the relevancy and views that had attracted ICON initially. As informant Farese explained, ICON could at any time decide it had “too many brunettes!” While Phan may see them as solely ICON creators laboring on behalf of her retail partnerships in the beauty industry, they very much saw themselves as YouTubers essentially and ICON creators professionally. They reflected an understanding of how tenuous the digital workforce could be and the contingent nature of digital production in a neoliberal economy. YouTubing professionally, like many digital lifestyle production efforts such as fashion blogging, are hardly stable, and the informants understood they could lose their connection with the network any month. While digital media scholars have long professed the precarious labor environment of digital work with its part-time, no benefits culture (Andrejevic, 2013; Deuze, 2007), it continues to draw young people daily to produce and prosume happily in hopes of getting, what informant Farese described as, “that taste of fame.”

Contributions

Toward a focus on postfeminism

This study enriched the concept of postfeminism by teasing out and highlighting the role of negotiation within the dynamic interactions between the personal and the social. Focusing on a single case of beauty YouTube production, this study cannot make arguments about all YouTube beauty networks, but offers a singular exemplar of how postfeminism plays out in Phan’s ICON network.

The narratives of these women support transnational feminist argument that women’s entrepreneurship in globalization is not singularly oppressive but rather capable

of inhabiting a nuanced new womanhood characterized by increased physical mobility, traveling, and business acumen, such as various studies discovering studying women who simultaneously resisted and redefined globalization in their work (Freeman, 2001; Mies & Shiva, 2014). This study demonstrated the unstable balance among different social forces and personal actions. From this perspective, the women constitute an understanding of working within neoliberalism to defy traditional patriarchal expectations about female appearance communicated through women's fashion magazines, yet sustain capitalistic expectations to labor in a neoliberal capitalist environment working round the clock and scoring deals as freelance entrepreneurs. Moving from the "patriarchal family to the patriarchal factory" is not necessarily a feminist progression when YouTube operates in the economic structure of capitalism (Eisenstein, 2010, p. 413). But this case study *did* aim to support a transnational feminist understanding of postfeminism in YouTube by lessening the binary of local/global, feminine/masculine, to encompass women's experiences of utilizing globalization for potentially enriching lifestyles and avoiding lumping all experiences of postfeminism in globalization as exploitative (Freeman, 2001).

That said, this study also contributed to Banet-Weiser's argument that even online, postfeminist practices are confusing, especially when YouTubers willing objectify their bodies for the viewing pleasure of others (2011). Though these women largely felt they were performing for other women, they were nonetheless commodifying their bodies in the service of beauty in their work. When asked about this, they largely felt their performance was for the benefit of other women, as well as themselves, in their greater professional mission to, as informant Farese put it, "help someone today." While the

beauty myth surreptitiously presents itself as “helpful” to women, it is essentially creating deficiencies which sustain beauty advertising and marketing. It is my hope that this study brought nuance to feminist media studies that desire to bifurcate feminists vs. postfeminists cleanly, without considering postfeminists who want to be feminists and feminists who practice postfeminism opportunistically. Additionally, the unique time period of their beauty work, during an era of neoliberalism, demonstrated the evolution of feminist practices. While second wave feminism espoused critiques of beauty, third wave feminism (and postfeminism) demonstrate a reconstitution of beauty, perhaps as a path to gainful employment.

Additionally, Phan’s business model to be a purposefully multicultural YouTube network is worthy of praise for bucking the tradition of women’s mass media forums that largely showcase white models (Peiss, 1998). This study contributed one way of understanding what multiculturalism might mean in the digital work world where YouTubers are increasingly “of many places.” Nonetheless, the trappings of beauty hail women of color, too, to perform beauty labor. While these women labored on behalf of Phan’s company which speaks to women diversely, they still, at the end of the day, were selling beauty products and patriarchal ideologies of how females ought to make themselves up.

Toward a focus on female production

This study was uniquely and heavily focused on the production of beauty labor, as opposed to the meanings of the beauty texts they created. This was an intentional attempt to answer the call by Mohanty (2013) and others in transnational feminist cultural studies for more systemic analyses of the material, through interviews with actual women and

analyses of political economies, as opposed to more studies of representation via text and discourse analyses. By delving deeply into the production of Phan's multicultural beauty creator team, this study illuminated the structure of the YouTube network economy, the flows of money in their online retail-partnered industry, and the work that goes into marketing on behalf of traditional beauty legacy brands. It also considered the impact of this production on women's bodies. In addition to demonstrating the beneficial rewards of being prosumers, such as gaining a useful technological skillset in filming and editing, the women's narratives demonstrated the capitalistic challenges operating under YouTube's MCN economy.

With pressures to spend now in order to reap the rewards later, this study shed light onto the expectations for beauty YouTubers to use their own money to buy products and hope for the day when the products would be gifted to them by sponsoring corporations. This cycle of product-based labor demonstrated the way this seemingly independent, DIY production operated within the larger political economy of the beauty industry and its related ideologies of beautification and the discipline of women's bodies through self-adornment practices.

As transnational feminist scholarship continues to call for research focused on justice, not just representation, this study highlighted the political economy of YouTube beauty networks, yet it also opened a conversation about gender wage parity for entrepreneur-hopefuls on YouTube who position themselves in the larger Hollywood entertainment industry (Alexander, 1997).

While the challenges are numerous for female digital prosumers, these women's experiences provided hope that there are communities, on YouTube especially, where

women are welcoming each other from many walks of life to collaborate as professionals. As Farese put it, YouTube was one safe place where “you can sit with us.” Feminist or postfeminist, these women demonstrated the opposite of the picture painted by Dean (2013) of millennials online. While these women produced videos, not blogs as Dean studied, they were actively bucking the “whatever” attitude Dean described of young people avoiding a sense of “belonging” online. Perhaps because of their intentions to be entrepreneurs rather than hobbyists on YouTube, the women were very much “leaning in” to the technical production of their work, the financial knowledge needed to reach more viewers, and the sense of community they gained in each other’s company. Though their CEO Phan avoided having a position on gender politics, these women were hopeful their channels would absolutely provide a safe place for women online offering friendship, fun, and, for some, feminist fellowship.

This study revealed that while this emerging online genre of YouTube beauty marketing is in line with historic beauty work post-WWII, it is distinct in a neoliberal era of individual entrepreneurship and the commodification of the self as a brand. This is a site where the markers of feminism, postfeminism, and transnational feminism intersect and collide. On the YouTube platform, beauty work is comparable to older forms of beauty work like door-to-door sales of Avon or Mary Kay where the women play the role of both salesperson and confidant. But it is distinct in that the women do not identify as Avon workers, or ICON workers, but rather as entrepreneurs who *sometimes* sell ipso products, but *always* sell their personalities as brands of beauty expertise on YouTube. The relationship still exists with corporate brands, but the identity of the entrepreneur is

the heavier focus as it both rhetorically empowers the creators as business women and distracts the viewers from the hard sell of products.

It is here where the creators struggled with the concept of authenticity. Instead of seeing authenticity as a social construction — there is no “real me” — they saw it as both a personal and business necessity to maintain their viewership and, thus, be successful. Authenticity and branding were related here, as the appearance of authenticity was a key part of their own and their network’s brand to appeal to the “everygirl” around the world. But as McRobbie (1985) has reminded us, the notion of the authentic self is a false one and keeps the individual entranced in a mission to “find” or discover a real self that never existed. In this way, the creators were both involved in finding their own true selves and encouraging viewers to do the same via a video discourse of tips and tricks of being the best self. As ICON communicated the importance of authenticity through its various training programs, its creators adopted them as well. But this case study demonstrated that there is no authenticity just as there is no “real me.” ICON’s production is wholly polished and corporate, even as it endeavors to appear DIY and homemade at times. While ICON and its creators continue to grapple with authenticity — strategically and personally — this case study demonstrated the impossibility of this task as an endless search for a self that is fabricated in the service of capital and a dubious promise of entrepreneurship as the path to being one’s own boss.

Thus, this hard work in the name of authenticity is the goal of the beauty myth, which sustains the retail partners ICON works for. Feminism in its various forms, then, lays bare the shortcomings of commodification in the name of authenticity, as beauty work, even reconstituted, is still work distracting women from its material impacts on

their bodies, lives, and wallets. And such work can easily cross the line into exploitation as creators are asked to take on brands they do not want to work with and are summoned to work on a time table with no boundaries.

Limitations and Future Directions

This case study had limits in the sense that given both time and budget constraints, it relied more on interviews than observing the women's production live, whether at home or in studios such as Ipsy Open Studios in Santa Monica, California. All the women had their own time constraints as busy entrepreneurs, so our conversations were limited to Skype and email interviews and follow-up questions via email so as not to impose upon their obligations as mothers or university students, for example. Had I been able to observe them filming in person, I would have illuminated further their production expertise and production choices handling both the on and off-screen pressures of their YouTube labor, but given the timetable for this dissertation, their interviews served as the basis of telling their stories as producers.

Additionally, interviews were conducted only with ICON creators and managers who responded to my invitation to participate in the project. Therefore, these findings are based on Alzate, Greenberg, Farese, and Morgan's perspectives of ICON content creation, as opposed to all ICON creators and managers, such as Phan herself who declined participation due to an understandably booked schedule. This left the study to draw conclusions based on Phan's comments in public interviews, rather than one-on-one answers to this study's research questions about her empire.

Also, the issue of the beauty video discourse was minimally explored in this study. In order to fully grasp the ideological mechanisms at work in YouTube beauty

videos, the production, the texts, and the audiences for these videos should be further investigated (Johnson, 1986). Further exploration of text discourses across all of ICON, as well as reception from ICON viewers, could bring to bear what messages ICON communicates to its followers on behalf of the brands it labors for. Future research might also consider this case from a theoretical framework of female spectatorship. Though outside the scope of this study's research questions, future researchers should interview subscribers of Alzate, Farese, or Greenberg regarding how they receive the messages filmed by the creators.

It would also be useful for future research to conduct a cross-analysis of several YouTube networks, such as StyleHaul or other large MCNs, to consider how messages or creators differ on various networks, as well as a cross-cultural analysis of ICON UK and UNICON (France). Finally, future transnational feminist cultural studies might consider the role of beauty product waste on the environment, as well as product chemicals on the body. Though some of ICON's creators had methods for handling product excess — largely through giveaways hosted on their social media platforms — the amount of products necessary to maintain YouTube beauty channels is substantial, and environmental-focused studies could illuminate upon the role of YouTubers in beauty product recycling and DIY approaches to beauty, practiced by some of ICON's creators.

This list of areas for future study only partially reflects the possibilities that are inspired by this study's informants. To conclude this study, I return to the notion that research must go beyond text-based conclusions and toward a holistic understanding of women's lived experiences online and off with digital video production. Therefore, I invite all readers to view these women's YouTube channels and gain a sense of their

personalities, purpose, and politics to fill the gaps this study overlooked or misinterpreted unintentionally.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

GENERAL/DEMOGRAPHICS

Where do you live and how long have you been there? Where did you grow up if different?

How do you define yourself in terms of where you live, do you consider where you are “home”? Or do you have other places in the world where you also feel you belong?

What places have you traveled to for work or for fun that you’re proud of?

How old are you and what is your family’s ethnic background?

What are you doing right now in life? Working, in school, starting a family, etc.

What kinds of things do you do for leisure?

TECH

How would you describe yourself in terms of technology? Tech junkie or hate it or get by the best you can?

What hardware do you use? Laptop, desktop, smartphone, iPad, etc.

What software do you use most? I know your main platforms for your brand (FB, Twitter, Instagram), are there others you love? In future?

How has using certain software or hardware changed since back when you started? Is it more fun? Confusing?

Do you think technology has made videos better than they have been in the past?

What do you think about using technology to make videos more authentic? Do you do any special editing things to make your videos more appealing to viewers or to make them feel closer to you?

Are there rules you have about protecting your privacy?

Are there rules you have about being ethical online? Have you seen other channels make unethical choices?

How do new technologies or upgrades affect your job?

How do you go about learning how best to use these technologies?

YOUTUBE

Do you remember how old/where you were when you discovered YouTube and began watching?

Before being a YouTuber, what types of videos did you watch?

Are there channels you check daily, for work or fun? What do you use them for?

Why did you start your channel and what was going on in your life at that time?

How do your friends and family feel about your channel?

Who are your mentors on YouTube? Who do you want to model your success after?

How did you choose your YouTube username?

What is your goal for viewers?

Do you think there’s a difference between a video and a vlog?

Can you describe a typical workday for you?

How much time a day do you spend on your channel? Major chunks do you keep up on? (editing & comments)

What are your work hours right now? What time of the day do you prefer to work (day/night)?

Are there crunch times for work at certain points in the week/month/year?

Do you feel like you have work/life balance/boundaries? I know it can be common to work all the time.

Are there ever negatives to having a YouTube channel?

Where do you prefer to work? Home, coffee shop, ICON studio?

What are the most important characteristics of a good video?

What kinds of tasks do you have to check off to finish a video?

What are the main challenges/things that are always hard with making a video?

What are some of the rewarding aspects of the work you do?

How much control do you have over the day-to-day work you perform?

Flexibility/deadlines for others?

How do you typically communicate with other YouTubers?

When was a moment you were especially proud of the work you did on a video?

ICON

How did you come to work with ICON?

What does your ICON work involve? Is it different from your existing videos?

Are you a freelancer to ICON or a staff member?

Why did you want to work with ICON? What do you hope it brings for your channel?

What are the best positives?

Are there ever negatives to being a part of an organization, such as ICON rather than working solo?

Do you prefer working solo or collaborating?

MONEY/ENTREPRENEURSHIP

I think of you as an online entrepreneur, what does that word mean to you? Do you identify with it or consider yourself one? What job title do you say to new people you meet?

Why do you think young people especially like working for themselves or working in the digital world?

What role does money play in your life? Do you have to teach yourself about your finances or do you get help?

How do YouTubers get paid (YouTube or AdSense)?

Do you also get compensated for featuring products or certain people?

What makes a YouTuber successful financially? Unsuccessful?

Is your YouTube channel your main source of salary? Or do you do other work too to make a living?

So many YouTubers make content for free (ex. gamers who never get to see a paycheck from companies who they game-test for, while others are paid for their work. How do you feel about digital work and ethical pay?

What does “making it” mean for your goals?
Do you think YouTube is fair in its payment to YouTubers for their hard work?
How long do you think you’ll want to be a YouTuber? What type of work do you think you’ll do in the future?

BEAUTY

What role has beauty played in your life growing up? Have you always been interested in skincare, makeup?
Why do you make beauty videos?
How do you keep up with trends in the beauty/fashion industry? What about trends in editing?
Who are your mentors for beauty? Who do you model your skincare or beauty habits after?
What do you think about beauty standards today? What will they be like in the future?
There are lots of women making beauty videos of all skintones, is beauty more/less diverse on YouTube v. mags?

SHOPPING/WASTE

What role does shopping play in your personal and work life?
How do you get your beauty products (for yourself and for your work)?
What happens to old/unused products? Ex. pass onto family or friends, throw away, recycle, return to the store?
How much product do you go through to create a video?
What things are important to you about products? For example, brand, price, ingredients?
Do you follow where products are made/background of brands?
Are there any social causes you/you and your friends/you and your family have ever been involved with? Charities, environmental issues, racial or gender equality, children, homelessness, religions?

FEMINISM

Why do you think women find the YouTube platform appealing?
What do you think about the number of men versus women who have channels?
What does feminism mean today to you? Or in the past? Do you identify with it personally or with friends or family?

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