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Becoming “That Girl”: A Digital Ethnography of Productivity and Wellness Culture on YouTube

By

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Abstract

This paper uses a combination of digital ethnographic methods and in-depth interviewing to examine productivity and wellness culture on YouTube in the wake of the 2020 "that girl" trend. The first section focuses on how the interviewees relate to productivity and routine. Second, conceptions of authenticity in "that girl" content are analyzed on both the content creation side and the viewer side. The third section examines how influencers and viewers negotiate boundaries as an act of self-preservation in creating and consuming productivity content. The last section focuses on TikTok and how reactions to wellness and productivity content differ depending on whether it is short-form or long-form.

I explore the effect of consuming "that girl" content on viewers while keeping in constant dialogue with creators' own conceptions of their content's impact by examining their values and beliefs surrounding authenticity, productivity, and consumerism. Drawing upon updated theories of front stage and backstage behavior for the digital world (Goffman 1956) such as porous authenticity (Abidin 2018) and the productivity of negative affect (Berryman and Kavka 2018; Reade 2020), I find that productivity and wellness influencers operate in a gray area of constructed intimacy with their viewers. Further, I find that influencers depend on their community of subscribers to give their work meaning, while viewers often attach themselves more to a genre of content than a specific creator and negotiate boundaries with wellness content to mitigate the negative effects it can have on their mental health.

Introduction

While the coronavirus pandemic was devastating for most of the population, it presented an opportunity for a privileged sector of society to slow down, turn inward, and focus on self-improvement. With nowhere to go and work and school moved online, those with socioeconomic means were able to transform a traumatic world event into a time for reflection, exercise, and leisure activities. In many ways, the world stayed connected through social media, and watching lifestyle content on YouTube could help an isolated person feel less alone. It comes as no surprise that in an environment with more free time and a lack of control over outside factors, productivity and wellness content proliferated online. In the midst of what the World Health Organization named an "infodemic," or an increase in the spread of misinformation

during a disease outbreak, perhaps some people took back control by attempting to manage their own health and wellness (WHO 2020).

Productivity videos labeled “that girl” started appearing on YouTube in the summer of 2020, when the initial shock of the pandemic was over and people had begun settling into the “new normal.” One of many aesthetics that has taken YouTube and TikTok by storm, “that girl” is characterized by hyper-productivity and a focus on self-care. A typical video shows a “day in the life” or a morning routine, most often of a woman in her twenties. Being “that girl” is synonymous with waking up early (five or six in the morning), exercising, journaling, meditating, making a healthy breakfast, and getting ready for the day, all before the “real day” begins. These videos essentially serve as a guidebook for viewers to become their happiest, most productive selves. The subtext is that those who are not “that girl” are not performing at their highest potential, perhaps by sleeping in, scrolling through social media in bed, and skipping breakfast. The inspiration for this paper comes from the backlash to the “that girl” trend that argued it “ascribes to white supremacist views of beauty and productivity by idealizing the ‘look’ of wellness as that of a woman who is laboring at all times—for her job and for her body—and who is young, white or white-passing, thin, able-bodied, cisgender, and whose gender performance abides by heteronormative expectations of femininity” (Sweeney-Romero 2022). I was fascinated by the proliferation of productivity and wellness content by women who, for the most part, were white, thin, and affluent, and wanted to figure out who these women really were, and what viewers actually thought of their content.

It could be argued that this content is simply motivational and entertaining and that implementing a morning routine could have given meaningful structure to those who lacked it during the pandemic. However, young women spend much of their free time online, and

increased time spent on social media is associated with mental health problems (Riehm et al 2019). What are the consequences of these parasocial relationships with creators who are promoting restrictive, unattainable lifestyles when viewers' own lives do not, or cannot, match up? Women in these videos tend to wear expensive workout sets, live in luxury apartments, and shop at high-end grocery stores. While some of them have traditional nine-to-five jobs, others are full-time influencers with flexible schedules. Regardless of career choice, privilege permeates these videos. The road to happiness and productivity, as they depict it, is bound up in the ability to participate in consumerism and to lead a quiet, chaos-free morning focused only on themselves. "Wellness" becomes inextricably linked with wearing luxury athleisure, consuming expensive supplements, and buying produce from Whole Foods, and "productivity" becomes a reflection of one's own self-worth. "That girl" routines are portrayed as a recipe for happiness but have prohibitive barriers to entry.

The similarity of these videos, from the routines and the food consumed to the apartment decor, begs the question of whether the creators gained popularity because they fit a certain aesthetic, or if they molded themselves to a popular aesthetic in order to gain traction. The ubiquity of this highly similar content, whether one seeks it out on YouTube or has it thrust upon them on TikTok, evokes a certain habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and gives it a space in the zeitgeist of social media geared toward young women. It in turn creates a standard, whether real or imagined, of what wellness and productivity look like. This is regardless of whether the content creators actually follow these routines in their "real lives," and it is regardless of the editing process that puts the creator in control of her final image. There are perhaps differences between the "on-camera" and "off-camera" self, as well as the "on-camera" and "off-camera"

days of content creators. However, it can be made to seem that these curated videos are someone's everyday reality.

Whether one dismisses this trend as unrealistic or views it as aspirational, it has held strong into 2023. This paper explores not only content that is labeled "that girl" explicitly, but also any similar content in the productivity, routine, and wellness genre. "That girl" effectively characterizes a specific aesthetic that continues to be employed in content, but the use of the label itself has decreased since its inception in 2020. Through time "in the field" and in-depth interviews with both influencers and viewers, this digital ethnography aims to get to the heart of the implications of productivity and wellness content for young women. I explore the authenticity of this content, asking influencers what their lives look like on and off camera, and I assess their values, attitudes, and beliefs surrounding productivity, consumerism, and privilege.

This paper is split into four sections based on themes that emerged in my fieldwork and interviews. The first three sections begin with a vignette "from the field," each highlighting a creator that I interviewed and connecting to the section's theme. The first section focuses on how the interviewees relate to productivity and routine. Second, I analyze conceptions of authenticity in "that girl" content, and how it is perceived on both the content creation side and the viewer side. The third section examines how influencers and viewers negotiate boundaries as an act of self-preservation in creating and consuming productivity content. The last section focuses on TikTok and how reactions to this genre of content differ depending on whether it is short-form or long-form. This paper seeks to explore the effect of consuming "that girl" content on viewers while keeping in constant dialogue with creators' own conceptions of their content's impact by examining their values and beliefs surrounding authenticity, productivity, and consumerism.

Literature Review

Existing literature speaks to society's concern with health, wellness, and productivity. Biomedicalization is a possible factor behind the proliferation of health and productivity content in late modernity. Described as "the extension of medical or biological explanations for the way things are," biomedicalization is now a mental model that "makes medicine the most readily available explanation" when searching for solutions to life's problems (Neff and Nafus 18). With everything from moods to feelings now biomedicalized, "health" becomes not only a state but a euphemism for what is desirable. While "normal" can stand for an objective average, it also stands for "what has been, good health, and for what shall be, our chosen destiny" (Hacking 169). In other words, in a biomedicalized society, being "normal" is no longer just falling at the average on a bell-shaped curve; it is possessing an optimal state of health. If one's behavior is deemed "unhealthy," they are breaking the social rules of a biomedicalized world (Neff and Nafus 19). An emphasis on medical labeling creates new deviants, and in this social-deterministic model, individuals have no agency (Foucault 1976). While unhealthy behavior was previously a personal matter, in late modernity, it is a social problem. Biomedicalization and the ideology of health have further narrowed the scope of normality, with those who do not prioritize wellness cast as deviants.

In the time-crunched, biomedicalized culture of late modernity, an ideology of health and wellness thrives. Lifestyle guides like self-help books have been popular in the United States for almost two centuries (Starker 2002). However, constantly striving for self-improvement is not just an aspiration now; it is an expectation. According to Neff and Nafus, choosing not to take action on a problem makes one a "double outlier," and "not normal" by "falling short of the cultural ideal of the striving self-improver" (39). The demand of biomorality, or the moral obligation to be happy and healthy, renders people who are complacent with their health

"deviants" and positions them as threats to society (Cederström 4). In what Cederström describes as "the wellness syndrome," an obsession with the body is combined with a desire for authenticity, which is in turn seen as a way of "improving one's self" (8). Turning inward and focusing on self-improvement would have previously been viewed as narcissistic, but in late modernity, it is a moral obligation. The result is "passive nihilism," or people turning inward and focusing on perfecting themselves instead of transforming the problematic world they are in (Cederström 8). While wellness was previously about simply "feeling good," it now seeps into all aspects of our lives, whether it be "wellbeing programs" at work or mundane activities such as washing the dishes being portrayed as an opportunity to "improve mindfulness" (Cederström 3).

How do biomorality, the wellness syndrome, and passive nihilism translate to the online world? The lines between Goffman's front stage and backstage in the digital world are not as clear. While the "front stage" is used to describe behavior that is visible to an audience and therefore part of a performance, the "backstage" describes how people behave in the absence of an audience (Goffman 1956). How does this translate, however, to content creation, in which vloggers are filming their lives for an imagined audience in mainly "backstage" environments? To bring Goffman into the digital age, several scholars have started to explore the blending of these presentations of self. For example, in an article for *Real Life*, anthropologist and ethnographer Crystal Abidin writes that authenticity in influencer culture "has become understood less as static and more as a performative ecology and parasocial strategy with its own genre and self-presentation elements." Abidin contends that being "real" means being more "relatable," and that striving for relatability is a form of tacit labor, or the "the embodied and intentionally unseen work required to make a practice seem natural or effortless." Relatability is

put to work through "calibrated amateurism," which Abidin argues is a modern version of Goffman's concept of scheduling and MacCannell's theory of staged authenticity. To give their audience an inside look at their "authentic" selves, influencers often "attempt to emphasize a false divide between their digital representations on social media and their actual lives as lived offline, by asserting that online and offline are distinct spheres." Lastly, Abidin points to the "porous authenticity" employed by influencers, in which an audience is "enticed into trying to evaluate and validate how genuine a persona is by following the feedback loop across the front stage of social media and the backstage of 'real life,' through inconspicuous and scattered holes or gateways that were intentionally left as trails for the curious." In other words, creators purposefully scatter less-curated content throughout their feeds in order to seem more authentic. In "that girl" content, however, I find that influencers made little effort to emphasize a divide between their "on-camera" and "off-camera" selves, and were instead focused on presenting their online lifestyles as authentic. Any admission to differences between their lives online and offline only came through in interviews. Instead, "that girl" creators were prone to giving disclaimers at the beginning of their videos, explaining that viewers do not need to follow their exact routines to be happy.

Affective, or emotional, labor is increasingly recognized as a strategy employed by creators to forge connections with viewers. In "Keeping it raw on the 'gram: Authenticity, relatability, and digital intimacy in fitness cultures on Instagram," Josie Reade argues that fitness influencers posting "raw" (unedited, realistic visuals) is a form of affective labor that cultivates socially and economically productive digital intimacies between Instagram users (16). Further, Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka's article, "Crying on YouTube: Vlogs, self-exposure and the productivity of negative affect," argues that sharing negative emotions on YouTube translates

into “affirmations of authenticity, (self-)therapy and strengthened ties of intimacy with followers,” which points to a “booming economy of affective labour” on YouTube. In other words, sharing “real” emotions is in an effort to appear vulnerable and intimate, which in turn strengthens bonds with viewers, fostering more success on social media.

This project engages with and contributes to the existing literature by examining both content creators *and* viewers. This allowed me to explore the contradictions and inconsistencies in viewpoints between those on both sides of the screen to better understand whether the backlash to this content is true to what viewers are feeling. It also helps understand whether creators are conscious of the potentially harmful effects their content can have on viewers and dives into viewers’ agency in navigating content that is known to portray unattainable lifestyles. Rather than stop at the point of stating that content creators use affective labor strategies such as porous authenticity, calibrated amateurism, and negative affect, I am able to explore the extent to which these strategies have an effect on viewers, and what the effect of the content is on viewers’ lives overall.

Methodology

I used a combination of digital ethnographic methods on YouTube and in-depth interviewing for this project. I watched and took field notes on “that girl” videos and the comments below them, but did not take on more of a participatory role, like adding comments myself. The content was found through search rather than through my own recommendations because I did not want my own algorithm to influence what I watched. I found that interviews were especially important, because “that girl” content is highly similar and tends to follow a blueprint. Because of this similarity, reaching saturation in the field did not take as much time as

one would expect for an ethnography. As time went on, watching more content was not necessarily providing me with more meaningful data. However, I did make an effort to focus my fieldwork on the influencers I interviewed in order to have a richer analysis of them.

Given that YouTube videos are public and free, gaining access to my field site was not an issue. As a woman in her twenties, this content has been pushed into my suggestions box for years, and I have been a casual and occasional viewer of it. In this way, I was an "insider" in that I understood YouTube lifestyle content and influencer culture before I entered the field. While I only watched morning routine and productivity videos sporadically, I was drawn to them once I began to see the backlash against them from other YouTubers and on Twitter. Having been in multiple environments where hyper-productivity and the image of perfection were an expectation, I was invested in the debate surrounding these topics as well as the newfound popularity of this content. It is thus important to note that this project began with a critical lens: I did not start as an impartial researcher. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago and a graduate of a rigorous college, I tire of and push back against elitism and hyper-productivity. However, in order to be successful in these environments, I have had to be complicit in both. I saw the "that girl" trend as toxic and as a way of further narrowing the scope of who is allowed to participate in health and wellness. However, in my interviews, I tried to remain as impartial as possible. I avoided the word "toxic" and let influencers and viewers speak for themselves. While at times I heard what was expected, at others, I was pleasantly surprised. Regardless of the backlash against the trend that got me interested in the topic, I did not come into the project with an argument in mind, and let the data speak for itself.

My positionality as a researcher both complicated and aided my relationship with my interviewees and with the topic itself. I am a white, middle-class, able-bodied, and cisgender

woman. If I wanted to implement a "that girl" routine into my own life, I have the privilege to do so. As a woman in her twenties and as someone familiar with this content, I was able to easily relate to my interviewees and make them feel comfortable enough to open up. However, my similarity to them may have also caused me to overlook details or themes that would have been evident to a researcher who was more of an outsider.

By spending time in the (digital) field, I was able to uncover more about who these women were, as well as their understanding of health, productivity, and happiness. It gave me a more nuanced picture than that which was painted by backlash to the "that girl" trend and complicated my understanding of the topic. However, I knew sitting down and speaking with creators and viewers was the only way I would be able to uncover the motivations behind and reactions to the content. I began by trying to recruit influencers since I knew there would be more of a barrier to contact with them. Despite the fact that they post their lives online, they are incredibly difficult to reach.

To find the influencers I wanted to contact, I started with a short list of those I already knew of, and then opened an incognito window and typed "that girl routine" into YouTube to get a more "random" sample of creators. My first tactic was to send formal recruitment messages to their business or management emails because I thought my university email address would give me some degree of legitimacy. I contacted the first 50 creators listed after briefly making sure each posted content that was within the scope of my inquiry. However, fifty or so emails later, I still have not gotten a single response. I decided to switch tactics and send direct messages to the creators' Instagram accounts, which were found through an easy search (some were actually listed on their YouTube profiles). This required more vulnerability as a researcher than emailing, because creators would be able to see my profile picture and follower count. I had more success

with influencers who, despite having hundreds of thousands of subscribers on YouTube, had only a couple of thousand Instagram followers. For the creators who were just as popular on Instagram as they were on YouTube, my direct messages continue to be marked "unseen." I recruited two interviewees through Instagram direct messages, and one influencer through a distant offline connection. I interviewed the first creator twice since it was done much earlier than the other two, and my research questions had developed in the meantime. In total, I conducted four interviews with three creators, each ranging from thirty to forty minutes. I would have liked for this number to have been larger, but even with efforts to snowball recruit from the creators I interviewed and a large quantity of Instagram direct messages, I had no more recruitment success.

Recruiting viewers of "that girl" content proved to be much easier. Just by discussing my project with my peers, I was able to find interviewees who were slightly removed from me, such as a friend's sister or a friend of a friend. I interviewed five viewers in total, each averaging about thirty minutes. Out of my nine total interviews, eight were done on Zoom and one was done in person.[1] Zoom interviews were essential because my interviewees were spread out across North America. With the interviewees' consent, I recorded the audio from our interviews and uploaded them to Otter.ai, which is an automatic transcription service. I then went through and edited the transcripts to fix any errors and loaded them into MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software. I used the paraphrase function on MAXQDA to summarize the transcripts as an initial coding cycle, which helped me better comprehend the content. I then decided to do a cycle of values coding, which codes for participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña 131). As this was a project with attitude, values, and belief-based research questions, I found this step was crucial to make sense of the data. I then created categories and built a master category list out of

[1] See appendix for sample interview guides.

those that appeared in each transcript. This required reconciliation of different categories as well as the organization of categories, codes, and subcodes.[2]

By doing three rounds of coding on MAXQDA, I gained deeper insight into the data and was able to see which "stories" were most salient. I was able to draw comparisons across the transcripts, find contradictions, and get a sense of the ideological differences between creators and viewers. My coded interview transcripts, combined with my field notes, allowed me to answer my research questions and construct a narrative. All interview participant names have been changed, and I have made an effort to conceal any identifying information.

I. The Perceived Value of Productivity and Routine

Productivity and routine came through in my coding as some of the creators' main values. There was a tension between how productive creators thought they *should* be, given their content niche, and the reality of their lives. This tension comes through in interviews and my field observations, and is emblematized by this field excerpt on Holly, a full-time creator and recent college graduate in a southern U.S. city:

For one participant, Holly, I decided to watch videos that seemed most emblematic of her productivity and wellness content. In this case, I decided on a fall morning routine video. Holly has almost 200,000 subscribers, and this particular video had 11,000 views. She is a recent college graduate who lives in a southern U.S. city and runs a small business in addition to posting on YouTube.

Holly starts her morning by opening her blinds and letting the light in. She makes a Nespresso coffee in a Hocus Pocus mug consisting of two shots of espresso, frothed oat milk, and pumpkin spice creamer. As part of her morning "peaceful quiet time," Holly reads a devotional,

[2] See appendix for coding framework.

journals for five minutes (in a journal from her brand), and reads a bit of an entrepreneurial book. She then puts on a one-piece Alo set and a soft checkered cardigan, washes her face, brushes her teeth, and responds to texts. Her skincare routine is simple and consists of moisturizer, sunscreen (Curology is her go-to), and a Summer Fridays lip balm. She makes her bed and goes for a walk before starting work, plugging her brand's tote bag before she heads out. Back home, Holly makes an "apple pie smoothie" which she describes as "delicious, crisp, and warming." She makes a comment about avocado toast not being "fun," and I found it interesting that she made a point to push back against a breakfast that is consistently shown in productive morning routine videos.

Done with breakfast, Holly "sets the mood" for work by lighting a candle, writing a to-do list, time blocking her day, and putting on jazz music because it's "so therapeutic." She uses Netflix to put a fake fireplace on her TV for "cozy vibes" and exclaims "Now I'm ready to work at home!" On her desk, she shows that she has water, her iPad, a planner, and an external hard drive. Since she'll be filming that day, she puts on a full face of makeup. Holly normally only puts on makeup for meetings, events, or for filming content. She starts out with a Smashbox primer and a Kosas foundation, before pausing for a moment to say, "I just wanted to chat a little about morning routines on here." She continues, "I'm like the queen of doing a routine video." Holly has been uploading her routines since eighth grade, and she acknowledges that they've changed over the years. She admits that she has been "putting off" uploading a routine video lately because she hasn't been proud of her routine since she graduated from college. She has felt overwhelmed in the mornings even though she had nowhere to be, and would usually just wake up, have coffee, do her devotionals and journaling, and "jump right into work." The additions of going on a walk, ice rolling her face, and "setting the mood" for work have only

come recently. She had been embarrassed to have been waking up as late as 8 am or 9 am and was not "feeling motivational." She continues with her makeup, selecting a Rare Beauty blush. "I just need to realize that it's okay if my morning routine isn't as elaborate as it used to be." She is not working out first thing in the morning and overall has not been enjoying mornings as much as she used to. For those reasons, she has felt hesitant about posting a routine video.

In the remainder of the video, Holly finishes her makeup and expresses that her new morning routine may be simple, but there are small parts of it that feel "really special," like going for a walk and having sunlight on her face as soon as she wakes up. Holly seemingly compared herself to an idealized "that girl," and did not want to post routine content when she did not feel she was living up to her productive brand in real life. While I started off this project concerned about how viewers responded to productivity and wellness content, I had not thought about how creators compared and policed themselves. Holly appears to have felt a large degree of shame, and even cognitive dissonance, in being a productivity YouTuber who felt unmoored and "lazy" in her unstructured post-college life. She seems to feel that she is failing herself and her viewers by not being motivational. Holly took time out of her video to express insecurities and vulnerabilities, which is reminiscent of Berryman and Kavka's theory of the productivity of negative affect (2018). Her content is mediated and edited, and she had the opportunity to portray herself confidently and in the best light. Does this vulnerability come from a place of truly wanting viewers to see her as an imperfect human being, or is it a strategy to cultivate a sense of intimacy with viewers? Is authenticity a constructed illusion in order to make viewers feel closer to creators with unattainable lifestyles?

Holly felt a responsibility to her viewers to authentically be "productive" and "motivational." I found that the viewers I interviewed all independently valued productivity and

routine, but some felt pressured into it given their stressful school and work schedules that required them to use their time "wisely." Taylor, a senior in college double majoring in history and English, contended:

"I mean, I guess like, in the sense of like, productivity, like, I don't really feel like discouraged by like, their sense of productivity because like, I feel like I'm a productive person myself."

Ellie, a graduate student at an elite university, expressed that having a balanced life is at times unattainable:

"You know, like, everyone's like, where's that work-life balance? I tried to do it for myself as a graduate student, but it falls away. It slips away so easily. Where like, if I even if I wanted to only do schoolwork from like nine to six just like it's not possible. Like I'm still going to be doing work. Yeah. 9 pm at night. Yeah. Whether I know it's like not good for me or not." -Ellie

For viewers of productivity and wellness content, time management and pushing themselves to the limit is a necessity, not a choice made on a path toward self-improvement. If they were not "productive," there would be consequences in their academic and professional careers. For the influencers, however, productivity and structure are more of an option:

"But for me, I'd rather bring the motivation, the like, tips, the tools, the how I started my business behind the scenes, like that's really my calling, I feel like, online." -Holly

For Holly, productivity is a passion, and a "calling." Gwen, a content creator with a full-time engineering job on the west coast, thinks routines are a necessary ingredient to success:

"Like, oh, well, I'm a Virgo. Oh, and I, I but I really am rooted in routine, like, I feel like to have a routine and to be quote, unquote, or your definition of successful I think, or other people, you know, you see other people who are successful do have a routine." -Gwen

While people in school or working traditional jobs are productive out of an abundance of pressure to perform, the creators I interviewed (except Gwen, who works a nine-to-five job) structured their days in order to avoid a feeling of listlessness. It is as if they are treating themselves as a project, viewing their lifestyles as a removed work-in-progress rather than their

everyday reality. The creators, in this way, have a parasocial relationship with themselves. They are constantly negotiating an idea of what their identity is and talk abstractly about who they are in terms of branding and marketability. By filming and editing their productivity and wellness routines, they are presenting an idealized version of themselves, but to what extent does this online version of themselves map onto their "authentic" and "real" off-camera self?

II. Authenticity

During the coding process, the subject of authenticity came through as especially salient in the interviews. Creators seemed preoccupied with appearing as "real" as possible, or at least as people who stuck to their routines. In my field observations, I noticed that "that girl" videos often had "realistic" in the title, as if recognizing that these routines were usually unrealistic. On the other hand, viewers of "that girl" content were skeptical of the creators' authenticity and employed a critical lens when consuming this content. Below is an excerpt from my field observations on Gwen, an influencer that I interviewed who was vulnerable with me about the differences in her personality online and offline:

Having had luck securing an interview with Gwen, I decided to watch a few videos that seemed representative of her content. Gwen is a recent college graduate who lives in southern California in a high-rise, luxury apartment with her dog and her boyfriend. She works a traditional job in addition to posting content on YouTube. I went to her profile and saw that she had 16,800 subscribers, but she had routine videos that had reached nearly a million views. I decided to watch her most popular video, a 5 am morning routine focused on creating healthy habits.

The video opened with a "word to the wise" on the screen, which essentially explained that some days she does not wake up at 5 am, but it is a habit she is trying to build. "So, what

may work for me, might not work for you!" She continues that it is important for people to listen to their bodies and follow a path that helps them "find beauty in the mundane." The video opens with her getting out of bed, and she goes into the bathroom to get ready for the gym. Gwen explains that she wakes up two hours before work to have "me time" and tries to drink a full bottle of water before 7 am. By 5:30, she is at the gym in her apartment building. She compares this time to meditation, explaining "I put in my headphones, listen to a podcast, and just vibe for an hour." Gwen claims that performance is optimized and injury is reduced in the morning because of windows in body temperature. She wears bike shorts, a black sports bra, a cropped sweatshirt, white crew socks, and white Vans to work out. Her workouts, she explains, come from one of two exercise apps, because this helps to "reduce decision fatigue."

Back from the gym, Gwen "wakes up the boys" (her boyfriend and dog) and puts on sweats and a jacket to take her dog on a walk. She seems self-conscious about this outfit choice, saying, "Please don't judge me, I'm honestly not trying to impress anyone." Gwen describes this walk as "family time," and as bringing her "a level of peace" that she needs in the morning. Once she's home, she takes a shower and gets ready for work. Out of the shower, she dives into her full skincare routine. She opens up about how she struggles with acne and showcases products she uses such as Supergoop sunscreen. When she goes to apply light makeup, she once again displays a level of self-consciousness, saying "I've never known how to do makeup, so don't judge me." She goes on to make tea and write down her tasks for the day.

Gwen up until this point has only shown herself consuming liquids. She explains that she isn't fasting, but simply isn't hungry in the morning and opts to skip breakfast. Ending off the video, Gwen says that she feels amazing, and this is due to her decision to get her workout done

"first thing." This leaves her free in the evenings, when she's tired after work and just wants to relax.

Watching this video, I noticed that Gwen is taking the time to make disclaimers and explain her decisions. While some of this extra explanation comes in the form of a warning for viewers not to compare themselves to her, most of it surrounds what appears to be her own insecurities that she may want to address before someone else does in the comments. Similar to Holly, she seems to be comparing herself to an idealized "that girl," who perhaps would not wear sweatpants to walk her dog, or who is skilled at applying makeup. Further, Gwen feels a need to address the food she consumes (or does not consume) in the video, which perhaps is a result of anticipating comments about her not preparing a healthy breakfast. As far as "that girl" routines go, Gwen's 5 am routine is relatively simple. She goes to the gym, walks her dog, showers, and gets ready for the day. However, Gwen sees her gym time as a form of meditation, and the whole goal of her morning routine is to take time for herself before the day begins. The overall impression one gets from the video is that Gwen is in a defensive mode, actively trying to quash criticism before it comes. I also wondered if Gwen's self-consciousness and vulnerability about her insecurities were a tactic to establish a sense of intimacy with her viewers. By drawing attention to her own imperfections, Gwen was making herself more relatable, thus perhaps more palatable, to her audience.

Through interviewing Gwen, I came to the conclusion that the online and offline selves are not binary; they cannot be mapped directly onto Goffman's front stage and backstage (1956). Rather, there is a gray area that creators exist in:

"I feel like in terms of like, that, I'm able to separate myself. There are times, though, where I realized that, oh, like, if I'm doing like a day in the life, like, maybe I'm planning too much for the video. And it's not actually, you know, what I'd really be doing, like, maybe I'm adding cleaning in there, when in reality, I probably wouldn't have cleaned if I didn't have to add in something or

add more time to hit like the eight-minute mark or whatever, on the content. So yeah, I think so. Sometimes, like, I'll change my life a little bit to fit to whatever video I'm trying to create." -Gwen

"Like they would rather see a mundane, like, work day in my life than a travel vlog to Disney. So I was like, okay, this kind of works out because my audience wants this more like solo intimate content with me, where I just show like my mundane life, you know, doing errands and cleaning and getting my work done. That's kind of the content they're coming to me towards." -Holly

Gwen and Holly are not *changing* themselves for the camera, but they are *curating* themselves to fit the perceived desires of their audiences. Rachel, a creator who recently switched from working in a lab to influencing full-time, touches on her experience of constantly viewing footage of herself at different angles:

"I think like, after a while, like you just get used to it, you know, everybody's face looks bad in like some angles like I feel like at the beginning, it was kind of weird, especially like hearing your own voice on the recording. But then afterwards, I just got used to it. Sometimes I'll be like, I look bad in this frame, or like, sometimes I'm like, wow, I actually, look really good in this frame. So it's like, I don't really take it like, seriously to heart, I guess." -Rachel

Rachel edits out clips that are not flattering to her, curating her image online to show her best self. It came through in the interviews that constructing boundaries for what is shown online and what is not must be consciously negotiated. All the influencers interviewed have different work situations: one has done YouTube full-time since graduating college, one works a traditional nine-to-five job in addition to YouTube, and one recently left a full-time job in order to pursue YouTube full-time. Two of the interviewees contended that they follow their routines every day, as having this structure has helped improve their lives:

"Yeah, literally, I feel like my, I feel like I'm the type of person where my days are like, very methodological, but I don't, I don't really like it deviating from like, everyday life. And like, yeah, I basically do everything that you see in like the videos like almost every day (Laughs)." -Rachel

"Yeah, pretty much they (her routines) *do change based on the season usually or like the month or, you know, my summer wants to look a little bit different than my winter and things like that.*

But for the most part, like since high school, I've just had that routine. And yeah, like I said, it changes from time to time, but having that routine doesn't change. And I seriously, I hate going throughout my day when I don't start it with even just like 30 minutes of kind of dedicated time to reading or journaling or going for a walk or something like that. So yeah, it's pretty ingrained in my head since I've been doing this for so long, which makes it easier to do today." -Holly

For these creators, having a rigid routine is not about capitalizing on a social media trend or about being "that girl." Being highly regimented gives them guidance and allows them a sense of structure on days that could otherwise have a daunting, empty schedule up to them to manage and fill. By knowing which step is next, they are able to feel less anxious about how they are spending their time. The routines construct boundaries between their personal lives and social lives, which are so often blended when their job requires them to post their lives online:

"But definitely now I work and live alone. So it has definitely been a challenge the past six months. And I think that's also why it's helpful for me to have these routines, because otherwise I could wake up, like work from my laptop in bed, and then I could just, I could stay in bed all day like working for myself, there's no one telling me to get up. So I like have to have a reason to get up and kind of that morning routine. It's like, okay, I have to go on my walk, I need to journal like in that chair, and that's five feet away from my bed, but not my bed. It gets me up. And I think also it kind of helps me to remember to make plans and like have a life outside of work." -Holly

However, even the morning and night routines, which Holly describes as the "bookends" to her day during which she does not have to think about posting, are ultimately still about productivity. While productivity normally is associated with one's work output, in Holly's case, productivity seeps into self-care:

"And then my evening, I try to like disconnect and wind down, I will watch TV, I'll read a fiction book, I tried to cook dinner, or like FaceTime a friend, and it's just kind of like, yeah, those beginning and end caps to my day and help me make sure that the time in between those end caps are also productive, because I'm like, taking the time for myself before and after." -Holly

Taking time before and after the workday to disconnect from social media and unwind is also viewed in the context of productivity. Self-care is done in the hopes of being more productive while working, and not necessarily for the sake of relaxation. In a way, being

regimented and having a strict routine is a form of self-surveillance. Beholden to no one in terms of work, creators describe implementing healthy boundaries but are in turn policing themselves. One creator describes how she quit her traditional nine-to-five in order to leave a toxic work environment, mean bosses, and workplace conflict:

"I think that it's been like, I think it's one of the things that's really hard because previously, when I was working like a nine to five and doing YouTube, there was a lot of structure, but also it was a lot more stressful, I think something that people get wrong about somebody who's done both... working a nine to five isn't like so easy either. I feel like sometimes it's hard to deal with, like, bosses that are super mean. Like customers and like workplace conflicts. And those are much more... I find like those, that to be that to be really stressful on me. So like the reason that I like chose not to work at my old workplace anymore, it was because like, I felt like it was a very toxic environment. And I just like didn't want to. So the lack of structure beats the toxic environment in that case, but since like, my boyfriend works, a nine to five, like, it's easy to schedule my day similar to him." -Rachel

Free of a toxic work environment and able to call the shots herself, Rachel still structures her day like a nine-to-five. It is interesting that those with the flexibility to work as much as they want and when they want choose to structure their days in traditional ways, and to be perhaps even more regimented than the population that must work in a specific time frame and answer to authority in the workplace. Why are those who have the most freedom to live life however they want also the ones who are most concerned about sticking to a routine?

The creators attempt to construct firm boundaries between "work" and "life," despite the fact that those boundaries are necessarily blurred because of the nature of their jobs. However, while two creators insisted that their personalities were the same on YouTube as they were in "real life," only one admitted that there was a difference, and had a level of anxiety about that difference:

"I wouldn't say like anything turns off for me, and this was a oh, what if, like, the people who are our friends like they watch our video and they go oh, that's not really you. That's not you. But then when I'm talking to cameras, sometimes that's easier than talking to like, you know, a crowd

of 20 people so how I may come on camera, and I may come off on people or like in person is two different things. But I still think that they're both me, just I show up in different ways." -Gwen

Gwen admits that how she presents herself on-camera and off-camera is different, but these are simply two versions of herself, rather than a "real" self and a "fake" self. She feels more comfortable speaking in front of the camera than in front of a group, despite the fact that her videos are seen by a larger audience. Part of this is that she is able to curate her image online:

"I think it's like, the fact that I can edit too is really easy. And then like, I wouldn't say like talking to camera, because I also do a lot of voice overs. And I love doing voice overs rather than vlogging. And like, trying to think of things to say on the spot, that part is very hard for me to do. But if I like have a plan, or like a script, that's easier for me to do on camera than you know, and like talking to other people, but I do think it's very vulnerable to do that. And I'm still trying to be vulnerable." -Gwen

By scripting her voice overs, Gwen constructs a separation between her "authentic" self and her self that is ready for consumption by a mass audience. While she is showing intimate aspects of her life, like rolling out of bed in the morning and exercising, what she posts is highly mediated. However, she feels tension regarding how vulnerable she is and indicates that she feels this is something she should improve upon. There is also anxiety over being "caught" by people in her "real life" for not being the same online as she is in person:

"I feel like I'm still myself in front of a camera and with my friends but then it was like I was scared that people's perception of if they met me didn't match to what they were watching then their whole perception of who I am as a person would change. But in my head I know that I'm still me even if a camera is on and even though I might try to be more energetic than I normally am like in person just because I do want to keep people's attention, like that's still a part of me and I'm not like trying to be someone else when the camera's on, but I wouldn't say that happens all the time." -Gwen

There is an element of emotional labor (Hochschild 1979) that goes into presenting herself on YouTube as "more energetic" than she would usually be. Part of her job is to keep viewers engaged and interested in her life, so she surveils herself to assess whether or not her

personality is fulfilling the imagined desires of her audience. When she feels that she is too low-energy in videos, she will add in “stupid takes”:

“Because there are definitely times where it's like I'll watch back on the video and be like, oh, you know, I could have been more energetic and then I'll try to add like, some stupid take that I'll say and then I'm like, oh, is that really me? And my boyfriend will say oh, that's so interesting that even if I don't see that I'm changing, my boyfriend was sometimes like, oh, that's so weird that you said that on camera. You don't normally say things like that. And like, oh, so maybe subconsciously, I'm saying things on camera because I'm like trying to make my videos better, but I'm trying my best to still be myself.” -Gwen

While Gwen is merely trying to adapt her on-camera personality to make it more palatable to her audience, there is still a tension in wanting to be authentic, and still “herself.” Throughout the interviews with creators, it became clear that there was a fundamental tension between the healthiness of creating strict boundaries between work and their personal lives, and the need to show viewers that they were “authentic.” There was also the fundamental contradiction between the fact that they all expressed that they did not want to film their whole lives and had routines in order to separate their work from their personal lives, but these same self-care routines were often filmed for YouTube content. It is an important part of the job to cultivate intimacy with an audience and for the audience to create a strong parasocial relationship with the creator, but there is also a consistent effort by the creators to put walls up and create a separation between their lives on YouTube and their personal lives. Viewers can come into the bedroom (and even sometimes the shower) with their favorite creators, but there is a mediation through editing, voice overs, and what is purposefully left out of content that puts a wall up between the two. Perhaps it is because the experience of watching this content borders on voyeurism, and creators feel that some things must be kept private. There are concerns about privacy and about who exactly is consuming the content and taking in the small details of their lives.

Intimacy, in this case, is a constructed illusion used to draw viewers in without giving them unlimited access. Holly, for example, prefers that her viewers like to see her alone in her apartment, doing mundane tasks that are focused on productivity. That way, she does not have to show her audience her boyfriend, friends, and family. While entering her personal space and seeing how she spends her mornings and evenings is highly intimate, she has the power to keep certain aspects of her life off-camera. Viewers are let into the "backstage" spaces in influencers' lives, but not necessarily into their "front stage" personal lives with their friends and family. While seeing someone's mundane home life, which is usually private, would normally be seen as more intimate, influencers are in reality showing the least "personal" aspects of their lives, such as what products they use and how they make their coffee. Viewers are only privy to highly mediated expressions of vulnerability, and the result is a sense of familiarity built upon very little substance.

Perceived relationships between creators and viewers

I was interested in whether the people who consumed wellness and productivity content on YouTube implemented the routines into their real lives, or watched it just for entertainment. Are these videos guidebooks on how to live, and do viewers see them as a motivational pathway to happiness? Katie, a recent college graduate doing research on the east coast, did implement elements from "that girl" content into her daily routine:

"So I think, you know, just being able to like, again, use these people as reference points really let me like reprioritize, like, organization, and prioritizing, like my mental and my physical health through like fitness and wellness." -Katie

Dana, a graduate student at an elite university, feels motivated by the content, but this motivation does not translate into real change:

"I, for the most part, I think I feel motivated. Like, I'm like, Okay, I'm gonna get my crap together. And it's like 3 am. But so I think I feel motivated to get my, my stuff together the next day, but it just, it doesn't happen as I wanted to. But it's still like this cycle. I don't know why I keep watching them. Maybe I'm like, trying to live through them. Maybe?" -Dana

Ellie also views the content as aspirational, especially when it comes to fitness content:

"I definitely think it was like an aspirational notion of it. For sure. I think that's like a key thing. But also, I think it's like, Yeah, something like an ideal to like, look towards, like a goal of like, I don't know, maybe like, if I want to get more fit, and they have like a workout routine. Maybe I'll do that." -Ellie

While it became clear to me that the main purpose this content served was motivation and inspiration (whether or not this translated into actual lifestyle changes), I also set out to see how the viewers came to consume this content in the first place. What has their relationship been with YouTube throughout their lives, and do they have attachments to specific creators or just watch what shows up in their suggestion boxes? While I had expected the interviewees to have strong connections to a creator or a small group of creators, I found that they were more interested in a genre of content than in a specific person:

"Yeah, so I think a lot of it at the beginning was like, influenced by like, what I saw, like on TikTok, I think that was a big one. So like, peak quarantine, like, I did a lot of like, Chloe Ting. And then I feel like after I feel like that was like a fad in itself. And then afterward, like, I kind of started branching out into like, MaddFit, and then other people there, but usually just like browsing from, like, one point, and then just kind of finding what I like. And going from there. Yeah." -Katie

"I really, I watch those like routines. I like 'what I do in a day.' So I don't know what... I think, maybe some like, Oh, I wish I was that productive. But I'm not that productive. What else do I watch? It's mostly a day in my life, like, all of my YouTube videos are showing up in my suggested it's like, a day in my life or like productivity videos. How to be more productive, which is so bad, but that's what I want." -Dana

"I think I gravitated towards watching it just because I mirror the audience that they're like looking for. So I think just like through an algorithm or something that comes up, and I started watching them, and I like them." -Ellie

During the pandemic, they described turning to this content as a way to be more productive and fill their time by striving for new fitness goals or by cooking new meals. This was largely offered to them on the basis of an algorithm, and they watched whatever videos seemed interesting to them in their suggestion boxes. The only exception to this was Taylor, who has been watching YouTube since middle school. Starting with beauty content, she has followed the same creator as she made a transition into lifestyle and wellness:

"Yeah, there's this girl. Her name is Danielle Carolan. Have you heard of her? Yeah, I don't know why, like, I just like got really into it when I was in middle school. And now I've been following her for so long. I like can't see the I mean, like, it's almost like this story that I'm watching." -Taylor

Watching Danielle's videos, and growing up with her, has naturally led Taylor to follow the people in Danielle's immediate circle:

"So her, I'm trying to think of other wellness people? Um, I don't know, I guess maybe like sort of her sphere of like New York influencers. I'm really like, fascinated by. Um, so this girl, Katy Bellotte, that she's like friends with I'll occasionally watch her videos. And then over the years, I'm sure that there is more like, wellness stuff I've watched. But that's sort of the rotation I like stick to these days." -Taylor

I was interested in this attachment Taylor had to one influencer, and the parasocial relationship she has had with her spanning nearly ten years. I wanted to know if Taylor felt a closeness or an intimacy with Danielle, so I asked her if she would approach her if she saw her in person:

"That's like, Oh, my God, I don't know. I guess I would like, especially if it's someone I've maybe like, more casually watched, I would just like ignore it. But if it's like someone that like, yeah, I've watched since I was like, pretty young. I definitely would. I mean, I'm conscious of the fact that like, I don't know her. So like, I don't really feel like a friendship, like, you know what I mean? So like, I guess, I don't know if I would say hi, maybe I would just because it's like, you should tell someone if you're a fan of their content. But I like to think I don't have any delusions about like, our friendship." -Taylor

I found Taylor's comment about not having any delusions about her friendship with Danielle highly interesting because the creators I spoke with all valued the community they had built on YouTube:

"I feel like I'm super connected with them. Because, like, just for me, I read like all my comments, and I respond, or at least like heart, all of them. And like, I read my DMs too. And I try to respond as well. And like, I just really like interacting with people and seeing like, how, what I go through sometimes relates to how they go through and like we're not alone in this together, and we can all work on things together to become better." -Rachel

Rachel values her YouTube community because she feels that she bonds with her viewers over shared experiences and similar wellness goals. Similarly, Gwen sees her online community as a "driving force" to keep making content, despite initial fears that she would be met with criticism:

"I feel like my experience has been super positive. And I'm really grateful for that. Because a big part that was stopping me from starting was because of like, what I thought people would say in their videos, but I would say for the most part, it's, it's been a driving force and why I'm continuing is because of the people who have reached out to me, whether that be like, people, I don't know, or even my friends, like, I feel like the community that I am building, it's something that I didn't even think I'd get out of it. So it's been a super positive experience." -Gwen

While Gwen and Rachel hinted at the idea of a perceived "core community" that they have built online, Holly acknowledges it explicitly. There is a sense that when her videos reach viewers outside of this "core," she is more vulnerable:

"I have just like a core set of viewers that like I recognize their usernames when they comment and whatnot. And so it's usually just those core group of people that comment unless the video kind of gains traction. And so the more viral a video goes definitely more hate will come in, especially on platforms like TikTok, where it pushes it out to, you know, anyone who has no idea who you are. But thankfully, I feel like since I have a pretty solid like base of followers who kind of have followed me since I was growing up and have like a grip on my content." -Holly

While the influencers feel that their relationship with their subscribers is the main motivation behind creating their content, Taylor contends that she is not delusional about the

nature of the relationship and recognizes that she is not actually friends with the creators she follows, even if she has been following their lives for years. While the discourse on parasocial relationships often emphasizes the attachment that viewers have to a creator (Ashraf 4), it seems that the creators are the ones who have a parasocial attachment to their viewers. Perhaps having an online community fills in gaps in creators' real-life communities. Rachel, for example, turned to YouTube during a rough time in university, when she was surrounded by students with "bad habits" around health and had a hard time making social connections. In this way, her perceived relationship with her online community is a symbiotic relationship.

III. Negotiating Boundaries as Viewers

Viewers of "that girl" content are not passive and helpless. Especially when it comes to consumeristic, product-heavy content, they are able to negotiate boundaries in order to take what serves them from videos and distance themselves from the rest. The following vignette is an example of a product-laden "that girl" video, in which Rachel highlights the products that have helped her improve her physical appearance. This particular field notes excerpt elucidates the ways in which "that girl" creators bind the ability to participate in consumerism to the ability to participate in wellness culture:

Rachel is a content creator based in Canada. While she previously had a full-time job working in a lab, she recently quit in order to pursue YouTube. With a degree in health sciences from a prestigious Canadian university, she hopes to eventually attend medical school. Rachel has 185,000 subscribers on YouTube and has videos that have reached a million views. Her content focuses on productivity and health tips, and many of her video titles explicitly say "This will motivate you!" For Rachel's vignette, I decided to focus on a video on "that girl" tips and routines, posted fairly recently.

Rachel starts out the video by expressing how many choices there are for products when scrolling on Pinterest and Instagram. She wanted to make a video highlighting her favorite products to be "that girl," and shows pictures of herself before she implemented these products with captions such as "acne," "unfit," "dry skin," and "bad hair." Next comes two glowing "after" shots, captioned "clear skin (mostly)" and "better fitness." The "before" and "after" photos both show full-length body shots, seemingly to emphasize the weight that she has lost. Neither photo seems to address a change in mental state, but rather just what Rachel sees as improvements in physical appearance.

Rachel decides to show products chronologically as she goes through her daily routine. She starts off in the gym, which has soaring ceilings and luxurious lighting. She uses shots of herself on the elliptical and doing hip thrusts to highlight Lululemon "hotty hot" shorts and a Lululemon long-sleeved top, stating that she has had both for five to six years. Another Lululemon favorite is a more recent addition: a white cropped half-zip top, though she can't yet speak for its durability. Outside of luxury athletic wear, Rachel recommends a barbell pad and silk scrunchie from Amazon.

As is the standard with "that girl" routines, Rachel shows herself undressing and getting into the shower to showcase the products she uses. I was expecting her to promote high-end shampoo and conditioner, but she instead recommends sulfate-free Pantene products. She goes into quite a bit of detail on how to shampoo, explaining that she massages at the roots and will double shampoo if her hair is greasy. Stepping out of the shower and into a pink, fluffy robe, Rachel applies a hair mask and brushes her teeth using an electric toothbrush, claiming that it removes more plaque than the non-electric variety. Back in the shower, Rachel uses a La Roche-Posay cleanser, a men's razor to shave, and a sulfate-free body wash, recommending that

viewers wash their bodies last in order to "wash away all the other products" and avoid body acne.

As for morning skincare, Rachel asks that her viewers "please ignore" the eczema on her chin, explaining that she was born with it. Now in a light, airy section of her industrial apartment, she is dressed in a robe and a microfiber headband from Amazon. She recommends two toners, two serums, three moisturizers, two sunscreens, and a lip balm, many of which were also purchased on Amazon. As she goes through her routine, she puts information on the screen as to why each product is important and the supposed benefits of each, the majority focusing on skin elasticity and fine line reduction. She seems self-conscious to be giving skincare advice, saying "I know my skin isn't looking great right now because of the eczema, but it was way worse before." She then inserts pictures of her previous acne, as if to add credibility to the routine and products she has just shown. Rachel does, however, urge her viewers to see a doctor if they have a serious skin concern.

A theme I've observed in "that girl" videos is natural, light makeup, and Rachel is no exception. "Normally I don't put on makeup every day," she says, but "usually only once or twice a week." She starts with her eyebrows and explains that she applies her brow pomade "very lightly," inserting a picture of herself when she used to heavily fill in her brows with the caption "so embarrassing." As she moves on to concealer, she says "I do have a lot of pores on my face, and pores are normal." She avoids putting makeup on her eczema and finishes with a Laura Mercier powder, a Milk Makeup blush, and Urban Decay eyeshadow on her lower lashline. After her makeup is complete, Rachel puts on an oversized brown sweater and gently brushes out her hair with a bamboo brush. She then shows her nighttime skincare routine, in which she double cleanses her face, applies retinol, and moisturizes. Once again, specific

products are showcased, such as a retinol serum from Amazon and a Eucerin moisturizer. Rachel closes out the video, thanking her viewers for watching.

In watching Rachel's video, the connection that is often made by content creators between consumerism and wellness is clear. Rachel plugs products that have improved her physical appearance (which is seemingly equated to her health), claiming that they have helped her improve her life. She speaks negatively about herself throughout, lamenting that her past self was unfit, had bad hair, did not know how to apply makeup, and struggled with acne. While this video was likely posted with the intention of helping viewers become their "best selves," it implies that those with acne or with dry skin must work to improve themselves, and the way to do this is through consumerism. If the intent behind being "that girl" is to be happier and healthier, why is mental health left unaddressed in this video, with only products that improve physical appearance showcased? Here, the journey to happiness is portrayed as a quick fix through Amazon purchases and luxury athletic wear.

The viewers that I interviewed did not take the productivity and wellness content that they consumed at face value. While some took life advice from the videos more than others, they all had some degree of a critical lens through which they were watching. While the creators constructed boundaries as far as what parts of their lives and parts of their personalities viewers were allowed to see, viewers constructed boundaries surrounding the effect that they would allow the content to have on them. The notion of taking the content "with a grain of salt" kept coming up, which brings to light another contradiction regarding how viewers and creators view each other. While creators are fulfilled by the guiding role they have in leading their viewers to happier, more productive lives, the viewers I interviewed generally had a "take it or leave it" attitude about the life guidelines that the creators provided:

"I watch it, but like, I feel very detached. I'm not someone who, like, idolizes it." -Ellie

"So I would say now, like, I take it very much with a grain of salt, because I know, like, I think the, you know, 'that girl' trend can be like sort of toxic in a way to where it's like, you can't be like this very, like, you know, like, you can't be like your most successful like best self if you're not doing like XYZ. And I think that's like another, like, really toxic thing about people that are putting this kind of content out there. So I definitely take it with a grain of salt. Like, I love it, because it gives me, like, a framework to like, kind of, like, match my own ideals with but I don't really like to take it so seriously anymore." -Katie

"But yeah, I am skeptical when people like, give health advice or show what they eat. Because I honestly feel like people leave... They leave important things out of that. Either they're not like fully showing what they ate, or maybe they're not acknowledging that they have some like, relationship with food that's maybe not the healthiest. So yeah, I try to, like, remain skeptical about that content." -Taylor

While there seems to be the attitude from the creators that they are fostering a close-knit community of people who are using them as inspiration to become their happiest and healthiest (most productive) selves, the viewers are skeptical of the content and try to detach themselves from it. They are conscious of the fact that what is portrayed in the videos is not realistic for the average person. Katie describes her relationship with the content when she was first exposed to it:

"I think at first it was definitely like, what these people were saying were like, the right way to do things. Like, I feel like when I was first watching these videos, I was like, Oh, this is what I need to do to, like, be my most productive or like, be like, my most healthy and whatnot. And like, I kind of like took their advice as like, kind of like, the holy grail at the time, I guess. And it was just like, oh, like, this is like, kind of like the lifestyle I need to live in order to like, be like, my best self. And like, over time, like, as I was just kind of learning and you know, living this, like post-grad life, I think, I was consuming, like, this type of media, like to the same amount, but not to the point where like, I was taking everything they said, like quite so literally, I think now it's kind of just more of like, a framework to kind of make my own lifestyle choices." -Katie

As Katie left college and entered more of a "real world" environment, where she had the responsibility of a full-time job, the "ideal" image portrayed by productivity and wellness influencers was shattered. Instead of seeing their advice as the "holy grail" path to happiness, she

is now able to take the parts of the content that are helpful to her, like workout and meal ideas, and disregard elements as she sees fit:

"Yeah, definitely, I think it can be hard too, because I have to like, remember that, you know, my lifestyle is so different from these people that like are... their whole life is dedicated towards like promoting a certain lifestyle, like a certain like, wellness lifestyle. And that's just like, not possible with like, the job I have. And like, all that stuff, like I'm just, again, like, these are people that are paid to do things. So it's like, it's easy to get caught up in like, Oh, if I'm not like eating like them, or if I'm not, like, you know, doing this type of like, hair and makeup routine, like I'm not going to be like as, you know, successful or as like, well-off as these people. And so I think that's something that I definitely struggle with." -Katie

While Katie employs a critical lens and takes what serves her from the content and leaves out the rest, she still finds herself comparing herself to the influencers that she follows. Despite the fact that she realizes her life does not compare to theirs on many dimensions, she is not able to construct a foolproof boundary. This inevitable "comparison game" was common among all the viewers:

"It's just like a comparison game. You know, and I think that's like the worst. They're always saying social media isn't real and like okay, it isn't real but like you're still consuming that and it still has, like, some sort of effect and I just, I found myself, like, comparing myself like way too much and I was like, listen, yeah, like that's not me." -Ellie

The viewers that I interviewed were all college-educated women in their early-to-mid twenties. What is the effect of this content on young girls, who may not have had the life experience to realize that what they are viewing is a highly mediated and edited version of someone's life? Ellie highlights her concern on this topic:

"So it's just like, I do think when I watched them and like knowing how this can, like, impact young women. That's like really what gave me the ick and I was like if I as like a 24-year-old who like watches YouTube with like a critical eye still feels like, pressure, yeah, to conform to that sort of lifestyle like I can only imagine what like a 16-, 17-, 18-year-old like young girl, you know is gonna feel." -Ellie

Throughout the interviews with viewers, they expressed concern for those younger than them consuming “that girl” videos, alluding to the fact that they are more impressionable and may not be able to detach themselves from potentially harmful aspects of the content.

Detachment from consumerism

The viewers held the conflicting view that while they were motivated and inspired by the content, they were also deeply aware of the possible negative consequences of consuming it. This feeling of comparative lack that resulted from watching the content led to the detachment from or complete abandonment of it. Comparative lack mostly came through in terms of the inability to participate in consumerism the same way that influencers did, rather than manifesting itself in physical aspects such as negative body image:

“I'm on a grad student stipend, I can't buy much, but I think you do have this, like, when you watch these YouTube videos you do feel like you need to buy certain stuff. [...] Well, so I'm just I'm like, maybe I should quit grad school. Like maybe I should do it. Or maybe I'm like, I should start YouTube. But like, I could not do YouTube. I think. Yeah, but when it comes to like buying stuff, like I also really like watching like, like apartment tours and stuff like that. And I'm like, I wish my apartment was like that. Or was that well-decorated. But yeah, it's just like, it's just not as feasible as it is for them.” -Dana

“But, I mean, again, lately, I feel like there's been so much of like, Amazon, like people just like buying everything from Amazon in terms of like, maybe like health products and stuff. And that gets a little bit exhausting to me. Like, I'm just tired of seeing, like, I guess, like, you know, like, everything is like, this is the next thing that will make your life better.” -Taylor

“And I think too like, going back to your comment about a probiotic, like, I'm like, oh, maybe like, I don't know, I've never considered taking one, but like, maybe I should. And then it's like, okay, well, what other supplements do I need? Or like, what other things do I need? Or like, what am I missing out on that is going to make me healthier? Whereas like, just that my baseline, what I'm doing is healthy enough? It's like, almost like, how much do I need to add to my life? Or is it like, just like a scam?” -Ellie

Promoting products and brand sponsorships are both key ways that influencers make money. Often, these sponsorships take up a minute or two at the beginning of a video, and due to new FTC guidelines, sponsorships must be explicitly disclosed by the creator. Showcasing products such as greens powders, probiotics, and luxury athletic wear is a lucrative income stream and it aligns with productivity and wellness influencers' messaging. However, when the same brands saturate the videos of a certain niche on YouTube, it can falsely portray the ubiquity and necessity of a product that viewers did not previously believe that they were lacking. Aside from the comparison viewers draw between the influencers' productivity and their own, it also appears that they need to participate in consumerism in order to "unlock" the potential to be their happiest and healthiest selves:

"I feel like I was less materialistic before and now that I'm like, maybe watching more videos or more apartment tours whatever now I'm like, Oh my God, I am missing this or like now I have a list of stuff that I want. I think before I didn't." -Dana

This notion of needing to keep up with the latest products pervades the viewer interviews when I ask for their thoughts on consumerism in "that girl" content. Ellie points to the pressure she now feels to purchase probiotics, out of fear that she is "missing" out on something that will make her healthier. Dana sees the lifestyles that influencers lead and jokes that she should give up her spot in a prestigious graduate program because she is constrained by a modest stipend. Taylor feels exhausted by the seemingly endless stream of products that would supposedly make her life better, especially those that come from Amazon.

In this way, wellness, health, and productivity are conflated with the ability to purchase expensive products. Interestingly, this negative effect on viewers' mental health runs contrary to the goal of wellness content, which is self-improvement and happiness. However, viewers are

not helpless when barraged with hyper-consumerism. They are once again able to negotiate boundaries with the content and take only what serves them:

"I think, in a way I do get influenced by that, mainly because, like, you know, a couple years ago, like, I would like, find things through TikTok really, and then be like, buying that because of that, but recently, with like, the de-influencing trend, like now I'm a little more cautious about my, like, immediate, like, instinct to just buy something I see because someone you know, says it's like a really great product. Like, I actually kind of slow down and do my research now. Because TikTok is kind of also telling me like, hey, like, Maybe you should take a step back and really see if you need or want this product or if this product is really like you know, the hype that is like making itself out to be. So I think recently, I've definitely like slowed down on the, you know, the consumerism that I'm taking a part of, but back then, yeah, it was definitely a lot easier for me to just kind of like see something and be like I'm sold." -Katie

"Yeah. I don't really consume all of that stuff or like buy into it. But it's, it's really prevalent in a lot of their videos. And it's like, one product after another after another. It's like this endless stream of like, shoving these ads down your throat." -Ellie

Throughout the interviews, I got the sense that a shift has occurred when it comes to influencer-driven consumerism. The term "de-influencing" has gained traction since I started this project, and it describes the practice of people "exposing" heavily promoted products for not living up to the high standards that influencers set for them. While in the past, products that were promoted by influencers were generally perceived to be high quality, there is now pushback against the constant churning of consumerism. Dana expressed to me that younger viewers see participating in fast fashion as a way of participating in a culture, and it is true that there is pressure for younger people to keep up with ever-changing trends. However, I am finding that the women I interviewed were conscious of consumerism and committed to being thoughtful about their purchases, regardless of whether they felt the pressure to buy things that would supposedly improve their lives. Their attitudes toward hyper-consumerism in "that girl" content continue to demonstrate that viewers have agency and are able to construct boundaries that

protect them from content that could be “toxic.” They are not modeling their lives on those of influencers, and they are able to stay true to their own values.

IV. TikTok

Despite the fact that this is a digital ethnography of wellness and productivity content on YouTube, TikTok was salient in each interview. As someone who does not use TikTok, I took on more of an outsider role, and my participants’ thoughts gave me a fresh perspective. I found that content in the same niche is perceived differently based on the platform, given that TikTok has short-form videos and viewers ultimately have no control over what their algorithm shows them. For example, while one person may be on “that girl” TikTok, another person may be on sustainability TikTok. YouTube, however, is for long-form content, and while there is a suggestions page, viewers must actively click on a video in order to watch it, which gives them more control over what they are consuming:

“Because I mean, like, I think with YouTube, like, you know, you still get recommended stuff, but you have control over what you watch. Like, you know, I can like keep scrolling and scroll past things I don't like on TikTok, but I still see it, like I still see the content, even if it's for just a second. So because of that, like, it is probably a more negative effect. And it goes through cycles for me of what my algorithm thinks I want. So like, some months, it'll just be like, super bad, and like toxic and like people, yeah, showing what they eat and like, how much you need to work out and blah, blah. But some months, it'll be better. But just overall, just the lack of control I have, I think, over it makes it more negative.” -Taylor

While TikTok algorithms change based on what users interact with and what they are interested in, the interviewees complained that they were shown content that was “toxic” for them and were not able to escape it. The creators I interviewed had similar problems with TikTok but from the other side. Rachel, for example, started TikTok before venturing into YouTube. She had a few TikToks reach a million views, and subsequently started posting more wellness content

to keep herself and others accountable in their health and fitness journeys. However, she soon had to leave the platform because of its perceived toxicity:

"And I liked YouTube so much better than TikTok because I found that on TikTok, because your For You page, you don't get to choose the types of videos that you see, it just appears. A lot of videos that like blew up kind of got a lot of also like negative comments on it. But then for YouTube you know how you can choose what you watch specifically, I feel like my community's much more positive on there." -Rachel

While Rachel was frustrated by the negative feedback on her TikToks, she was conscious of the potential reasoning for it:

"So I feel like for YouTube, a lot of people who watch content like that kind of like already have that mindset of like, wanting to be better, or like, wanting to get motivated or develop healthy habits and stuff. So when they see that video, it's like a positive thing. But I can also see how if you're in a negative headspace, and you kind of see other people doing well, it kind of makes you feel worse. And that's why I feel like on TikTok that, like more negative comments happen, because you don't like specifically choose the video." -Rachel

She was cognizant of the fact that her content could be triggering for people in a "negative headspace" and of the fact that people view her content and draw comparisons, making them "feel worse." On TikTok, users have the ability to keep scrolling through content they do not wish to consume, but they are still exposed to it, even if for a matter of seconds. When TikTok users have content forced upon them that does not align with their current mindset, it results in more negative feedback for the creators:

"Every time I posted a video that went out to like, more than like, my core audience, or like the core, like people who watch these videos, on the For You page, it would have a lot of comments being like, oh, like, not everyone can do this... Things about being Asian. Or like, sorry, I'm not like privileged like you." -Rachel

Similar to Holly, Rachel believes that she has a "core" set of viewers, or a smaller, and perhaps safer, micro-community within the internet. While everything they post is public and could be viewed by any audience, they both seem to have a sense of privacy provided by this

"core" group. When those figurative boundaries are crossed, and "outsiders" are let in on TikTok, they are subject to scrutiny from people who have little context for their content:

"And especially on TikTok, you don't have maybe time to put in disclaimers or to tell the full story. Like it's so quick. And I think that's maybe a slight problem with the short-form content is people you know, make assumptions about influencers from the short-form content, when they may not know the whole picture, but that's just how that short-form content is." -Holly

When "in the field" on YouTube, I noticed that almost every "that girl" creator included a disclaimer to explain that viewers did not have to do everything they do to be happy. These disclaimers were sometimes minutes long, and the creators often explained that there were days they did not follow these routines or that they "slipped up" and were human, too. This demonstrates that productivity and wellness creators *are* aware that their content could potentially have a negative impact on viewers, and these disclaimers are perhaps an effort to shirk themselves of responsibility for it. It is as if these disclaimers are insurance against backlash or accusations of toxicity. By verbally stating that they are not trying to convey their lifestyles as a "holy grail" guide to wellness, creators are displaying a consciousness of the potentially harmful effects of their content while abandoning responsibility for it.

While implementing disclaimers could be viewed as a way to continue making popular yet contentious content, it came through that influencers themselves were not immune to the "comparison game" and perhaps did see themselves as separate from the negative aspects of the trend. Holly reflected on the homogeneity of "that girl" creators:

"It was a very certain type of girl who you saw in every video like skinny, usually white, like, wealthy like it was the same type of girl. And I think that's also where it went wrong is if TikTok, I don't know if influencers who didn't look like that were also making this content. But if they were like, TikTok wasn't pushing it, like they were this typical, you know, 'that girl,' that all look the same. And so I think it could have been a really great trend if TikTok would have been pushing the creators that were of different ethnicities, different body sizes, different, you know, incomes, and just show like regular people doing these little routines. But I think, yeah, it all looked the same, like all the content looks the same, all the girls look the same. And it kind of made me even

feel bad. It's like, should I be still be making productivity content when I don't look like that? Like, what, like, you know, it won't still do as well." -Holly

Holly has the privilege to participate in the "that girl" trend. Despite being a recent college graduate, she lives alone in a luxury apartment, does YouTube full-time, and has her own business. However, she is conscious of the fact that there is a very specific type of woman who is most successful in algorithms, particularly on TikTok. She doesn't view herself as belonging to the white, skinny, wealthy mold that dominates this sort of content, and despite her successful career, she continues to doubt whether she has a place in her niche. Even for the women who fit the mold, there seems to be an idealized "that girl" to whom they compare themselves, and to whom no one matches up. While in previous decades women compared themselves to models they saw in magazines, it is now widely understood that images of these women are edited and not a realistic representation of the person. Now, women are comparing themselves to influencers who seem "real enough" in that they are not cover models, and this is potentially even more dangerous for those who do not have the media literacy to engage with the content responsibly. They are comparing themselves to someone they could potentially *be*, and not someone whose life is clearly out of reach.

Conclusion

In my interviews with viewers, I see a wide range of experiences with "that girl" content. I was primarily interested in whether viewers used these videos as blueprints for their own lives, by implementing similar early morning routines, for example. My interviews with viewers also centered around their thoughts on the authenticity of influencers and how much of an effect they allowed the content to have on them. I was especially concerned about the biomorality aspect of American culture, given that steps to become "healthy" often have socioeconomic barriers. Who,

in American culture, is allowed to be healthy, and therefore happy? What does it mean when one's wellness, which allows one to be more productive, is tied to one's worth?

I began my project with the already-formed notion that "that girl" content was toxic and harmed viewers by causing them to compare themselves to influencers with unattainable and consumeristic lifestyles. However, through both fieldwork and interviews, I have a much more nuanced understanding of the topic. There is no villain and victim binary. Rather, "that girl" content creators are responding to larger societal pressures. In *The Wellness Syndrome*, Cederström writes, "People who don't carefully cultivate their personal wellness are seen as a direct threat to contemporary society, a society in which illness, as David Harvey puts it, 'is defined as the inability to work.' Healthy bodies are productive bodies. They are good for business" (4). Self-improvement in the form of better productivity and wellness is a biomoral expectation in late modernity. Published in 2015, *The Wellness Syndrome* is especially relevant in light of the pandemic. Those with the privilege to do so reframed lockdown and isolation as a time to focus on themselves and do things that they normally would not take the time to do, such as working on their fitness or cooking healthy meals. The result was pressure for people to be "productive" at a time when they, for once, could be doing nothing at all. I believe that "that girl" content and wellness and productivity content proliferated during the pandemic out of a grasp for control in the context of late modernity. When productivity and health are tied to self-worth, what is one to do when both of these things are threatened by uncontrollable, outside sources?

I believe that these conditions allowed a privileged sector of society to turn inward and focus on themselves in a turn toward passive nihilism. When interviewing creators, it came through that they were predominantly focused on themselves and self-optimization. On passive nihilists, Simon Critchley writes, "Rather than acting in the world and trying to transform it, the

passive nihilist simply focuses on himself and his particular pleasures and projects for perfecting himself, whether through discovering the inner child, manipulating pyramids, writing pessimistic-sounding literary essays, taking up yoga, bird-watching or botany" (4). "That girl" and productivity content is not about engaging in the outside world, let alone improving it. It is in the service of the self, and the self is viewed as a project. Seemingly predicting "that girl," Cederström writes, "Where does our preoccupation with our own wellness leave the rest of the population, who have an acute shortage of organic smoothies, diet apps and yoga instructors? Withdrawing into yourself and treating the signals of your body as a good-enough ersatz for universal truth has become an increasingly appealing alternative to thinking soberly about the world" (8). For those who have the privilege to ignore the outside world, turning inward and focusing on self-improvement is an alternative to engaging with uncontrollable issues, like a pandemic or rampant police brutality. However, not everyone has the option to do so.

Privilege and passive nihilism pervade "that girl" content, but viewers of it are not helpless. They have the agency to separate themselves from the content and to negotiate their boundaries with it. While the consumeristic aspects of the content did cause viewers to feel a comparative lack, it was clear that they did not believe creators' lifestyles were realistic, and they were able to ignore the pressure to consume at the same level as them. I also found that viewers generally did not have a strong connection to specific influencers, but rather a genre of content. Taylor being the exception to this, she nonetheless had no "delusions of friendship" regarding the creator she has watched for years. The viewers of wellness and productivity content were not powerless; rather, they were able to take what served them from the content and distance themselves from the rest.

In terms of parasocial relationships, I had expected that viewers would have attachments to particular YouTubers. However, I found that it was the content creators who had a parasocial relationship with their perceived core communities. A sense of community is what made the work meaningful for them, as was the sense that they were helping people become healthier, more productive versions of themselves. Further, despite the fact that their content was public, creators felt uncomfortable when their videos were viewed by a larger public outside of this "core" group, as was the case on TikTok, where feedback would be more negative. Their sense was that when their content was forced upon people via TikTok's mysterious algorithm, it would fall into the feeds of those who were feeling too negatively about themselves to see someone else doing "well." This underscores the idea that hyper-productivity and the ability to participate in hyperconsumerism are synonymous with "wellness" according to "that girl" creators. However, when interviewing viewers who consciously selected "that girl" content on YouTube, they still employed a largely critical lens. I had expected that viewers were using this content as a replacement for religious guidance in an increasingly secular society, with content creators taking on a preacher role. It became evident, though, that the creation of this content, and the perception of a "core community," was more important for the influencers than it was for the viewers. In other words, the content creators needed the viewers more than the viewers needed the content creators.

A thread seen in each influencer vignette, and throughout my fieldwork, was Abidin's concepts of porous authenticity and calibrated amateurism. The creators consistently pointed out flaws in themselves and expressed insecurities, seemingly in an attempt to make themselves more relatable to viewers who saw their lives as unattainable and unrealistic. Berryman, Kavka, and Reade's theories surrounding an economy of affective labor on social media also held true

throughout my fieldwork and interviews. Realizing that being "real" creates a sense of intimacy with viewers, creators strive to be more "vulnerable" on camera. This intimacy in turn makes creators more successful with their audiences, who are more likely to view them as relatable. Building upon Berryman, Kavka, and Reade, I contend that this intimacy and authenticity is a constructed illusion. Despite how "real" and "vulnerable" the creators claimed to be, they all described processes of mediation that put up boundaries between them and their audience. While they showed highly intimate moments such as getting into the shower or rolling out of bed in the morning, they never truly let viewers into their personal lives. By showing their productive mundanity, they were able to construct an illusion of intimacy while actually letting viewers in on very little.

Viewers are not the only victims here, however. Rather, everyone involved is in some way victimized by the biomoral pressure of late modernity to be productive and healthy. "That girl" content creators engage in self-surveillance, effectively creating a parasocial relationship with themselves. They also engage in the "comparison game," not only to an idealized "that girl," but also to versions of themselves that are edited and perfected for the online world. There is no winner in a society that ties worth to productivity.

Appendix

Coding Framework

Master Category List

1. **Aspiration/Motivation** (N=22): interviewees refer to content as aspirational or motivational
2. **Authenticity** (N=30): interviewee mentions or alludes to authenticity
3. **Background** (N=33): background information on the interviewee (education, current job, current location, etc.)
4. **Comments on society** (N=16): interviewee makes a comment or a judgment on larger society as it relates to productivity/wellness
5. **Community** (N=18): interviewee mentions a sense of community or a community she has built through social media
6. **Comparative lack** (N=12): interviewee describes comparing herself to an influencer and feeling like she is lacking something in comparison
7. **Consumerism** (N=31): interviewee mentions or alludes to consumerism (i.e., product advertisement by an influencer or feeling pressure to buy new products)
8. **Criticism** (N=37): interviewee criticizes wellness/productivity content and/or culture
    a. **Unrealistic** (N=17): interviewee states that something pertaining to wellness/productivity content is unrealistic
9. **Gender** (N=1): interviewee mentions or alludes to gender
10. **Isolation** (N=4): interviewee mentions or alludes to isolation or feeling isolated
11. **On-camera vs. off-camera** (N=19): interviewee mentions perceived differences in herself or influencers on and off camera
12. **Pandemic** (N=5): interviewee mentions the coronavirus pandemic
13. **Privacy** (N=9): interviewee mentions privacy (i.e., the desire to keep some aspects of her life private and offline or fears over safety)
14. **Productivity/Wellness** (N=43): the interviewee mentions or alludes to productivity and/or wellness
15. **Race** (N=9): the interviewee mentions or alludes to race or a situation where race is salient
16. **Routine** (N=14): interviewee mentions or alludes to her routine or influencers' routines
17. **SES** (N=18): socioeconomic status, class, and/or privilege are salient in the interview
18. **TikTok** (N=39): the interviewee mentions TikTok
19. **Watching patterns** (N=28): the interviewee describes her watching patterns on YouTube or TikTok
    a. **Specific creators** (N=16): the interviewee mentions specific creators that she watches
    b. **Algorithm** (N=17): the interviewee describes how an algorithm influences what she watches

Values Coding (Saldaña 131)

Beliefs

1. **Aspiration/Inspiration** (N=16): believes content is aspirational/motivational
2. **Audience wants intimacy** (N=3): believes the audience wants to feel a sense of intimacy with the creators
3. **Creators homogenous** (N=8): believes that successful "that girl" creators are homogenous (i.e., white, thin, privileged)
4. **Critical lens/skepticism** (N=55): employs a critical lens/skepticism in approach to "that girl" content
5. **Entertainment** (N=8): believes "that girl" content is entertainment
6. **Impact of pandemic** (N=5): interviewee holds a belief surrounding the impact of the coronavirus pandemic
7. **Influenced** (N=8): interviewee believes she has been influenced by content she has seen
8. **Pushing consumerism** (N=20): interviewee believes that influencers are pushing consumerism (buying products) onto viewers
9. **Relatable** (N=9): interviewee believes that her content is relatable or that the content she watches is relatable
10. **Tension** (N=2): interviewee believes there is a tension between two things (i.e., being a sustainable person and watching "that girl" content)

Attitudes

1. **Bitterness** (N=1): interviewee displays a bitter attitude
2. **Isolated** (N=4): interviewee describes feeling isolated
3. **Pressure** (N=12): interviewee describes feeling pressured (i.e., to buy certain products)
4. **The ick** (N=1): interviewee feels a mild sense of disgust
5. **Toxic** (N=16): interviewee holds the attitude that something is toxic
6. **Unrealistic** (N=18): interviewee holds the attitude that something is unrealistic

Values

1. **Anti-hyper-productivity** (N=10): interviewee displays a value that runs counter to hyper-productivity
2. **Anti-consumerism** (N=27): interviewee displays a value that runs counter to hyper-consumerism
3. **Anti-trend** (N=6): interviewee displays a value that runs counter to keeping up with trends
4. **Authenticity** (N=27): interviewee values being authentic and/or "real" and/or watching authentic creators
5. **Balance/Boundaries** (N=21): interviewee values having balance (i.e., between work and life) and setting boundaries
6. **Community** (N=20): interviewee values having a community

7. **Conscious of privilege** (N=8): interviewee values being educated about and conscious of privilege
8. **Could not support** (N=3): interviewee is clear that she cannot support an aspect of "that girl" content
9. **Credibility** (N=1): interviewee values credibility and an influencer having the appropriate credentials to disseminate information
10. **Disconnecting** (N=3): interviewee values disconnecting from social media and the online world
11. **Diversity** (N=4): interviewee values diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, SES, and body type in "that girl" content
12. **Education** (N=4): interviewee values education/being educated
13. **Exercise** (N=11): interviewee values physical activity
14. **Feminism** (N=5): interviewee values feminism and/or sees herself as a feminist
15. **Financial success** (N=4): interviewee values earning enough money to consider herself financially successful
16. **Marketable** (N=16): interviewee values being marketable, or appealing to a wide audience
17. **Openness** (N=7): interviewee values openness/vulnerability
18. **Privacy** (N=6): interviewee values privacy and keeping some aspects of her life offline
19. **Productivity** (N=26): interviewee values productivity and productivity is an important part of her life
20. **Routine** (N=16): interviewee values having a routine and her routines are an important part of her life
21. **Storytelling** (N=8): interviewee values storytelling in "that girl" content, whether it be in the content she creates or in the content she watches
22. **Wellness/Health** (N=10): interviewee values health/wellness and it is an important aspect of her life

Sample Interview Guides (interviews were semi-structured)

Interview guide for viewers

1. Would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself, like your educational background and what you do, for example?
2. What are your YouTube viewing patterns? For example, what content are you drawn to and why? How much time do you spend watching YouTube?
3. Do you watch specific creators, or tend to watch what shows up in your suggestions box?
4. How do you translate what you see in this content to your everyday life, if you do at all? For example, how do you take what you see in videos and implement it into your own routines?

5. (Asking them to elaborate on anything they've mentioned, like eating habits, workout habits, products they've purchased, new wake-up times, etc.)
6. Can you describe yourself before you implemented these new habits into your life? (Only ask if they describe taking advice from YouTube videos)
7. How do you feel when you watch the content? What is your gut reaction?
8. How has comparison to the creators you watch come into play, if it has at all?
9. What differences do you see in productivity and wellness content on YouTube and TikTok? (Question getting at the differences in the effect of long-form vs. short-form content)
10. What are your thoughts on the consumeristic aspects of productivity/wellness content, like ads for products in videos?
11. How have your consumption/shopping habits changed since you've started watching this content, if they have?
12. Do you feel that the creators you watch are authentic, and what does authenticity mean to you on YouTube?
13. What does productivity mean to you and how important is it to you?
14. What are your thoughts on the diversity of the creators making this content?
15. Any last thoughts you'd like to share with me?

Interview guide for creators

1. Would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself, like your educational background and what you do, for example?
2. How did you start out on YouTube and what has your experience been like?
3. How did you end up in the productivity and wellness space on YouTube?
4. How has posting this genre of content affected your lifestyle, if it has?
5. Do you have to make an effort to separate your work life from your personal life? If you do, what does that look like?
6. How do brand sponsorships fit into your content?
7. What has the feedback been like on your content?
8. Could you tell me about how routines fit into your life and how important of a role they play?
9. Could you walk me through your typical day?
10. Tell me about the difference between your online life and offline life. How do you differ as a person, if you believe that you do?
11. Could you tell me about the role of consumerism in your work life and in your personal life?
12. Would you mind telling me a bit about how fulfilled you feel with your work?
13. Do you watch wellness and productivity content? If you do, how do you feel when you're watching it?
14. What is your relationship like with your subscribers?

15. How do you envision your future on YouTube?
16. Any last thoughts you'd like to share with me?

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