1-1-2018

#FashioningIdentity and #PerformingAuthenticity: Communicative, Relational, and Affective Labor in the Digital Frontier of Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging

Jessica L. Neumann
University of Denver

#FASHIONINGIDENTITY AND #PERFORMINGAUTHENTICITY:
COMMUNICATIVE, RELATIONAL, AND AFFECTIVE LABOR IN THE DIGITAL
FRONTIER OF FASHION AND LIFESTYLE BLOGGING

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

_____

by

Jessica L. Neumann

June 2018

Advisor: Dr. Kate Willink

Author: Jessica L. Neumann
Title: #FASHIONINGIDENTITY AND #PERFORMINGAUTHENTICITY: COMMUNICATIVE, RELATIONAL, AND AFFECTIVE LABOR IN THE DIGITAL FRONTIER OF FASHION AND LIFESTYLE BLOGGING
Advisor: Dr. Kate Willink
Degree Date: June 2018

Abstract

Fashion and lifestyle blogs serves as a new cultural space, where bloggers are viewed as *influencers* and set cultural, societal standards of an ideal womanhood. Female bloggers' various forms of labor – specifically, communicative, relational, and affective – establish a blogger's role in social and economic life and reiterate the significance of consumerism as a hallmark of femininity. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are typically women, whose labor sustains the fashion and lifestyle blogging ecosystem. This occurs through consistent, branded communication; cultivating connections and relationships with followers and fellow bloggers; and transference of affect across digital divides, in real time, through platforms such as Instagram. These processes perpetuate the cycle of consumption through a framework of fulfilling one's duty as both a woman and a citizen.

This project examines fashion and lifestyle blogs and their authors through performance-based interviewing and thematic narrative analysis in order to turn a critical eye to blog websites and social media platforms. The dissertation unpacks the cultural scripts and communicative performances that emerge within (im)material blog spaces and the ways in which bloggers enact particular subjectivities in Web 2.0 culture; the labor performances of bloggers; and the implication of blog and social media imagery on blog followers. Constant connectivity and access to digital space encourages consistent subject

performances bound to neoliberal, capitalist culture, turning blog and social media spaces

into powerful, communicative, Web 2.0 structures.

Acknowledgements

While words on this page cannot reflect the amount of gratitude that fills my heart, I would like to offer a few small bits of gratitude. Thank you, Dr. Kate Willink, for sticking with me for many years. Your sage advice, probing questions, kindness, and patience helped me navigate this long and winding graduate school road. I also give hearty thanks to Kara Taczak, whose editing skills helped me through *every* sentence of this project.

Thank you to my amazing friends: Keeley, Emily, Jenna, Dave, and Amanda. You have seen me through many years of work and frustration (including some tears). You each bring light and laughter to my life and your support means more than you will ever know. To Marty and Phoenix… thank you for cheering me on throughout my entire graduate school career. And thanks, Marty, for allowing me to take days off work to write - in many ways, you made this happen!

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for your unwavering enthusiasm and love. It has kept me afloat. In the moments I questioned my ability to continue this degree, you provided the encouragement I needed. I appreciate the countless school supplies you purchased, trips to the library, and every Newport Creamery sundae in celebration of good grades.

My final "thank you" goes to my wonderful boys. Peter, you are not only the love of my life but also my biggest champion. I appreciate of every laugh and ounce of coffee you provided during this project. To Ripley and Bear… your unconditional love, sloppy kisses, and steadfast sweetness was a wonderful respite over the past several months. Even though you are no longer physically here, you are always in my heart. You (and your Dad) have brought me all the happiness in the world.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: How to Start a Blog, Make Friends, and Influence People Through

Communicative, Identity-Based Blog Work

"Bloggers look like they have fulfilling careers, financial success, flexible schedules, and fun lives. But these creative mavens are ostensibly also regular women. As such their digital images of perfection make it seem accessible to everyone: just a lot of passion and a few social media accounts away."

- Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund –

A large, wrapped box rests under the modest faux Christmas tree draped with twinkling copper lights and mismatched homemade ornaments gathered over the years. My boyfriend and I are opening gifts early, in advance of our upcoming holiday travel. He brings over my gift, wrapped with care and topped by a handwritten label: "To my one and only." I shake the box, holding it up to see if its weight or sounds offer any clues to its contents. I rip open the paper and see a Zappos.com shipping box. He quickly notes the box is being recycled, urging me to continue opening my gift. I peel the tape from the box's edge and open the flaps to sheets of brightly colored tissue paper. Nestled between the paper is a cream-colored box with an embossed gold cobweb and a name I never expected to see: Charlotte Olympia.

I look up at my boyfriend, then back at the box in my lap, then back to my boyfriend. I am in shock and disbelief. I carefully take the shoebox out and lift the cover into my lap, unfolding the branded tissue paper to find two perfect, lush black velvet kitty

flats.[1] I slowly lift one of the shoes up and feel the beautiful craftsmanship, admiring the

shimmering thread stitched into the top of the shoe, outlining a sly cat's face. These shoes

are a fashionista's dream, covetable and expensive and something I would never buy

myself. With excitement, I immediately put them on despite wearing ratty purple

sweatpants and a t-shirt. I walk across our apartment, the small gold heels click-clacking

with delight across the wooden floors. The shoes fit perfectly.

The Little Shoes That Could

   I had admired these shoes for many years. My boyfriend heard me mention them

in passing as a "dream" addition to my closet. In anticipation of my dissertation

interviews with female fashion and lifestyle bloggers, he thought the shoes would give

me confidence, as though magic pixie dust was intertwined with the shoes' golden thread.

These shoes would make me look and feel like a fashion insider. But as I admired the

shoes, the critical scholar in me surfaced. I was suddenly overcome with a question that

has emerged in my research -- "Are you thinking critically about these shoes and the

meaning embedded in them?" I finally owned a pair of shoes worn by fashion insiders

and featured countless times on Instagram feeds and in blog posts, shoes that also happen

to cost more than some pay in monthly rent. One of my first inclinations upon slipping on

these flats was to post a photo to my own Instagram account with a witty description

followed by #charlotteolympia, #kittyflats, and #dreamshoes. Ironically, this would

illustrate the exact performances I seek to unpack in my research – specifically, identity

performances and a can-do girl subjectivity. Bloggers portray a socially-accepted ideal

---

[1] According to the Charlotte Olympia website, the Kitty Flats feature an "embroidered cat-face… a modern take on your traditional gentleman's smoking slipper" (Kitty flats, 2017) and are considered one of the brand's signature styles.

2

womanhood, achieved through consumption and illustrated throughout the images and narratives published on their blog and social media platforms. So instead of snapping an artful, filtered photo on my iPhone, I removed the shoes and placed them gently back in their chic, tissue paper-lined home.

Fashion and Lifestyle Blogs: Communicative Phenomenon or Fad?

The webpage opens to beautiful imagery reminiscent of a high-style fashion editorial. The top of the page features three stylized images. The first is a shot of an attractive, thin, brunette woman lounging on a boat floating in azure blue European waters. She wears a white Forever 21 fluttering off-the-shoulder top, striped high-waisted shorts, and large Karen Walker sunnies with a brimmed Rag & Bone straw hat, hair blowing in the breeze. The second image features the same woman, this time wearing AG skinny jeans and Sam Edelman heeled booties with a black and gold Storets blazer suggesting a 21st century Sargent Pepper. The third image is a close-up of the woman, applying Nexxus styling product to her chestnut brown hair and wearing a simple gray t-shirt. Moving a computer mouse over these images reveals a pop-up button proclaiming "Shop this Look." Clicking the pop-up redirects to a retailer's website where the fashionable item(s) can be purchased in just a few easy steps. Slightly below the images is the clean text of the site's name and brand: *Hello Fashion*.

Fashion and lifestyle blogs like *Hello Fashion* illuminate the way ideology operates in and through communication and culture. Many fashion blogs, an online phenomenon that became popular in the early 2000s, have evolved into fashion *and* lifestyle blogs integrating everyday life topics from fashion and beauty to home decor and travel (Mediakix, 2015). Fashion and lifestyle blogs allow women to discuss their

style and engage with followers through imagery and narratives, as well as the back-and-forth of blog commentary. Each *Hello Fashion* posting (i.e. dated entry) – like most top, influential fashion and lifestyle blogs – features stylized, professional photography and narratives detailing a particular snapshot of the blogger's life. With art-directed photos and sincere narratives, fashion and lifestyle blogs have become online spaces for learning about style, home décor, and beauty. Many popular bloggers feature high-end products across their media platforms, highlighting the classed nature of a bloggers' work. One of the most popular features on fashion and lifestyle blogs is the "Latest Obsessions" section, which showcases fashionable on-trend items with links to purchase the various accouterments the blogger either covets or is currently wearing. Since blogs are closely tied to social media, sites like *Hello Fashion* include easy-to-spot links to the bloggers' assorted Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram profiles. As is the case with most popular fashion and lifestyle blogs, *Hello Fashion* is managed by a monetization application[2] that allows the blogger to track website visitors and earn profits from purchases made via their website – a process that is often opaque to followers (i.e. consumers). The primary purpose of fashion and lifestyle blogs is to sell: clothes, accessories, beauty products, bedding, and the bloggers' brand.

Why Fashion and Lifestyle Bloggers? Understanding Digital Subjects in Communication Studies

Ideologies – those reigning cultural and institutional values - are embedded in our increasingly digital life. Many cultural and social ideological norms go unnoticed,

---

[2] One of the most well-known and used monetization applications is rewardStyle. Other monetization applications available to bloggers include Skimlinks and ShopSense.

especially in fashion and lifestyle blogs. As *influencers*, fashion and lifestyle bloggers set cultural standards and establish their role in social and economic life. By examining fashion and lifestyle blogs, this dissertation turns a critical eye to these sites to unpack the cultural scripts and communicative acts and performances that emerge. One of the key performances is that of a can-do girl subjectivity (Gill, 2007; Marwick, 2013; McRobbie, 2004), which is bound to capitalist societal norms. Today's subjects, such as the can-do girl, "draw on the various roles, norms, and connections that the liberal public sphere makes available to construct relations, identities, and interests" (Konings, 2015, p. 24). Blogs and bloggers, for example, provide tools to perform particular subjectivities via "implicit scripts, disciplined routinization, and tacit knowledge" (Konings, 2015, p. 22). These scripts are ubiquitous throughout fashion and lifestyle blog content, whose primary focus is feminine labor and aesthetics.

Within the beautiful images and carefully crafted narratives of fashion and lifestyle blogs is a modern communicative phenomenon that illustrates the distorted boundaries between digital and everyday life. My interest lies in how bloggers perform an online identity and can-do girl subjectivity within a framework of consumption, economic, and cultural capital. For one thing, blogger performances and communication has impacted my own life, specifically messaging that teaches women that being consumers is what we are born to be. Bloggers constantly relay this message to their followers. In combination with a continuous connection and a sense of bonding through social media platforms, blog entries, and email newsletters, bloggers engage and also keep followers in-the-know. I feel an attachment to many of the bloggers I follow and their messaging has impacted my own understanding of the digital and material world.

My own experience illustrates how blogs and social media platforms are communicative and pedagogical, serving as a template for women in what is appropriate, feminine behavior in a capitalist society.

With constant connectivity and new technologies hitting the market almost monthly, bloggers have identified the potential of the digital world, where so many women create meaning and "experience" everyday life. Bloggers spend their days creating and performing a distinct identity (i.e. brand) across media platforms. These performances place bloggers in symbolic positions and impact how they – and followers - experience their everyday life (Barker, 2007). Communication studies scholars will be able to better understand changing notions of identity and subjectivity in Web 2.0[3] culture by examining fashion and lifestyle blogs, social media, and monetization applications. We live in a digital, connected, neoliberal, social media-obsessed world. The most popular female fashion and lifestyle bloggers utilize digital space(s) to gain popularity, visibility, and financial success.[4] As bloggers become more popular and continually appear in Instagram searches or within traditional forms of mass media, it is important to examine them, and the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon, to understand the cultural shift toward neoliberal digital meaning making.

---

[3] Web 2.0 is considered the second stage of development of the World Wide Web, most notably the shift to dynamic, user-generated content and social media platforms (Marwick, 2013).

[4] Fashion blog *The Blonde Salad*, by Chiara Ferragni, has 5.6 million Instagram followers and 1.2 million Facebook subscribers. The most popular fashion and lifestyle blogs are determined by a bloggers' number of followers and engagement on social media (i.e. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest), which provides a snapshot of how many people bloggers reach each day (Indvik, 2016). Another example, fashion and lifestyle blog *Pink Peonies*, had 142,371 social media followers and 126,909 visitors to the blog over a three-month period in early 2015 (Mijatovic, 2015).

To explore the fashion and lifestyle blog space and its impact on culture, as well as to open open up space for a new discussion, I ask: (1) How do fashion and lifestyle bloggers enact particular subjectivities in Web 2.0 culture? (2) What forms of labor are tied to these subjectivities? (3) Do fashion and lifestyle bloggers understand the implication of the imagery they publish in a constantly connected culture? I am particularly interested in how the labor of blogging – communicative, relational, and affective – impacts a blogger's everyday life. Considering these questions unearths how constant connectivity to digital platforms has morphed blog and social media spaces into powerful, communicative Web 2.0 structures.

Which Filter Should I Use?: Cultural, Communicative Frames for Blogging

Fashion and lifestyle blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, and thus has not been prominently featured within communication studies literature. In this section I examine works within assorted academic fields – communication studies, cultural studies, media studies, and fashion theory – to build an understanding of the theoretical landscape in and around blogging and the performance of identity. Blogging and *influencing*, as a new cultural institution, is rooted in performed identities and the subject position of "fashion and lifestyle blogger." Understanding notions of identity and subjectivity lays a foundation for larger issues of consideration, such as visibility, neoliberalism, gender, and consumption.

Fashion blogging gained popularity in 2003 and has grown exponentially over the past 15 years, with millions of fashion-related blogs on the Blogger website platform alone (Findlay, 2015; Rocamora, 2011). Fashion bloggers focus primarily on cultural, social, and "fashion" capital (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006; Pedroni, 2015) and perform

particular identities as part of their "living," economically speaking. "Fashion blogger" is both an identity and subjectivity; blogs offer an online space for identity formation, as well as a frame through which to view the world. Fashion bloggers harness the "'entrepreneur of the self' and its ethos of self-responsibility and self-optimization" (Pham, 2013, p. 260). By performing a particular identity and presenting a particular subjectivity, bloggers communicate ideologies to their followers.

The fashion blogosphere promises to make "shopping better, looking better, and feeling better easier for more people, but particularly women who continue to be fashion's ideal subject – [to] enable and encourage the gendered labors of caring and managing one's self and image" (Pham, 2013, p. 260). The blogosphere broadcasts images of the ideal female subject, a can-do girl of Web 2.0 culture, and a feminine identity to aspire to. The blogging phenomenon spans various mediums, spaces, and populations and offers an illustration of how we conceptualize identities, subjects, and self-representation in our increasingly networked world.

Through a review of literature in communication, cultural, media, and fashion studies, several themes emerge, including the impact of performed identity and subjectivity; neoliberalism, both in and out of the blogosphere; and gendered and classed representations of bloggers. These themes bridge the vast divides of Web 2.0 culture, connecting to the core of this project: the way(s) fashion and lifestyle blogger's identity and subject performances serve as pedagogical tools. Blogs and bloggers illustrate and perpetuate notions of ideal femininity through written and visual narratives, emphasizing the meaning-making potential of consumption for women.

How Do I Look?: Performing a Fashioned Identity

From a communication studies perspective, bloggers are a contemporary illustration of performed identity and subjectivity, tantamount to understanding the cultural scripts of Web 2.0 capitalist culture. Using a critical communication studies lens, identity is "a reflexive enterprise, which is factored by an individual's selection of self-image or how/what s(he) chooses to project about herself/himself" (Mathur, 2014, p. xv). This identity "can be assembled and disassembled, accepted and contested, and indeed performed for audiences" (Reissman, 2008, p. 7). Identity is established within the individual; is often defined in terms of difference; is never fixed, but rather constantly evolves; and is always fragmented (Conquergood, 1991; Hall, 1996; Hao, 2012; Trinh, 1989). Formation of identity is an important social process that helps individuals define who they are. Identity is closely linked with personal values (Rattle, 2014) while also being defined externally (Hoffman-Axthelm, 1992). Due to its fluid, mobile, personal, and self-reflexive nature (Kellner, 1992), identity is silently negotiated and engaged within the everyday. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers negotiate their identities across multiple media platforms in order to self-brand and accumulate capital.

The embodiment of subjectivity and performance of identity are often bound to accepted cultural scripts. Subjectivity is the position from which we consider discourse to be the most meaningful, informing, "how we experience ourselves" (Barker, 2007, p. 215). Subjects actively assume different roles and perspectives, "look at life and [our] position from new vantage points, and in the process reconstruct" (Konings, 2015, p. 25) relationships to themselves and to others. Individuals assume different identities at

different times (Hall, 1992), including different subjects such as woman, worker, consumer, fashionista, blogger, or entrepreneur.

Identity performances by fashion and lifestyle bloggers harken back to Erving Goffman's (1959) foundational notion of *performance of self in everyday life*. The online identity(ies) of bloggers are "conscious, reflective performances of the self for particular audiences" (Dobson, 2015, p. 9) and are constructed to foster specific, curated narratives about one's life (boyd, 2008; Dobson, 2015). Yet some scholars consider today's social media influencers as engaging in self-representation as a means to demonstrate authenticity – spaces positioned and understood outside of the market, residing within the inner self – and as a mode for connecting with others (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2015). This self-representation, however, is complicated when bloggers and influencers begin performing identities for profit. Their identities are commodified and branded, thus taking on additional cultural value (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

I'm a Blogger Subject, in a Blogger Subject World

Fashion and lifestyle blogger subjects, a new media celebrity of sorts, reinforce gender norms predicated upon consumption and ideal womanhood. These subjects are constructed, from a performance studies perspective (Dolan, 1994; Foust, 2010), on the notion of consumption. Most messages in the fashion and lifestyle blog space explicitly - or implicitly - tell followers to consume. Because of this, blogger subjects become instructors, their blogs a pedagogical tool. Media representations provide implied, established instructions to use in our own construction of identity, who we are, or who we aspire to be. Bloggers, the newest media icons, do this with every update of their Instagram, Facebook or Twitter pages. Even if bloggers do not explicitly tell followers

what to do, the imagery they feature offers a template for what women should purchase, avoid, and aspire to.

Young female fashion and lifestyle bloggers are often framed as active media users and producers in the social media landscape (Dobson, 2015) while at the same time "judged as being active in the 'wrong' ways – thought to be engaged in projects of self-representation driven by vanity, or incessant social communication driven by insecurities and trivialities" (Dobson, 2015, p. 2). While the fashion and lifestyle blogger "subject" is fluid and constantly changing, it is always bound to dominant ideological representations paralleling the contingent nature of Western culture. To keep up with fashion trends and the consumer market, fashion and lifestyle bloggers must highlight (i.e. sell) trends, establish a relationship with retailers and brands, and encourage consumption by performing a palatable online identity. The easiest route for "keeping up with the Joneses" of the fashion and lifestyle blogging and social media landscape is through a performed ideal womanhood. Feminine self-representations proliferate online platforms[5] and are easy to replicate. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are a palatable and consumable subject.

As blogging morphs into a new cultural industry, female fashion and lifestyle blogger subjects become the newest iteration of cultural tastemaker (Duffy & Hund, 2015b): the *influencer*.[6] An influencer effects the behaviors of others (Influencer, 2017).

---

[5] When logging into the LikeToKnow.It platform, the "featured" section is littered with traditionally feminine imagery (i.e. dresses or skirts, the color pink, ruffles and frills, and long sumptuous hair).

[6] *Forbes'* top 10 fashion influencers amass over 23 million Instagram followers, 1.9 million Twitter followers, more than 4 million Facebook likes, and 2.3 million YouTube subscribers, with a total reach of more than 31.7 million individuals (O'Connor, 2017).

In the fashion and lifestyle realm, these women are social media celebrities paid to attend events, wear clothes, travel, and market brands on social media platforms (Harris, 2017). Influencers have become part of a larger system of fetishizing commodities, "emphasizing consumption rather than production orientation… offering brands a (falsely) empowering force in consumption" (McAllister, Cooke, & Buckley, 2015, pp. 348-349). Successful influencers are given free clothes, front-row seats to New York's Mercedes Benz Fashion Week (Justice, 2016; Pham, 2013; Wilson, 2009), sponsored by high-end brands and designers (Dunne, 2014a; Dunne, 2014b), and featured in publications and websites for traditional fashion media such as *Vogue* and *Elle* (Carreon, 2016; Holgate, 2010; Schiffer, 2015; Zee, 2009). These women have established themselves as neoliberal[7] digital entrepreneurs – or, arguably, laborers, that work to infuse brands, including self-brands, with social value beyond their material uses (McAllister et al., 2015). Influencer subjects are a powerful force, as illustrated through social and economic capital ranging from the number of likes an Instagram post garners to capsule clothing collections with retailers. An influencer's identity can be curated, performed, and capitalized on.[8]

---

[7] Neoliberalism frames the world in economic terms, where we find ourselves with market-based solutions to a myriad of social, political, and economic problems (Hanan, 2016). It is an organizing principle of society, where neoliberal policies "advocate corporate deregulation, privatization, competition, entrepreneurialism, and open markets to achieve both financial success and individual self-actualization… [where] the logic of the market can be used both to understand human behavior and to regulate it" (Marwick, 2013, p. 11). This "neoliberal gaze of power" orders and arranges bodies through the austerity of the free market (Hanan, 2016).

[8] Many influencers consider themselves successful entrepreneurs due to their dedication to authenticity and integrity – remaining true to one's self-brand is non-negotiable in the blog and social media space (Harris, 2017). They capitalize on their performed identities, but it is always authentic.

Visibility, power, and profits. Fashion and lifestyle blogging taps heavily into the visible realm and amplifies Web 2.0 culture by placing the fashion industry at our fingertips. Through a monetization application program called rewardStyle, bloggers are able to utilize a tool that pairs them with brands and designers to encourage spending in the digital sphere while also tracking commissions. rewardStyle has a sister application for Instagram, LIKEtoKNOW.it, which allows blog followers to purchase entire outfits from an Instagram post just by "liking" the photograph. These applications emphasize the chameleon-like nature of fashion and identity, where "today's all-encompassing culture demands that [we] acquire the ability to change [our] identity (or at least its public manifestation) as often, as fast and as efficiently as [we] change [our] shirt or [our] socks" (Bauman, 2011, pp. 24-25). Notions of identity and subjectivity are embedded in the highly visible performance space of Web 2.0 culture (Marwick, 2013). Not only can blog followers glean ideas or inspiration from their favorite bloggers' various social media platforms, they can now purchase entire outfits – and identities – at the click of a button.

More and more people engage with others digitally rather than in person. People – myself included – are constantly tethered to their smartphones, laptops, and tablets, checking the newest Instagram posts or Twitter feeds multiple times throughout the day. The average individual touches their smartphone 2,617 times per day (which includes tapping, swiping, clicking and typing) for a total of 145 minutes (Winnick, 2016). All the while, the number of people engaging with social media platforms such as Facebook,

Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram[9] continues to increase.[10] Successful fashion and lifestyle

bloggers have tapped into social media platforms because they provide a space to publish

daily updates, capture everyday moments, and communicate with followers while also

building and maintaining a self-brand.

Click to "Shop": Bloggers as Neoliberal Subjects

Identity performances on popular fashion and lifestyle blogs offer a clear

representation of the fashionable neoliberal subject, playing into dominant ideologies of

what it means to be a successful woman in a capitalist society. Fashion and lifestyle

bloggers serve as digital citizens (Siles, 2012), the "ideal embodiment of a new capacity

to transform important aspects of social life" (p. 408). In the United States, neoliberalism

emphasizes self-reliance and self-discipline, framing work as pleasurable (Ong, 2006).

We see this exemplified in the blogosphere: female fashion and lifestyle blogger subjects

are entrepreneurs and can-do girls, spending most of their time working for the pleasures

of blogging (including the free clothes). Neoliberalism is an expression of a kind of

progressive modernization (Pabst, 2004) and "an individualism which is 'competitive,'

'possessive,' and construed often in terms of the doctrine of 'consumer sovereignty'"

(Peters, 2001, p. 19). Neoliberalism is hegemonic in nature and reifies social and

economic hierarchies.

---

[9] Pinterest and Instagram are social media-based, photo sharing websites; Pinterest has 12 million users, many women, as of 2012. Instagram had 150 million followers in 2013 (Ibrahim, 2015).

[10] Both men and women use social media – 68% of women and 62% of men utilized social networking as of 2015. According to a Pew Research study, 90% of young adults use social media, a 78-point increase from 2005. Overall, 65% of adults use social networking websites (Perrin, 2015).

Female fashion and lifestyle bloggers have coopted the blog space by applying

neoliberal principles to their everyday lives, turning themselves into entrepreneurs via

clear displays of consumption. The social norm of shopping as a feminine hallmark, as

well as the economic norm of keeping up with trends and consuming "things," propagates

fashion and lifestyle blog imagery and narratives. Bloggers emphasize that we should be

able to shop anywhere and at any time. Through perpetual connectedness, fashion and

lifestyle bloggers demonstrate a sense of power that has the capacity to produce things, to

induce pleasure, to form knowledge, and to generate discourse (Foucault, 1984). Blog

subjects personify the neoliberal, postfeminist[11] *can-do* attitude: attending to fashion and

appearance, focusing on self-improvement, and purchasing goods to achieve "self-

realization" (Marwick, 2013, p. 13; McRobbie, 2004). Blogger identities are tied to the

ability to consume, echoing the "unshakable myth that women should work for and

through consumption" (Duffy & Hund, 2015a, p. 2). Following fashion and lifestyle

bloggers reinforces this myth, encouraging consumption as an essential, womanly duty.

Bloggers consume for their very livelihood and perform the culturally-accepted

blogger subject to maintain their position in a neoliberal culture. As Ong (2006) points

out, *technologies of subjectivity* are one of the key markers of neoliberalism today.

Technologies of subjectivity stem from self-preservation in turbulent, competitive

markets and include "adherence to health regimes, acquisition of skills, development of

---

[11] Postfeminism is grounded in the notion that social relations, economic relations, and neoliberalism shape how we understand womanhood today. Postfeminism from McRobbie (2007) and Gill's (2007) viewpoint is framed through hegemony and neoliberal culture; it "repudiates feminism as a collective political project while celebrating the empowerment of individual girls and women through apolitical and capitalist activities" (Keller, 2015, p. 276). It should be viewed as a sensibility rather than an explicit method of analysis, taking many features of womanhood into account such as femininity as bodily property; transition from sex object to sexualized subject; individualism; and self-surveillance and self-discipline (Gill, 2007).

entrepreneurial ventures, and other techniques of self-engineering and capital accumulation" (p. 6). Fashion and lifestyle bloggers harness technologies of subjectivity as female, can-do entrepreneurs. They accumulate cultural, social, and economic capital through their sites – sometimes becoming millionaires – and have carved a niche in Web 2.0 culture. Through these acts, fashion and lifestyle bloggers illustrate their citizenship in a capitalist market.

This capitalist citizenship is also evident in social media feeds and interactions with followers. These interactions create meaning and reinforce the fashion blogger subject. If bloggers are doing their job correctly, they influence trends and push consumption. This, in turn, impacts the blogger's identity. A blogger's identity and subject position(s) are interconnected, shaping the way bloggers become laborers for capitalism and the free market. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are an ideal female subject who, ultimately, returns to consumption time and time again. Bloggers are framed as entrepreneurs, but are actually workers (Andrejevic, 2007). The edges of the workplace bleed into the bloggers' personal lives, where everything they do is part of performing an identity to be both documented and broadcasted.

Bloggers profit, often substantially, from their blogs and media platforms through the promotion of brands and/or designers. The performed identity of the blogger is always on display and always connected, illustrating capitalist society's implicit demand for incorporating social functions of communication to sustain capitalism as a system. This includes the way(s) communicative acts help large systems control, deliberate, persuade, cooperate, compete, and create (Greene, 2007). For example, the blogger, *Gal Meets Glam*, Julia Engel, communicates and promotes on behalf of capitalist markets

through her site's narratives, images, and frequent social media updates. Every post on her blog links to items available for purchase and she has expanded her self-brand to include a line of dresses launched in April 2018. *Gal Meets Glam* considers herself an entrepreneur, even including it as a descriptor in her blog's bio section. She writes that her blog and social media platforms allow her to create and share what inspires and motivates her with the world (Engel, 2017). In turn, this has made her a successful digital media star; she has worked with Banana Republic, Frye, *Us Weekly*, and BaubleBar. Yet Engel's performed identity is nuanced, and her "work" is not always apparent to readers.

"My Musings": Narratives of Consumption

Performing an ideal female subjectivity in the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere leads to popularity and financial success. Technology platforms allow bloggers to configure a persona that is "highly visible, entrepreneurial, and self-configured to be watched and consumed by others" (Marwick, 2013, p. 13). By consuming goods and encouraging their followers to do the same, fashion and lifestyle bloggers help bind identity to consumption. Blogs become a branded space, encouraging consumption and promoting an aspirational lifestyle attainable through buying whatever one's favorite blogger is featuring in today's #ootd (i.e. outfit of the day) post. As digital and material lives blur, the less distinguishable women's identities, subjectivities, and values become.

The narratives found on fashion and lifestyle blogs construct a sense of (self)worth and value, providing instructions for proper performance(s) of identity and a can-do girl subjectivity. These narratives illustrate how popular bloggers are inculcated in the cycle of choice and consumption. Women are portrayed as "fun-loving, consumption focused, and more 'empowered,' active and bold, physically, socially, and

17

psychologically" (Dobson, 2015, p. 23), especially within social media. One of the easiest ways to demonstrate an independent and empowered self is via consumption of goods and, by extension, an entrepreneurial spirit.[12] As fashion and lifestyle blogger Marianna Hewitt of *Life With Me* points out, "[We] are consumers and we have really close relationships with many other consumers through our blogs and social media, and at the end of the day, brands want people to buy their clothes" (Hewitt, 2015). Bloggers are consumers and their followers are consumers. This becomes the basis for communication, accomplished by creating a cohesive narrative and subjectivity that spans the history of a fashion and lifestyle blog. This communicative framework is approachable, likeable, and intimate – all hallmarks of the ideal woman.

Popular blogger *Gal Meets Glam*, for example, illustrates a successful, entrepreneurial blogger who has established an ultra-feminine identity that has made her immensely popular (and wealthy). Western culture indoctrinates women into a consumer-based society, where they must define themselves by and through consumption. Female fashion and lifestyle bloggers make this their life's work. *Gal Mets Glam*'s approach to this work utilizes a confessional narrative style of communication. Her writing style makes female followers feel a sense of kinship, especially since both are trying to be better women (i.e., consumers). Bloggers are not just individual women who like and write about clothes. They are also marketers, trend spotters, and living, breathing

---

[12] This attitude towards femininity is often seen as backlash against the second wave feminist view of normative gender roles; women as consumers of feminist images rather than producers; and the overarching male gaze (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2015; Hess and Nochlin, 1972; McRobbie, 2007; Mulvey, 2009).

advertisements. In an October 20, 2016 post, titled "Riding Boots for Fall," *Gal Meets Glam* wrote:

> After our first full night staying in Warren, VT at *The Pitcher Inn*, we woke up for an early-ish breakfast before setting off on a long day to explore Vermont. Craving a savory breakfast after the previous night's smorgasbord of S'mores, I ordered scrambled eggs and green tea, sitting on the back porch with the cool morning air. This day of the trip happened to be the coldest during our week in New England, a crisp but comfortable 50 degrees, perfect for adding an extra layer of clothing. As we ate our breakfast we watched how the trees shed some leaves with each gust of wind, at times, it was as if it was raining fall leaves. After a not so quick breakfast we hopped in the car, cameras in hand, and set off to find the best of the fall foliage…Truth be told, Vermont and New Hampshire (and what we saw of Massachusetts) are so thick with deciduous forests that everywhere we went was incredible. In fact, it made it very hard to get to places "on time", as at least every 10 minutes we'd see something that we would ooh and awe at… On this brisk day, I layered up, starting with a *plaid J. Crew shirt*, followed by *this equestrian inspired Tory Burch sweater* and topped off with *this navy Frame peacoat*. I wore these tan corduroy pants, also worn here, that matches perfectly with my *Frye riding boots* I bought at Nordstrom earlier this year. I originally got them for our trip to Ireland, and am glad I can finally bring them back out again. It's been a while since I found the perfect cognac colored flat leather riding boots and this pair is perfect. They also come in a *dark brown and black*. Now that we're definitely into the fall season, we'll be living in boots, so finding a pair that can be worn with most of your wardrobe is key. (*Emphasis* added.) (Engel, 2016b)

Gal Meets Glam never explicitly tells her followers to click on the hyperlinks in her narrative or asks them to purchase the Frye riding boots she adores. Her narrative is not just about purchasing a pair of fall riding boots, but a story of visiting New England, photographing the fall foliage, and time spent at quaint bed and breakfasts. Her narrative just happens to be sprinkled with style tips and affiliate links. In addition, Engel's narrative and imagery is aspirational. The posting is dotted with images of rolling, autumnal hills in Vermont and *Gal Meets Glam* traipsing through leaves wearing shiny new riding boots.

Figure 1. "Riding Boots for Fall," by *Gal Meets Glam*, features idyllic images of her enjoying a vacation in the Vermont countryside.

Figure 2. "Riding Boots for Fall" also features photographs of the rolling autumn hills and changing leaves (Engel, 2016b).

Gal Meets Glam, like many fashion and lifestyle bloggers, disseminates messages that teach others about acceptable behaviors, how to dress, and/or how to live (Giroux, 1994). As the example above illustrates, this is accomplished through a seemingly personalized narrative and approachable style. By telling stories, fashion and lifestyle bloggers like *Gal Meets Glam* articulate to followers what and how to consume. Bloggers, thus, exemplify communicative labor by equating identity and communication with consumption. Engel is one of the most successful influencers on the rewardStyle platform and has become wealthy and successful through the "doing" of online work[13] and performing her identity as the ideal blogger subject. Every part of her life is a workspace and site for performing the branded self. Engel, like many popular bloggers, is a model cultural influencer. She embodies a feminine, commodity-obsessed subject, making her an archetypical can-do girl.

#HowtoBeFeminine: Gendered, Classed Performances of Consumption

Critical communication and cultural studies scholars find that institutional hierarchies influence culture, which ultimately disciplines our behavior(s) (Hall; 1997; Halualani et al., 2009; Martin & Nakayama, 1999). Mainstream media presents fashion and lifestyle bloggers as an ideal female subject that is autonomous, agential, individualized, and empowered (Gill, 2007). This ideal female subject – the influencer – is part of the meaning-making cultural hierarchy.

When we understand culture, we also understand social life, institutional structures, and who we are (Grossberg, 2008). As an extension of accepted mainstream

---

[13] In June 2016, *Gal Meets Glam*'s site received sponsorships from Shopstyle, Luisaviaroma, (Ann Taylor) LOFT, Express, Macy's, L'appel (sunglasses), Old Navy, and J. Crew (Engel, 2016a).

culture and a key player in its hierarchy, fashion and lifestyle bloggers impact the way(s)

women perform gender and class both digitally and in everyday life. A blogger's

performance(s) of femininity instills meaning in digital spaces. Meaning is assembled

through communication and social construction (Hall, 1997; Halualani et al., 2009) and

many popular bloggers act as a template for female consumers. Bloggers perform

accepted feminine representations and behaviors across their branded media platforms.

They use their bodies as tools, most commonly to model clothing. The body of the

modern woman is one of her most important assets, for it is embedded with cultural

understandings of what it means to be a woman and/or to be feminine. The female

blogger's body is informed by dominant discourse and notions of hegemonic

femininity.[14]

Fashion bloggers are situated in a time and space obsessed with consuming

material things, which is one of the hallmarks of womanhood (McRobbie, 2007).

Subjects render their "life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice

and autonomy" (Gill, 2007, p. 154), which translates into consumption. Case in point: the

more followers a blogger has, the more popular they become; the more popular the

blogger, the more money they make. The self-branding approach used by bloggers

reiterates the importance of market freedom in our society. Being an entrepreneur – or

can-do girl – is valued. Encouraging followers (i.e. women) to consume equals success.

---

[14] The notion of *woman* or *femininity* is constructed via cultural distinctions (Thornham, 2007) and aligned with "commodification, standardization, and passivity" (Thornham, 2007, p. 13). Traditional notions of femininity are re-inscribed via hegemonic femininity, found in popular media formats and grounded in material, social, and cultural structures (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McNay, 2000; Rakow, 1989; Thornham, 2007; Tuchman, 1978). Hegemonic femininity, or *emphasized femininity*, acknowledges "the asymmetric position of masculinities and femininities in patriarchal gender order" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848).

Individuals can shop from their iPhones through Instagram and identities can, arguably, be purchased directly from a blogger's stylized photographs. By continually (re)presenting traditional notions of womanhood and gendered identity dependent upon the act of consumption, popular fashion and lifestyle bloggers indoctrinate themselves and their followers into the dominant ideological system that defines what it means to be a woman in today's digital, fluid culture. The most obvious route to success in the commoditized blog space is presented through feminine identity performances. For example, bloggers who portray a highly feminine subject reinforce the importance of cultural norms around female behavior and dress. The highly visible blog space emphasizes the way(s) gendered scripts and performances are part of our everyday life *and* the digital world.

As cultural sites of meaning-making, blogs also signify something larger than a specific brand or trend. Popular influencers create an online persona that is seemingly "living the glam life" (Duffy & Hund, 2015a). The Chloe ballet flats or Chanel handbags that repeatedly appear on bloggers' bodies make a statement about what holds meaning in social and cultural life, helping individuals to define it. Fashion and lifestyle blogs encourage readers to engage in consumption practices to create meaning, at the same time perpetuating the dominant, gender-based assumption that women are born to be consumers, especially of high-end goods. These aspirational items are framed as part of living a happy life. From this perspective, blogs serve as a cultural device – their authors, cultural influencers – for disseminating meaning and highlighting what is valuable or desirable in our society (Guy, 2007). Bloggers demonstrate, through their labor, that anyone can live a glam or aspirational life. However, much of this labor remains invisible

through the lens of "living the good life." Because blogs serve as an instructional, communicative framework for women, a blog site's imagery, narratives, and representations influence culture. Blogs and bloggers communicate how to dress, live, consume, and *be*.

Communicating Across Platforms: Connecting Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging to Communication Studies Research

Fashion and lifestyle blogs repeatedly situate consumption as necessary, as well as part of embodying an ideal female subject. Examining the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon within communication studies considers the socially reproduced representations of womanhood and questions the meaning-making potential in fashion and lifestyle blog texts (Hall, 1997; Hammer & Kellner, 2009). Fashion and lifestyle blogs, as well as social media platforms, have become a new value space in Western Web 2.0 culture, especially for women. Within the fashion and lifestyle blog space, in particular, women are instructed to be can-do girl subjects. Bloggers illustrate this can-do girl through their bodies, turning the corporeal into a neoliberal tool to reproduce an ideal feminine subject. Blog followers are guided to their most fulfilling life through shoes, bags, and trends. Bloggers engage in multiple forms of labor to perpetuate the neoliberal cycle of production and consumption through meaning and material goods.

The rich tapestry of the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere, and its influence on and by consumer culture, highlights a phenomenon ripe for examination within the communication studies discipline. Shining a light on fashion and lifestyle blogs unearths the nuanced details of everyday human experience, those ordinary moments in everyday life that go unquestioned (Husserl, 1982) but are full of meaning and potentiality. Fashion

and lifestyle blogs illuminate the interconnectedness between identity performances, gendered subjectivities, and labor, cultivating meaning for bloggers and their followers through digital representations. Meaning is embedded in the blog and social media space. Following along on a blogger's personal journey impacts not only bloggers themselves, but also their followers.

Stitching the Pieces Together: Chapter Outlines

In Chapter Two, "Fashioning a Methodology of Performance-Based Interviewing and Thematic Narrative Analysis," I provide a detailed explanation of my hybrid methodological approach merging performance-based interviewing techniques and thematic narrative analysis. By combining these approaches, I am able to uncover the way(s) fashion and lifestyle bloggers produce knowledge and meaning within digital spaces. As a scholar, this approach leads to better understanding the blogger subject and performance(s) of identity in the digital realm. I develop a multifaceted methodological approach that allows me to rigorously analyze narratives, images, and interview texts. Engaging with these texts from the perspective of individual blogger experiences, as well as through dominant ideological constructs, crystallizes the data and illustrates nuance in the telling of blogger narratives.

Chapter Three, "Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging as a Communicative Labor (of Love)," investigates the relationship between immaterial, communicative labor of blogging and digital meaning-making in an economy of visibility. I identify the role of authenticity in blogging and explore authenticity's relationship to *technologies of the self 2.0*, my reworking of Foucault's (1984) theory of a technology of the self. I also discuss the role monetization applications play in the world of fashion and lifestyle blogging,

focusing on the rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it tools. The chapter also introduces the reader to the three Denver bloggers interviewed for the dissertation: (1) Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner of *The Middle Closet*; (2) Allison Ruchaber of *Peach & Pepper*; and (3) Lucille Wenegieme of *The Black Velveteen*. I offer insight into the narrative and visual styles of each blogger, including robust examples from the interview sessions, to highlight the communicative labor of blogging.

Chapter Four, "Relational Labor, Performances of Authenticity in a Sponsored Everyday Life, and Blogging Communit(ies)," outlines the impact of relational labor on the fashion and lifestyle blogging industry. Authenticity has been identified as one of the key features of a successful fashion and lifestyle blog. It is key to the relational labor of blogging and helps to establish connection between bloggers and followers, as well as blogger to blogger. I illustrate relational blog work through examples from *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen,* as well as popular influencers *Gal Meets Glam*, *Cupcakes and Cashmere*, and *Sequins and Stripes*. The chapter ends with a discussion of blog communities' reliance on relational and communicative labor to keep the monetized blogging machine racing forward in our constantly changing digital world.

In Chapter Five, "The Affective Labor of Blogging Through Ordinary, Everyday Moments," I explore the final piece of the three-pronged approach to blogging labor: the transmission of affect and affective labor. The affective turn in communication studies informs the analysis, as does Stern's (2010) *Forms of Vitality*. Using vitality and affect to understand fashion and lifestyle blogs uncovers the negotiation of sense-making and ordinary experience(s) in a digital, attention-based economy. I also explore the

interconnectedness between affect, vitality, and excess in social media spaces, specifically Instagram and Instagram Stories.

The final chapter, "Communicating, Connecting, and Relating in the Digital Frontier: Shifting Ordinary, Everyday Life," synthesizes my findings and highlights the connective capacity of communicative, relational, and affective labor in fashion and lifestyle blogging. I dive further into the meaning-making potential of narratives in blog and social media spaces, as well as the pedagogical function of fashion and lifestyle blogs. I reiterate the significance of an ideal blogger subject in the fashion and lifestyle blog ecosystem, where the ever-present can-do girl subjectivity informs the way many women structure their everyday life around and through consumption. I also present alternative narratives that emerged within the interview and analysis process. This includes a critique of the monetized blog space, as well as creating a more inclusive blog environment that values multiple voices and representations. I end the chapter with a discussion of this study's implications for the communication studies discipline and future threads of research around fashion and lifestyle blogging and its communicative function.

Chapter Two: Fashioning a Methodology of Performance-Based Interviewing and

Thematic Narrative Analysis

As I sit outside of Aviano Coffee prepping for this interview, I realize I'm (surprisingly) not as nervous about today's interview with Allison of Peach & Pepper. Perhaps I will begin to feel those familiar butterflies closer to 2:00 pm? There is a chill in the air and the leaves are drifting down from their tall branches all around me. The sound of baristas working just a few feet away wafts out the open windows providing a white noise helping me to prepare and focus. The smell of freshly brewed coffee mingles with the smell of the crushed leaves beneath passerby's feet. I take a deep breath and turn back to my notes and iPad.

There are so many thoughts running through my head, both about today's interview and my methodological choices and, of course, fashion. What will Allison be wearing? Am I dressed fashion-y enough (Probably not)? But today is about being a comfortable and stereotypical researcher -- not someone preoccupied with labels or dressed to impress. Beyond my sartorial choices, I am mulling over some bigger questions: Am I using the right approach to these interviews? Why on earth did I decide to cobble together my own methodology rather than sticking to just one method? I know why – it will lead to more robust and rich research. But my life would be so much easier if I had just stuck to interviews or a specific type of analysis. Although I've never made things easy for myself…

A Crystallization Approach: Multiple Methods for Understanding Fashion and Lifestyle Blogs

Fashion and lifestyle blogs are a relatively new site for communication studies research, yet blogs offer rich texts for examination because their interactive digital communication(s) connect individuals and create meaning. In order to better understand the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon, I approach this project using a mixed methodology that combines performance-based interviewing and thematic narrative analysis. Combining these methods reveals the ways in which bloggers produce knowledge and meaning within the digital frontier of the fashion and lifestyle blog space. These methodologies allow me to rigorously unpack narratives, images, and interview texts while also identifying individual blogger experiences framed within ideology, identity, and subjectivity.

Approaching this work through multiple methodologies results in crystallization, a process which highlights nuance within performances of identity and meaning-making in the digital realm. Crystallization examines the many intersecting parts of a story, from multiple points of view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and a process stemming from the notion of crystals, which "grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions" (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Stories, like crystals, ultimately have multiple sides and ways to be told and understood. In this study, interview narratives and blog and social media content provide multiple angles and interpretations of the same experience, emphasizing that stories have multiple ways of

being told. Blogs and social media platforms are interactive and constantly changing spaces, part of everyday Web 2.0 life. Because of this, the approach to analyzing these spaces should be nimble, nuanced, and multidimensional.

As a long-time reader of fashion and lifestyle blogs, I decided to turn a critical eye to these sites through my doctoral research. I continue to be influenced by bloggers, visiting particular websites for outfit inspiration or to simply look at beautiful, aspirational imagery. Yet the longer I viewed these sites, and the further I traveled into my graduate studies, the more intrigued I became by the performances of identity and subjectivity in these digital spaces. Many bloggers in my daily rotation have, over time, curated a particular identity and narrative style online. These narratives and images tell a story of appropriate feminine behavior as well cultural norms around femininity, womanhood, and communication. Upon reflection, I began to wonder how the narratives and imagery displayed by fashion and lifestyle bloggers impact female readers, especially those not trained in critical cultural or communication studies theory.

With this in mind, I study fashion and lifestyle blogs to better understand the blogger subject and performance of identity in the digital realm. Utilizing elements of performance-based interviews and thematic narrative analysis highlights important aspects of communication and cultural studies work. Specifically, blogger narratives of individual experience(s) are a means to make sense of the material – and immaterial – reality of our cultural and social surroundings (Madison, 2005). Engaging with fashion and lifestyle bloggers to understand digital meaning making and performance of identity allows me to unpack a core sample of bloggers through their individual stories.

Understanding the Influencer: A Field Study

Integrating performance-based interviewing and thematic narrative analysis acknowledges and emphasizes key shared elements within the methods themselves: reflexivity, production of meaning (i.e. truth), and the value of individual experience(s). Approaching data collection and analysis through multiple methods strengthens the research process and highlights the historical, political and material conditions of everyday life that impact the organization of our daily experiences (Hamera, 2006). On their own, these methods lend themselves to full engagement with everyday experience(s). For this study, narratives – both in person and through digital, discursive texts – provide a window into blogger's daily experiences while also speaking to the larger phenomenon and impact of fashion and lifestyle blogging.

In the next section I outline the various steps of my data collection process, including a discussion of performance-based interviewing methods. I then provide a description of thematic narrative analysis and include a step-by-step of my approach to this analytic work. When these two methods are put in conversation with one another, they enable the researcher to use discursive and image-based texts alongside interview narratives to uncover the nuanced, prismatic ways communication exists within digital spaces. I end this chapter with a discussion of the significance of reflexivity in these methodological approaches and within my work.

The Data Collection Process

To adequately collect data for a thorough exploration of the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon, I turn to bloggers themselves as well as my own observations

during interview sessions and data analysis. Using an IRB-approved study plan (Appendix A), I hone in on my core sample by conducting a thorough review and recording of each blogger's website and social media posts to identify key themes and issues within the data. To complement this data, I interviewed three Denver-based fashion and lifestyle bloggers over one to two interview sessions lasting approximately 60-120 minutes each. I also used pre- and post-interview field notes to reflect my own experience in the co-production of knowledge in the interview space. The interviews and textual data from blogs and social media, primarily Instagram, were rounded out with thematic narrative analysis to thoroughly unpack the bloggers' experiences. Using interview texts in symphony with thematic narrative analysis added depth to my understanding of the interactive digital space of the blogosphere, resulting in prismatic, crystallized (Richardson, 2000) results.

Data and observation. I relied on three primary sources of data for this study: (1) narrative and image-based texts from bloggers' websites and Instagram platform; (2) interview recordings and transcripts; and (3) observational field notes. These three sources provide a thorough, multi-perspective approach to understanding individual experiences of fashion and lifestyle blogging.

The first step of the data collection process required collecting narrative data from each blogger's website and Instagram platform. I analyzed each blog's entire history,[15] logging notes and highlighting themes that repeatedly emerged within the blog's images and narratives. The log of each blog posting noted the (1) posting date, (2) title, as well as

---

[15] *The Middle Closet*'s website began September 11, 2014. *Peach & Pepper*'s website began May 31, 2016. *The Black Velveteen*'s website began December 3, 2015.

included the (3) full narrative text, (4) brands featured in the posting, and (5) additional notes. These additional notes included key moments such as (1) incorporation of the monetization application RewardStyle (if applicable), (2) incorporation of social-media monetization application LikeToKnow.It (if applicable), (3) introduction of blog sponsorships or partnerships, and (4) any other moment(s) that seemed particularly noteworthy or tied directly to the original research question of *how do fashion and lifestyle bloggers enact particular subjectivities* and *how is labor displayed in blog and Instagram representations*?

The next step, interviewing, added an additional layer to the analysis process by unpacking individual experiences and providing context through narrative while also speaking directly to culture. The narratives that emerged in the interview sessions articulated the individual blogger's positionality and subjectivity in a nuanced, detail-oriented way (Cordova, 2014). The interview narratives also uncovered the reality experienced by individual people, speaking to those "representations, histories, and longings that came before this moment to make the now more extraordinary" (Madison, 2010, p. 50). Interview texts supplement the narrative and image-based texts in this study, illustrating the significance of context and contingency in the fashion and lifestyle blog space. Reading the narrative texts of blogs and Instagram posts are informative, however the inclusion of interview narratives highlights the intricacies inherent in blogging. For example, the motivation for blogging about certain life moments or discussing particular topics in the blog and social media space may have very different motivations from what the dominant narrative of a particular posting seems to represent.

33

Recruitment of study participants. Three Denver-based fashion and lifestyle bloggers were interviewed for this study. I interviewed each blogger on at least one, but in most cases, two occasions, for a discussion of each bloggers' experience. I connected with local bloggers who are successful but not necessarily household names across the national and international fashion and lifestyle blogosphere. I was interested to meet with and discuss fashion and lifestyle blogging with individual bloggers and the process of negotiating the experiences of blogging in everyday life. Bloggers still exploring their digital identity speaks to the issues I seek to unpack in this study, including performance of identity and approaches to communication within the blog space.

My initial intention was to interview full-time fashion and lifestyle bloggers with whom I share a mutual acquaintance. However, it was difficult to find participants fitting those parameters who were also willing to participate in multiple interview sessions. I widened my search to recruit other part-time bloggers with whom I had a mutual acquaintance, as well as through cold email outreach based on a search of Denver fashion and/or lifestyle bloggers. The three bloggers in this study are part-time fashion and lifestyle bloggers, each choosing to do this outside of their other full-time work or employment. These positions include jobs in the tech sector, the media sector, and motherhood.

The first blogger participant is *The Middle Closet*, a site run by two sisters – Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner. Hailey, Paige, and I share a mutual friend who made the initial connection via email. Hailey and Paige immediately responded and were excited to be interviewed. Their blog includes fashion and lifestyle content with a focus

on mixing high and low fashion. Hailey is a former fashion model and Paige serves as the

site's photographer. The two sisters work together as a team to produce blog content. The

second blogger, Allison Ruchaber of *Peach & Pepper*, has blogged for approximately

two years and created her blog as a marketing tool for her personal clothing brand. I

emailed her directly after reviewing her blog, which was discovered through a Google

search of Denver-based bloggers. Allison was willing to participate, although we

communicated via email several times before scheduling our first interview. The third

blogger, *The Black Velveteen*'s Lucille Wenegieme, was also found via researching local

bloggers through an internet search. Lucille responded to a cold email request for study

participation and was very open to being interviewed. She is a blogger and stylist,

although she is transitioning out of blogging into a new media-based endeavor.

Interview sessions. Upon connecting with the bloggers using an approved

recruitment script (Appendix B), I scheduled the initial in-person interview session via

email. The first interview took place in a mutually agreed upon, convenient location. For

all three bloggers, this was a popular coffee shop.[16] Before beginning the interview

session, each blogger was asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix D). The

interviews were semi-structured (Moreman, 2011) but tended to be organic in nature. I

used a pre-approved set of questions (Appendix C) and whenever possible, I tried to

guide both questions and answers back to issues of identity and digital meaning making.

The interview sessions were recorded using iPad and iPhone voice recording software

---

[16] I was also prepared to find a more private interview space if the interviewee was not comfortable meeting in a public space. This would have been a conference room at the University of Denver or a location suggested by the blogger.

and sent to a transcription services for professional transcription immediately after each interview session.[17] In total, I participated in five interview sessions.

The interview questions draw upon Lofland & Lofland's (1995) notion of guided conversation, starting with a question I developed (Appendix C) while also creating space for open, free conversation. Keeping the interview sessions semi-structured allowed the interviewee(s) to feel comfortable and for conversation to lead where it may. We only moved on to the next question(s) at a time that felt natural. As a co-participant in the interview process, I was committed to work toward deep understanding of the blogger narrative without judgment (Madison, 2005). I openly shared my own experiences and stories during the interviews if the conversation called for this type of participation.

In all interview sessions I utilized performance-based interviewing methods (Denzin, 2001; Ezzy, 2010; Madison, 1993) to engage with bodies in the field, seeking to relate to my participants and acknowledge the process as one of witnessing rather than pure observation (Madison, 2010). Performance-based interviewing is tenuous, relational, and requires mutual investment of participants (Pollock, 2009). The interview process is dialogic and predicated upon trust, disclosure, and rapport. Performance-based interviewing requires negotiation and connection with another person in order to create something together. From the initial email through the final interview session I worked to establish rapport and trust with the interviewees by highlighting our shared interest of fashion and blogging. The bloggers and I had a shared language of high fashion, as well as a "who's who" in the blogosphere and pop culture more generally. I disclosed who I

---

[17] I used a New York City-based transcription service, Transcript Divas, for the transcription of my interview sessions.

am, where I am coming from, and highlighted my own experiences when needed in the interview sessions in order to maintain the established sense of trust and rapport.

Performance-based interviewing extends the objectives of critical cultural studies work and focuses on the contextual and contingent nature of stories, experiences, and history. This approach to interviewing critically informed my methodology in that I considered "the entire communicative encounter as a significant performative encounter worthy of study" (Willink & Shukri, forthcoming). Bakhtinian (1986) theory considers performance-based interviews to be dialogic exchanges, those "layered utterances which are ripe for interpretation" (Willink & Shukri, forthcoming). Interviews are deeply contextual and extend beyond *just* the interpretive (Willink & Shukri, forthcoming). A performative interview approach is also shaped by embodiment, empathy, and Conquergood's (2006) notion of coevalness, where bodies share a common experience in a particular space and time.

Embodiment and empathy. Using an embodied, performance-based interviewing style requires engagement in a dialogic exchange while forging a connection with another person to co-create meaning. Through performance-based interviewing we are connected and fully embodied in the project, where the body serves as "an integral part of the interview process – from preparation, throughout the interview, to data analysis and choices about representation of findings" (Ellingson, 2012, p. 525). As co-participant in the interviews, I am embedded in the final interview product. I attempted to understand the "…interviewee's way of understanding her reality, definition of it, and meaning-making processes… [where] reality is always performed and emotionally embodied"

37

(Ezzy, 2010, p. 168). This required reflexivity and self-awareness (Ezzy, 2010; Finlay, 2012; Madison, 2010), as well as continued connection with the participant.

Empathy is also important to performance-based interviewing for it is key to establishing and maintaining trust (Mallozzi, 2009). Choosing "to attend to [my] empathetic moves [means] choosing to be caught between listening to the participants as well as listening deeply to the privileged and less-than-privileged voices in my head" (Mallozzi, 2009, p. 1048). Interviewing requires "focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of… personal experience… [and] inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" (Ezzy, 2010, p. 168). During the individual interview sessions, I consistently listened to my co-participants while also going back and forth between my own thoughts and interpretations and those of my interviewees. Performance-based interviewing is laborious and requires constant attention and acknowledgement of the contextual nature of the interview space, as well as constant negotiation of the embodied self and reflexive thinking. The narratives that materialize from interviews are embedded in social and cultural contexts. The narrator takes us in, granting access to their personal stories. To foster the relational nature of interviewing I put my body, and myself, into the process.

Coevalness. Another key aspect of performance-based interviewing is the acknowledgement of coevalness - a relational, embodied experience where narrator and interviewer rely on one another to co-produce knowledge and unpack meaning *together* (Conquergood, 2006; Reissman, 2012). As the interviewer, but also co-participant, I was tied to the space, the dialogue, and the interviewee(s). Coevalness requires the

interviewer and interviewee to actively share the same space and time (Conquergood, 2006) and to navigate the interview space and interaction together. Through this lens, "there is no choice about being inside or outside the dialogue. Everyone is part of it, invested with a participant's responsibility for sifting through what he or she has lived" (Pollock, 2009, p. 146). I had to consider important questions throughout the interview interaction, such as "Who speaks?" and "What difference does the speaker make?" while also considering how performances of the past and present shape the historical moment and the subjectivity of the participants (Pollock, 2009). At the same time, I engaged with my own positionality and self-reflexivity in the interview space, since the telling of others' stories is important and, at times, fragile work.

   In-depth, non-performative interviewing approaches. While most of the interviewing process turned to performance-based interviewing methods, I also drew upon Seidman's (2006) three-interview protocol. Seidman's approach offers an in-depth approach to interviewing where "behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives around them" (pp. 16-17). Utilizing Seidman's approach asks questions to uncover specific experiences and histories. This helps the interviewer to understand the way(s) bloggers navigate their everyday life. Seidman's approach also helps parse out the theme of blogging labor, in the blogger's own words. Because the individual bloggers could not commit to more than one or two interview sessions, I utilized key components of Seidman's interview protocol to accommodate the interviewee's schedules. The first and second interview questions (Appendix C) were combined in order to learn as much as possible about the participant's

life history and experiences during our time together. Questioning repeatedly turned to the blogger's experiences leading up to becoming a fashion and lifestyle blogger, as well as their current experience(s).

Throughout the interview sessions I helped my participants reconstruct earlier happenings by continually asking "how?" (Seidman, 2006, p. 21). My questions focused on details of experience within everyday life (Seidman, 2006) in order to examine the present through the bloggers' relationships, community, and communication. During the second interview session, if applicable,[18] I incorporated key aspects of Seidman's third interview protocol. These discussions focused on meaning-making and "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 22). Exploring the interview questions and answers was a co-constitutive process between myself and the interviewee(s), always turning back to the context of individual experiences.

Field notes. I recorded field notes (Goodall, 2000; Sanjek, 1990) before, during, and immediately after the interviews, focusing on my surroundings and general observations of the bloggers' fashion and style. I also recorded my own emotional and intellectual responses to the surroundings and interview dialogue, which was then incorporated into post-interview journaling. These self-reflexive forms of raw data (Sanjek, 1990) included information on my emotion(s); what was seen, heard, smelled, and felt; any sense of affect that was evident in the interview space; and additional thoughts or judgments that arose during the process (Goodall, 2000). In addition, some of

---

[18] Lucille of *The Black Velveteen* was only able to participate in one interview session, which was structured to include components of all three of Seidman's (2006) original interview topics. Despite only meeting for one interview session, Lucille contributed a substantial amount of time and the discussion was rich in both content and open reflection. Her interview session lasted approximately 75 minutes.

the blogger participants were amenable to having their photograph taken after the interview session, which was added to my field notes. Having a visual representation of the interview session and the bloggers' appearance complements my notes and helped to jog my memory in (re)telling stories and describing the interview experience.

Analyzing Stories: Thematic Narrative Analysis

Narrative and the telling of stories has served as the core of many modes of research, especially within the social sciences (Barthes, 1975; Ricoeur, 1981). Narratives are comprised of individual stories, strung together through the event of storytelling as (re)telling and (re)iteration of experience. I turn to narratives because of their capacity to illustrate meaning-making for the storyteller in everyday life. The act of (re)telling a story is often just as important as the story itself (Madison, 1993). Individual narratives are interconnected with ideology and the way a storyteller connects events and experiences within their narratives speaks to the impact and influence of dominant, ideological structures. Narrative storytelling is a social process that helps individuals make sense of the world, create meaning, and orient identity within everyday life. Turning to thematic narrative analysis provides the tools needed to investigate how individual stories interact and coalesce with ideological structures to inform important issues within this study: communication, labor, and power within everyday life.

Utilizing thematic narrative analysis to analyze bloggers' stories illuminates how narratives are meaningful, layered, and contextual. This approach to analysis highlights Freeman's (2015) notion that narratives can be used as "a *method*, a mode of inquiry into the human realm…*theory*, about some aspect of the human condition… [and] in the

context of *practice*, that is, the various human 'doings' that are part of everyday life" (p. 22). (Re)constructing and (re)visiting stories – both in the blog space and in interview sessions – helps individuals understand their experiences, where writing and (re)writing becomes intrinsic to the meaning-making process of everyday life (Bruner, 1987; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Freeman, 2010). The act of revising our experiences through narrative creates "…new contexts by mobilizing and articulating fresh understandings of the world, by altering power relations between peoples, by constituting new practices" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 3). Because narratives are contingent and contextual, asking questions of bloggers and helping them reconstruct their experience(s) through narrative helps illustrate the interconnectedness of ideology, power, and communication.

Thematic narrative analysis does not provide specific steps for analysis beyond collecting, transcribing and identifying themes within the data (Reissman, 2008). The method emphasizes the importance of interpreting themes that develop within different narratives, rather than critiquing the data, while also putting the themes and narratives in conversation with one another (Reissman, 2008). My approach to extracting themes was intuitive and loosely formatted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I extracted themes by calling attention to the repetition and frequency of particular ideas, as well as ideas or concepts that draw out similar thoughts, feelings, opinions, and goals (Buehler Hunter, 2014; Charmaz, 2006). I listened to the interview sessions and read the interview transcripts multiple times before beginning the process of coding and compiling themes. During the

repeated listening and rereading of transcripts I verified that the transcription was correct and made changes to incorrect words or phrasing as needed.

While coding the interview narratives, I noted recurrent themes within the margins so that they could be easily identified. The repeated thematic codes that emerged within the interview texts include: (1) community, (2) connection, (3) a "can-do girl" approach, (4) difference or uniqueness, (5) visibility, (6) communication, (7) authenticity, and (8) the notion of "shifts" (i.e. movement in individual experience or culture more broadly). I re-read the transcripts many times in order to consider the various dimensions and themes within the narratives themselves, in order to work toward data crystallization.

The narratives used in this dissertation either tie directly to my research questions or are representative of key, recurrent themes. I accounted for additional context, reporting on what the interview narrative(s) do not clearly articulate (Reissman, 2008) by incorporating my own personal journaling and field notes. After conducting the initial coding and analysis, I utilized Venn diagrams to identify where the data and themes overlapped, diverged, and created hierarchies (Madison, 2005). Venn diagrams offer a visual representation of similarities and differences in data, using overlapping circles to identify connections between, at times, disparate groups or concepts (Venn diagram, 2012). The process of Venn diagramming helped me to focus on key, repetitive, as well as overlapping themes within the data. Venn diagramming, in combination with thematic narrative analysis, constructed a process of constant reevaluation of the narrative and interview texts, thus crystallizing the data.

Reflexivity and the Researcher

Reflexivity is a cornerstone within communication and cultural studies research (Conquergood, 1991; Finlay, 2012; Hertz, 1997; Rose, 1990; Spry, 2006). Reflexivity requires being critical and active in constructing knowledge, looking through a critical lens "at the process, context, and outcomes of research" (Finlay, 2012, p. 317), lending itself to a rich understanding of the research space and experience. It "requires researchers to take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data" (Finlay, 2012, p. 317), as well as to avoid judgment (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). A reflexive researcher is thoughtful, present, and understanding – important considerations in both handling rhetorical texts and dealing with participant narratives. Throughout this process I avoided reviewing the data too quickly or jumping to conclusion, instead choosing to work slowly through the various texts and remain present and thoughtful during the analysis.

I approached the interviews, in particular, through a reflexive and empathetic lens as a co-participant in the interview space (Conquergood, 1991). I avoided entering the interview space with preconceived notions or judgments on how the bloggers would answer questions or engage in the interviews themselves. I *listened* to the interviewees and their stories carefully during each interview session (Spry, 2006), as well as during the analysis stage of rereading and replaying the interview texts. As a co-participant in this research, I approach the analysis and written work using a self-reflexive voice that is one of "a believable, compelling, self-examining narrator" (Goodall, 2000, p. 23). I also

engaged in field notes and journaling as a way to process and identify my own thoughts, judgments or biases, and reflections.

By focusing on self-reflexivity throughout the various stages of research and analysis, I was able to "turn, bend, or reflect back upon [myself], upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules and other social components" (Conquergood, 1991, p. 188). When examining the interview and narratives of my participants, I recognize their stories are not amorphous or fixed and that individuals continue to grow and change. I, too, occupy a similar space and use self-reflexivity in my own narration of the blogger's stories. I recognize that my presence in the research space, particularly in the interview setting, affects the way bloggers reflect upon their experiences and tell their stories.

Conclusion: Why Analyze Blogs Through a Multidimensional Crystallization Approach?

Understanding individual stories lends itself to understanding larger social and historical discourses that shape our experiences. A critical, cultural approach to interviewing and thematic narrative analysis help unpack the written, visual, and interview texts that unearth key issues within a blogger's experience and performance of identity. Narrative analysis, along with interviews, help to bridge gaps and link experiences, events, and ideas to reproduce stories. Narratives serve as "the proverbial ferry between the abstract and the concrete, between cognition and behavior, and between the symbolic and the material" (Reissman, 2008, p. 16). Through analyzing narratives and blog texts together, stories converge, and the world begins to make sense.

By stitching together textual narratives and themes from each blogger's site and Instagram feed with the narratives that emerged within the interview space, I was able to engage in a thoughtful yet robust analysis of this study's participants. In critical cultural studies, as well as in the broader communication studies field, subjects and power are embedded in the systems and institutions that help to develop our various subjectivities. By combining performance-based interviews and thematic narrative analysis, I approach this project through two significant critical lenses in order to examine individual blogger subjects. The combined methodology allows me to string together moments, interpret these moments, and gain insight into the narrator's experience(s) as situated within larger ideological frameworks. Narratives help individuals understand events, social actors, and who they are (Atkinson & Delamont, 2007), providing insight into the self as well as critical, cultural, and communicative norms.

In turning to a mixed method, I am "better attuned to cultural context, better able to see how this context has been woven into the fabric of both living and telling" (DeFina & Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 6), as well as able to "draw upon the poetic power of language in conveying the ambiguity, messiness, and potential beauty of people's lives" (p. 6). Turning back upon experience(s) and (re)creating them through a co-participant structure helps map constellations of meaning in our individual experiences. This is especially important to the phenomenon of fashion and lifestyle blogging, where bloggers speak to their followers, and to themselves, through narratives, images, and social media captions (Foucault, 1984; Siles, 2012). Blogs permit individuals "to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and

souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (Foucault, 1984, p. 18). This is done through stories, encapsulated in visual and written narratives in both blog and Instagram posts.

Bloggers disclose to their followers what is significant in their lives (Reissman, 2008), as well as the message(s) they want to broadcast to the world. Individual blog posts are small stories, those dynamic and ongoing moments (i.e. slice-of-life narratives) that are also "salient and powerful narrative meaning-making ways in mediated interactions" (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 4). Using narratives in the blog space builds a sense of relational closeness, where followers become invested in bloggers themselves. Digital spaces become a place to learn how to dress, and present methods for performing specific identities while also highlighting aspects of who we are or believe ourselves to be. Because of the meaning-making power of stories, followers of fashion and lifestyle blogs often buy what these bloggers are literally and figuratively selling.

In the next chapter, I introduce the three fashion and lifestyle blogger participants: Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner of *The Middle Closet*, Allison Ruchaber of *Peach & Pepper*, and Lucille Wegenieme of *The Black Velveteen*. In order to better understand the individual blogger experience, I incorporate pieces of each blogger's individual narratives and excerpts from the interview sessions. Learning more about these bloggers offers a glimpse into the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon itself and the unquestioned practices of communicative labor in today's fashion and lifestyle blogosphere. As I demonstrate, fashion and lifestyle blogs are a site for understanding larger cultural and social understandings of identity in a neoliberal, constantly connected culture.

Chapter Three: Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging as a Communicative Labor (of Love)

I sit at the back of Aviano Coffee nervously checking the time on my iPhone and iPad and rereading my printed interview protocol. Between obsessively checking my iPhone, I glance down at my Charlotte Olympia kitty flats, taken out of their beautiful box exactly for this occasion. A woman in line for a double macchiato even pointed to my shoes as I paid for my chai latte, noting their "cool factor." Yet I still wonder: do I look fashionable enough for this initial interview session? Will Hailey and Paige walk in looking glamorous, wondering why I am wearing a simple black dress and high-priced "it girl" shoes?

My iPhone buzzes and I glance down to see a text from Paige. She and Hailey are just getting their coffee. I respond, letting her know I am sitting in the back and look forward to meeting. This initial interview session is during the lunch hour, and we are surrounded by Cherry Creek locals eating luscious French pastries, engaged in conversation interrupted only by the occasional scraping of industrial metal chairs against Aviano's concrete floors. Before I know it, Hailey and Paige walk up to my table looking glamourous yet down to earth. Hailey is tall with rich chestnut hair cascading over her shoulders and a slight frame. She wears a typical fashion blogger ensemble of skinny black jeans, brown suede booties, a blue and white pinstripe cold-shoulder top, and a black quilted Chanel bag. Paige also looks fashionable, although more casual, in

dark skinny jeans, blush pink Superga sneakers, and a floral ruffled tank. She is several inches shorter than her sister, with very dark hair cut into a blunt lob with eye-skimming bangs. When I ask to take their picture, they agree. Both smile and Hailey immediately angles her body and strikes a pose.

Blogging, Branding, and Communicative Labor: The New Digital Frontier

Fashion and lifestyle blogging, when framed as work, becomes just one of the intersecting fragments of an individual blogger's identity. It is a fashionable chapeau worn when needed, which became evident as soon as Hailey Middleton, one of the blogger participants in this study, was asked to have her photo taken. She was camera-ready during the entire first interview session, but when I pulled out my iPhone she instantly knew how to angle her body, tilt her head and smize[19] for the camera. She seamlessly transitioned to being "on," accessing the blogger persona for those few seconds on camera. The shift was momentary but illustrated how the blogger subjectivity is not just part of an identity, but also an embodied form of work.

Fashion and lifestyle blog work is inextricably bound to the body because the blogger's body is essential to their brand. Without their bodies, bloggers would be unable to amass social and financial capital. Through a lens of entrepreneurship, fashion and lifestyle bloggers cultivate a business, using their bodies to sell clothing, accessories, beauty products, and experiences. But bloggers must also be approachable, framed as the can-do girl-next-door. In today's "post-feminist milieu the ideal feminine subject is often

---

[19] Smizing, i.e. "smiling with your eyes" is a term coined by supermodel Tyra Banks during Season 13 of her television show, *America's Next Top Model* (Smize, 2009). Smizing conveys approachability and authenticity; it is even encouraged on the popular professional networking site LinkedIn (Kline, 2014).

understood as precisely not the docile body but rather the 'can-do' girl who is 'flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and self-made and who easily follows non-linear trajectories to fulfillment and success'" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 79). Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are flexible, driven, and use their bodies as a tool. Bloggers model clothing and write personal narratives, to do the invisible, communicative labor of blogging.

Fashion and lifestyle bloggers rely upon the availability and accessibility of digital culture to do their work. Web 2.0 culture has contributed to a shift in how individuals experience their everyday life and work across mediums and platforms. Turning to a screen - small or large, for work or pleasure - throughout the day is Western culture's new norm, where daily interactions occur via digital channels. Through immaterial communicative labor bloggers expand "neoliberal cultural economies and [are] 'part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect'" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 43). Creation of monetary value requires engagement with followers (i.e. consumers) and building a sense of closeness through constant back-and-forth communication. Engaging in this economic and communicative work in the digital frontier – a vast and nebulous realm subject to change at any moment with the newest search algorithm or code – puts bloggers at the nexus of shifting technology, immaterial labor, and meaning-making embodied in both real and digital life.

In order to unpack the space that fashion and lifestyle bloggers inhabit in this new digital frontier, I will first explore the relationship between immaterial, communicative labor of blogging and digital meaning-making in an economy of visibility. Meaning-

making in blog and social media spaces is often achieved through solidifying an authentic self-brand and engaging in what I term *technologies of the self 2.0*, the Web 2.0-version of Foucault's (1984) theory of presenting and maintaining an authentic self. I then turn to a discussion of monetization applications and the ways in which these digital tools help bloggers turn everyday life into a commodity. The latter half of this chapter introduces the three Denver bloggers who participated in this study – *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen* – using narratives from their blogs, social media feeds, and interview sessions to highlight the interconnection between the communicative labor of blogging and meaning-making.

Communicative Labor and Digital Meaning Making

Fashion and lifestyle blogging is a form of immaterial, communicative labor stitching together digital technologies and activities not generally recognized as work (i.e. acts that define cultural standards, fashions, tastes, and norms of consumption) (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Communicative labor, broadly speaking, is both written and spoken cultural production (Dean, 2009; Greene, 2004; Greene, 1998; Hardt & Negri, 1994; Reeves, 2016). This labor is a byproduct of neoliberalism, which regulates individuals into workers (Giroux, 1994). Communicative workers primarily disseminate messages and illustrate appropriate ways to experience emotions (Ahmed, 2009) and live everyday life (Giroux, 1994). In a Web 2.0 world, immaterial products such as ideas, symbols, codes, affects, and images have become valuable commodities (Reeves, 2016) and are embedded in communicative labor. Neoliberal messages, bound to this labor, become rooted in culture through dominant narratives and ideologies. Communication plays a

significant role in building social and cultural networks, making it a form of immaterial labor (Greene, 2004) and a persuasive, pedagogical tool.

As a pedagogical tool, communication and neoliberal messages provide a framework for individuals to construct their identities. This is often accomplished through the frame of capitalism. For example, popular culture illustrates happiness as attainable through material goods. Aspirational lifestyles and material *things* are the benchmark of living a happy (neoliberal) life. Female fashion and lifestyle bloggers are touted as *influencers*; as influencers, these women (laborers) provide narrative and image-based proof of happiness as a byproduct of an aspirational, material lifestyle: artfully styled living rooms, extravagant shopping excursions, artfully plated food, and Instagram-worthy lattes. Blogger messaging serves the interest of the economy. As can-do girl subjects, fashion and lifestyle bloggers communicate the neoliberal message that what connects individuals is consumption. In immaterial labor, "… products are themselves, in many respects, immediately social and common. Producing communication, affective relationships, and knowledges, in contrast to cars and typewriters, can directly expand the realm of what we share in common" (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 114). In Web 2.0 culture, our understanding of commodities includes ideas and symbols, as well as material goods. We "become common" (Hardt & Negri, 2005) through our shared experiences around consumption.

Despite a shift to immaterial labor, there is still a need to produce material goods in Web 2.0 culture – the cars and the computers – even though everyday life has been digitized (Greene, 2004). Communicative labor prescribes social and cultural norms and

52

behaviors, and in the digital frontier messaging must use immaterial digital spaces to produce meaning and a sense of connection through a common goal of purchasing material things. For example, influencer messaging around appropriate feminine behavior appear in advertisements, blogs, magazines, social media channels, and brand cultures/identities. This communicative labor encourages individuals to cultivate an identity that fits within neoliberal parameters - through consumption. This is easily done through monetization applications that allow users to "like" an Instagram photo and immediately connect to a digital marketplace to purchase items curated specifically by a fashion and lifestyle blogger.

Communicative labor through blogger messaging also helps individuals identify particular subjectivities. In the case of female influencers, this ideal subject is a modern can-do girl. The can-do girl subject embodies neoliberal ideals around consumption. Bloggers live as can-do girls, pushing the notion that identities and happiness should revolve around bettering oneself via consumption. We are, after all, what we consume. These women appear nimble and driven, aligning themselves with market demands and trends. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers' messaging consistently emphasize the newest covetable cold-shoulder top or link to purchasable clothing, beauty, and home goods. By absorbing these messages subconsciously and engaging with bloggers, followers validate capitalist notions and help reproduce the production/consumption cycle.

Blogging is, in the end, a job. However, this is not always apparent at first glance. Western culture's widespread acceptance of self-branding – a form of communicative labor – means individuals become sellable, fluid, and fragmented (Banet-Weiser, 2012;

Hearn, 2008). Self-branding is bound not only to the items bloggers attempt to sell via their various digital channels, but also contributes to immaterial ideals that are consumed via blogs and through social media applications. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers feature actual clothing and accessories in outfit posts and on Instagram, yet these bloggers are also marketing the immaterial: their self-brand and an aspirational lifestyle. Self-brands are foundational to what is considered a product in today's political economy (Banet-Weiser, 2012) and has blurred the line between traditional products and people as brands. In a world of bloggers and influencers, the bloggers themselves become the product and must know their brand in order to be successful. Social and cultural norms dictate the importance of self-brands, which are easily created and replicated through digital channels, communicative labor, and illustrated through meticulous, beautiful lifestyle photos and narratives.

Harnessing a self-brand. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers perform specific identities and embody subjectivities as a form of work in their everyday lives through self-branding. Bloggers generally classify themselves as entrepreneurs, but many of these women fundamentally labor for large retailers, impacting the way(s) bloggers communicate with their followers, the blogger community at large, and themselves. Fashion and lifestyle blogs hinge upon a strong and authentic self-brand because this ultimately represents an individual's taste (Pham, 2015) and "communicates a personal style of dress as well as a style of identity and of life" (p. 3). While bloggers sell specific clothing items, they also sell their identity and lifestyle. Blogging practices become a form of taste practice which produces value around cultural, social, and economic capital

54

at both the micro (i.e. blogger) and macro (i.e. fashion industry) level (Pham, 2015). At the same time, bloggers are located in particular social contexts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) where cultural capital is embodied and ingrained due to life experiences, habits, and skills. These social contexts, as well as embodied cultural capital, reproduce a cultural milieu that helps sustain tastes and the need for blogging – and consuming – more generally.

Blogging practices and self-branding in a constantly connected Web 2.0 culture creates a space where bloggers become *aspirational laborers* in addition to communicative laborers. They are enabled by digital activities that provide participants with social and economic capital while also ensuring "female content creators remain immersed in the public circulation of commodities" (Duffy, 2015, p. 60). Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are aspirational laborers because they "seek to mark themselves as creative producers who will one day be compensated for their craft—either directly or through employment in the culture industries" (Duffy, 2015, p. 50). Today's successful fashion and lifestyle bloggers are often recognized and compensated, but the consumption and promotion "of feminine commodities confines them to a system of patriarchal capitalism where gender and consumerism remain inextricably bound" (Duffy, 2015, p. 50). These influencers are a digital, fashionable, shrouded version of the traditional salesperson. Pham (2105) argues that bloggers use monetization applications via *free taste labor* to cultivate media and publicity, build consumer interest, and cultivate relationships through narrative and trust in the blog space. Top bloggers or influencers - what Pham terms *superbloggers* - "economize readers' activities by turning

their consumption of the blog and their admiration and emulation of the superblogger's taste into cultural, social and financial capital" (p. 6), which manifests in clicking on embedded affiliate links in the blog and liking photos on the blogger's Instagram feed.

While I agree with aspects of Duffy and Pham's findings, individual bloggers' stories illustrate nuance and active negotiation of the blogger subject and its association to neoliberal labor. The bloggers interviewed for this study understand their blogs are a business, but they are also cognizant of the types of images they produce across platforms. For example, Allison of *Peach & Pepper* will not promote or sell alcohol, lingerie or bikinis through her blog or social media because, "For me personally, it's not my thing… I think about what I'm saying and how somebody could misinterpret it or something… I think a lot about what I'm saying and the pictures I'm putting out" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017). Allison promotes consumption through her online presence but also thinks about whether or not the narratives and images she publishes – and capitalizes on – are consistent with her identity as a Christian, mother, and wife. She engages with communicative labor, but it must be in line with her personal values. Despite this thoughtfulness, consumption remains a hallmark of femininity and is widespread in the blog space. The bloggers that participated in this study consider their blog and Instagram accounts an outlet for finding and using their voice. However, these digital spaces also happen to produce economic, social, and cultural capital.

Technologies of the self 2.0. Building and sustaining a self-brand through blogging requires engagement, use of one's voice, and self-reflexivity. For fashion and

lifestyle bloggers, it also requires a strong connection with followers to maintain a site's viewership and the bloggers' visibility. In many ways the communicative aspects of blogging are not just between blogger and viewers, but also with the self. Foucault's (1984) notion of a *technology of the self* relies upon "a 'social relationship' with oneself, one of innovation, production, and consumption, charged with ideally producing a unique, 'authentic' self" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 73). Producing and maintaining a unique and authentic self is laborious. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers employ this form of communicative labor to be successful, which is illustrated through visibility and acceptance by the blog community and followers.

While some scholars do not consider fashion blogs to be *technologies of the self* within Foucault's original context (Duffy, 2015), I argue blogs are a modern interpretation of a *technology of the self*. In blogging and branding, the *technology of the self* revolves around "explaining oneself to the users – audiences, viewers, peers – who view and evaluate the self-brand, so that self-presentation is a dynamic between production and consumption, between the individual and the culture at large" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 73). When applied to individual bloggers as brands, the blog narrative, for example, becomes a space where turning to authenticity and voice not only helps the blogger work on themselves, but also helps them connect with followers to market and maintain their self-brand. Blogs become a communicative tool for women to "put [themselves] out there" (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2015). As a *technology of the self 2.0*, blogs allow the author to explore their brand identity and produce content for

followers to consume. This work is bound to feminine commodity culture (Duffy, 2015) and includes commodifying one's identity and self-brand for continued business success.

A *technology of the self 2.0* provides space for bloggers to perform subjectivity intrinsic to their success. Immaterial, communicative labor in the blogosphere relies upon the can-do girl subjectivity as it is bound to consumption. Duffy (2015) identifies this performed subjectivity as part of a larger blogging myth of collaboration, where the immaterial labor of fashion and/or lifestyle bloggers via sponsorships, affiliate links, and free products allows commercial brands to market inexpensively using personal information offered freely in blog narratives. Bloggers create digital brand communities, which become marketing niches. The blogger subject then serves as the definitive marketer for social sharing communities such as Instagram (Duffy, 2013; Van Dijck & Nieborg, 2009). What often starts as a creative passion project evolves into potential means for future employment and sponsorship opportunities (Duffy, 2015; Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013). The blog space is no longer just a creative outlet, but a space where bloggers communicate messages and perform a subjectivity that perpetuates a digital, gendered, and curated labor market.

Blogging in an economy of visibility. A contemporary economy of visibility structures our everyday experiences through media representations and cultural and economic practices, pushing beyond *just* making political categories such as gender or race visible (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Gray, 2012). In an economy of visibility, the body becomes paramount to larger structures of power, especially in terms of gender and its relationship to law, policy, and discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2013). Women and girls have

long been studied through a lens of the male gaze (Mulvey, 2009; Wolff, 1997) and as visual objects on and for display (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Projansky, 2014). The female body holds value and is continually assessed through its visibility, with the can-do girl subject at the forefront (Harris, 2004). Through creating, cultivating and maintaining a self-brand, female fashion and lifestyle bloggers are subjected to "a layered process of judging, assessment, and valuation taking place in a media economy of visibility" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 87). This manifests in a Web 2.0 economy of visibility through *technologies of the self 2.0* across digital media platforms.

The digital economy of visibility is situated around the physical body as well as immaterial forms of labor. This includes the ways individuals communicate messages, maintain relationships, and transmit affect (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Baym, 2015). The combination of blogger bodies and communicative labor, in particular, illustrates the relationship between communication, identity formation, and consumption. Physical bodies model clothes and circulate affect in the blog space. They also communicate messages that produce identities bound to the capitalist notion of consumption. Once cannot exist without the other in an economy of visibility.

Monetization of Everyday Life: rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it

The internet is overpopulated with instructional guides for creating and leveraging a fashion and lifestyle blog and/or self-brand. In an online article titled "How to Make Money Blogging," aspiring bloggers are advised to create an online presence that is "sleek, stylish, and reputable" (Blalock, 2014) and to cultivate a marketable personal brand that attracts other brands and retailers. Bloggers strategically manage relationships

and communicate through socially mediated, branded performances of the self (Duffy, 2015; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013). If individual fashion and lifestyle bloggers are successful in these practices, spaces open for both communicative labor and digital meaning-making.

In recent years there has been a democratization of the fashion industry (Brown, 2011; Givhan, 2007; Menkes, 2013) illustrated by the front rows of top fashion designers' bi-yearly shows (King, 2009; Wells, 2008; Wilson, 2009). These front rows used to be reserved only for the top fashion magazine editors. Today, those seats are filled primarily by influencers. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers have become (mostly) accepted participants in the fashion mainstream. Today's popular bloggers have harnessed the momentum of blogging as a cultural institution and channeled it into a flexible and fashionable workspace. Fashion and lifestyle blogging is an invisible labor (Ong, 2006: Pham, 2015) that bleeds into the blogger's personal life in a never-ending cycle of work masked as play. This has been made possible by monetization applications, which put tracking purchases and engaging with different platforms at the blogger's fingertips. Smartphones, backup mobile batteries, and superfluous Wi-Fi connections means that everywhere the blogger goes becomes a workspace. A blogger's labor is not viewed as labor – it is seen as engaging with followers, even if that means the blogger is posting Instagram Stories at all hours of the day and constantly checking the number of likes on a particular online post. Bloggers employ communicative labor by engaging with followers, highlighting consumption, and connecting with others day and night. In a neoliberal capitalist society, the communicative work of a can-do girl never ends.

rewardStyle. With the introduction of rewardStyle in 2011, the landscape of fashion and lifestyle blogging and its cultural significance expanded exponentially. rewardStyle recruits individual retailers and its founders – Amber Venz Box and Baxter Box – stress the significance and value in bloggers creating content across media platforms and their role as cultural tastemakers. rewardStyle works with hundreds of brands including Net-a-Porter.com, Target, J. Crew, Sephora, Nordstrom, West Elm, YSL, and Kate Spade. It considers itself "the only platform that measures and monetizes the influence of content on a global scale, across owned and social channels, powering influencer compensation that is in-step with true brand and retail influence" (rewardStyle, 2018).

rewardStyle offers bloggers and influencers resources for navigating the blogosphere and growing their business in order "to maximize economic success across web, mobile, and social platforms." This suite of services includes publishing channels for creating and distributing content as well as tracking technology for content monetization across platforms; end-to-end monetization with over 4,000 retailers and one million worldwide brands for collaborations and sponsorship; strategic consulting to turn one's blog into a global business;[20] ongoing education and training, including access to resources such as historical branding performance data and information on engaging with audiences and navigating particular events such as the annual Nordstrom Sale; and business alignment with the established rewardStyle brand and the benefits of "peer-to-peer relationships that are nurtured within the highly-vetted rewardStyle professional

---

[20] rewardStyle bloggers and influencers are four times more likely to be economically successful as they were in 2012 (rewardStyle, 2018).

network" (Influencers, 2018). The foundation of rewardStyle and other monetization applications is built upon communicative labor in service of capitalist markets.

LIKEtoKNOW.it. The LIKEtoKNOW.it platform, launched by rewardStyle in March 2017, revolutionized the way consumers and brands connect and shop via social content on the Instagram platform, especially for users aged 18-34.[21] The app "enables retailers to generate and track sales across channels globally, helps influencers to monetize their social media posts and enables customers to shop content they discover through social which has traditionally been difficult to do" (Ganatra, 2018). LIKEtoKNOW.it serves as a "consumer-facing, ready-to-shop content platform, making beautiful and original influencer content actionable for millions of socially-inspired shoppers worldwide" (rewardStyle, 2018). When a consumer signs up for LIKEtoKNOW.it they are provided a quick and seamless way to purchase items discovered across social media platforms. It enables consumers to shop "style inspiration from the top global influencers, curated by [the user] and ready-to-shop when [the user is]" (LIKEtoKNOW.it, 2018). As rewardStyle's Executive Vice President of Operations, Dave Murray, notes, "We're effectively providing a mobile proposition for consumers to purchase items that they have discovered across different platforms in a seamless and user-friendly way" (Ganatra, 2018).

As of March 2018, LIKEtoKNOW.it had 1.3 million registered users on their mobile app; 2.3 million Instagram followers; $210 million in sales to retailer partners; over 1,000 original pieces of content published daily; and over 20 million emails

---

[21] The LIKEtoKNOW.it site notes that 75% of their users are between ages 18-34 (LIKEtoKNOW.it, 2018).

delivered monthly (Ganatra, 2018; LIKEtoKNOW.it, 2018). The application has "redirected the style publishing industry and contributed to the professionalization and financial independence of thousands of influencers worldwide, enabling them to earn meaningful revenue on their digital content" (rewardStyle, 2018). By partnering with Instagram, LIKEtoKNOW.it has made photo shoots a part of everyday life - city sidewalks or the cobblestone streets of New York's meatpacking district are the new runway. Sharing these fashionable moments - and making a profit - is as easy as a few simple taps on a blogger's iPhone.

The process of consumption via LIKEtoKNOW.it is straightforward and seamless. If one of the fashion and lifestyle bloggers a user follows on Instagram posts a photo and tags it #liketoknowit, the consumption process is triggered by "liking" the photo. If signed up for LIKEtoKNOW.it, within a few minutes the user receives an email with direct links to purchase items the blogger is wearing in their Instagram photo as well as additional items the blogger recommends. Users can also follow the LIKEtoKNOW.it Instagram account, gaining access to thousands of influencers the company highlights by reposting images by rewardStyle-affiliated bloggers. These images are both appealing and feature items that will sell well. If LIKEtoKNOW.it features a particular blogger in their feed, the number of likes and followers for the individual blogger spikes, according to *The Middle Closet* bloggers Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner. For example, on average *The Middle Closet*'s Instagram outfit posts garner between 300 and 800 likes. When their posts have been featured by LIKEtoKNOW.it's account, the likes jump to well over 1,000. On the blogger side, LIKEtoKNOW.it offers a tool to track purchases

and followers. For retailers, LIKEtoKNOW.it has a similar function for tracking

purchases and providing market research on potential customers engaging with a brand at

all levels.

LIKEtoKNOW.it has also provided a platform for retailers to utilize the labor of

bloggers to manage consumer brand relationships via social media content from the first

"like" to the end purchase. As a mobile tool, LIKEtoKNOW.it is quite powerful[22] as it

creates space for "the customer [to interact] with [a retailer's] store/app with purchase

intent with the potential to drive more customer retention for retailers in the medium to

long-term" (Ganatra, 2018). Influencers and bloggers become a marketer working

digitally for large brands and communicating neoliberal messaging to the masses. The

innovation of LIKEtoKNOW.it lies in its ability to turn mobile social content and

customer screenshots into a direct and digital marketplace (Ganatra, 2018). During a

2016 SXSW presentation on branding and marketing in the digital realm, Venz Box

highlighted that,

> Consumers are increasingly craving relatable content to guide their purchases, and
> they look to social media and digital creators for their inspiration. A retailer's
> relationship with those content creators, who have the power to reach consumers
> and make real connections, is a crucial part of getting their message heard by the
> right audience. (Digital Marketing in the Age of Influencers, 2016)

Digital influencers and bloggers are a "pillar in key marketing strategies that shape

consumer engagement and brand royalty" (Digital Marketing in the Age of Influencers,

---

[22] As Ganatra (2018) discusses in her *Forbes* piece, rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it drive influencer
sales for fashion and lifestyle retailers. For example, four out of five Nordstrom.com mobile web visits in
2017 resulted from referral traffic driven by influencers, with 79% of those visits resulting from
rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it. rewardStyle also drives referral traffic to Revolve.com (34%), Net-a-
Porter.com (30.83%), and Shopbop.com (24%).

2016). Because of the frequency of blogger communicative labor, as well as affective and/or relational engagement, consumers identify with bloggers they either aspire to be or who reflect parts of themselves. Through communicative labor fashion and lifestyle bloggers serve as sales staff framed as the girl next door or your friend from yoga class who always wears the cutest Lululemon and Nike swoosh-adorned outfits.

An additional layer of complexity in this marketing approach is the interconnectedness of the bloggers' self-brand in relation to other established marketplace brands. Bloggers must negotiate staying true to their self-brand and cementing it in the virtual space while also promoting other retail brands for profit. This is appealing because LIKEtoKNOW.it offers bloggers a commission on all sales made through the app or the #liketoknowit hashtag, ranging from 5 to 20 percent. Bloggers and retailers both benefit from the relationship, however bloggers engage in the most labor. Their labor cuts across consumer industries – women's and men's fashion, the "mommy" industry, beauty, and home goods. A bloggers' communicative work provides the most revenue and approaches the sales process relationally, like sharing advice with one's best girlfriend about the cute dress she saw that would look *amazing* with your favorite pair of strappy sandals. Narratives in the blog space mask the subtle marketing of goods because users feel as though they know the bloggers, trusting their judgment because the communicative channels always appear open and inviting. This leaves the critical questions about the power embedded in this marketing unasked.

In the next section I introduce the three blogger participants of this dissertation: *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen*. I also address key issues

65

and themes that emerged in the research and analysis process. This includes the way communicative labor is threaded throughout the standardized can-do blogger narrative, where a proven formula for successful blogging is rooted in a palatable yet authentic self-brand. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers spend their days engaging in constant communicative work – for themselves and their followers – to remain relevant, visible, and marketable. The three blogger participants each offer a different approach to negotiating the work of blogging, branding, and performing identity.

Welcome to the Blogosphere: Examining Communicative Labor and Branding Through Three Denver Bloggers

In order to better understand fashion and lifestyle blogging as a business, as well as an influence on identity and subjectivity, I examine blogs through the stories of bloggers themselves. Blog images and narratives are telling in their own right, however I want to better understand the nuance(s) of digital meaning making, identity performance, and the communicative labor of blogging in Web 2.0 culture. Throughout this section I illustrate these key components of fashion and lifestyle blogging through the stories of three blogs and their narrators: *The Middle Closet* (Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner), *Peach & Pepper* (Allison Ruchaber), and *The Black Velveteen* (Lucille Wenegieme). I explore how these bloggers establish and market their self-brands and the can-do girl subjectivity female fashion and lifestyle bloggers are known for, as well as the normalization of consumption that is threaded throughout their stories. I also examine the role *technologies of the self 2.0* play for these bloggers, to varying degrees. Each blogger offers insight into the negotiation of blogging and identity that is validated through

66

economic and social capital. The communicative labor of *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen* offers an interesting dimension of analysis for the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon as a whole.

The Middle Closet

Figure 3. Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner, as featured on their "Who We Are" website page (Middleton & Kushner, 2017a).

The Middle Closet was established in September 2014 by two sisters – Hailey Middleton and Paige Kushner. Their namesake, Middleton, inspired the blog name, as well as the fact they often share clothes and both love fashion. I was first connected to Hailey and Paige through a mutual friend at the University of Denver who has known the two sisters since they were all undergraduate students. While I had not heard of their blog prior to this dissertation, when I searched for *The Middle Closet* and came upon their minimalist, stylized website, I was pleasantly surprised. Here was a young, fashionable

woman – Hailey serves as the blog's model – whose blog reminded me of sites run by

urban, popular, in-the-know bloggers. Yet many outfit posts featured heartfelt, slightly

tongue-in-cheek narratives that instantly drew me in as a reader.

A fashion and lifestyle blog run by two sisters is unique in the blogosphere and

provides an interesting dynamic on their site. Hailey serves as *The Middle Closet*'s model

and brand image while Paige handles photography and back-end logistics. According to

their website bio section,

> *Hailey* Middleton is the co-founder, visionary and 'face' behind The Middle
> Closet. She is a former fashion runway model for high fashion designers and
> brands. She has always had a passion for all things style-related, one of the many
> things she and Paige have in common. Hailey studied finance then quickly found
> herself interested in the technology space. She has both beauty and brains; Hailey
> works full time for an industry leading software company. Hailey's sister, *Paige*,
> is the curator of the blog, wife and mom of 2. She has a finance background, but
> has re-emerged as a professional photographer, with an emphasis on street style
> photography. The Middle Closet successfully bridges high end brands with more
> moderately priced pieces, emphasizing clothing that is versatile and timeless.
> Even the most inexpensive blouse can far surpass it's price tag in style with the
> right pairings. The result is content that is relate-able to the everyday woman,
> simple to purchase and easy to recreate. (Middleton & Kushner, 2017a)

Hailey and Paige clearly outline who they are and what their site sets out to do. Their site

imagery and narratives reflect who they are, but the sisters do not shy away from

acknowledging this space as something more than a creative passion project through the

use of words like "content" and acknowledging the ability to purchase items through the

site's outfit posts or Instagram photos. *The Middle Closet* has built a brand culture from

the beginning, weaving their brand throughout outfit posts, individual narratives, and

Instagram photos. Hailey and Paige have a brand story and they're sticking to it.

A brand story. Hailey explains that the sisters **"**strive for is a classic look" with their style. She continues,

> …we talk a lot about investing in pieces that may cost more, obviously, because it
> is an investment that's going to last you for years – like handbags, shoes, coats –
> the pieces you know will be the timeless ones. But then also mixing in the high
> street fashion. So what is that trend of the year or the trend of the season? And
> then being able to mix and match the under $100 piece. You don't have to spend
> thousands of dollars on everything that you own, but there are some pieces that
> we do say…. To invest in. (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13,
> 2017)

The Middle Closet considers itself a blog focused on classic, fashionable items with a sprinkling of trends for good measure. When asked about their personal brand, *The Middle Closet* (as well as the other two blogger participants in this study) described the brand as though it were a person, in part because blogs are the product of a *self*-brand. This exemplifies Kaputa's (2012) notion that, "In many ways, brands are like people. They have qualities, attributes, and personalities. And people are like brands. They are products that can be nurtured and cultivated to become winning brands" (p. xvi). Before launching the blog Hailey and Paige spent six months researching the business of blogging. They approached *The Middle Closet* as a business from the beginning, cultivating their brand and market niche before launching the site.

The Middleton sisters acknowledge blogging as a form of work, with sponsorships and free clothes simply a bonus. They are concerned with selling – as the

text above notes, they advise readers on what to buy, what to avoid, and what to invest in as classic closet staples. While there have been several sponsorships during the history of *The Middle Closet*, during our initial interview Hailey and Paige highlighted several key partnerships: La Mer, a high-end classic beauty company; Goldyn, a local upmarket shop carrying niche designers and brands; and ChicWish, a Chinese company whose trendy clothes are inexpensive but well-made (and also proliferate the blogosphere). *The Middle Closet* garners approximately 7,000 page views per month and 5,000 unique website visitors. Hailey and Paige proudly note that they do not buy followers or Instagram "likes," which has become normative in the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere.

Hailey and Paige want their blog – and brand – to be approachable. I was quite nervous to meet Hailey and Paige – Hailey, in particular – because the photos on the blog often feature Hailey posing with a reserved, at times severe, countenance. Yet in chatting with Hailey over two interview sessions, I learned she is approachable as well as warm and personable. Hailey truly cares about the blog and the work she puts into it. *The Middle Closet* is a second job, one she often spends 50 hours per week on, creating content and developing partnerships with large brands and retailers outside of her nine-to-five job at a technology firm. During both interview sessions, the significance of communicative labor and hard work, more generally, was threaded throughout the discussion. Laboring is a significant aspect of her everyday life.

Labor, communication, and everyday life. The importance of labor is woven throughout Hailey and Paige's interview narratives: Hailey was a ballet dancer at a young age, then worked as a runway model. She has a full-time job and also runs *The Middle*

Closet's blog and social media sites. Paige initially handled the back-end of the blog and collaborations but has since moved to only handling the site's photography and brainstorming content with Hailey. She has three children and has also launched her own photography business. Despite having established their blog and brand several years ago, keeping *The Middle Closet* visible and relevant is a job in and of itself. The role Instagram plays in branding and blogging in an economy of visibility can make or break a blogger. Paige noted during our first interview, "Social media – managing Instagram in itself is a 100 percent, I would say, six to eight hour a day job; just engaging and trying to grow it – it is. It's so much time" (P. Kushner, personal communication, June 13, 2017). Hailey also acknowledged the impact of social media on the work of blogging, where being engaged and active is vital to success: "You have to be active because if you're not… I've taken a week off before, because I was at a conference. You instantly see how it affects how you are interacting with other people and how they interact with you" (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017). The Instagram platform highlights the significance of communicative labor in fashion and lifestyle blogging – posting multiple times per day and maintaining one's narrative and visibility almost always ensures success. Without constant engagement and communication with followers, a blogger can quickly lose the social and cultural capital that accompanies visibility.

As a business, fashion and lifestyle blogging is about numbers. It is about the number of likes on an Instagram post or the number of unique visits to *The Middle Closet* site. Hailey and Paige note the blog is "who [they] are" and ultimately they want to drive followers to the blog itself. For Hailey and Paige, there is clear understanding of blogging

71

as a venture and the interconnectedness of blog outfit posts, social media platforms, and a curated presentation of self that builds a brand and ties into a larger business plan. Through blog narratives, self-presentation, and self-care via *technologies of the self 2.0*, bloggers like Hailey and Paige remain visible and engaged through communicative messaging while also exploring who they are in digital spaces.

The personal *is* sellable. *The Middle Closet* found that turning to a personal narrative style of writing is helpful at the individual level – i.e. a *technology of the self 2.0* – and also at a business level, building blogger and follower community engagement in addition to profit and viewership. Hailey was reluctant to write about personal experiences on the blog, but Paige pushed her to do so when she was navigating a difficult time in her life. While writing a personal narrative began as a method for exploring a difficult time as well as the happenings of everyday life, it also impacted the way followers interact with *The Middle Closet* across digital platforms. During our first interview session Paige noted, "I pushed her to [write personal narratives], because we noticed that anytime you would post something that was more personal, the number of visits to the site would spike. It was indicative of a personal post. So people really responded to that" (P. Kushner, personal communication, June 13, 2017). Visibility and engagement equates to status and social capital, thus keeping *The Middle Closet*'s brand marketable (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Marwick, 2013). The initial goal of writing in her own voice may not have been to spike traffic to their website, but that was the result proven by the number of visitors and sales. Using her personal voice across *The Middle Closet*'s platforms is now the norm for Hailey.

While the blogging process was fairly organic for Hailey, many how-to guides for new fashion and/or lifestyle bloggers instruct women to find a specific voice or create a unique niche in the marketplace. As Blalock (2014) notes, "With thousands upon thousands of people starting fashion blogs every day – most of which have never had any formal editorial or journalistic training and all have great clothes – how can you possibly stand out from the well-heeled crowd?" Blogs rarely remain a space for personal reflection on style with a few hundred readers, instead becoming a new workspace and communicative platform (Pham, 2015). Fashion and lifestyle blogs are marketed as not just a space for talking about one's love of clothes, but as a business dependent upon having a unique, authentic voice. The blogger's voice draws readers in, maintaining and/or growing readership and distinguishability in the market. This is imperative in a digital space with thousands of bloggers vying for readers' attention. While there is room for all of these bloggers in the marketplace there is still a sense of competition since the most popular and visible bloggers will reap the highest benefits and revenues. For example, there are over 11,000 individual bloggers and influencers utilizing the rewardStyle platform alone (Influencers, 2018). In order to stand out, a blogger needs to effectively communicate their authentic, easily identifiable brand and voice.

Two for one: selling stories and shopping. If fashion and lifestyle blogs are about creating a connection with followers while also selling material goods and immaterial notions, telling stories and welcoming readers into a blogger's daily life is the most direct method to accomplishing both. In May 2017, Hailey posted a narrative and

set of photos highlighting a floral off-the-shoulder maxi dress. She explored the virtues of

maxi dresses and noted to followers,

> …one of my favorite things about spring is that I can wear my maxi dresses.
> Whether it's to fun parties like the one I went to this weekend or out for brunch
> with friends, they are so comfy and easy to wear. This one is a new favorite of
> mine! The print is amazing and I love the easy off the shoulder cut with higher
> slits. I've linked a few others below, make sure to get them before they sell out!
> Have the best day! (Middleton & Kushner, 2017b)

Hailey's narrative featured musings on the difficulty of Mondays and a discussion of her

weekend attending a "barn party" at the Denver polo grounds. She explained the

excitement of meeting new people and getting out of her standard routine followed by a

discussion of the merit of maxi dresses. Underneath the narrative was a section titled

"Shop the Post":

Figure 4. A screen shot of the "Shop the Post" feature on *The Middle Closet* website,
accompanying the "Back to Monday" blog entry (Middleton & Kushner, 2017b).

"Shop the Post" (and similar featured sections) are commonplace in fashion and lifestyle

blogs. In this instance, *The Middle Closet*'s "Shop the Post" featured links to both the

items Hailey wears in the accompanying photos as well as other items that might be of

interest to followers. Hailey includes links to her exact Flynn Skype maxi dress – retailed

at $187 - and other maxi dresses followers might like. She also offers links to shoes similar to the Vince espadrilles worn in the photos, which were no longer available at the time of posting.

As has already been established, fashion and lifestyle blogging is a business for most bloggers, especially those using a monetization application. In order to make profits a blog must receive sponsorships, charge for site advertising, or earn commissions. While the "Back to Mondays" narrative does not explicitly tell the reader to buy a maxi dress for the summer months, the dress is framed as versatile, feminine, and an easy closet staple. The post illustrates the repeated narrative of women needing to shop. For example, I already own several maxi dresses. But after reading Hailey's narrative and viewing the beautiful images I wondered if I needed to purchase another dress for my collection. Fashion and lifestyle blogging is a gendered form of communicative labor reinforcing the notion that women are "born to shop" (Buehler Hunter, 2014). In the case of "Back to Mondays" we see a combination of a blogger's voice and body laboring in an economy of visibility. The products being sold in this post includes the maxi dress Hailey is wearing, her barn party experience, as well as her own body in an economy where consumers are also the products (Banet-Weiser, 2015).

All women seem to have the potential to be can-do girls. *The Middle Closet* demonstrates this, as do countless guides to becoming a blogger. Women should be can-do girl subjects and the easiest and most successful route to do so is often framed through blogging. In the interview sessions, however, I learned blogging is difficult and time-consuming communicative work. The messaging bloggers broadcast serves as a form of

communicative labor because bloggers reinforce the notion that women must and should shop in order to be valuable members of a neoliberal society. It is a routine and required practice for blogs as businesses. Because of this, fashion and lifestyle blogs become a pedagogical tool for understanding, communicating, and perpetuating the role of consumption in a woman's everyday life.

Peach & Pepper

Figure 5. Allison Ruchaber, of *Peach & Pepper*, as featured on her website's "About Me" page (Ruchaber, 2017a).

The blog *Peach & Pepper* was established by Allison Ruchaber, a mother of two and owner of a self-designed apparel company by the same name. Her blog began as a marketing tool for her clothing line but has since become her primary focus. As written in Allison's bio,

Hey there! Welcome to my blog! I'm Allison....wife to a hot hubs, mom of two awesome kids, style-lover, shoe-obsessed, former freelance writer and owner and designer of peach & pepper apparel. Other things you should know about me: I'm obsessed with ruffles, love boho-style, can't get enough of anything sweet, am a believer in the power of a great barre workout, have been called a cheese-pig (Is there anything better than good wine and a great cheese plate?) and could search quotes on Pinterest for hours. And if you were wondering about the meaning behind the name peach & pepper, it's my style in a nutshell....sweet with a touch of spice, feminine with just a little bit of edge. Most importantly, I believe that style speaks volumes about a woman's personality and I'm excited to share my personal style with you…Cheers! Here's to loving life and style! (Ruchaber, 2017a)

With a background in freelance writing, the shift to blogging was a natural transition for Allison. While she began the blog as a marketing tool she found herself drawn to the life of a fashion and lifestyle blogger. The blog allowed Allison to write about design and be creative – and the free clothes were a bonus. Whereas her *Peach & Pepper* clothing line was a difficult business to run, blogging seemed an easier fit: "I'm not great at a hard sell. Blogging is easier. It's a softer sell. If somebody likes it, they can buy through your link. They can ask you about it" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 13, 2017). Having a blog initially allowed Allison's clothing brand to appear more frequently in search engine results and provided a means to cultivate partnerships with other local bloggers and brands. However, the blog has since morphed into its own business and passion.

     Normalizing consumption. The best approach to keeping a fashion and lifestyle blog visible is through endorsing consumption. Many women turn to shopping when they are stressed or as a reward – no matter the situation, shopping can be seen as a form of therapy. Turning to a digital space that justifies shopping and consumption perpetuates

the cycle. For example, Allison wrote a very long post in December 2017 about

consumption-based cultural practices:

> Is it wrong when someone tell you to "go to your happy place" and you immediately head to the mall?? (Pretty sure my hubs would say yes to that, but guys just don't get the retail therapy thing do they?) Can't lie, I love to shop…. window shopping, shopping for myself, shopping for others… I love it all. And in Denver there's no better place to do all of the shopping-related things than Cherry Creek Shopping Center. It really is the perfect place to find all the gifts for pretty much everyone on your list (all in one pretty place) or just walk around and admire the festive decorations and huge gorgeous tree out front, grab something delicious to eat with friends, get your holiday makeup done or see a fun Christmas movie. It's kind of a one-stop shop for everything holiday (or otherwise)! And yes, I know Christmas is about giving vs. receiving (and I absolutely love searching for meaningful and fun gifts for my friends and fam… just found some perfect stocking stuffers at Cherry Creek Shopping Center this week in fact!), but when it come sot the holidays, I also can't resist trying on festive and sparkly holidays outfits and finding party-worthy looks (I mean what girl doesn't love a little overload of sequins every now and then?). And one of my very favorite places to shop for pretty dress (and really everything else) is Free People. (Ruchaber, 2017b)

Allison's narrative, excerpted from a much longer blog post about shopping for the

holidays, was accompanied by photos of Allison in and around the Cherry Creek

Shopping Center wearing various Free People clothing items. The images are stylized

and offer a glimpse into what seems to be a fun afternoon of trying on clothes and

exploring different parts of the shopping center.

Photos of Allison are interspersed with short descriptions of the various Free

People clothing items Allison wears, including links to purchase each item. The post

features Allison wearing multiple outfits, including: (1) frayed ankle-length jeans,

silver kitten-heeled booties, a blue and silver sequined Free People tank, and a fluffy

white cropped jacket; (2) slim tweed Free People pants and a lush Free People

burgundy velvet blazer with matching burgundy studded ankle boots; (3) a cream and

black floral dress and Moroccan-inspired bolero jacket, both by Free People; (4) a

sheer emerald green beaded Free People dress over a black body-con dress; (5) a black

lace tank and embellished red taffeta maxi skirt, both Free People; and (6) a tan furry

Free People bomber jacket and faux fur black trapper hat.

Figure 6. A photo of Allison posing in front of the Christmas tree at Cherry Creek
Shopping Center in "Holiday Happy Place."

Figure 7. Allison trying on clothing in the Free People store, also featured in
"Holiday Happy Place" (Ruchaber, 2017b).

The accompanying photos are beautiful and Allison appears happy as she tries

on clothes, touches up her lipstick in the Free People dressing room mirror, and poses

in the store as though in a high fashion editorial. In examining the images, I was first struck by how aesthetically pleasing they were. Then I considered how beautiful the dresses, accessories, and tops were with their lush fabrics, shiny embroidery, and rich seasonal colors. I began to wonder how I could incorporate these items into my own wardrobe, which caused me to pause. I read the next part of Allison's narrative, which mimics some of my own thoughts. Allison pointed out,

> I won't lie to you, I literally spent two hours there recently trying on all sorts of dresses and sparkles and holiday-worthy looks (felt like a little girl playing dress up in someone's amazing closet!) … and I wish I could've just taken all of them home with me! Believe me, they have some absolutely stunning holiday outfits in the store right now… case in point, check out all the photos below (and there are a lot of them!) for some amazing party looks (and winter wear too), all available at Free People Cherry Creek. (Ruchaber, 2017b)

Putting my magpie and retail-therapy tendencies to the side and turning a critical eye to this blog post unearths the constant cycle of consumption women are subjected to. Women are continually instructed to consume – especially during the holiday season, although almost any occasion can be framed as a reason to buy the newest trendy pair of shoes. In this post Allison has woven the notion of consumption throughout her narrative and photos through the framework of a day-in-the-life of a fashion and lifestyle blogger. Outside of the advertising for Free People clothing, Allison provides recommendations to readers outside of the sartorial. She encourages readers to visit the Cherry Creek Shopping Center to enjoy the holiday décor and spend time with family. At the same time, Allison's narrative emphasizes the importance of buying gifts (for the self and for others) and engaging in consumptive practices.

80

This outfit post illustrates a larger cultural narrative of capitalism as essential and inescapable (Baumann, 2000). Allison's post is a partnership with the Cherry Creek Shopping Center, as well as mid-range retailer Free People. The post is a slightly obscured attempt to sell items and help Allison build her blog business. Allison is following the template that has been established for blogger success and is inculcated in the cultural systems that emphasize consumption as a womanly duty. She performs communicative labor through her endorsement of Free People and the Cherry Creek Shopping Center. Because the narrative and images are aesthetically pleasing and fun, readers are enticed to take part in similar activities as part of the holiday season.

Allison's messaging illustrates what Pham (2015) considers the reality culture of social commerce and demonstrates "in intimate detail how products fit into and enhance the everyday lives of real people" (p. 57). This practice of constructing brand stories, as Allison does throughout the post, is offered up for less than traditional sales or marketing channels. Free People, like many brands, does not advertise through magazines or other traditional media channels, instead turning to bloggers and influencers to do the labor of advertising for them. Allison writes about the Cherry Creek Shopping Center and Free People as a nouveau form of marketing, engaging in communicative labor through her narratives to highlight the importance of consumption and forms of capital. She likely receives a commission on items sold via the embedded website links, but the post itself builds Allison's social capital and visibility. Allison is being authentic to her own voice and brand while also reinforcing

the postfeminist can-do girl subjectivity of empowerment through consumption

(Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007). Illustrating a can-do girl subjectivity communicates

the importance of consumption to followers in subtle yet impactful ways.

Self-critique and *technology of the self 2.0*: am I good enough? *Technologies*

of the self 2.0 allow bloggers to explore who they are within blog narratives while also

engaging with readers. Allison does this frequently by negotiating her own self-

presentation at the same time as showing readers her vulnerable moments. As part of an

end-of-year post she wrote,

> I'll admit I'm kind of a homebody and when it comes to spending money, I tend
> to overspend on "stuff" and not put nearly enough resources or time into travel
> and experiences. And that's really where memories are made. Again, I don't
> think I'll look back and regret the things I didn't buy, but chances are I will
> wish I had spent more time and money on seeing the world and sharing these
> experiences with my family and friends... Finally, in 2018 I'm going to try my
> very best to accept myself more, flaws and all. As a lifelong perfectionist, I
> tend to be very self-critical and overly concerned about what others think of me
> (which can be a pretty tough thing in this blogger/social media world). And it's
> exhausting If I'm honest. So this goal is a big one and very likely the one that
> will be the hardest to achieve. But I'm willing to try. And I think that focusing
> on these other goals for 2018 will be a big start in self-acceptance too. As my
> mom always says, when you take the focus off yourself and put it on others,
> you're just happier. So I think family, friends, travel, and learning new things is
> a great start to becoming a woman comfortable and happy in her own skin.
> (Ruchaber, 2017c)

A common thread throughout my interview sessions with Allison, as well as indicated in

her blog narratives, is a default to self-criticism amplified by an economy of visibility and

digital spaces that allow for reader comments and suggestions. The communicative labor

of blogging necessitates constant connection and engagement with followers. However,

this connection and visibility can be overwhelming with its expectation of constantly

portraying a can-do girl subject.

During our first interview Allison noted, "I question whether I'm good enough sometimes. That's also because sometimes people look down on [blogging] and think it's not real or meaningful" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 13, 2017). Allison engages in the can-do girl activities required of bloggers but does not always reap the benefits – specifically, empowerment. For example, Allison questions her age as a blogger. She is in her early forties, which in her eyes puts her at a disadvantage because most bloggers are in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties. There are some clothing items she will never wear, even if it is the most popular trend of the season – i.e. a pair of short shorts or a bikini. Allison is also hyper vigilant about the angles of her photographs and the way her face is framed, not wanting to highlight her slight, hardly noticeable wrinkles. She engages in self-care and self-presentation but rather than serve as a tool for the blog, these activities create tension and self-doubt.

As a slightly older fashion and lifestyle blogger Allison has created a niche within the Denver blogger market. But at times it seems to hold her back. There were multiple occasions during our interview sessions when Allison would question what she had written or her place within the Denver fashion and lifestyle blog space, a shadow crossing her face or a hint of worry in her eyes. Engaging in the practice of *technologies of the self 2.0* amplified these feelings of uneasiness, as does the communicative labor and visibility required in blogging work. The parts of Allison's identity she so readily fixates on as a detriment are actually what make her an interesting blogger in a Web 2.0 economy of visibility. In some ways, Allison does not fit the cookie-cutter mold of fashion and lifestyle bloggers due to her age. Yet she appears younger than her age and most of her

followers are their twenties and thirties. The constant focus on self-presentation and self-improvement proves to be daunting for Allison, however it is an essential piece of the labor of blogging.

Fulfilling the labor of blogging - and womanhood. During our second interview session Allison touched upon not only self-critiquing herself as a blogger and woman, but also some of the lows associated with the immense work that goes into maintaining a fashion and lifestyle blog. For her,

> There are definitely lows and it sounds sort of petty but with the changing Instagram algorithm and getting fewer photos and fewer comments I was complaining this morning I was losing followers. Only 700 people saw my post yesterday and I'm like, this is so frustrating… How do you get yourself in front if you're trying to build a business out of it? I mean, I have some lows at home when my husband and I will get in a fight because he thinks I'm not taking care of my family responsibility, that I'm doing photo shoots or something… I feel like I'm falling short as a mom, a wife. (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017)

There is no beginning or end to the work day with the fluidity of space and time around digital networks and blogs. Remaining relevant and visible requires regular, at times vigilant, communication. But the work of blogging also affects the work required to maintain interpersonal relationships. As Allison discussed during both of our interview sessions, there can be a tension in her home around the work that goes into blogging and her ability to balance it with the work of being a mother and wife. In contrast to the other

84

two blog participants, Allison has multiple forms of communicative and relational labor

to engage with in her everyday life. Personal and familial relationships are complicated

by the amount of engagement required for blog success. The constant communication

with other can-do girls and blog followers requires countless hours of work. With no start

and end time to the blogger's day, other parts of the blogger's life can fall to the wayside.

There is no question that Allison understands hard work. She has proven herself

as an entrepreneur - she started her fashion company as well as the blog, and both have

been successful. She did not have the bandwidth to pursue both brands and turned to

blogging because it was more comfortable. As with Hailey and Paige, Allison threads the

notion of labor throughout her blog narratives and in the interview sessions. She struggles

with some aspects of marketing a self-brand, especially as a fairly new blogger. Some

brands want to capitalize on Allison's communicative (and relational and affective)

marketing work without compensating her. She acknowledges many brands want,

> …the free advertising. They're willing to gift a product that doesn't cost them
>
> much… I don't know if I'll ever make a salary to make up for what I could be
>
> making… I'm having to start turning down collaborations that don't make sense.
>
> If it's not something I really want and they're not willing to pay, then I'm going
>
> to have to say no. I feel that's treating it more like a job. (A. Ruchaber, personal
>
> communication, October 13, 2017)

There is constant negotiation between the labor required as a fashion and lifestyle blogger

and the other labors embedded in being a woman, wife, and mother. Allison has had to

determine what works best for her business and her family, weighing the costs of the

labor of blogging in relation to fulfilling what she considers her duties as wife and mother. If she was a mommy blogger, Allison could certainly weave her labors together, but she is adamant about being a fashion and lifestyle blogger because it is tied to her identity. The communicative work of being a blogger has to coexist with other forms of feminized labor in her everyday life.

The Black Velveteen

Figure 8. Lucille sitting at one of her favorite spots, as featured in the "About" page of *The Black Velveteen*'s website (Wenegieme, 2016).

The Black Velveteen, a blog by Lucille Wenegieme, highlights her styling work with local brands as well as traditional high fashion photo shoots. Lucille's personal flair is evident throughout her various platforms – as noted on her site, her brand is "Style... On My Terms." Lucille has followed a less traditional fashion and lifestyle blogging path than *The Middle Closet* and *Peach & Pepper*. As she notes in her self-written bio,

> A lifelong creative person, it took a while for Lucille to consider herself **"a creative"**. A scientist by trade, Lucille always struggled to balance her affinity for orderly, scientific work with all the crafts she enjoyed in her free time. Between

biology classes, she studied costuming and indulged in theater. She poured over editorial spreads and stalked Met Gala coverage when she was supposed to be studying for chemistry exams. As she finished grad school, she found that she wanted to make her "free time" into her "full time", and began her journey doing creative work. And what a journey it's been! Lucille enjoys podcasts, shoe-shopping, and laying in the grass. She only exercises because she knows she should, and is very worried she might not ever actually enjoy it. Unlike the blog's namesake, her go-to drink is a Whiskey Ginger. (Wenegieme, 2016)

Lucille wanted to create a site where she could showcase outfits she loved and began by posting outfit photos her mother took on their porch using an iPhone. The goal of *The Black Velveteen* was not to sell a specific product, but to share clothing items Lucille loves while also serving as inspiration for others.

Lucille works in digital communication strategies for non-profit organizations and started her blog in 2014 "…when a lot of the most high-profile people started being able to make very good livings off of [blogging] and really establishing it more as an industry and not a collection of people doing a hobby" (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017). This was also the same time Instagram was switching to a new algorithm, and as Lucille puts it, "Instagram had definitely started shifting away from the pet project, kind of like, 'This is me doing something cute and fun,' to 'I'm creating content for people to enjoy and consume and interact with and drive revenue'" (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017). Lucille made a conscious effort to approach her blog and social media presence in a way that was authentic and not driven by a monetization application or sponsorships, especially because blogging has never been her primary source of income. She has also avoided making communicative labor the focal point of her blog, at least not to the same extent as *The Middle Closet* and *Peach & Pepper*.

Circumventing the normative mold. In fashion and lifestyle blogging, as well as blogging more generally, a strong self-brand now serves as the foundation for what is inevitably a business. In contrast, many of the original fashion and/or lifestyle bloggers were concerned with having a space to explore their likes and interests and not about business plans, digital branding, or market feasibility. As Lucille pointed out during our interview, blogging is now,

> …all about, "What's your brand? What's your niche? Who's your audience? What are your followers? What do your followers consume? What are they obsessed with? What are they doing? How are you anticipating what kind of content they want?" Also, now because the market – I personally would say the market is very saturated, and so now it's all about, like, so what's your thing? How are you different? Yeah, you're really great, but there's also 8 million other people on Instagram that are bloggers, too. It's like, what's your thing? There's definitely a lot of pressure to have a brand where you distinguish yourself and do something different. (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

Throughout the interview, Lucille emphasized that her approach to blogging is not about selling items for commission, but instead a way to express her personal style to inspire others. She consciously made a choice to not work with a monetization application and tries to separate herself from others in the Denver blog space. With experience in styling photo shoots, Lucille decided to begin using herself as the model: "It was nice that I could just be the subject and be the model and to do that and have one other factor that's just built in… I can just find the look and create it and do it myself" (L. Wenegieme,

88

personal communication, October 15, 2017). Even though Lucille does not monetize content, she still displays characteristics of a can-do girl subject including a unique/individualized sense of self, drive, and self-made approach to blogging.

Lucille acknowledges that fashion and lifestyle blogging is a business but has mixed feelings about this new cultural industry. She started her blog at a time when the business side of blogging was just emerging and made a choice to keep her blog as a personal journal-like space rather than a business. She engages in communicative labor "lite" – visibility and connection are important to her web and social media presence, but this is not her long-term career goal. Yet Lucille understands the power embedded in harnessing the blog space into a sustainable business, especially for women. At one point she noted,

> …in a certain way I'm like, 'I'm a blogger, so I know that you making that image probably was a lot of hard work and I totally respect that you're spending all this time and you might as well be making money.' But you're also showing me this thing so that you can make money. So it's really, it makes me feel really weird, and so it's very rare that I do. Also I tend to just go for more inspiration than anything. (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

In many of Lucille's posts, which are less frequent than *The Middle Closet* and *Peach & Pepper*, Lucille link to items she is wearing. However, the content Lucille features is not monetized, and she avoids being prescriptive. She considers herself "a lot less consumer-driven than a lot of other blogs and bloggers… people really resonate with that" (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017). Because communicative labor

89

prescribes appropriate behavior through messaging, Lucille's blog is not a formulaic

approach to pushing the market forward. There is a sense of authenticity and genuine

engagement rather than direct marketing through perfectly curated images. However,

there is still a hint of the traditional blogger approach to communicative labor because

Lucille's blog content ultimately feeds the neoliberal machine. By simply highlighting

fashionable items and providing links, Lucille offers a neoliberal message, even though

she does not profit from it.

Selling without "selling." In a December 2015 post titled "Calvin Klein," Lucille

discussed a secondhand Calvin Klein coat she found at a local Denver thrift store. In

contrast to more traditional fashion and lifestyle blog narratives, Lucille tells the story of

finding this coat and the ways it informed a blog collaboration:

> Recently, I went on a little thrifting escapade with the ever fabulous Ash Taylor of *The Guts & Glory*… We scoured the ARC for pieces for ourselves and shoots, and Ash spotted this primo camel coat. She tried it on, didn't think it fit her well, and then in true amazing lady fashion, suggested I try it. My picks weren't quite right, but this baby was perfect. A Calvin Klein coat for $20? Dreams do come true. While styling a look to shoot at *Bellwether* with Miss Shea Hennessy, I decided to pair this coat with some of my favorite, newly acquired minimalist pieces. I got this *white midi dress* for a steal since it was quite late in the season, and these *Madewell sandals*, are officially the most comfortable heels I own. My good friend Angela brought me this mixed metal bangle back from Mexico (last year? Two?), and the seashell ring is an oldie my mom gave me. Between thrifted pieces and gifts, so much of my style is made up of individual pieces that have been loved, thrown away, lost, or hand-selected just for me, and I am so happy about it [emphasis added]. (Wenegieme, 2015)

Lucille links to the Madewell sandals and white midi dress she wears under the classic

camel Calvin Klein coat, but the post itself is not sponsored or monetized. She is sharing

items she loves with followers for inspiration, not profit. The photos in the post mimic

those featured in monetized blog feeds:

90

Figure 9. Lucille wearing a Calvin Klein coat and standing in front a quintessential Denver brick wall, posing like a typical fashion blogger (Wenegieme, 2015).

Lucille is highlighting the significance of consumption but through a less direct approach. As part of her brand, Lucille emphasizes a thoughtful and conscientious attitude toward fashion, where each piece she describes has its own story and meaning. She also engages in *technology of the self 2.0*, but one less directed at garnering hundreds of followers or commissions and instead rooted in the meaning-making process of acquiring clothes. This becomes a method to connect with followers without the ties of direct economic capital from directly sponsored content.

At the same time, Lucille is still advertising consumption and living a branded lifestyle. The tan coat she wears is Calvin Klein, a brand that ranges from department-store goods to high-end designer gowns. Even though the coat is secondhand, it is still

embedded with immaterial notions of aspiration and luxury. The narrative Lucille tells is different from the routine fashion and lifestyle blogger script (i.e. the standard "authentic" blogger story). As Lucille explained during our interview, her approach is "'This is what I'm wearing.' Or 'These are things that I actually own that I really love and I put them together this way and I really like that'" (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017). Followers can choose for themselves to adopt some or all of Lucille's style. Yet Lucille's narrative still informs followers of items she has purchased, illustrating the notion that women should consume. Lucille's messaging is a diluted version of traditional blogging communicative labor. Her push for consumption is not intentional, and the fact that nothing Lucille links to on her site is monetized illustrates her removal from the larger business of blogging. But her stories and exploration of style are still tied to the dominant narrative that a woman's role in society is consumer. Consumption does not have to be practiced through sponsored content or affiliate links to hold meaning-making potential for the individual consumer. But the labor of consumption as feminine duty is still present, although repackaged, within Lucille's corner of the internet.

Flipping the switch – unscripted content. So much of what is broadcast across fashion and lifestyle blogs and social media spaces is scripted by designers, brands, and public relations firms. For example, many fashion and lifestyle bloggers that work with public relations firms receive branded clothing items to showcase as well as talking points to include in their blog narrative(s). Some brands even ask to see blog narratives and/or photos before they are published to provide final approval. This practice is

common and often goes unquestioned. There are set formulas for maintaining a successful blog determined by the blog community, monetization platforms, and big brands. Lucille has avoided this scripted track by blogging,

> …much more informally than I think a lot of other bloggers do. Now, because it's been around for so long, there's a rubric. You post at this time and you do it X many times a day and you do this many angles, and you do three of this kind of photo, and you do three of this kind of photo and, you know, there are ways to be prescriptive now because it is a business. I don't really do any of that. (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

Any aspiring blogger can turn to the Internet to learn the basics of blogging. Many online how-to guides and webinars are sponsored by marketing or public-relations firms because without influencers, the in-house work of marketing would be much more labor-intensive. The formula Lucille describes above is spot-on. While being a successful fashion and lifestyle blogger is rooted in an authentic self-brand, there are many bloggers who seem to cut and paste from established templates for millennial bloggers. For example, every summer the Nordstrom department store has a semi-annual sale. In summer 2017 the weeks leading up to, as well as during, the sale overtook the Instagram platform. rewardStyle, as a Nordstrom partner, provided influencers with a playbook for promoting the sale. As an Instagram user I found the number of Nordstrom-sponsored posts to be overwhelming. Even Hailey and Paige pointed out their frustration with the oversaturation and constant push for these sponsored posts: "Because I think it's beat to a pulp. And I think you see all the same clothes on every single blogger, and it just gets –

it's too much" (P. Kushner, personal communication, July 17, 2017). In this example Nordstrom and rewardStyle provided bloggers with suggested narrative language and hints on when to post. These how-to guides to blogging provide a crash course in communicative labor.

The way Lucille approached her blog – which she has now taken a step back from – was by being herself and using her voice without any sort of sponsored talking points. Her approach to blogging was about focusing on what she loved instead of trends. This is evident in her blog postings, which are interspersed with entries about podcasts she recommends and her musings on social, cultural and political issues alongside outfit photos. In December 2015 Lucille described her hesitance to jump on the "athleisure" bandwagon and avoidance of trends. In May 2016 she featured a post that at first seemed to be about the way neon can be incorporated into spring and summer wardrobes but evolved into a commentary on race and gentrification in Denver neighborhoods. She is unafraid to be provocative and makes blog narratives about more than just the clothes or a snapshot of everyday life. Lucille is unscripted and unwavering across her social media platforms. She flips the switch on how bloggers are supposed to only care about clothes. Without the pressure of working with monetization applications or big brands, Lucille can write about anything she wants. She communicates messages to her followers within a capitalist system. Lucille tries to avoid neoliberal scripts and prescriptive language, although she cannot escape these dominant ideologies in every post. But from Lucille's perspective, there is no template.

Conclusion: Labor in the Digital Frontier

While *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen* are all members of the Denver blogging community, each has chosen their own path to traversing this fashion and lifestyle-based digital frontier. While Allison seems to navigate the business of blogging and her role in blog culture as she goes with the guidance of rewardStyle, Lucille has decided to stop blogging altogether and pursue other media-based opportunities. Hailey and Paige, on the other hand, have followed a set business plan from the beginning and constantly anticipate what lies ahead, understanding the ebbs and flows of business and treating blogging as what it is – a job.

Blogging today, with constant connection and monetization application resources, has become Web 2.0's newest form of communicative labor. Bloggers must engage in communication-based labor to be successful, while at the same time perpetuating larger ideological systems and norms. This includes the culturally-accepted womanly duty of consumption and a can-do girl subjectivity predicated upon bettering oneself through shopping. Digital spaces help individuals make meaning (both for bloggers and followers) through the shared language of neoliberal logic. Influencers monetize a large portion of their lives and remain constantly connected and visible, performing immaterial communicative labor in order to better themselves and make a profit. At the same time, these influencers perpetuate a cycle of consuming whatever is new, trendy, and/or fashionable.

In the next chapter I explore the ways in which fashion and lifestyle bloggers, including Hailey, Paige, Allison, and Lucille, engage in blogging communities and

meaning-making through relational labor. I illustrate this relational labor by collecting, arranging, and analyzing narrative fragments within interview texts, blog stories, and social media posts. I supplement my participant's stories with examples from other well-known influencers within the fashion and lifestyle blog community, including *Gal Meets Glam*, *Sequins and Stripes*, and *Cupcakes and Cashmere*. By reading, arranging, and rearranging these textual fragments, I demonstrate how bloggers negotiate an authentic persona within relational engagement with followers and the blogging community. At the same time, I illuminate how fashion and lifestyle bloggers serve as cogs in a large monetization-based digital machine.

Chapter Four: Relational Labor, Performances of Authenticity in a Sponsored

Everyday Life, and Blogging Communit(ies)

I brush my thumb against the Instagram icon, touching the multicolored square that catches my eye as soon as my iPhone home screen appears. The application opens and the heart at the bottom of the screen appears highlighted in bright fuschia pink, signaling I've received some sort of comment or note. I touch the heart emblem and see within the drop-down list of communications that I've received a response from Julia Engel of Gal Meets Glam. I'm excited and surprised all at the same time, not believing such a well-known blogger would have responded to a comment I made on one of her Instagram posts.

Engel recently posted about the upcoming launch of her eponymous dress line on Instagram, writing: "In NYC this week prepping for our @galmeetsglam launch in 25 days!!! The next few weeks are going to be a whirlwind. Have you been following along our countdown with new dress previews going up every day over on our site?! (Link in profile to it) I can't wait to reveal more over the next few weeks!" With this post Engel opened a space for direct feedback and connection with her followers. Without stopping to overthink my comment, I immediately sent a 38-character note: "This is so exciting – as are the daily reveals ❤." After reading my comment, within a few minutes she responded by saying "thank you so much!!!" Reading her reply felt as though my short commendation made a difference to the successful and famous Engel. She is a new media

celebrity, a modern can-do girl, considered one of the best-known influencers in the

fashion and lifestyle blogosphere. In that moment I felt seen, as though my words became

a (very small) part of her world.

Relational Labor: A Woman's Work

Fashion and lifestyle blogging is a digital industry primarily used by and for

women. There are varying forms of labor interwoven with the narrative and image-based

immaterial work of blogging, a constant sense of communication and relationship

building. This immaterial work manifests through relational labor, a form of labor framed

as feminine, creative, "precarious, flexible, immaterial, service-oriented, and often tied to

the management of one's own and others' emotions" (Baym, 2015). Similar to emotional

labor, which requires managing the feelings of others in specific situations (Hochschild,

1983), relational labor manages the feelings of others through ongoing communication

and connection (Baym, 2015). This relational work is cultivated and built upon trust,

interpersonal skills, a sense of commonality, and shared language.

The term relational labor emerged within studies of precarious work conditions,

where informal or interpersonal forms of communication build meaningful social ties

(Alacovska, 2018; McKinlay & Smith, 2009). These ties then became the basis for

economic activities. As Alacovsca (2018) outlines,

> All labor activities thus involve creating and negotiating meaningful social ties
> (friendships, love and collegial relationships), marking certain transactions
> (wages, barter, gifts) as appropriate to those relationships and adopting certain
> commercial media (money, in-kind payments, favors) to facilitate economic
> transactions within those relations. (p. 5)

This labor is found within storytelling and cultural scripts, as well as the emotional and affective work of blogging. Relational labor requires "regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work" (Baym, 2015, p. 16). While Baym (2015) explores relational labor in the music industry, the same relational framework can be applied to fashion and lifestyle blogging. Blogging work is also precarious, with its creative roots and flexible notion of space, time, and workplace boundaries. By engaging with followers, acknowledging comments and feedback, and responding to direct messaging via Instagram and email messages, bloggers engage in relational labor and build a sense of closeness within their community. When a level of closeness and trustworthiness has been established by the blogger, followers are far more likely to click an affiliated link or make purchases through LIKEtoKNOW.it because it feels as though you are purchasing from a friend – not a retailer.

The relationship between blogger and follower in fashion and lifestyle blogging is "matched" (Zelizer, 2012) through shared interest, blog narratives, and the cultural script of consumption. Meaning-making in the blog space is tied to a cycle of purchasing goods, displaying the goods, and building capital (i.e. social, cultural, and economic). Buying material goods through a blogger's Instagram photo stamped with the #liketoknowit tag requires an exchange of money (i.e. payment media). When the goods are purchased through an affiliate link, the blogger receives a commission. The greater the relational connection, the more willing followers are to click a tagged photo or link. Thus, the more these links are used to purchase items through the blogger, the greater the status of the blogger via visibility, social, and economic capital. In the economy of visibility bloggers

cultivate this status as yet another form of currency. For Baym (2015), relational labor is tied to capital as there is always monetary potential in connecting with, then selling to, fans (or followers). When fashion and lifestyle bloggers engage in relational labor through narratives and digital interactions, female bloggers cultivate and acquire status, a form of visible currency. Status and visibility frame these women as marketable (Marwick, 2013) and more often than not, profitable.

The cultural shift to a feminized economic life (Adkin & Jokinen, 2008; Baym, 2015; Hardt, 1999) places greater focus on emotions, listening, conversation, and being genuine or authentic in the workplace. Since the 1970s workers have been expected to incorporate relational work into their employment practices (Banet-Weiser, 2015). The feminization of economic life is bound to producing pleasant, comfortable or exciting feelings in consumers, as well as "products" that are aesthetically pleasing (Adkins, 2005; Adkins & Jokinen, 2008; Baym, 2015; Hardt, 1999). A blogger's self-brand is a perfect illustration of feminized economic life. *Gal Meets Glam*, for example, is aesthetically pleasing. The blog features shades of pink and soft-lit photos; the site also features comfortable, pleasant and aspirational imagery. The *Gal Meets Glam* narratives are conversational and authentic. Even the shipping boxes for the *Gal Meets Glam* clothing brand are the same shade of pink used throughout her website. The brand is the epitome of feminized labor in Web 2.0 culture.

In addition to a reliance on feminized, relational labor with followers and blog community members, fashion and lifestyle bloggers also engage in visibility labor, the "work individuals do when they self-posture and curate their self-presentations so as to

be noticeable and positively prominent" (Abidin 2016b p. 90) to their followers (Abidin, 2015; Duffy, 2016; Wissinger, 2015). This visible labor appears effortless (Abidin, 2016a); this is necessary because one of the key components of a successful fashion and lifestyle blog is to make the work of blogging invisible. Relational labor serves as a form of tacit labor, "a collective practice of work that is understated and under-visibilized from being so thoroughly rehearsed it appears effortless and subconscious" (Abidin, 2016a, p. 10). As bloggers continually update their feeds and connect with followers through apps like Instagram, they do the tacit labor of blogging without drawing attention to the labor itself. Instead, bloggers such as *Gal Meets Glam*, *The Middle Closet*, and *Peach & Pepper* simply appear to be engaged with the community.

In this chapter I examine the ways authenticity – a key attribute of successful fashion and lifestyle blogs – has been commodified. Authenticity is fixed to relational labor because bloggers cannot maintain a follower base without it; relationships are expected to be authentic. However, authenticity is often woven into a blogger's brand but stands in direct opposition to the use of endorsements and/or sponsorships. Performing authenticity as a successful blogger requires intensive relational labor to sustain the blogger's self-brand, visibility, and marketability. I provide examples of this relational work using interview and narrative texts from *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen*, as well as other well-known bloggers in the national fashion and lifestyle blog community. I end the chapter by examining relational labor at the community level, which requires relational and communicative support between bloggers

101

in the local and national communities, as well as communication between bloggers and their followers.

Commodifying Authenticity: Cultural Value in an Economy of Visibility and Likes

Fashion and lifestyle blogging has become the hottest "it-girl" industry through the allure of free clothing, sponsored trips to exotic locations, and the acquisition of cultural, social, and economic capital. Influencers are laborers, performing and writing narratives, cultivating followers, and self-branding. Bloggers must solidify an authentic brand, which all the how-to guides expressly tell aspiring bloggers to do. Brands are, after all, bound to the structures that help cultivate our everyday lives (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Lury, 2004). Fashion and lifestyle blogging is complex because of the interconnectedness between a self-brand and the negotiation of being truly authentic.

As cultural tastemakers, fashion and lifestyle bloggers help produce culture in an economy of visibility. Cultural production is a complex process that includes the negotiation and management of relationships, affect, and modes of communication. This production can be done through material goods, such as a capsule clothing collection (i.e. *Gal Meets Glam*'s limited edition Frye boots) or through immaterial means such as "concepts, ideas, and images – not things – [which] are the real items of value in the new economy" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 45). In fashion and lifestyle blogging, cultural scripts of consumption and aspiration are broadcast across social media platforms. Influencers and superbloggers epitomize the can-do girl (Gill, 2007; Harris, 2004) and appear in charge of their lives and destinies as digital entrepreneurs. These women sell an aspirational lifestyle and secure sense of self. This is only accomplished through labor,

102

visibility, constant connection, and acts of self-improvement (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007; Harris, 2004). Blogger representations perpetuate the cultural cycle of consumption through continued engagement within the blog and social media space. Doing this relational work in an authentic way requires being oneself, showing emotions, managing the emotions of others, and keeping communication channels open at all times.

Many popular fashion and lifestyle bloggers circumvent the notion of being corrupted by material goods, consumption, and capitalism (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marx, 1976) through authentic narratives and self-brands. Authenticity is broadly defined as

> …cultivating the courage to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow
> ourselves to be vulnerable… authenticity demands wholehearted living and loving
> – even when it's hard, even when we're wrestling with the shame and fear of not
> being good enough, and especially when the joy is so intense that we're afraid to
> let ourselves feel it" (Brown, 2009).

In the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere, authenticity is tied to trustworthiness as well as the notion of consumption. Bloggers are marketers at their core and being authentic is sensed by followers; these bloggers are successful because "customers trust messages that come from another consumer, who gives a genuine recommendation based on their real experience – and less and less likely the messages that come from the brand itself" (Laihanen, 2017). Even though blog messages are often about buying the newest item or splurging on an amazing handbag, because these ideas are framed through authentic narratives – the blogger talking to their followers as though sitting across from them at a coffee shop – the user forgets the message is about consumption. In April 2018, Julia

Engel of *Gal Meets Glam* posted a temporary Instagram photo that illustrated her authentic online persona. The photo was not perfectly airbrushed, but instead showed how tired she was while working on the launch of her clothing brand:

Figure 10. A screen shot of a *Gal Meets Glam* Instagram Story; this temporary post features Engel sharing how tired she is, and how hard she is working, on the launch of her clothing line (Engel, 2018b).

The photo's caption is warm and genuine. Engel appears "real," her dark circles on full display (which is out of the ordinary in her curated Instagram feed). Even though Engel is not perfectly coiffed with a full face of makeup, she still has her face turned the camera at the perfect angle. She ties the caption to her self-branded clothing line, but also to her followers. Engel emphasizes the significance of her followers and wanting to create

something they will love. The text is highlighted in a blush, millennial pink – also perfectly on-brand for *Gal Meets Glam*. She appears authentic and trustworthy. Because Engel is showing a side of herself that is slightly flawed, the user feels a sense of intimacy, a peek into Engel's behind-the-scenes world. At the same time, Engel emphasizes the role of labor – she is "pouring [her] heart and soul" into the clothing brand, the telltale signs of fatigue on her face. Because of these multiple forms of labor, she is exhausted; since this work is for her followers, however, Engel is willing to do the work. Engel brings attention to her appreciation, taking time out of her busy schedule to check in and perform relational maintenance with her followers.

The use of authenticity through relational narratives, such as the one above, is ultimately commodified and exists within an economy of visibility. In this instance, Engel is a can-do girl highlighting her *Gal Meets Glam* dress line. By putting in this relational work, she is guaranteeing followers join her on this journey and, hopefully, purchase dresses from her collection. In most fashion and lifestyle blogging posts, more generally, a blogger links directly to the clothing item(s) on display and available for purchase. The blogger is themselves (i.e. an authentic model) but continues the can-do girl script of pushing material goods and self-care. Authenticity now exists in a realm of affiliate links and number of clicks or purchases. The way bloggers connect narratives to consumption illustrates that capitalism drives what the blogosphere and Instagram have become – a digital space for pushing the market forward.

Not Too Hot, Not Too Cold…: Authenticity, Sponsorships, and Denver Bloggers

There is a deep-seated narrative within the blogosphere around authenticity and the use of one's voice and opinion(s). This became especially important in 2009 when the Federal Trade Commission passed a regulation requiring bloggers to disclose gifted items as well as financial relationships with companies and products (Pham, 2015). Because of this regulation, fashion and lifestyle bloggers must now incorporate #ad or #sponsored into Instagram post descriptions to note when they are featuring gifted or sponsored items. In a digital space that equates authenticity with success, these new requirements make the job of performing an authentic identity and brand vital. In response to these new FTC requirements, many bloggers point out that opinions and reviews represented across their media platforms are the bloggers' own - not influenced by brands and public relations-backed talking points. So even though the item(s) are sponsored or gifted, bloggers are not "selling out," their authentic persona remaining intact.

Hailey, Paige, Allison, and Lucille all feel strongly about using their authentic voice in digital content. All four women expressed the importance of providing their followers with truthful narratives. Yet there is a spectrum to this work, as well as branding one's online presence. There are some bloggers, such as Allison of *Peach & Pepper*, who relies upon rewardStyle as her primary business resource. Most of her Instagram posts are tagged with #liketoknowit and/or feature some sort of branded content. Lucille, on the other end of the branding and authenticity spectrum, rarely features sponsored Instagram posts. If she does feature sponsorships, they are with organizations like Threads Worldwide, a group that fosters fair trade for local jewelry

106

artisans across the world to help women become economically independent.[23] Hailey and Paige of *The Middle Closet* lie somewhere in the middle, working with rewardStyle to strategically market brands and items with a lower price point, but limiting the number of sponsored posts in their Instagram feed.

Peach & Pepper. In this targeted ecosystem, Allison of *Peach & Pepper* serves as the epitome of a rewardStyle influencer by featuring some sort of consumable product in almost all of her social media posts. Yet during our in-person discussions, Allison emphasized the significance of being truthful and authentic in all of her digital content. When speaking about brand relationships, she explained,

> I'm very particular about the brands I work with. I only promote things I would actually wear in real life…. I just started putting on my blog how it's important that all opinions are mine and that even though the post is sponsored, I'm going to say what I feel. I mean I do try to paint the companies in a good light. If there's something that I hated I would have [to say that]. (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 13, 2017).

Allison seems open and forthright in her blog and social media content, but she also leans into the rewardStyle ethos. What she said in our interview sessions illustrates the tension inherent in emphasizing an authentic self and also playing into the dominant cultural narrative that women should consume. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers can acquire economic capital by encouraging other women to consume, which presents an additional layer of meaning to negotiate. To make her blog worthwhile financially, Allison has to

---

[23] *Peach & Pepper* and *The Middle Closet* also work with fair trade brands and charitable organizations, however they feature more paid, traditional sponsorships with larger brand organizations.

sell content (i.e. clothing and accessories) for compensation. Brand commissions help keep *Peach & Pepper* in business, paying for Allison's photographers, website hosting fees, and branding tools. Allison wants to be truthful with followers, and she emphasizes that everything she promotes on her blog is what she would truly wear in everyday life. She is relatable in all of her digital narratives, but this relational work is done with the intent to maintain both her blog and a particular lifestyle.

In relational work individuals focus on cultivating a connection over an extended period of time. When a blogger performs authenticity in their communication with followers, they nurture a sense of relational closeness and manage the digital divide between blogger and follower. In fashion and lifestyle blogging this relational work includes what Veijola & Jokinen (2008) term hostessing. The act of hostessing is a work-based performance that requires the "management of social situations, affects, and corporeal needs between friends, acquaintances, as well as strangers" (pp. 176-177). Hostessing, as a form of relational work, is considered inherently feminine not only due to the style of work, but also because the role of a hostess is traditionally women's work. Hostessing is grounded in feminine skills such as making others feel welcome, being social, and aiming to please. Allison alluded to fulfilling her hostessing role in her relational blog work: "I am a person who loves fashion and creativity. I think I do come off being kind and empathetic. That's a big part of my identity" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017). While relational labor is often dismissed as "women's work" (Baym, 2015; Bolton, 2009), it is still intensive labor that does not observe the boundaries between a blogger's personal and professional life. For Allison in

particular, managing relational labor in the blog space, as well as her role as mother and wife, requires hostessing across material and immaterial channels.

The Black Velveteen. Lucille stands at the other end of the blogging spectrum – her blog posts are not about acquiring economic capital, instead serving as fragments of creative inspiration within a digital space. She rarely advises readers to purchase specific items through affiliate links, which she emphasized multiple times throughout her interview session. It is very clear that Lucille's blog is not about selling items. Lucille has chosen to be authentic by not participating in blog monetization. She is very self-aware of her role in the Denver blog space, as well as the role of blogging at a cultural level. As she pointed out during her interview session,

> …influencer marketing is so successful because a lot of people don't know that someone with an agenda is spending a lot of money to put this thing in front of you. I personally have a lot of conflict around that, which is why I haven't done it. There's a lot of pressure to do it, just because in an oversaturated market it's a way to get your money, which I would say the lion's share of bloggers are women and having a way for women to make money in a way that's independent and is driven by them and their creativity is really great. The other side of that, though, is the pressure to look a certain way, present yourself a certain way, talk a certain way so that you're getting those dollars. I've noticed that I don't get a lot of those dollars because I don't play the game in that way, but there's always pressure to do it. (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

As fashion and lifestyle blogging developed as an industry and labor force, the perception of blogging changed. Some established and aspiring bloggers "leaned into" the monetization and marketing focus of blogs, while others like Lucille decided to either leave the blogosphere or cut back on posting.

Lucille was candid about authentic blogging versus marketed blogging during her interview. Her style of writing feels as though she is speaking directly to followers. The words radiate authenticity. Yet she still exists within a world of consumption that is nearly impossible to circumvent (Bauman, 2000). When Lucille provides inspiration on her website or Instagram platform through narratives and photos, followers almost certainly need to consume clothing or accessories to replicate her style. There is acknowledgement of consumption in Lucille's online presence, a hint of neoliberal communicative messaging. Lucille is authentic but her narratives still help replicate a world of consumption as there is, ultimately, no way to escape it.

The Middle Closet. Throughout our conversations, Hailey emphasized how important it is for her to be truthful and authentic with her followers. There are rules when publishing a sponsored digital post, where being honest is more important than selling items. As Hailey said during our first interview session,

> Just because it's being gifted to me does not mean I'm going to write the best review in the world. I've always wanted to be very honest with everyone. So if I don't like a certain skincare brand, I'll give it a fine review. But it's going to be very honest. (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017)

Her reviews seem sincere, but at the same time there are no outright negative posts. Some of this may stem from the fact that *The Middle Closet* only works with brands they would use organically. They also feature brands they like and want to advertise to followers without direct monetization or commissions. Some of this may stem from a desire for future collaborative opportunities with brands, some might just be part of the relational labor required in fashion and lifestyle blogging. The best way to be a successful blogger is to share opinions with followers as though they are your best girlfriend.

The norm within the monetized fashion and lifestyle blogosphere is to sponsor or collaborate with brands more often than not. *The Middle Closet* had to learn their sponsorship threshold and experiment with partnership models. At one point, almost all of their posts were sponsored. However, this proved to be exhausting. Hailey and Paige decided to be more strategic, both in terms of their time and their brand. As Hailey noted during our first interview,

> In the beginning we took [all brand sponsorships] … The biggest thing I've always said from day one is if we would not purchase it organically, we're not going to be featuring it on the blog, because, I mean, I'm going to talk about how much I love a piece and I want to be able to spend the money to buy that. (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017)

Both Hailey and Paige expressed concern about inundating their followers with branded content. Rather than constantly push followers to buy specific products or tagging all Instagram posts with #liketoknowit, Hailey and Paige vary their content in order to keep followers happy while also demonstrating their authenticity. But there are more and more

tools available to bloggers to incorporate sponsorships into everyday life. As Hailey
pointed out during our second interview,

> …because as influencers, we can post an Instagram Story and have a link attached
>
> to it, so people can swipe up. So rather than having to go like a photo, they can
>
> just go shop my Instagram Story or my Snapchat story. And so, it's a whole other
>
> avenue for them to just put more content out there. (H. Middleton, personal
>
> communication, July 19, 2017).

With multiple avenues to making a sale, bloggers must determine what is most important
to their blog business: the relationship with followers or the ultimate goal of purchase.
There is often tension between the two. Since most of the work in the blogosphere
depends upon relational connection, bloggers must cultivate relationships with other
bloggers, as well as followers, in order to create economic value. At the same time, the
importance of connecting with another person can undermine the need to make a sale,
vital to the business of blogging. For example, Hailey finds it important to know,

> …that what I'm putting out there is authentic to who we are, regardless if the
>
> people are purchasing everything that we put on there, or whatever it may be. It's
>
> those single instances where someone reaches out and they say, like, 'Thank you
>
> for writing about this,' or 'I really loved what you did here,' or 'I resonate with
>
> you on this end.' Whether it's one person or it's 40,000 people, that one person
>
> makes the difference. And so, I know that it's kind of making a difference, even
>
> though I know it's not like revolutionary, what we're doing. But know that it's at
>
> least like touching someone… and especially, when you know that at least one

person has read it, that kind of makes me want to do it more. Where I'm like,

'Okay, people are responding to something.' And that kind of shows me that what

we're doing is good. (H. Middleton, personal communication, July 17, 2017)

Constantly reinforcing one's self-brand – which Hailey does through her relational work of connecting and narrating – leads to the production of economic value. But it also creates a sense of meaning and connection in an increasingly digital world. Hailey noted that some of her followers have reached out and simply wanted to meet for a cup of coffee. Her relational labor maintains *The Middle Closet*'s success, visibility, and ability to produce meaning. But her labor also creates connections; these connections build trust which can translate into sales. Hailey feels like a friend, which helps her maintain both interpersonal relationships and economic success. Hailey and Paige's goal is to present a curated feed of images and avoid overwhelming their followers. However, they are still part of the rewardStyle monetization machine. In the fashion and lifestyle blogging industry, to sustain the blog ecosystem one must develop relationships with followers while also encouraging these followers to buy, buy, buy. It is the only way to survive.

Nuance within authentic, commodified stories. While I am critical of how authenticity is used in the blog space as a marketing tool, I also understand a great deal of care goes into blogging as a business. This repeatedly surfaced during the interview sessions. For example, during my second interview with Allison she addressed her experience blogging and connecting with other local Denver bloggers:

When I'm talking to at least the bloggers I know in Denver I feel like they're all

very well-rounded, level-headed, kind, and self-aware and think about their

113

messaging. I don't know if I mentioned this. I think there is a responsibility when

you're doing this to be honest. Obviously you want to create a pretty feed and all

that but I personally feel a responsibility that if somebody's going to buy

something from link that it is an item that I would actually purchase. I hope that

people start to trust your opinion and look to you for style advice or whatever. I

think you don't want to let them down. (A. Ruchaber, personal communication,

October 24, 2017)

Bloggers often understand, to some degree, the process of digital meaning-making both

for themselves and their followers. This notion of care was woven throughout the

interviews. Blogging is a business for Allison, Hailey and Paige and must be treated like

one. However, so much of the blogger's identity is wrapped up in these digital spaces. If

fashion and lifestyle bloggers consider this work part of their identity, their core,

authenticity is bound to be marked in online performances. As Allison points out, "I have

always liked fashion, so I think fashion is part of my identity… I think I do come off as

being kind and empathetic. That's a big part of my identity and how I hope that

[followers] see me" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017). The

interconnectedness of blogging as a business and the sharing of authentic stories is

muddled by competing demands of creating capital, maintaining a brand, remaining

visible and relevant, and being true to one's identity and core.

     A blogging loop hole. As was discussed in Chapter Three, monetization

applications such as rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it have changed the landscape of

social media and blogs. What was once a creative space for exploring a love of fashion

and style is now a vast marketplace crossing borders of time and space. While some

bloggers avoid monetization tools, others have harnessed them as essential pieces of their

business plan. *The Middle Closet* has used rewardStyle for approximately three years.

They were rejected the first two times they applied for the program, but upon being

accepted became successful sellers. Much of this is due to rewardStyle providing

resources and coaching to keep bloggers in-the-know, maintaining the influencer status

quo.

At the same time rewardStyle and LIKEtoKNOW.it dominated blog and

Instagram platforms, these applications also shifted the way advertising seeps into our

everyday lives. With the proliferation of social media platforms and easy access to digital

channels, individuals are constantly presented with advertising – both noticeable and

invisible. While the Federal Trade Commission's mandate forces bloggers to identify

sponsored posts, there seems to be an alternative approach via Instagram Stories.

Instagram implemented a new system of temporary posts – Instagram Stories – to allow

users to post temporary slides or images that disappear after 24 hours and do not appear

in a blogger's feed or history beyond the initial posting period. The model is similar to

Snapchat (Constine, 2017) and provides a flexible, temporary tool for bloggers to

communicate with their followers.

Bloggers can push products without direct sponsorships by simply saying at the

beginning of an Instagram Story video clip that they are not being paid. Bloggers have

retooled these Stories into a channel to share their love of a particular brand's pair of

shoes or a miraculous eye cream. There is no need to tag these stories with #ad or

#sponsored. InstaStories allow bloggers to promote brands without the negative side effect of over-posting or inundating followers with outright branded content. Instagram Stories let users, and especially bloggers, "share as much as you want throughout the day — with as much creativity as you want. You can bring your story to life in new ways" (Instagram Just Released Snapchat-Like Feature, But Here's Why You'll Use It, 2016). Some InstaStories are sponsored and bloggers are given talking points by brands. Other posts are not sponsored or paid, but instead feature bloggers plugging specific brands and laboring for brand relationships because it is the cultural script that proliferates the platform. These Stories also build a blogger's visibility and engagement, which makes them more popular. This popularity equals success within the relational and communicative hierarchy of blogging.

While Instagram posts in a blogger's feed help build a relationship between bloggers and followers, Instagram Stories let the user watch parts of a blogger's everyday life, forging an even closer relational bond. The video functionality of Instagram Stories feels as though a friend is sharing an intimate secret. These videos highlight moments of vulnerability, frustration, or excitement. For example, the blogger Emily Schuman of *Cupcakes and Cashmere* recently said in an InstaStory, "Anytime I find myself being more vulnerable, um, I'm just, like, rewarded with a sense of community that's really incredible" (Schuman, 2018). After her confessional, the next few videos in Schuman's stream highlight items from her *Cupcakes and Cashmere* clothing brand. However, these sponsored posts do not feel like a direct advertisement. The user watches Schuman trying on her clothing line in her master bathroom, recorded with her iPhone. These ads are not

a scripted or softly-focused commercial. Because the user feels a connection with Schuman through her relational (and affective) labor, buying items linked directly to her InstaStory becomes seamless and disconnected from larger, capitalist systems – especially when surrounded by emotional or relational content.

One of the original style bloggers, Aimee Song of *Song of Style*, has been quoted as saying, "You should find joy in just creating and posting content, not the numbers. If you don't, then you should do something else" (The 10 Best Quotes from #CreateCultivateLA, 2018). Hailey echoed this sentiment in our first interview session and confirmed that "Regardless of what you're wearing, you still obviously need to show your personality" (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017). However, in the same breath Hailey noted that "understanding what that brand is after, I think, is also really important" (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017). There is friction between being truthful with followers, being yourself in the blogosphere, and succumbing to successful blogging business strategies. The foundation of blogs is rooted in numbers – the number of times a post is read, the number of times it is shared or linked to, the number of comments, and the overall number of posts a blogger publishes on a daily basis (Pham, 2015). There will always be competing economic and social motivations because the business of blogging requires both. Bloggers must navigate the digital frontier while also weighing the significance of their relational and communicative labor from moment to moment.

Go Team Blogger!: Relational Labor within Blogging Communit(ies)

Relational labor happens in multiple ways and at multiple sites – between

bloggers and their followers, between bloggers in the local community, and between

bloggers at the national or international level. Bloggers and their followers, for example,

create imagined communities through reader comments, social media platforms, and the

ebb and flow of blog traffic (boyd, 2010; Marwick, 2013; Pham, 2015). While imagined

communities were originally conceived of as political spaces created through media

channels, today these imagined communities are possible due to a networked public

sphere and the ability to create asynchronous communities around particular issues or

interests (Anderson, 1983; Koh, 2016). Connection and relationship building is at the

heart of imagined digital communities, embedded in comments, site traffic, and user

interaction. Because relational labor is at the heart of fashion and lifestyle blogging, the

digital blog community serves as an example of a Web 2.0 imagined community. At the

same time, blogging communities exist in the material world. The Denver fashion and

lifestyle blogging community, for example, is quite small. Based on comments made

during this project's interview sessions, Denver bloggers are members of a supportive

community. Hailey, Paige, Allison, and Lucille all emphasized the importance of

community support within blogging. Local bloggers help one another[24] work through

changes to the blog landscape, challenges with updated Instagram algorithms, and

increasing a blogger's reach to audiences.

---

[24] This is not always the case with other blog communities (Koivu, 2016). There is a sense among the blogger participants in this study that cities such as New York and Dallas are seen as less supportive and view other bloggers as competition, not co-producers of meaning.

Fashion and lifestyle bloggers also engage in community building amongst bloggers to maintain the blog ecosystem. In 2014, Hailey and Paige participated in *Tour Through Blogland*, a digital series where bloggers highlight others in the community. In this post Hailey and Paige identified three bloggers their followers might be interested in. The narrative for this post included resounding support for the community itself:

> We really enjoy getting to know other bloggers, and have found that a wonderful community exists within the niche fashion blogging. We'd like to introduce you to three of our favorite bloggers below. Each of these women are talented, unique and *very* kind. They inspire us! We hope you enjoy reading their blog(s) as much as we do. (Middleton & Kushner, 2014)

Throughout their interview sessions, Hailey and Paige continually referenced the community of bloggers and the friendships they have developed both in Denver and with bloggers across the country. Part of the work of blogging requires keeping up with the community and maintaining visibility outside of one's own blog. This includes commenting on other blogger's Instagram posts and providing words of encouragement in the comments section. In some instances, this type of communication is sincere and authentic. For Allison, this is just part of the business of blogging:

> On a regular day I'm on Instagram and posting, responding, and I think a lot of
>
> getting more engagement is engaging with people, so taking time to go through. I
>
> try to be authentic about what I'm commenting, like being in touch. But you want
>
> to get people to notice your page as well, so there's that kind of mutual benefit.
>
> (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017)

This type of communicative engagement is what bloggers do - providing support for others while also making one's own account more visible. But from Hailey's perspective, engagement with the community can also have ulterior motives:

> And like the support that you do get, I've wondered before, is it really genuine? You know, people saying – everything that they put on a comment and I'm guilty of it, too. I'll say "Oh, have so much fun" like blah, blah, or "Oh my gosh, I love this. You look adorable." Whereas I'm looking at it, and I'm maybe not being the most honest as I should. (H. Middleton, personal communication, July 17, 2017)

In this instance Hailey speaks to the proven formula of commenting on other blogger's feeds in order to continue a visible presence online. Fashion and lifestyle blogging requires relational and communicative labor – almost constantly – to remain relevant and productive within the larger blogging community. If a blogger comments on another blogger's feed, and a follower likes the comment, they will likely reroute to this new-to-them blogger's feed. There is a web of connection in the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere; building relationships in different parts of the community web connects the blogger to even more potential followers. Doing this relational and communicative labor maintains the blogging network as well as individual blogger's livelihoods.

Social Capital and Blogging: Sitting at the Influencer Table

The importance of relational closeness and community is continually emphasized by fashion and lifestyle bloggers. In the digital realm, connecting through shared interests – often identified through hashtags – or through mutual friends and acquaintances is less daunting with the removal of face to face contact or rejection. Yet once a connection has

been made with a follower, the blogger must foster and maintain the digital relationship.

This requires bloggers to build social capital comprised of personal relationships and

cultural norms of reciprocity (Lin, 2001; Williams, 2006), as well as "a durable network

of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition"

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 14). Social capital feeds relationships through a sense of

kinship, trust, and support (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017), which is easy to do with the erasure

of space and time issues in a digital Web 2.0 world. Instagram users are willing to

connect with people they do not know via the platform (Jin & Phua, 2014) through shared

interests, which applies to celebrities as well as fashion and lifestyle bloggers. Having an

open Instagram profile, which most bloggers and influencers do, lets followers connect

without approval, illustrating the open access of digital social networks.

Blogger to blogger relationships. Within the cultural industry of fashion and

lifestyle blogging, a sense of hierarchy and status has emerged within the circulation of

social capital. Through digital conversations – direct messaging, comments, and emails –

fashion and lifestyle bloggers bond with their followers and build relationships while also

situating themselves within the hierarchy of influencers (Abidin, 2014). Paige pointed out

during our second interview session the impact of these digital relationships:

> I think you get on social media, and you follow these people and you're like
>
> 'They're my friends. Like, I know them.' You don't know them, but you think
>
> you do. And you take advice from them, like you would your friend. (P. Kushner,
>
> personal communication, July 17, 2017)

Even bloggers and influencers are not exempt from the power of digital, relational connection. *The Middle Closet* is a well-known blog, but not at the same recognition level as *Gal Meets Glam* or *Hello Fashion*. Hailey and Paige situate themselves within the digital fashion and lifestyle blog hierarchy, and even with all of their success they must continue to build social capital and secure their position within the hierarchical blogging ecosystem. Bonding with their followers and fellow bloggers through multiple forms of communication is an iterative process. Hailey and Paige engage in this work because it helps them continue their digital success through constant online presence and acceptance by the community through likes, regrams, and comments.

Blogger to follower relationships. Outside of the community connections inherent in blogging are the important connections between bloggers and followers. While blogging bridges physical barriers through a fluid sense of time and space, as the phenomenon grows it is rooted deeper in physical, material, everyday life. As the reach of fashion and lifestyle blogging has grown, so has the power of in-person support. This is especially important as a bloggers' visibility and celebrity status grows. In a February 2018 Instagram Story, Julia Engel of *Gal Meets Glam* posted the following temporary slide:

Figure 11. A screen shot of *Gal Meets Glam*'s Instagram Story thanking Engel's followers for their attendance at a Lord & Taylor event (Engel, 2018a).

This InstaStory calls attention to the need nurture the relationships between bloggers and followers (which can include other bloggers). As a bloggers' reach grows, as Engel's has, opportunities for in-person connection emerge and must be attended to. The post above was a response to an event Engel hosted in February 2018 at the Lord & Taylor department store in New York, which she invited followers to in an Instagram Story. Putting out a call for attendees produced an excellent turnout - by acknowledging the turnout and its meaning, Engel fostered a greater sense of connection and community with her followers. As a reader, this acknowledgement creates meaning at the personal level and a sense of closeness to Engel, even if they have never met her. Watching Engel's Instagram feed and InstaStories inculcates her in a follower's everyday life.

123

Through a constant checking in and communication practices with followers, Engel participates in communicative, relational labors of love.

In another example of blogger to follower connection, Allison of *Peach & Pepper* finds that engaging with followers is done out of both business necessity and a humanistic need to establish a connection with others. She pointed out that, "I try to respond to every comment individually. I try because I personally like it when someone responds to me … I try to respond to that because I just think it's respectful and it's what I would want" (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017). As a blog follower herself, Allison recognizes the power of engagement, connection and community. She responds to and connects with her followers because she understands the significance of this type of relationship, digital or material.

Bloggers are instructed in the significance of community engagement via blogging community resources, such as rewardStyle and Create & Cultivate.[25] At a 2017 Create & Cultivate workshop for female entrepreneurs, Jen Gotch, the woman behind the brand ban.do,[26] noted that female entrepreneurs and bloggers should "Take connection over transaction" (The 10 Best Quotes from #CreateCultivateLA, 2018). In fashion and lifestyle blogs, bloggers and their followers have a shared sense of community around fashion, style and aspirational imagery. Constant communicative labor is required to

---

[25] Create and Cultivate is a platform for female entrepreneurs, branded as "a movement for women looking to create & cultivate the career of their dreams" (Create & Cultivate, 2018)

[26] ban.do is a lifestyle brand of self-designed as well as niche designer clothing, accessories, gifts, and stationary. According to the ban.do website, the brand is "inspired by the power of friendship, the good old days, and all things fun. we're also really into supporting our community of customers, fellow artists, and like-minded brands. we think there's room at the top for all of us (About Us, 2018).

sustain the relational aspect of these communities. The labor of community engagement by bloggers is "an investment toward building and maintaining an audience that will sustain a career" (Baym, 2015, p. 14).

Authenticity is also prioritized in blog community resources, where how-to guides make authenticity an automatic requirement to the labor of blogging. In an article debating authenticity in fashion and lifestyle blogging, Estrada (2013) notes that being "authentic shouldn't feel forced, and while you should challenge yourself to be the best blogger you can be, understand your comfort level with how much you're sharing about yourself. When you are writing from an honest and true place, that's when your readers can truly see your shine." These helpful hints and how-to articles strengthen the blogging industry and community, offering bloggers business and networking support while also maintaining the industry itself. Blogging community resources assist influencers in broadcasting an authentic self, remaining visible, and building their businesses to maintain the blogging status quo.

Resources available to bloggers emphasize, although not in such explicit terms, how investing in the community supports the cycle of consumption and visibility. Internet and social media platforms serve as tools to communities, especially blogging communities, around shared meaning, activities, and practices (Baym, 2015). In an industry that is about connecting and branding, the inclusion of an authentic sense of self is what gives some bloggers a leading edge in an overpopulated digital space. Paige, for example, pointed out that seeing authentic bloggers keeps her invested in the community: "I look for that in the bloggers that I follow, you know, now, that I feel like I'm really

loyal to. And I make a point to engage with those bloggers, because I know it helps them" (P. Kushner, personal communication, July 17, 2017). There were multiple times during the interview sessions when Paige expressed her frustration with the blogging community as a whole, and the sense of hegemonic content that is restated over and over. When presented with someone authentic, with a unique point of view, Paige believes that engaging with blogging community members not only helps these community members, it also helps maintain a bloggers' own popularity, visibility, and brand.

Community, Competition, and Selling: Competing Interests in the Blogging Trifecta

Despite an emphasis on community, there is also an underlying sense of competition among some bloggers. When asked what their least favorite part about blogging is, Hailey and Paige responded with "other bloggers" because of the largely competitive nature of the industry. At times the blogosphere feels very disingenuous and inauthentic for the bloggers themselves. As Hailey described,

> You're really on your own… we go to these conferences and you'd think that people are going to be really supportive and all that stuff, and it just doesn't seem as genuine, I think. You really just kind of feel like you're on your own. (H. Middleton, personal communication, July 17, 2017)

Part of the blogging community norm is showing support and fostering relationships, but at the same time these moments of connection can be done out of necessity rather than honest engagement.

At national events, such as those sponsored by rewardStyle, there is a heightened sense of competition within the blogging community. Hailey and Paige described an

126

interaction they had at the annual rewardStyle influencer conference, reserved for the top

one percent – approximately 200 – of the program's economic producers. There are

opportunities during the conference to meet directly with brands to discuss collaboration

and sponsorship opportunities. Hailey and Paige were in the middle of a conversation

with a brand representative when a vlogger – video blogger – interrupted their

conversation to introduce herself, immediately announcing she had over one million

YouTube followers. The Middleton sisters were blown away by this woman's audacity,

but at the same time acknowledged they could not compete with such massive numbers.

As Paige noted at the end of her retelling, "It was like, we're all here for the same reason.

If bloggers support each other, everybody does better. They're all so different. There's no

reason to have this competitive nature" (P. Kushner, personal communication, June 13,

2017). While Paige makes an excellent point, the blogosphere is now a business space

more so than a space for creative pursuits. With so much economic potential within the

blogging industry, a business acumen is now common, thus encouraging a sense of

competition between thousands of bloggers vying for the attention of a limited number of

brands.

In some blogging circles, however, there seems to be a shift in the sense of

competition. The experience Hailey and Paige described occurred a few years ago. In

recent years there has been an emergence of demonstrating vulnerability, and

authentically performing emotions, especially via Instagram. For example, popular

rewardStyle blogger Liz Adams of *Sequins and Stripes* posted an Instagram Story

questioning what success means for fashion and lifestyle bloggers:

127
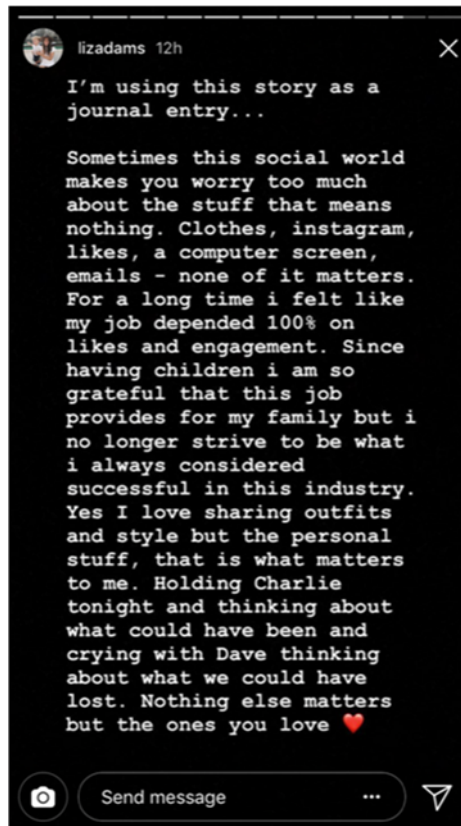
Figure 12. A screen shot of *Sequins and Stripes*' Instagram Story detailing the meaning of life, which is not dependent upon one's blog (Adams, 2018).

Rather than focus on the number of likes or #ootd posts, Liz comments on the meaning of life and the importance of family. She experienced a traumatic event with one of her children and in the hours after the incident posted the journal entry above. *Sequins and Stripes* is still an incredibly successful and popular blog. She attended the rewardStyle conference in 2018 and many of Liz's posts remain sponsored. *Sequins and Stripes* has more than 108,000 followers on Instagram and she posts constantly on InstaStories, likely due to the less formalized, temporary format. Bringing attention to the business side of blogging in relation to personal connection and one's real, everyday life is unique (although becoming more common across blogger feeds). Liz's post is an example of the

connection between real-life community, digital communities, and success. There is no competition in this moment of vulnerability; Adams received thousands of direct messages in response to her personal post offering support and encouragement. Adams acknowledged these messages in another Instagram Story, noting that she and her husband read every comment and that each touched them deeply. The norm in fashion and lifestyle blogging seemingly leans toward a space of connection, support and empowerment rather than competition. The relationship between Adams and her followers was strengthened by her authentic honesty and vulnerability – and named by Adams as a response, further strengthening the relational connection and closeness between *Sequins and Stripes* and her followers.

The Cultural, Social, and Community Value of Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging

Blogging is a laborious industry and bloggers are constantly doing the communicative and relational work required to keep their blog popular, visible, and significant. The relational labor of fashion and lifestyle blogging is rooted in a blogger's ability to relate with others – followers and fellow bloggers – through an approachable, authentic performance of self in digital and everyday life. A blogger's relational work ultimately results in economic capital, if they are successful, because followers who feel a closeness and trust in bloggers are more willing to click on their affiliate links and continue the cycle of consumption condoned by monetized blogging. While some bloggers avoid the system of blogging as business, others see the value attached to this lucrative, albeit exhausting, line of work.

There are narratives within blogging that speak to the power of community building in digital spaces. On the one hand, the blogging community must have buy-in from its participants in order to maintain the economic value tied to this digital work. On the other hand, there is tension between being an authentic person and blogging to push the market forward. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers must navigate this through their communicative and relational work, in a space of visibility and constant connection. While bloggers need to support one another in order to remain visible (i.e. through regramming or posting positive comments on blogger Instagram posts), others see value in the role community plays:

> The biggest misconception is that we're in it for the free clothes, free travel experiences and because we want to be famous… Sure, that's one way of looking at it, and with some people that might be the case, but having an online community can be a very positive and empowering thing, especially as a woman in today's world. The best part about this journey is I get to meet so many amazing people. (Diamond, 2017)

This narrative by Aimee Song of *Song of Style* stresses the significance of support and relational connection in blogging. When bloggers and follower are divided by thousands of miles, the act of communicating and connecting becomes even more significant. Blogging and social media networks bring together individuals through shared interest, no matter the distance. However, these bonds revolve around consumption, since a monetized blogger's primary goal is to connect in order to promote the purchase of material items and earn commissions.

The combination of communicative and relational labor fosters the final form of labor practiced by fashion and lifestyle bloggers – affective labor. In the next chapter I explore the affective turn within communication studies and the ways affect is circulated

within digital spaces. I also illustrate how *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, *and The Black Velveteen* embody vitality, an important theory with affect studies, and make sense of everyday, ordinary moments. As an embodied form of knowing, affect builds upon relational labor, allowing bloggers and followers to connect via shared interests, similar experiences, and a nuanced, felt sense of emotional connection.

Chapter Five: The Affective Labor of Blogging Through Ordinary, Everyday Moments

We sit outside on the coffee shop's concrete patio, underneath an umbrella that is not doing much to shade us from the July sun and heat. We sit on the corner of two quiet streets, very few people walking by on this midmorning workday – just the occasional mother in Lululemon pushing a designer stroller or a neighborhood local walking their dog. Our compostable plastic cups filled with iced coffee are sweating from the heat, pooling condensation at the cup's edges and darkening splices of the wooden table.

I glance up at Hailey and Paige. Both appear put together and polished, albeit casual. Paige is wearing black yoga leggings and a simple gray v-neck tee. Her blunt bob is perfectly mussed, although she says that today she looks "like a mom." Hailey is also a bit more casual during this session, wearing a light grey crew-neck sweatshirt and fitted skinny jeans. She oscillates between resting her oversized sunnies on the bridge of her nose and using them to push her hair back on the top of her head, depending on the angle of the sun. I keep wondering if they are hot with the warm summer temperatures. I'm wearing a sundress and burning up while they both sit there seemingly cool as cucumbers. We sit in a short, but comfortable silence, as they mull over my question: What do you hate about blogging?

There is something palpable swirling around us, an emotional back and forth between wanting to answer honestly versus providing the perfect sound bite. I cannot tell

if it is nervousness and fear that I'm feeling bounce between us or something else. The three of us are sharing this space, doing nothing out of the ordinary. But I still sense something is happening. Hailey and Paige are thinking through their responses while also emitting feelings that I cannot quite put a finger on. There is almost a sense of potentiality. As I ponder what they will say, Hailey begins to speak.

Everyday Life Fashioned Through Affect and Vitality

Fashion and lifestyle blogging is a modern communicative phenomenon that illustrates the blurred boundaries between digital and everyday life. Digital blog and social media posts affect individuals in their everyday lives – both bloggers and their followers – while everyday life influences the performances and narratives within these digital spaces. As outlined in Chapters Three and Four, the practice of successful fashion and lifestyle blogging necessitates communicative and relational labor on a constant basis due to Web 2.0 culture. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers also engage in affective labor, a labor rooted in the body and manifest in both digital and material representations. Through their communicative and relational encounters, bloggers engage in affective relations, comprised of an embodied form of knowing. The use of affect in blogging, in combination with narrative, produces structures of feeling that allow bloggers and followers to comprehend their own subjectivit(ies) while also impacting the body and senses.

In this chapter I explore the way(s) affect is cultivated and sustained in the digital frontier of fashion and lifestyle blogging. To understand this connection, I offer an explanation of affect as well as the affective turn within communication studies. One

aspect of this affective turn is the emergence of the attention-based economy (Davenport & Beck, 2002; Goldhaber, 1997; Nixon, 2016). We live in a world of engagement and attention, both key dynamic forces in the affective labor of blogging. I turn to Stern's (2010) *Forms of Vitality* to understand examples of affective circulation and labor within the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere. I enhance this exploration of vitality with a discussion of embodied knowing and sense-making by bloggers. Throughout I use examples from *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen*; to supplement these examples I also include textual fragments from prominent fashion and lifestyle influencers *Gal Meets Glam* and *Song of Style*. I end the chapter with a discussion of the interconnectedness between affect, vitality, and excess in social media spaces.

Do You Feel It?: The Affective Turn

The affective turn within communication studies is a relevantly new thread of research and scholarship within the discipline. Communication studies has generally focused on linguistics and those visible or quantifiable aspects of human experience. The affective turn considers other communicative moments, those that are *felt* rather than seen, *becoming* rather than being. Through a traditional philosophical frame, affect is understood as the material forces that impact the physical body – the aspect(s) of "human experience that remains largely 'hidden in plain view'" (Stern, 2010, p. 3). From a communication studies perspective, affect challenges structuralism and a reliance on linguistics to define our everyday lives. Instead, the affective turn in communication studies focuses on material forces rather than representations, language, or symbols.

These material forces can lie in a gesture or an expression – even a smize. Affect calls

attention to those moments we often quickly move past – the pauses, changes to rhythm,

and slight shifts in mood. Through affect we turn back upon the material body and *how* it

experiences and traverses everyday life.

Affect is layered, nuanced, and difficult to explicitly define. We know that affect

is relational, social, intense, and ephemeral (Cromby, 2011; Massumi, 2002). It silently

impacts individuals throughout their everyday life experiences: "Affect is in this sense a

force that arises out of and through relationality and exchange, through contacts between

myriads of singularities and their assemblage" (Kanngeiser, 2012, p. 282). Affect lies

somewhere between emotion and cognition as "partners in an ongoing series of emergent

processes" (Protevi, 2009, p. 25). Because affect focuses on the material body and

embodied feelings, we define it by a "feltness" or a transformative "becoming-with"

(Manning, 2009). Individuals are not self-contained subjects but instead a vessel for

transmitting affect, enhancing and/or depressing energy(ies) with physiological impact

(Brennan, 2004). Affect circulates around and within bodies moving fluidly in space,

swirling and dancing about.

Affect is energetic, malleable and circulatory. Our everyday interactions are

opportune for transmitting affect because they are situated around the notion of

potentiality, where bodies and movement are betwixt and between. For Manning (2009),

> Bodies are dynamic expressions of movement in its incipiency. They have not yet
> converged into final form…. I propose that we move toward a notion of a
> becoming-body that is a sensing body in movement, a body that resists
> predefinition in terms of subjectivity or identity, a body that is involved in a
> reciprocal reaching-toward that in-gathers the world even as it worlds. (p. 6)

135

Affect pushes individuals toward experiences and encounters in a forward trajectory. This movement and forward momentum allows individuals to transform.

It's About the Nuance: Affect, Emotions, Feelings

While affect is often superimposed with emotions or feelings, each is subtly different. Emotions are "a recognized affect and identified intensity" (Massumi, 2002, p. 61) and can exist without language in the form of affect (Stern, 2010). Emotions are also foundational to our experiences in everyday life. Massumi (1995) considers affect and emotions to exist and be experienced through social, cultural, or community consensus. Emotion is felt at the individual level but defined by a collective, affective accord. Affect exists in, through, and around individuals but is not personal (Massumi, 2002; Shouse, 2005). It is an orientation that centers some bodies while marginalizing others, beginning with the circulation of affective economies (Ahmed, 2006). Affect is pre-personal (Massumi, 2002), an unconscious experience of intensity (Shouse, 2005). In the example of fashion and lifestyle blogs and social media feeds, these digital spaces serve as an environment for circulating affect through relational, social, and, at time, emotional reasoning. The digital and material spaces of blogging are a catalyst for emergent everyday processes.

Feelings, on the other hand, are sensations that have found their match in words (i.e. a descriptive tool), part of an individual's specialized system of reception, and a distinct interpretation of the sensorium (Brennan, 2004). Feelings are retrospective for "we know what we've felt when we are no longer in the feeling" (Manning, 2009, p. 46). We perceive the world through feelings. They are a tool for articulating what is felt;

without them we cannot transition or induce the act of becoming (Manning, 2009).

Feelings connect individuals and can be articulated through language and symbols. They are personal (Shouse, 2005). Because of their ties to language, feelings "include something more than sensory information insofar as they suppose a unified interpretation of that information" (Brennan, 2004, p. 5) and can be defined as "sensations that have found the right match in words" (Brennan, 2004, p. 5). Once connected to language, emotions or affects become feelings. In the blog space and social media platforms, bloggers connect with followers through feelings and emotions. Bloggers and followers have a shared love of clothes or aspirational lifestyles, but this can only go so far. Describing feelings to followers or filming a vulnerable moment helps bloggers and followers relate to one another. It illustrates a sense of humanity, which serves a distinctive function in the attention and affective economies of Web 2.0's digital everyday life.

Are You Watching?: Attention and Affective Econom(ies)

Broadly speaking, an attention economy is the recognition of attention as a commodity, one that is both scarce and valuable (Davenport & Beck, 2001). In Web 2.0 culture, consumers' attention is a valuable resource in communication and culture industries (Goldhaber, 1997; Nixon, 2017). The attention economy is heightened by the multitude of digital platforms at an individual's fingertips. Situated within a larger digital economy of visibility, and fashion and lifestyle blogging in particular, a user's attention is invaluable in a digital sea of branded social media or blog posts. One of the key aspects of garnering the attention of users is through affect and relational connection (Banet-

137

Weiser, 2012; Baym, 2015). Immaterial labor such as affective, relational, and communicative labor swirls around material bodies as well as through digital space. Bloggers use all three forms of labor to attract the gaze of users inundated with content. When done well, bloggers have a committed follower base in a competitive attention and affective economy.

Affect in communicative messaging increases the effectiveness of advertising and marketing (Lang, Dhillon, & Dong, 1995) and invokes a connection and/or judgment of objects. In an affective economy, "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space within social space – through the very intensity of their attachment" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 119). We exist within a system where objects circulate and emotions "stick." Emotions bind subjects together, especially when those subjects are invested or engaged with others in social spaces. Blogging communities are social by nature and illustrate Ahmed's (2006) point that emotions in these spaces stick figures together through *adherence*, which then creates the effective of a collective, also known as *coherence*. The blogging community at large, as well as the relationships between individual bloggers and their followers, connect through adherence and coherence around shared language, meaning, and aspirations to foster an affective economy.

In fashion and lifestyle blogging, the notion of an affective economy becomes discernible in the affective messaging from bloggers tied to commodified, branded goods. Affect exists alongside discursive and narrative texts. Within this line of thought, affect does not reside within material objects or signs, but instead lies within the circulation between objects and signs (Ahmed, 2006). In blogging, this occurs when users connect

138

emotionally to the blogger while at the same time associating and assessing commodified goods marketed (i.e. communicated) by the blogger. This circulation of signs creates a sense of intimacy and connection with the blogger as well as the featured consumable items.

For Ahmed (2006), we see this as "a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power, or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time" (pp. 120). From this perspective, emotional/affective experiences serve as a form of capital. Affect is not embedded in material commodities but is born through circulation across social fields and the social and cultural movement between signs. In the business world, emotional capital is the emotional skills or experiences that give individuals an ability to successfully communicate and form interpersonal relationships (Emotional capital, 2006). Emotional capital is important across sectors, fashion and lifestyle blogging included. Because fashion and lifestyle blogging is a business, emotional capital is another way in which bloggers can remain visible – even stand out – in the hierarchy of bloggers. A blogger's emotional capital, illustrated through communicative and relational strength, makes them successful. In addition, emotion serves as a form of excess (Bergson, 1911), an overflow of material things which escape representation and shape our bodies as well as our understanding of the world. Affective and relational labor in fashion and lifestyle blogging bonds bloggers and consumers who see a reflection of themselves in the other through the circulation of signs, including affective connection. It is through this affective labor that connections are cultivated, established, and maintained.

Vitality, Movement, and Ordinary Moments in Social Media Encounters

So much of everyday life goes unnoticed – moments and experiences are often overlooked simply because they are ordinary. Turning to Stern's (2010) *Forms of Vitality* provides theoretical tools to examine the vitality forms that lie within human experience and expression, illuminating *how* communicative content - and its contours - produce the way(s) we feel our subjectivity(ies). For Stern, vitality is woven into the way we experience others:

> We intuitively evaluate their emotions, states of mind, what they are thinking and what they really mean, their authenticity, what they are likely to do next, as well as their health and illness on the basis of the vitality expressed in their almost constant movements. (2010, p. 3)

Vitality is composed of movement, time, space, force, and direction as they unfold, creating a "fundamental dynamic pentad" (Stern, 2010, pp. 4-5). This framing of experience is specific but also holistic. For Stern, vitality is a whole, "a Gestalt that emerges from the theoretically separate experiences of movement, force, time, space, and intention" (p. 5) comprised of individual, energetic moments.

Vitality is embedded in the "force, speed, and flow of a gesture; the timing and stress of a spoken phrase or even word; the way one breaks into a smile… the manner of shifting positions in a chair… and the rush or tumble of thoughts" (Stern, 2010, p. 6). These moments are ordinary but also ensconced with meaning, content, and potentiality. They are imprinted on our subjectivity(ies) in subtle ways and appeal "to amodal perception to explain how a 'sense of self' emerges relationally, with the capacity to continue to become" (Massumi, 2010, p. 187). Stern explains vitality through the example of emotional bonding between a mother and infant child. For example, *what* is

140

communicated to an infant is not as significant as *how* it is communicated. A mother would not logically explain to infant why they are crying, asking them to calm down. Instead, the mother would shift her tonality, speaking to the infant in soothing tones and altering her expression. Vitality exists in these everyday moments. The communicative aspects of vitality – movement, time, space, force, and direction – help individuals comprehend feelings as well as their subjectivity(ies).

Within vitality is a sense of being alive through "the ephemeral nature of the present" (Willink & Shukri, forthcoming). For Stern, vitality is part of "episodic memories and give life to the narratives we create about our lives" (p. 11), providing a verbal method to recount memories, phenomenological experiences, and "implicit relational knowing" (Lyons-Ruth, 1998; Stern, 2010; Stern, 1985). Fashion and lifestyle bloggers perform their work through communicative acts and relational connection via written, visual, and spoken narratives. Examining these narrative representations and textual fragments of a blogger's experiences through vitality forms brings to light their performative, generative, meaning-making potential.

Dynamic Forms of Vitality: I'm "Feeling" This Blog

In *Forms of Vitality*, Stern notes that vitality forms are psychological, subjective phenemona that emerge in dynamic encounters (p. 7) and are felt through *all* of our senses. The first form in Stern's theorization of vitality is *movement* – that which is embodied, felt, and exists everywhere. To truly understand movement, we must know what, why, and how movement is deployed. It is dynamic and stems from physical, mental, and virtual movement embedded in the experience of physical and mental

movement which "traces a small journey" (p. 21). The second vitality form, *force*, speaks to the processing of dynamic experiences and the "tendency to attach the feeling-perception of force, energy, power, and vigor to human movement" (p. 22). Force speaks to the ways we embody affect and "how much" we feel movement. *Time* is the "temporal contour or time profile of the movement as it begins, flows through, and ends" (p. 4), enabling individuals to feel force. *Space* facilitates an individual's understanding of how movement influences the ways our bodies move in physical spaces. The final vitality form, *directionality*, provides a sense of intention in our movement(s).

By considering these vitality forms I am able to understand the impact of vitality on subjectivity(ies), community, and larger social and cultural structures. In digital spaces, for example, there is a sense of possibility not only within the ether of the Internet or Instagram platform, but also through manifestation within individual bodies. Virtual sensations "in order to become real, must tend to urge the body to action, and to impress upon it those movements or attitudes of which they are the habitual antecedent" (Bergson, 1911, p. 168). In the blog space, followers virtually sense possibility and potentiality in digital communicative encounters.

The movement of vitality within the digital realm becomes part of an individual follower's material enactment of the messages they see online. This is generally manifest through consumption. Our bodily forces enact us to move and feel that which we encounter in digital spaces. Blog sites and Instagram feeds are a form of media, although not always recognized as such. For example, an Instagram post may appear static, yet it is a form of movement through its circulation through the social media network, the

"regramming" and sharing of content, and its ability to spur followers to like an image and make a purchase with the click of a button. Vitality and the circulation of affect can stir our senses, for movement is everywhere. It becomes evident "when we hear or read language, or let free the imagination" (p. 20) and in these moments "we can experience virtual worlds of forces in motion" (p. 20).

Ordinary moments. So much of what is embedded in blogger narratives is a slice of *ordinary* everyday life. These moments and narratives may be curated, but they are still everyday happenings – picking up coffee, shopping for the perfect pair of shoes, or preparing dinner. As entrepreneurial, can-do girl subjects, bloggers engage in both self-presentation and self-improvement through snapshots of their everyday life, those ordinary moments. By showing off these moments, bloggers remain visible and engaged – as well as successful in a neoliberal, capitalist society. A blogger's communicative, relational, and affective work within narratives convey the ordinary affects experienced in everyday life; they are public feelings that circulate broadly, as well as intimate experiences that are "immanent, obtuse, and erratic" (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). Bloggers help circulate these public feelings and a sense of potentiality.

Even the temporary, less-curated moments captured by Instagram Stories illustrate those nuanced, ordinary parts of everyday life. These moments are dripping with ordinary affects, those,

> …varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affect that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're things that happen… in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and

agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *some*thing. (Stewart, 2007, pp. 1-2)

Using Instagram Stories to connect with followers allows bloggers to establish intimacy and transmit affect through digital channels. These channels allow bloggers to "talk to the user on a really intimate level" (Strugatz, 2014, p. 10) and with its similar format to Snapchat, provides one of the most personal connections available through a social media platform (Strugatz, 2014). These digital encounters are moving, pulsing and vital. The nuances in everyday life create meaning through enacting the fashion and lifestyle blogger subjectivity.

Becoming (or what "might be"). Ordinary affect is not only present in digital blog and social media communications, we also see it within face to face interactions, specifically within the interview. Examining interview texts through affect provides a sense of what "might be." For Willink and Shukri, interviews "as affective exchanges are sites of intra-actional becoming (Barad), generative and emergent, processual and perpetually in motion (Manning)" (forthcoming, p. 3). Turning to affect sheds "light on the ways in which a hesitancy, a look, a *feeling* beckons us to rephrase a question, share a personal narrative of our own, or move on to the next topic in the interview dance" (Willink & Shukri, forthcoming, p. 6). These moments and movements make sense of the interaction, as well as the narrative itself; the interview is about "rhythms, valences, moods, sensations, tempos, and lifespans" (Stewart, 2008, p. 572).

When recalling and rewriting the narrative at the beginning of this chapter, I was struck by how a look or pause by Hailey and Paige was so telling upon reflection. Approaching the interviews in this study from a performative perspective already speaks

144

to embodiment in the interview space/interaction. By turning to affect within those spaces/interactions I uncover the potentiality in both the experience(s) and the narrative(s) that emerge.

The interview space is full of ordinary affect, in the "watching and waiting for an event to unfold, the details of scenes, the strange or predictable progression in which one things leads to another, the still life that gives pause, the resonance that lingers… the layering of immanent experience" (Stern, 2010, p. 6). During both interview sessions with Allison of *Peach & Pepper*, for example, we broached the subject of blogging in relation to her wife and mother subjectivities. During these discussions there was exchange of affect as we navigated difficult, tenuous subject matter. In those moments affect and energy crossed between our bodies, moving in, "specific directions, carrying a content that varies according to the nature of the affect or affects concerned… [where] the process of the transmission of affect does not stop because we… become blind to it" (Brennan, 2004, p. 14). Transmission of affect, according to Brennan, refers to a social process that is also "biological and physical in effect… the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies those affects entail, can enter into another" (p. 3). In those moments I felt the movement of energy as well as Allison's anguish. In Chapter Three I recalled a moment in our second interview where Allison described struggles she has with her husband:

> I mean, I have some lows at home when my husband and I will get in a fight
> because he thinks I'm not taking care of my family responsibility, that I'm doing

photo shoots or something… I feel like I'm falling short as a mom, a wife. (A.

Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017)

Allison – as a wife and mother and aspiring full-time blogger – feels torn by her love of

blogging and free clothes and the love for her family. When discussing these personal

issues, Allison did not make full eye contact and often looked down when speaking. Her

entire bodily composure shifted. At the time I noticed that something was happening but

did not tie it to affective transmission. Upon reflection, however, in those moments

Allison grappled with her sense of authenticity, as well as vulnerability, torment, and

shame. Allison's affect was palpable. She did not articulate these emotions through

language, but they circulated within the interview space. Allison knows, although may

not always name, her relational and affective duties as a mother and wife. They stand in

opposition to the affective, relational, and communicative labor needed to maintain a blog

business. As a can-do girl subject, Allison must engage with her followers, remaining

active and constantly moving. The blogger subject and wife/mother subjects, when

discussed during the interview, became a vitality form, illustrating how Allison's

communicative content and language speak to her *feeling* these subjectivities. I could feel

the shift in affect as Allison discussed her struggles with balancing blogging and a family

life. What she did not put into words was still evident via the energy that existed in that

moment. There was movement in Allison's switching back and forth between

subjectivities, as well as a sense of force in the way she seemed to be *feeling* the

vulnerability and shame of having to negotiate these subjectivities.

Affect - and vitality - is evident in our everyday experiences as we work to navigate the world. It is the moments when we engage with others that we begin to feel alive. In the interview setting I had several moments of sensing something even if I could not articulate what, exactly, I felt. In the next section I explore the transmission of affect within blogging through two examples – *Gal Meets Glam*'s excitement and *The Black Velveteen*'s anger. Each example highlights the nuance of affective labor and the way(s) affect circulates as a form of capital by connecting bloggers and followers, maintaining visibility and engagement. With the development of Instagram Stories, the circulation of affect becomes clear, especially through the vital forms of movement and time.

Transmitting Affect in Instagram Stories

Many fashion and lifestyle bloggers reconcile the business of blogging through its creativity and narrative functionality. Even though blogging is a business, these bloggers emphasize community and connection rather than the economic capital earned through their work. Much of the connection in blogging is cultivated through affective relationships and labor. Engaging in affective labor enables bloggers to maintain their authenticity through emotions and a sense of vulnerability. Bloggers, especially popular influencers, write to thousands of followers while at the same time fostering a sense of personalized, intimate, relational closeness. There is a sense of rhythm in the frequency of their posts, a back and forth movement that keeps both the blogger and follower engaged and the blogging machine moving forward.

Because women are often drawn to emotional connections, bloggers and their followers exist within a cycle of visibility, emotion/affect, and connection. By naming

emotions and sharing them in the blogosphere through language and narrative, bloggers negotiate sense-making and meaning through the invisible, connective tissues of virtual channels. Narratives help individual bloggers articulate this sense-making while also transmitting affect. We see this in not only in blog narratives, but also through the increasingly popular Instagram Stories. The platform's temporary posting mechanism enables users to connect with their followers, sharing stories and affect, without altering their curated, professionally photographed feeds.

Instagram Stories offer a digital space for fashion and lifestyle bloggers to engage with their followers and move through the world together. The temporary and immediate nature of this platform speaks to the vital form of time. Digital communicative, relational, and affective labor requires constant connection and visibility. Connection and visibility are also key to vitality. Affect is about movement and timing. Bloggers nurture relational connections in real-time across the digital realm. As bloggers post Stories to Instagram, their personalized icon at the top of the application's homepage appears almost lit from within, surrounded by a fuchsia and orange circle. It pulses and moves, signaling to the reader that the blogger has something to say. It beckons followers to check in to see what is happening before the Story disappears (within 24 hours) and illustrates "the temporal aspects of the interactive flow such as the rhythmic repetitions, the ongoing match of affective states, and the sequential mirroring" (p. 380) and the "variety of sensory and behavioral modalities that preserve the intensity, shape, and rhythms of the original message" (p. 380). The rhythm of posting is intuited by followers. By watching these

148

Stories, the follower is imprinted with the experience and movement of the blogger. The more posts a blogger makes in a day, the greater the sense of time and movement.

The connection between bloggers and followers at the community level is also affective. Exchange of affect fuels the health of the blogging community, the network of followers, as well as the individual blogger's success. We see this in likes, comments, direct messages, and acknowledgement of followers by bloggers. If the blog or Instagram feed is not maintained, it begins to atrophy. Hailey spoke to this exact phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter Three, through recounting her first experience leaving the blog space temporarily. She was attending a work conference and was unable to post for about one week: "You instantly see how it affects how you are interacting with other people… and things like that. So it is constant" (H. Middleton, personal communication, June 13, 2017). Not engaging meant a loss of rhythm and movement, causing *The Middle Closet*'s health to deteriorate. Engaging with the vital movement and timing within blogging keeps the space – and in some cases the market – alive. The rhythm of blogging speaks to the demands of affective labor. It is a subcutaneous flow through bloggers, pushing them to continue posting, maintaining visibility through a constant digital presence. In combination with the aesthetically pleasing imagery of a blogger's Instagram feed, the Instagram platform and InstaStories appeal to followers by pulling them – forcing them – toward the everyday "becoming" experience of the blogger. Even the name Instagram Stories highlights the ways in which the movement of stories helps individuals navigate the world, propelling them toward consumption. It is through vitality that these stories come into being.

A Transmission Story: Excitement

Gal Meets Glam provides a helpful example of vital, transmission of affect. After following Engel for many years, followers feel as though they know her. She invites followers into vulnerable or less polished fragments of everyday life through her Instagram Stories. Some days she records short Instagram Stories walking with her husband to get coffee in a simple of pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Other times she posts Stories where she has just finished an Orange Theory workout class, her face flushed and sweaty. In combination with the personalized blog narratives or earnest social media captions, the user feels connected to Engel despite only knowing her through limited snippets she purposefully discloses to her audience.

As a long-time follower of *Gal Meets Glam* I can attest to this connection. When Engel announced she was launching a clothing line, I became instantly excited not only because I like dresses but because I like *her*. She brings the user along on her journey. She seems nice and genuine, like someone you know from college and occasionally run into at Whole Foods buying organic vegetables and freshly cut flowers. When Engel expresses excitement about being featured in the highly regarded fashion publication *Women's Wear Daily*, the user feels excitement too. Engel includes her followers in the meaning-making process by posting Instagram Stories such as:

Figure 13. A screen shot of *Gal Meets Glam*'s Instagram Story highlighting the feature on her clothing collection to *Women's Wear Daily*, also thanking the publication (Engel, 2018c).

Through a continued combination of affective, relational, and communicative labor, Engel keeps her blog followers engaged. The blogging phenomenon is interactive, especially with Instagram Stories. Users can send Engel a direct message about a particular Story or like comments to her posts. Engel can respond to user messages or acknowledge her followers through a Story proclaiming "thank you" or a heartfelt Instagram caption. By responding and acknowledging her follower base, Engel continues cultivating and maintaining her affective and relational connections. These connections propel her blog forward. *Gal Meets Glam*'s transmission of affect illustrates Song & Zinkhan's (2008) findings that bloggers who provide personalized information increase

the perceived interactivity of the blog, as well as the user benefit from engaging with the blog/blogger. As the example above illustrates, fashion and lifestyle bloggers manage affect and communicate through social, branded, and at times strategic, performances of self (Duffy, 2015; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013). Engel illustrates her excitement and gratefulness – positive affects (Silvia, 2006) – through the Story's caption. At the same, time there is a sense of excitement and connection because as a follower, one is invested in her journey and success.

A Transmission Story: Anger and Frustration

Lucille provides a different tale of the transmission of affect, one of anger and frustration. In a 2018 series of Instagram Stories, Lucille expressed her emotions, primarily anger, through language and feelings, about the absence of diverse bodies and opinions within fashion and lifestyle blogging communities on Instagram. In the series of Stories Lucille confronts a lack of diversity – and her frustration with this norm – in the digital realm of fashion and lifestyle blogging. She posted a series of Stories on International Women's Day, including the following:

Figure 14. A screen shot of @katherinepower's "International Women's Day" post.

Figure 15. A screen shot of Lucille's Instagram Story calling attention to the lack of non-white bodies in @katherinepower's original post.

The stories appeared one after another, lasting seven to 10 seconds each. In each Story

she comments on the imagery from another blogger's feed highlighting the inspiring

women within the fashion and beauty e-commerce profession. All of these women are

white. Because of this, Lucille's commentary is layered with anger, frustration, and a

calling out of this discrimination.

Lucille has repeatedly worked to represent the experience of a black woman in

her social media presence. In fact, she named her blog in part because as an African-

American she "likes having 'black' in the title" (L. Wenegieme, personal communication,

October 15, 2017). During our interview, Lucille touched upon the lack of diversity in

blogging:

I'm very frank about what other bloggers look like, because I think a lot of the

time people just don't even really notice, it's just become such a default that

154

people don't notice that they're only consuming one type of thing. And so I just

try to by really frank. People's bodies are people's bodies, I'm not saying that that

body is a bad look to have or a bad body to have, but just if you've been scrolling

through your Instagram for five minutes, how many of the people that you see

look like me?... I tend to talk about that kind of thing in my Instagram stories, that

kind of thing. Just being a little bit more frank about, yeah, just being brown and

being tall and being curvy and not being apologetic about that. But when I'm

feeling great about it, I talk about it. When I'm feeling shitty about it, I talk about

that too. More than anything, I would hope that people enjoyed that I bring a

different conversation to the table. Sometimes that's exhausting. (L. Wenegieme,

personal communication, October 15, 2017).

The energy that Lucille emitted during this exchange speaks to the ordinary affect and

transgressive data that "shift people's life trajectories in some small way, change them by

literally changing their course for a minute or a day" (Stewart, 2008, p. 572). Lucille

articulated her frustration and navigation of the blog sphere as a woman of color who

does not possess the typical tall, thin, willowy body of many of today's top influencers.

There was a shift in the energy at our small table at Coffee at the Point. The voice

recognition software recording the interview could not detect the energy, but it was there.

Not only was the affect swirling around the space and our bodies, there was a sense of

history and struggle in Lucille's responses. I felt some of Lucille's pain and frustration. I

could sense the vital forms of time and movement - the rhythm and tempo of Lucille's

words in an even, deliberate cadence. She was composed, yet there was an energy behind

155

her gaze that signaled *some*thing I, as a white woman, could never truly understand what Lucille was feeling in that moment. There was animacy (Chen, 2012), an affective tonality that gave meaning to her words. But I sensed them and upon reflection, acknowledge them.

That same energy from the interview space exists in the comment Lucille made to the blogger's account, highlighted in Figure 15 above: "@katherinepower Are there not any black female fashion & beauty e-commerce founders & inversions, or are they just not your favorite?" (Wenegieme, 2018). There is an intensity or magnitude (Stern, 2010) to Lucille's comments. She uses language to engage with this blogger and to call out hegemonic issues she sees within Instagram culture. Lucille's comments carry the affective residue of years of struggle as a woman of color, her comments serving as form of excess tied to her words. As excess, Lucille's comments to @katherinepower "function as ways to cement or destabilize notions of identity, collude or subvert hegemonic ideological processes, and interrupt power, regardless of the purpose of disruption" (Willink, 2010, p. 207). The vitality forms circulating through Lucille's Instagram Stories, as well as her interview responses, animate an affective rhythm that both highlights and disrupts her sense-making of ordinary moments. Lucille refuses to submit to the expectations of the typical blogger subject, instead choosing to call out and disrupt the ideological norms she encounters in everyday life.

Why Do I Blog? Embodied Knowing and Making Sense of the World

Blogs "form communities of consumers who are bound together by affect and emotion, and by a sense of authentic experience" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 218). Blog and

social media spaces express an "embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world… [promising] a better experience of social belonging – partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture and partly because of its revelations about how people can live" (Berlant, 2008, p. viii). *Gal Meets Glam*, for example, portrays an authentic experience through narratives and a curated stream of images and clothing styles. Her brand is established, and Engel never deviates from it. She performs a hyper-feminine identity as part of her brand, attracting followers with similar backgrounds, experiences, and tastes. This presentation and performance speaks to Engel's followers and produces affect via *Gal Meets Glam*'s social media and blog representations. She embodies her brand and it helps her to navigate and make sense of the world.

Because fashion and lifestyle blogging incorporates self-reflexivity through *technologies of the self 2.0*, as well as transmission of affect/emotion, embodied forms of knowing in the blog space create "the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 117). There is a hegemonic ideology around what a fashion and lifestyle blogger should look like and the type of work they should engage in. There are examples of women who do not fit the cookie-cutter mold of today's popular influencer – white, tall, thin, young, and wealthy. We see this in Lucille as well as Allison. In the next section, I discuss Allison's navigation of age in an industry primarily featuring young, white women. Allison must negotiate different forms of labor than her younger counterparts in her everyday life experiences.

Age and the Blogger Subject

Allison of *Peach & Pepper* is a blogger with an established brand. At the same time, Allison is an atypical fashion and lifestyle blogger in that she is older than most other bloggers/influencers. She is in her early 40s and has slight wrinkles around her eyes. She faces competing concerns around her blogging business, her role as wife, and her motherly duties.

Peach & Pepper illustrates there is not a homogenous, gendered blogger subject. However, she must put in additional labor to maintain her success. Allison is white, slender, slightly above average height, and beautiful. Yet she still has age working against her. Younger bloggers, for example, do not have to worry about close-up photographs highlighting their wrinkles. During our second interview, Allison and I discussed the shift in blogging toward live (or live-ish) videos on Instagram or Facebook. This brings up several issues for Allison:

> I mean, I have to make sure the angle is good and the lighting is good. I know a lot of girls and I totally respect the fact that they'll do like no makeup when they roll out of bed and I think people actually appreciate seeing that, the realness of it. I mean I try to be real but you're not going to see me without anything. I don't leave the house without makeup… if it's something where I feel like I need to be talking face to face, will, virtually face to face, I may redo it a couple time to make sure that it's not so awful. (A. Ruchaber, personal communication, October 24, 2017)

158

Allison does the intensive communicative, relational, and affective work of blogging, but more so than other younger bloggers. In addition to her age, Allison must also consider her family life in relation to her blog and social media presence. Most bloggers do not worry about navigating digital spaces in an authentic way while also hiding key aspects of their life – i.e. not featuring their children in photographs and blog stories.

Allison is adamant that she is not a "mommy blogger" and approaches her blog from only a fashion and lifestyle lens. Because of this, Allison wants to shield her children from the blogosphere. She does not include her children in her online presence, bifurcating her blog and home life. Yet these extra considerations wear on Allison. She must engage in additional communicative work to perform an ideal, feminized, can-do girl subject. Blogs are seen as "authentic" due to their relatability and girl-next-door quality, while also cementing the commercial value in reinforcing gendered expectations around womanhood (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2010). Allison fits within the ideal feminine blogger body and subject, despite being over 40. Yet when Allison had room in the interview space to reflect on her experience as a blogger, she vocalized and embodied sense-making around her age. She considers her age throughout ordinary moments, but it is not evident in her blog narratives. Yet in person it is always there, swirling around and creating an energy I could feel in the space. Allison's blog images and narratives often appear sunny and happy. She smiles in photos and her language, especially in Instagram post captions, is light. But when talking about her age and blogging in person, there is a

sense of anxiety or shame around not being good enough. I can feel Allison's uneasiness around being the best and engaging in the can-do girl, fashion blogger subject.

With extra attention paid to her age and familial duties, Allison dedicates additional time and communicative, relational, and affective labor as a blogger. Portraying a happy-go-lucky can-do girl subject is difficult work in and of itself. Adding in concerns about one's image and age, and juggling home life and kids' schedules, impact Allison's emotions as she discussed in our interview. She constantly navigates these competing subjectivities and forces. However, this is almost invisible in her blog and social media narratives. In many ways, Allison avoids transmitting negative affect in digital spaces. This is a different form of labor, only communicating part of oneself. In some respects, this labor is more difficult and measured. It is part of Allison's brand and when performing online, she must be vigilant about communicating only her can-do blogger subjectivity.

Exploring Excess Through Socially Mediated Moments

Through immaterial labor bloggers expand "neoliberal cultural economies and [are] 'part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect'" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 43). Bloggers strategically manage affective relationships and engage in socially mediated, branded performances of the self (Duffy, 2015; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013) as a means to maintain their business. Because of the emphasis on affect and relational closeness across platforms such as Instagram, consumers identify with bloggers they either aspire to be or who

reflect parts of themselves. They move along with the blogger, experiencing the space, time, and rhythm of everyday life together. Through affective exchange and labor bloggers forge a bond with their followers.

In a society that is constantly connected, Instagram posts and Stories are updated multiple times each day. With this continuous visibility, followers feel a closeness to bloggers simply because they are following alongside these curated, rhythmic fragments of everyday life. Through conversing with actual bloggers, it becomes apparent there is a love of clothing intertwined with the business of blogging as a tool for acquiring economic and social capital. But this love of clothing or need for a creative outlet is overshadowed by the business strategies needed to remain visible and relevant. While it may be inadvertent, bloggers transmit affect in order to engage with followers. This movement and rhythm, the swirling of emotion, is what draws users to particular bloggers. But it is also a business necessity.

Performing excess: *Song of Style*. During our second interview, Hailey and Paige recounted the recent opening up about the struggles of blogging by influencers. Paige was describing vulnerability and movement, those downsides of blogging illustrated by popular influencer *Song of Style*:

> She's been around forever, and she's got millions of people that follow her. And she just, she does blogs like video blogs. And she put one up last week that garnered a lot of attention, because she talked about suicide. And how like – it's like she puts up this perfect image of her life. But behind it, it's not like that. She struggles. It's so – it's such, like, a vulnerable place and she's super self-

conscious. And she's depressed a lot of the time, and it was just interesting, you

know? (P. Kushner, personal communication, July 13, 2017).

The demands of the ideal blogger subject, the always moving can-do girl, is trying as

well as exhausting. During the video, Song is quoted as saying:

> My followers think my life is perfect, and they're always commenting things like 'your life is goals,' but in reality, even though I've had many ups, I've also had my share of low moments… everyone struggles in some way in their lives and I wanted to share that with my followers just in case anyone was feeling low, or that they aren't worthy. (Song, 2017)

This short vignette illustrates both the relational and affective connection Song makes

with her followers. Watching the video, the user is drawn to Song's openness and

*felt*ness. She works to bond with followers by being her less-than-perfect, authentic self.

She communicates with her followers during a difficult moment and manages her own

emotions, as well as her follower's emotions by telling them it is okay to not always be

happy or to experience struggle. Song makes meaning alongside her followers and opens

a space for dialogue and connection. Song has our attachment and attention through her

vulnerability.

Song's video has been viewed over 135,000 times. The vlog is housed on *Song of*

Style's YouTube channel and is captioned with: "Life isn't always perfect and everyone

goes through some hard times every now and then. Thank you for being the most

supportive people ever! Love you" (Song, 2017).

Paris Vlog - Haute Couture Fashion Week and Real Talk | Aimee Song

Figure 17. A screen shot from *Song of Style*'s confessional vlog detailing her experience with depression and her struggles with always presenting the happy blogger image (Song, 2017).

In the confessional portion of the video, she sits in front of a blank white wall in Paris wearing a black designer off-the-shoulder dress. Song's makeup is perfectly done, and her hair is set in a pin-straight blowout that was likely styled by a professional. There are tears in her eyes as she speaks and from time to time she wipes them away, being careful not to smudge her eye makeup. Song highlights her imperfections and identifies not only her weakness, but her sense of otherness. She discusses the difficulty in pretending she is happy and that "everything is okay." She creates time and space for a difficult discussion in a seemingly perfect blogging world.

Even though our discussion of Aimee Song during the second interview was about the struggles of another blogger, there was a resonance between *Song of Style*'s vulnerability and the way blogging can make others, such as Hailey and Paige, feel in their own work. Being real and authentic in the blogosphere is part of the formula for

success, but only if it is reflective of the perfect, aspirational life. Being real and authentic is terrifying. Being visible and connected at all times leaves little time for the blogger to *not* perform.

Song's performance illustrates those moments of excess – of feeling depressed, vulnerable, and unhappy. She highlights imperfections and authentic struggles in opposition to hegemonic norms of the can-do girl. Song's use of excess frames the experiences that do not fit or cohere with social standards (Willink, 2010). In fashion and lifestyle blogging, the blogger should be highlighting curated, beautiful, aspiration moments that emphasize consumption as the avenue to happiness. Song deviates from this message. Yet her opening up – movement – also connects Song with others in the community. Through rhythm and pauses, or emphasis of particular words, Song tells her narrative and creates "a generative nexus of performance and performativity that can, in turn, extend our understanding of the very ground of social life" (Hamera, 2006, p. 46). The video calls out to those moments of excess and rhythmic disruptions in everyday life. There is affective and relational connection in Song's open, vulnerable narrative around depression and the loneliness of blogging. Her acknowledgement of this imperfection makes her and us feel alive. In watching the video, the user experiences intersubjectivity (Stern, 2010), the sharing of *some*thing between people – blogger to blogger, blogger to follower, and follower to follower. The follower can sense what Song is experiencing through the video and "the general physical tone of [her] being" (Damasio, 1999, p. 286). Followers may not consciously react to Song's affect and flow of energy, but it somehow

fosters a feeling of being alive. She also opens a space for a new narrative that is truly authentic.

Conclusion: Vitality, Social Media, and the Dance of Blogging

Fashion and lifestyle bloggers are vital, affective beings navigating the world through digital space. Even though most of their work is done digitally, there is a constant circulation of affect around and between bloggers and their followers. With the surge in popularity of the less formalized social media platform Instagram Stories, bloggers and their followers are even closer than could be imagined. The real-time, real-life connection in these video snippets offers a digital channel for affective labor and connection. Even though bloggers speak through Stories and engage with their followers across great distances, their "words are not isolated from the movement, sounds, and other sensory dimensions which add to their substance" (Madison, 2010, p. 169). Through gestures, pauses, and movement, bloggers communicate with the followers in unseen, unrecognized ways.

A blogger's body is their primary tool as a can-do neoliberal laborer. Their bodies help them communicate through language, speaking to followers through confessional or slice-of-life videos within the Instagram Stories platform; model clothes and pose in the newest, trendiest item to push forward the notion of a woman's duty as consumer; and engage with followers in real life encounters. Through the lens of communication studies' affective turn, the work of fashion and lifestyle bloggers illuminate how bodies are a communicative, impactful vessel whose *feeling* and *becoming* speaks to followers. This is how bloggers connect and continue the success of their own sites, as well as the

blogosphere as a whole. In combination with narratives, a blogger's affective labor embodies Stern's notion of a vitality form. It is these vital forms that create and maintain a blogger's success.

Chapter Six: Blogging in the Digital Frontier: Connections, Relationships, and Identities in Ordinary, Everyday Life

As I was finishing this project, I decided to take an evening off from writing, choosing to mindlessly watch television with my boyfriend. I sat on our couch in my pajamas and only paid partial attention to the moving images on the TV screen, trying to unwind after a long day of full-time work in higher education and an early morning of editing. As I zoned out, something jolted me to attention. It was a commercial for eBay. It's rapidly moving images were colorful and set to a lively pop song.

The commercial opened with a thin, white woman in her 20s wearing a floral miniskirt, printed jacket, and red suede ankle boots; her highlighted hair shiny, cascading below her shoulders in beachy waves. The woman snaps her photograph in a mirror – i.e. a mirror selfie – and an #ootd social media post is superimposed next to her. The post's image is tagged with #floral, eBay's pick for one of spring's fashionable trends. Then the commercial cuts to a woman sitting in a bar, wearing a sky blue ruffled blouse, her phone open in front of her. In the background there are blurry figures enjoying drinks, most of whom are looking at their blue-tinged phone screens. This woman sees the #floral #ootd Instagram post and swipes over to her eBay phone application. She types in "new floral…" and is met with multiple options for new additions to her closet – floral jumpsuits, embroidered shoes, and a bright blue floral handbag. She taps her phone and we suddenly see a brown shipping box in her hands.

167

Brightly colored eBay-branded tape is removed, the box opens, and suddenly we see the same beautiful blue floral handbag from the eBay app. The woman holds it up and admires the bag in all its material glory.

The next set of images moves quickly through multiple women putting on brightly colored, floral garments and walking through their homes. These same women are suddenly riding in a convertible, taking selfies, laughing and mugging it up for the camera. In the next scene, the commercial cuts to a model in a floral, brocade jacket and brightly colored makeup posing editorially under a banner heading, similar to what would be found on a blog or fashion publication website. The page is titled "This Season's Hottest Trend: Floral." The camera zooms out quickly to a wide shot and we see yet another woman, this one sitting at an outdoor café table watching the same editorial clip on her phone. She, too, is wearing a floral dress and a black leather moto jacket with bright pink floral appliques. She looks up from her phone and sees a tall model-esque woman walking toward her wearing head to toe lilac. She points her phone at this woman and we suddenly see pop up lilac thought bubbles proclaiming "New fave" and "#lilac." An invisible pen draws a lilac heart next to the model's face. The commercial ends with multicolored, changing backgrounds and the tagline "Fill Your Cart With Color" and "@ebayfashion."

By the end of this 30-second television spot I realized this seemingly innocuous eBay commercial provides an of-the-moment example of the many issues I explore in this dissertation. As the television channel switched back to its regularly scheduled

programming, I jumped off the couch and headed straight to my laptop. Suddenly, there

was a lot to write about.

Making Friends (and Lasting Connections): Bridging Communicative, Relational,

and Affective Labor

The short eBay commercial described above brings into focus the communicative, relational, and affective labor of fashion blogging, as well as the importance of engagement, visibility, and consumption for women in a Web 2.0 culture. In the span of 30 seconds, eBay highlights women's work in a digital, connected, social media-centric society. Women are encouraged to be on their phones at all times, buying items based on what they see around them. Women should also be take note of the clues embedded in social media streams, instructing women of their cultural duties. With phone applications such as eBay's, a "click to shop" functionality can be accessed at any time. Phones and monetization applications turn the world into a digital marketplace. Individuals connect by turning to Instagram, communicating through hashtags and likes rather than face to face discussions. The need to consume and connect circulates across digital platforms, materializing in everyday life.

Figure 18. The first model in the eBay fashion commercial, who starts the consumption process by posting an Instagram photo tagged #floral (eBay, 2018).

Figure 19. Later in the commercial, three women ride in a convertible snapping selfies (eBay, 2018).

This commercial pinpoints the current state of fashion and lifestyle blog culture: simple blog journals about fashion and style with unprofessional photography and unedited content are practically nonexistent. Instead, blogs have become curated feeds of aspirational imagery whose primary function is to encourage women to be can-do girl subjects. Specifically, blogs frame the can-do girl subject as a happy, empowered, entrepreneurial woman who consumes pretty things.

Beyond the blogosphere, this commercial identifies the cultural expectation that a woman's duty is to pay attention to trends and to always be on the lookout for the newest,

greatest *thing*. In this example, women should want – and as eBay illustrates, need – bright and colorful florals. Floral printed dresses, bags, and blouses will bring happiness and, potentially, the aspirational lifestyle bloggers represent. There is a sense of fulfillment within this portrayal of consumption. The commercial condenses fashion and lifestyle blog messaging about acquiring *things* into short, colorful, pulsing snippets of movement and life.

The moving images of the commercial reveal the power of curated feeds and self-branding. The circulation of social media images, like this commercial, frame consumption as both a duty and as fun and lighthearted. eBay's depiction of the fashion and lifestyle blogger's life illustrates the rhythm and timing of today's fast-paced digital world. Women connect and communicate digitally, turning to Instagram or eBay, as part of the Web 2.0 FOMO (i.e. fear of missing out) mentality (Buglass, Binder, Betts & Underwood, 2017; Rifkin, Cindy & Kahn, 2015). If women watching this commercial or following bloggers on Instagram engage in consumption, they, too, can enjoy a night out on the town with friends snapping selfies and reveling in a beautiful, material life.

Consuming and Connecting: What's Not to Love?

Blogging exists because we are inculcated in a capitalist, neoliberal society that favors a can-do girl sensibility (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007). The blog and social media space has ushered in the newest iteration of a marketplace. With platforms such as Instagram and InstaStories, bloggers are always a mere click away from connection and followers are a few short taps from consumption. Over the course of this project I engaged with fashion and lifestyle bloggers in person through interviewing sessions and

also turned to narratives in blogger's website musings and social media feeds. This process unearthed the intricacies of the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon. Specifically, the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon continues to flourish because of the labor of individual women.

Female bloggers maintain consistent, branded communication; cultivate relationships in real and digital life; and transfer affect in real time, across digital divides, to foster a sense of connection. Fashion and lifestyle bloggers fulfill their womanly duty to consume (Duffy & Hund, 2015a) and embody the can-do girl subject (Dobson, 2015; Gill, 2007) through building a brand and sense of success, continually engaging in an unending cycle. I continually turned back upon my original research questions in order to better understand these women: (1) How do fashion and lifestyle bloggers enact particular subjectivities in Web 2.0 culture?; (2) What forms of labor are tied to these subjectivities?; and, (3) Do fashion and lifestyle bloggers understand their role in Web 2.0 culture, specifically the implication of what they publish on both themselves and their followers? In this chapter I address these research questions and unpack the ways the communicative, relational, and affective labors of blogging have turned digital space(s) into a discreet pedagogical tool.

Analyzing the Digital Frontier: Making Sense of the Connection Between Clothes, Blog Labor, and Pedagogical Stories

Throughout this project I have sought to identify the constellation of meaning-making potential between communicative, relational, and affective blogging labor. Web 2.0 culture has erased a sense of time and space for fashion and lifestyle bloggers – they

172

are always on, always performing, and always engaging. Work and personal life are blurred in the fashion and lifestyle blog space, which results in bloggers spending inordinate amounts of time doing their blogging work. A blogger's work connects them to their followers, the blogging community, the industry, and the market. All are interrelated. Communication, relationships, and the transmission of affect become tied to the circulation of material goods, which serves as the common language between bloggers and their followers.

To better understand the sense of connection between blogging labors, identities, subjectivities, and meaning, I organized my thoughts and notes by grouping texts and themes through a process of Venn diagramming. This process allowed me to be playful with the data, visualizing the interconnectedness and overlap of themes while also putting them in conversation with one another. In the first iteration of my diagram, I hand-drew three circles – one for each form of labor – and jotted my ideas down in pencil so that I could move and erase the notes as needed. The circles did not overlap in this first draft because I wanted to situate my thoughts and identify themes by each form of labor. The circles were filled with notes and scribbles, including the short phrases or single words that continually emerged in the coding and analysis process.

As I worked through my thoughts I erased – a lot – and moved ideas and themes around, trying to understand the rhythms and flow of the data. In hindsight, the initial diagramming process allowed me to engage with the data in unexpected. For example, interviewing provided me with time to interact with my blogger participants and feel the movement and affect in real time. I analyzed affect in the interview and narrative data

173

through the theory of vitality forms. Returning to the data and allowing myself to engage

with vitality forms through mental movement (Stern, 2010) helped crystallize the way(s)

movement, force, time, space, and direction are also present in the data's recurring

themes. The more attuned I was to this process, giving myself room to play with the data,

the clearer the diagram became. Letting the data move freely, opening my mind to the

way the themes within the three forms of labor intersect with one another, the clearer the

connections and differences became.

The primary themes that surfaced within the data include: narrative as the primary

mode of communication in digital spaces (communicative labor); the significance of

visibility and success (communicative labor); the establishment of trust through

narratives (relational labor); a constant connection and use of reflexivity (relational

labor); sense-making through narrative (affective labor); and the presence of vitality

(affective labor). Identifying these themes and moving them around within the diagram,

finding where the themes best fit, allowed the space betwixt and between the circles to

take form, solidifying the data, becoming *some*thing.

In the second iteration of the Venn diagram, I hand drew three circles, but allowed

them to overlap. There was one space between communicative and relational labor,

another between relational and affective labor, and a final space between affective and

communicative labor. At the center of the overlapping circles was a small space where all

three labors coalesced. Certain ideas began to appear in multiple spaces, such as the

importance of maintaining a blog's visibility and engagement (relational and

communicative); communicating and selling aspirations (communicative and affective);

and monetizing relationships and feelings (relational and affective). I could finally see where ideas and themes intersected between the different spheres of labor. By playing with the data and an intent to be nimble, I opened space to visualize the themes dancing around one another, envisioning the ebb and flow within and around the sketched circles.

The revised third iteration of the Venn diagram (Figure 20) illustrates the synthesis of themes within the blogger narratives, visual imagery from the blogs and Instagram platform, and interview texts. This version of the diagram is based on the first two hand-drawn drafts described above. In its final form, the diagram highlights the movement inherent in the data, especially within the overlapping sections between communicative, relational, and affective labor. In the small, central space of the diagram, I note what has become the crux of this project: where communicative, relational, and affective labor overlap is also where meaning is made and culture is revealed and reinforced. Through this labor, bloggers illustrate that digital blog and social media platforms serve as a pedagogical tool for disseminating examples of appropriate female behavior (i.e. the ideal female subject). It is through these labors that bloggers tell their stories and make meaning. At the same time, these stories serve a pedagogical function. Stories are the connective thread between bloggers, followers, community, and culture.
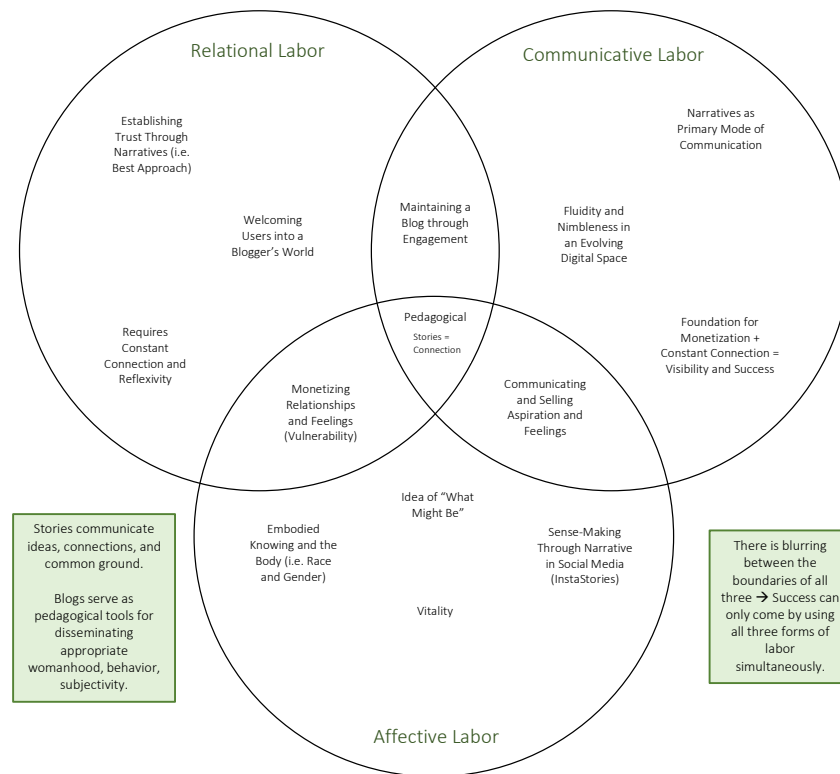
175

Relational Labor

Communicative Labor

Affective Labor

Establishing Trust Through Narratives (i.e. Best Approach)

Welcoming Users into a Blogger's World

Maintaining a Blog through Engagement

Narratives as Primary Mode of Communication

Fluidity and Nimbleness in an Evolving Digital Space

Pedagogical

Stories = Connection

Requires Constant Connection and Reflexivity

Foundation for Monetization + Constant Connection = Visibility and Success

Monetizing Relationships and Feelings (Vulnerability)

Communicating and Selling Aspiration and Feelings

Idea of "What Might Be"

Stories communicate ideas, connections, and common ground.

Blogs serve as pedagogical tools for disseminating appropriate womanhood, behavior, subjectivity.

Embodied Knowing and the Body (i.e. Race and Gender)

Sense-Making Through Narrative in Social Media (InstaStories)

There is blurring between the boundaries of all three → Success can only come by using all three forms of labor simultaneously.

Vitality

Figure 20. Version three of my final Venn diagram, synthesizing the analysis and data.

In the next section I explore the two primary findings. First, I discuss the pedagogical function of fashion and lifestyle blogs. I then turn to the power of narratives to communicate ideas, foster connections, and reinforce ideologies. It is important to note that these themes are not independent of one another. Instead, they are interwoven within the fabric of fashion and lifestyle blog culture, their threads crossing over and beside one another in intricate patterns. This is also true for the labors essential to fashion and lifestyle blogging. Communicative, relational, and affective labor inform and overlap with one another. In some ways, bloggers can only be successful by using all three labors simultaneously, allowing communication, relationships, and affect to converge.

Can One Teach "Style"?: The Pedagogy of Blogging

As the data throughout this project suggests, fashion and lifestyle blogs serve a

pedagogical function for both female fashion and lifestyle bloggers and their female

followers. Engaging in the labors of fashion and lifestyle blogging conditions bloggers to

act in service of the market (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Blalock, 2014; Dobson, 2015;

Marwick, 2013). Their work informs blog followers to do the same. Bloggers are given

tools through monetization applications and how-to guides, as well as advice from fellow

bloggers, instructing them in the best ways to blog. This includes when to post, the types

of pictures that garner the most attention, how to capitalize on holidays through gift

guides, and how to be authentic. Bloggers commodify their everyday lives through their

blog and Instagram posts with the help of monetization applications like rewardStyle and

LIKEtoKnow.it. Scrolling through Instagram feeds presents followers with countless

affiliate links and hashtags, which serve as a branded form of language.[27] Repeatedly

seeing monetized content leads followers to believe they should always tie the ordinary

aspects of their everyday life – decorating a living room, the back to school season, or

cooking dinner with family – to commodities.

When bloggers identify consumable items in their blog posts or Instagram Stories,

they perform as can-do girl/blogger subjects. By associating their identities with

commodities, bloggers teach women how to behave and consume. Bloggers perform

specific, conscious identities online for particular audiences (Dobson, 2015) in order to

---

[27]rewardStyle, in particular, has tapped into branded blogging hashtag language. The application, as well as
their affiliated bloggers, use hashtags such as #LTKunder100, #LTKunder50, #LTKitbag, #LTKhome,
#LTKbump, and #LTKfamily in Instagram posts. As this demonstrates, nothing is off limits in the
commodified blog space: family, children, pregnancy, and home life are now associated with consumption.

sell the notion of consumption. Yet the pedagogical function of fashion and lifestyle blogs is not always apparent. With so much of our everyday life tied to branded content (Banet-Weiser, 2012), a blog follower likely does not think to ask: *Why am I purchasing (insert any item) from (insert blogger name)?* Because bloggers speak and write to their followers in a personal, relationship-oriented way, their labor and the blog's pedagogical function remain invisible.

The pedagogical function of fashion and lifestyle blogs is also a side effect of the economy of visibility. The economy of visibility requires "a highly skilled and flexible casual labor force that possesses skills traditionally associated with femininity, including communication, cultural production, and self-care" (Pham, 2015, p. 144). Fashion and lifestyle bloggers do all of these things: they are flexible, working day and night; they also communicate to followers while influencing culture as highly visible and marketable subjects. In the economy of visibility, a blogger's body and narratives instruct female masses how to dress, to behave, and how and when to consume. Blogger messaging pushes women further and further into the economy, shaping and perpetuating neoliberal logics that structure everyday life. Because this messaging is embedded in curated Instagram feeds and aspirational imagery, blog followers are enticed into the act of consuming. Through the eyes of fashion and lifestyle bloggers, consumption looks fun. Blog imagery brings FOMO to followers, usually multiple times through the average day. To keep up, bloggers and their followers must continually turn back to prescribed ideologies around womanly duties: consuming material goods and reinforcing the importance of can-do girls a capitalist society.

Telling Consumption Stories: Forging Community and Ideological Bonds

As fashion and lifestyle bloggers prove, stories are the most effective way to engage in communicative, relational, and affective labor. Bloggers use narratives to connect with their followers and members of the blog community. Narratives communicate personal tidbits alongside ideology, helping individual bloggers make sense of their world and assign meaning to their experience(s). In turn, followers begin to understand the world through the blogger's experiences, engaging in the same activities and/or behaviors in order to make sense of the world and create meaning. When followers read blogs over a long period of time, they begin to connect with the blogger and forge relational and affective bonds. Because narratives are teeming with affect (i.e. vitality forms), they give life to the stories individuals tell about their lives (Stern, 2010). The (re)telling and (re)writing of stories becomes a communicative, relational, and affective process for both the blogger and the follower.

Throughout this project I have discussed Julia Engel of *Gal Meets Glam*. Engel is an effective storyteller, her personalized approach to communicating through narratives has built a powerful, lucrative brand. Engel has brought readers along on her journey as a blogger. Her followers became instrumental to designing, creating, and selling her *Gal Meets Glam Collection* dress line and she has included them in the storytelling and meaning-making process. Engel discusses her moments of exhaustion and self-doubt, as well as her excitement for this new, can-do girl venture. She connects with followers through her blog, Instagram, and Instagram Stories. Followers can offer words of encouragement to Engel through direct messages or posting public comments. Engel can

179

then respond, creating a constant back and forth of storytelling, communication, and meaning-making.

The longer followers are part of Engel's narrative, fostered through her communicative, relational, and affective labor, the more invested they are in the *Gal Meets Glam* brand. Just after her clothing launch, Engel shared the following in her branded weekly newsletter:

> On Friday, April 20th we launched Gal Meets Glam Collection! Thank you so much for your incredible support. I loved seeing all of the tweets, instagrams, stories, and posts sharing your excitement and favorite dresses!! I will be attending events at *three Nordstrom stores* to celebrate the launch! The first event is this Thursday, April 26th in *Walnut Creek at the Broadway Plaza Nordstrom.* The main event, open to everyone, is 6-8pm. Stay tuned for details about our next event in *Dallas at Northpark Center Nordstrom* on Tuesday, May 1st! If you live in or around any of the event locations, I would love to see you there! (J. Engel, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

Engel acknowledges her followers and supporters in this message, signaling their importance in her everyday life. By commenting on the social media response to her launch, Engel stresses the power of these platforms in creating and circulating meaning. Engel invites followers to meet her in person and forge additional relational, communicative, and affective connections. Followers are invited to attend this event, to mingle with Engel and further build the relationship, in person and in real time. But this

relational, communicative, and affective engagement only comes from purchasing a material good and investing in the *Gal Meets Glam* brand.

While Engel is a top influencer with an intentional, strategic, curated brand, the bloggers that participated in this study spoke of different experiences of telling their story in the blog and social media space. There is undoubtedly encouragement within the blog community to brand, sell, and further the market. *The Middle Closet* and *Peach & Pepper*, as monetized bloggers, acknowledge this as part of the business of blogging. However, I do not want to overlook the way(s) Hailey, Paige, and Allison make meaning and feel a sense of connection with their followers and fellow bloggers. They all acknowledge the difficulty in engaging in the communicative, relational and affective labor of blogging – although they would not phrase it in those terms – and have to negotiate the demands of blogging alongside other responsibilities and aspects of everyday life. They follow a formula to be successful in the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere, telling narratives to connect with followers and creating meaning. But I did not see sinister, ulterior motives in their communicative, relational, and affective work. I also do not doubt the meaning they create through connecting with followers and being accepted by the blogging community. One thing that became very clear throughout this project is the many layers within the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon. As I discuss at the end of this chapter, these layers require further unpacking and research.

In order to deepen my final analysis, I revisit earlier discussions of the blurring between digital and material life in Web 2.0 culture. Specifically, this blurring contributes the way(s) bloggers navigate communication, relationships, and affect in an

increasingly digital, sometimes disconnected, world. Authenticity has become a buzzword in Web 2.0 culture, and bloggers consider authenticity a fundamental reason for their success. A sense of authenticity helps bloggers navigate a job that occupies a hybrid space in culture. Being an authentic can-do girl subject is often framed as non-negotiable. But this relies on embodying cultural scripts of an ideal feminine identity. Bloggers have made this identity part of their work, capitalizing on it. At the same time, there are parallel stories that discount the acceptance of this ideal feminine subject. During the narrative analysis and in-person interview sessions of this project two critiques emerged. First, there were stories critiquing the lack of diverse voices in the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere. Second, there were comments by well-known bloggers and in individual interview sessions that framed the monetized blog space as negative, criticizing rewardStyle, in particular, in enabling women to be can-do girl subjects.

#FashioningIdentity and #PerformingAuthenticity

Blogs, through their pedagogical narratives, serve as a space for creating culture, with influencers do the work of creating what is valuable in a Web 2.0 world. Fashion and lifestyle blogger's taste practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Pham, 2015) help to define culture while economizing "readers' activities by turning their consumption of the blog and their admiration and emulation of the superblogger's taste into cultural, social, and financial capital" (Pham, 2015, p. 6). Through communicative, relational, and affective work, bloggers engage with followers on an everyday basis, bringing them along on jaunts for coffee or a drive to the grocery store via Instagram Stories. Bloggers welcome followers into their personal lives and demonstrate their authentic selves. At the same

time, bloggers construct their identity around the blog in order to perform for their followers. Bloggers are authentic, but they do this with the intent to build economic, social, and economic capital.

Bloggers are integral to pushing consumption forward and proliferating Instagram feeds with aspirational imagery. Lucille identified this during our interview, noting that fashion and lifestyle bloggers are,

> …very much a part of the culture, which is amazing, because in a lot of ways those people inserted themselves into the conversation, which is really cool but it also is interesting, as a consumer, when you used to follow someone because they were giving you their honest opinions and they were showcasing their fashions and things that they could get ahold of, and now they're PR people, in a way, for brands. Which isn't bad, it's just different. (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

Fashion and lifestyle bloggers have become part of the larger fashion system (Barthes, 1983) and, in some ways, determine cultural discourse around fashion, class, and living one's best life. The performance of identity by fashion and lifestyle bloggers is successfully accomplished through cultivating narratives and imagery around an aspirational, beautiful life. In an entrepreneurial-focused, socially connected, highly visible world, performing the "right" identity or embodying the "right" subjectivity is required for a successful blogging career. Blogging labor helps these women perform their identity while also fulfilling the can-do girl subjectivity. The can-do girl is empowered and develops a sense of self through consumption practices (Banet-Weiser,

2012; Gill, 2007). She is conscientious of her image, cares about herself and her body, and lives her life through Instagram and her blog. When bloggers appropriately perform as this subject, they ensure their followers' - as well as their own - investment in the cycle of production and consumption. They become neoliberal laborers for the market.

At the same time, identity is also closely linked with a blogger's personal values (Rattle, 2014). Allison of *Peach & Pepper* ties her identity to a love of fashion, as well as her role as mother, wife, and Christian. Lucille of *The Black Velveteen* also ties her blogging identity to a love of fashion. Her identity is also structured around her creative soul and unique role as a woman of color in the predominantly white Denver blog space. Paige and Hailey of *The Middle Closet* consider their blogger identities rooted in their love of fashion, as well, which stems from growing up with a mother who was also a department store buyer. They combine their love of fashion with their other work: mother, photographer, and rising tech company star. They all love fashion. Each has a distinct performance of identity and brand. They all attempt to make authentic choices and tell authentic stories. Yet Hailey, Paige, Allison, and Lucille all exist within a western, commodity-centric culture and are indoctrinated into a system of neoliberal and ideological norms. Their values inform who they are but also help define their external identity performances (Hoffman-Axthelm, 1992). All of these identity performances are contingent upon performing an ideal fashion blogger subjectivity.

Reader Comments: Opening Space for New Meaning and Discussion

In a society where consumption is valued, and everyday life is branded (Banet-Weiser, 2012), it is only logical for fashion and lifestyle bloggers to weave the notion of

consumption throughout their narratives. As can-do girl subjects, this is what they are

instructed to do. Yet through the interviews and narrative analysis process, I began to see

slight fissures in the fashion and lifestyle blogging foundation. *The Middle Closet*, *Peach

& Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen* all alluded to critiques around and within blogging,

especially the monetization of blogging. In the next section I explore some of the

alternative narratives that came to light in both the local and national fashion and lifestyle

blog space. The two most prevalent critiques include the lack of diverse voices in

blogging and negative observations of monetized blogging, especially in creating

divisions and hierarchy within the blog community.

  Where is my voice? At several points during this project, the absence of *different*

voices was mentioned. Taking a quick, cursory look of the fashion and lifestyle

blogosphere emphasized the homogeny within the digital space. For example, most

bloggers look alike – many are tall, thin, white, and young. They also have enviable style

and dreamy closets filled with racks and racks of shoes or high-end luxury goods

adorning their bodies or dangling from the crook of their arm. At the same time, there are

examples of popular influencers who do not fit the cookie cutter, dominant mold. There

are women of color and women with curvy bodies. Allison and Lucille are also examples

of an atypical blogger – Lucille is a tall, black, curvy woman and Allison is an over-40,

thin, white, woman. Both carve a unique space for themselves, although there is a sea of

standardized content to sift through to find these unique examples. With monetization

applications leading the fashion and lifestyle blog industry, bloggers are encouraged to

push formulaic content more so than creatively express themselves. Bloggers sell what is

admired and replicable because they are advised to do so. This includes accessories, clothes, body types, and lifestyles. But the world is not full of one-size-fits-all beauty or style.

For example, Lucille has abandoned her personal fashion and lifestyle blog. At the end of our interview, she expressed wanting to move to – and create – a platform with multiple voices, drawing upon in-person community in an honest, authentic way. As she noted at the end of our interview session,

> Sometimes it's really nice to have my own corner of the internet, but I work so much better when I'm in a community, so making sure there are more voices. Anytime I can bring more voices to the table, that's something that I really love.
>
> (L. Wenegieme, personal communication, October 15, 2017)

In an Instagram post published around the same time as our interview, Lucille announced her move from through a critically reflective narrative. She wrote:

> I will no longer be updating my blog *The Black Velveteen*. After a long hiatus, I've decided that my beloved corner of the internet has served its purpose. I am so grateful for all the amazing talented people it has put me in community with, and all the amazing experiences blogging gave me. More than anything else, blogging gave me a safe space to find my voice, in a place where there was no success or failure, just expression and connection. Blogging has become a very different industry than it was when I first started. Some people leaned into that and thrived on it, but I don't think it serves me anymore. (Wenegieme, 2017)

Lucille's narrative names the changes within the blogosphere, identifying the shifting priorities of today's bloggers. Even though the photo accompanying this post features a smiling Lucille, she affectively communicates unhappiness to her followers through her choice of words. It was also evident in the interview space. As we explored this topic, Lucille's tone became more serious, her expression stoic, and her energy forlorn.

186

Lucille's narrative illustrates a sense of excess, bringing forth a discussion that is not frequently had within the blog or Instagram space. She recognizes something that many bloggers do not want to name, opening up a new narrative thread and creating space for new and different voices.

Monetization as the enemy. Another narrative thread that developed during the analysis stage of this project is the negative perception(s) of monetized blog space. While the average reader of a fashion and lifestyle blog may not contemplate the use and exchange value embedded within sponsored posts, other followers have begun to question the applications that turned blogging into an industry. For example, bloggers are often referred to as social influencers. This new title, however, comes with a new sense of status. Embedded in the influencer title is a sense of hierarchy and a form of exclusion. Some fashion and lifestyle bloggers consider rewardStyle to be "cliquish" and believe the application homogenizes blog content, favoring bloggers who earn the most likes or economic capital (Koivu, 2016). This mirrors comments I heard in interview sessions. During our second interview, Paige of *The Middle Closet* noted, "there's a group of people, readers, who don't like it. They know – and I've read on other blogs, forums and stuff, that it's annoying. There are certain people that don't like that I'm clicking, and you're making money off it" (P. Kushner, personal communication, July 19, 2017).

Critiques do not exist solely in the vacuum of the blogosphere. The renowned fashion columnist Suzy Menkes has been a vocal critic of blogging, considering it narcissistic and unprofessional. As Menkes wrote in a *New York Times Magazine* piece, she is "stunned at the open way bloggers announce which designer has given them what"

187

(Menkes, 2013). But that is ultimately the business of blogging. Peacocking for street style photographers, attending and documenting fashion shows via InstaStories, openly advertising sponsorships, and building a presence across digital media platforms is a proven method for blog success. While traditional fashion insiders have frowned upon blogging, its omnipresence in mainstream culture signifies a slight opening of borders and access to what was once an exclusive club.[28] Influencers have become insiders.

Some bloggers also explore the negative perception of monetization applications in their narratives. Kelly Larkin of *Kelly in the City*, a Chicago-based fashion and lifestyle blogger, wrote of the controversy that often surrounds rewardStyle. She notes that some followers and bloggers consider the use of monetization platforms a "money grab" and tool that ultimately "cheapens sites" (Larkin, 2016). However, Larkin takes the opposite view. For her, rewardStyle offers bloggers the ability "to create more content and *better* content" (2016) because blogging is an expensive job. Bloggers need to purchase fashionable items, especially at the beginning when they do not have brand partnerships or sponsorships. Without gifted or sponsored items, the cost of maintaining a fashion and lifestyle blog adds up when bloggers need to continually produce new content. Blogs and bloggers are only valuable when they are visible, marketable, and stylish. Larkin writes about the unseen expenses of blogging, such as professional photography, editing, or work with brand strategists. Allison echoed this during her interview sessions. For bloggers, "It's a fine balance between 'selling out' and remaining

---

[28] Pham (2015) takes issue with negative press and perceptions of Asian and Asian-American. Even with the opening of space for bloggers, there are hierarchies around race and class in the digital economy of visibility (Chow, 2002).

true to yourself and your 'brand,' but as I'm not independently wealthy, working with affiliates and brands has helped me grow my blog in ways I never thought possible" (Larkin, 2016). Bloggers relentlessly negotiate the digital push-and-pull between monetized resources and being one's authentic self in an industry motivated by social and cultural capital.

Will Blogging Last?: Implications and Future Directions for Study

In reflection, blog and social media platforms instruct women in how to behave, consume, and live their lives. I am guilty of following the instructions performed by my favorite bloggers. A great deal of my life involves consuming and identifying with brands. I am defined by the venti sugar-free vanilla soy latte I purchase at Starbucks on my way into work most mornings. I am also defined by the blush pink leather Kate Spade tote that hangs on my shoulder and its matching bow-adorned wallet. These branded feminine accessories and the logo-adorned and overpriced coffee cups signal to the world who I am or aspire to be. As a follower of blogs I often wonder if my critical thinking around the blog space is effective or if I am so inculcated into the system of consumption that I will never escape it. But at the same time, do I want to?

As part of understanding and negotiating my own positionality, I have sought to understand how bloggers negotiate their identity, subjectivity and consumption practices. By interviewing *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen*, I gained access to the Denver blog space and listened to the bloggers' stories. After hearing their stories and studying their blogs, I was able to piece together the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

189

It is nearly impossible to escape the branded goods and constant advertising that cross an individual's path on a daily basis. The eBay commercial discussed at the beginning of this chapter provides just one example of the way fashion and lifestyle blogging has become an influential platform in Web 2.0 culture. It highlights how individuals fail to recognize the impact of branding and advertising in their everyday lives, demonstrating the ease at which individuals can turn to their iPhones and immediately consume the items around them. Aspirational, curated lifestyles are framed as meaningful and essential; it is easy to become caught up in the excitement of blogging and of living an imagined, aspirational life. Through their communicative, relational, and affective labor, bloggers foster a sense of connection and build imagined communities where followers and bloggers become friends. Because they are "friends," followers do not question *why* these connections are predicated upon consumption.

For example, I feel close to the bloggers I follow. Based on the interviews with Hailey, Paige, Allison, and Lucille, the connection means a lot to bloggers, as well. It is, after all, a connection with another human being in an increasingly digital world. *The Middle Closet*, *Peach & Pepper*, and *The Black Velveteen* all explained their constant work to engage, but at the same time acknowledges how meaningful the relational, connective aspects of blogging can be.

The work of fashion and lifestyle blogging is nuanced, layered, nimble, and always changing. Future research and scholarship on the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon should mimic the fluid nature of digital labor. As new forms of media and technology are introduced into everyday life, blog culture and practices evolve. By

focusing on fashion and lifestyle blogging within communication studies, scholars can better understand this fluid communicative phenomenon. Digital sites shape the way followers engage in digitally mediates communication and how they engage with others in person. Both lead to meaning making.

The inclusion of fashion and lifestyle blogs in communication studies research, specifically turning attention to the interaction of communicative, relational, and affective labor in the blog space, will expand upon existing research of blogging (Abidin, 2016a; Abidin, 2016b; Duffy, 2015; Pham, 2015). Understanding fashion and lifestyle blogs, as well as the more general blog space, leads to better understanding of the communicative effort required in digital meaning-making. It also better addresses the blurring of digital and material boundaries and labor practices.

Further, turning to the way(s) consumption is situated within individual identities will provide better understanding of the impact of dominant digital cultural narratives (Bauman, 2007; Denzin, 2001; Duffy, 2015), while also addressing the proliferation of social media in work life, personal life, academic life, etc. Using individual stories to understand a particular phenomenon will be important to the discipline. It is easy to generalize industries or phenomena, but as I learned throughout this project, individual bloggers have very different reasons for entering the blog space or continuing to dedicate time and resources to such intensive digital work. With rapid changes to technology and innovation across platforms and systems, we are bound to find ourselves with countless opportunities to work, connect, engage, and consume.

Female fashion and lifestyle blog followers, myself included, turn to screens throughout the average day to connect with bloggers and fulfill our need for aspiration as well as shared interest. Yet so much of what is seen in digital spaces (blogs, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) is not just visual or narrative text, but also a *feeling* or *becoming*. Instagram Stories of ordinary moments illustrate how bloggers move through the world and embark upon potentialities. They circulate public feelings (Stewart, 2007) and individuals feel and experience life alongside their favorite bloggers. Instagram Stories has become increasingly more important for blogger visibility. I hope to see more research on the way(s) blogger's affective labor impacts communicative norms and shapes culture. Having the ability to turn to InstaStories – or another platform with a sense of immediacy – shifts the way individuals experience life. It may eventually remove the need for in-person connection(s) altogether.

References

Abidin, C. (2014). #In$tagLam: Instagram as a repository of taste, a brimming marketplace, a war of eyeballs. In M. Berry & M. Schleser (Eds.), *Mobile media making in the age of smartphones* (pp. 119-128). New York, NY: Palgrave Pivot.

Abidin, C. (2015). Communicative <3 intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, & Technology*, 8. Retrieved from http://adanewmedia.org/2015/11/issue8-abidin/

Abidin, C. (2016a). Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online? Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(2), 1-17.

Abidin, C. (2016b). Visibility labour: Engaging with influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, *161*(1), 86-100.

About us. (2018). *ban.do*. Retrieved from https://www.bando.com/pages/about-us

Adams, L. [@lizadams]. (2018, March 26). [Screenshot of Adams' Instagram Story journaling what is important in life, especially within the world of blogging].

Adkins, L., & Jokinen, E. (2008). Introduction: Gender, living and labour in the fourth shift. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, *16*, 138-149.

Adkins, L. (2005). The new economy, property and personhood. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *22*, 111-130.

Ahmed, S. (2004). Affective economies. *Social Text*, *79*(22), 117-139.

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2009). Embodying diversity: problems and paradoxes for Black feminists. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *12*(1), 41-52.

Alacovska, A. (2018). Informal creative labour practices: A relational work perspective. *human relations*, 1-27.

Andrejevic, M. (2007). *iSpy: Surveillance and power in the interactive era*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso.

Atkinson, P., & Delamont, S. (2007). Rescuing narrative from qualitative research. In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative - State of the Art* (pp. 195-204). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2012). *Authentic, TM: The politics of ambivalence in a brand culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2013). Locating critique. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *10*(2-3), 229-232.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2015). Keynote address: Media, markets, and gender: Economies of visibility in a neoliberal moment. *The Communication Review*, *18*(1), 53-70.

Barker, C. (2007). Issues of subjectivity and gender. In C. Barker (Ed.), *Cultural studies: Theory and practice* (4th Edition) (pp. 215-244). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasure of the text*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (1983). *The fashion system*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang.

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2011). *Culture in a liquid modern world*. (L. Bauman, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Baym, N. K. (2015). Connect with your audience! The relational labor of connection. *The Communication Review*, *18*(1), 14-22.

Bergson, H. (1911). *Creative evolution*. (A. Mitchell, Trans.) New York: Camelot.

Berlant, L. (2008). *The female complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Blalock, M. (2014). How to make it as a fashion blogger: Facts, figures, and insider tips. *StyleCaster*. Retrieved from http://stylecaster.com/how-to-make-money-blogging/

Bolton, S. C. (2009). The lady vanishes: Women's work and affective labour. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, *3*, 72-80.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

boyd, d. (2008). Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. In D. Buckingham (Ed.), *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp. 119-142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brennan, T. (2004). *The transmission of affect*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Brockmeier, J., & Carbaugh, D. A. (2001). *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self and culture*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins B. V.

Brown, B. (2009) Authenticity. *Brene Brown*. Retrieved from http://brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Authenticity_download-1.pdf

Brown, C. (2011). Viewpoint: Amateur fashionistas blog their way to the top. *Centretown News Online*. Retrieved from http://centretownnewsonline.ca

Bruner, J. (1987). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, *54*(2), 11-32.

Buehler Hunter, K. M. (2014). *Buying into (re)tale therapy: Establishing identity, exercising freedom, and pursuing happiness through circulations of personal and master narratives about shopping*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Denver, Denver, Colorado.

Buglass, S. L., Binder, J. F., Betts, L. R., & Underwood, J. D. M. (2017). Motivators of online vulnerability: The impact of social network site use and FOMO. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *66*, 248-255.

Carreon, J. (2016, June 9). 11 fashion bloggers you should be following in 2016. *Elle*. Retrieved from http://www.elle.com/fashion/news/g25950/which-style-blogs-matter/

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Chen, M. Y. (2012). *Animacies: Biopolitics, racial mattering, and queer affect*. Durham, NC. Duke University Press.

Chow, R. (2002). *The Protestant ethnic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society*, *19*, 829-259.

Constine, J. (2017, August 2). Instagram Stories turns 1 as daily use surpasses Snapchat. *TechCrunch*. Retrieved from https://techcrunch.com/2017/08/02/instagram-stories-anniversary/

Conquergood, D. (1991). Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs*, *58*, 179-194.

Conquergood, D. (2006). Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics." In D. S. Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of performance studies* (pp. 351-365). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Cordova, R. A. (2014). "Punk has always been my school": The educative experience of punk learners. *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 142.

Create & Cultivate. (2018). *Create & Cultivate*. Retrieved from http://www.createcultivate.com/about/

Cromby, J. (2011). Feeling the way: Qualitative clinical research and the affective turn. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *9*(1), 88-98.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Co.

Davenport, T. H., & Beck, J. C. (2001). *The attention economy: Understanding the new currency of business*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Dean, J. (2009). *Democracy and other neoliberal fantasies: Communicative capitalism and left politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of self in everyday life*. (S. Rendall, Trans.) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

De Fina, A. & Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). *The handbook of narrative analysis*. N.ew York, NY: Wiley Blackwell.

Denzin, N. (2001). *Interpretive interactionism* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Diamond, A. (2017, March 28). 10 fashion bloggers on what their jobs are really like. *Man Repeller*. Retrieved from http://www.manrepeller.com/2017/03/fashion-bloggers-influencers-get-real-about-jobs.html

Digital Marketing in the Age of Influencers. (2016). SXSW. Retrieved from
        https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6ODPbpYOjs

Dobson, A. S. (2015). *Postfeminist digital cultures: Femininity, social media, and self-representation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dolan, J. (1994). *Presence and desire: Essays on gender, sexuality, performance*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Duffy, B. E. (2015) Amateur, autonomous, and collaborative: Myths of aspiring female cultural producers in Web 2.0. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *32(1)*, 48-64.

Duffy, E. F., & Hund, E. (2015a). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(11), 1-11.

Duffy, E. F., & Hund, E. (2015b, September 25). The invisible labor of fashion blogging. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/09/fashion-blogging-labor-myths/405817/

Dunne, C. (2014a, June 18). How top style bloggers are earning $1 million a year. *Fast Company.* Retrieved from http://www.fastcodesign.com/3032096/how-top-style-bloggers-are-earning-1-million-a-year

Dunne, C. (2014b, September 10). How one fashion blogger is on track to earn almost $8 million a year. *Fast Company*. Retrieved from: http://www.fastcodesign.com/3035472/fast-feed/how-one-fashion-blogger-is-on-track-to-earn-almost-8-million-a-year

eBay. (2018). *Individual* [Television commercial]. Retrieved from https://www.ispot.tv/ad/wQML/ebay-fashion-individual

Ellingson, L. L. (2012). Interview as embodied communication. In J. Gubrium, J. Holstein, A. Marvasti, & K. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 525-539). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Emotional capital. (2006). In Ph. H. Collin (Ed.), *Dictionary of business* (4th Ed.). London, UK: A&C Black. Retrieved from http://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/acbbusiness/emotional_capital/0?institutionId=1676

Engel, J. (2016a, June). Compilation of June sponsorships. *Gal meets glam*. Retrieved from http://galmeetsglam.com

Engel, J. (2016b, October). Riding boots for fall. *Gal Meets Glam*. Retrieved from http://galmeetsglam.com/2016/10/riding-boots-fall/

Engel, J. [@juliahengel]. (2018a, February 28). [Screenshot of Engel's Instagram Story thanking fans for attending her Lord & Taylor event].

Engel, J. [@juliahengel]. (2018b, March 31). [Screenshot of Engel's Instagram Story describing her exhaustion leading up to her clothing launch].

Engel, J. [@juliahengel]. (2018c, April 6). [Screenshot of Engel's Instagram Story highlighting the feature on her clothing line in *Women's Wear Daily*].

Entwistle, J., & Rocamora, A. (2006). The field of fashion materialized. *Sociology*, *40*(4), 735-751.

Estrada, J. (2013, October 2). "Personal" blogging: Where's the line between authenticity and privacy? *Independent Fashion Bloggers*. Retrieved from https://heartifb.com/2013/10/02/personal-blogging-wheres-the-line-between-authenticity-privacy/

Ezzy, D. (2010). Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(3), 163-170.

Findlay, R. (2015). The short, passionate, and close-knit history of personal style blogs. *Fashion Theory*, *19*(2), 157-178.

Finlay, L. (2012). Five lenses for the reflexive interviewer. In J. Gubrium, J. Holstein, A. Marvasti, & K. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 317-331). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1984). *The Foucault reader*. P. Rabinow (Ed.) New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Foust, C. (2010). *Transgressions as a mode of resistance: Rethinking social movement in an era of corporate globalization*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Freeman, M. (2010). Telling stories: Memory and narrative. In S. Radstone & B. Schwartz (Eds.), *Memory: Histories, theories, debates*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Freeman, M. (2015). Narrative as a mode of understanding: Method, theory, practice. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou, *The Handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 21-37). West Sussex, UK: Joh Wiley & Sons.

Ganatra, R. (2018). How LIKEtoKNOW.it is driving influencer sales at scale. *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/rganatra/2018/03/05/liketoknow-it-driving-influencer-sales-at-scale/#36ebdea72298

Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry*, *16*(1), 122-130.

Get the facts. (2015). *RewardStyle*. Retrieved from: https://www.rewardstyle.com

Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *10*(2), 147-166.

Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (Eds.) (2011). *New femininities: Postfeminism, neoliberalism, and subjectivity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Giroux, H. A. (1994). *Distributing pleasures: Learning popular culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Givhan, R. (2007). Everyone's a fashion critic. *Harper's Bazaar*. Retrieved from http://www.harpersbazaar.com/fashion/fashion-articles/fashion-critic-givhan-0907

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Goldhaber, M. H. (1997). The attention economy and the net. *First Monday*, *2*(4). Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v2i4.519

Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Gray, H. (2012). Recovered, reinvented, reimagined: Treme, television studies, and writing New Orleans. *Television & New Media*, *13*(3), 268-278.

Greene, R. W. (1998) Another materialist rhetoric. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *15*, 24-41.

Greene, R. W. (2004). Rhetoric and capitalism: Rhetorical agency as communicative labor. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, *37*(3), 188-206.

Greene, R. W. (2007) Rhetorical capital: Communicative labor, money/speech, and neo-liberal governance. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *4*(3), 327-332.

Grossberg, L. (2008). Cultural studies. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc.

Guy, T. C. (2007). Learning who we (and they) are: Popular culture as pedagogy. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 115,* 15-23.

Hall, S. (1992). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural studies* (pp. 277-294). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs 'identity'? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 15-29). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Halualani, R. T., Mendoza, S. L., & Drzewiecka, J. A. (2009). "Critical" junctures in intercultural communication studies: A review. *The Review of Communication, 9*(1),17-35.

Hamera, J. (2006). Performance, performativity, and cultural poesis in practices of everyday life. In D. Soyini Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of performance studies* (pp. 46-64). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hammer, R., & Kellner, D. (2009). From communications and media studies through cultural studies: An introduction and overview. In R. Hammer & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches* (pp. ix-xlvii). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Hanan, J. S. (2016). *A subject of technology: Performing attention deficit disorder in neoliberal time(s)*. Unpublished manuscript.

Hao, R. N. (2012). Cultural reentry: A critical review of intercultural communication research. In N. Bardhan & M. P. Orbe (Eds.), *Identity research and communication: Intercultural reflections and future directions* (pp. 71-85). Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.

Hardt, M. (1999). Affective labor. *boundary 2, 26(2),* 89-100.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (1994). *Labor of Dionysus: A critique of the state-form.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2005). *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Harris, A. (2004). *Future girl: Young women in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Harris, S. (2017, March 11). What is an influencer? *British Vogue*. Retrieved from http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/what-is-an-influencer

Hearn, A. (2008). Meat, mask, burden: Probing the contours of the branded self. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *8*, 197-217.

Hertz, R. (1997) *Reflexivity and voice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hess, T., & Nochlin, L. (1972). *Woman as sex object*. New York, NY: Art News Annual.

Hewitt, M. (2015, September 13). Ask a fashion blogger: What do you do at Fashion Week? *Harpers Bazaar*. Retrieved from http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a12171/fashion-bloggers-at-new-york-fashion-week/

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hoffman-Axthelm, D. (1992). Identity and reality: The end of the philosophical Immigration officer. In S. Lash & J. Friedman (Eds.), *Modernity and identity* (pp. 196-218). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Holgate, M. (2010, March 1). Index: Logged on. *Vogue*, *200*(3), 514-518, 523-524.

Husserl, E. G. A. (1982). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy: First book*. (F. Kersten, Trans.) Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer.

Ibrahim, Y. (2015). Instagramming life: Banal imaging and the poetics of the everyday. *Journal of Media Practice*, *16*(1), 42-54.

Indvik, L. (2016, March 14). The 20 most influential personal style bloggers: 2016 edition. *Fashionista*. Retrieved from http://fashionista.com/2016/03/style-bloggers-2016

Influencer. (2017, November 5). *Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary and thesaurus*. Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/influencer

Instagram just released Snapchat-like feature, but here's why you'll use it. (2016, August 2). *Create & Cultivate*. Retrieved from http://www.createcultivate.com/blog/the-newest-instagram-feature

Jin, S. A. A., & Phua, J. (2014). Following celebrities' tweets about brands: The impact of Twitter-based electronic word-of-mouth on consumers' source credibility perception, buying intention, and social identification with celebrities. *Journal of Advertising*, *43*(2), 181-195.

Justice, A. (2016, February 10). New York fashion week: Bloggers replacing celebs and models and they receive front row respect. *International Business Times*. Retrieved from http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/new-york-fashion-week-bloggers-replacing-celebs-models-they-receive-front-row-respect-1543047

Kanngieser, A. (2012) … And … and … and … The transversal politics of performative encounters. *Deleuze Studies*, *6*(2), 265-90.

Kaputa, C. (2012). *You are a brand!: In person and online, how smart people brand themselves for business success*. Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Keller, J. (2015) Girl power's last chance? Tavi Gevinson, feminism, and popular media culture. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, *29*(2), 274-285.

Kellner, D. (1992). Popular culture and the construction of postmodern identities. In S. Lash & J. Friedman (Eds.), *Modernity and identity* (pp. 141-177). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

King, J. (2009, September 10). Bloggers take over the front row. *InStyle*. Retrieved from http://news.instyle.com/2009/09/10/bloggers-take-over-the-front-row/

Kitty flats. (2017). *Charlotte Olympia*. Retrieved from https://www.charlotteolympia.com/en/shoes/kitty/kitty-flats-black-and-gold-E001139VMC0002.html?cgid=category_shoes_kitty#page=2&start=19

Kline, S. R. (2014). Smize – Why you should know how to smile with your eyes. *LinkedIn*. Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140813132812-28070613-smize-why-you-should-know-how-to-smile-with-your-eyes

Koh, A. (2016). Imagined communities, social media, and the faculty. *Academe*, *102*(3), 19-22.

Koivu, L. (2016). Why I generally don't recommend rewardStyle. *Oh, She Blogs!* Retrieved from https://ohsheblogs.com/generally-dont-recommend-rewardstyle/

Konings, M. (2015). *The emotional logic of capitalism: What progressives have missed.* Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.

Kuehn, K., & Corrigan, T. (2013). Hope labor: The role of employment prospects in online social production. *The Political Economy of Communication*, *1*, 9-25.

Laihanen, A. (2017, June 1). Rise of the fashion bloggers: A trend fashion brands shouldn't miss. *BrandBa.se*. Retrieved from http://www.brandba.se/blog/rise-of-the-fashion-bloggers-a-trend-fashion-brands-shouldnot-miss

Lang, A., Dhillon, K., & Dong, Q. (1995). The effects of emotional arousal and valence on television viewers' cognitive capacity and memory. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *39*(3), 313-327.

Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital: A theory of social structure and action*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lindolf, T. R. & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd. Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (1995). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lury, C. (2004). *Brands: The logos of the global economy.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lyons-Ruth, K. (1998). Implicit relational knowing: Its role in development and psychoanalytic treatment. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *19*(3), 282-289.

Madison, D. S. (1993) That was my occupation: Oral narrative, performance, and black feminist though. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *13*(3), 213-232.

Madison, D. S. (2005). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics, and performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Madison, D. S. (2010). *Acts of activism: Human rights as radical performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Mallozzi, C. A. (2009). Voicing the interview: A researcher's exploration on a platform of empathy. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *15*(6), 1042-1060.

Manning, E. (2009) *Relationscapes: Movement, art, philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Manning, E. (2013). *Always more than one: Individuation's dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Marris, P. & Thornham, S. (2000). The media and social power: Introduction. In P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader* (pp. 5-17). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Martin, J. N. & Nakayama, T. K. (1999). Thinking dialectically about culture and communication. *Communication Theory*, *9*(1), 1-25.

Marwick, A. E. (2013). *Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Marx, K. (1976). *Capital: A critique of political economy, Volume 1*. (B. Fowkes, Trans.) London: Penguin Books.

Massumi, B. (1995). The autonomy of affect. *Critical Inquiry*, *31*, 83-109.

Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the virtual.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Massumi, B. (2011). *Semblance and event: Activist philosophy and the occurrent arts.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Mathur, N. (2014). Introduction. In N. Mathur (Ed.), *Consumer culture, modernity and identity* (pp. ix-xl). New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

McAllister, M. P., Cooke, T. R., & Buckley, C. (2015). Fetishizing Flor: Constructing retail space and flexible gendered labor in digital-era insurance advertising. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *32*(5), 347-362.

McKinlay, A., & Smith, C. (2009). *Creative labour: Working in the creative industries*. London, UK: Palgrave.

McNay, L. (2000). *Gender and agency: Reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory*. Oxford, UK: Polity.

McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, *4*(3), 255-264.

McRobbie, A. (2007). Top girls? Young women and the post-feminist sexual contract. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(4-5), 718-737.

Menkes, S. (2013, February 17). The circus of fashion. *New York Times Magazine*, 91-94.

Middleton, H., & Kushner, P. (2014). A tour through blogland. *The Middle Closet*. Retrieved from http://themiddlecloset.com/2014/10/27/20141011tour-through-blogland/

Middleton, H., & Kushner, P. (2017a). Hailey & Paige. *The Middle Closet*. Retrieved from http://themiddlecloset.com/about/

Middleton, H., & Kushner, P. (2017b, May). Back to Monday. *The Middle Closet*. Retrieved from http://themiddlecloset.com/?s=back+to+monday

Mijatovic, M. (2015, June 4). The best lifestyle blogs to follow. *firstsiteguide*. Retrieved from https://firstsiteguide.com/best-lifestyle-blogs/

Moreman, S. T. (2011). Qualitative interviews of racial fluctuations: The "how" of Latina/o-White hybrid identity. *Communication Theory*, *21*(2), 197-216.

Mulvey, L. (2009). *Visual and other pleasures* (2nd ed.). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Munro, R. (1996). The consumption view of self: Extension, exchange and identity. In S. Edgell, K. Hetherington, & A. Warde (Eds.), *Consumption matters* (pp. 248-273). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Nixon, B. (2017). Critical communication policy research and the attention economy: From digital labor theory to digital class struggle. *International Journal of Communication*, *11*, 4718-4730.

O'Connor, C. (2017, September 26). Forbes top influencers: Meet the 30 social media stars of fashion, parenting, and pets (yes, pets). *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/clareoconnor/2017/09/26/forbes-top-influencers-fashion-pets-parenting/#47e2699e7683

Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Pabst, A. (2004). Immanence, religion, and neo-liberalism. Paper presented at the University of Bologna

Pedroni, M. (2015). "Stumbling on the heels of my blog": Career, forms of capital, and strategies in the (sub)field of fashion blogging. *Fashion Theory*, *19*(2), 179-200.

Perrin, A. (2015, October 8). Social media usage: 2005-2015. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/

Peters, M. (2001) *Postructuralism, Marxism, and neoliberalism: Between theory and politics.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Pham, M. T. (2013). "Susie Bubble is a sign of the times": The embodiment of success in the Web 2.0 economy. *Feminist Media Studies*, *13*(2), 245-267.

Pham, M. T. (2015). *Asians wear clothes on the internet: Race, gender, and the work of personal style blogging.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. (2017). Uses and gratifications of social networking sites for bridging and bonding social capital: A comparison of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *72*, 115-122.

Pollock, D. (2009). Oral history. In S. Riley & L. Hunter (Eds.), *Mapping landscapes for performance as research: Scholarly acts and creative cartographies* (pp. 145-148). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Projansky, S. (2014). *Spectacular girls: Media fascination and celebrity culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Protevi, J. (2009). *Political affect: Connecting the social and the somatic*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Rakow, L. (1989). Feminist studies: The next stage, *Critical Studies of Mass Communication, 6*, 209-214.

Reeves, J. (2016). Automatic for the people: The automation of communicative labor. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *13*(2), 150-165.

Reissman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Reissman, C. K. (2012). Analysis of personal narratives. In J. Gubrium, J. Holstein, A. Marvasti, & K. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 367-379). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

rewardStyle. (2018). *rewardStyle*. Retrieved from https://www.rewardstyle.com

Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ricouer, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*. (J. B. Thomson, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Rifkin, J., Cindy, C., & Kahn, B. (2015). FOMO: How the fear of missing out leads to missing out. *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, *43*, 244-248.

Rocamora, A. (2011). Personal fashion blogs: Screens and mirrors in digital self-portraits. *Fashion Theory*, *15*(4), 407-424.

Rose, D. (1990). *Living the ethnographic life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ruchaber, A. (2017a). About. *Peach & Pepper*. Retrieved from https://www.peachandpepperblog.com/about-2/

Ruchaber, A. (2017b, December). Holiday happy place – Cherry Creek Shopping Center. *Peach & Pepper*. Retrieved from https://www.peachandpepperblog.com/blog/2017/12/7/holiday-happy-place-cherry-creek-shopping-center

Ruchaber, A. (2017c, December). It's new to me: New goals, possibilities, and hopes for 2018. *Peach & Pepper*. Retrieved from https://www.peachandpepperblog.com/blog/2017/12/29/its-new-to-me-new-goals-possibilities-and-hopes-for-2018

Sanjek, R. (1990). *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Schiffer, J. (2015, March 17). Whoa: Vogue just put a blogger on the cover for the first time ever. *Who What Wear*. Retrieved from http://www.whowhatwear.com/vogue-espana-fashion-blogger-cover-chiara-ferragni-the-blonde-salad

Schuman, E. [@emilyschuman]. (2018). [Instagram Story of Schuman thanking followers for their support].

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shouse, E. (2005). Feeling, emotion, affect. *M/C Journal, 8*(6). Retrieved from http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php

Siles, I. (2012). Web technologies of the self: The arising of the "blogger" identity. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *17*, 408-421.

Silvia, P. J. (2006). *Exploring the psychology of interest*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Smize. (2009). Urban dictionary. Retrieved from https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Smize

Song, A. (2017, July 11). Paris vlog – Haute couture fashion week and real talk. *Song of Style*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K91_HeP7Wa0

Song, J., & Zinkham, G. (2008)). Determinants of perceived web site interactivity. *Journal of Marketing*, *72*(2), 99-113.

Spry, T. (2006). A "performative-I" copresence: Embodying the ethnographic turn in performance and the performative turn in ethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *26*, 339-346.

Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Stern, D. N. (2010). *Forms of vitality: Exploring dynamic experience in psychology, the arts, psychotherapy, and development.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stewart, K. (2007). *Ordinary affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stewart, K. (2008). Cultural poesis: The generativity of emergent things. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd Ed.)(pp. 565-586). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Strugatz, R. (2014, May 19). Snapchat catching the eye of fashion. *Women's Wear Daily*, *207(*101), 10.

Sykes, P. (2014, May 6). 'Some fashion bloggers are pulling in 7 figure salaries' says Rewardstyle's Amber Venz. *The Debrief*. Retrieved from http://www.thedebrief.co.uk/style/fashion/some-fashion-bloggers-pull-in-7-figure-salaries-says-rewardstyle-s-amber-venz-20140510602

The 10 Best Quotes from #CreateCultivateLA. (2018). *Create & Cultivate*. Retrieved from http://www.createcultivate.com/blog/2018/2/26/the-10-best-quotes-from-createcultivatela

Thornham, S. (2007). *Women, feminism and media*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Trinh, M. (1989) *Woman, native, other: Writing postcoloniality and feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Tuchman G. (1978). "Introduction: The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media." In G. Tuchman (Ed.), *Hearth and home* (pp. 3-38), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Van Dijck, J., & Nieborg, D. (2009). Wikinomics and its discontents: A critical analysis of Web 2.0 business manifestos. *New Media & Society*, *11*, 855-874.

Veijola S., & Jokinen, E. (2008). Towards a hostessing society? Mobile arrangements of gender and labour. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, *16*, 166-181.

Venn diagram. (2012). In A. Livingston, & I. Livingston, *The Thames & Hudson dictionary of graphic design and designers* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Thames & Hudson. Retrieved from http://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/t hgraph/venn_diagram/0?institutionId=1676

Wells, R. (2008, May 4). Have laptop, will travel: Bloggers arrive on fashion's front row. *Age*. Retrieved from http://www.theage.com.au/new/fashion/bloggers-arrive-on-fashions-front-row/2008/05/03/1209235234242.html

Wenegieme, L. (2015, December 13). Calvin Klein. *The Black Velveteen*. Retrieved from http://theblackvelveteen.com/blog/2015/12/13/calvin-klein

Wenegieme, L. (2016). About. *The Black Velveteen*. Retrieved from http://theblackvelveteen.com/about/

Wenegieme, L. [@lucille_irl]. (2017, June 30). *Big announcement*. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/BV_jtNvHsgJ/?taken-by=lucille_irl

Wenegieme, L. [@lucille_irl]. (2018, March 9). [Screenshots of blogger @katherinepower's feed discussing International Women's Day].

What is a lifestyle blogger? (2015, June 15). *Mediakix*. Retrieved from http://mediakix.com/2015/06/what-is-a-lifestyle-blogger/#gs.7KFce2I

Williams, D. (2006). On and off the 'Net: Scales for social capital in an online era. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(2), 593-628.

Willink, K. (2010). Excessive interviews: Listening to maternal subjectivity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(3), 206-216.

Willink, K., & Shukri, S. (forthcoming). The dance of intra-activity: Affective attunement and reflective affective analysis in interviewing. *Text and Performance Quarterly.*

Wilson, E. (2009, December 24). Bloggers crash fashion's front row. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/27/fashion/27BLOGGERS.html

Winnick, M. (2016, June 16). Putting a finger on our phone obsession: Mobile touches – a study on humans and their tech. *dscout.* Retrieved from https://blog.dscout.com/mobile-touches

Wissinger, E. (2015). #NoFilter: Models, glamour labor, and the age of the blink. In J. Davis & N. Jurgenson (Eds.), Theorizing the Web 2014 [Special Issue]. *Interface/, 1*(1), 1-20.

Wolff, J. (1997). "Reinstating corporeality: Feminism and body politics." In J.C. Desmond (Ed.), *Meaning in motion: New cultural studies of dance* (pp. 81-99), Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Zee, J. (2009, September 20). Fashion blogger style: Check out the personal style of trendsetting bloggers and reporters. *Elle.* Retrieved from http://www.elle.com/fashion/g1775/fashion- blogger-style-353038/

Zelizer, V. A. (2012). How I became a relational economic sociologist and what does it mean? *Politics and Society*, *40*(2), 145-174.

Appendix A

Project Title: Fashion and Lifestyle Blogging: Identity, Gendered Performance, and the Market
Principal Investigator: Jessica L. Neumann
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Kate Willink
DU IRB Protocol #: 987653-1
Version Date: December 7, 2016

I. Background: Fashion and lifestyle blogs have become immensely popular in the West, as we have shifted to a Web 2.0 culture. These blogs offer a new site for unpacking modes of communication and critically viewing culture. Fashion and lifestyle blogs allow women to discuss style, whittling out a journal-like space to engage with followers through imagery, narratives, and the back-and-forth of blog commentary.

The rich tapestry of the fashion and lifestyle blogosphere and its influence on and by consumer culture highlights a new phenomenon that is ripe for examination in the communication, cultural, and media studies disciplines. Online and social media performances of identity and subjectivity bring forth several important questions:

(1) How do fashion bloggers perform specific identities and subjectivities?
(2) In what ways have fashion blogs become pedagogical tools for neoliberal subjectivities, impacting performances of self in everyday life?
(3) Do fashion bloggers that use monetization applications - and have become successful entrepreneurs because of them - understand the impact their demonstrations of consumer behavior impact female followers?

Considering these questions will help us to unpack how fashion blogging and social media platforms are a powerful, communicative structure in Western consumer society. Fashion and lifestyle blogs repeatedly situate consumption as necessary to being an ideal female subject. From a critical perspective, examining this phenomenon considers socially reproduced representations of womanhood and questions the meaning embedded in cultural texts that are commonplace in fashion and lifestyle blogs (Hall, 1997; Hammer & Kellner, 2009). The fashion and lifestyle blog space, as well as social media platforms, have become a new value-laden space in Western culture, especially for women.

II. Collaborative Research and Performance Sites: The initial interview will take place in a neutral, public space such as a coffee shop or café. The researcher will meet with the participant(s) in a mutually agreed upon location. The researcher and the participant will agree upon the location of the second and third interviews.

III. Human Subjects Involvement

a. **Study Population:** The research study is focused on fashion and lifestyle bloggers, so the participants will be female, full-time fashion and lifestyle bloggers located in metropolitan areas such as Denver, Colorado. While there are some men that write fashion and lifestyle blogs, this study is interested in female bloggers and their performance of gendered identity in the blog and social media space. The study plans to interview one (possible two) blogger over the course of three interviews. The large majority of female fashion and lifestyle bloggers are between the ages of 18 and 36 and are of middle to upper class. The study will not be interviewing any individuals that are members of a potentially vulnerable population.

b. **Recruitment Plan:** To recruit participants for this study I will contact specific fashion bloggers that fall within my target demographic: full-time, female fashion bloggers that use the RewardStyle monetization application and the LikeToKnow.It feature on Instagram. There are three particular bloggers I am interested in contacting regarding the study: *Denver Darling, The Middle Closet,* and *The Fox and She*. I have mutual acquaintances with both bloggers, who I plan to reference in the recruitment emails. *(Please see the sample recruitment scripts for additional information.)* Once I hear back from the blogger(s) regarding their interest in the study, I will follow up with them via phone and/or email, depending on their personal preference, to discuss the study, the interviewing process, time commitments, and to answer any questions they have. *(Samples of these emails are also included in this IRB protocol packet.)*

c. **Informed Consent Process:** The recruitment email that I send to participants will offer a brief overview of the study and note that as a participant they will be asked to sign an informed consent form before participating in the interview(s) and study. All communication prior to the initial interview session will note that if the individual commits to meeting me for interviews, they are still welcome to leave the study at any time and that they can refuse to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable. The initial meeting will occur in a neutral location and any subsequent interviews will take place at a location that is mutually agreed upon by the interviewer and participant. At the beginning of the first interview I will explain the study and ask them to fill out the informed consent document, which will be available to them in hard copy. During this initial in-person conversation I will remind the participant that they are welcome to discontinue participation in the study at any time and that they can also refuse to answer questions if they make them uncomfortable. I will also provide a signed copy of the informed consent form for the participants' records.

d. **Procedures:** For this dissertation, my methodology will combine performance-based interviews, narrative analysis, and interpretive phenomenological analysis to reveal the potential to produce knowledge interactively while also emphasizing co-production of meaning and the relational aspect of this work. Fashion and lifestyle blogs provide a new site for communication studies research. These blogs offer a shifting, interactive, and relational digital space that connects individuals across the world through images and narratives. By combining interviewing, narrative analysis and case study research approaches this project will be able to unpack narrative, visual, and interview texts to provide a core sample exploration of the blogger's experience. These combined methodologies will help to explore the performance of identity and subjectivity within the social, digital, interactive spaces that have become conventional in everyday life.

Utilizing a hybrid methodology will allow this study to work toward a detailed understanding of human experience and the phenomenon of fashion and lifestyle blogging. Taking a phenomenological approach, this study will unpack fashion and lifestyle blog culture and the neoliberal framing of individuals. Interviewing helps us truly understand the individual experience, providing context through a narrative format. It speaks directly to culture. Interviewing and the narratives that emerge articulate an individual's positionality and subjectivity in a nuanced, detail-oriented way (Cordova, 2014). Narratives help to uncover the reality experienced by individual people; their stories speak to representations, histories, and longings that came before particular moments, to make the now more extraordinary (Madison, 2010), for the participant and interviewer alike. The hybrid methodology allows for engagement with fashion and lifestyle bloggers who consider blogging to be their primary job and who also use monetization applications such as RewardStyle. The proposed methodology uses the narratives that emerge in interviews in order to understand identity both rhetorically and culturally.

Using an embodied, performance-based interviewing style, participants engage in a dialogic exchange to forge a connection with another person for the purpose of co-creating meaning. Through performance-based interviewing we are connected and fully embodied in the project, where the body serves as an integral part of the interview process, including preparation, throughout the interview(s) and into the data analysis stage and representations of findings (Ellingson, 2012). Putting ourselves, individually, in a fully embodied, vulnerable position as interviewer, we become intertwined and embedded in the final product. It is through our vulnerability that we can try to understand the interviewee's way of understanding her reality (Ezzy, 2010). This requires reflexivity and self-awareness (Ezzy, 2010; Madison, 2010; Finlay, 2012), as well as connection with the narrator. The narratives that materialize from the interview are embedded in social and cultural contexts, which are part of the

negotiation of the interview process and space. The narrator takes us in, granting us access to their personal stories. To foster the relational nature of interviewing we must put our bodies, and ourselves, into the process. Neutrality and objectivity have no place in the performance-based, embodied interview, which is beneficial to the production of knowledge through this type of project.

   e. **Materials and Devices:** The only materials that will be utilized in the interview sessions are an iPhone and iPad with voice recording applications, as well as a pen and paper for note taking. The interview sessions will be recorded for transcription purposes. Some of the direct quotations from interview sessions may be used in the final dissertation and in future articles or conference submissions.

IV. Risk Assessment: There may be a small impact on the individual participants since they will be interviewed over multiple sessions and will be asked to discuss their decision to become a full-time fashion and lifestyle blogger. This may be a sensitive topic for the participants. The study itself will not intervene in the participants' social lives. The only impact will be their reflections on the interview.

V. Potential Benefits: This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about the fashion and lifestyle blogging phenomenon and to understand the way(s) women create and perform identity in the digital realm. It seeks to make fashion and lifestyle blogging a part of the scholarly conversation on identity and digital culture. While the participants may not directly benefit from participating in this study, their participation will contribute to new exploration within the Communication Studies academic field.

VI. Confidentiality: This research study is not intended to be anonymous. Participants can opt to be referred to in the dissertation and future published work by their blogger name and/or given name. This is noted in the informed consent form.

Works Cited

Cordova, R. A. (2014). "Punk has always been my school": The educative experience of punk learners. *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 142.

Ellingson, L. L. (2012). Interview as embodied communication. In J. Gubrium, J. Holstein, A. Marvasti, & K. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 525-539). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ezzy, D. (2010). Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(3), 163-170.

Madison, D. S. (2010). *Acts of activism: Human rights as radical performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix B

Dissertation Recruitment Script:

To recruit individuals who are full-time fashion and lifestyle bloggers, I will recruit individual bloggers that I have followed and fit my target demographic: be female, full-time fashion and lifestyle bloggers located in metropolitan areas such as Denver, Colorado.

Initial Email:

Dear _____,

I am a PhD student at the University of Denver (in the Department of Communication Studies) conducting research on fashion and lifestyle blogging. As a full-time blogger, I would love the opportunity to work with you on my dissertation and to learn more about the experiences of blogging full time.

My personal research interest is in exploring how and why individuals choose to participate in fashion and lifestyle blogging and its relationship to identity. I am embarking on my dissertation, which will explore how bloggers perform their identity within the blog space and via social media platforms. I am also interested in issues of gender and how we use narratives in this digital space.

I am looking to work with individuals that self-identify as fashion and lifestyle bloggers and are willing participate in three interview sessions. During these interviews I will ask questions, but ultimately engage in a conversation, about your story and what led you to become o a full-time fashion and lifestyle blogger. To supplement these interviews, I will also use text and photographs from your fashion and lifestyle blog (with your permission).

Does this study sound like something you would be interested in participating in? If so, I would love to chat with you more about details of the study, scheduling the first interview, etc. Please feel free to respond to this email or call me at 303.525.7847.

Thank you!

Best wishes,
Jess Neumann

Follow-Up Email (if interested in participation):

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for your response! It is great to hear from you and I hope that I can answer any questions you have.

In terms of project specifics, I would like to conduct three separate interview sessions. The interviews will last between one and two hours each and will take place at a spot that you are comfortable in such as a coffee shop or restaurant. At the first interview I would like to learn a bit about your personal history and what has led you to where you are today. The second and third interviews will generally be one to two weeks apart.

My personal philosophy on interviewing is that it is not a one-sided process but a conversation. I have a set of questions I'd like to ask, but I'm open to keeping these sessions fluid and seeing where the interview takes us.

I will provide an informed consent for you at the beginning of our first interview which details several issues related to your participation in the project. I am also happy to answer any questions you have at that time, or in advance. Also, this is a voluntary study that you can choose to opt out of at any time.

If you are still comfortable with moving forward on this project, please let me know and we can schedule our first interview session. I look forward to working with you!

Best wishes,
Jess Neumann

Appendix C

Proposed Interview Schedule for Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview schedule below includes sample questions I intend to use as a guide for my interview sessions. The specific questions may vary, slightly, depending on the interviewee. My methodological approach will utilize key components of critical communication and cultural studies interview work. The approach is engaged with bodies in the field, and seeks to relate to participants, acknowledging the process as one of witnessing rather than pure observation (Madison, 2010). All aspects of this mixed method are tenuous, relational and require mutual investment of participants (Pollock, 2009). The process is dialogic, requires endless negotiation, and is founded on trust, disclosure, coevalness, and rapport. Because the interview sessions will be focused on co-production of meaning, they may include a slight variation to the questions below as follow-up questions emerge in the moment. My overall goal is to work with the participant(s) to share stories and narratives about their experience as a fashion and lifestyle blogger, as well as their reflections on those stories.

Interview Session One

Introduction:
Hello, it is great to meet you! Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study, and for taking time out of your busy schedule – I really appreciate it. Before we begin today's interview, I need you to read and sign the informed consent form, confirming your understanding of my research and its conditions. Please feel free to ask any questions about this form before or after you sign it. *{Wait for the participant to read the informed consent form, ask questions, and sign.}*

Great! Now that you have signed the informed consent document, do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview? Please remember that you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may ask to stop the interview at any time. Do you mind if I record this interview using my iPhone and iPad so that I can better recount and represent our conversation? *{Wait for response.}*

{Turn on recording devices.} The iPhone and iPad voice recording function has been turned on. If you would like me to turn it off at any time, please let me know and I will do so.

Body
Beginning Transition: The purpose of this interview is to get a bit of background information on how you became a fashion and lifestyle blogger, and what life events led you to where you are today. Could you begin by telling me a little bit about yourself? I am interested in getting to know you….

{After the participant offers a bit of background, I will move into the following interview questions.}

- Have you always loved fashion, design, and other topics that are now featured on your blog?
- Did fashion and style impact your childhood and teenage years? If so, how?
- What did you do when you finished college (if you went to college)? Can you describe your professional life at that time?
- When did you decide to begin your fashion and/or lifestyle blog? Can you tell me about that decision, what led up to it, and what happened immediately following?
- How did social media fit in?

{Once getting a detailed history of the participant, I will end the interview session. We will also schedule our second interview session at this time, confirming a mutually agreed upon time and location. I will also provide a short overview of the subject matter to be discussed during the second session: what their everyday life is like as a fashion and lifestyle blogger, a detailed account of their experience as a blogger, and a focus on relationships and community.}

Interview Session Two

Introduction:
Hello! It is so nice to see you again. How are you? *{Wait for the participant to respond.}*

Great! Before we begin our second interview session, do you have any questions for me? Also, do you have any thoughts about our last interview session or did you want to follow up on any of your previous responses? *{Wait for the participant to respond.}*

Okay, as a reminder, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may ask to stop the interview at any time.

{Turn on recording devices.} The iPhone and iPad voice recording function has been turned on. If you would like me to turn it off at any time, please let me know and I will do so.

Body
Beginning Transition: So as I mentioned at the end of our last interview, today's session will include questions and discussion about your everyday as a fashion and lifestyle blogger, a detailed account of their experience as a blogger, and a focus on relationships and community.

- To start, can you walk me through what your average day as a fashion and lifestyle blogger looks like?
- What are some of the challenges you face in the average day?

- What are your favorite parts about the day-to-day of blogging?

Transition: Can we shift a bit to a discussion of the relationships and community of fashion and lifestyle blogging? Great…

- Who do you interact with on a daily basis?
- What relationships have developed in blogging? Do you interact on a daily basis with your followers? Other bloggers?
- What is the fashion and lifestyle blogging community like?
- Can you describe what blogging has done to influence the way(s) you connect with other people?
- How had blogging impacted your relationship(s)?

{Once we have discussed, in great detail, the everyday life of blogging, I will end the interview session. We will schedule our final interview session at this time, confirming a mutually agreed upon time and location. I will also provide a short overview of the subject matter to be discussed during the third and final session: what fashion and lifestyle blogging means to them, as well as the intellectual and emotion connection between their identity and blogging.}

Interview Session Three

Introduction:
Hello! It is lovely to see you again. How are you? *{Wait for the participant to respond.}*

Great! Before we begin our final interview session, are there any questions you have for me? Do you have any thoughts about our last interview session or do you want to follow up on any of your previous responses? *{Wait for the participant to respond.}*

Okay, as a reminder, you do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and may ask to stop the interview at any time.

{Turn on recording devices.} The iPhone and iPad voice recording function has been turned on. If you would like me to turn it off at any time, please let me know and I will do so.

Body
Beginning Transition: So as I mentioned at the end of our last interview, today's session will include questions and discussion of what fashion and lifestyle blogging means to you, as well as your thoughts on identity and blogging.

- So to start, when did your interest in fashion begin?
- What does fashion mean to you?
- Can you tell me more about what drew you to blogging?

- What did your blog look like/what was it about when it first started?
- When did you start blogging full-time?
- Can you tell me about the evolution of your blog?

Transition: So, I am interested in how blogging influences your sense of self.

- What do you see as the relationship between blogging and your identity?
- How does blogging impact your everyday life?
- What do you hope to get out of blogging?
- How does blogging make you fee1?
- Does blogging make you feel successful? If so, how?
- Is there anything you dislike about blogging? What are the biggest challenges you face as a fashion and lifestyle blogger?

Transition: I'd now like to focus about on blogging and the way you communicate and relate to others.

- Do you talk to others about blogging?
- Do you have blogger "co-workers"?
- How do you frame blogging when you talk to others about it?
- What kind of messaging to you aim for on your blog? How do you think it impacts your followers?
- How does blogging make you feel about yourself and your life?

Transition: So as we wrap up this interview session, is there anything that I did not ask about that you would like to share with me? *{Wait for the participant to respond.}*

<u>Conclusion</u>
Thank you for your time! I have really enjoyed talking with you over the past several weeks. Please feel free to contact me at jneumann@law.du.edu or call me at 303.525.7847 if you have any questions or concerns. Please call me if you wish to retract anything that you said in the interview or want to keep private. If this happens, I will strike that section of the interview from the record and exclude it from my research. That being said, I also encourage you to call me if you think of any clarifications or additional information that you wish to share. I am more than happy to talk with you again if you have any thoughts. Thanks for sharing your stories with me!