Retreats into Nomadism:
Negotiating “The Good Life” in the Intimate Publics of Postfeminist Online Culture

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how models of the "good life" promoted within the "solo female" travel blog genre are inflected by postfeminist sensibilities of retreat. Specifically, it looks at an emerging cultural current I call the "retreat into nomadism" paradigm in lifestyle blogging. I look at how models of the good life based on postfeminist narratives of retreat are negotiated, with reference to authenticity discourses, within the networked intimate publics surrounding online lifestyle content.

To accomplish this aim, this work applies a method for reading personal lifestyle blogs that takes into consideration, first, that personal blogs are forms of multi-site, transmedia auto/biography, and, second, that personal blogs address multiple publics of varying size and intimacy simultaneously. Lifestyle bloggers generally, and travel bloggers specifically, use a variety of rhetorical strategies to address presumed intimate audiences. These audience are assumed to share key points of commonality and are imagined as harbouring the same postfeminist, neoliberal sensibilities about what it means to live well as a contemporary female subject. Throughout this dissertation, I trace the increasingly influential retreat into nomadism narrative through case studies of solo female travel blogs and their surrounding publics, with attention to how contemporary travel blogs engage with generic predecessors. While superficially at odds with the more familiar "retreat into domesticity" trend in postfeminist media (modelled in home-based genres of lifestyle content like mommy blogs and DIY blogs), the retreat paradigm of postfeminist travel media, like postfeminist sensibility more broadly, derives much of its logic from the larger structures of feeling associated with neoliberalism, with particular emphasis on the ideal entrepreneurial female subject, who seeks retreat from the personally unsatisfying conditions of the corporate workforce through entrepreneurial empowerment and by marketing the self as a consumable branded good.

I adapt Lauren Berlant's concept of the intimate publics of women's culture to the affordances introduced by lifestyle blogging's online, networked settings. Intimate publics thrive on participants' assumption of shared experiences, values, and commitments. In the online social settings surrounding lifestyle blogging, intimate publics coalesce through the networking affordances of digital media, forming discourse communities that centre around distinctly postfeminist interpretations of the good life as one of retreat into a more authentic relationship to one's personal investments and ethical commitments, to work as a product of one's passions rather than of financial imperative, and to one's community as sharing common experiences and interpretations of what it means to live (and live well) as a contemporary female subject. Responding to the transmedia self-representational content shared by bloggers, participants in online intimate publics negotiate models for the good life, whether by echoing and affirming the narratives they encounter, or critiquing these narratives through the deconstructive work of "snark."

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My #BlogHer2017 nametag is conspicuously bare: with no blog, business website, Instagram, or Twitter handle listed, the white field under "Sarah McRae" is glaring. I also suspect that this omission makes me less interesting in this networking-focused context. What am I doing here, anyway?

A division of SheKnows Media, BlogHer brands itself as a movement rather than just a conference. Founded in 2005 by Lisa Stone, Elisa Camahort Page, and Jory Des Jardins to answer the question "where are the women bloggers?" ("About Us" *BlogHer)*, BlogHer's claim to fame is its annual conference of the same name, which it promotes as "the largest conference and community for women content creators in the world" ("About Us"). The BlogHer conferences serve as a meeting place for networking and professional development catered to female bloggers, online entrepreneurs, and digital media influencers.

I am neither a blogger nor an entrepreneur, and I have always been more of an observer than an influencer in social media settings. Acutely conscious of these facts, I loiter uncertainly in the crowded conference wing of the Hilton Bonnet Creek, cloistered away in the resort region of Orlando, Florida. All around me, people are on a mission. Looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows, I can spot the Instagram fashion bloggers as they pose for "outfit of the day" (#OOTD) posts by the hotel pool. These are the kind of outfits not often seen in Edmonton, Alberta: big statement hats, flowy floral pantsuits, and glitzy oversized jewellery. The fitness bloggers are also easy to spot, identifiable by their prominent clavicles and striated deltoid muscles. A few of them are hovering around the remains of the breakfast buffet, whispering agitatedly about the

carb-heavy breakfast options and loading up on the last of the Greek yogurt. A mommy blogger rushes over to exchange a few words with her husband and kids, wishing them a great day as they dart off to nearby Disney attractions, while Mom works on building her personal brand.

I am feeling a bit anxious, so I load up my plate with a few of the offending mini-muffins, and find an empty seat against the wall where I can calmly take things in. I am here to do participant observation, but the practice is new to me as someone formally trained in English. This method requires the researcher to both observe and participate in the practices of the group or community they study: it is "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (Dewalt and Musante 2010, 13). The pressing problem so far is that I am not sure how to transition from observer to participant. I pull out my phone and open the Instagram app—a habit—and browse the #blogher17 feed: from three minutes ago, a picture of a woman in a floral pant suit and statement hat; from half an hour ago, a sweat drenched selfie taken in the hotel's fitness lounge. I look up, and can count several people looking just as uncomfortable as me, seated along the peripheries of the room, repeatedly swiping their smartphone screens in an upward motion, which suggests that they are also engrossed in their Instagram feeds. Maybe I am participating in the culture after all? Consider that BlogHer is primarily an online community of bloggers and influencers, whose participants meet once or twice a year at most, and whose connections and contributions within the BlogHer community (and within online "lifestyle" and entrepreneurial self-help genres generally) occur mainly online.

The theme of #Blogher2017 was Experts Among Us. The event is structured around a series of keynotes, panels, workshops, and networking events, where the appeal is in gaining

access to the expertise of several big names in various blogosphere niches—particularly in lifestyle genres. Lifestyle content encompasses online genres like personal blogs and social media accounts, as well as equivalents/predecessors in television (e.g. cooking shows, wellness tv, and "fashion police" style reality tv) and print (magazines and self-help books). This kind of content proposes, explicitly or implicitly, different models for how to live well. Lifestyle content includes several prominent subgenres that can be further subdivided into countless increasingly niche subgenres, all of which propose their own narrative for what it means to live well, and then turn a profit by monetizing their distinct guides for how to live better.

A large portion of lifestyle content participates in domestic-themed genres like cooking or recipe blogs, DIY home-reno or crafting blogs, and mommy or parenting blogs. Other genres move the blogger-subject away from the home and into the more public settings of fashion or fitness and sport-related blogs. Some genres seem to reject much of lifestyle blogging's embrace of the domestic—specifically, travel bloggers and digital nomad bloggers offer a model for living well that foregrounds a rejection of the traditional (family and home-oriented) life timelines and narratives that DIY and Mommy bloggers idealize. Despite the seemingly in-conflict lifestyle models apparent in these different lifestyle genres, lifestyle bloggers and content creators across different niches are similarly engaged in questions of how to live well—and, importantly, questions of how to better *market* (and make a living from) their models for how to live well. That is why BlogHer conferences are relevant to lifestyle content creators from all genres. Over the course of #BlogHer2017, a 3-day event, I encountered experts on both lactation and exploration; on remodeling 3 story-heritage homes and living out of a backpack; on innovating uses for the mason jar, and on finding the best prices for rental cars.

This is how it worked (and didn't work) for me: I took part in the events, panels, and conversations that were open to me, and when I couldn't participate, I watched. Many of the events for accessible by invitation only. Sometimes it was a matter of RSVPing to an event before the roster filled up (which is how I scored a place at the newbie breakfast, the only limited event I was able to attend). Other times entry was determined by the level of a blogger's celebrity, which was measured by metrics like the number of followers an individual had on one or more platforms. Since many of the exclusive events were hosted by individual sponsors to test-drive products or establish potential partnerships, these sponsors were understandably looking for the right fit. When I'd strike up conversations while standing in lines, sitting for meals, and waiting for panels to start, I'd inevitably be asked about my work and why I was at Blogher. I would say that I was a graduate student from Canada studying lifestyle blogs. Some people were excited at that idea, while others were a bit suspicious about my motives. Like other attendees, I spent a lot of time going to panels, and I chose those I was interested in. Some were nearly empty— in particular, the panel called "Transformation is Ageless" was poorly-attended, which could have had something to do with the popularity of a panel about bullet journaling that was happening at the same time. Another panel about monetizing your blog was standing room only, and I noted that the audience was far more alert and engaged than at the other panels I'd seen.

My experience at BlogHer, including the atmosphere and the people I met, was not exactly what I was expecting after spending years thinking about and reading within the lifestyle blogging genre and the discourse communities surrounding it. As I explore in-depth in this project, lifestyle blogging answers questions about the good life and how it might be achieves, and it often does so using appeals to common experience and by fostering blogging and reading

publics that feel intimate (whether that intimacy is manufactured or organic or both simultaneously). It may seem common-sense to assume that the atmosphere created by being in the same room as legions of people with, presumably, similar interests and investments (in the practice of blogging and in encouraging women to become digital entrepreneurs) would lend itself to a more intimate setting – that is, a more intensely intimate version of the intimate publics I describe in this work. And yet it didn't always feel that way.

Alone in my hotel room after days full of panels and conversations with representatives from brands at the expo hall that would get cut short when it became clear I wouldn't be an effective brand rep, I'd look at the event Facebook page that I'd been added to shortly after my registration, along with thousands of others. While the talks I'd attended during the day, as well as the conversations I participated in and overheard, were overwhelmingly positive (at worst a little constrained or awkward), the conversations that unfolded in the private group page were far more mixed. Looking back at the posts shared in the group during the conference, in the midst of posts praising panelists and the conference organizers, or requesting information on events, a large portion of them followed the structure, "Anyone else_____?" Was anyone else concerned about the lack of gluten free breakfast options? Was anyone offended by the overabundance of vaginal cleansing products in the swag bag? Was anyone else going to Disney to see the fireworks? Was anyone else going broke eating at the resort restaurants? Was anyone else feeling lonely? In a few different threads of comments, participants admitted they were having a hard time meeting people and expressed feeling like their attempts to connect with other attendees had been rebuffed. Others disagreed, saying the complainers were expecting too much from others. Still more said they hadn't experienced the problems some commenters were expressing. One poster wrote (I summarize her post here to respect the privacy of the group for BlogHer attendees

only) that she felt shy at times while at the conference. She explained that, after seeing so many people in the Facebook group express the same feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, she felt less alone in her embarrassment and decided to worry less.

What my time at BlogHer made abundantly clear is that online settings foster or encourage a distinct kind of intimate setting, perhaps partly because they enable us to more efficiently reach out in search of the "anyone else" that feels as we do. But it was also clear I needed to spend more time investigating what prompts that intimacy, and whether it has to do with the affordances built into online forums that allow more kinds of voices to be heard on almost-equal footing as the more famous, more popular voices to which they respond. My reference earlier to the people seated on the sidelines on their phones wasn't meant to engage in widespread cultural fears of the ills wrought by social media, ot to shame or worry that people have become so addicted to socializing online that they forget how to interact face-to-face. I do want to draw attention to the differences in the way that intimate publics seemed to take shape in the online and offline settings.

For example, every morning after breakfast a different speaker would do her best to inspire us, either by sharing the narrative of her own success and what she did to get there, or by leading us through an exercise meant to help us tap into the powerful energy residing in our wombs. And we, the audience would react on a scale from "very earnestly inspired" to "politely uncomfortable." In moments like these, there was a presumed intimacy insofar speakers expected that we, the audience members, were coming from a similar place (and that we all had wombs we were eager to tap into as a source of power and creativity). And yet the setting lacked intimacy in the sense that it wasn't conducive to sustained questioning or dissent. BlogHer just was not set up in a way that made it easy for participants to dialogue in the way bloggers and

blog readers dialogue in online settings, whether in a community Facebook group or in the networked publics surround blogging content.

While my exposure to BlogHer gave insight into the larger culture of postfeminist sensibilities of entrepreneurship that lifestyle blogging participates in, and illuminated some of the behind the scenes working of blogging practice that bloggers might not be forthcoming about in their online presentations, it also confirmed that I needed to be spending more time digging into online publics to figure out what I wanted to know: which is not only how bloggers talk about authenticity and the good life, but how those presentations get taken up by audiences.

From my observation of #BlogHer2017, and of the discourse surrounding online lifestyle content, it is clear that much of women's lifestyle content speaks to—and circulates within—online intimate publics. These publics coalesce in networked online settings, forming discourse communities that centre around distinctly postfeminist interpretations of "the good life" as one of retreat into a more "authentic" relationship to one's personal investments and ethical commitments, to work as a product of one's passions rather than of financial imperative, and to one's community as sharing common experiences and interpretations of what it means to live (and live well) as a contemporary female subject.

I am drawing from Lauren Berlant's concept of the intimate publics of women's culture, which I adapt to the affordances introduced by lifestyle blogging's online, networked settings. Intimate publics thrive on participants' assumption of shared experiences, values, and commitments. As Berlant puts it, intimate publics discuss "how to live as an *x*" (2008, viii). In the case of women's lifestyle blogging, the *x* is neoliberalism's ideal female subject, which is also a postfeminist subject. "Participants" (both content creators and consumers, or, as is often the case, individuals who create and consume within their chosen lifestyle genre) in these

intimate publics surrounding women's personal lifestyle content contribute to an ongoing negotiation both of what it means to live well, and of what it means to live authentically. This latter negotiation does not just place value on authenticity for authenticity's sake, but idealizes conceptions of authenticity as contributing to a larger vision of what it means to live well as a neoliberal postfeminist subject.

Performing authenticity is frequently a matter of appearing unique, original, in possession of special skills or insights, and directing these traits or qualities towards the accomplishment of some personal passion project that is in accordance with a defined and consistent personal commitment or ethic (thus suggesting origins in existentialist discourse). And yet authenticity is also a balancing act. In addition to placing an individualist emphasis on being true to one's unique self, authenticity discourse pressures the blogger-subject to perform authenticity as a kind of "realness" that means being in tune with the experiences and desires of the larger demographic consuming their content, and emphasizing the commonalities (things like socioeconomic origins, personal values, work ethic) that connect lifestyle influen*cers* with the lifestyle influen*ced*. Based on the above description, authenticity within lifestyle blogging does not sound much different from authenticity in politics, or authenticity in celebrity. Why is it important, then, to think about authenticity as it specifically relates to lifestyle blogging? The *how* of authenticity discourse's circulation is significant, as it gestures towards changes introduced by affordances specific to different online publishing platforms, and how they influence the consumption, spread, and negotiation of cultural ideas. By looking closely at the publics that lifestyle content addresses, and in which it circulates, we can observe how the performance and negotiation of what it means to live authentically contributes to lifestyle genres' models of the good life. These models propose that the good life involves entrepreneurial retreat

from the unsatisfying (or inauthentic) conditions of contemporary, middle and upper-middle class western work life, into more traditionally domestic, or less traditional nomadic alternatives.

The introductory material that follows describes the cultural currents and sensibilities that shape lifestyle blogging's models for the good life. It looks at postfeminism and neoliberalism, both as key critical concepts for interpreting cultural texts, and as components of the larger structures of feeling that direct the production and consumption of lifestyle media in ways that publics might not perceive. This section also sets up a preliminary paradigm of "retreat" as a central theme in lifestyle content's response to a cultural setting inflected by neoliberal and postfeminist sensibilities, arguing that retreat from unsatisfying work conditions, whether into domesticity or nomadism, is inherent to the models for the good life offered by bloggers and content-producers within contemporary lifestyle genres.

BlogHer, the Good Life, and the Fantasy of Retreat

Online lifestyle genres address the question of what Berlant calls "that moral- intimate-economic thing called 'the good life'" (2). The good life is not a new object of inquiry and desire. Questions of what this good life looks like, and how it might be achieved, have occupied thinkers for millennia, and still emerge in the contemporary production and circulation of lifestyle content, and in personal lifestyle blogs as autobiographical lifestyle guides specifically. These questions and investments are central to the kinds of discourses and negotiations that circulate within the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture. Bloggers, and the intimate publics they address, persistently tackle variations of the same question identified by Berlant in *The Female Complaint*: "How to live well as an *x*" (*viii*). Lifestyle content attempts to model how to live well as a postfeminist neoliberal subject, which might also be how to live well as a

globetrotting nomadic girlboss, or how to live well as a thrifty DIY momtrepreneur, or how to live well as a producer and purveyor of "how to live well" manuals.

The BlogHer conferences reflect what seems to be a consensus that we should all be aspiring to live and work better as part of a pursuit of the good life, but narratives about what this good life looks like are frequently in conflict. The conferences are marketed as unique opportunities for online entrepreneurs and content-creators to network, get professional development, and access self-help and self-improvement resources. Various panels and sessions are offered, all of them devoted to helping online influencers and freelancers (current and aspiring) develop income streams. These resources include workshops on building relationships with brands, increasing ad revenue, making the most out of SEO (search engine optimisation), and leveraging established and emerging technologies to streamline one's sources of revenue. There are also workshops tackling topics related to personal experience, motivation, and aspects of living well: panels on storytelling and healing, prioritizing self-care, and navigating aging anxiety-free. I attended a panel called "Transformation is Ageless" shortly after leaving the expo hall, where Olay representatives used a special app to guess my age after taking a computer scan of my face. After judging me to be several years older than my real age, the app noted my "problem" areas (frown lines, drooping jaw) and suggested products to fix them. This is just one example of the conflicting narratives I encountered while navigating BlogHer—in this setting, the general atmosphere is intended to get people excited about self-improvement, pursuing new opportunities, and chasing after (or modelling) some idea of the good life. However, other than agreeing that the good life should be pursued, there is really no consensus as to what living well looks like (including whether we should embrace wrinkles, or erase them), except that it requires an initial investment of "hustle," an affectionate term used in these circles to describe one's side

or passion projects. There is more to say about the role of hustle in lifestyle discourse—for now, suffice to say that hustle as a kind of labour refers to hard work, often unpaid, that is seen as outside, beyond, or extra-to the 9-to-5 day job.

The expo hall mentioned above hosts dozens of brand reps giving out samples and swag along with the promise of potential partnership or sponsorship. There was no evident theme to the kinds of brands and businesses represented—some stalls clearly had broad applicability, like Wordpress, Ebay, Amazon (for publishing ebooks). Some brands were highly specific, however, and I found myself wondering how many conference attendees would seriously consider incorporating references to Sunkist tuna packets and Bob Evans frozen mashed potatoes into their personal brand. Yet, to my surprise, throughout the conference people were posting prolifically on social media about Vagisil and "mashtinis" (mashed potatoes served in a martini glass)—and they were doing it for free. Perhaps this unpaid labour was meant to demonstrate these aspiring influencers' value as future social media brand reps. In the end, I left the conference with the impression that many of the "just starting out" bloggers would have accepted brand partnerships with literally any brand, no matter how irrelevant, in order to get one step closer to monetizing their online presence. This, I think, is a suiting image for the personal blogging industry as a whole, and how it requires a future-focused attitude of investment in the form of free labour that anticipates future success and rewards in the form of a liveable income and flexibility in how one manages one's schedule and geographic location.

The conference was held at the Hilton Bonnet Creek, a resort-style hotel sandwiched between the main Disney theme parks. In the past, BlogHer's location has tended to rotate between New York and major Californian cities. The move to the South was a new one, meant to provide an opportunity to attend the conference to people who had in the past been unable to

manage the long-distance travel. There was something evocative, I think, about the conference's setting within the context of the hotel resort, and the resort's setting within the context of the isolated, self-contained world of the theme park. Taking the shuttle from the Orlando airport, I was struck by the isolation of the geographic area devoted almost entirely to the housing of Disney's theme parks and several resorts catering primarily to park-goers. Without a car, the only places I could access (without summoning an Uber) were the Disney-themed attractions serviced by the resort's shuttle buses. Michael Sorkin (2012) has noted this curious sense of displacement prompted by the theme park: everything offered by Disneyland is a referent to something or somewhere else, which means that, despite the act of have travelled to get there, one finds that "One has gone nowhere in spite of the equivalent ease of going somewhere."

California's Disneyland and Florida's Disneyworld have historically been (and remain) objects of fascination for theorists and semioticians, largely for the representational possibilities (or impossibilities) they seem to offer within the context of post-industrial, capitalist, consumerist American society. Umberto Eco has described Disneyland as "the quintessence of consumer ideology" (43), and, because it is in so many ways an expression of the values and ideologies held dear by that nation, as America's own Sistine chapel. Sorkin calls it "a utopia of leisure" and America's "stand-in for Elysium." Famously, Baudrillard dismantles the distinction between fantasy and reality that Disneyland appears to set up. The boundaries between the fantasy, miniature world presented by Disney, and the reality of actual American society that begins and ends in the parking lot outside, are actually based on a false distinction. In fact, Baudrillard proposes, *all* of America is Disneyland. He writes, "Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland," and adds "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real."

Although most theorizations of Disney's fantasy geographies have focused on the (much smaller) Californian version, Sorkin notes how, through the ascendance of its Disneyworld, Orlando has become "America's capital of transience," with more hotels than New York or LA. The idea of leisure is important to understanding Disneyworld's significance within the American (and global) imaginary. As an enclosed space with a high barrier to entry (for most, costly airfare is involved, even before steep admission and accommodation costs come into play), Disneyworld (and Orlando itself as the location of several famous, family-oriented tourist pilgrimage sites) becomes an object of aspiration—in many cases, the culmination of years of labour and careful economy. Though a site for the fantastic, phantasmagoric, and hyperreal, it is also a site of conspicuous leisure, and resorts like the Hilton Bonnet Creek (also the location for #BlogHer2017) cater to a demographic that seeks out Orlando's amusements as an escape from "reality"—a reality not only characterized by the mundane and un-fantastic, but by the economic reality of work, and all that is grueling and draining about it. Though Baudrillard might problematize the idea that the world outside the resort is more real than what is inside, the *belief*, held by those inside, that the resort offers escape or retreat from unpleasant realities motivates this annual mass migration to Orlando.

As Sorkin observes, "one of the main effects of Disneyfication is the substitution of recreation for work, the production of leisure according to the routines of industry." He uses the example of how, in the Disney theme park setting, labour is represented as a spectacle to be consumed, and traditional or historical forms of work are valued for the nostalgia, and seeming authenticity, they offer. Perhaps, then, leisure-as-routine contributes as much to the fantasy-setting of Disneyworld as do the anthropomorphic animals and themed miniature worlds. Even the employees labouring within this setting are pressed upon to maintain a fantasy of an

environment where work is not burdensome. A frequently-cited excerpt from Disney theme park employee guidelines is the injunction to not only smile, but do so sincerely (e.g. Van Maanen et al. 1989).

The enjoyment of such luxuries as the resort and the theme park is relegated to the realm of aspiration for many. These forms of conspicuous consumption and leisure have long been symbols of the good life according to traditional models of the American dream, where the rhetoric is "prepare well, work hard, save and invest, and you will have a good chance to succeed and prosper" (Jillson 2016, 264). BlogHer's discourses about entrepreneurialism suggest a shift away from a model of the good life in which long stretches of hard work and economy result in rewards in the form of prosperity and leisure. The goal pushed by many participants in BlogHer conferences, and the lifestyle industry on a larger scale, is retreat from the traditional workforce—which means a retreat toward work that is more authentic, more flexible and self-directed, and, importantly, work that doesn't feel like work because it is the product of the individual's passions. This is not so much the equivalent of visiting Disney resorts and theme parks, but of residing permanently within them of one of their workers, wearing the permasmile associated with Disney's spectacle of happy labour—work that is not burdensome. BlogHer's setting within the context of Orlando's resorts was fitting to some extent, because these places are symbols of leisure, or retreat from work— yet we associate them with a *temporary* retreat, a respite, or a reward for the routine of hard work. As this introductory chapter examines, the retreat from traditional work idealized by online lifestyle content proposes, paradoxically, both a retreat into unlimited leisure, and into unlimited work. BlogHer attendees were pursuing a vision of total retreat from the workforce into the increased authenticity and freedoms offered by online social life's entrepreneurial opportunities. Yet this transition into a different kind of work also

means working without limitations on hours, and often working without pay, in the hope of eventually achieving the neoliberal dream of self-supporting successfully without safety nets.

It might be that the good life is, in fact, primarily an economic concept. Edward Fischer's 2014 ethnographic interrogation into what is consistent in different cultures' conception of the good life and what it means to live well suggests, first of all, the close relationship between economics and conceptions of the good life. Idealized visions of what the good life entails influence economic behavior, and "different sorts of values (cultural, moral, material) inform economic relations." People are inclined to "give moral meanings to their many market interactions, and take moral meanings from them as well." Fisher uses the example of the moral weight of certain grocery-shopping decisions (e.g. is this egg cruelty-free). I think that we can also apply this association between the good life and morally-inflected economic action to the various retreats idealized within postfeminist discourse, where self-directed passion-projects leading, ideally, to financial independence, are lauded as the greatest good for the contemporary female subject. Rather than something that is achieved and subsequently enjoyed, the good life (according to Fischer) might be "an ongoing aspiration" rather than "a state to be obtained," and "striving for the good life involves the arduous work of becoming, of trying to live a life that one deems worthy, becoming the sort of person that one desires," which might require delayed gratification and self-discipline in the present.

Setting BlogHer within the context of the resort resulted in an atmosphere where it was unclear whether we were supposed to be "leaning in" to our emerging entrepreneurial identities, or retreating into well-deserved leisure time, as suggested by the conference's proximity to the hotel's lazy river, and the constant stream of mimosas and rosé on offer in the Expo hall. As I reflect on the research I have done into women's lifestyle blogging within online intimate

publics, and larger cultural negotiations of the good life that lifestyle media and consumers engage with, I cannot think of a more appropriate setting for an event based on the assumption that not only can retreat and hustle co-exist, but that they are inseparable, and equally essential to obtaining that elusive good life modelled and promised by bloggers and lifestyle entrepreneurs. The resort setting also drove home a point about how aspiring entrepreneurial subjects get caught up in (and sucked dry by) the cruel optimism of these fantasies of retreat. So much of the discourse surrounding digital entrepreneurship and the commodification of lifestyle content emphasizes the freedoms these kinds of labour offer when they bring in income, such as the freedom to manage one's own time, and flexibility of geographic location. Yet BlogHer's setting was one of limited mobility—the resort is, on a practical level, really hard to leave, and surviving within the resort is an expensive undertaking.

Models of the good life circulated by online lifestyle content are inflected by postfeminist sensibilities of retreat from personally unsatisfying conditions of the corporate workforce, and empowerment both through the consumption of branded goods, and, increasingly, the marketing of the *self* as a consumable branded good. Postfeminist feeling, we will see, derives much of its logic from the larger structures of feeling associated with neoliberalism, with particular emphasis on the adaptable, self-sufficient entrepreneurial subject addicted to meticulous self-monitoring and self-improvement.

Narratives of Retreat within Postfeminist and Neoliberal Sensibilities

Personal lifestyle blogs employ rhetorics that echo a cultural trend sometimes referred to as "postfeminism." Over the past few decades, a body of scholarship has emerged that examines how popular culture aimed at women (with a particular focus on Western cultural production) increasingly incorporates postfeminist discourses that appear to assume the pastness of feminism

as something that has already achieved its main goals and been naturalized into contemporary society. This postfeminism promotes a de-politicized rhetoric of female empowerment and agency through the prioritization of consumerism, entrepreneurship, and self-improvement (Tasker and Negra 2007, 1). Diane Negra suggests that "postfeminism often functions as a means of registering and superficially resolving the persistence of 'choice' dilemmas for American women" (2009, 2), observing that postfeminist culture tends to reduce more complicated feminist issues into the universal problem of work/life balance (3) and questions of how one can find personal fulfillment in life. Personal lifestyle blogs contribute to these postfeminist discourses, inscribing ideologies of the empowered female consumer, while incorporating rhetorics of the ideal postfeminist subject as one who finds empowerment, fulfillment, and balance through the logic of self-branding, and the process of becoming both consumer and commodity.

Many of the foundational texts that give overviews of postfeminist culture (Whelelan 2000; McRobbie 2004; Negra and Tasker 2007) describe trends and themes from the 90s and early 00s mass media landscape. However, more recent lifestyle content in postfeminist popular culture, though in many ways continuous with women's popular culture from 10-15 years ago (e.g. in its depoliticized focus on personal empowerment and choice), has evolved somewhat in its negotiation of what, exactly, the ideal postfeminist subject must do to ensure her own happiness. This shift is due in part to networked identity technologies, and the cultural influence of online micro-celebrities (regular women who become powerful lifestyle tastemakers through blogs and social media) in setting the tone for postfeminist sensibility. This shift also evokes post-recessionary changes in attitudes about money and the workplace (see Negra and Tasker 2014). Personal lifestyle bloggers represent a particular kind of post-recession postfeminist sensibility that is inflected by neoliberal discourses of the ideal subject as embodying an

individualist spirit of self-improvement and entrepreneurialism. Postfeminist lifestyle content is especially invested in the idea of retreat from full-time white-collar work as the traditional path for affluent, educated female subjects, idealizing departures from the banalities and restrictions of corporate life into a vision of the good life that prioritizes entrepreneurialism and self-sufficiency.

Within postfeminist lifestyle content, there are two kinds of postfeminist retreat narratives. According to Negra, postfeminist media narratives emphasize "fantasies of evasion, escape, and retreat" (2009, 7). She describes the "retreatist epiphany" (2009, 86) as a narrative trope in "chick-flicks" where the female protagonist (often depicted as an unfulfilled urban career woman) realizes that the path to happiness is a retreat into traditional sources of female fulfillment (e.g. the domestic sphere, the hometown/small town community, heteronormative romance and gender roles, maternity/motherhood). Domestic narratives of retreat are also fundamental to bloggers' depictions of the good life across several lifestyle genres associated with the domestic sphere. However, I think it is important to note a less prominent, but increasingly influential kind of retreat narrative in contemporary postfeminist culture: the "retreat into nomadism," which, while superficially at odds with the more familiar retreat into domesticity trend in postfeminist media, is in fact politically and ideologically in harmony with postfeminist women's culture's [non] commitments. I am therefore proposing two influential narratives of retreat circulating through recent postfeminist discourse: narratives of retreat into the traditionally-feminized space of the domestic sphere (e.g. home-based genres of lifestyle content like mommy blogs and DIY blogs), and narrative of retreat into the historically

masculine-coded experience of nomadism (e.g. travel blogs). [1]

While acknowledging the already well-documented phenomenon of domestic retreat narratives in postfeminist media (Negra 2009; Negra and Tasker 2014; Matchar 2013; Allen et al. 2015), I choose to focus on tracing the contours of this other postfeminist model of the good life, whose growing influence within postfeminist popular culture can be noted within the online and offline circulations of autobiographical and lifestyle content, indicating a public of consumers eager to buy (figuratively and literally) the idea of wanderlust both as a brand and as a subject position.

"Postfeminism" as a Sensibility

Rosalind Gill suggests that we use the term postfeminism to refer to a "sensibility" in popular culture. She describes this sensibility in detail in "Postfeminist Media Cultures" (2007b), suggesting, first, that postfeminist discourses revolve around sometimes contradictory themes, at times appearing to embrace feminism, while at other times rejecting it (149). The word can be used to refer to an epistemological break from Second Wave feminism towards what is more frequently referred to as intersectional feminism today. In this context, 'post' signifies a "transformation and change" (250) from the dominant iterations of Anglo-American feminism, and "a shift away from a focus on equality to a focus on debates about differences" (250) and

[1] Of course, discourse surrounding travel's emancipatory potential for women is not unique to this cultural moment, nor is the contemporary affluent West's fixation with "nomadism" and "wanderlust" solely the domain of postfeminist sensibility.

In the 18th and 19th century, travel narratives from women like Lady Mary Wortley Montague circulated alongside a much larger body of male-written offerings. These early female travel writers were celebrated and reviled for their "pluck" and "eccentric" taste for travel, and contemporary female travel bloggers seem to feel that their decision to travel and write about it continues to be greeted with a similar mixed response. Similarly, reactionary "wanderer" or "nomad" identities have a long history among Western middle- and upper-class men, as I explore in Chapter Two through histories of the backpacker and the contemporary digital nomad.

considerations of how feminism intersects with other anti-foundationalist discourses (race, class, sexuality, colonialism). Postfeminism can also refer to discourses in popular western culture that assume the pastness of feminism, or feature some kind of backlash against it (Faludi 1992; Whelelan 2000; McRobbie 2004).

Backlash discourses might attribute "all women's unhappiness to feminism," suggest that "all the battles have been won," or argue that "you can't have it all," or that "'political correctness' has become a new form of tyranny" (Gill 253). McRobbie's analysis of "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture" (2004) centres around a backlash pattern, suggesting that a key current in postfeminist discourse and media is a sense of ambivalence towards feminism at best and, at worst, an overt dissatisfaction with or rejection of second wave feminism's legacy. McRobbie looks at how the achievements of Second Wave feminism have been undermined by popular culture. Importantly, the "tropes of freedom and choice" (255) that have come to be associated with popular depictions of young women in the past few decades reflect a popular consciousness that feminism has done its work and become redundant. Postfeminism takes feminism "into account" and finds its to be a "spent force." I think the backlash theory can be traced within some micropublics of postfeminist online culture, such as the fitness and fitspo micropublics of Instagram, which are dedicated to negotiating how the subject should care for and display her body, with some participants in these publics expressing their weariness with "feminist killjoys" (Ahmed 2010) who critique social media-sharing of sexualized workout pictures promoted as fitspo ("fitness inspiration"), as well aesthetics-oriented forms of exercise, like female bodybuilding and its perceived emphasis on catering to the male gaze. Defenders of such activities respond by invoking the "choice" paradigm of female empowerment as justification for choosing to engage in activities that might be understood by some as

retrogressive—if the activity is freely chosen by the subject, this paradigm argues, it must therefore be a feminist act.[2] We see a similar defensiveness in narratives of domestic retreat, where bloggers working in domestic lifestyle genres respond to felt pressures to perform within traditionally male-dominated spheres as a means of contributing to the feminist cause. These kinds of bloggers often respond to such pressures with a similar invocation of choice feminism, reclaiming the domestic sphere as a place of satisfaction, fulfillment, and legitimate work.

Compared to the examples of backlash sentiment outlined above, the female nomad lifestyle blogger is somewhat unique in that, even on a superficial level, her actions (which involve travelling the world, often alone) are likely to be perceived as progressive, in the sense that they seem to break the mold of traditional femininity. Rather than contributing to backlash, the postfeminist nomadic subject is more likely to self-identify as a feminist, conceiving of feminism as a rejection of the traditional lifestyles and timelines associated with normative femininity. This happy, nomadic neoliberal feminist subject rebels against the restrictions of the patriarchy through her embrace of a de-politicized, "girl power" kind of feminism based on self-discovery through wanderlust, and freedom through entrepreneurialism.

Gill outlines several recurring features of postfeminist sensibility: relevant for this study is postfeminism's "emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline" (149) and how it plays into postfeminism's articulation of the ideal female subject. Similarly, McRobbie traces

[2] Online discourse communities surrounding women's fitness are rife with debate about which fitness activities should be considered feminist. The subreddit "xxfitness," for example, is particularly interesting as an intimate public where different fitness activities are continually evaluated by members as "feminist" or "not feminist." A thread titled "How do you reconcile bikini competitions with feminism?" (May 4, 2016) saw heated debate, where supporters of these competitions tended to base their arguments on the feminist freedom to choose, even when that choice involves seemingly retrograde bikini pageantry. Problematically, the empowering potential of the traditionally-masculine activities embraced by the forum, like weightlifting and powerlifting, is frequently rationalized through the apolitical language of personal "empowerment" associated with postfeminist sensibility.

postfeminism's celebration of choice to late modernity's processes of individualization (Giddens 1991), where self-monitoring practices (coaxed along by self-help culture, lifestyle content, etc) structure how the subject navigates social experience. McRobbie suggests that this trumpeting of choice as both the evidence and means of female empowerment is a "modality of constraint" where "The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices" within the "regime of personal responsibility" (261).

The ideal postfeminist subject is heavily invested in self-monitoring and self-improvement. Gill argues that this self-surveillance often comes in the form of scrutinizing the body and appearance, but also suggests that this self-surveillance (an activity long associated with femininity) now increasingly has a psychological, self-help component where the inner life is conceived of as needing careful monitoring and continual disciplining and reconstruction. This self-surveillance is closely tied to another feature of postfeminist sensibility noted by Gill, which is its "focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment" (149). Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that postfeminism emphasizes the individual over the collective, and its "ideal manifestation [...] is not struggle for social change but rather capacity for entrepreneurship" (2011, 56). She notes that similar ideals are embedded in "the contemporary media-savvy interactive subject who is at ease in navigating the ostensibly flexible, open architectures of online spaces" (56), an argument which Genz echoes in her study of postfeminist celebrity culture (2015).

Personal lifestyle blogs tap into a market hungry for lifestyle content—that is, content that is supposed to demonstrate to consumers how to live well, assisting them in navigating choices from "which variety of nut butter is best" to "should I quit my job to pursue freelance work." Lifestyle blogs profit on cultural habits of self-monitoring and anxieties about "making the right choice," habits and anxieties reflected in, and engrained by, a larger context of

postfeminist sensibilities in mainstream media targeted to women.

Neoliberalism's Influence on Postfeminist Sensibility

Postfeminist culture idealizes the self-reflexive, self-scrutinizing female subject, whose entrepreneurial mindset and adaptivity help her successfully navigate the seemingly plentiful choices available to her thanks to earlier feminist accomplishments, and who achieves self-fulfillment and success as a result of her good choices and discipline. This idealized subject is complicit with neoliberal ideologies of political austerity and personal responsibility, and understanding these neoliberal undertones is important to grasping not only postfeminism's conception of the ideal feminine subject as self-monitoring, self-sufficient and entrepreneurial in spirit, but also its isolated, inward-gazing social perspective and apolitical leanings. Gill and Scharff trace the ways in which postfeminist and neoliberal discourses interact with (and often propel) each other, noting that "postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism but also a sensibility that is at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas" (7). This is an important distinction to make, and summarizing the currents and trends we see in popular women's culture as being only a response to feminism's legacy, would be overlooking an essential part of the picture.

Rather than taking neoliberalism "into account," contemporary postfeminist sensibility, with its prioritization of hustle and its idealization of the girlboss, is about harnessing neoliberalism's narratives about the entrepreneurial subject in order to make sense of how contemporary women are to take charge of their own happiness. In an instance of what Nancy Fraser calls "the cunning of history," the goals and critiques of second wave feminism are echoed in the "feeling currents that legitimize the transition to a new form of capitalism: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal" (99)—a context in which empowerment is interlinked with

enterprise, and "the dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation" (111), from middle class professionals aspiring to break the glass ceiling, to low-waged, income insecure, exploited lower classes imagining security and self-improvement, and, increasingly, the digital entrepreneur hustling after the promise of future income. It is important to note here that Fraser is not talking about postfeminism per se, but is critiquing neoliberal-era feminist discourse. She distinguishes between an earlier, radical second-wave feminism that assumed total systemic overhaul of the existing socio-economic structures would be necessary to achieve real equality, and a later, but still second-wave feminism that seems to have absorbed some of neoliberalism's tenets in its various expressions. Fraser explains this as a shift from a political and Utopian second-wave feminism that aimed to enact broader cultural change to enfranchise women in an androcentric capitalist era, to a de-politicized, inward-looking feminism focused on "cultural recognition" in a neoliberal era (108).[3] I would hesitate to set up a strict distinction between a radical and politically-engaged past feminism, and an apolitical, inward-gazing contemporary feminism that in complicit with larger political/economic structures that promote inequality and constrain women. Consider that a key text for early second-wave feminism, Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), reads a lot like the "before" narratives of postfeminist makeover tales of retreat from the constraints of contemporary, western middle-

[3] We might take issue with the implication that cultural recognition and identity-based activism are distractions from the important issues, and signs that feminism has lost its "insurrectionary spirit." While Fraser is correct in pointing out that popular discourses associating women's empowerment primarily with equal access to waged work tend to occlude considerations of an inherently unequal economic system, we might problematize the idea that such discourses are the main cultural inheritors to second-wave feminism. As theories about postfeminism have already argued, "postfeminism" is not the main successor to an earlier form of feminism, but rather a cultural current or sensibility that can be traced in much of popular culture. But perhaps this cultural sensibility has become so pervasive in media representation (and more recently in online discourse communities) that I could *appear* to have ascended as simply the next (disappointing) installment in a line of feminisms.

class life. Though the dissatisfactions of the domestic sphere and the happy housewife persona are replaced with anxieties about the temporal and geographic constraints of the traditional workforce, the same narrative thread persists, where the isolated female subject must break free of societal constraints to find personal fulfillment, rejecting the roles middle-class social life imposes on her. Although the later narrative sees our contemporary middle-class female subject trying to break free from roles that earlier figure might have longed for, the same articulations of societal constraint and longing for empowerment persist.[4]

Gill and Scharff (2011) summarize neoliberalism as "a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision that rose to prominence in the 1980s under the Reagan administration in the US and Thatcher's premiership in the UK." Yet more often than not, neoliberalism is invoked broadly to describe its impact on social consciousness in the West, rather than in reference to a specific line of thinking in political and economic theory. In *A Brief*

[4] Similarly, neoliberal postfeminism's concept of emancipation through the embrace of problematic economic structures has earlier articulations. Multi-level marketing is one of the most pernicious examples of how neoliberal capitalist enterprise takes advantage of the widespread, contemporary longing (particularly among women with children) for self-directed, geographically- and temporally- unconstrained access to a livable income. Around the same time that Friedan was writing about "the problem that has no name," we can trace the rise of multi-level marketing as a gendered, "empowering" entrepreneurial project that could be pursued within the confines of the domestic sphere. By hosting Tupperware parties and becoming Mary Kay consultants, middle-class women engaged in low-stakes forms of entrepreneurialism that left subjects feeling optimistic about the possibility of engaging in meaningful, profitable work without rupturing the traditional domestic unit. Recently, Multi-Level marketing companies are more popular than ever. Companies brand themselves with postfeminist empowerment language, and vendors embrace the language of hustle, the girlboss, and the momtrepreneur as they promote products like leggings (Lularoe), essential oils (Young Living), and lipstick (Lipsense) on social media, trying to generate income by signing-up more vendors in their downline. There is concern that the popularity of these systems has reach an alarming point, with swathes of participants being pushed into debt and "psychological crisis" (Wicker, "Multi-Level Marketing Companies," 2017).

History of Neoliberalism (2007), David Harvey proposes that neoliberalism has become hegemonic, pervasive to the extent that it influences common-sense interpretations of the world. It is its own ethic, and "seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (4). Similarly, Wendy Brown (2003) suggests that "Neoliberal rationality [...] involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*" (39-40). To describe this spread of neoliberalism's key assumptions and logics to all areas of human life, Patricia Ventura borrows Raymond Williams' phrase "structure of feeling," which refers to "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt" (Williams, cited Ventura 2). Ventura writes, "Neoliberal culture as a structure of feeling impels us to extend the market, its technologies, approaches and mindsets into all spheres of human life" (2). Within this context of a far-reaching neoliberal ethic, Gill and Scarff write, subjects are "constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising" (5), and are "increasingly exhorted to make sense of their individual biographies in terms of discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice—no matter how constrained their lives may actually be" (6).

What does it mean when neoliberalism, a political and economic theory "that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 3), operates as its own ethic, infiltrating all spheres of human life, a largely unrecognized force structuring popular feeling and experience? First of all, the relationship to the populace becomes one of (often unrecognized) control: as Ventura observes, in addition to being at one level a "set of economic and political policies and ideologies favoring corporatism, privatisation of public enterprises, and the reduction of state power and intervention," neoliberalism is also a "governmentality"—that is, it can refer to "the way subjects

think about the collection of practices, techniques, and rationalities used to govern them and which they use to govern themselves" (2). Within neoliberal logic and ethics, a population's happiness and well-being are sourced to "individuals' abilities to make market principles the guiding values of their lives, to see themselves as products to create, sell, and optimize" (Ventura 2).

Recognizing the widespread embrace (or, rather, the unconscious acceptance or intuiting of) neoliberalism's ideals of individualism and entrepreneurialism is important to understanding contemporary postfeminist sensibility's adaptation of traditionally masculinized narratives of the entrepreneur into a celebration of the figure of the #GIRLBOSS (e.g. Amoroso 2014). It is essential to recognize how this seemingly empowered figure is actually responding to forces outside her control—a lack of upward mobility via "traditional" channels (e.g. corporate workforce) in order to pursue entrepreneurial projects in an attempt to ensure financial freedom, and enough lifestyle flexibility to lead a life that balances work and passion (or, ideally, transforms the latter into the former). Despite the apparent newness of the empowered "girlboss" figure in postfeminist sensibility, the larger structures of feeling contributing to the empowered entrepreneurial subject as the solution to post-recession economic ills have been bubbling under the surface of Western (American in particular) culture for a long time.

At the root of "neoliberalism" is the American tradition of liberalism: both in the sense of individual autonomy and rights (e.g. to property) and liberation *from* government (not trusted). This focus on freedom as defined by individual autonomy and liberation from oppressive governments was the articulated ideal of the United States until Great Depression, when this "freedom" from excessive state involvement was perceived to be direct cause of systemic suffering (10). The rise of the welfare system and an ideal of state-assisted upward mobility

followed, only to be succeeded again as (in the 70s and 80s, and coming to a head in the 90s post-cold war period) the expansion of market forces led to reassertion of liberalism's tenets of individualism and "negative liberty" (liberty from the state), with addition of market rationality in all spheres (Ventura 11). In response to previous decades' political collectivity, neoliberal sensibility "centers on undermining the validity of collective social action by prioritizing the individual and the family at the expense of the collective and while elevating the market and the corporation at the expense of the society of the welfare state" (Ventura 30).

Neoliberalism's embrace of market logic in all spheres of human experience results in a general emphasis on entrepreneurial initiative as a driver of the good, suggesting that "continuous increases in productivity should...deliver higher living standards to everyone" (Harvey 65). Neoliberalism's individualist, entrepreneurial ethic does not refer only to the literal act (or aspiration) of becoming an entrepreneur and starting a business, but also describes a broader sensibility in which the self is both the *site* and *product* of continual improvement, and the object of continuously-tweaked marketing strategies aimed at making the self "commercially viable" (Ventura 11)—and in which financial and social failure is attributed to the individual's inability to be an adequate "entrepreneur of the self." According to Brown, neoliberal culture "figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care,' conceived of as the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions" (42). Indeed, "self-care" has reached such buzzword status that think pieces decrying its vague consumerist impetus (e.g. Niazi, "What the Fuck is Self Care?") proliferate. Discourses of the self as a site of product-optimization and marketing strategy are often framed as discourses of self-care, and circulate within the self-help market, a market that lifestyle bloggers also tap into as producers of autobiographical lifestyle guides. Ventura argues

that neoliberalism's self-help culture re-directs that burden of care for populations from government to individuals, "such that individuals are instructed/harangued into feeling utterly isolated and responsible for themselves and thus in need of so-called experts" (33). Within this culture, lifestyle bloggers are both the scammers *and* the ones being duped—for every online persona profiting from the promise that they hold the secrets to the good life, there are legions more labouring after this promise and making no progress. Ruth Williams notes how the female neoliberal subject is "encouraged to adopt a depoliticized outlook that ignores oppressive social realities in favor of a therapeutically tinged focus on herself" (616), gesturing towards the de-politicizing tendency of postfeminist discourse within a larger neoliberal context, in that it shifts the focus away from the failures of overarching economic and political structures that foster unsatisfying conditions for "work-life balance," fixating instead on the postfeminist subject's individual quest for empowerment. Within neoliberal sensibility, experiences of stagnation, insecurity, unhappiness, and crisis are attributed to personal inadequacies. Unsuccessful individuals are merely poor entrepreneurs of the self, who "should have worked more, worked less, gotten more education, gotten more practical training, invested more wisely, taken more financial risk, taken less financial risk, carried more insurance, been healthier, exercised more, exercised less, eaten more, eaten less" (Ventura 32).

Ventura's list of "should haves" is evocative of the anxious undercurrents we can perceive in what I call postfeminist autobiographical lifestyle guides—or personal lifestyle blogs. In these guides, the task at hand is finding and living "the good life," not as an existential end in itself, but as a means of survival in precarious neoliberal society. One must figure out how to acquire health, wealth, and happiness as an entrepreneurial neoliberal subject, and then sell one's personal success story of having found the secrets to the good life, not as a capstone to a long

fulfilling life and career, but as a necessary *starting point* for fulfilling work and the minimum income required for survival.

"Cool" feminism, "Hot" feminism: Postfeminist Sensibility's in Popular Feminist Discourse

There has been some recent debate as to whether "postfeminism" remains a useful interpretive paradigm for analyzing popular media content targeted towards women. This debate emerges out of observations about what seems to be a renewed interest in feminist issues within popular media discourse. In a recent call for chapters, Jessalynn Keller and Maureen Ryan suggest that it is time to "problematize postfeminism as the dominant framework with which to understand gender politics within contemporary media culture" ("Emergent Feminisms"), inviting work that engages a global perspective in tracing the contours of a new feminist "zeitgeist." Along with Gill (2016), I maintain that postfeminist sensibility remains a useful analytical lens, regardless of the emergence of this apparent resurgence of interest in feminist topics within popular media. Though I agree with Keller and Ryan's suggestion that "postfeminism" should not be uncritically accepted as the dominant discourse in popular media targeted to a young female audience, I would still argue that it remains a powerful force—perhaps more so than ever, due to postfeminist sensibility's capacity for slipping into different guises, including this new wave of feminist discourse, which can be troublingly complicit with the overarching neoliberal structures and ideologies so readily absorbed into postfeminist sensibility.

Catherine Rottenberg proposes that we are "witnessing the emergence of neoliberal feminism in the USA" (2013), epitomized by Sandberg's *Lean In* (2013) and Slaughter's "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" (*The Atlantic*, July 2012)—two self-declared feminist manifestos that debate the question of whether it is possible to balance family and career

aspirations. Rottenberg suggests that we can trace within this publishing trend a recent shift in feminist discourse, in which popular feminist thought is becoming increasingly compatible with "the market values of neoliberalism," espousing an individualist conception of women's liberation. She observes that "Mainstream liberal feminism is being disarticulated and transmuted into a particular mode of neoliberal governmentality." That is, much of the recent popular culture expressions of feminism offer no critiques of the neoliberal framework within which they operate. Neoliberal feminism recognizes and repudiates gender inequalities, but places the responsibility for dealing with these ills on the individual subject who must "accept responsibility" for her own self-care. The effect of this new neoliberal feminism is pernicious, and Rottenberg suggests that this new, popular feminism "is eviscerating classic, mainstream liberal feminism" and that

> by using key liberal terms, such as equality, opportunity, and free choice, while displacing and replacing their content, this recuperated feminism forges a feminist subject who is not only individualized but entrepreneurial in the sense that she is oriented towards optimizing her resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative and innovation.

Angela McRobbie proposes that, recently in popular culture, notions of "the perfect" dominate discourse that addresses what it is like to live as a contemporary female subject. In "Notes on the Perfect" (2015), McRobbie updates her ideas from *The Aftermath of Feminism* to reflect recent shifts in popular attitudes towards feminist discourse in the post-recession era. She notices a re-emergence of openly feminist discourse in popular culture, but one that emphasizes "individualistic striving" and which attempts "to attach something of feminism to an ethos of competitive individualism" (4) not unlike the entrepreneurial emphasis of post-recession postfeminist sensibility described above. Such conceptions of "the perfect" elucidate how contemporary postfeminist discourse is wrapped up in models of "the good life" and the embrace

of aspirational content that both narrates the pursuit, and instructs on the attainment of, genre-specific formulations of what is means to live one's best life.

McRobbie centres her analysis around the trope of the perfect as a "lietmotif" of contemporary femininity, using "the perfect" to refer to "a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the 'good life'" (9). She argues that ideas of "the perfect" in contemporary discourse about femininity operate as "a kind of neoliberal spreadsheet, a constant benchmarking of the self, a highly standardized mode of self-assessment, a calculation of one's assets, a fear of possible losses" (9). McRobbie describes an emerging form of feminism espoused by women who are conscious of the gender inequalities that mark their lives, but who require a feminism that "can be made entirely compatible with the search for the 'good life'." While conceptions of the perfect can focus on career success, McRobbie argues that "The perfect relies [...] most fully on restoring traditional femininity, which means that female competition is inscribed within specific horizons of value relating to husbands, work partners and boyfriends, family and home, motherhood and maternity" (7). Regardless of how perfection is imagined, the popularity of rigorous self-improvement regimes is apparent in the pervasiveness of consumer items like fitness trackers and productivity journals.[5]

[5]The self-reflexive and self-disciplining work of the ideal neoliberal postfeminist subject is epitomized in the popularity of the bullet journal, a highly aestheticized practice of self-observation and self-regulation in which the subject records day to day events and accomplishments alongside personal reflections. This record-keeping is inscribed alongside lists of short- and long-term goals. There is a sub-genre of Instagram content dedicated to documenting the process of bullet journaling, in which participants photograph their bullet journal pages as both a model of how to make this practice of reflexive self-discipline "pretty" though the application of cute stickers and incorporation of calligraphy, and as a record of the subject's progress towards whatever goal(s) they are chasing. In response to the popularity of this journaling practice, shops like Indigo provide a host of products dedicated to this specific kind of life writing that prompts Buzzfeed writers Rachel Wilkerson Miller and Ellie Sunakawa to ask "is it a to-do list or is it a diary?" before expressing her "low-key" obsession with the practice ("WTF is a Bullet Journal?" May 31 2016). The assumption behind the bullet journaling phenomenon is that we should not only aggressively pursue self-improvement through carefully-documented daily self-discipline regimes, but that the process should be nice to look, and even displayed as a model for others.

Rosalind Gill looks at neoliberal feminist bestsellers in "Postfeminism and the new cultural life of feminism" (2016), taking them as evidence that feminism is becoming relevant again in popular culture. We are also in an era of social media activism and "4th wave" feminism. Gill suggests that, in light of recent changes, we must pause to consider whether a postfeminist framework for reading popular culture, developed in the 90s and early 00s (eons ago in a digital age) are still relevant. She presents a "manifesto" for continuing to talk about postfeminism: she clarifies, first, that postfeminism is not a critical perspective, but an *object* of study, and that postfeminism as a culture or sensibility is inherently fraught with contradictions —which might lead to some feminist causes being embraced, while others continue to be suppressed. Even those issues which are popularly thought of as feminist are inflected by postfeminist thinking and neoliberal culture, particularly in the realms of celebrity and corporate culture (as well as a form of entrepreneurialism that proclaims anti-corporatism while promoting the *self* as its product). She also points out some areas where more investigation is needed: the topic of surveillance in postfeminist culture, and the self-surveillant and peer-surveillant subjects of postfeminist and neoliberal sensibility.

In another recent work ("Post-Postfeminism?" 2016), Gill argues that "A crucial distinction [...] needs to be made between those who see postfeminism in historical or epistemological terms and those who use the notion critically as analytical term," and suggests that "engaging with the contradictions of media culture is an important part of being a feminist media scholar." She proposes that, in addition to the figure of the neoliberal feminist success story, contemporary culture also glamourizes the stylish young feminist in a process she calls "the cool-ing of feminism." We witness the emergence of "cool" feminism within popular media and celebrity culture, with women's magazines, for example, featuring feminist-themed content

(Gill uses the example of *Elle* magazine's special issues on feminist topics) and self-identified feminist female celebrities like Emma Watson and Beyoncé encouraging their fans to embrace the feminist identifier. This so-called "hot feminism" (Grazia 2015) is a re-branded version of feminism that embraces normative heterofeminine interests like fashion and consumerism as acts of feminist empowerment, and "shares much of its content with the women's magazine culture from which it developed." It is "resolutely not angry" as a result of what Gill calls "affect-policing," as well as notably "contentless." In its insistence that feminism can be compatible with a multitude of lifestyles and outlooks, cool feminism is "unencumbered by the need to have a position on anything." Gill therefore argues for the continued relevance of postfeminism as an analytical term based on the continued presence of postfeminist sensibilities even within ostensibly feminist discourses.

I agree with Gill's assertion that postfeminist as an analytical term remains relevant in our current cultural context, despite (or perhaps because of) an apparent resurgence of feminist discourse. In the lifestyle blogs I examine, female bloggers often frame their lifestyle choices as feminist acts—nomads, for example, frequently expound on how important it is for women to experience solo travel, citing it as an opportunity for empowerment and personal development that anyone can access (e.g. *Adventurous Kate*, "Dear Ladies: This Can Be Your Life Too"). Here we see a version of feminism that places emphasis on the individual's responsibility for self-care and self-improvement through making bold changes in her life, following the model of the lifestyle experts behind successful travel blogs. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three's examination of postfeminist retreats into nomadism, the intimate publics reading and responding to this kind of content take issue with the assumption that taking responsibility for one's own empowerment is as easy as bloggers make it out to be, invoking politics of class,

identity, and racialized difference in order to suggest that travel is not that accessible for everybody—considerations that tend to be left out of blogger narratives. Like the cool feminism Gill traces through the glossy pages of young women's fashion magazines, bloggers present a version of feminist empowerment that is heavily aestheticized, communicated through repetitive images of attractive young white women exploring the world in style, where that main object of consideration is how the cultures encountered by the female subject can serve her quest for self-discovery and self-improvement, rather than how she as a subject should come to terms with her own complicity in a capitalism system that imposes harm on the places and people she comes into contact with.

Shifts in Postfeminist Discourse: Pre-Recession and Post-Recession

In postfeminist online culture, personal lifestyle bloggers present answers to what Negra (2009) identifies as perennial questions contemporary subjects must confront, which are reflected in popular media. These questions include: "where can we feel at home?" "How can we respond to the seemingly ever more time-pressured conditions of daily life?" "Where/how do we find rewarding forms of work?" "How do we (re)establish the dominion of the self in a hyper-commodified culture?" (8) In response to these questions, lifestyle content producers give answers that are often, but not always, continuous with the "disingenuous" (Negra 2009) solutions to these questions proposed by postfeminist popular media. Social media and online lifestyle content (such as blogs) have become key purveyors of postfeminist discourse, disseminating a version of postfeminist sensibility that is intimately tied to the autobiographical and stories of individual lives. We might think of lifestyle bloggers' answers to the recurring questions outlined above as being an articulation of postfeminism 2.0—a version of postfeminism where the female subject's self-surveillance and navigation of life's important

choices are both determined and made public by her engagement with new social technologies. A key distinction we can make about how lifestyle bloggers contribute to postfeminist sensibilities is that their answers to all of the questions mentioned above revolve around the process of commodifying the self by harnessing the networked affordances of social media. Paradoxically, by commodifying the self, the subject seeks to assert the dominion of the self, while also resolving the other problems by obtaining financial freedom, more flexible management of time, and (presumably) rewarding work that leverages hobbies and passions into income.

Negra has accounted for recent shifts in postfeminist culture in her more recent work. In *Gendering the Recession* (2014), Negra and Tasker note that the period they described in their previous work on postfeminist culture (2007) coincided with an economic boom that came to a crashing halt in 2007-2008, ushering in cultural as well as economic shifts, causing the authors to question whether postfeminist media culture has evolved in response. They propose that "recessionary media culture" and postfeminist culture are united in their assertions that it is up to the individual to accommodate for social ills: "Just as postfeminist culture suggests that it is individual women (rather than systems of gender hierarchy) that require modification, recessionary media culture implies that management of the self can effect positive change. Though governments seem increasingly unable to act in the interests of citizens, media texts" (2).

In post-recession postfeminist discourse, narratives that describe retreats into domesticity *and* those describing retreats into nomadism speak to a widely-felt and increasingly urgent desire for financial self-sufficiency. On the surface, lifestyle bloggers promote and idealize their rejection of the rat race, marketing their lives as aspirational narratives of financial independence, temporal and geographic mobility (the freedom to be where one desires to be,

whether home or abroad, and to spend one's time how one wants). Such narratives fail to account for how "the options, opportunities, and rewards experienced by women in postfeminist media are consistently those that accrue to an elite minority in possession of considerable education, social, and financial capital" (Negra 2009, 9). While appearing to rebel against society's limiting expectations, the lifestyle persona's entrepreneurial, self-motivated and self-monitoring individualism locates her decidedly within neoliberalism's systems of inequality, as she personally accommodates for the present system's failures through her own hard work and encourages others to do the same, overlooking how the decision of whether to reject the traditional workplace is a choice available to a relative few.

Postfeminism's Retreat Paradigm

While much of neoliberal feminism's narrative of the good life is based on models of "leaning in" (Sandberg) and working extra hard to bridge gender inequality in the workplace, an alternate narrative is growing in popularity within postfeminist sensibility, so much so that it seems poised to become the dominant narrative of popular postfeminist discourses—particularly within online lifestyle content. Rather than urging women to lean in to a high-powered corporate career, this thread of postfeminist discourse proposes that *retreating* from corporate life and leaving the traditional workforce is the best way for the neoliberal, postfeminist female subject to lead her best life.

In much of contemporary online lifestyle content, the blogger-subject embraces her individual passions and seeks to locate her authentic self by retreating from artificial environments (e.g. the traditional workforce) that leave her feeling unfulfilled, instead pursuing an authentic lifestyle where the subject extricates herself from the financial, temporal, and spatial obligations of 21st century middle class urban office culture through the liberating potential of

self-branding and self-commoditization using networked media.

A prevalent theme in postfeminist media is that professional work is unrewarding (Negra 2009, 88) and a bad bargain. Retreats from the workplace are popular aspirational narratives in postfeminist sensibility broadly, and in online postfeminist culture particularly. In the lifestyle content that circulates within online intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility, we see two major, recurring narratives of retreat from unsatisfying work: the retreat into more traditionally feminine domestic pursuits, and the retreat into the historically male-gendered domain of the nomadic lifestyle. The former is largely continuous with the version of pop culture's postfeminist slant as described in detail by Negra (2009). It encompasses DIY blogs, Mommy blogs, food and cooking blogs—blogging genres that depict and glorify home life and the domestic sphere, frequently situating the blogger within the context of a family unit, and making sense of her identity and responsibilities within those traditional parameters. The latter form of retreat—one that moves away from both the discontents of urban/9-5 life *and* from feminine-gendered domestic pursuits, is most notably composed of travel blogs. Travel blogs are a smaller, but influential niche that most often represents the blogger as a solo unit. While in some ways incorporating traditionally masculinized narratives of the heroic wanderer and colonizer of all that he surveys, solo female travel blogs also draw heavily on postfeminism's neoliberal apparatus of the self-monitoring, self-improving subject, who finds the solution to the lack of fulfillment offered by the dominant social structures in the commodification of her experiences and personality.

These two narratives appear to describe very different lifestyle trajectories circulating within the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture. There are the more recognizably domestic lifestyle genres like the DIY blog, which often situate the main female persona within

the context of a settled domestic unit (as a wife and/or mother) and which narrate the labour of "nesting" in a way that evokes the familiar postfeminist concern with retreat into the traditionally domestic and communal (as opposed to the unfulfilling and anti-social work place). Then there is the solo female budget traveler, who rejects the constraints of typical markers of achievement for educated young women (career, marriage/children, markers of financial security like houses and cars) in favor of nomadism. In doing so, the nomadic female subject adapts narratives traditionally associated with masculinity (the adventurer; explorer; conqueror/colonizer of exotic locales) and fits these narratives into an adjusted lifestyle narrative that is largely continuous with postfeminism's glorification of the empowered, entrepreneurial female as consumer-commodity. What both the domestic and the anti-domestic streams of lifestyle blogging within postfeminist online culture seem to agree upon is that the traditional workplace (imagined as the normal 9-5, decently well-paying office job that awaits educated, privileged westerners) is death to the soul, and can should be abandoned—and replaced with either less work or more work, as long as the work is perceived as self-directed and as building on one's passions. While a postfeminist nomadic lifestyle guide might focus on productivity strategies and methods for trimming down to-do lists in order to maximize free time for travel experiences, a domestic lifestyle guide might emphasize the satisfaction of approaching tasks in labour-intensive ways, delighting in the assumed moral superiority of doing things the old-fashioned way. Though superficially at odds, both narratives operate on the assumption that doing things *by* and *for* oneself is the goal, and that the nature of one's work itself is central to visions of the good life.

An important aspect of postfeminism 2.0's icon's idealization of retreat (whether into domesticity or nomadism) is the subject's embrace of an entrepreneurial individualistic spirit that motivates her to leverage the tools (2.0 technologies) and privileges (university education, white

collar skillset, parental financial safety net) available to her in order to commoditize her passion, turning passion and persona into financially-viable enterprises. The assumption is that, to really qualify as living well, one must be making a living off showing others how to live.

The Good Life in Postfeminist Neoliberal Sensibility: Hope Labor, Aspirational Labor, and the Cruel Optimism of Hustle

At BlogHer 2017, I was struck by how often the word hustle cropped up. Ambiguous in meaning, within the context of BlogHer's lifestyle gurus, social media influencers, and digital entrepreneurs, the word is generally invoked to refer to a state of perpetual busyness, productivity, and goal-oriented hyper-activity. It is a blanket term for hard work, but more often seems to be used in reference to non-traditional employment, i.e. entrepreneurial work rather than waged or salaried work. This hustle can often refer to unpaid work, or "aspirational" (Duffy 2017) labour that precedes (in the ideal narrative where everything works out according to plan) the good life made possible by entrepreneurship. Unlike the OED definition of "hustle (n.)" as "a swindle, racket; a means of deception or fraud; a source of income; a paid job," the word circulates within blogger and lifestyle design discourse in a more positive light. Whether or not observers might see certain forms of online entrepreneurialism as a racket, the word hustle is invoked by its proponents as a reference to working hard and dreaming big. The discourse of hard work and delayed gratification as a necessary prelude to living the good life is important to the sensibility of contemporary lifestyle content: Duffy (2017) notes that a recurring refrain among her fashion blogger interviewees was their emphasis on hard work and consistency—of keeping at it despite the time constraints of day jobs, families, and other commitments (63).

I concluded from my observations at BlogHer 2017 that, for those aspiring to be neoliberalism's ideal entrepreneurial subject, the central source of continued optimism—the

promise that present hustle will yield future pay-offs, which is communicated by a host of invited speakers who represent success narratives, and by the persistent upbeat attitude and determination of other attendees eagerly distributing business cards and tweeting about mashed potatoes in hopes of attracting the attention of brands—also depletes the subject economically. The conference itself is expensive to attend, though the costs associated with conference fees, staying in an expensive hotel, and transportation to Orlando are justified as investments that will be repaid through the attendee's exposure to advice from experts and networking opportunities.

Searching for posts that include #hustle on Instagram prompts the app to suggest related hashtags, or those hashtags that occur most often alongside #hustle. These include #ambition, #successgogetter, #workethic. Posts with #hustle appended to them feature motivational quotes, selfies (often where the subject is holding a cup of coffee), outfit of the day posts, and post-workout shots. The sensibility conveyed here seems to be one where their subject documents their optimistic daily grind while reflecting on the goal life that keeps them pushing in the present.

The BlogHer website lets users post blog posts to their website, some of which evidence this embrace of the hustle lifestyle. Contributor lingwong reflects on bloggers' relationship to hustle without actually stating what hustle is or what distinguishes it from other kinds of work: she reflects, "'Hustling' has become the 'thing' to do… we're led to believe that if we aren't hustling we aren't doing enough to be successful" (Feb 28 2017). In another post hosted on the BlogHer website called "Hustle Bustle," blogger mkhyde opens with the quote "Great things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle," which is also featured in the listicle "9 Popular Quotes Commonly Misattributed to Abe Lincoln" (Herfurth 2015). Again, the poster does not explain what she understands hustle to be, but decides that she needs

to do more of it, and then closes with the salutation "Hustle up and out peeps." Indeed, hustle circulates more as a sentiment or mood that as an action we can pin down with a definition. In "My Hustle: A Day in The Life of A Blogger," Kayla of *Lost Gen Y Girl* reflects on her generation's embrace of hustle:

> I think as a generation, Millennials and Gen Y want to make things happen.
> We want to make BIG THINGS happen.
> We want to make a difference.
> We no longer really care for working for someone else and climbing that corporate ladder, but that's not really news.
> As a result of that mindset though, we're seeing more and more young people pursuing their dreams of being entrepreneurs.
> So we're hustling.
> All the time.

Kayla goes on to describe a typical day in her life, which involves working a typical workday, commuting home, going to Crossfit, and only settling into her blogging work at 9 or 10pm when she is already tired from a full day. But Kayla keeps pressing on with an optimism that is particularly common in small- and mid-scale personal lifestyle blogs—"Because your hustle never stops. Your hustle's a part of you."

It is evocative, I think, that aspirational narratives of hope labour are so intertwined with hustle as a buzzword—knowingly or not, self-styled entrepreneurs and girlbosses are describing their work using a term that, until recently, implied illicit or illegally-gotten financial gains. There might not be anything illegal about blogging and selling one's persona as a source of income, but there is something uncomfortable—something that feels wrong—about the condition of suspended hope and delayed expectation of reward in which most lifestyle hustlers seem to reside. I want to turn now to a consideration of the key role that hope plays in the circulation of the ideal figure of the female entrepreneurial subject within contemporary neoliberal

postfeminist discourse. The aspirational appeal of bloggers' autobiographical lifestyle guides, and the accompanying modelling of the the good life as a life of retreat from the traditional work force, perpetuate a cycle of delayed promise in which subjects are slowly drained by the labour (or hustle) of achieving the financial independence required for the post-recession postfeminist ideal of retreat into domesticity or nomadism.

Within neoliberal discourse, the subject's ability to adapt to and make accommodations for the inability of larger economic and social structures to provide livable work (work that provides for basic needs *and* is satisfying or fulfilling to some degree) by hustling after a dream-vision of accomplishing some passion project and reaping financial independence as a reward, all by embracing neoliberalism's "entrepreneurial spirit." This act of "taking into one's own hands" the pursuit of livable work might be an example of what Chandler and Reid (2016) identify as a key mode of governmentality within neoliberalism: resilience. They argue that neoliberalism constructs resilient subjects who accept the "necessity of adaptation to the 'realities' of an endemic condition of global insecurity." Within the context of neoliberalism, which "presupposes the unknowability of the world, and likewise one which interpolates a subject that is permanently called upon to live in accordance with this unknowability," the ideal subject is one "for whom the bearing of risk and its responsibilization is a required practice without which he or she cannot grow and prosper in the world."

Often, strategies of adaptability do not accomplish their intended purpose. It is widely accepted among aspiring lifestyle bloggers and online entrepreneurs that prosperity in their desired creative fields must be preceded by a period of unpaid work. New bloggers must first focus on content creation and the work of drawing a following before they can hope to attract sponsors, a process that can take months or years before the blogger can reasonably expect to

draw any kind of income (an end result that is decidedly rare)—this is the initial "hope labour." Kuehn and Corrigan (2013) use the term hope labour to describe "online work's seduction as a future-oriented investment" (10). They further describe hope labour as "un- or under-compensated work carried out in the present, often for experience or exposure, in the hope that future employment opportunities may follow" (10). Although "socially recognized self realization" is noted as a primary motivator for social labour online—i.e. online production for the personal satisfaction of achieving competency in an area—hope labour is a secondary motivator for some. The fact that *some* people monetize these same kinds of online production becomes a source of hope for many.

There is a dearth of statistics on blogger demographics and income. Blogger.org's 2012 report on the state of the blogging world (based on a 1000 person survey) still makes its rounds within the blogosphere, and is cited in some academic work (Duffy 2017; Madej 2016). It indicates that only 8% of aspiring professional bloggers make a livable income from blogging, while 81% never make more than $100. The applicability of this report for research on lifestyle blogs specifically is shaky at best (the survey of only 1000 subjects doesn't indicate what *kind* of blogs the surveyed subjects are producing—are these personal bloggers? Freelance bloggers working for content mills?) If the survey includes freelance bloggers creating content for businesses, the percentage of bloggers making a liveable income might be even lower if only aspiring personal lifestyle bloggers are considered. I can think of at least 10 such bloggers within my own extended social circle, and I am certain that none of them have pulled in more than a few dollars for their work.

This anticipatory labour, motivated by hope or aspiration, and often unpaid, is usually described in academic literature with a pessimistic focus on the harm it can inflict on those

whose lives are consumed by it. However, within the postfeminist neoliberal discourse consumed and circulated by those who participate in hope labour, this kind of work is simply entrepreneurial, or, more affectionately, hustle. Hope labour within personal lifestyle blogging is both a form of cruel optimism for aspiring bloggers—a vision of delayed pay off that keeps the present laboring subject happily hustling away at their passion project without recompense—and a tantalizing promise that successful bloggers can dangle before their audiences in order to sell consulting services, digital blogging manuals, and attract traffic with blog posts offering advice for how to succeed in the industry.

A significant amount of analysis has already been dedicated to the unpaid labour that drives much of online content production. The digital economy has long been recognized as one mainly fueled by the free labor of online subjects, which is "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" (Terranova 2000, 34). In *The Reputation Economy*, Alessandro Gandini observes that the "narrative of precariousness and passion that connotes knowledge workers in the media and creative scenes" is now well-known, and adds that, in addition the narratives of precarity within discourses surrounding digital knowledge and creative work, "a narrative of liberation and independence has simultaneously surged as hegemonic, diluted within a strongly entrepreneurial attitude that substantially anaesthetises the negative traits" (2016, 86). This optimism about the possibilities afforded by online entrepreneurialism is important to fueling the unpaid labour of lifestyle content producers—a point Erin Brooke Duffy examines at length in *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love* (2017), a qualitative investigation of the aspirational labor of online lifestyle content.

Duffy uses the term aspirational labor instead of hope labor to describe what she identifies as "a seductive ideology that pairs passion with (worker) profit to glamorize labor

conditions that are far less remunerative and gratifying than hyped" and "romanticizes work as its conditions are becoming more precarious, time- intensive, and decidedly unromantic" (11). She looks at the aspirational labor of online content producers seeking fame and the possibility of getting paid to do what they love, noting that the success stories of a handful of high-profile bloggers draw attention away from the efforts of the masses of lifestyle content producers of low to middling influence (4). Duffy's focus on aspirational labor appears similar to Kuehn and Corrigan's hope labor. However, I like Duffy's choice of the word aspirational over hope, as I feel that (whether or not this was Duffy's intention), the phrasing evokes the dual function served by much of the lifestyle content posted online with entrepreneurial intent: that is, the work is both aspirational in the sense that the one producing the content hopes to make a profit from it, as well as aspirational in the sense that, in order to sell the content and attract a following, the lifestyle being modelled should also *be* aspirational, and the object of aspiration for others.

Duffy observes, importantly, that "the deployment of various markers of authenticity helps to obscure the reality that social and economic capital are often prerequisites to pursue production, networking, and professionalization opportunities" and that the playing field for those seeking to monetize lifestyle content is "profoundly uneven" (219). Though they emphasize the extent of their hard work and hustle as part of an authenticating strategy meant to deflect accusations of privilege, it is still in the blogger's best interest to encourage followers' perception that an initial investment of time, effort, and capital (and, specifically, investment in the blogger's expert content, ebooks, and consulting services) will yield a lifestyle similar to those modelled by successful lifestyle bloggers. Aspirational labour within lifestyle genres is a curious process of holding onto hope by selling hope, in a cycle that runs on optimism and drains everybody involved.

It would be elucidating, at this moment, to briefly discuss Berlant's work on cruel optimism, currents of which run through ideas about hope labour and aspirational labour, with the caveat that cruel optimism does not really describe a pointed kind of labour with an optimistic end-goal, but rather a kind of existence. Cruel optimism is "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" and "whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of the form of it provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world." This cruelty is something that the analyst observes about someone else—the person or group experiencing the attachment usually perceives this object as lightening or bettering their experience. The object of desire is not necessarily something articulated or even fully understood by the subject—it consists of "a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make us and make possible for us." Some of these promises we might be aware of; others not so much. Even if the burden of attachment is perceived by the optimistic subject, the possible loss of this attachment to the object of promise is still worse, as it would "defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything."

Though Berlant suggests that cruel optimism can have any number of objects of attachment, the kind of attachment she examines at length is to a conception of the good life. Thinking about a Western context, with a particular focus on the United States, Berlant describes a general condition of attrition, or of "the wearing out of the subject," where suffering is considered ordinary, and experienced as normative. Cruel optimism describes the continued popular reliance on the postwar period promise of the American dream based on fantasies of "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (3),

despite the failure of late capitalism to promise this kind of stability for the greater part of the public, no matter how hard working.

In neoliberal society, subjects live in a state of crisis ordinariness where they learn to adjust to the prospect of looming upheaval in ways that allow for continued optimism. Berlant traces "the emergence of a precarious public sphere, an intimate public of subjects who circulate scenarios of economic and intimate contingency and trade paradigms for how best to live on" in the context of fraying fantasies of the good life (3). I see the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture that emerge around various lifestyle genres as manifestations of this precarious public sphere, where the traditional American dream is more often the object of suspicion than of aspiration. The discourse of these online publics is largely focused on negotiating what it means to live well as a postfeminist subject within a wider context of economic precarity, and the growing sentiment that the kind of employment offered by traditional industries is inadequate to provide the coveted balance that would allow subjects to enjoy rich intimate relationships and to pursue their individual passions. What follows is a kind of cruel optimism whose object of attachment is the neoliberal ideal of lifestyle freedom through entrepreneurialism—a dream where an initial investment of hard work or hustle will eventually pay off in the form of various new freedoms that contribute to the subject's ability to experience the good life. These freedoms include financial independence, the ability to manage one's own schedule, and the option to work from whatever location one desires, all of which are necessary precursors to living 'the good life' as conceived by the neoliberal postfeminist subject: that is, that good life as a life of retreat. This retreat, whether it is figured as a return to the domestic sphere, or as an embarkation into nomadism, comes in the wake of the subject's disillusionment with the failed promises of the American Dream. We can perceive the cruelty of this increasingly widespread optimistic

investment in the promises of entrepreneurial lifestyle design: coming to the disappointing realization that one common vision for achieving the good life is actually unachievable, neoliberal postfeminist subjects embrace an alternate vision that espouses the foundational logic of the very structures that rendered the former dream an impossibility—the cruel punch line being that, for most, this new dream is no more achievable for than the old one.

Reading the Retreat into Nomadism through Travel Blogs and Intimate Publics

In the study that follows, personal travel blogs and their constituent parts (e.g. related social media accounts) form the primary objects of consideration. Solo female travel blogs in particular are given special attention, as contemporary cultural artifacts gesturing towards a larger postfeminist idealization of the retreat into nomadism as a potential model for the good life, and as a solution for contemporary western, middle-class society's unsatisfying economic and social conditions. Throughout, I am attentive to the feedback and commentary contributed by participants in the intimate publics surrounding online lifestyle content, both because this feedback provides further insight into the specificities of this narrative of retreat and the meaning it holds for those who believe in it, and because looking at these intimate publics gives us insight into how ideas about the good life, and about authenticity as contributing to the good life, circulate and are *negotiated* within intimate publics. Observing this ongoing negotiation suggests that the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture consume, evaluate, and, sometimes, propose adjustments to models of the good life based on assessments of whether a particular model represents the lived experiences and felt investments of the subset of the population that model addresses.

My approach was to examine my case studies within the context of the intimate publics in which they participate. This meant paying attention to feedback shared by other participants in

the form of comments posted on the blog and on related social media, while also considering posts from other bloggers that respond to content posted by a blogger, as well as commentary posted on off-site venues. Where off-site commentary is concerned, I focused on the forums at Get Off My Internets as a means of better understanding some of the ways in which lifestyle content gets taken up and problematized within intimate publics. To further narrow the scope of my analysis while still take into account how blog content is distributed across multiple media platforms, my examination of content created by bloggers primarily discussed content posted in the blog homepage alongside Instagram posts, including examples of audience response on those two platforms.

This decision to focus on Instagram as well from the primary blog homepages came because I had noted, over the past few years, how much Instagram had come to dominate many bloggers' strategies for building an online presence, promoting brand partners, and directing traffic to their websites. In Chapter One, I spend some time unpacking the genre elements and affordances that make Instagram a particularly fertile ground for the formation of intimate publics and micro-publics, looking at how content posted on that platforms can address multiple, intersecting micro-publics that speak to different experiences of what it means to life well as an x subject. I have not discussed other platforms, such as YouTube, with the same degree of sustained attention, even though some bloggers rely heavily on that platform to build an audience. To me, it simply made the most sense to focus on Instagram for a case study of travel bloggers, as it seems to be the social media platform of choice within that genre. If I had focused on fitness bloggers, on the other hand, such an analysis of Youtube and the kinds of self-presentations it encourages, as well as the kinds of communities it incubates, might have played

a more important role in my analysis, since bloggers in this genre sometimes build their fame posted instructional videos on that platform.

My approach to close reading the content I examined in this work resembled, to a large extent, the way any other reader might initially approach the content. Although I analyse the way bloggers set up their homepages to try to understand how they prompt visitors to navigate their site, taking into account features into the interface design that coax readers into certain kinds of readings, such as the trend among travel bloggers to place a "get to know me" button prominently in the centre of the blog landing page, most of the individual posts I ended up discussing, I came across through other navigational paths. Much of the blogger content I came into contact with, I accessed initially because it had been mentioned in the GOMI forums. Then I would follow the navigational pathways set up for me—metatags and related links set up by the blogger—to find other content. Other times, I would take the blogger's Instagram page as a starting point, since I was following several of the recurring case studies examined here on my personal account. In this way, my encounters with my objects of study were an ongoing aspect of my personal life and in that way unfolded somewhat organically.

Where my reading strategy departed from the casual browsing of an ordinary reader was that I tried to apply a more rigorous self-reflexivity to the process by taking inventory of the directions the blogs content seems to pull me, and asking myself whether the directions I took were reflective of how the blogger and the affordances of the interface were prompting me to read, or whether my navigational decisions were evidence of my personals interests and idiosyncrasies. When an Instagram posts lists dozens of hashtags linking it to—and situating it within—larger ecologies of content speaking to a particular mood, experience, or demographic, to what extent does that work situate the reader as a participant in online publics? This is a topic

I explore in more depth in my analysis of how blogger production on Instagram situates blog content within multiple overlapping intimate publics and smaller micro-publics.

Chapter 1 provides a roadmap for understanding and reading the personal lifestyle blog, both in its function as a transmedia, autobiographical lifestyle guide, and as a living document consumed and interpreted within the context of networked intimate publics. First, through a case study of solo female travel blog *The Young Adventuress,* this chapter traces how the design of contemporary lifestyle blogs has departed from older, chronologically-organized layouts and logics, evolving into transmedia autobiographical texts. These transmedia texts consist of assemblages of interlinked, location-specific genres that contribute to a larger autobiographical field, which the blog consumer navigates via idiosyncratic reading pathways. Because the transmedia personal blog incorporates other social media platforms—notably Instagram—this means that the rhetorics and affordances of those platforms influence the content and audiences associated with the blog hub or home page. Second, I explain the reading method that directs my interpretation of the cultural objects I examine (personal travel blogs and feedback from intimate publics). I use the example of travel media from Black female travel bloggers/instagrammers as an illustration of how we can think of online intimate publics as, simultaneously, a cultural phenomenon tied to broader postfeminist sensibilities, a logic built into the very architectures of online publishing and the ecologies of online social life, and a reading method that considers primary texts within the context of the networks in which they circulate.

In Chapter Two, I look more closely at the increasingly influential cultural narrative of the retreat into nomadism as a model for the good life. This model takes genre precedents from the history of travel writing, as well as from the male-dominated digital nomad and lifestyle entrepreneur self-help genres, and adapts them to specifically postfeminist and intimate contexts.

I examine this postfeminist retreat into nomadism trend within the context of the tourism industry—specifically, the "backpacker" subset of this industry—with attention to how this content seems to offer a solution to economic, social, and existential malaise, with a specifically postfeminist emphasis on empowerment through the risk of participating as a consumer in a travel industry perceived to be male-dominated and male-oriented. For case studies, this chapter examines the nomadic version of the "makeover narrative" frequently referred to in postfeminist sensibility, through a close reading of travel blogger "About Me" pages and other content that assumes a before/after structure, in which the "before" version of the travel blogger led an inauthentic lifestyle tied to work without meaning, and the "after" blogger leads a nomadic life of entrepreneurial freedom (a freedom that is promoted as being available to all, with only a few small changes).

Lastly, in Chapter Three, I look at personal travel blogs through the lens of *critical* intimate publics, or "anti-fans." Using the case study of *Get Off My Internets,* a forum dedicated to critiquing lifestyle bloggers through the use of sarcastic commentary or "snark," I describe how intimate publics respond to models of the good life with reference to authenticity as an informal metric for measuring expertise in matter of the good life. After an overview of the origins and evolutions of authenticity as a site of value generally, and in celebrity/micro-celebrity culture specifically, I refer to my observation of the critical intimate public represented by the GOMI travel blogger sub-forum to derive several trends in authenticity discourse surrounding personal travel blogging, which can also be applied to personal lifestyle blogging more generally. These trends can be observed in the way that travel bloggers perform authenticity as part of their strategy for selling themselves as experts on the good life, and also through patterns in the kinds of inauthenticity-based criticisms that appear in GOMI as a critical intimate public.

The trends I observe are: the careful management of brand relationships and sponsorships in personal blogging, where evidence of monetization is often viewed as evidence of inauthenticity; blogger denials (and anti-fans accusations) of special privilege stemming from assumptions that a particular socio-economic background has contributed to the success bloggers' claim as their authority in matters of the good life; bloggers' use of intimate registers to communicate authentic personality through strategies like describing moments of difficulty or uncertainty, which critical publics can in turn interpret as "staged" existential backstages; and, lastly, bloggers referring to a series of less authentic others (other, less adventurous people stuck in conventional jobs back home, other, less "off the beaten track" tourists, and other, less authentic bloggers in the same genre niche).

Chapter 1: The Personal Blog as Transmedia Lifestyle Guide and its Participation in Intimate [Micro] Publics

In this chapter, I set up a method for reading personal lifestyle blogs that takes into consideration, first, that personal blogs are forms of multi-site, transmedia auto/biography, and, second, that personal blogs address multiple publics of varying size and intimacy simultaneously. This method assumes that we can determine something of a blog's rhetorical intent and target audience by looking closely at its formal features and strategic deployment of available affordances. Lifestyle bloggers develop strategies for accommodating the diverse navigational habits that develop alongside evolutions in how people access lifestyle content online. Rich examples of these strategies can be found in popular travel blogs by women. Notably, contemporary lifestyle blogs of this kind operate as transmedia lifestyle guides that encourage consumers to peruse content in a non-chronological, mood or interest-based style. Lifestyle bloggers also participate in online intimate publics by targeting content to specific demographics through strategic hashtagging. By choosing hashtags that signal their participation in multiple (often overlapping) publics of varying degrees of niche, travel bloggers on Instagram address multiple publics simultaneously, some of which are more general (such as publics dedicated to travel broadly), but many of which are "intimate" in the sense that they centre around points of identification, or shared experiences of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject. Awareness of the extent to which personal travel bloggers craft their content and messaging based on assumptions about their visitors (how they navigate content, and what kinds of communities they identify with) can emphasize the importance of reading lifestyle content in the context of the intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility, a reading style that informs Chapters Two and Three of this work.

The rhetorical intent of the personal lifestyle blog is to model the blogger's version of the good life (which, in the case studies examined here, is imagined as a life of retreat into nomadism) and to *sell* this vision of the good life through branding strategies aimed at performing authenticity. To engage a wide readership, lifestyle bloggers must be conscious of the different kinds of readers accessing their content, and make accommodation for the kinds of reading paths they represent. Depending on the genre niche a blogger addresses, crafting lifestyle content also involves incorporating elements of several genre precedents specific to that niche. This also means being aware of shifts in how potential readers access blog content, which is influenced by the introduction of different affordances on other, related online content-sharing platforms like Instagram. Finally, bloggers in lifestyle genres must know which intimate micro-publics to address and how to appropriately contribute to the models of the good life that interest these communities.

It is essential to not only recognize that recent lifestyle blogging practices incorporate transmedia representation strategies, but to also acknowledge that the blog's expansion into a multi-site project means that the decision to include a new platform into the network of the blog means that the blogger is by extension introducing a new set of *affordances* (possibilities for what content creators and consumers can do with the platform through making, viewing, searching, and giving feedback) into the blog, and a new set of *expectations*, as readers access the blog home page via content posted on social networking sites with their own distinct rhetorical and social norms.

Presently, lifestyle blogging practices are heavily influenced by the popular image-sharing application Instagram. Launched in 2010, Instagram is a photo-sharing application and website that allows users to create a profile and share pictures. These pictures are posted to the

user's profile, which acts as a social media profile, allowing for (limited) customization and the constructing of (if the user desires) an autobiographical archive of photographic documents of daily life. Users can choose to use the site primarily to share personal content and interact with real life acquaintances, but Instagram allows for much more than that. Using search and explore features, as well as hashtags, the user can browse content posted by anybody, so long as that person's profile is publicly accessible. Lifestyle bloggers use Instagram to reach a larger audience and draw readers back to their blog home page. They accomplish this by posting attractive photographic content that reflects the model of the good life the blogger is proposing. Additionally, this content is accompanied by text, which, similar to a traditional blog post, offers an explanation of, or the story behind, the image that is presented. These Instagram posts perform much of the same work as the familiar blog post that features text accompanied by images, except in this case it is the text that supports or explicates the image, rather than images lending visual appeal to a primarily text-based presentation. Instagram also has a relatively-new function for sharing short videos ("Stories") with followers, which bloggers using the app have incorporated into their output. Instagram stories have interesting implications for thinking about how bloggers perform authenticity through intimate registers and, in this case, by creating the condition for what feels like a more intimate or personal connection, where followers receive alerts indicating that a blogger has posted a new story, which the follower can immediately view to receive in real time updates about the blogger's location, emotional state, etc.

When they link an Instagram account to online persona, bloggers are incorporating a platform with distinct affordances. Recent work in auto/biography studies focuses on the material affordances that direct much of digital self-representation, offering analyses of how different social networking sites encourage or coax specific kinds of information from users,

resulting in the representation of subjectivities moulded by the interfaces being used (e.g. Morrison 2014; McNeill 2012). There has also been a move away from work on blogs (e.g. the essays in *Biography*'s 2003 special edition "online lives") to work focusing on online genres that do not have the obvious generic continuity with older forms of life writing that initially drew scholars to blogs.

Because I am approaching personal blogs as encompassing multiple sites, an awareness of how affordances vary across sites is necessary, as it leads to nuances in generic expectations and how authenticity is read/performed. The word "affordance" was coined by James Gibson in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979), in which he describes how animals interact with their physical environment, stating that "the *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*" (119). Gibson's neologism that implies the "complementarity" of agent and environment, because what an environment affords is relative to what the agent can do. Don Norman later adapts this idea to industrial design in *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988, 2013). In the context of human-made objects, he describes an affordance as "a relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine just how the object could possibly be used" (11), departing from Gibson in his emphasis that an affordance is not a property of a thing, but a *relationship* that depends on agent's ability to perceive what can be done with a thing.

The concept of affordances has more recently been adapted to descriptions of design in digital interfaces. In the context of digital sites for self-representation such as blogs and related social media, any discussion of affordances must acknowledge the "rhetorical potentialities and constraints specific to a medium of communication" (Miller & Shephard 2009, 281). As Morrison observes, "We are guided not only by the often-implicit discursive precedent of the

genre in which we write or speak but also by the material affordances and constraints of the objects through which we structure these stories of ourselves" (2014, 117). Miller and Shepherd note the often subtle ways in which affordances guide the kind of content that is produced through a particular interface: "An affordance," they write, "is *directional*, it *appeals* to us, by making some forms of communicative interaction possible or easy and other difficult or impossible" (281). Morrison talks about affordances in relation to Facebook, which imposes more constraints on the kinds of content its users can create than traditional blogging services like Blogger or Wordpress. Morrison notes that, in addition to determining how and where content appears on a page, Facebook "coaxes" certain kinds of disclosures by asking users to share "what's on their mind," or, to use a more recent example, by inviting users to re-share old content on the anniversary of the day it was originally posted, coaxing nostalgic reflection. In an update to her 2003 work on web diaries, Sorapure observes that "As Facebooking and similar activities become common practice for millions of people, autobiography theory needs to account for this blended/cyborg model of authorship, where the interfaces of writing strongly influence self-representation" (268), with many web applications contributing to the development of a particular kind of "autobiographical I," one which is "socially constructed through a range of interactive features offered by blogs and social networking sites" (269).

Blogging sites are less likely to use these kinds of overt tactics, but there are still lots of ways to think about how blog-building applications invite us to create certain kinds of content. For example, popular blogging services like Wordpress come with templates that invite users to follow generic precedent by positioning certain kinds of content in specific positions. Also, bloggers typically post content across sites that encompass sites like Instagram that coax certain kinds of behaviours, such as encouraging users to attach hashtags to their content, which then

situates the content within overlapping networks on content claiming to participate in an ongoing conversation on a particular topic.

Instagram's affordances encourage the relatively rapid formation of intimate publics through the use of directed hashtags, and the easy spread of content addressed to specific or niche micro publics, prompting bloggers to develop strategies for simultaneously addressing multiple publics with their own distinct investments in models of the good life that overlap in some respects and diverge in others. Instagram's magazine-like browsing affordances means that bloggers are also catering to lifestyle content consumers less interested in autobiographical content and more interested in an aesthetic or mood-based navigational experience.

Personal blogs are increasingly moving away from the reverse-chronological, text-dominant form of early personal blogs, towards a highly visual, non-chronological form, operating as *transmedia* autobiographical lifestyle guides inviting endless possible pathways of engagement across several interlinked publishing platforms with distinct genre norms and sets of affordances. The transmedia lifestyle guide form is a reflection of the rhetorical intent of the personal lifestyle blog, which in many ways imitates the lifestyle magazine as a curated manual and aesthetic for living well according to the guidelines of a specific niche, where depictions of the good life might be based on different activities such as fitness or homemaking. In personal lifestyle blogs, the blogger models a niche-specific version of the postfeminist neoliberal conception of the good life, a modelling that is accompanied by the promise that the reader, by self-examining, self-disciplining, and consuming in the ways outlined by the blogger as self-empowerment brand, can achieve the lifestyle depicted in the blog as lifestyle manual.

Thinking about application-specific affordances is not only important to understanding the strategies involved in how bloggers create a navigational field of content spread across

multiple locations, but also understanding how the lifestyle content generated by bloggers is taken up by intimate publics in an ongoing negotiation of what it means to live well as a postfeminist neoliberal subject. Later in this chapter, I examine how Instagram invites participation from intimate publics, contributing to the development of a seemingly intimate online setting for bloggers and publics to discuss areas of shared investment. I argue that Instagram specifically encourages the formation of intimate micro-publics that coalesce around sets of hashtags that speak to a particular aspect of the good life. I use a case study of how Jamaican-Canadian travel blogger *Oneika the Traveller* incorporates hashtags that straddle multiple publics—budget/adventure travel, solo female travel, and Black female travel—and adapts her output to each of these intersecting publics.

Participants in these intimate publics (users who give feedback in the form of comments, likes, re-posts, or who use the same hashtags in their content) are ultimately a small portion of the overall traffic to bloggers' lifestyle content in relation to a large, diverse, and predominately anonymous audience, whose engagement with lifestyle content is difficult to trace and describe. In the absence of available data on how the majority of lifestyle bloggers' readers access and engage with their content, I look instead at how successful bloggers (using the case study of *The Young Adventuress)* organize their content, which gives us an indication of the kind of visitors the blogger expects will be accessing her site, and what their navigational habits might look like. Finally, I want to clarify that the two case studies I include in this chapter are not meant to demonstrate opposing strategies for addressing distinct kinds of readers—rather, I think that most successful lifestyle blogs will have developed strategies for attracting browsing-based navigational strategies, as well as engaging with multiple intimate [micro] publics.

Identifying the Personal Lifestyle Blog: Rhetoric and Form

Before examining the influence of Instagram on the personal blogging industry, I want to clarify what I mean by the personal lifestyle blog. In her book-length study of travel blogs (2016), Ruth Deepti Azariah observes that blogs are hard to situate, either as a genre or a form, because they "shift from intimacy to objectivity, from monologic description to dialogue with readers and from topical descriptions of place to internal reflections of the author, sometimes within a single entry" (10). I want to suggest that the constant shifting between genres and forms that we see in lifestyle blogging becomes less of an issue when identifying them generically *if* we identify personal lifestyle blogs primarily based on the rhetorical action they perform, which is, I would argue, the modelling of and instruction on the good life. I am thinking about personal lifestyle blogs as transmedia autobiographical guides or manuals for versions of the good life. What bloggers promote as the good life varies according to lifestyle genre, though their models for living well are usually inflected by postfeminist and neoliberal sensibilities, promoting visions of the good life as one of retreat from the dissatisfactions of the traditional workforce into either entrepreneurial domesticity or entrepreneurial nomadism.

How do we identify this specific kind of blog—this postfeminist transmedia autobiographical lifestyle guide—from the abundance of other modes and forms identifying themselves as blogs? Even the question "what is a blog?" invites diverse answers. It is pressing, therefore, to address questions related to the blog itself as genre, rhetorical mode, social action, and transmedia self-representational project.

In her influential essay "Genre as Social Action" (1984), Carolyn Miller proposes that we think about genre in terms of what it *does* rather than how it looks, arguing that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centred not on the substance or the form of discourse but on

the action it is used to accomplish" (151). She proposes that a definition of genre based on action "is interpretable only against a context of situation and through the attributing of motives" (152). Drawing on Lloyd Bitzer's concept of exigence in relation to genre (1968), Miller argues that "exigence is a social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need" (157) and a "social motive" (158). According to Miller's definition, genre can be understood as "a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent" (163).

In this chapter, I am tracing how travel bloggers adapt their content to the exigencies associated with how lifestyle content circulates online. Bloggers not only accommodate for the migration of visitors from other social media platforms, configuring the navigational structures of their autobiographical output to allow for a seamless transition from highly visual, browsing-based platforms, but they also respond to the exigencies of online intimate publics, which means adapting rhetorical strategies for effectively representing models of the good life to the social context of the [micro] publics the blogger addresses, and how the blogger understands these publics' experiences. Adapting to the exigencies of diverse publics takes different forms depending on the publishing platform, and for this reason, lifestyle bloggers are tasked with continually revising the formal attributes of their content to better enact the social actions they want to perform within the context of the publics and platforms in question.

For this reason, focusing on the rhetorical action performed by blogging content does not render the examination of formal features irrelevant. My examination of intimate publics here, and in Chapters Two and Three, relies on close reading strategies rather than surveys and interviews, and it is therefore largely through close examination of lifestyle blogs' formal

attributes that I hope to gain an understanding of what rhetorical actions are being performed, and in response to what perceived social exigence.

The influence of exigence is a recurring consideration in recent analyses of personal blogs. Kathryn Grafton's "Situating the public social actions of blog posts" looks at how blogs straddling multiple public discourse communities negotiate or manage the exigencies of those communities. Laurie McNeill refers to the concept of exigence or social motive to describe the phenomenon of six-word memoir in her contribution to *Identity Technologies* (2014). Aimée Morrison uses Miller's concept of genre as social action in her analysis of how "mommy blogs" are a specific kind of creative and interpersonal social engagement that responds to the exigence (isolation, desire for guidance) of early parenthood (2010, 1), echoing Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd's claim that blogging responds to exigence of "self-expression and community development" (2004, 9).

I agree with Amy Devitt's assertion that genre consists of a "fusion of form, substance, and action and should be re-examined as contextualised form" (27) and that we therefore must attend to "the forms that make generic action happen" (27). Devitt proposes discussing genre with the goal of understanding "what people interact with when encountering and using genres" (30) rather than attempting to classify genres into taxonomies. For example, for blogs "form includes words, sentences, organizational structure, format, layout, and other visual elements" (33), elements that must be analyzed carefully in order to understand how they are deployed strategically in response to rhetorical exigence. To give an in-depth inventory of the formal features particular to lifestyle blogging genres is beyond the scope of what I am aiming to accomplish in this chapter (and such attributes change so often that any such inventory would quickly be rendered obsolete). I will, however, briefly pause to analyze some key generic

features of the personal lifestyle blog in its current stage of evolution, which will help us to identify both what a blog *is*, and how a blog *works*. Such a consideration requires thinking about matters of form and rhetorical action simultaneously.

First, the pressing question—what is a blog? The term blog tends to be thrown around loosely, and although the word is more often associated with the personal and autobiographical, it has other manifestations. For example, it is also commonly used in corporate marketing strategies. It is normal for corporate websites to have a blog section, where writing staff/freelancers contribute content that is meant to lend authenticity to the website/corporation by using a more casual, personal tone (even if the identity of the blogger is unidentified, or shifting, or suspect—I knew someone who blogged under 8 different names for an online content mill).

I characterize blogs as bodies of content with a home page or hub that can be self-hosted or hosted through a blogging service like Wordpress. Blog home pages may or may not be linked to pages on other social media sites—these pages are not blogs themselves, but can be part of blogs. Miller and Shepherd (2009) propose three main phases in the evolution of blogs as online genre: the first phase consisted of bloggers who were highly technologically-literate, knew how to code, and could find and re-post content without search engines, usually people in tech industry talking about technology; the second phase saw the rise of blogging services that made it easy for beginners to publish content, and is characterized by the proliferation of personal home pages and blogs; the third phase coincides with the rise of social networking sites (early 2000s), which the authors view as a continuation of the blogging genre. Miller and Shepherd argue that the biggest change ushered in by phase three has to do with how readers access blogs, with more and more readers finding blogs by following a link on a SNS (Social Networking Site)

user's profile (268). They seem to be talking about the blog-like features that used to be a function of the then-popular Myspace. At the time of my writing, the blog remains distinct from a Facebook or Twitter profile, although both of those sites can fall under the umbrella of a blogger's digital presence. Smith and Watson also note that blogs are distinct from SNSes, although they suggest that this is because blogs are "textual forms" while SNSes are "multimedia formats" (2014, 72). Although most blogs will contain more and longer chunks of text than most social media profiles, popular blogging genres like lifestyle and travel blogs are characterized by image-heavy content. I would argue that what differentiates a blog from a SNS profile is more a matter of rhetorical action than of form—a Facebook profile is usually directed to friends and acquaintances, but a successful blog (defined in terms of traffic) is addressed to a larger audience.

Miller and Shepherd write that "*The* blog, it seems clear now, is a technology, a medium, a constellation of affordances and not a genre" (2009, 283). They are partly responding to their own earlier essay on blogs (2004), which focused on personal blogs with diary-style entries, and posited two main rhetorical functions for blogs: "self-expression and community development" (9). Their later essay recognizes that the word blog has come to encompass a lot of different kinds of content (Miller and Shepherd use the example of the news or current events blog), with only a few persistent points of commonality that alert us to the fact that we are reading a blog: reverse chronology, brevity of entries, present-ness of narrative (284). But even these features are becoming less persistent (e.g. more sophisticated blogs feature the most recent entry on homepage, but also encourage browsing by category via site menus and metatags). Defining blogs as a technology does not seem wholly accurate, in that this definition only gets at one aspect of blogs: the homepage or primary URL associated with the blog, usually hosted by a

blogging service like Wordpress. If we define blogs as a technology, we have to think of content posted on other sites like Instagram as being separate from the blog, even though it is created by the blogger and continues the rhetorical work of the blog.

Until recently, popular personal blogs featured a homepage that retained certain similarities to blogs 20 years ago (most recent posts featured prominently, most posts still text-heavy, comments sections on every post). Within some lifestyle genres, even these common characteristics associated with the personal blog are changing, encouraging us to think of personal blogs as forms of transmedia autobiography, existing across sites and inviting endless possible pathways of engagement. In a recent chapter on travel blogs (2016), Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas take inventory of some of the ways in which personal blogs have evolved in recent years, suggesting that "though still recognizably a text-based mode, characterized by discrete entries or 'posts' in which users narrate subjective reflection or commentary," blogs have become increasingly visual in nature, largely due to "the speed and ease of mobile technologies and the accessibility and prevalence of phone cameras." They suggest that, in recent years, travel blogs adopt a "generic style" that "almost always an 'illustrated' account," suggesting that written narrative is primary to the travel blog genre, with images supplying an important, but secondary, role. I think it is important to take note of recent changes to personal blog layouts as reflections of a generic shift from the personal blog as a digital descendant of the diary, to the personal blog as transmedia lifestyle manual and descendent of the lifestyle magazine—in which the visual component can no longer be thought of as secondary.

Lifestyle blogging, like other forms of digital micro-celebrity, is typically performed across sites: as Emma Maguire observes in her study of video blogger Jenna Marbles (Mourey), "the Jenna Marbles personal brand works as a composite cultural text across media platforms and

digital spaces" (2015, 73). By using multiple sites (usually 5-10) that link back to a hub or home page, bloggers can reach a wider public and generate more traffic. Because higher traffic usually comes with more opportunities to make money through advertisements and sponsorship, it is likely that many bloggers' pursuit of monetary capital is accompanied by a desire for social capital, which can be measured in a variety of ways, such as by sheer number of visitors, level of visitor engagement (e.g. subscribing to content, sharing, posting comments), or indicators of "prestige (e.g. making it onto another blogger's "top ten blogs in *x* category" list). Whether blogging success is determined by monetary or social capital (or both), success comes with the caveat that the work of maintaining a consistent blogging persona and convincingly rendering authenticity becomes more complex, as bloggers grapple with maintaining the appearance of consistency while adapting their content to meet the generic expectations of a broad range of sites.

We can no longer think of blogs as being primarily text-based, individual websites, but must rather think of them as multi-site, "transmedia" (i.e. across media) forms of self-representation that feature networks of interlinked platforms (e.g. Instagram and YouTube) and media (including, in some cases, print media). Lifestyle bloggers demonstrate not only an awareness of the affordances and rhetorical demands of the various platforms they employ, but work to accommodate/encourage different kinds of *readers*, and, relatedly, different kinds of *reading pathways* of *transmedia engagement*.

Navigating Pathways of Engagement in the Transmedia Lifestyle Blog

Azariah makes an observation of travel blogs that we can apply to personal blogs in general, stating that "the self as travel blogger is networked across multiple online platforms. Each of these tools comes with its own set of affordances that travel bloggers use in various

ways to distribute their blogs. This mainly involves making careful choices and controlling the information publicly displayed to audiences" (126). She also suggests that this networked blogger-self stretches "beyond the borders of the blog" through the use of different platforms with different sets of affordances. I propose a small but important alteration to this phrasing, and argue that the spread of blog content across several platforms *extends* the borders of the blog itself. As the borders of the networked personal blog expand, the pathways by which readers discover and interact with blogs multiply.

I think adopting the term transmedia might prove helpful in conceptualizing the multi-site, networked blogger persona. The term is most famously associated with Henry Jenkins, who primarily has media franchises in mind when he uses it. Jenkins conceives of transmedia as a conceptual tool for thinking about how fictional stories are disseminated across different platforms and locations: he writes in a blog post on the topic that "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" ("Transmedia Storytelling 101," 2007). There are some wording choices here that we should problematize, particularly the word fiction, which excludes what is perhaps the most common instance of transmedia storytelling—the everyday transmedia self-representational output of casual social media users, which is also not always systematic or unified and coordinated, although the effort and planning behind even casual (non-micro-celebrity) social accounts should not be underestimated. Jenkins' articulation of transmedia: imposes limitations on a term that seems well-suited to the discussion of networked online identity work and persona construction. The term has become somewhat of a marketing buzzword (e.g. marketing literature dedicated to so-called brand storytelling, and to instruct on how to harness the affordances of

multiple media platforms to engage the consumer in an immersive ad campaign), but I think transmedia has great (and at this point, unexamined) potential for auto/biography researchers thinking about how life stories, or personas, are articulated and discovered across multiple sites.

Markku Eskelinen (2012) insists that Jenkins' transmedia is a "catchphrase" and should be considered "far removed from academic discourse" (334). His response to Jenkins' use of storytelling is helpful, though: Eskelinen writes that transmedia practice is "not limited to stories. There are many other cultural forms, modes, products, processes, and practices that are transmedial, especially if transmediality is described as loosely as Jenkins has described it" (334). Jenkins' definition also "reduces storytelling to stories" and "reduces stories to characters and fictional worlds" (334). Eskelinen suggests that instead of thinking of stories as the key elements that move across media in transmedia storytelling, we should break stories down into "micro-ecologies of events and existents" (335), where what we witness is less a matter of expanding storylines and storytelling, but of the "fragmentation and recombination" of elements of story. While the word ecosystem to me evokes something that occurs naturally, or crops up organically, the transmedia systems offered by personal blogs have a high degree of planning and strategy to them—evidence of authorship in the traditional sense of the word—that we cannot ignore.

Cardell and Douglass suggest that the appeal of the travel blog is tied to "its authenticity as a first-person, eyewitness account and to the author's persona as an honest autobiographer of their experience." I want to make an addition to this statement by clarifying that this appeal is specific to a certain kind of reader—the serial reader who returns to a specific blog intermittently, or subscribes to a blogger on one or more media platforms, out of an interest (whether the interest resembles that of a fan, or of an anti-fan) in the blogger's persona and

autobiographical narrative. Casual or one-off visitors accessing a blog through google search or by encountering content from the blog on other social media platforms (clicking on an image in Instagram's "explore" feed, for example) might also be attracted to the travel blog over other sources of travel-related information, because of the apparent authenticity it offers as subjective and less obviously commercial accounts. When it comes to these casual readers, though, I am reduced to guess work, because these kinds of readers are less likely to participate in publics by publishing feedback.

As for the appeal of the blog being in the author persona, this is true for serial readers who visit the blog regularly for updates on the bloggers' life (and scholars interested in auto/biography and persona tend to gravitate towards this kind of reading and reader)—but these are not the only kinds of blog readers, and likely are not even the most common kind of lifestyle content-consumer. The second half of this chapter, along with Chapters Two and Three, will focus on blogs and blog-consumers as participants in the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, from commenters on Instagram posts to anti-fans gathering in off-site forums founded on critique. However, I think it is important to recognize that successful personal travel blogs adapt their blog content and design to appeal to a variety of readers. Serial, participating (e.g. giving feedback) readers with an interest in the blog's autobiographical elements and how they address aspects of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject are helpful to us because they give insight into how larger cultural trends, investments, and anxieties are negotiated in online spaces. First, however, I want to focus on a different kind of blog consumer, whose existence can be inferred (despite these kinds of users leaving no trail in the form of feedback) through recent shifts in how bloggers design their content to support a particular kind of navigation resembling the aesthetic or mood-based browsing popular on Instagram.

Case Study: *The Young Adventuress* and Transmedia Navigation

Based on how many popular travel bloggers are formatting their home pages, it appears that there is some incentive for lifestyle bloggers to frame their blog as a kind of storehouse for personalized information, rather than as a serialized autobiography. Bloggers create posts that are clearly designed to answer commonly-searched queries, in language that ensures the post will appear in searches related to those queries. This kind of strategizing is one aspect of the umbrella of tactics for generating traffic known as Search Engine Optimization or SEO, which encompasses several strategies for ensuring that content will appear as high as possible in the list of results from relevant queries on internet search engines. For example, bloggers in domestic lifestyle genres rely on popular instructional or how-to genres like recipe posts to draw traffic from search engines to their content, while nomad bloggers include posts that respond to popular queries like "how much does it cost to backpack in Europe" and "how to make money while travelling"—contributing to the impression that much of the content posted on travel blogs is nearly identical across websites. These are the kind of strategies for drawing in new readers that have long been associated with the blog as a single website or homepage. While the above tactics are still important to blogging success, there are also strategies specific to the personal blog as a *transmedia* network of content, where consumers migrate between publishing platforms as they navigate through a blogger's content.

Another way that lifestyle bloggers attract new readers is by reaching users of social networking sites that have a browsing- or curation-based structure, with popular examples being Pinterest and Instagram. These are web/mobile applications where lifestyle content abounds, largely due to their emphasis on highly visual content that can be discovered through search- and exploration-based affordances where users can search using specific keywords, browse by

themed tags, or have algorithms recommend new content based on how the user's previous interactions with the application. In order to demonstrate how lifestyle blog home pages are changing their visual appearance and navigational logics to accommodate the expectations of users migrating from image-sharing platforms, I will turn to the example of *The Young Adventuress*, which has recently undergone a site re-design that reflects this shift. The layout design we see here incorporates some trends specific to the travel blogging subgenre, but the overall shift to a non-chronological and highly visual browsing experience is applicable to other lifestyle genres.

Liz Carlsson of *The Young Adventuress* is an American blogger based in New Zealand who started blogging in 2010. Her personal brand centres around being a "solo adventuress." She is also a prolific Instagrammer with over 200,000 followers on the platform. She has publically revealed that she makes "well into six figures" through affiliate marketing on her blog, offering guided tours, and freelance work in social media and marketing (Schwarz, *news.com.au*). Her web presence suggests her skill in both photography and web design, specifically in the way her blog interface evokes a mood-based browsing aesthetic.

The current trend in the travel blogging subgenre is to greet new visitors to the blog home page with an oversized image of the blogger and an introduction. In the image below, we have an image of Matthew Kepnes of *Nomadic Matt* (who currently dominates the travel blogging industry with his budget-focused, guidebook-like content), apparently captured mid-conversation, in which Matt looks particularly real and approachable. The image is paired with superimposed text, "Hi! I'm Nomadic Matt, and I'm here to help you travel anywhere better, cheaper, & longer."

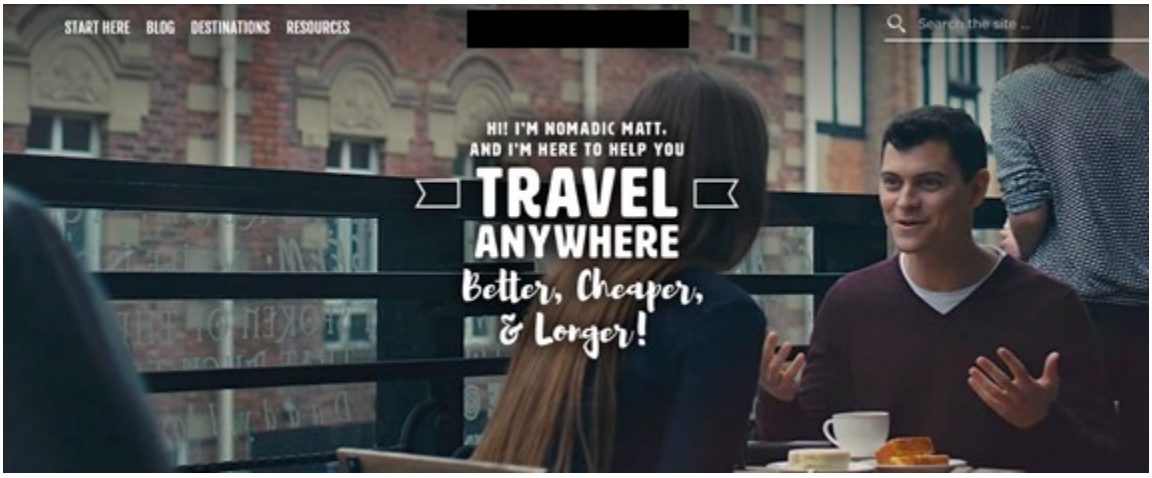

Illustration 1: Welcome image, nomadicmatt.com, captured Dec 11, 2017

Similarly, on arriving at youngadventuress.com, the user is greeted by a full screen image of Liz (viewed from behind) surveying a mountainous landscape[6], paired with the greeting "Hi, I'm Liz" and the subheading "A normal girl living her messiest dreams," accompanied by a link with the caption "Get to know me." This greeting page situates the blogger persona as central to the work being performed by the blog, and suggests to visitors that the blog home page is a kind

[6] Although the main argument of this section is that travel bloggers are following more widespread trends in how lifestyle content gets circulated through social media channels in the form of compelling visuals that fit particular aesthetics, another possibility is that travel blogs inherit this privileging of visual evidence from older forms of travel media.

One way that travel blogging's continuities with earlier visual culture associated with travel media could be in the ways that they draw on form of visual shorthand. An example of this kind of shorthand is the figure of the solo traveller viewed from behind, which is a popular image in contemporary travel social media. As Rob Gallagher pointed out to me in his remarks on an early draft of this section, this kind of imagery, which is used by *The Young Adventuress* here, and in travel blogs more generally, is reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's "Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog" (c. 1818). The visual trope of the nomadic or wandering subject viewed from behind as (s)he surveys a swathe of unexplored territory extends at least from the romantic scenes of pre-Raphaelite painting to contemporary travel blogs.

Another possibility for how visual shorthand evolves is through what Urry and Larsen call the "hermeneutic circle of representation" (2011), which has to do with the fact that tourist photographs largely replicate existing images. For example, after Murad Osmann's travel Instagram account went viral in 2013, one trope has become a common Instagram shorthand for romantic (with a lower-case 'r') wanderlust: the image of the anonymous female figure, viewed from behind, holding the photographer's hand as she guides him through exotic locations.

of entry point for an exploration of a large autobiographical transmedia project.

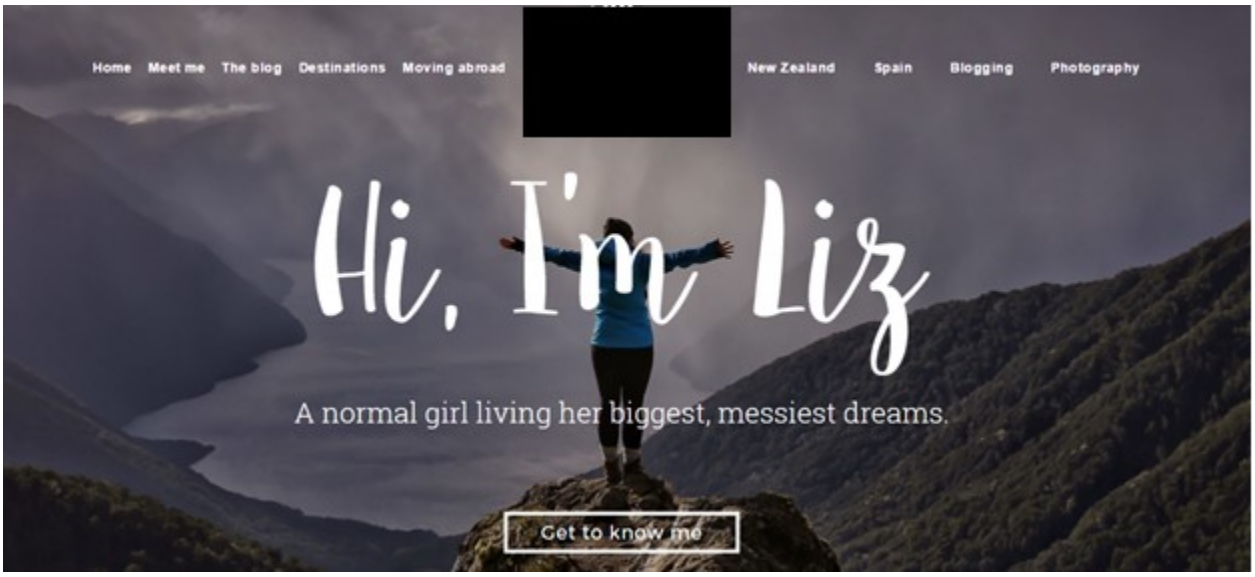

Illustration 2: Welcome image, youngadventuress.com, captured June 3, 2017

At least, readers interested in life stories will see it this way. I am the kind of reader who would first click "get to know me," paying the most attention to content that contributes to Liz's persona construction. Other readers might skip over Liz's invitation to get to know her, and migrate instead to one of several links at the top of the page organizing the blog's content by theme, including advice on specific destinations, moving abroad, or on the practice of blogging itself. The site's non-chronological, theme-based browsing affordances accommodate both readers using the blog for its guidebook-like features (information and tips of travel organized by destination and theme) and the blog reader that autobiography researchers are prone to imagine when describing what blogs do and how they are read—readers interested in the autobiographical narrative the blog appears to offer. Except in this case, the reader has to activate an autobiographical narrative through the selection of a navigational pathway through the field of possibilities offered by the transmedia personal blog.

The construction of Liz's home page sets her blog up as a transmedia storytelling experience, where readers interested in Liz can learn more about her, and those looking only for travel tips can quickly navigate to the regions/topics that interest them. However, only a fraction of those accessing Liz's content will see this page first, if they see it at all. This fraction would be readers already familiar with *The Young Adventuress* accessing the home page on a repeat visit, or those accessing it using a link (for example, via one of countless "Best ____ Bloggers" lists). But how does the experience/readership change when visitors arrive at the home page through one of several social media accounts connected to the blog? We can be sure that the blogger has thought of this, and caters her individual social media accounts to attracting new readers by trapping the attention of casual browsers.

In addition to arriving at blog content through search engine queries and following links posted elsewhere, users can discover bloggers via web/mobile applications like Instagram. While many casual users access Instagram primarily to post daily minutiae and view the posts of real-life acquaintances, another popular use of Instagram is to browse (either by following hashtags or by viewing Instagram's recommendations using the explore option) content from strangers around the world based on one's niche interests. This kind of user might be looking for entertainment or inspiration from their browsing of lifestyle content. This kind of browsing by theme has an element of aesthetic enjoyment, as well as an aspirational and curational quality, much like the experience of browsing a lifestyle magazine. Because *The Young Adventuress* takes good pictures and is popular on Instagram, her photos will likely show up in the explore feeds of anybody who regularly interacts with travel accounts. She also uses many popular hashtags in order to ensure that her images crop up in the feeds of potential readers with

overlapping interests, such as #explore #wanderlust #instatravel, the generic #instagood, as well as hashtags specific to the location and contents of a particular post

In the screenshot below, we see one of Liz's Instagram posts appearing alongside similar posts from other Instagrammers, in a feed of content associated with the hashtag #loveireland. Liz's post is in the top right corner:

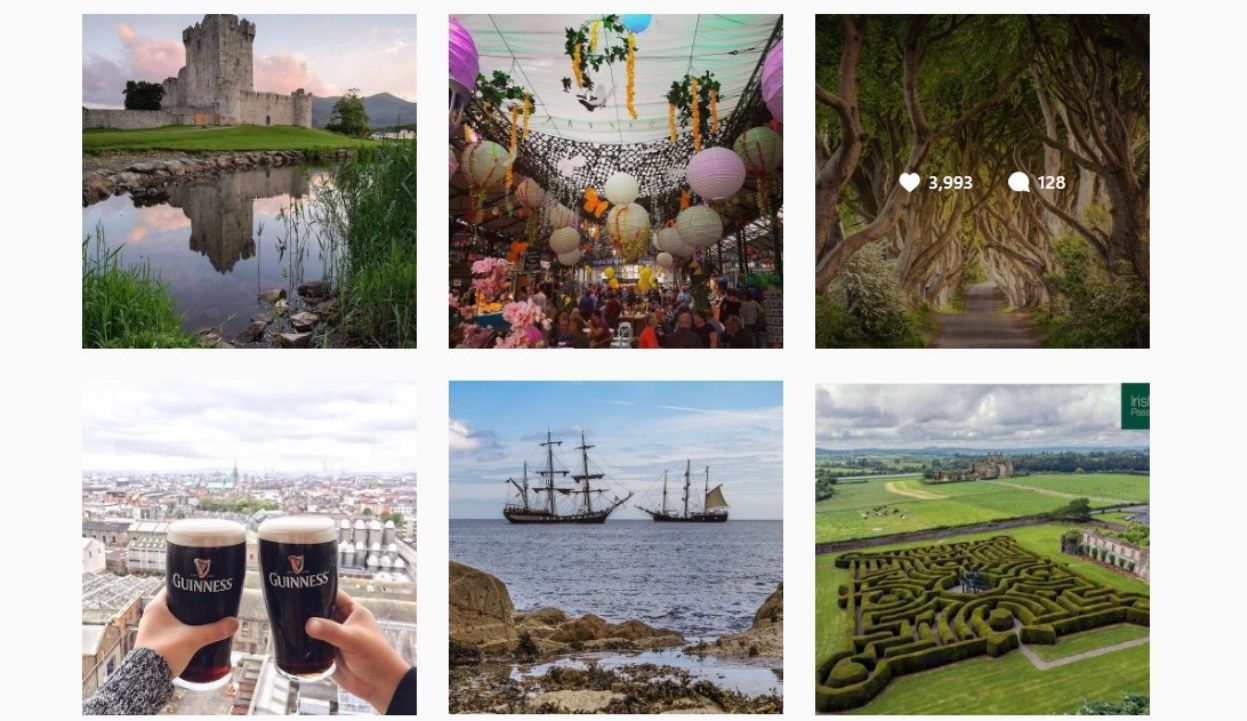

Illustration 3: Instagram feed of posts with hashtag #loveireland, captured June 3, 2017

A user browsing this hashtag on Instagram might be attracted to the mood or atmosphere captured by Liz's picture, and click on the image to view a full description. If the user is interested in viewing more content from Liz, they might click on her username to view her Instagram profile. From there, this hypothetical user might decide to become a regular consumer of Liz's content by following her on Instagram—or they might take things one step further by following the link in her profile to her blog's home page.

Illustration 4: Instagram post by @youngadventuress, June 3, 2017. Captured June 4, 2017.

The reader who accesses Liz's transmedia autobiography (we might call it a transmedia persona, or a transmedia guide to living) are likely seeking entertainment (to be transported to a far-away destination) or inspiration (planning a trip)—or they might be looking for nothing in particular. They might consume Liz's Instagram content without ever making their way back to her blogging home page, but for those Instagram readers who *do* read Liz's Instagram profile bio and follow the link back her blog, Liz's new layout ensures that the transition will be as seamless as possible.

Following any of the potential pathways of exploration available on the blog's front page introduces the user to something conspicuously similar to the experience of browsing Instagram:

a series of unlabeled square images, where the navigational logic is based on hovering over whatever image seems the most visibly appealing until a description of the post appears[7]:

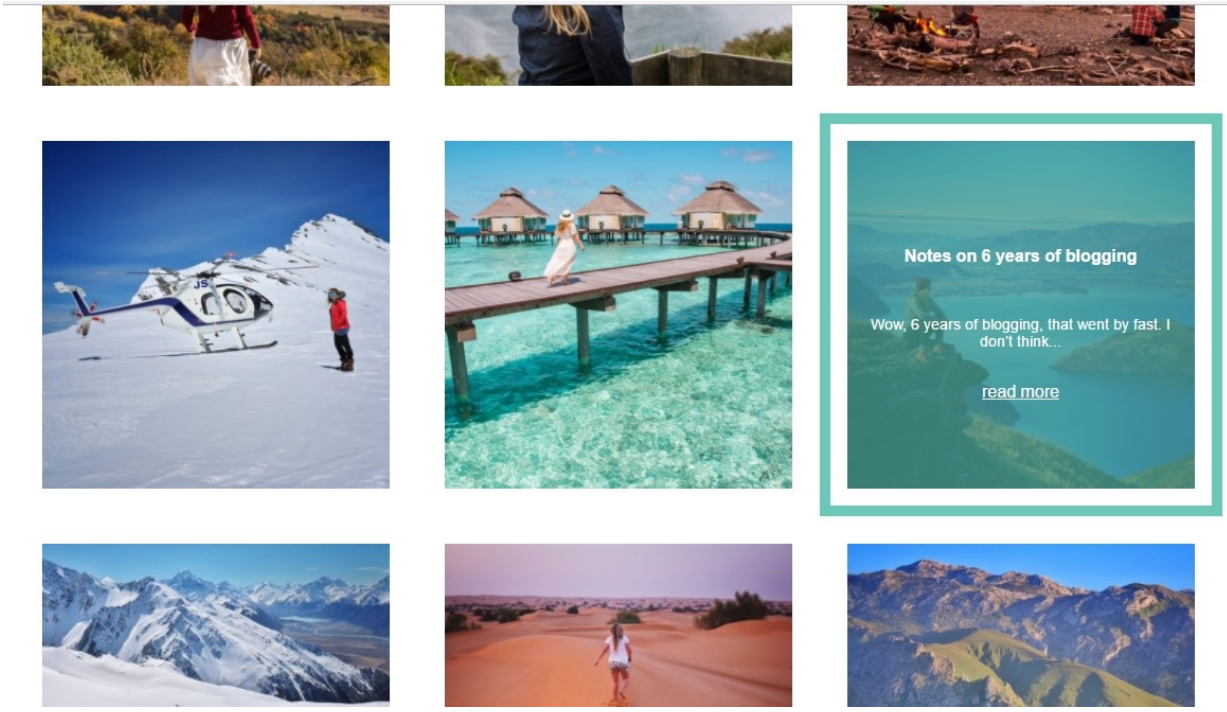

Illustration 5: Browsing by "This Will Probably Get Me Hatemail" tag, youngadventuress.com, captured June 3 2017

Blog layouts are evolving to embrace a more exploratory, non-linear, non-chronological *transmedia* format, and I would argue that this is largely to create a fluid transition for readers accessing lifestyle blogs via diverse entry points. *The Young Adventuress*'s transition to a layout that places text *secondary* to visuals makes the move from Instagram browsing (usually a non-specific, inspirational/aspirational activity) more natural. In the second half of this chapter, I will look at another way that the blog's evolution into a transmedia format impacts the work that goes into bloggers' self-presentation across platforms. The personal blog's close relationship to

[7] In the mobile version of theyoungadventuress.com, the posts appear with captions already superimposed, due to the absence of a hovering feature of mobile interfaces. However, the website otherwise retains its Instagram-like appearance and browsing-based navigation.

Instagram not only encourages its move towards achronality and a visuals-based browsing of autobiographical content, but this relationship also means that the blogger's interactions with, and targeting of, different publics with varying degrees of intimacy, occur in *traceable* ways. Also, we see an acceleration of the way that publics coalesce around themed content through the application's affordances.

Negotiating The Good Life in the Intimate Publics of Postfeminist Online Culture

Before I look more closely at how Instagram's affordances encourage the formation of intimate publics, I first turn to the concept of the intimate public as a framework for understanding how creators and consumers of online lifestyle content negotiate conceptions of the good life, and, specifically, how this good life should be understood in relation to experiences of living as a postfeminist female subject in neoliberal western society. I borrow Lauren Berlant's ideas about the intimate publics of American women's culture, and adapt them to the affordances and ecologies of online social life, demonstrating how the intimate public is both a recurring cultural phenomenon that precedes blogs and social media (but is particularly encouraged by the networking affordances of digital sharing applications), and a way of reading that considers feedback posted by participants in online publics alongside primary content posted by lifestyle bloggers. I use the case of Instagram micro-publics that assemble around ideas (communicated through hashtags) related to increasingly niche identities (from communities dedicated to travel, to solo female travel, to Black solo female travel) to show how observing hashtag usage alongside post captions and responses from publics gives us insight into which publics—and by extension, which experiences of living and being in the world—the blogger addresses with her content. This reading strategy informs Chapters Two and Three of this work as well.

Personal lifestyle blogs participate in the intimate public of postfeminist online culture, a term I use to refer to both the lifestyle content produced by bloggers at all levels of popularity, and the feedback and interactions that circulate around this content via the networked affordances of the platforms bloggers use to post content. Within this intimate public, both bloggers and blog visitors are participants in a networked, intimate public sphere whose members produce and comment on the lifestyle content circulating within this public and its smaller micro-publics specific to certain lifestyle genres and niches. An important recurring task for this intimate public and its participants is the negotiation of the good life, what it consists of, and how it might be achieved. Though this task might not be recognized by participants as the end goal of their contributions to online publics, the main activities of postfeminist online intimate publics suggests its centrality: some participants produce lifestyle content that models what it means to live well; others show approval of other such models by liking, sharing, posting positive comments, and purchasing materials and services promoted by lifestyle content producers; and some post negative feedback and criticism in comments sections or off-site as in the GOMI forums.

Berlant describes the intimate public as "a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*" (2008, viii). She explains that although the autobiographical often circulates within intimate publics, this is not what makes them intimate. Rather, "what makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (viii). Even content that is not presented as autobiographical can be read by intimate publics as "autobiographies of collective experience"

(vii). It is not so much that intimate publics foster intimacy, but that they "presume intimacy" (vii). The concept of an intimate public is particularly useful for thinking about how postfeminist sensibility circulates, in so far as both intimate publics and postfeminism feature assumptions of commonality or shared experience among their adherents. For example, we might identify echoes of the intimate public of women's culture in Negra's observation that postfeminism frames certain anxieties and desires as being common to all women: "codif[ying] and essentializ[ing] femininity, relentlessly insisting that all women are bound together by a common set of innate desires, fears and concerns" (2009, 12).

The intimate public of American women's culture has to do with what Berlant calls "the unfinished business of sentimentality" and the expectation that "fantasies of the good life *can* be lived" (2). Furthermore, this intimate public understands the "social world as an affective space where people ought to be legitimated because they have feelings" (2). Berlant's analysis of some of the "the gender-marked texts of women's popular culture" in the 19th and 20th centuries focuses on literature and film, but the stuff of women's popular culture consists of a wider variety of forms and genres. I see personal lifestyle blogs as rhetorically similar to autobiography/memoir and women's magazines in particular, both of which would have been staple commodities in the intimate public Berlant describes.

The intimate public is a productive framework for thinking about contemporary personal lifestyle blogs, but it necessitates viewing bloggers as participating in a popular culture that is different from (though related to) the women's culture described by Berlant. We might think of these lifestyle bloggers as contributing to an intimate public based on a distinctly *postfeminist* sensibility. These postfeminist intimate publics have origins in earlier women's culture, assuming a similar collectiveness of experience and desire on the part of its participants, and

adopting many of the same forms. But while participants in Berlant's intimate public of women's culture are united by the pursuit of love and belonging, and are supposed to share the experience of the "bitter vigilance of the intimately disappointed" (1), the intimate public of postfeminist, online culture centers around the self-reflexive, self-disciplining, self-branding entrepreneurial female subject.

Other studies of online auto/biographical genres have used intimate publics as a framework (Cardell & Maguire 2015; Winch 2015; Morrison 2011; Poletti 2011). Morrison's work on mommy bloggers as an intimate public is interesting because she intentionally limits her sample to blogs with "a limited audience size, usually between five and one hundred regular readers" and a "limited participation in remunerative blogging practices such as advertising, sponsorship, paid reviews, or attendance at marketing junkets" (38), implying that blogs with a mass culture feel (i.e. larger readership and commercial content) do not perform the work of intimate publics. Blogs like *The Young Adventuress*, which is well-known within its market (solo female travel), are located somewhere between Berlant's intimate public of women's mass culture and Morrison's intimate public of personal mommy bloggers. These blogs are characterized by markers of commoditization: most of these bloggers are deriving some kind of income from their blogging work, and some of them identify blogging as their primary source of income. Like the smaller blogging publics described by Morrison, the public(s) I'm looking at are different from the mass market-produced women's culture described by Berlant, in that the materials of consumption "circulate according to network rather than broadcast theories of transmission," which results in a more reciprocal or blurred relationship between producers and consumers of content (37). Even though participants in the intimate public of postfeminist online culture have increased agency insofar as they can influence the reception, spread, and future

trends in blogging content through participatory behaviors like sharing, commenting, and parodying, this public nevertheless emerges from and still preserves the "fundamental conservatism and inequality of the capitalist modes of production that focalize [women's] culture" (Morrison 51).

Situating my own work in relation to Berlant's mass publics and Morrison's smaller publics, it seems evident to me that smaller or micro publics can exist within larger mass publics, which means that a network of interconnected personal blogs such as Morrison describes can exist as its own micro-public with distinct genres and norms, while also participating in a larger public, i.e. what I call the intimate public of postfeminist online culture. Therefore, different subgenres genres of personal blog participate in both the larger public of postfeminist online culture, while also incorporating many smaller networks of blogs within that genre that participate in their own intimate publics similar to the kinds of publics Morrison describes.

It is important to note that I am departing here from other conceptions of the micro-publics in social media networks that identify micro-publics as networks of content surrounding a particular persona. Barbour, Lee, and Moore suggest that the concept of the micro-public is important to understanding social media practices "such as sharing, tagging, and mediated expression in the forms of personal images, memes, likes, and dislikes." They focus on how cross-platform networks of distribution for individual posts means that posting content in any of these locations involves addressing many, "possibly overlapping" publics. They summarize the micro-public as "a duality" in which users address a "potentially massive audience and can feature tens, hundreds, thousands and even millions of individual followers, who are all nodes in a massively personal network." They understand micro-publics, not in terms of scale, but as "network[s] that [are] regularly and privately updated by a central identity"—that is "A micro-

public is attached to a unique persona." I am departing from this conception of the micro-public as a network in which a single persona forms the central node, to instead focus on how smaller publics within the large, general public of Instagram (or social media generally) gather around particular discourses related to areas of unique interest or investment, which are often points of identification, experience, or ideas about the good life. In doing so, I am consciously moving my focus from how social media users create content to craft personas, to how this content circulates and contributes to larger cultural narratives and negotiations.

The Intimate Public as Reading Practice: The Case of Oprah's Book Club

The online intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility are continuous in many ways with the larger publics of women's culture, except that the digital architectures that enable online intimate publics encourage what is often a rapid and/or organic (unplanned) formation of discursive networks revolving around the question of what it means to live well as a postfeminist female subject. A key distinction is that the networking affordances of digital media platforms encourage intimate reading practices, with more opportunity to respond (often immediately after first exposure) to lifestyle content and to connect with other participants consuming and producing similar content, suggesting that the intimate public as a way of relating and responding to content is built into the very logics of some social networking platforms. As my later case study of travel bloggers on Instagram shows, participants in online intimate [micro] publics respond to content with emphasis on how that content does or does not relate to or reflect their experience of what it is like to live/live well. But there are precedents for this kind of readings practice that we should consider: notably, the woman's book club, and specifically, Oprah's book club.

I turn now briefly to Oprah's book club as an example of a cultural phenomenon that exemplifies the reading and sharing practices of intimate publics. In its original iteration, the book club ran from 1996-2011 (with a hiatus in 2002), and has been attributed as the key factor in the meteoric rise to popularity of several works—a phenomenon called "the Oprah effect" (Minzesheimer 2011). In its current form, Oprah's book club 2.0 incorporates networking technology and social media platforms into its discussion of book club entries, though the previous version of the book club also featured the use of a dedicated forum space in addition to televised events and independent book club meetings. Hammet and Dentith (2007) pay close attention to the role electronic media played in the success of Oprah's book club, with reading guides posted online, newsletters being sent to subscribers, and, notably, readers of selections being encouraged to participate in an online forum associated with the book club. Their analysis of the reading practices encouraged by the book club includes quotes from participants in the book club forum.

Discussions of Oprah's book club as cultural phenomenon have tended to focus on the intimate and affect-laden reading practices it encourages. Kate Douglas (2008) describes the book club as relying on "everyday literary criticism" that draws heavily from personal experience and self-reflexivity as readers make sense of the assigned texts through reference to an autobiographical interpretive framework. She writes that "the club's immersion within the culture of Winfrey's program in general assures participants that the Book Club will extend on the particular values espoused in the show's more general format: comprehensible popular culture-based responses to social issues, the importance of self-reflexivity in reading social texts, and the value of autobiographical disclosure in interpretation, meaning-making, and ultimately the overcoming of adversity" (238). Julie Rak (2012) makes the connection between Oprah's

book club and the intimate public, suggesting that "The reading paradigm Winfrey used most often in Oprah's Book Club combined enthusiasm for a work, personal identification with the characters and social issues of a book, and an emphasis on group connections between readers and writers" (228). According to Hammett and Dentith (2007), Oprah's book club promotes "the practice of gendered readings of the selections and Winfrey's approaches to interpretation" (213), which tend to solidify "conventional notions of women as natural readers of sentimental and emotionally laden works" (214).

We see a similar reading paradigm within postfeminist intimate publics where participants consume lifestyle content via networked online platforms. Participants who post feedback in the comments sections of primary content (e.g. blog posts and Instagram photos) are likely to demonstrate enthusiasm or approbation for what has been posted, or to respond with an account of how they have experienced something similar. Negative feedback, sometimes on-site but more often not, also participates in these intimate publics through its investment in identifying what is true and untrue for the community the lifestyle content in question addresses.

The online intimate publics of postfeminist online culture are also cultural inheritors to the affects of Oprah's book club in their investment in neoliberal conceptions of the female subject as someone who is responsible for her own self-care through continual processes of self-monitoring and self-improvement. Hammet and Denteith observe that the kinds of text favored by Oprah's book club contain narratives that describe using innate qualities to overcome obstacles, reifying "a culture of individualism while subverting the importance of gender, race, or class distinctions" (215). The book club's emphasis on self-improvement and change are taken up by participants in the book club as examples of and motivation for personal growth. Such narratives are rooted in the tradition of American individualism and the ideological imperative of

"pulling oneself up by the bootstraps." Similarly, Ventura observes that, within this reading paradigm, books are accepted "as object lessons" (74), or models for how to learn from others' adversity and "grow from others' growth", essentially a "guide to living in neoliberal culture." Ventura suggests that Oprah "may well be the face of affective capitalism" (70), which emphasizes the individual's responsibility to cultivate, through consumerist self care practices, their best self despite external setbacks. Like the texts favoured by Oprah's book club, personal lifestyle blogs as autobiographical manuals to the good life provide models for how to live out processes of continual self-disciplining and self-improving. Like the protagonists of many of Oprah's chosen texts, lifestyle bloggers often present a self-narrative in which their successes are attributed to a fiercely individualistic drive to be extraordinary, fueled by moxie and determination. Like readers in the book club, participants in the intimate publics surrounding postfeminist lifestyle content might post content that expresses how a particular blogger's model of the good life has been particularly helpful or meaningful to them; other times, participants point out how some guides to living are exclusionary, indicating how aspects of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject have been left out of the dominant lifestyle narrative. Regardless of whether participants agree with the representation of the good life proposed by lifestyle bloggers, their participation in intimate publics indicates a reading style similar to the woman's book club model, embracing gendered reading practices that prioritize affects and personal identification.

Digital autobiographical lifestyle content and the online intimate publics surrounding it continue some of the key discourses and reading strategies exemplified by Oprah's book club. However, what must be noted about online intimate publics is that they do not always have a clearly delineated purpose and membership. The online forum associated with Oprah's book club

is an online space set aside for an identifiable purpose—to discuss entries in the book club. Of course, this discussion naturally leads to discussions of individuals' personal reflections and experiences, which can further lead to broader postfeminist meditations on the good life and what it means to live as a neoliberal postfeminist female subject. The networked affordances of digital media naturally lend themselves to the spontaneous emergence of intimate publics that do not necessarily have identifiable boundaries or membership—at least, not until the user understands and begins to use hashtagging features to identify content that speaks to a particular theme or narrative in which she feels invested.

Intimate Publics as Reading Strategy

Within and across platforms like Instagram and Twitter, we can trace the emergence of micro-publics that engage in the negotiation of different aspects of the good life. Content-creators and consumers within specific lifestyle genres comment on each other's content, both out of obligation to the accepted norms of those platform (e.g. "comment for comment, like for like"), and as a means of negotiating the ongoing collaborative project of articulating a community or intimate public's vision of the good life. Reading personal lifestyle blogs alongside feedback from blog visitors (blogs, comments, forums, parody) helps us understand how models of the good life are presented, authenticated, mimicked, and deconstructed in various blogging genres require looking networks of interrelated texts. Similar arguments have been made about the importance of considering different kinds of feedback and participation in online culture: prominent examples being studies of "participatory culture" (Jenkins 1992; 2006; 2009) and "prosumers" (Bruns 2008). Because I am looking at how currents of a specifically neoliberal, post-recession, social media-enabled postfeminist sensibility circulate through online venues, I use a framework of intimate publics (Berlant 2008) for thinking about personal lifestyle

content and consumers of this content. Online lifestyle content addresses the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, where both bloggers and blog visitors are participants in a networked, intimate public sphere that at times promulgates, at times deconstructs—in short, continuously *negotiates*—ideologies currently associated with postfeminist mass culture.

Others have noted the value of examining networks of discourse surrounding personal blogs in order to understand the work they perform. In Aimee Morrison's work on mommy bloggers (2004), she traces a network of texts surrounding a news article deriding mommy blogs, including blog posts and audience responses in comment sections. After tracing the ways in which generic norms and boundaries of mommy blogging are defined through the process of bloggers and commenters critiquing and defending the practice, she concludes that "Genre is a process: more than the sum of texts that fall under its reach, genre is enacted in the contested relation between texts and communicants, a negotiation that defines, enforces, or rewrites the rules of engagement that constrain and enable syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic relations that structure texts and interactions" (11). More recently, Andrea Hunter (2016) looks at the shift that occurred in the mid-00s, when mommy blogs went from radical acts of personal story telling and hubs around which communities of mothers could gather and share experiences (the kinds of communities described by Morrison) to branded commodities.

I choose to use intimate public rather than just public or networked public (boyd 2010, Varnelis 2008). Some critics have found the concept of a public sphere (Habermas 1989) to be a useful lens for thinking about networked online sociality. Zizi Papacharissi proposes that today's private sphere is different from previous experiences of the private sphere in that the networking function of new media allows the individual to connect with a larger public, resulting in blurred boundaries between the personal and the political (*A Private Sphere* 2010). Others employ the

term networked publics," including the Networked Publics Research Group in *Networked Publics* (2008) and danah boyd in her work on social network sites ("Social Network Sites as Networked Publics" 2011). According to boyd, networked publics are different from previous kinds of publics because they are shaped by the digital "architectures" that make them possible: she refers to features like scalability, or the possibility that content can go viral and reach a vast swath of people with or without the creator's consent, and 'persistence," which refers to the automatic archiving of all kinds of content, including content that feels ephemeral (like blog comments).

While the term networked public gets at some important features of personal lifestyle blogs and the networks of feedback surrounding them, I think it paints an incomplete picture of what is going on within these networks. I think the concept of an intimate public indicates something different from the networked publics described by boyd, where producers of content do not know how to behave due to the "collapsed contexts" and "invisible audiences" of online publishing. Despite the fact that personal lifestyle bloggers can only identity a small proportion of visitors to their website and social media (basically those who choose to subscribe, share, or give feedback), the various subgenres of personal lifestyle blogs are like the intimate publics described by Berlant in that the rhetoric of these genres assumes commonality/shared experience between bloggers and blog consumers. This presumed common ground is apparent in content that evinces a postfeminist sensibility, evident in its emphasis on ideals of feminine entrepreneurship, self-improvement, self-monitoring, and self-disciplining.

Zizi Paparachissi examines the role of networked digital media in facilitating what she calls "affective publics," which are formed out of "mediated feelings of connectedness" that have the potential to create visibility for political causes and propel change through their embrace of

"the storytelling infrastructures of a digital age" (2015, 7). Paparachissi identifies affect "as the sum of—often discordant—feelings about affairs, public and private...that drives, neutralizes, or entraps networked publics" (7). This formulation of affective publics is related to my own deployment of intimate publics as a conceptual tool, in the sense that affective publics make us examine how digital media's networking affordances brings geographically-distanced people together through affect-laden displays and discourses. Yet these affective publics are, in some ways, quite different from the intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility I examine. The former is politically-driven, while the latter is predominately apolitical in orientation (though this apolitical tendency associated with postfeminist sensibility is sometimes criticized by participants in publics, as a close examination of discourse within intimate publics will show). While Paparachissi's affective publics bring visibility to otherwise marginalized voices, and help spur events like Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring movements, the online intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility tend rather to obscure non-dominant subject positions, with lifestyle content produced by young, attractive, wealthy western white women ascending to the top of their respective genres, and producing content that addresses an imagined audience of demographically-similar readers. As we see later with the example of Instagram's Black female travel micro-public, even those speaking from a non-dominant position can contribute to postfeminist online culture's homogeneity by proposing solutions to racialized aggressions and exclusions that are based on de-politicized feelings of empowerment—empowerment that finds its power in acts of consumption and self-commoditization.

Both lifestyle content creators and consumers might be thought of as participants in the intimate public of postfeminist online culture. Berlant occasionally refers to "consumer participants" (viii), while Kylie Cardell and Emma Maguire refer to the "reader-consumer-

citizen-self" of intimate publics (213). For the sake of simplicity, in this project I refer to bloggers as bloggers and use participants to refer to all the people consuming and responding to blogs, which includes bloggers looking at other blogs. For someone to be a participant in an intimate public, they do not have to agree with the vision of commonality presented by a particular piece of content. As Berlant observes, "the domain of detail is always being negotiated, debated, and taken personally" and "even when people speak out against the terms the intimate public sets out as normative, they are still participating in the promise of belonging that it represents insofar as they are trying to recalibrate whose experience it can absorb so that they can feel included in the mass intimacy that has promised to include them" (ix). Following Berlant's description here, I consider even the producers of parodic and snarky content at Get Off My Internets (which I explore further in Chapter Three) to be participants in the intimate publics presented by different genres of personal lifestyle blogs, and the larger intimate public of postfeminist online culture. An important distinction between Berlant's model and intimate publics that exist primarily online is how the affordances of online applications encourage greater participation from consumers in the form of feedback that is more visible than the kinds of feedback that would be used in primarily offline publics (e.g. verbal discussion of content or published reviews, which have far more barriers to publication than an online review or comment). Also, because geographically-defined barriers to participation are reduced, we see increasingly niche intimate micro-publics emerging in online spaces. This means that, in addition to the larger intimate public of postfeminist online culture, we also see many smaller publics that participate in this larger publics while also incorporating the discussion of experiences and investments specific to the lived experience of smaller subsets of the population.

Instagram, Hashtags, and the Intimate [Micro] Public

Instagram is an online content-sharing platform whose affordances (primarily the hashtag) encourage the formation of discourse communities dedicated to an endless assortment of themes and topics of shared interest, many of them taking on the qualities of the intimate publics of women's culture, as users browse, create, and respond to content that addresses a specific micro-public based on particular aspects of what it means to live well as a contemporary female subject. As I have tried to show with the earlier case study in this chapter, this platform is especially important to recent lifestyle blogging practices.

When I discuss Instagram, I am primarily interested in the affordances of hashtag-based browsing as they contribute to the formation of online intimate publics for the negotiation of what it means to live well as an *x*. When an Instagram user posts new content, the short text caption (the longest Instagram captions tend to be a couple of short paragraphs, but a few sentences is more common) is usually followed by an assortment of hashtags, which structure Instagram's browsing-based logic. For bloggers and lifestyle-content producers, it is normal to have a block of dozens of hashtags attached to one image. These hashtags will be a combination of tags specific to the scene depicted in the image (location-based hashtags, for example, that are commonly used within the city the image represents) as well as hashtags the blogger attaches to all of her posts, which are meant to situate her content within various Instagram communities or publics of varying size. Barbour, Lee, and Moore (2017b) suggest that hashtag use signals "a desire to […] contribute to and participate in particular conversations" and "mark and legitimise specific archives and taxonomies" while demonstrating "a readiness to participate and be represented across multiple conversations and interests" (2). They connect "the public nature, movement, and momentum of the hashtag" with "the connectivity that results in collectives" (2).

They are referring partly to the cross-platform affordances of Instagram (such as the option of simultaneously uploading content to Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter), which increases the reach of content while also adding complexity to the nature to the user's participation in multiple publics and/or collectives. In the context of users' participation in online networks, "No longer is the individual 'part' of a collective, but rather the individual is connected to multiple publics, making the collective dimension of persona a meta-collective complex" (Barbour, Lee, and Moore 2017a, 5).

Instagram is not the first photo-sharing service of its kind, and looking at earlier discussions of other photo-sharing websites can help us understand the kind of community that Instagram represents. One notable predecessor is Flickr, launched in 2004 and still active, though it has never reached the level of popularity Instagram currently occupies. Like Instagram, Flickr lets users post visual content that other users can access through various browsing affordances like tagging features and curated public collections. Analyses of predecessors to Instagram—notably, the image-sharing service Flickr—suggest that online image repositories emphasizing the display of themed photographs have long been sites for both the articulation of personal identity and for the negotiation of collective experience. Murray (2008), for example, writes that on Flickr "one is invited to explore thousands of images organized not only through technological features, such as tags, groups, and batches, but also through the less concrete processes and functions of fetishization, collection, memory, flow, taste, signification, and social networks" (149), and further proposes that Flickr constitutes "a collaborative experience: a shared display of memory, taste, history, signifiers of identity, collection, daily life and judgement" (149). This description suggests that the photo-sharing website functions as a kind of living archive or piece of collective memory, continuously negotiated to better reflect the

experience of its contributors. According to this view of photo-sharing websites and applications like Flickr, and more recently, Instagram, features such as liking, re-posting, commenting, or posting new content under a communal hashtag, contribute to the formation of a communal aesthetic, and/or repository of shared experiences and investments.

We should be cautious, however, to avoid overemphasizing the agency of users in determining the values and norms of the online communities to which they contribute. Jose Van Dijck (2011) points out that conceptions such as Murray's of how photographic databases like Flickr operate as "*collective perspectives*, *experiences* and *memory*" problematically exclude considerations of "the role of automated algorithms in the production of social norms." Van Dijck notes that, in many studies of photo-sharing websites, authors emphasize collectivity and community to explain "a technological framework largely based on algorithmic connections" that uses engineering to collect data on users that can, for example, be leveraged for targeted marketing campaigns. Van Dijck differentiates between "automated connectivity" and "human collectivity," and argues that "the term 'connective' would be much more appropriate [than 'collective'] to indicate the intricate entanglement of technological and human interaction involved in the digital mediation of experiences, perspectives and memory." But this should not mean that the social actions performed via these sites are culturally insignificant because guided by larger structures that are in large part economically motivated.

I think that we can see continuity between earlier efforts to theorize Flickr and current pressing questions for how Instagram works as a site for online sociality based on image-sharing. The website/application is easily analyzed as a site for autobiographical acts rooted in the collective *and* connective, as Instagram affords users the opportunity to contribute self-representational (whether representational in the sense that it documents day-to-day activities, or

in the sense that it gives a record or evidence of the user's tastes and interests) content to collective negotiations of a particular aspect of living (what does it mean, for example, to be #blessed? Millions of Instagram users have contributed their answers to this question), while also employing the site's *connective* features to search, explore, and stumble upon new representations of living, and of living well. For example, once a user follows a few solo female travel accounts, the algorithm will continue to suggest content from similar accounts, inviting the user to integrate further into the micro-public dedicated to negotiating what it means to travel alone as a woman.

Kris Fallon (2014) suggests that Instagram, compared to its predecessor Flickr, reverts to a "traditional notion of individual identity, temporal linearity and serial progression" due in large part to its "emphasis on the photo stream, and its 'instant' appearance on other social media timelines," features that "bind it more firmly with a traditional notion of individual identity, temporal linearity and serial progression" (58). I disagree with this assessment: in fact, Instagram's affordances encourage users to browse content much like they would a magazine or inspiration board. The application's explore feature suggests content that the user might find interesting, based on accounts followed and posts liked ("How are Posts Chosen for Search & Explore," Instagram Help Center). Instagram is a prominent site for the emergence of online micro-celebrity, and it is common for personal accounts to have numbers of followers far exceeding the number of personal acquaintances using the application. What this suggests is that it is common practice for Instagram users to follow the accounts of people with whom they have no personal connection, but whose output appeals to them on some level—whether because their content has aesthetic appeal, or perhaps because the narrative suggested by their posts engages in questions tied to the user's personal investments and ideas about the good life.

Barbour, Lee, and Moore (2017b) find that not all Instagram persona work addresses or participates in an imagined community or collective, even when hashtags are involved. After an analysis of motifs in posts with the hashtag watchingtv, they observe that "These images garnered very few, if any, likes and comments, in a sense negating the collective nature of persona work. They describe the images they examined as a "kind of personal communication […] despite their participation in a broad public hashtag," noting that "their intent or aim has more to do with the pleasures and gratifications of personal/self-expression, asserting oneself in public, and image-making and archiving than with asserting particular identities and leveraging their value and visibility amongst a broad community." I mention this case study here because it adds perspective to the kind of Instagram practice I am looking at in this chapter: not all hashtags are necessarily connected to a distinct discourse community with norms for participation. In the above case study, the hashtag of focus is descriptive of an activity—and a very general activity at that—and does not suggest any particular investment, identity, or perspective of the world.

Case Study: *Oneika the Traveller*

In their overview of research questions and methods specific to Instagram ("Instagrammatics" 2016), Highfield and Leaver suggest that it is necessary to "consider whether the act of researching surface material that would otherwise have little attention and whether amplifying that material through research and research reporting has the potential to do any harm" (qtd in Barbour, Lee, and Moore 2017, 5). While Barbour et al. take precautions in their case study of #watchingtv due to the implied privacy of these technically public posts (as the authors note, many of these posts have limited engagement in the form of likes and comments, and seem primarily directed to users' personal acquaintances despite the invitation of a larger viewership via the incorporation of hashtags), I am limiting my visual analyses (and

accompanying screen captures) to "micro-celebrity" accounts where the number of users following a profile is in the thousands (often in the tens or hundreds of thousands), and where the number of followers far exceeds the number of accounts the followed by the profile.

Although I am choosing to focus on accounts with a very large following in an effort to limit my study to social media users who seem to be consciously addressing a large and decidedly open or public viewership, micro-celebrity as a term has broad applicability and can even be applied to the work performed by those addressing much smaller and more limited online publics. danah boyd and Alice Marwick view celebrity as a "an organic and ever-changing performative practice" (2011, 140) and "a continuum that can be practiced across the spectrum of fame" (141). We might then think of celebrity and micro-celebrity as forming parts of the same continuum, and sharing a common set of practices that include "ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona" (140). Senft defines microcelebrity as "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good" (2012, 346). Marwick defines micro-celebrity as "a state of being famous to a niche group of people" as well as "a behaviour: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention" (114). Marshall's 2014 introduction to *Celebrity and Power* acknowledges the fact that networked digital practice has led to the increased relevance of celebrity practice for normal individuals who are not traditional celebrities. He writes that, "through technology, the socially networked individual has become more prevalent in the creation of contemporary culture and a linchpin in the organization and flow of cultural forms and practices" (xxiv). New networking technologies introduce "new metrics of fame" including measurements of followers, likes, and views across different sites. As a result, more people are "engaged in processes of an attention economy that used to be the

province of celebrities" (xxiv). Celebrity tactics are now a mainstream practice of online self-representation, even for those who do not desire a large following or fame. It encompasses things like managing one's web presence with consistency and professionalism in mind, which is basic practice for many casual social media users.

Oneika the Traveller is a travel blog run by Jamaican-Canadian "Oneika," "a gal in her ~~early~~ thirties" ("About Me"). Her blog includes an Instagram account with over 70,000 followers, where she describes herself in the bio as a "travel journalist" rather than a blogger—perhaps because she's leveraged her blogging success to land a recurring digital series on *The Travel Channel* called "Big City, Little Budget." Oneika started travel blogging in 2005, and later accelerated her efforts to expand her content across several media so that she could make a full-time income in travel media and leave her job teaching at international schools in Asia, eventually making "six-figures" through her work in travel media (Talty, 2018). Her content addresses a broader public interested in travel—specifically, long-term career travel, with much of her blog content being dedicated to giving insight on how (presumed English-speaking, North American, educated) readers can find employment overseas. She also addresses a female or solo-female audience (though Oneika is married, she still often travels alone, and caters much of her content to a "single" demographic), with posts dedicated, for example, to giving advice on how to dress as a woman in countries with different social norms. Finally, Oneika addresses a public of other Black female travelers, with a whole section of her blog dedicated to "travelling while black," which includes posts like "What being black and abroad means to me" and "10 countries every black woman should visit."

As is the norm within the travel blogging industry currently, Oneika's home page prominently displays a widget previewing her Instagram profile:

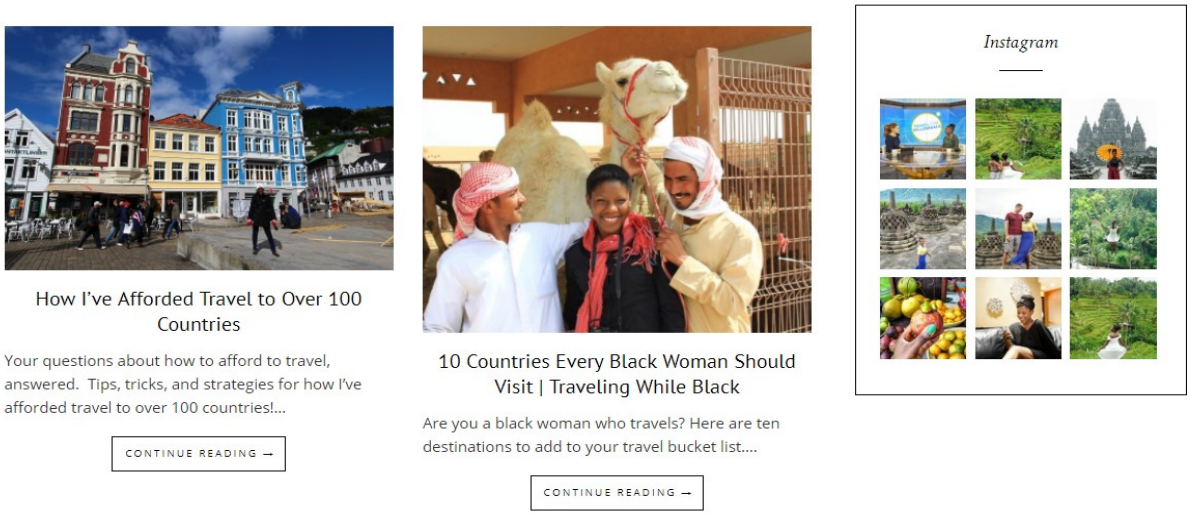

Illustration 6: Instagram widget on home page, oneikathetraveller.com, captured Dec 09, 2017

If we shift locations to Oneika's Instagram page and view a recent post, we find (beneath a caption describing aspects of her recent trip to Bali and the benefits of travelling with a friend instead of exclusively solo) a list of hashtags:

Illustration 7: Instagram post by @oneikatraveller, captured Dec 09, 2017

Decisions about which hashtags to append to their content are important for lifestyle content creators, as they largely determine which micro-publics their work addresses. It is the norm for popular Instagram accounts to attach dozens of hashtags to every post. Similar to recent marketing literature focused on social media marketing, lifestyle bloggers address varying degrees of niche audiences simultaneously by using a series of carefully-chosen hashtags. In marketing literature, marketers are encouraged to use nanotargeting strategies to address a specific audience. In *Likable Social Media* (2015), Dave Kerpen advises identifying a narrow target audience, and engaging with them closely to develop a trust relationship leading to brand loyalty (27). Indeed, a lot of the strategies we see in Oneika's feed below closely follow the names of chapters in Kerpen's marketing manual: going "Beyond 'Women 25 to 54'" in

targeting an audience; Be Authentic; Share Stories; Inspire you customers to share stories, reminding us that lifestyle blogging is about marketing a product.

Above, we can see that Oneika is addressing a few different publics that overlap, and that she speaks to several distinct, smaller demographics simultaneously. She includes hashtags dedicated to a more general Instagram community interested in travel, such as #meettheworld, and #traveloffpath. We should note that these hashtags are more specific than, say, #travel (which has over 200 *million* posts compared to #meettheworld's approximate 200 *thousand*), in that they communicate a kind of travel that is adventurous or daring compared to "on the beaten path" or short-term, fixed itinerary (antithesis of nomad travel). Additionally, Oneika addresses a specifically female or solo-female audience with her use of hashtags like #sheisnotlost and #ladiesgoneglobal. Finally, Oneika addresses a niche micropublic of Black female travellers or potential travellers with hashtags like #blacktravelfeed and #blackgirlstraveltoo.

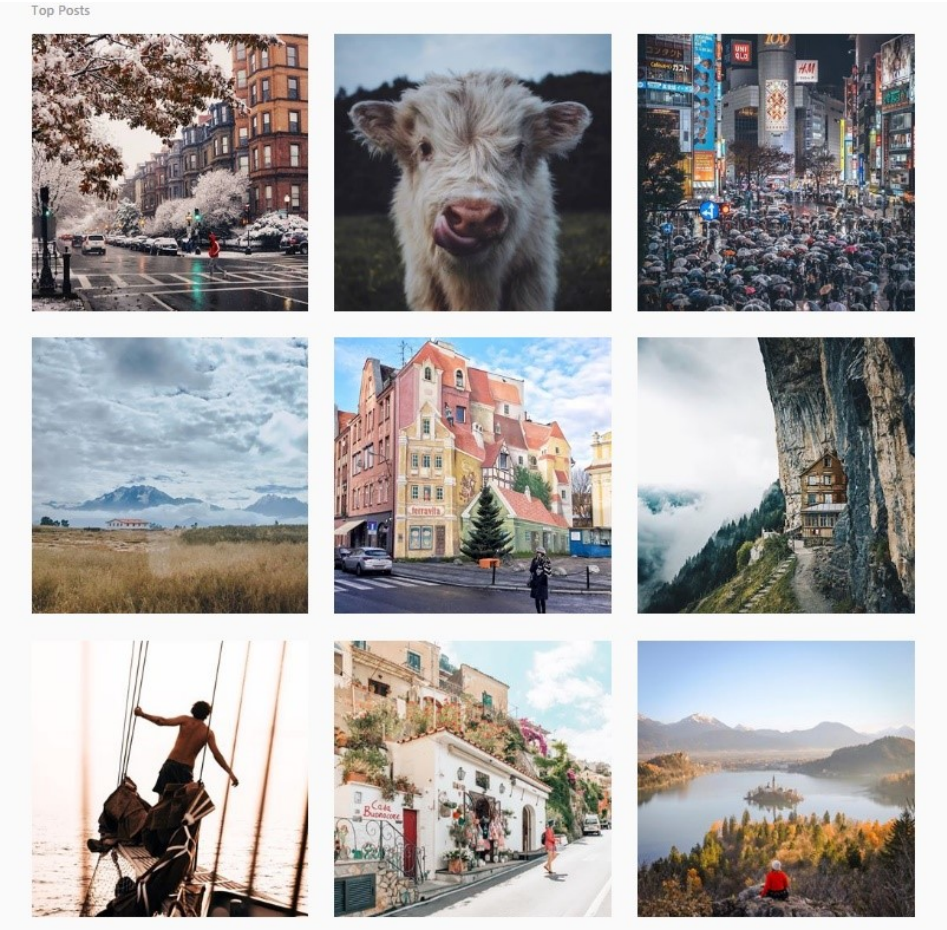

Illustration 8: Instagram feed to posts related to #meettheworld, captured Dec 15, 2017

The above image is an example of what the #meettheworld Instagram feed might look like at any given time. This feed features fewer selfies than other travel hashtags specific to a particular traveler demographic like solo women or Black women, instead focusing on noteworthy settings and landscapes, where images of anonymized travelers contribute to the aesthetic without dominating the image. Although many of Oneika's Instagram posts prominently feature her face, suggesting that her popularity is due in large part to her self-brand and image as an individual, she also includes posts with a more general, travel guidebook-like appeal.

Illustration 9: Instagram post by @oneikatraveller, captured Dec 09, 2017

Some of Oneika's posts are about the experience of travelling long-term and alone as a woman. She focuses her discussion of the hardships associated with this kind of travel, using both empowerment language (through her emphasis that travel is not as dangerous as is popularly conceived in North America), and intimate disclosures of the struggles of being absent from markers of home (e.g. the close relationships and celebrations that accompany a settled lifestyle). Her reflection here, and the responses she invites when she closes her caption with a question inviting commenters to share their personal travel fears, is not markedly different from other solo female travel blogger content, where a convention is to pre-emptively diagnose and seek to remedy imagined female readers' fears hesitations about solo travel (e.g. "The Solo

Female Traveller's Manifesto" by *The Young Adventuress*, and *Adventurous Kate's* decision to caption her site "The Solo Female Travel Blog").

Illustration 10: Instagram post by *@oneikatraveller, Nov 13, 2017, captured Dec 09, 2017*

In the above image, we see Oneika addressing a specifically Black and female public. The caption of the post, not pictured, itself describes an aspect of Oneika's experiences as a Black woman and as a traveler: her history of discomfort with the colour of her skin, and her more recent decision to own and display her melanin proudly. She writes, "for years I've been told, both implicitly and explicitly, that my kind of Black isn't beautiful." She goes on to reflect on the attached image of her trip to Brazil: "I immediately had this thought when I came across this picture from my trip to Brazil. This melanin is such a gift, how could I not love it? I'm proud of my heritage and eternally grateful that it shows in my outward appearance."

In the comments section of the post, dozens of users share their appreciation for Oneika's openness, and respond with similar experiences of past discomfort and more recent rejections of

social forces that hold them back. User nellsbells5186 writes “you radiate joy and beauty with your positivity. Bless you my melanated well travelled sista!” Similarly, “Naakowaa” shares her appreciation for Oneika’s message to the specific micro-public of Black female travelers:

> You are radiant and such a beautiful message!!! Thank you for always being so proud of who you are and making sure to show and speak on it. This is one of the reasons that I enjoy your posts because you are always coming from a place of self love.
> 👏👏👏👏👏👏♡Yes, our melanin is most certainly a gift!

Oneika tends to give individual thank-you’s to affirming comments as part of her work to maintain an authentic presence and connection with the micro-publics she addresses. In response to one affirming post, she writes “Thank you lady!! I think these positive affirmations are so necessary in our community!” suggesting that with this post she is primarily addressing a micropublic of Black women like herself.

Following the hashtag #blackgirlstraveltoo leads us back to a general feed with 141, 381 posts as of December 4, 2017 (compare to #worldnomads at 480,448 and #travel at 237,626,842 for a sense that we are looking at a smaller micropublic within the larger public of Instagram posts about travel).

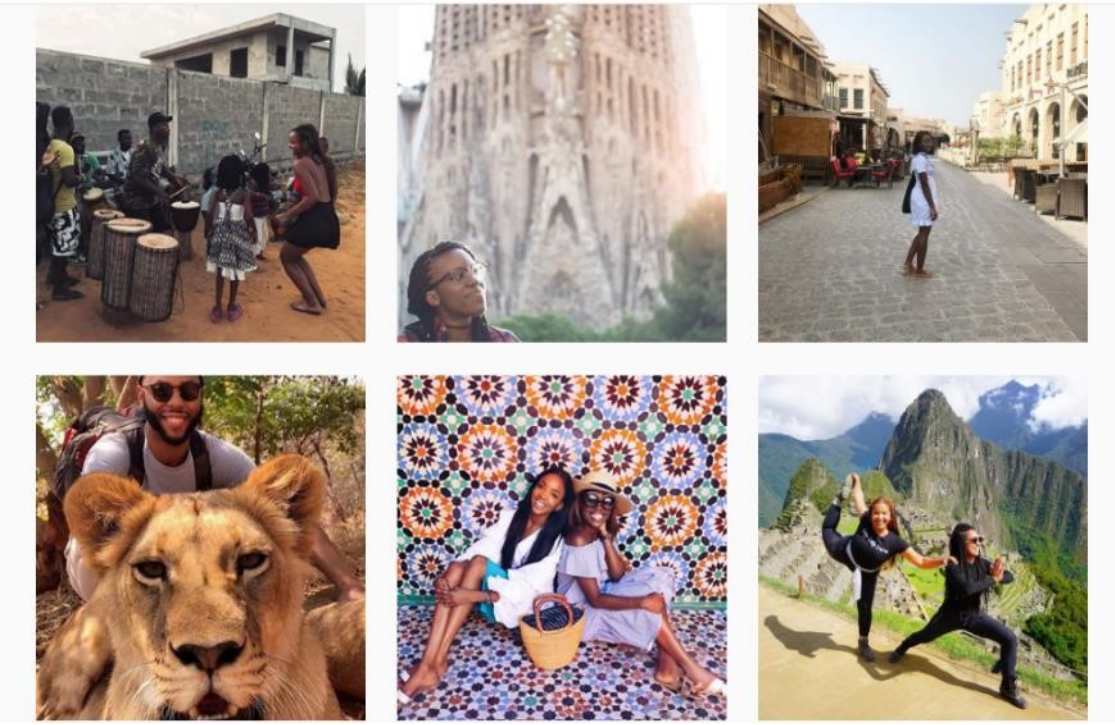

Illustration 11: Instagram feed of content related to #blackgirlstraveltoo, captured Dec 09, 2017

Browsing some of the recent posts attached to this hashtag, it quickly becomes apparent that those addressing the public associated with #blackgirlstravel too are not always describing experiences specifically related to travelling as a Black female subject, but rather that they make a habit of including this hashtag to signal their belonging or commitment to this ongoing collective/connective narrative of what it means to live well as a Black female nomadic subject. Some posts are indistinguishable from other manifestations of postfeminist, neoliberal sensibilities related to the ideal nomadic female subject. Travelingfro posts a reflection post on having reached ten thousand followers on her travel account, recalling the details of her retreat into nomadism before/after narrative before specifically citing the importance of the online community she has found:

> Traveling solo can be lonely and y'all have become a traveling family, a support group and people with whom I can openly share my story […] But here we have a deeper connection. An understanding, personal journeys that go be on the shallow surface of

> what Instagram can be. That everything isn't free trips and free products. But that there is a hustle and beauty lies in the process.

Like Oneika, she includes hashtags specific to the Black female travel community alongside more general travel-themed and female-travel-themed hashtags: her list includes #thediscoverer #blacktravelista #soultravel #womenwhoexplore #ladesgoneglobal #hardlyhome #blackpackas #wanderwell. Speaking to several communities at once, she adopts a general but intimate tone that seeks to downplay aspects of blogging that would de-emphasize her relatability and authenticity (and, by extension, her viability as a model of the good life). She does while still alluding to postfeminist and neoliberal ideals of empowerment through hustle, though she invites participants in the publics she addresses to view hustle as a process where the experience of striving itself is beautiful even without the rewards of free trips and swag.

Illustration 12: Instagram post by @travelingfro, captured Dec 10, 2017.

It is interesting to note how Black lifestyle content engages with dominant discourses of neoliberal postfeminist subjectivity, with its concomitant discourses of leaving the status quo and hustling after lifestyle goals based on a retreat into nomadism paradigm, while simultaneously distancing itself from these discourses in the way that Black female travel accounts distance themselves from dominant narratives of female travel experiences by emphasizing their belonging to a unique micro-public of Black women documenting their experience of what it means to live as a nomadic female subject in neoliberal society—which is necessarily also a matter of what it means to live as a Black female nomadic subject. Recently, some scholars have sought to problematize the tendency of analyses of postfeminist culture/sensibility to focus exclusively on Western media's representation of white subjects. Jess Butler observes that "most of the academic literature on postfeminism examines cultural representations featuring women who are young, heterosexual, middle-class, and white" and that examinations of postfeminism tend to conclude that this cultural trend "works to exclude women of color and reproduce racial inequality by reinstituting (Western) whiteness as a dominant cultural norm" (2013). Butler contends that there is actually an abundance of popular culture content featuring non-white western women participating in postfeminist discourse, and who demonstrate an embrace of postfeminist sensibility, adding that, while it may be true that postfeminism's archetypal subject is white (and middle class, and heteronormative), "this does not necessarily mean that nonwhite, non-middle-class, and non-heterosexual women are altogether excluded from, or somehow unaffected by, postfeminist discourses." Postfeminist sensibility circulates widely, working to "conceal the underlying power relations that reproduce hegemonic ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and class," obscuring these relations for women of colour whose subjectivization is

molded by the postfeminist sensibilities that infiltrate so much of contemporary popular culture and individual self-representation.

It matters to much of her audience, and to this analysis, that Oneika is Black, and yet it is also easy to feel like her race does not matter within postfeminist discourse. Analyses such as Chris Holmlund's (2010) have suggested that postfeminism represents "a white 'chick' backlash" that denies class and avoids race (116). Discussions of how women of colour take up postfeminist discourses are rare, though non-white bloggers contribute significantly to discussions of what it means to live well as a female subject. Bloggers like Oneika[8] tend to do so by recognizing some of the ways in which achieving the good life looks different for women of colour, without probing too deeply into the broader social and historical structures that create and perpetuate that difference, or analyzing too closely what that difference actually means for the postfeminist Black subject, or for her white peers.

As Dayna Chatman (2015) observes, in critical discourse about postfeminism, postfeminist subjects are often identified as young, educated, heterosexual, and white. Using Beyoncé as a case study, Chatman proposes postfeminism as a sensibility is a useful theoretical lens for examining how media interpellates certain Black women as postfeminist subjects (930). As Chatman points out, western media culture does not exclude Black women from postfeminism narratives of the time crunch and concerns about the [im]possibility of having it all as a contemporary female subject seeking to balance professional and personal desires. She concludes that, "When black women…situate themselves and are situated by media as post-

[8] *The Blog Abroad* is another travel blog run by a Black woman that seems to engage in the overlapping intimate publics of Black female/solo female travel blogging. Not all bloggers attempt to appeal to a mass audience in this way: *Somto Seeks*, for example, addresses "black women, men, immigrants, visionaries, hustlers and dreamers who have the audacity to create a life of boundless adventure" ("About").

feminist subjects, they effectively take positions outside a black feminist political agenda focused on struggle against racist and sexist oppression—this is a problem" (937).

If Oneika feels that her efforts to achieve the good life have required her to surmount more obstacle than her white peers, she is reticent about saying so. At the same time, Oneika's Blackness is the topic of many of her posts, and she frequently talks about the different reactions her skin and hair prompt in the countries she visits. At times, Oneika treads very close to saying political things, but ultimately she shies away from doing so. For example, in one blog post, Oneika recounts travelling to Senegal to connect with her ancestry. She discloses that the trip was part of a partnership with the DNA home-testing service 23andMe. After taking the DNA test, Oneika learns that she's 86% West African (Senegalese) and 12.4% European. The DNA service estimates how recent her latest ancestors from each lineage might have been, guessing that she had a British or Irish ancestor living around the mid-nineteenth century. The implications behind Oneika's DNA report invite guesswork from the reader about how Oneika's family's eventual arrival in Jamaica fits in relation to the transatlantic slave trade, as well as specifications about the apparent European ancestry and whether it was the result of assault or coercion or something else.

Oneika's task then become how to frame this information without alienating her audiences or detracting from the purpose of the post, which is to promote the service 23andMe provides. Initially, Oneika simply says, "Given that I don't know much about my family's background beyond my paternal and maternal grandparents (who were all born and raised in Jamaica), this information was extremely interesting" ("Travel based on your DNA," Aug. 9, 2018) and she does not elaborate on what was interesting about it. The one time she mentions her connection to the slave trade occurs when she notes that "The pretty colonial structures on Gorée

belie the human atrocities that occured therein: enslaved Africans were jailed and tortured here before being transported to the Americas. It is entirely possible that one of my ancestors was kept here before being sent to Jamaica." In the accompanying photograph, Oneika looks to the side while she stands in front of the side of a building overgrown with vegetation, which would appear nondescript without the description she provides. Although Oneika gestures towards a very significant history in the above two lines, she does not expand on the idea and provides only this description, but moves on to describing the rest of her trip. Though she's expounded on what it means for her personally to wear white pants after labour day (Instagram, @oneikatraveller, Aug. 16 2018), Oneika does not reveal much about what discovering her Senegal ancestry means to her personally. We get the sense that the blogger is holding back, whether because she's reluctant publish these details because it is difficult for her, or whether she thinks the content would be too "heavy" and would interfere with the lighthearted, aspirational quality of her blog. It is also possible she intentionally assigns her readers some of the labour of making the historical and personal connections the post gestures towards. In an Instagram post on the same topic, Oneika expands on this discussion a little bit, adding "it's ironic, when the so-called Black Travel Movement has grown in recent years, places like Gorée are a not-so-happy reminder that black folks have ALWAYS been travelling—just not always by choice." However, her prompt for the comments section is more general, asking "Have you travelled to a lace you are connected to genetically?"

It's clear from the things Oneika does say that women of colour like her who participate in postfeminist intimate publics face the added task of addressing difference in a way that does not alienate their white audiences or discourage brand partnerships. A blogger like Oneika could opt to address a primarily Black audience and focus on talking about her experiences in a way

that consistently foregrounds how her experience of travelling differs from that of her white peers, but she instead limits documenting those experiences in a sub-section of her blog on "travelling while black." *Oneika the Traveller* retains a mass, "safe" appeal by addressing a more general western, middle class female audience. In order to invoke a postfeminist sensibility that appeals to this mass audience, Oneika crafts content that contributes to the "autobiography of collective experience" based on the assumption that all middle class western women share similar desires, investments and experiences.

Oneika manages to appeal to a niche public while simultaneously speaking to the experiences and investments of a more general public. Speaking to intersecting discourse communities of varying sizes invites new challenges as bloggers try to avoid alienating any one public in an attempt to appeal to another. In the case of Black female travel bloggers, this might mean describing the challenges specific to travelling as a Black woman, while integrating their description of these experiences into an overall logic of postfeminist empowerment—a version of empowerment in which the onus falls on the individual to make up for larger structures of racialized inequalities by proudly displaying her melanin and embracing her beautiful self.

Oneika's tasks of balancing the representation of what makes her experience as a Black woman traveller distinct while ensuring her blog is a product with broad postfeminist appeal is evocative of Oprah Winfrey's framing of Blackness within the broader framework of middle-class women's experience within the intimate publics of mass women's culture. Although Oprah's media franchise has regularly addressed the historical traumas associated with Blackness in America, often through a personal lens via personal stories from Black celebrities, public figures, authors, and Oprah herself, these narratives and Oprah's positioning of them have

tended to included the idea that, for African Americans, the good life *can* be achieved despite the struggles shared by this demographic, and should be the object of optimistic striving.

Kimberly Chabot Davis (2004) has discussed the politics of cross-racial empathy in Oprah's Book Club, arguing that the dynamics at work within the cultural space of a book club dominated by white women, but where discussions of Black women's fiction are often at the centre. She proposes that, "while some white readers displayed a problematic 'color-blindness' with imperialist overtones, others experienced transformative identifications with black subjects and a reflective alienation from white privilege" that could be mobilization in the formations of anti-racist coalitions. Conversely, a seething opinion piece posted to *Medium*, called "Fuck Oprah" contends that the celebrity "caters to the white feminist gaze" and it "just more neo-liberal white feminist stories." Tellingly, the author of the blog posts claims to "write about and for blackness" (Cleo J, "Fuck Oprah"), a stance that appears opposed to Oprah's packaging of Black experience for middle-class white feminist audiences. Whether or not Oprah's media offerings defang or betray Black women's experience by commoditizing them and marketing to a largely white audience, what the mixed reception surrounding Oprah's products makes clear is that the project of making content that speaks to Black experience accessible to white audiences is unavoidably fraught. Oneika seems to have avoided conflict in her comments sections, perhaps because she moderates comments but possibly because she's avoided offending any of her audiences by framing her experience as she does—as both specific to Black women and generalizable to the neoliberal postfeminist female subject. If Oneika's success was anywhere near the scale of Oprah's, the story might be different.

I have demonstrated the potential of a reading strategy that understands personal lifestyle blogs as transmedia guides to the good life, and that considers these guides within the context of

the intimate publics they address with their niche-specific models of the good life. In the chapter that follows, I will apply this kind of reading to solo-female travel blogger content as part of a larger examination of how postfeminist sensibility is increasingly turning to models of the good life based on a retreat into nomadism. Specifically, the ideal form of nomadism promoted in postfeminist travel content (and related genres like the masculinized digital nomad self-help genre) is one of nomadic entrepreneurialism. The result is an altered version of the postfeminist makeover narrative, where the contemporary female subject finds relief from the discontents and constraints of contemporary western work culture by taking her neoliberal hustle on the road.

Chapter Two: Solo Female Travel Blogs and the Postfeminist Entrepreneurial Subject's Retreat into Nomadism

This chapter looks at how sensibilities of retreat into nomadism circulate within contemporary popular culture, with a focus on how online lifestyle content is indicative of a larger cultural trend that I call the retreat into nomadism paradigm of postfeminist neoliberal sensibility. As examples of this sensibility, I look at case studies from the solo female travel blog sub-genre, with a focus on how these bloggers structure much of their online content using tropes similar to the postfeminist makeover paradigm (Gill 2007) common in popular media, which has been examined in studies of postfeminism that use television, film and chick lit fiction as case studies. Martin Roberts (2007), for example, examines the postfeminist rationale behind the television program *What Not to Wear,* and Diane Negra's *What a Girl Wants* (2009) includes references to the makeover trope in all kinds of postfeminist media artifacts. But instead of a literal makeover of one's appearance as the necessary barrier to a more fulfilled life (usually imagined as a life with improved romantic prospects), the solo female travel blogger presents a makeover narrative in which the before self is left unfulfilled by 9-5 office culture and the

dissatisfactions of corporate life, or one where the subject feels constrained by the gendered expectations about what a woman's life timeline should look like, and anxieties surrounding female solo travel. The after self, having retreated into a life of entrepreneurial nomadism, leads a fulfilled life of financial and geographic freedom. The empowerment advertised in the after version of the travel blogger makeover narrative is distinctly postfeminist in its expectation that the female subject personally makes accommodations (or hustles) for the unsatisfying social and economic structures that make work/life balance or having it all seem out of reach. Solo female travel blogs also reflect larger postfeminist sensibilities in their presentation of a narrow view of empowerment grounded on options available to a relative few, but that are presumed to be available to all.

To better understand the nomadic makeover narrative apparent in women's online travel media and how it responds to questions of the good life, I also identify important relatives to (and influences on) the travel blog genre. I look at the travel blog's origins in the history of travel-related writing and media like the travel memoir and guidebook. I also examine discourses surrounding the figure of the backpacker, noting how travel bloggers tap into existing cultural associations of the backpacker with authenticity—particularly personal (existential) authenticity, which is performed or demonstrated to audiences through the modelling of a version of the good life that rejects traditional career and relationship timelines in favour of minimalism, nomadism, and independence. In addition to the backpacker, the more recent cultural phenomenon of the digital nomad self-help guru requires consideration. Self-styled lifestyle entrepreneurs like best-selling self-help author Tim Ferriss are partly responsible for bringing the entrepreneurial nomadic subject to the fore in the current popular mediascape. The female travel bloggers I examine in this chapter adapt the predominately masculine narrative of the digital nomad to the

intimate registers and timeline-based anxieties of postfeminist sensibility, directing this adapted content to an assumed intimate public of readers presumed to resemble the before self of the nomadic makeover narrative: unfulfilled, constrained, and in need of postfeminist empowerment through self-improvement (acquiring social capital through travel), entrepreneurialism (leaving a standard office career for a nomadic one), and consumption (within the tourism industry generally, and of the blogger's promoted goods and services specifically).

Retreat Narratives in Popular and Online Culture

Before tracing this emerging cultural narrative idealizing the retreat into nomadism, I will first (briefly) turn the other, more popular retreat narrative of postfeminist sensibility. Narratives of retreats into domesticity—specifically, into an ideal of thrifty, do-it-yourself, self-sustainable independent living—are a key current in post-recession postfeminist sensibility. Whether directed towards domesticity or nomadism, retreat narratives in postfeminist media respond to the impetus of unsatisfying or constraining economic and social realities facing educated, middle class western women. Both Emily Matchar in *Homeward Bound* (2013) and the contributors to Negra and Tasker's *Gendering the Recession* collection (2014) see a shift occurring in privileged, educated women's attitudes towards domesticity around the time of the US recession. Matchar calls it a "180-degree turnaround from the consumerist fantasies of the late 1990s and early 2000s" (5), and she uses Ree Drummond of *The Pioneer Woman* as an example of the public's thirst for media depicting retreat into a simpler, DIY lifestyle. Drummond not only manages a blog detailing daily life as a "domestic country wife" ("About Pioneer Woman"), but hosts a cooking show in The Food Network, and has produced several cookbooks and a line of branded goods. She presents her life narrative in the form of a makeover narrative where the before is a metropolitan career woman, and the after is a thrifty cowboy's wife:

> I attended college in California, then got a job and wore black pumps to work every day. I ate sushi and treated myself to pedicures on a semi-regular basis. […] Unexpectedly, during a brief stay in my hometown, I met and fell in love with a rugged cowboy. Now I live in the middle of nowhere on a working cattle ranch. My days are spent wrangling children, chipping dried manure from boots, washing jeans, and making gravy. I have no idea how I got here…but you know what? I love it. Don't tell anyone! ("About")

In 2009, Negra identified a central promise of postfeminism as the "promise of coming back to oneself in a process of coming home" (7), whether that means a return to one's hometown, a shift from fast-paced urban life to more rustic or community-based living, or a downsizing of career ambitions to focus on romance or family. In 2014, Negra and Tasker note how this trope, while still present in postfeminist media, has evolved somewhat in response to economic shifts, so that not only domesticity, but thrift and resourcefulness emerge as idealized traits: they observe that "Recessionary popular culture has latched onto the commodification of domestic femininities in ways continuous with but also distinct from previous eras, with female consumer resourcefulness becoming a new theme on many fronts" (7). Negra and Tasker use the example of shows like *Extreme Couponing* to suggest that consumer culture is still intact, if qualified by the demands of post-recessionary culture. In recent years the ideal postfeminist heroine has become one who exemplifies "adaptive economy and safe female entrepreneurialism" (7).

In 2009, Negra noted that "Postfeminism looks disapprovingly upon those forms of female agency unrelated to couple and family formation, preferring a self-surveillant subject whose concepts of body and behavior are driven by status anxiety" (153). I would argue, rather, that postfeminism's more recent manifestations have been influenced by a cultural context that couples anxieties about financial uncertainty with dreams about the increased mobilities afforded by networking technologies. Contemporary postfeminist sensibility *does* offer a narrative that

claims to reject domesticity and the traditional rewards of heteronormative romance and the family unit. Yet domesticity, romance and family unit do not disappear from this narrative entirely, as they constitute a lingering specter within the nomadic formulation of postfeminist identity. The nomadic female subject's narrative is one of empowerment through choice (as with postfeminist sensibility generally), but this time the choice is to *not* marry, buy a house, and have kids (at least, not *yet*). Continuous with other and older iterations of postfeminist narratives of female empowerment, the liberating choice to reject traditional domesticity in favor of nomadism is framed as a choice available to everybody, while it ignores how the decision to exist as a solo-unit without ties to place and possession relies on economic safety nets enjoyed by relatively few.

Matchar's analysis of what she calls the New Domesticity looks at narratives of women's retreat into domesticity using examples from popular mass media, notably memoirs and chick lit fiction. She also dedicates much of her focus to lifestyle blogging and interviews with individuals who have left the traditional workforce in order to pursue a different lifestyle, whether that means embracing housewifery, sustainable living, or entrepreneurship in the form of side hustle from selling handmade goods, or income from lifestyle blogging. Though not explicitly a book about postfeminism, Matchar's book echoes accounts of this cultural trend in its observations that "Young women tend to feel that the work of feminism is largely done, leaving decisions about career and domesticity a depoliticized matter of 'personal choice'" (28). Matchar frames young, privileged women's widespread embrace of domesticity and traditionally feminine pursuits as being, in part, a response to economic collapse of the post-recession era. Confronted with wage stagnation and a lack of fulfilling career prospects for educated new graduates, DIY-culture and idealized visions of the home as a self-sustaining unit are responding

to (and problematically downplaying) a lack of adequate social safety nets. Through her work, Matchar sympathizes with the motivations behind this cultural trend of retreat, while continually problematizing this New Domesticity's lack of engagement with the political and economic systems driving the external pressures that motivate many to retreat to a thriftier, safer, more familiar domestic sphere. Importantly, this "New Domesticity is the re-embrace of home and hearth by those who have the means to reject these things" (12). With travel bloggers, we can see a similar problematic tendency to disengage with the barriers to workplace satisfaction faced by those with less earning potential, family safety nets (e.g. a room at mom's place), or ties that making packing up and leaving impossible. The fact that travel bloggers offer a model of the good life that is unavailable to most does not go unnoticed by intimate publics: I examine resulting critiques in Chapter Three's study of authenticity and anti-fans in the intimate publics surrounding travel blogs.

This kind of shortsightedness has already in problematized by critics of popular women's travel memoir. In her analysis of Elizabeth Gilbert's massively successful 2006 memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*, Ruth Williams suggests that while "on the surface, [*Eat, Pray, Love's*] messages of liberation and self-rescue seem to support a feminist vision of women's empowerment in which women resist patriarchal social norms—marriage, children, being selfless—by placing importance on their own spiritual development and happiness" (615), this message equates the spiritual journey "not with critical reflection on the self and society, but with 'spiritual' consumption" (615). Kendra Marston also looks at popular women's travel romance and how they frame the cultural other (foreign landscapes, foods, people) as being meaningful only in their ability to contribute to the subject's personal transformation into a more fulfilled or spiritually whole individual. Marston writes, "This transformation results in a renewed

understanding of the restrictions placed upon white, middle-class femininity in the US context and a changing relationship to feminism in a 'postfeminist' era", while "Forms of oppression beyond those concerning the white heroine become suppressed in favor of exploring the social tensions and contradictions experienced by the white postfeminist subject of neoliberalism" (2016, 4). As Williams observes about *Eat, Pray, Love,* "The spiritually fulfilled subject represented in Gilbert's happy ending is not ultimately positioned to ask critical questions regarding how the world works; instead, she is taught to ask questions about how she can work better within the world (621). Travel bloggers echo this concern with questions of "how to work better within the world" without reflecting on how the nomadic female subject's experience of the world is isolated or fundamentally different from the rest of the world.

A paradigm of retreat into nomadism has entered postfeminist sensibility through travel blogs, popular travel memoir, and the abundant wanderlust memes circulating Facebook and Instagram (such as the examples below, drawn from "The Travel Bible," a travel-themed Facebook page with over 280 000 followers as of January 10, 2018).

Illustration 13: Travel memes from "The Travel Bible," captured Jan 10 2018 (www.facebook.com/givemetravel/)

Despite its increasing influence in postfeminist online culture, the retreat to nomadism[9] lifestyle narrative is more prevalent in white, affluent, masculinized popular culture, with much of the recent digital nomad buzz being dominated by men in the tech industry, and some of its most popular texts being rooted in the themes of a larger, heavily-masculinized self-help culture (e.g. *The 4-Hour Workweek)* that groups advice for entrepreneurship, travel, fitness, and dating into easily-digestible autobiographical manuals for the good life [for bros]. In some ways, this masculinized self-help culture (which I examine in greater detail later in this chapter) mirrors postfeminist culture in that the ideal entrepreneurial subject is central, though the discourse

[9] I have chosen the word "nomadism" for its connotations, rather than its dictionary definition of "the practice, fact, or state of living an itinerant life" (OED, "Nomadism"). On a purely practical level, "nomad" is one of the most common words employed in travel blogger titles (popular examples include *Legal Nomads, Nomadic Matt, Thrifty Nomads*), alongside variations of "adventure" and "wander"/"wanderlust." While forms of the word "adventure" are used in two of my key texts (*The Young Adventuress* and *Adventurous Kate*), "retreat into adventure" sounds clumsy, and lacks the cultural resonance of "nomadism." I have chosen the phrase "retreat into nomadism" because of the current pervasiveness of the term "digital nomad," which overlaps with the specific aspects of travel blogging I am exploring. Not all travel bloggers aspire to travel full-time, supporting themselves with income from blogging, or other location-independent sources of income. Some bloggers keep their "day jobs," and blog about travel during their vacation times.

So, in a sense, my use of "nomadism" is a short form of digital nomadism. The bloggers I examine in the case studies of Chapter Two model a version of the good life that cites leaving the traditional office workforce for remote work as key. The critical publics I observe in Chapter Three frequently return to blogger's rejection of corporate life for fulfilling and authentic freelance work in airing their grievances.

"Retreat into nomadism" is not only less clumsy than "retreat into digital nomadism," but also helps differentiate the bloggers I study from the masculine-gendered self-help genre associated with digital nomadism. One key distinction to keep in mind is that the solo female travel bloggers I study tend to frame their entrepreneurialism a little differently—there is less emphasis on capitalistic enterprise for the sake of it, and on using various forms of digital entrepreneurship to become fabulously wealthy. Rather, the postfeminist narrative of retreat into nomadism plays up nomadism's connotations of freedom and exploration, and postfeminist travel narratives are more likely to position digital entrepreneurialism as a means to an end—a way of funding one's wanderlust, rather than the means of building a digital empire.

surrounding the ideal neoliberal male subject has traditionally been unburdened by time crunch (Negra 2009) anxieties or questions of what it means to have it all. Guides marketed towards men about how to make a living digitally while travelling the world focus less on marketing the self as a consumable commodity, and more on offering freelance services in one's area of training (because the imagined audience has university training, likely in STEM or business), maximizing return of time invested, and outsourcing work to digital assistants from countries where labour can be purchased for cheap.

Female travel bloggers pick up narrative threads from these bro-culture artifacts to varying degrees, tapping into an increasingly palatable post-recession cultural narrative and adapting it to perceived needs of a different imagined audience. While I do not pretend to argue that domestic and nomadic retreats hold equal footing in postfeminist culture, online or offline, I do suggest that narratives of retreats into nomadism are becoming more prominent, as networking technologies make it more feasible for some women to travel extensively while documenting their experiences online. And, as has been the case with travel writing by women historically, women entering the entrepreneurial nomad discourse have to adapt the masculinized registers native to this discourse to fit within postfeminist sensibility in an attempt to render their narratives accessible and relatable for postfeminist intimate publics.

Approaching Personal Travel Blogs as Autobiographical Lifestyle Guides

Before looking more closely at examples of how solo female travel bloggers contribute to a postfeminist sensibility of retreat, it is necessary to identify the travel blog and how it operates rhetorically. The personal travel blog draws from other genres to produce transmedia guides or manuals to the good life as one of retreat into nomadism. The term travel blog can refer to a broad spectrum of texts, some of which have little to do with this analysis of postfeminist

nomadic retreat. For example, some travel websites (e.g. Trip Advisor's "Insights" section) commission bloggers whose posts are featured on their website. There are some websites that encourage users to create accounts and post blog updates that are hosted, with minimal customization, on their website (e.g. TravelPod). Ruth Deepti Azariah (2016) makes the distinction between these kinds of travel blogs and what she calls "independent travel blogs," where "the personal voice of the blogger is more easily identified" and "paratextual elements" like layout design are customizable.

Before 2016, research on travel blogs tended to approach its objects from a utilitarian perspective (e.g. how can travel blogs help us develop better marketing strategies and products for the tourism industry?). Banyai and Glover's review (2011) of travel blog research indicates that, until that point, most attention had been directed towards big, aggregated sites like travelblog.org, where there is less focus on individual personal narratives or personas. Banyai and Glover, along with the sources they summarize, understand travel blogs to be the equivalent of "personal online diaries," and seem to take the information contained within blog entries as factual representations of travelers' experiences and perceptions, with no concern for performance and rhetoric. The scholarship represented in this review understands the feedback on tourist experiences posted on blogs as the equivalent to the insider perspective you would get if you looked in a tourist's private diary: "constraint free feedback" (268). We see studies devoted to quantitative content analysis, assessing tourists' reactions to attractions or to tourism marketing in specific places, gauging, for example, how closely the experiences narrated on travel blogs reflect the marketing of the destinations visited. Until recently, most research on travel blogs conceived of travel bloggers as *consumers* and targets for the tourism industry—

cross-sections of the market in general—rather than as *movers* of the tourism industry, or as tourism industries in and of themselves, often offering their own products and travel services.

In a recent overview of the travel blog as a genre, Cardell and Douglas propose that it is most helpful to think of the travel blog as a "rhetorical mode" in which "Travel bloggers employ a range of media in order to frame a predominantly subjective account of travel experience" (2016). I would add to this that the personal travel blog functions not only as a subjective account of travel, but as an autobiographically-inflected guidebook, not only for travel, but for a version of the good life imagined as one of retreat into nomadism. If we think of travel blog as rhetorical mode, we might think of the travel blog as representing an assortment of rhetorical modes that comes from several generic antecedents like the travel log or diary, the explorer narrative, the literary travel memoir, and the travel guidebook—as well as rhetorical modes borrowed from other emerging genres, like the digital nomad self-help genres discussed in a later section. Sometimes these modes operate well together; often they might appear to be in tension.

Travel blogs invoke tropes and rhetorics from older travel and exploration genres, adapting them to the affordances and exigencies of networked digital environments, as well as the cultural demands of the moment. In the case of the solo female travel blogs I examine, bloggers respond to the demands of the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture and related sensibilities of retreat. Specifically, solo female travel blogs respond to a growing taste for postfeminist narratives of retreats into nomadism.

In order to understand the rhetorical modes found in personal travel blogs and what they accomplish, it is helpful to take a step back and consider some of the genres that precede and influence the travel blog. Travel writing, as a term referring to the development of travel narratives across several distinct historical periods and contexts, is a clear predecessor to the

contemporary travel blog as a genre concerned with describing both self and other. Travel writing encompasses a broad array of subgenres, linked, Carl Thompson suggests, by "the negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space" (2011, 9). While this other is typically understood as the cultural other encountered through the experience of travelling to new environments, I would suggest this the other in travel writing can also refer, variously, to conceptions of the home left behind, of other travelers, and even of the imagined public consuming the content being produced.

Thompson traces travel writing's evolution from a form primarily associated with the "dissemination of information about the wider world" to a mode predominately associated with autobiography and memoir, where the travelling subject (rather than the places being described) is the primary object of interest. Early Age of Exploration travelogues, though meant to be entertaining, and, intentionally or not, inscribed with markers of an author's subjectivity, were primarily thought of contributions to various fields of scientific and cultural enquiry. Simon Cooke (2016) observes that "Among the earliest travel writings, interest in the personal biography of the traveler is subordinate to the world exceptionally experienced," which meant that early-modern travel writing would use references to trustworthy authors and editors as means of "legitimizing the veracity of the contents" by establishing the authority of the one presenting the information.

With the late 18th century and the rise of literary romanticism, travel writing (and consumers of travel writing) grew increasingly concerned with "the traveler's distinctive style and sensibility rather than by any factual information they conveyed" (Thompson). Carey notes that the rise of a "romantic mode of travel" resulted in a popular sensibility that conceived of travel as "as much an inward event as an outward one"—a conception of travel that still prevails.

Carey observes further that "under these circumstances the truth told in travel is a personal one and the voice has validity to the extent that it can conjure a convincing account of that experience." Specifically, the emergence of the Grand Tour tradition (mid-1600s to mid-1800s, where young men of means would undertake an arts and culture-focused travelling itinerary throughout western Europe as a form of education and as a preparation for entering society, resulted in the development of a more "reflexively autobiographical form of travel writing" (Cooke). We see continued evidence of this historical shift towards the travelling subject's personality and interiority as the object of focus in travel media. This focus is literalized in the way that, recently, many travel blogs use layouts that centre around a prominently-displayed greeting from, and image of, the blogger (a trend I remarked upon in Chapter One). This focus on the travelling subject is also implicit in the way that travel bloggers incorporate personal experience and intimate disclosures into ostensibly guidebook-like material like destination guides and tips for saving money. The contemporary travel memoir, too, is indicative of this shift, with popular titles like *Eat, Pray, Love* and Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012) dominating the genre with their depictions of introspection and personal growth against the backdrop of travel and adventure.

Another key predecessor to the travel blog is the travel guidebook. By the 20th century, guidebooks had become what is likely the most influential form of travel writing (Laderman 2016)—though it is possible the convenience of digital resources like online guidebooks and travel blogs has replaced them in recent years. Travel guidebooks focus on a particular destination, region, or itinerary, and provide logistical information, like where to eat, how to use transit, find lodgings, and speak simple phrases in the local language. But more than that, they tell the consumer where they *should* go, and what they *should* see. Laderman suggests that the

guidebook informs tourists of "what is worth visiting or noticing, and, crucially, […] how these worthwhile attractions should be interpreted and understood." Although they might appear to consumers as objective purveyors of useful information, guidebooks are far from impartial descriptions of travel destinations, and "in many ways construct the places they purport to describe" (Laderman 2016). As well, they contribute to what MacCannell calls "site sacralization" (1976), informing us which places are worth visiting and why, giving some suggestion of the significance of a site/sight. Different guidebook brands appeal to different niches—for example, *Lonely Planet* is popular among the budget-minded crowd, and those who perceive themselves as travelers rather than tourists. Tony and Maureen Wheeler, creators of the iconic brand, entered the travel guide industry in the 1970s, with the publication of titles like *Across Asia on the Cheap* and *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring*, tapping into what was then the rising popularity of the wanderer/backpacker set within the travel industry—a now massive subset of the tourism industry that the *Lonely Planet* brand continues to address.

Thompson (2016) proposes that contemporary travel writing can be divided into two main forms: the guidebook and the literary travel book. While the guidebook is "a highly objectivist form in which the writer's personality is erased to foreground the practical information needed by travelers," the literary travel book "usually foregrounds and showcases the writer's distinctive sensibility." I would alter Thompson's proposed division of travel writing into two main genres, suggesting instead that there is a whole spectrum of travel writing modes incorporating, to different degrees, aspects of both the guidebook and the literary travel book. Travel blogs themselves fall differently on this scale, between the mostly informative (a blog like *Nomadic Matt* that primarily consists of destination guides) and the mostly personal (such as

Adventurous Kate, in which the blogger updates readers on events in her personal life and relationships, and often includes meditations on travel and women's experience generally).

We can also conceive of the guidebook versus literary travel book distinction as a case of twin discourses or registers in travel writing. Azariah dedicates much of *Tourism, Travel, and Blogging* (2016) to examining "tourism" and "travel" registers, examining how "the tensions between travel and tourism are discursively expressed and negotiated" (2) in travel blogs, and how travel bloggers situate themselves discursively as travelers rather than tourists. She states that "Bloggers strive to describe personal experiences of travel and so dissociate themselves from commercial tourism. Nevertheless, they must also strive to gain visibility for their blogs by engaging with global audiences, and validating both their narratives and their position as authentic bloggers of travel often requires a discursive style that is touristic" (127). Indeed, travel bloggers must strategically blend travel discourse with tourist discourse, presenting themselves both as off the beaten path adventurers and "experts or tour guides," with the effect that "the discursive style of the blog shifts from the monologic tones associated with tourism to the personal voice associated with travel" (164).

Azariah's use of the word touristic to describe a discourse that is commercialized can lead to confusion, as the word is more often invoked to refer to a kind of travel or travel location, usually one that is perceived as less authentic. The traveler/tourist tension that Azariah outlines has a long history and is closely interwoven with discussions of authenticity in tourism studies. While it is important to look at how travel bloggers try to perform a kind of traveler authenticity that impacts perceptions of their authority on matters related to the good life, when it comes to talking about tensions between rhetorical modes, I would rephrase this as a possible tension between the travel memoir and the travel guidebook as generic precedents to the travel blog.

Azariah describes these multiple narratorial positions as a kind of tension inherent in the travel blog, but I see the presence of both traveler and tourist modes—or, instead, the memoir and guidebook generic antecedents—in the personal travel blog as being essential parts of the emerging genre of the autobiographical lifestyle guidebook as something distinct from both travel memoir and travel guidebook as antecedents representing a traveler/tourist dichotomy.

Azariah's book on travel blogs is founded on the idea that travel blogs (and, we can assume, contemporary travel writing in general) incorporate elements of both tourism and travel discourses, which run roughly parallel to Thompson's guidebook versus literary travel book distinction, with the guidebook being addressed to an imagined audience of tourists who are invited to consume in specific ways, and the literary travel book being addressed to people imagining themselves as travelers (real or aspiring), who want to be entertained with stories about personal experiences of travel. Azariah's conceptual framing is more useful for thinking about in-between categories because it sets up distinctions in terms of the *discourses* different travel writing forms employ, rather than distinguishing between the forms themselves (recognizing, in the process, that these forms, especially in digital environments, evolve rapidly and are often difficult to categorize). I also think that Cardell and Douglas' use of the term rhetorical mode can be helpful in this discussion, as it better reflects the fact that travel bloggers are drawing from generic precedents, each with distinct modes that are echoed in the travel blog.

While it is helpful to think about the distinct genres and modes that can be traced within the contemporary travel blog as a conglomeration of several kinds of travel writing, I resist the tendency to think of the multiple genres and registers apparent in the travel blog in terms of dichotomies and tensions. Taking personal lifestyle blogs as an example, it seems clear that the autobiographical can co-exist with the guide or manual—for what are lifestyle blogs, if not

guides for living, where the autobiographical elements constitute the model meant to be followed? Travel bloggers increasingly market their content as authoritative and instructional, offering quick tips about where to go, what to do, how to save money, and, broadly, how to live as a neoliberal, postfeminist nomadic subject. In contrast to what Azariah argues, bloggers do not always need to suppress or downplay either the touristic or traveler mode in order to better represent the other. In fact, the presence of familiarly autobiographical modes can be essential to the rhetorical effect of the blogger's efforts of present their content in the form of a kind of guidebook—if that guidebook is presented not just as a trove of travel advice, but as a manual to living well as a nomadic subject.

Even though the personal travel blog as autobiographical lifestyle guidebook is dependent on both the guidebook and the memoir as generic antecedents, the distinct modes and registers associated with these genres should not necessarily be interpreted as automatically in tension or as interrupting each other's rhetorical work, but rather can be thought of as representing ends of a spectrum. Though autobiographical and guidebook modes often rely on each other within travel blogs that function as lifestyle guidebooks, we can perceive variations in the extent to which some bloggers rely more one mode than the other. In some cases, travel blogs act as information repositories, encouraging readers to browse by country or region in order to find tips and recommendations for how to travel there. Again, in some cases more than others, blogs foreground the blogger persona as a model for experiencing the good life through entrepreneurial nomadism, responding to popular appetite for aspirational lifestyle autobiography. A spectrum with guidebook/tourist modes on one end, and memoir/traveler modes on the other, is helpful in conceptualizing the kinds of imagined publics that different blogs address, and helps us identify those blogs which are most clearly addressed to a public

assumed to be *intimate*—blogs located closer to the memoir/traveler end of the spectrum. In these blogs, guidebook registers support the work of autobiographical and intimate registers; in the cases of blogs that appear to target a less invested (but more populous) public interested in blogs as information repositories that are still less commercialized than larger brands like *Lonely Planet* and *Trip Advisor*, the autobiographical works in support of the guidebook function of the blog.

The kind of travel blogs that seem most likely to attract engagement from intimate publics (both positive and negative) are blogs that present themselves as manuals for the good life, where the transmedia project of the blogger persona itself is essential to the blog's arguments for how to live as an ideal neoliberal postfeminist nomadic subject. Though these blogs contain some practical information about the act of travelling itself (what one might encounter when visiting new places and how best to manage those encounters), the value of the information is not that it is exclusively available on the blog in question (many of the tips and travel hacks offered by personal bloggers can be found repeated, all but verbatim, on most other travel blogs). Rather, for active participants in the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, the potential value is located in the blogger's efforts to give a model of how to live one's best life by enjoying the freedoms of entrepreneurial nomadism.

The project of the travel blog (and lifestyle blog generally) as auto/biographical lifestyle guidebook necessitates a degree of inwardness, and bloggers' observations about the world are filtered through the lens of the self-reflexive subject. Thompson observes that detractors of popular travel writing tend to dismiss the genre due to its tendency to promote "prejudicial and partial views" of the world, and to present a "reprehensible self-absorption" in response to "the form's autobiographical imperatives," reducing "the rest of the world to the role of supporting

cast in a traveller's personal drama and development." Holland and Huggan (1998) argue that "Perhaps it is best to see travel writing as pseudoethnographic, insofar as it purports to provide a document of, or report on, other peoples and cultures while using them as a backdrop for the author's personal quest" (12). I would argue that the label pseudoethnographic is not wholly appropriate for talking about travel blogs, which most of the time do not even pretend to be ethnographic, or to have the description of exotic locales and people as their primary purpose. Rather, it is the persona of the travel blogger herself that is the main object of focus.

Personal travel blogs incorporate and combine memoir and guidebook modes by presenting content in the form of a transmedia lifestyle guidebook, or as a guide to the good life, which can contain both practical travel tips similar to what one would find in a commercial travel guidebook, alongside meditations on what it means to travel as a solo female. Performances of introspection and self-reflexivity contribute to the representation of existential authenticity, which is presented through intimate registers with the assumption that the reader is part of the same intimate public of participants invested in questions of what it means to live and thrive as a contemporary female subject.

Retreat and the Good Life According to Backpackers and Digital Nomads

In order to understand how solo female travel bloggers contribute to postfeminist narratives of retreat into nomadism, it is important to consider two related categories of identification associated with nomadic neoliberal subjects. First is the backpacker category, which has been discussed extensively within tourism studies, with particular concern for backpackers' participation in authenticity discourse. Second is the more recent trend of digital nomad as a lifestyle identifier. Like the backpacker, the digital nomad emphasizes minimalism as essential for the good life, and proposes that the act of wandering through different exotic

locations is a unique perk of digital entrepreneurialism. The backpacker historically has close ties with discussions of what it means to live authentically, whether by visiting non-touristy locations, or by pursuing existential authenticity through living in a manner consistent with one's personal commitments, or by *performing* authenticity in pursuit of the social capital that accrues from appearing to have accomplished the former two. The digital nomad, in contrast, does not engage in authenticity discourses as explicitly. The digital nomad is concerned with a notion of authenticity based on following one's personal inclinations by designing a lifestyle that resists external pressures to work and manage finances using traditional methods (9-5 office job and plan to retire at 65). The emphasis of digital nomad discourse is not so much personal growth through encounters with authentic others and locations, but rather entrepreneurialism, aggressive self-improvement, and leveraging lower costs in developing nations to outsource labour and lead a luxury lifestyle on the cheap.

Through an examination of the interrelated discourses of the backpacker and the lifestyle entrepreneur or digital nomad, I explore how the postfeminist online subject takes traditionally masculinized narratives—from the explorer-conqueror of early travel narrative, to the backpacker/wanderer narrative of the 20th century, and most recently the nomadic digital entrepreneur—and adapts the masculinized registers and rhetorics of these personas to fit the postfeminist sensibilities of online intimate publics, where female subjects' depictions of retreats into nomadism are expected to authentically convey how to live well as a nomadic *woman*, a demand that is most frequently read as calling for increased intimacy of expression, discussions of the inner life, engagement with ongoing postfeminist discourses of having it all, and showing convincing evidence of humility and transparency.

While solo budget travel bloggers do not necessarily use the term backpacking in their branding, digging into individual blog posts usually yields some references to backpacking or being a backpacker, and destination guides tend to feature observations about the backpacker culture (or lack thereof) of a destination (e.g. "Why Don't More Backpackers Come to Malta," *Adventurous Kate*). The term backpacker, invoked casually by budget travel bloggers, comes with a lot of historical and theoretical baggage.

Research in tourism studies has attempted to categorize backpackers, pinpoint the historical origins of this kind of travel, and differentiate backpacker motivations and behaviors from those of other kinds of tourists. Compared to mainstream mass tourists, backpackers take longer trips (often months or even years long), rely on low budget transport and subsistence, follow loose itineraries and have a "serendipitous" orientation toward travel (O'Reilly 2006). Maoz (2007) notes backpackers' tendency to travel more widely than other tourists, seeking unusual routes, describing them as "people who search for authentic experiences, a search based on exclusion of other tourists." Nomadic Matt (who runs what is likely the most popular backpacker blog) describes the backpacker as "usually a young traveler on a long trip who sleeps in hostels, cooks his/her own meals, lives cheap, is on a budget, and parties hard" ("Of Backpackers and Tourists"). It should not be surprising that Matt sees fit to include "parties hard" in his definition, given the prevalence of partying imagery in youth hostel marketing, but research on backpackers tends not to pay attention to the hedonism that often comes along with this particular kind of travel.

In addition, backpackers are usually white, middle-to-upper class, from affluent Western countries like Scandinavia, UK, Ireland, Australia, NZ, South Africa, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, Canada and the US (O'Reilly 2006). The whiteness of backpackers might have changed a

bit in the 5-10 years since a lot of the research on backpackers has been published— informally, I recall having met more South Korean and Chinese backpackers than American backpackers staying in several hostels in 2015 and 2016. It is interesting to note that the US produces a relatively low number of backpackers proportional to its wealth and population (perhaps it is not fair to compare the US to European countries, where international travel is cheaper and more convenient, but, proportionally, the US has fewer backpackers than Australia, New Zealand, and Canada). Yet despite this, the most popular backpacker blogs are coming from the United States. Perhaps this success is because Americans form a large subset of English-speaking blog readers, and are more interested in reading blogs by other Americans due to the fact that the aspirational quality of travel blogs is more compelling when the blogger comes from a similar background to the reader (a place where such travel is still considered unusual or particularly adventurous).

Traditionally, backpacker culture has been associated with the Western youth counterculture, but this is changing. Chaim Noy remarks that backpackers "are commonly designated as youths who travel to 'third world' destinations and hold countercultural views" but "recent findings show that backpackers vary greatly in age, that backpacking is a long-standing tradition of travel in the West (particularly in mainland Europe), and that backpackers actually rarely adhere to anti-establishment worldviews anymore" (Noy 2007, 9). As the tourism industry adapts to the demands of backpacker tourism (hostels, bus tours, etc), the "global nomad is also being incorporated into the 'McDonaldised' system of conventional tourism" (Richards and Wilson 2004, 3). Even if the contemporary backpacker style of travel is barely distinguishable from so-called mainstream tourism, the figure of the backpacker and what he/she represents still holds an important place in the Western cultural imagination, and immediately summons

associations with authenticity, wanderlust/vagabonding, and an emphasis on personal growth and self-discovery missing from conventional tourism.

Backpacking culture has been established long enough that we can see gradations of perceived authenticity even within this in-group: for example, the emergence of the term "flashpacker" (Hannam and Diekmann 2010, 1) suggests the role of simplicity and frugality ("roughing it") in popular conceptions of how a true backpacker travels. The flashpacker is perhaps slightly older (late 20s to early 30s), stays in a variety of accommodations, spends more, and has more gadgets and conveniences (e.g. carries laptop). Designations like flashpacker tell us less about an actual taxonomy within the backpacking world, than about the perennial desire of tourists to differentiate themselves as being somehow better at travelling (which is usually tied up with conceptions as what it means to travel authentically) than other tourists.

Although the backpacker market is heterogenous and, some researchers suggest, better understood with consideration for difference based on nationality, gender, class, age, etc, (Nash 2001; Sorensen 2003), research in tourism/tourist studies has generally traced contemporary backpacking culture's origins to two distinct historical predecessors: the drifter counter-culture of the 1960s and 70s, and the Grand Tour of 17th-19th century Europe.

The figure of the drifter in tourism studies rose to prominence through Erik Cohen's 1970s taxonomies of the tourist. According to Cohen's taxonomy, the drifter usually comes from an affluent background, and travels as a means of escape from the alienation of modern middle-class life. The drifter travels off the beaten track and avoids activities associated with the mass tourism industry (e.g. tour groups, big hotels). The drifter travels for an extended period of time, perhaps picking up jobs along the way, with no fixed itinerary. Drifting, as a symptom of the 1960-70s counter-culture, was characterized as involving "The loosening of ties and obligations,

the abandonment of accepted standards and conventional ways of life, the voluntary abnegation of the comforts of modern technological society and the search for sensual and emotional experiences [...] to travel and live among different and more 'primitive' surroundings" (1973, 93). The language used here to express the drifter's dissatisfaction with modern experience will be very familiar to a reader of solo budget travel blogs, which proclaim to abandon conventional 9-5 lifestyles in favour of the freedom of long-term travel supported by digital freelance work, a similarity that suggests how invoking backpacking's counter-cultural roots can be a strategy for performing authenticity. In the case of contemporary travel bloggers, the language of the counter-culture's rebellion against the conventional life path for relatively affluent westerners is adapted to fit the digital nomad narrative of renunciation—renunciation, that is, of the office atmosphere, but not the office income.

As early as the 1970s, is was clear that drifter culture was becoming more and more mainstream and institutionalized alongside mass tourism, through the establishment of popular drifter travel itineraries (often running parallel to mainstream tourist trails), adventure and off the beaten track tours, guide books targeted to this kind of travel, and separate infrastructures dedicated to budget tourism (hostels, specific transportation fares for youth, budget passes like discounted EuroRail passes for specific intervals of time). Chaim Noy observes that, as the backpacker tourism industry continued to develop from the 1980s onward, "Although the colonial myth of the 'pioneer,' 'explorer' backpacker remained active, as did echoes of counterculture ideologies, institutionalization and commercialization nonetheless governed the backpacking industry" (Noy 2007, 5).

Today, we might think of the countercultural aspect of backpacking as setting up a contrast between backpacking and tourism in general (Welk 2004, 85), rather than between

backpackers and society (although travel bloggers sometimes like to set themselves up as living a life that goes against the values of mainstream society in the sense that bloggers forgo a traditional career path in order to travel extensively or indefinitely). There is actually not much at stake in bloggers' professions of seemingly counter-cultural views. As Welk writes, backpacking "is merely a stroll into non-conformism, a countercultural 'picnic'–a break from the backpacker's own conformist life" (2004, 85). And in the case of the most successful bloggers, backpacking does not really liberate from the tentacles of late capitalism, but rather, the practice of a backpacker lifestyle as a source of income further embeds them within the networks of consumer culture.

It is easy the see remnants of the countercultural origins of backpacking culture in budget travel blogs, which spend so much time establishing *what they are not*, or what they reject as inauthentic. Perhaps more difficult to identify (but still present in the rhetoric surrounding backpacking as a form of travel) is backpacking's potential lineage from the Grand-Tour rite of passage for educated, affluent young men in 17th-18th century Europe. After completing formal education, young elites would further their education through prolonged travel (Loker, Murphy & Pearce 1995), hitting key cultural sites throughout Western Europe. In theory, these tours would prepare young people to enter adult society as cultured and well-rounded individuals. As O'Reilly explains, travel is still often cited as a necessary capstone for a young person's education, even though the nature of this education has changed somewhat, from increasing one's familiarity with the classics, art history, and foreign languages, to "the need to 'find myself' or the development of a stronger sense of self and identity" (O'Reilly 2006)

Scott Cohen (2010) points out that these two frequently-cited origins of contemporary backpacking culture form significantly different historical starting points for the trend, each

making us think about the evolutions and connotations of backpacking quite differently: education and sophistication versus beatnik culture; class elitism versus countercultural attitudes (70, 2010). But perhaps thinking about backpacking culture as developing in part from these divergent historical precedents paints an accurate picture of the contradictions inherent in this mode of tourism: backpacking is frequently understood by educated, affluent young people in the West as something they *must* do before embarking on adulthood. It is cited by many, including travel bloggers, as a necessary formative experience that provides a kind of education that formal studies cannot. Liz of *The Young Adventuress*, for example, explains that she travels "because I want to learn" and "because I want to become a better human," encouraging readers to do the same ("We travel, we grow" Nov 3, 2016). The nature of this education is not so well-defined as the purposes of the Grand Tour would have been—young backpackers leave home with the vague project of identity-building through the pursuit of unique and challenging experiences, and the indulgence of a broad curiosity. Jean-Christophe Demers (2012) suggests that backpackers "respond to contemporary Western society's exigence to self-reflexivity" (my own translation). The contemporary backpacker trip seems to combine the goals of the Grand Tour with the aimlessness of the drifter lifestyle, suggesting a model for the good life in which the subject is supposed to become educated in the ways of the world through wandering.

More recently, wandering has become increasingly enmeshed with popular narratives of entrepreneurialism, both in the sense of capitalist enterprise, and in the sense of being an entrepreneur of the self through self-monitoring and self-improvement, with the goal of

increased social capital. We see this in the figure of the digital nomad, popularized through the lifestyle entrepreneur genre currently dominating the self-help market[10].

Despite the seeming incompatibility of the word nomad with marketing discourse and tech/start-up culture, the term digital nomad has nevertheless become something of a buzzword within these spheres, as well as within a self-help market targeted towards 20- and 30-something men. In part, the emergence of the figure of the digital nomad reflects a larger cultural trend towards the embrace of precarious freelance work, along with attendant neoliberal narratives of liberation from discontents of contemporary work life through entrepreneurialism.

A digital nomad leverages the affordances of digital/networked technologies to become location-independent while generating enough income to support a lifestyle based on continuous travel. Many people become digital nomads by freelancing in areas where they have existing training or expertise, or by convincing employers to let them telecommute. The principle behind digital nomadism is that it is more affordable to travel long-term, at a slower place, and in countries that are cheap for Westerners (South East Asia being the popular choice), while still

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[10] Contemporary self-help's celebration of the ideal, neoliberal entrepreneurial subject has some continuity with early, liberal forebears in the self-help genre. Indeed, we can observe a clear trajectory from Samuel Smiles and his book *Self-Help*; *With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (1859), which gives accounts of individuals who have risen out of obscurity into fame and prosperity, to figures like Ferriss, who claim to help readers with their own examples of having achieved success through grit and cleverness. As the quintessential example (and namesake) of the early self-help genre, Smiles' book evinces an optimistic faith in progress and idea of individual responsibility typical of liberalism's bootstrapping mentality.

The difference is that, while charismatic personalities have long been central to inspirational narratives of capitalist enterprise, the role of personal brand in the neoliberal bootstrapping narratives of lifestyle entrepreneurs like Ferris take precedence—becoming, in many cases, the only continuity in otherwise scattered narratives describing successions of vague entrepreneurial projects that never seem to culminate in sustainable business models. The main product on display is lifestyle expertise—and rather than authority on the good life stemming from established success in other areas of entrepreneurialism, the contemporary lifestyle entrepreneur's authority seems to come solely from having successfully marketed himself as an expert.

generating a full-time salary. Like backpackers and budget travel bloggers, digital nomads draw from conceptions of wandering as a form of self-improvement, and as a method for cultivating social capital. However, the digital nomad lacks the backpacker and budget travel blogger's emphasis on travelling authentically, instead emphasizing how one can leverage favorable exchange rates in developing countries to lead a luxury lifestyle for less money. The backpacker's interest in cultivating personal authenticity through self-reflexivity along with travelling is taken up by both digital nomads and travel bloggers. With the former, this existential introspection is conceived of as a tool for entrepreneurship (discover your entrepreneurial self), while in personal travel bloggers, and especially solo female travel bloggers, this introspection is performed in the context of postfeminist intimate publics that necessitate the work of discovering and articulating one's identity as a 21st century western woman—that is, figuring out how to live the good life not only as a postfeminist entrepreneurial subject, but as a female subject who is, perhaps unavoidably, continuously defined by the extent to which she adheres to traditional roles, relationships, and life trajectories.

There is also a vocal subpopulation of digital nomads who make a living off the *idea* of digital nomadism, attempting to generate income by coaching others in the art of becoming a digital nomad. The most famous (and successful) example of this tactic is lifestyle guru Tim Ferriss, author of what is arguably the foundational text of digital nomadism as an identifiable cultural trend: *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape the 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich* (2007). This text is widely embraced by existing and aspiring digital nomads, and is well-known enough within the digital nomad community that the subreddit r/digitalnomad frequently refers to it in an abbreviated form, 4HWW.

Ferriss has authored a suite of texts dedicated to sharing his lifestyle hacks, which aim to maximize productivity/output while minimizing effort—a philosophy he applies to all areas of living. In his first book *The 4-Hour Workweek*, Ferriss outlines his strategies for low-effort entrepreneurialism that leverages automation, passive income, and cheap outsourcing, while glamourizing his chosen lifestyle of luxury travel in developing countries and spending his time honing unique hobbies and accomplishments specific to the locales he visits, presumably for the purpose of accumulating social capital. Following the success of *4-Hour Workweek*, Ferris went on to produce *The 4-Hour Body,* in which he reveals his methods for gaining 34lbs of muscle in one month by working out for 1 hour a week. In *The 4-Hour Chef*, Ferriss shares his strategies for cooking impressive dishes as quickly as possible.

Ferriss' lifestyle advice emphasizes both financial and personal success, promoting entrepreneurialism, autodidacticism, the leveraging of networked technology, and strategic self-branding as key pillars for the good life. The end goal of Ferriss' lifestyle design is spending as little time as possible on income production, in order to pursue hobbies and leisure activities—importantly, these activities tend to have a self-improvement emphasis, encompassing things like travelling, language-acquisition, fitness, and acquiring unique skills (including producing a 15-minute orgasm, a hack outlined in *The 4-Hour Body*). Ferris calls his work lifestyle design, pitches it as a "replacement for multi-staged career planning" (9), and maintains a blog called "experiments in lifestyle design" (4hourblog.com) where the subject's body and mind is represented as a site of constant tweaking and perfecting through a series of "hacks," in which processes requiring the least amount of time and effort are favoured

Ferriss is dismissive of the classic American work ethic, and much of his work is dedicated to dismantling the idea that spending more effort and time on a task is automatically

more virtuous. This is an important distinction of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject and the new American dream that accompanies it—*productivity* (not necessarily hard work) is of utmost value, and self-promotion is a key virtue. Implicit in the vision promoted by Ferriss is that hard work is *still very much* a part of the dream, only now it is the hard work of an anonymous digital labourer from a developing country, referred to as a VPA or virtual private assistant.

Alice Marwick observes that self-help manuals like Ferriss' 4-Hour series operate as "instruction manuals for surviving without an economic safety net" (2013, 181), in which the ideal neoliberal subject happily accommodates for the lack of stability offered by larger political/economic structures, mainly by marketing their personal expertise in the area of survival. In the expanded and revised edition of *The 4-Hour Workweek,* Ferriss acknowledges the economic changes that occurred in the years immediately following the book's original publication in 2007. He highlights how the benefits of shorter-term lifestyle planning over long-term career planning are more apparent than ever, because the reliability of the latter is increasingly uncertain. Ferriss's book was published at an ideal moment—right before the recession—and his vision of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject riding the recession in luxury is understandably appealing. Ferriss echoes Berlant's cruel optimism when he talks about the dangers of an "optimistic denial" that leads to subjects enduring in draining, drudging jobs in the hope of this hard work eventually leading to a better life. What Ferriss sells instead is just another kind of [cruel] optimism—in this case, the idea that a little bit of hustle and bravado is enough to liberate the subject from tedium into a life of wanderlust and luxury.

The survival expertise offered by digital-entrepreneurship self-help manuals largely consists of teaching others how to market their *own* expertise, not unlike a massive multi-level marketing scheme. Indeed, the self-help industry's affinity with such structures does not go

unnoticed by consumers. One Redditor considering taking the plunge into digital nomadism voices their concerns on r/digitalnomad about this very MLM-like feature of the digital nomad lifestyle, as outlined by its most vocal proponents:

> I heard about this whole 'digital nomad' thing just 2 weeks ago, and it sounded like just what I wanted!... I (voraciously) read 4HWW and I felt a lot of it was preaching to the choir about maximizing experiences over $$. ... Then last night I looked at the top-all-time section of this sub, and for the first time I saw a pretty grimy side of the DN life, particularly in Chiang Mai. Apparently, the place is crawling with losers who are seduced to the city by the get-rich-quick prospect of the DN life, but who lack any marketable skills. This influx has caused an infestation with a pyramid scheme of millennial selling accelerators, bootcamps, seminars, self-help books, etc. promising riches to the latest batch of wannabe DNs by selling the DN life through accelerators, bootcamps, seminars, self-help books, etc.... (bkd9, July 12, 2017)

Nomadic Notes, an online hub of digital nomad resources such as ebooks and online courses, supports this Redditor's impression that many digital nomads make a living by giving instructions on how to be digital nomads. As Benjamin Wallace summarizes in *New York Magazine,* digital nomadism is "an update to both the old hippie trail and get-rich-quick fantasies," with popular the nomad location Chiang Mai striking the visitor as "half-hippie, half-hustler" ("American Cult Hoppers," July 12 2017). In *Lifestyle Entrepreneur,* Jesse Kreiger coins an aphorism that constitutes a brilliant summation of the digital nomad as an update to the backpacker-wanderer archetype and as an ideal neoliberal subject: "The world is both your playground and your potential addressable market" (xiv).

What I will call lifestyle entrepreneur discourse is not limited, of course, to the most famous examples of its proponents/salesmen. There is a subcategory of travel blog run by bloggers whose main source of income is not blogging itself, but other kinds of online entrepreneurship. These blogs identify as digital nomad blogs and describe aspects of that lifestyle. For example, Clayton Cornell of *Spartan Traveller* intersperses travel narrative with

reviews of self-help books, productivity hacks, thoughts on aspects of lifestyle design, and an account of how he hacked his diet to double his testosterone. A preliminary observation I would make, based on my perusal of travel blogs like *Spartan Traveller,* is that blogs using the term lifestyle design as opposed to general lifestyle are more likely to be heavily masculine-gendered and targeted towards an audience imagined as male. Clayton's "About Me" echoes Ferriss' rejection of the deferred life plan of the traditional American work force, and incorporates a notably Emersonian logic. He writers, "It's an ideal: to strip away the inessentials and to try to live life on my own terms. And although it's largely about travel it's also about life (and travel as a lifestyle). Reducing lifestyle overhead. Cutting anchors. Tossing baggage. Getting over the material and mental comforts the keep us from living a real, examined life." However, the author does not appear to be cognizant of this affinity with Emersonian minimalism/authenticity, and immediately follows the above excerpt with a quote from Bruce Lee.

What happens to aspiring digital nomads who do not already have jobs that can be transitioned to telecommuting or freelance consulting, and who lack the bravado to market themselves as nomad-experts? Some fall into freelance digital labour, such as the kind of work available on the digital freelancing platform Upwork. Pawel Popiel (2017) notes that Upwork's marketing strategy relies heavily on hope, and that it is the existence of *some* lucrative gigs and *some* success stories of individuals who have made a comfortable living freelancing with Upwork that drives the system's success. The existence of such success stories "fuels hope labor" as freelancers compete for the few high-paying jobs. Successful candidates tend to be "those with in-demand niche skills" as well as an established history on the site and good reviews, which reflects persistence. These successful freelancers are often featured in the site's promotional literature, and thus "perpetuate the idea that failure in this marketplace means not

sufficiently engaging in hope labor," drawing in legions of new freelancers with the promise that hard work and persistence will bring rewards in this marketplace.

Upwork uses blog-style articles and interviews to promote select success stories: in an interview with digital nomad Radhika Basuthakur, a freelancer who does social media/marketing for the website while travelling, little is said about the nature of Radhika's work (Feltham, "Inside Upwork" Dec 1 2016). We learn that she likes to start every day by reading articles about productivity and the future of work to motivate herself before she attends to various unspecified tasks assigned by clients. There is no mention of the stability of her income, of her future prospects, security, or of whether she receives outside financial assistance. If we think critically about Upwork's tagline "creating a world of work without limits," a double meaning emerges: a slogan meant to evoke the freedom and flexibility of location-independent work *also* implies a lack of checks and balances, where there is no upward limit to the amount of labour that will be required of the worker to eke out a living.

Like digital nomad lifestyle entrepreneurs, travel bloggers can generate traffic and income by selling optimism, or the dream of funding a nomadic lifestyle through location-independent work. Instead of pushing readers to start online businesses, however, travel bloggers sell the narrative of their own success as travel bloggers. Many of the most popular posts are variations of "How to Become a Successful Travel Blogger," with some bloggers selling ebooks or consulting on the topic. The emphasis tends to be on how it will require a lot of time and labour before any income is generated, and how, even then, the work will be arduous and continuous. For example, *Wandering Earl* describes 12-16 hour days with his laptop as the norm ("Why I Work 90 Hours Per Week"), explaining that all of this draining work is motivated by his desire to travel more, and adding that "If any of you have ever wanted something so badly that

you would sacrifice certain aspects of your life in order to achieve that one goal, you'll understand." Similarly, *Adventurous Kate* writes in her "About" page, "know this: making a full-time living as a travel blogger is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. This is in no way passive income—it requires an immense amount of time, work, and networking." This is a trope common to travel bloggers, but not to digital nomad/lifestyle entrepreneur guides: an emphasis of the *grind* of day to day work as a travel blogger. These narratives contrast with the lifestyle entrepreneur ideal of working less and less as one becomes more successful.

The labour of personal travel blogs might have more in common with the labour of online freelancing platforms like Upwork than with the models for entrepreneurship outlined by the most famous lifestyle entrepreneurs. Indeed, some travel bloggers promote this freelancing route as a way of earning income while travelling. In a blog post titled "How I Made Over $4000 in My First Month on Elance," *Bren on the Road* even suggests offering services for free initially, in order to build credit on freelancing platforms. The implication of this kind of advice is that hard work and persistence will yield results. Even though the most financially-successful travel bloggers generate income from a variety of sources that might include, in addition to revenue from ads, affiliate links, and sponsored posts, things like consulting, paid speaking gigs, and ebook sales (which they have in common with digital nomad lifestyle entrepreneurs), the emphasis is on writing and creative content production as a source of income. This implies that the assumed audience of travel blogs (as opposed to digital nomad blogs) is not just looking to get rich while travelling in style through developing countries, but craves personally fulfilling, authentic creative work (like travel blogging). Though the discourses surrounding travel blogging as a solution to contemporary corporate life's discontents have much in common with

digital nomad narratives, there is a heightened emphasis on travel blogging as real (i.e. difficult and time-consuming) work that is also personally fulfilling.

Postfeminist narratives of the retreat into nomadism incorporate aspects of the backpacker's quest for authenticity and the digital nomad's hyper-masculinized pursuit of self-improvement, and his confidence that entrepreneurialism is key to resolving the shortcomings of the lifestyle available to contemporary Western middle-class subjects. The postfeminist nomadic subject of the solo female travel blog narrates her process of attaining personal authenticity through intimate disclosures that detail not only her encounters with other cultures and locations imagined as more authentic than familiar life in the West, but through continual ruminations on what is means to reject or forego not only the traditional workplace, but the normative female timeline that includes settling down into domesticity before a certain age. Postfeminist questions of what it means to have it all, and skepticism about whether this is even possible, loom large in solo female travel blogger discourse, in a way that is not apparent in content associated with the digital nomad.

The solo female travel blog is similar to the digital nomad self-help genre in that it promises a better alternative to the traditional life and work narratives—however, unlike the digital nomad blog's persistent optimism that "you too can have it all" with a bit of entrepreneurial spirit mixed with boldness, the postfeminist nomadic subject tempers her faith in the neoliberal narrative of the entrepreneurial spirit as key to freedom and happiness with reflections on the real personal sacrifices that come with such a lifestyle, recurring doubts about the sustainability of nomadism, and uncertainty about whether the good life can really be designed. I think this difference partly emerges out of an attempt to appeal to and participate in the intimate public of postfeminist online culture, within which the appearance of authenticity

and realness is of utmost importance, and being too bombastic in one's assertions of lifestyle expertise could be off-putting.

Adjusting Popular Nomad Narratives to Postfeminist Intimate Publics

Digital nomadism and lifestyle design self-help culture presumes a male audience with its promises of a re-invigorated version of masculinity for those willing to adhere to, and *invest* in, its vision of the good life. In his article for *New York Magazine,* Wallace observes that "A notable percentage of nomads seemed to have at least flirted with different parts of the manosphere" (July 12, 2017), an informal umbrella term referring to online spaces devoted to the discussion of issues associated with contemporary masculinity. The term has negative connotations due to several notorious "men's rights" groups that fall under its purview (e.g. The Red Pill community on Reddit). Wallace observes that some "disenchanted longer-term expats" refer to self-styled digital nomads as "Bromads and Digital Gonads." Marwick (170) situates self-help gurus like Ferriss and Gary Vaynerchuk (author of *Crush It!,* a self-help guide that promises readers that they can leverage their passions into success through prolific social media content production) within the context of Silicon Valley and its "technolibertarian" ideal of the self-made, independent (male) subject. She notes that, importantly, the ideal subject of such self-help books is "divorced from interpersonal relationships and social ties" (170). In *The 4-Hour Workweek*, Ferriss' grandiose descriptions of his nomadic lifestyle suggest that he is free from family commitments, though we eventually learn that he is married when he recommends the use of an overseas virtual personal assistant for handling marital conflict via email. Marwick points out that Ferriss "universalizes a wealthy, white man's experience as a workable method for others" (180).

Despite appearances, there are indeed some women who identify with the digital nomad category, as evidenced by the existence of a web resource called Digital Nomad Girls. The website features conspicuous pink branding and overuses the word "girls" throughout, tapping into the girl power aesthetic of postfeminist sensibility. Digital Nomad Girls features interviews with different female digital nomads and organizes annual retreats for digital nomad women to meet and network. The creators of this website and of the retreats are clearly trying to rebrand the familiar tactics of male lifestyle entrepreneurs to appeal to a female audience, but the results are cloying, and the website does not seem to be very popular.

As I have argued previously, personal travel blogs exist at different locations on a scale between the travel guidebook mode, in which the blog functions as source of information for travel, and the travel memoir or autobiographical mode, in which the transmedia project of the blog operates as an archive of the self, tending towards the intimate and confessional. Solo female travel blogs *tend* to occupy a location closer to the memoir end of the spectrum, especially in their capacity as autobiographical guidebooks for the good life imagined as a life of postfeminist retreat. This emphasis on the good life links women's travel blogs to the lifestyle design genre of instruction offered by content creators within the niche of the digital nomad entrepreneur self-help genre. This postfeminist version of digital nomad lifestyle design suggests how, in the feminized version of the nomadic entrepreneurial subject, we see an increased emphasis on fostering impressions of intimacy, performing authenticity, and cultivating emotional capital within intimate publics.

Lifestyle design and digital nomadism-themed self-help does not place the same emphasis on authenticity and realness as personal travel blogs. There are occasional gestures towards authenticity, such as when authors maintain that they are self-made success stories.

Ferris, for example, makes sure to mention the low wage jobs he performed in his youth, and alludes to his humble origins. But this genre foregrounds larger than life impression-making, which does not seem to harm the self-brander's image within the publics he addresses. For those writing within this niche, the goal is to emphasize, as much as possible in the first few pages, how wildly successful the author has become, thus qualifying them to dole out lifestyle advice. In *Lifestyle Entrepreneur*, Kreiger quickly covers his early career as a rock musician and music label owner, moving to how he discovered his true calling as a business consultant. He casually mentions being hired by "4-time superbowl champ Bill Romanowski" (4) to help launch his line of supplements. Kreiger then outlines his transition to investment banking, where he became very busy generating "hundreds of thousands of dollars in commissions" (5). Then he describes getting involved in something called Project Rockstar, a coaching service devoted to mentoring "ordinary guys" in the various lifestyle arts, from fashion and fitness, to approaching women in the streets. Now Kreiger travels the world teaching entrepreneurship, lifestyle design and "dating science."

The category distinction between the travel blog and the digital nomad/entrepreneurship is at times blurred. The blog *Wandering Trader* occupies this grey area, with the author writing about various travel destinations like a typical travel blogger, while also emphasizing his work as a day trader as the thing that allows him to travel while working only 1-2 hours a day. It is this emphasis on how little he works to generate his income that sets *Wandering Trader* apart from what I would consider the prototypical personal travel blog (making Arrambide's blog, in terms of genre, more of a lifestyle entrepreneur blog, with its focus on the jet-setting, hyper-masculine entrepreneurial subject).

Travel blogs use some of the same tactics as digital nomad/lifestyle entrepreneur content to sell their version of the good life. A subgenre that I will call the "cultural capital checklist" is one such tactic. Both Ferriss and Kreiger market their work by using lists of unique and eclectic experiences and accomplishments to tantalize prospective readers and brand themselves as globetrotting heroes/masculine archetypes. Ferris provides the ultimate example of such a list:

> This book will teach you the precise principles I have used to become the following:
> Princeton University guest lecturer in high-tech entrepreneurship
> First American in history to hold a Guinness World Record in tango
> Advisor to more than 30 world-record holders in professional and Olympic sports
> Wired magazine's Greatest Self-Promoter of 2008
> National Chinese kickboxing champion
> archer (yabusame) in Nikko, Japan
> Political asylum researcher and activist
> MTV breakdancer in Taiwan
> Hurling competitor in Ireland
> Actor on hit TV series in mainland China and Hong Kong (Human Cargo)
> (*The Four Hour Work Week,* 17-18)

Meanwhile, Derek of the travel blog *Wandering Earl* echoes this trope, using a list of adventurous experiences in his "About Me" page to indicate how shifting to long-term travel has improved his life, qualifying him as an expert on the good life:

> Over the years, I've done everything from danger travel to living in Romania to learning Spanish in Mexico to working as a Tour Manager on board cruise ships. I've spent over two years in India, where I once randomly ended up acting in a Bollywood television show. An inappropriate amount of time on tropical islands, eating inappropriate amounts of street food, a three-day kidnapping in Bangladesh, teaching English in Asia, becoming an online entrepreneur and partaking in an endless search for a pair of sandals with sufficient arch-support for my flat feet are just a few more of the experiences this lifestyle has led me to.

Adventurous Kate provides us with an example of how this trope gets taken up in solo female travel blogs participating in postfeminist intimate publics. Kate McCulley started blogging in

2010, at the age of 26, after quitting a full-time job in marketing. After years of full-time travel, she currently travels part time and has set up a more stable base in New York. Like *The Young Adventuress*, Kate's blog identifies itself as a "solo female" travel blog. The dated layout design of Kate's blog, which is still primarily text-based and boxy, gives the impression that her work is less polished than some of the other most successful travel blogs—an aspect of her online presentation that could detract from her professional authority while lending itself to her authority as a potentially more authentic blogger. Kate still has over 100, 000 followers on Instagram. On her blog, she explains that she makes money through affiliate marketing, branded content and freelance writing and consulting. She hasn't disclosed whether or not she makes six figures like Oneika Raymond and Liz Carlsson. Kate's "About Me" is similarly dedicated to giving proof that she speaks from a particularly rich range of experiences:

> My name is Kate McCulley and I travel the world for a living.
>
> I've been shipwrecked in Indonesia. I've taken a boob to the face in Istanbul. I've hit on Jon Stewart in New York City, which got me subsequently mocked on The Daily Show, and I've been an extra in a really, really bad German movie.
>
> That's my life. If there's an adventure available, I'll go for it — and even if I end up punched in the face and bleeding from the eye (yes, it's happened), it will make a good story later!

Similar to digital nomad and lifestyle design genres of content, personal travel blogs at times present larger than life personas with intriguing lists of experiences and accomplishments as a way of tantalizing the reader with a vision of an extraordinary lifestyle that is within reach for readers, if they make just a few lifestyle changes (most importantly, rejecting the classic American dream and embracing minimalism/geographic flexibility). Despite this superficial similarity, most travel bloggers do not let themselves fully embrace the work ethic espoused by Ferriss and those like him—i.e. a work ethic where the goal is to work as little as possible,

because being busy is not virtuous in and of itself. This difference might be the result of bloggers' impression that the publics engaging with their content (especially when it comes to female bloggers tapping into the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture) are looking for likeable and authentic personas. If bloggers mainly emphasize how little they work, they are distancing themselves and their lifestyles from the publics they address, imagined as people still grinding away in traditional office jobs, looking for a way out. While fostering likeability does not seem to be prerequisite for digital nomad self-help gurus, for bloggers writing within the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, it is essential to balance aspirational distance (my life is better than yours) with proximity (we come from similar origins; I worked hard to get here and so can you). As I examine further in Chapter Three's study of how anti-fans judge travel blogs with reference to authenticity as a metric, travel bloggers try to combine neoliberal visions of the emancipated entrepreneurial subject with elements the classic American ideal of persistent industry—that is, of the hard worker grinding away at unglamorous work in order to inch steadily closer to the promised rewards of wealth and happiness. Travel bloggers put a lot of effort into conveying that blogging is a *job*, a claim that critical publics treat with skepticism.

Also key to the personal travel blog's presentation of the good life is a kind of work that hearkens back to the backpacker figure and the authenticity discourses this figure invokes. For the traditional backpacker, *not* working is the order of the day—unless the work is intermittent, for the purpose of room and board, and of accruing enough funds to continue on one's journey. The backpacker's primary work is the accumulation of *cultural* capital, and the project of self-improvement through discovery (discovery of the other and of the self; or of the self through the other; or, more cynically, of the other through the lens of the self). This self-reflexive labour is apparent in travel blogger discourse as well. For example, *The Young Adventuress* writes in "The

Evolution of a Traveler: My Journey to Self-Discovery (Again)" about travel fatigue and making the decision to slow down: "I needed to find my voice again. I needed to find my creativity again. I needed to find myself again" (Nov 7 2013). The answer Liz proposes to this dilemma is still a version of nomadism, but a slower, more experiential version of travel that Liz presents as more authentic than breezing through several destinations a week. In contrast, lifestyle design and digital nomad-themed content lacks the occasional intimacy of the personal (postfeminist) travel blog, where the work of self-examination and reflections on the journey of one's individual pursuit of the good life, and its attendant ups and downs, is an important part of the authentic appeal.

Male-targeted lifestyle design self-help invokes existential self-examination in its own way, as we see in Kreiger's program in *Lifestyle Entrepreneur*, which encourages readers to introspect and take inventory of what defines their identity and makes up their core values, in addition to their current roles and competencies. Later, the reader is prompted to reimagine this identity, and craft a vision of their ideal lifestyle-entrepreneur self. Kreiger rephrases basic existentialism in more convoluted language, and with an economic slant, stating "when your internal identity drivers are aligned with your outward facing persona, actions and undertakings, well that is the sweet spot where the magic happens...This is you living out your fullest potential with clarity and purpose, serving as an inspiration to others and making money in the process" (11).

The solo female subgenre of travel blog introduces aspects of postfeminist sensibility into its adaptation of memoir, guidebook, and lifestyle entrepreneur self-help genres, invoking postfeminist discourses surrounding the good life as a life of retreat from the contemporary corporate workforce—and, in the case of travel blog, into a life of nomadism. By focusing on

this seemingly novel form of postfeminist retreat, the female nomad blogs better pass as feminist due to their apparent rejection of postfeminist anxieties about the "time crunch" that underlies much of popular culture targeted towards women, and their stated lack of interest/investment in normative feminine-gendered accomplishments related to the domestic sphere (e.g. marriage, children, dream home). It espouses instead a neoliberal feminism that adapts the corporate model of success described by Fraser in "The Cunning of History" (2012) to the context of contemporary neoliberalism's nomadic entrepreneurialism that forms the model behind an increasingly influential body of self-help content straddling traditional publishing and the blogosphere. This nomadic-entrepreneurial female subject, like her male counterpart, is ideally equipped to adapt to post-recession precarity—and she does so with the trademark girl power attitude identified in earlier descriptions of postfeminist sensibility. But girl power in the context of the solo female travel blogger now consists of making personal accommodations for a larger system's inability to provide sufficient work-life balance.

There are, then, three strands of discourse intermingling within the postfeminist nomadic narrative: the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject and its emphasis on self-branding and monetizing social capital; the subject of the classic American dream and the protestant work ethic, with its focus on hard work and resultant virtues/rewards; and the self-reflexive subject who pursues existential authenticity, and represents this inward journey through intimate disclosures. What these sometimes in-conflict components share is their preoccupation with questions of the good life, and of how the nature of one's work factors heavily into what it means to live well. These discourses examine questions of what kind of work is most virtuous, and of what work has the potential to liberate the subject from the dissatisfactions of modern life. Regardless of what conclusions are drawn about virtuous kinds of work, it is always assumed

that attainment of the good life comes down to work, even if that work consists of consciously whittling down one's time spent working to a hyper-productive 4 hours a week.

The Postfeminist Nomad Makeover Narrative

Part of travel bloggers' efforts to present themselves as authorities on the good life involves crafting a persona that is aspirational in its presentation of the good life, and convincingly ordinary in the sense that the bloggers' transition from an average, unsatisfying lifestyle into an extraordinary nomadic one can be imitated by the blogger's audience if they follow the blogger's model. Usually, travel bloggers present the persona of someone who, despite having once led a perfectly average middle-class life chasing wealth through a typical 9-5 office job, has shifted her priorities in order to lead a life of frequent-to-constant travel funded by travel blogging and other freelance work. The "About Me" page, where bloggers introduce themselves and narrate their journey from ordinary to extraordinary, is an important tool used by bloggers in performing this kind of authenticity work.

These "About Me" pages often contain before/after stories detailing how the blogger in question was able to carve out a better, more authentic lifestyle for herself through digital entrepreneurialism and a retreat from unsatisfying corporate life. In her study of bloggers and other kinds of digital influencers (*Not Getting Paid* 2017), Brooke Erin Duffy pays special attention to origin stories of successful bloggers, although her archive consists of the one-to-one accounts she receives from interviewees, rather than narratives posted on blogger's "About Me" profiles. She suggests three narratives offering a "typology of aspirational labor narratives": "creativity as accidental entrepreneurship" (e.g. "I started a blog as a creative outlet and things just kept growing from there"), "managing uncertainty in the post- recession economy" (e.g. the enterprising domestic success, pursuit of "side-hustle"), and "breaking in" to the creative

industries (e.g. hoping to be noticed by industry influencers, or break into the "old media" version of the digital content producer's chosen genre) (61). To this list, I would add narratives of breaking away from workplace drudgery to a life of adventure via risk-taking and the labour of blogging.

The makeover paradigm of postfeminist sensibility is a close relative of a similar before/after narrative that circulates within neoliberal entrepreneurial culture, which emphasizes the transformation of the shackled 9-5 wage slave into the ideal entrepreneurial success story. I am not referring here to success stories that centre around an individual from humble origins eventually accumulating massive wealth and the attendant classic symbols of prosperity, expensive property. Rather, postfeminist narratives of nomadic retreat are closely tied to another emerging sensibility, that of the digital nomad embracing the geographic and temporal flexibility that comes from entrepreneurship and freelance work. Postfeminist narratives of the retreat into nomadism adapt the hyper-masculine registers of the digital nomad success story to fit the intimate, at times confessional registers of postfeminist sensibility, and incorporates undertones of uncertainty foreign to lifestyle design self-help literature—an uncertainty that stems from addressing intimate publics that demand both a guidebook for living well, and a degree of convincing humility and realness (a humility that is hard to convey while also presenting oneself as possessing unique authority in matters pertaining to living well).

The postfeminist makeover paradigm (Gill 2007) "requires people (predominantly women) to believe, first, that they or their life is lacking or flawed in some way; second, that it is amenable to reinvention or transformation by following the advice of relationship, design, or lifestyle experts and practicing appropriately modified consumption habits" (156). Lifestyle bloggers perpetuate and rely on this paradigm, modelling processes of neoliberal, postfeminist

transformation that they in turn present to readers as a model to imitate. This model is similar to those presented by self-help gurus and mass media lifestyle experts (television show hosts, magazine columnists), but the assumption is that as self-made normal people, social media micro-celebrities offer increased authenticity and, subsequently, a valuable authoritative capital within the intimate online publics of postfeminist culture.

Before and after narratives are essential to the logic of postfeminist sensibility cross lifestyle genres. Usually, the before version of the blogger-subject endures a grueling workweek, usually in a corporate setting, where she has no control over her schedule and struggles to find time to do the things she enjoys. In these narratives, the after takes the form of a retreat—either into increased domesticity, or, in the case of female travel bloggers and digital nomads, into nomadism. Perhaps the most widely seen trope within the travel blog genre is the "About Me" page that tells the story of the blogger's before life (presented, almost exclusively, as unsatisfying, conventional, constrained, banal), followed by an account of the epiphany that led to the blogger's current, more exciting and fulfilling life of travel.

Azariah (2016) discusses the "About Me" page as a convention of travel blogs and how these narratives describe "the transformation of the self into a traveller" and, further, set out to distinguish the traveller-self from tourists (77). Van Neunen (2016) also pays attention to the rhetorics of travel bloggers' "About Me" pages, observing that what we often see in travel blogger origin stories are narratives of leaving corporate life to pursue a more authentic way of living (which is accomplished by switching to freelance online work, or by starting an online business). In these narratives, the presumed audience or superaddressee tends to be imagined by the blogger as "someone in need of inspiration to conquer their fears and doubts" (202) and someone who is "unhappy with the repetitive and work-centric life in neoliberal society" (202).

In both Azariah and Van Neunen's assessments, the before/after trope of travel blogger "About Me" pages describes a transition into a more authentic self and lifestyle, whether the important transition is of the self into an authentic traveler (as opposed to a tourist), or of the self as a corporate sell-out into a liberated nomadic entrepreneur or freelancer.

According to Van Neunen, bloggers emphasize that their decision to travel long-term is a form of personal rebellion against normal life path of white, western, middle-class twenty somethings (199-200): "An existentialist narrative of *freedom* to become oneself in spite of the proto-capitalist logic of commodity ownership and regulated work" (200). Through his examination of popular blogs like *Wandering Earl*, *Nomadic Matt,* and *Wandering Trader*, Van Neunen emphasizes the paradox of the professional travel blogger who uses the logic of late capitalism (the entrepreneurial, branded self) to escape late capitalism's discontents (quitting the 9-5 job in order to lead a wandering or nomadic lifestyle) (2016, 207).

Van Neunen observes how these pages emphasize the "ordinariness" (198) of bloggers' origins through mentions of small town upbringings, middle class families, etc. He adds that this emphasis on the blogger's humble beginnings lends further emphasis to the blogger's current success. For example, Marcello Arrambide of *Wandering Trader* funds his nomadic lifestyle by trading stocks, and his "About" page emphasizes his progression from struggling to get by with minimum wage jobs, to leading the jet-setting lifestyle of a "Wandering Trader." The before/after or makeover narrative of travel blogger "About Me" pages foregrounds the assertion that this kind of radical lifestyle overhaul is something that the reader can mimic in their own life, with just a few sacrifices, a bit of hard work, and the courage to make the initial leap. In making this kid of claim, bloggers assume a homogenous audience consisting of educated middle-to-upper class westerners. Most bloggers have at least one university degree and some

previous career (198), suggesting that the ability to travel long-term while supporting oneself is actually a luxury available to relatively few.

We can observe several recurring features in travel blogger "About Me" pages. Usually, bloggers divide their "About Me" pages into several subheadings, which sometimes make the before/after life narrative explicit, as when *Nomadic Matt* uses the heading "From cubicle worker to travel writer," or when *The Blonde Abroad* uses the heading "From corporate finance to travel writer." Almost invariably, "About Me" pages make some reference to quitting a corporate job, usually after being inspired after a shorter-term stint of travel. These references to leaving an unsatisfying corporate life are supposed to emphasize how the blogger has discovered an alternate path for living that they are now sharing with their audience, so that they too can abandon the corporate workplace in favor of a nomadic lifestyle. However, these references, often passing, to the blogger's previous work experience and credentials, can draw attention to what *separates* bloggers from the average western worker who lacks the experience and skills to generate a livable income online.

Often, bloggers' inspirational accounts of dropping everything to travel also contain hints that attendant financial risks were not considerable. Matthew Kepnes (*Nomadic Matt*) recalls meeting a group of backpackers in Chiang Mai who introduced him to the idea that full-time travel can be accomplished without an independent fortune. He recalls, "I wanted to do what they were doing. After that trip, I flew home*, finished my MBA*, quit my cubicle job, and, in July 2006, set out on an adventure around the world that continues to this day" ("Hi, I'm Nomadic Matt," emphasis my own). Liz of *The Young Adventuress* decided to pursue a future as a travel blogger after teaching English in Spain and writing about her experiences there. She moved back to America first to save money working a typical office job, until "Four years ago I walked into

my boss' office, told him to stuff it, and then moved to New Zealand and began blogging full-time and developed a deep and abiding love for men in stubbies and gumboots" ("Get to Know Me"). A couple of recurring features to note about these origin stories is their references to university education and previous well-paying jobs.

Kristin Addis of *Be My Travel Muse* is another solo female travel blogger who began blogging full-time after leaving her banking job in 2012. She shares travel vlogs with her approximately 8000 YouTube subscribers once or twice a month on average, with most videos getting about 6000 views. On Instagram, she has over 100,000 followers, and posts about once per day, with most posts getting in the range of 1500 to 3000 "likes" (and, we can assume, far more views from users who did not click the heart button to signal their approval). She has publiches two ebooks, including a memoir in partnership with *Thought Catalog* called *A Thousand New Beginnings* (2016). Kristin's "About Me" covers all the main tropes of the travel blogger makeover narrative in her introductory page ("Hi, I'm Kristin…"). She begins by asserting her normal origins, stating "I'm just a normal girl from Southern California … I never had a trust fund, and never thought of myself as particularly brave, but here I am, four years later, still traveling the globe." She recalls an unsatisfying stint working as an investment banker before she sold her belongings and "became a solo female traveler." She then incorporates the social capital adventure inventory trope common to digital nomad narratives and travel blogs: "Since then, I've hitchhiked solo across China, been invited to countless events by locals, climbed some of the tallest mountains in the world, done some of the deepest SCUBA dives, did a 35-day safari in Africa, spent two months hiking in Patagonia, and even became a Buddhist nun for 10 days." She is sure to distinguish herself from regular tourists: "When other travelers

took the tourists boats, I found my way onto the cargo ferries, when others would hire a car and driver, I hung out of the door of a moving train, and when others would take a bus, I hitchhiked."

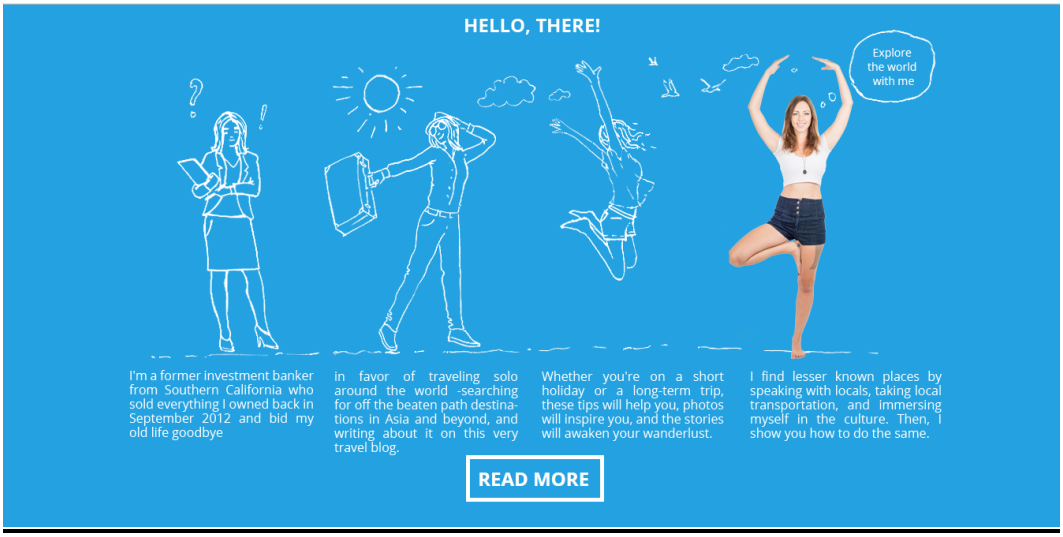

Illustration 14: Graphic from Be My Travel Muse homepage (bemytravelmuse.com), captured July 29, 2017

Kiersten Rich of *The Blonde Abroad*'s before/after narrative is particularly interesting because she narrates her transition through several archetypal identities associated with postfeminist sensibility: first, the unsatisfied career woman; second, the woman who leaves a high-powered career path to re-discover a more highly-feminized identity (in this case, finding empowerment through a highly sexualized feminine identity); and, third, a transition into the emerging category postfeminist nomad-entrepreneur. *The Blonde Abroad* boasts over 500,000 followers on Instagram, more than the other solo female bloggers considered here. She is also more active on Youtube than the other bloggers mentioned in this project, posting travel vlogs on a regular bases to her nearly 30,000 subscribers on that platform. She left her wealth management job in 2011 to travel full-time. Kiersten explains on her blog that she has multiple revenue streams that include affiliate programs, tours, and freelance consulting. Though she hasn't publicly disclosed her income, the following she commands suggests that she is

compensated thousands of dollars per sponsored post. Kiersten recalls starting a promising career in corporate finance and feeling unfulfilled: “I was just 21 years old and it was the weekend I graduated college when I moved from San Diego to Los Angeles. The city was big and unfriendly and I was working insane hours...The truth was, I hated my job and I felt trapped” (“About the Blonde Abroad”). She remembers quitting her job and being drawn into “the glitz and glamour of the star-studded city,” working as a bartender and a spokesmodel. A caption under a promotional ad for the bar, in which Kiersten is modelling in a bikini with a lifebuoy around her neck, reads “Business Suit to Bathing Suit,” a phrase that would work well as a title for a piece of postfeminist chick-lit. “I was having a blast,” she writes, “making money was easy, and life was fun! Yes, life was glamourous, but something was missing. I had lost my sense of purpose and lost sight of my future. I wasn’t happy, yet again.”

Kiersten also stands out because she emphasizes her success from an entrepreneurial standpoint more than many other solo female bloggers: “Four years later, I am now on the road nine months of the year and have a six-member team helping run this site. *The Blonde Abroad* has become a multi-level business and has various revenue streams including affiliate programs, consulting, social media marketing and digital content creation.”

What these “About Me” pages have in common is that these bloggers want to convey how they have taken risks in abandoning the life scripts followed by most of their peers, and demonstrate how these risks have resulted in a more fulfilling lifestyle that is worthy of emulation. Another recurring theme in travel blogger “About Me” pages is the promise that the blogger is sharing their story and knowledge in the hopes of inspiring readers to make a change in their own lives, and of giving them the tools to do so: *The Blonde Abroad* writes, “I hope to inspire you to live a life you love and settle for nothing less than extraordinary,” while Kristen of

Be My Travel Muse promises "this site is designed to help you travel more adventurously, and especially solo!" and further assumes a specific kind of audience, one who shares her idea of what constitutes the good life, with the addition "I'm guessing that you ended up here because, like me, you're looking for the ultimate escape, a chance to get to know yourself better, or you just want to plan an immersive trip that isn't the same thing that everyone else is doing."

In contrast to other content posted on lifestyle blogs and related social media platforms, the norm for "About Me" pages is to disable commenting features. Despite the absence of feedback from visitors in the form of comments, travel bloggers can try to gesture towards their participation in the intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility by giving evidence of how their work has circulated and gained influence within the circles they address. While many bloggers authenticate their identities as *professional* travel bloggers by referencing publications in major media outlets (for example, *The Blonde Abroad* prominently displays a header showing that she has been mentioned on *The Travel Channel* and in *Lonely Planet*), indications of their ability to influence and motivate ordinary readers also serve as supporting evidence for the blog's function as a guide to the good life. *Be My Travel Muse*, for example, does not have a comments section on her "About Me" page. Instead, Kristen shows select screen captures from her Facebook fan page, highlighting testimonies from readers who claim to have benefited from her work, with comments like "I'm about to go to Australia on a working holiday and I'm shit scared I won't make friends or be able to work and live as I want to etc…but almost every day I find something on your page which makes me step back, relax and realize everything will be fine as long as I am open to opportunity and new people"

Despite the moderated environment in which bloggers usually present their origin stories, we can still find some evidence of how intimate publics respond to these kinds of postfeminist

makeover narratives. *The Blonde Abroad*'s full-length bio page has an active comments section, where users express their identification with Kiersten's story, with many comments focusing on feelings of identification and/or inspiration. Aubrey writes "As I was reading line after line I began to relate to you on every level. I too went through the same experiences. I booked Abroad programs spur of the moment and it changed my life." Similarly, Alexandra R comments "Your words are written as if they were taken from my thoughts. I always say that the world judges us on our job or relationships. At 28 years old, I also have never seen myself as the cubicle type and I love adventures and love to travel and I have always loved living life (while my parents are more about working is most important, fun later)."

Travel bloggers' Instagram accounts only have room for a short bio at the top of their profile page. Rather than presenting a condensed version of the nomadic makeover narrative common to "About Me" pages, the bios of Instagram travel accounts tend to emphasize professional accomplishments, likely as part of the blogger's effort to attract interest from potential clients and/or sponsors. *Oneika the Traveller* describes herself with the caption "Travel Journalist | 103 countries 📺 Host of @TravelChannel's Big City, Little Budget & One Bag and You're Out," while *The Young Adventuress* identifies as a travel photographer and tour group host, inviting visitors to join her next guided tour of New Zealand. Above a link to her blog, *Adventurous Kate* captions: "*Solo* Female Travel 🛩 One of Forbes' Top 10 Travel Influencers 🌍 74 countries 🎗Currently home in NYC!"

If we look closer at individual Instagram posts, however, we see that bloggers regularly return to an (implicit in this case) overarching narrative about the transformative power of travel as key to the good life, often reflecting specifically on the experience of solo female travel.

Illustration 15: Instagram post by @bemytravelmuse, Oct 15, 2017. Captured Jan 9, 2018.

In this post, Kristin of *Be My Travel Muse* uses recent events (the outing of numerous sexual offenders in Hollywood within a short period of time) to reflect on the role that solo travelling has played in her life and how it has helped her heal from past traumas related to her own experiences of sexual assault. Though not explicitly a before/after narrative in the vein of the "About Me" pages described above, this kind of caption contributes to what we might understanding as an ongoing implicit narrative within solo female travel blogging, which is the retreat into nomadism as both a model to the good life and as a cure not only to malaise and inauthenticity, but potentially to fears stemming from trauma as well.

Participants in the intimate publics surrounding these posts tend to respond by either expressing identification with the narratives bloggers present, or indicating that they feel inspired by what they have read. In the post above, @mo.jo.sho responds "Yes 🙌 thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Over two years ago when I had just started traveling solo […], you were one of those inspirations I found along the way that helped me stay strong. Keep it up! Traveling solo reignited my faith in humanity, and every time I get out there again, it's instilled in me once again. ♡"

Solo female travel blogger Instagram accounts address/assume an intimate public receptive to, and invested in, accounts of retreat as transformative and key to the good life. Solo female travel content answers the question of what it means to live well as a contemporary female subject with never-ending presentations of after selves, narratives in which every new piece of content gives proof that the blogger-subject has improved, moved forward, and been transformed by her retreat into nomadism. In the post below, Kiersten of *The Blonde Abroad* reflects on her crazy decision to move to Cape Town, encouraging her readers not to fear starting over.

Illustration 16: Instagram post by @theblondeabroad, December 29, 2017. Captured Jan 9 2018

By asking a question about their plans for 2018, Kiersten invites publics to announce not only their travel plans, but, in some cases, plans for life-altering retreats from current employment and/or place of residence. User @jo_drei expresses their intention to pursue a nomadic lifestyle: "Killin' it!! I'm planning to go location independent in 2018 - digital nomad status!!!" User @borderfreetravels describes her feelings of identification, telling Kiersten "I'm feeling the same right now about making a big move after the New Year. Starting fresh feels oh so good😘♡"

In a post about her recent trip to Spain, *The Young Adventuress* reflects on the important role Spain has played in her life's trajectory:

> I started my blog right before I moved to Spain seven years ago and every day I wake up and pinch myself that is how my crazy journey began as a full time blogger. Spain really had a big part of shaping who I am now, and I miss it so much. I learned so much independence there, how to live and assimilate into a new language and culture, and of

> course, learned what I was truly passionate about. You never know where starting something might lead, right? (July 10 2017)

@mooski_adventures "So inspiring I love this Liz! You never know what the future will bring, just keep hustling, working hard & being brave, it must be a great feeling reflecting on your past couple of years and knowing you are aligned with your path."

Looking at how "About Me" pages and Instagram posts contribute to ongoing narratives of the retreat into nomadism model for the good life can give a limited impression of how these narratives are received: in the carefully moderated comments sections (when comments sections are even present) of these posts, we might get the impression that the intimate publics consuming this kind of content can always relate to, or be inspired by, travel blogger's modelling of what it means to live as a contemporary nomadic female subject. In order to give scope and nuance to how narratives of retreat into nomadism circulate within intimate publics, I turn, in the chapter that follows, to looking at how these kinds of narratives are critiqued on the basis of perceived inauthenticity.

What I have not yet examined is how these before/after narratives are part of bloggers' larger efforts to present themselves as authentic to publics, which is a key authenticating strategy. Ideas about the good life are inextricably tied to ideas about authenticity. Within lifestyle genres, the good life is conceived of as finding a lifestyle that adheres to one's personal values and commitments. For bloggers, whose ideals concerning the good life also necessitate deriving income from modelling the good life, being able to perform authenticity is key. I have not tried to give an exhaustive analysis of travel blogs broadly, but rather, I have tried to specifically examine how solo female travel bloggers appeal to the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture by presenting narratives of retreat in which the empowered, entrepreneurial female subject reveals how to access the good life through prolonged travel or

nomadism. Whether in the form of detailed "About Me" origin stories, or implicit in the way that bloggers connect individual posts across social media platforms together through an ongoing narrative thread of transformation, makeover or before/after narratives that represent the blogger's life prior to travel as unfulfilled or inauthentic, contribute to bloggers' authority as models of the good life.

In the chapter that follows, I will look the origins of authenticity as a site of value in celebrity and microcelebrity, at patterns in how travel bloggers strategize their performance of authenticity, at how anti-fans participate in intimate publics by identifying how travel bloggers' representations of the good life is *not* reflective of their experience of what is means to live as a contemporary female subject, and, finally, I will examine how bloggers and anti-fans negotiate what they feel is owed by bloggers and blog-readers within intimate publics.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Authenticity within the Anti-Fan Publics of Postfeminist Online Culture

This chapter examines how authenticity discourse circulates within the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, and, specifically, within the critical publics surrounding content that models the good life as one of retreat into nomadism. It looks at how these publics assess lifestyle content using informal metrics or standards of authenticity. These metrics are not explicitly referred to by participants in publics, but they can be observed in the form of trends or patterns that emerge through a prolonged observation of the discourse within these publics—particularly when we shift our focus to publics based on critique.

To get a better sense of the scope of the interpretive work performed by the intimate publics consuming narratives of the retreat into nomadism, it is imperative to also look at the discussions and negotiations of lifestyle content that take place *away* from the carefully-moderated official venues for responding to blogger content, such as the comments sections for posts on blog home pages and on Instagram. Azariah (2016) observes, importantly, that comments sections on blog posts are "a strategically controlled self-presentational space," and that "bloggers usually have the option of deleting or not displaying comments they dislike and the resulting display may be limited to what is useful to the blogger" (87). In this chapter, I look at the case of *Get Off My Internets* (GOMI) as an example of an alternative venue for reacting to lifestyle blogging content.

Get off My Internets functions as an intimate public based on critique, or what participants in that community refer to as "snark." We might think of GOMI as an anti-fan community in the sense that its participants treat their objects of critique with the same level of investment and engagement we associate with fandom as the formation of communities (online

and real life) around a shared interest in particular media text(s). Fandoms and anti-fandoms both engage with their texts in ways that go beyond passive appreciation, incorporating elements of participatory culture (Jenkins et al 2009) through their active contributions to the fandom community (e.g. through fan texts like creative interpretations and fan fiction). In the case of anti-fandoms, participants' fascination with their objects is based on a desire to problematize the narratives they locate in lifestyle content, and their responsive contributions draw attention to blogger inauthenticity.

Founded in 2008 by Alice Wright, who posts under the username PartyPants, GOMI is notorious in the popular press for being "cruel" (Van Syckle, *The Guardian,* 2016) or "the hate filled underbelly of blogging" (Migneault, *Huffpost* 2016). Van Syckle observes that, "if lifestyle blogs are a picnic of optimistic, well-styled, sarcasm-free conversations about kids and mason jar crafts, GOMI is the crowd in the corner predicting the hostess's imminent divorce." This description suggests an optimism/pessimism dichotomy. Is the behavior we see in the GOMI forums a form of "cruel pessimism" to counter the cruel optimism that so often motivates online lifestyle content and entrepreneurialism?

It might be beyond the purview of this study to assess whether this kind of sustained hate-reading practice drains the snarking-subject dry in ways comparable to the draining effect of aspirational labour or hustle motivated by a belief in the good life as one of entrepreneurial (and nomadic) freedom. The reading strategy I outlined in chapter one consists of close reading feedback from participants in the intimate publics surrounding lifestyle content, and, in the case of this chapter, I am primarily looking at offsite feedback posted on the GOMI forums, with some additional attention to comments on blog posts and social media that seek to problematize nomadic lifestyle narratives. The GOMI forums have a members-only sub-forum where

participants talk about their personal lives in a setting where intimacy levels are elevated, and it is likely that the effects/affects of snark in members' lives are a recurring topic there, but for ethical reasons I am refraining from citing content posted in a setting of implied privacy (even if the content is available to anyone who takes the time to make a free account on the website). The site's founder discourages reading too deeply into the motivations behind snark: in a 2014 interview with *Racked* where she is referred to as "A," Alice explains that "people hate-read blogs for the same reason they watch train wreck reality shows." She adds that "It's entertaining to see the mess and the 'What the hell' of it all. It's an escape, maybe not what some people would consider a healthy escape, but it is what it is" (Lieber, *Racked* 2014). Even though, on a surface level, the level of dedication and persistence GOMI participants show in their snark-based criticism of lifestyle bloggers looks like an unhealthy investment of time and mental resources (some of the most popular hate-reads, like the healthy-living blog *Kath Eats Real Foods*, have attracted tens of thousands of comments in forum threads spanning years), it is at least apparent from observing this community that participants feel a kind of ethical commitment to interrogating and deconstructing narratives from the lifestyle blogosphere that run counter to their own interpretation of what it means to life well as a contemporary female subject.

What a close study of GOMI (and of the "travel blogger" sub-forum specifically) suggests is that, in lifestyle genres like travel blogging, authority in matters of living well is intimately tied with the appearance of authenticity. In order to successfully promote their content as aspirational models of the good life, personal lifestyle bloggers must be able to effectively present themselves as authorities on the art of living well. Part of this is appearing to live authentically, as models of the good life tend to claim a high level of authenticity compared to conventional and constrained styles of living. Appearing to be authentic in terms of lifestyle or

personality is also important to selling one's lifestyle expertise. In the discussion that follows, I first explore the origins and evolutions of authenticity as a site of value in cultural production and consumption, and lay out a rationale for thinking about authenticity as a form of work or labour performed by personas whose success is largely defined by the extent to which they can sell their individual model of the good life. To assist with this exploration, I consider how theorizations of authenticity in relation to traditional celebrity are relevant to thinking about how bloggers and influencers (micro-celebrities) are judged by critical publics according to similar measurements or signals of authenticity. After this explanatory material, I examine trends in the methods and genre tropes that budget travel bloggers employ when performing authenticity, while also looking at patterns in the ways that critical intimate publics (or anti-fans) identify inauthenticity in the blogger personas they follow. To accomplish this, I use a case study of the "Travel Bloggers" sub-forum of GOMI[11], supplementing this material with examples from budget and solo female travel blog genres to illustrate the trends in authenticity work I identify.

Authenticity: Origins, Evolutions

Before continuing this discussion of how authenticity is rendered and perceived within the intimate publics surrounding online lifestyle content, I want to provide a more in-depth discussion of the word authenticity, its evolutions, how it is most commonly invoked in discussions of popular culture, and how it operates as a kind of labour within celebrity and, specifically, online micro-celebrity. I have found discussions of traditional forms of celebrity like

[11] As of February 2018, this sub-forum (and several others) has been removed from the GOMI forums as part of an overall condensing of the site's offerings, in an effort to prompt members to migrate to the (paid) subscription-based "private snark forum" snark.blog. My analysis of content from the "Travel Bloggers" sub-forum was completed in Winter 2017, during an earlier iteration of the GOMI forums. I have supplemented this material with close reading of content from the wider travel blogosphere that relates to the specific problems critiqued by GOMI members in the original threads, as well as on-site comments from some of those posts

popular music performance, as well as emerging forms of online micro-celebrity, to be fertile grounds for developing a base set of metrics that audiences frequently employ in evaluating the authenticity of celebrities and micro-celebrities.

Until the twentieth century, the word authenticity in English was used to describe things, not people. Early occurrences of the word refer most often to whether something (usually a text) can be trusted as true, verifiable, or genuine, or to whether something (an artwork, for example) constitutes an "accurate reflection of real life" ("authenticity" *OED*). Although these meanings of the word remain current today, alternative meanings began to proliferate around the early twentieth century, and authenticity is now often used to describe people and emotions. Over the last hundred years, authenticity has come to be associated with the inner life, and how habits of inwardness and introspection manifest in outward performance. Authenticity is sometimes used interchangeably with sincerity, or "the quality of truthful correspondence between inner feeling and their outward expression" (*OED)*. Lionel Trilling argues that authenticity and sincerity, though related, are nevertheless distinct (1972): while sincerity is a matter of saying what one *means*, authenticity refers to being true to whom one *is*. This interpretation of authenticity emerges from the history of existentialism in philosophy, which, according to its simplest form, refers to the degree to which one is true to one's personal commitments despite external pressures. The concept of authenticity as applied to individual human beings emerged alongside the rise of individualism, inwardness, and the related literary genre of autobiography, and relies on the assumption of a distinction between inward and outward, private and public individual (Varga and Guignon). As a philosophical and ethical concept, it involves "putting one's behavior under reflexive scrutiny" and is associated with reflections on "the good life" (Varga 3).

When authenticity is discussed and negotiated within the intimate publics surrounding

personal lifestyle blogs, the question of whether a blogger is authentic is not simply a matter of verification (although whether or not a blog or social media account is run by the person whom it claims to represent is indeed a recurring issue in web discourse). To understand how authenticity circulates within the publics surrounding online lifestyle content, it is helpful to keep the term's philosophical underpinnings in mind, as these publics (anti-fans publics especially) tend to be concerned with whether a blogger *appears* to be acting in a way that is true to his or her personal commitments despite external pressures (i.e. economic pressures, or the constraints imposed by a blogging genre or site). This emphasis on whether someone appears to be acting in a way that is consistent with voiced personal commitments is, however, only one aspect of how authenticity is performed and evaluated in online micro-celebrity. Rather than asking whether a particular blogger really experiences authenticity as a part of the good life, I am approaching authenticity as a site of value in online micro-celebrity, where individuals try to perform authenticity through recourse to various genre-dependent codes and tropes of authenticity, and where publics can approve or disapprove of these performances.

Richard A. Peterson describes authenticity as "a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (1086). In this case, bloggers are the ones claiming authenticity through performance, and the publics in which they participate are the "relevant others" accepting or rejecting this claim. This conception of authenticity is distinct from the word's association with the autonomous, introspecting subject seeking to live in a way that is consistent with his or her own ideals or understanding of self. Even so, we see echoes of existentialist conceptions of the authentic individual in critiques that cast a blogger's authenticity into doubt by questioning whether that person stands for anything, or whether they simply adapt their depictions of who they really are in order to meet audience

demands. Although bloggers make reference to the inner life and personal commitments as part of their authenticity work, and the sincerity of these kinds of statements is often cast into doubt by skeptical publics, the discourse of authenticity within micro-celebrity networks encompasses more than the word's official definition implies.

Authenticity as a site of value and a form of labour has roots in the word's association with the emergence of industrialism, reproduction, capitalism and the commodity. Walter Benjamin has argued that the reproducibility of art leads to a loss of "aura" and the feeling that a piece has become inauthentic (1936). In the production and marketing of goods, conveying an aura of authenticity in a product increases it value, and marketing literature suggests that strategies for "rendering authenticity" in a product are an important part of any business model (Gilmore and Pine 2007). This marketing logic also extends to the commodification of authenticity in online micro-celebrity. In her discussion of online fame, Theresa Senft invokes Benjamin, applying his principle of reproducibility to *selves* in the age of digital reproduction: "if mechanics introduced people to the pleasure of transforming authenticity through reproduction, digital technologies afford us the opportunity to produce and distribute *ourselves* as copies" (*Camgirls* 4). In an environment where the ability to create new personas is limitless, realness in self-representation increases in value. Authenticity circulates as an important currency in web 2.0 discourse, and the word has frequently been invoked in reference to the "real name web" championed by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (Hogan 2015). Yet authenticity's role in Web 2.0 discourse goes far beyond the use of real names and verifiable fact-based information on social profiles.

As Somogy Varga and Alice Marwick both observe, recent self-help literature focuses on *self-branding* as a process that engages both the introspective quality of authenticity as self-

reflexive exercise (you must first discover what makes you unique) and the commodification of authenticity in contemporary capitalism (you must brand yourself as authentic in order to achieve success). In the context of self-branding culture, which is prevalent in both recent self-help and web 2.0 social network discourse (Marwick; Hearn), the individual is both an autonomous, self-reflexive subject, and a commodity. Contemporary self-help and self-branding literature try to harmonize seemingly incompatible ideas: on the one hand, the autonomous subject pursuing authenticity by seeking to live consistently with his or her personal commitments, and on the other, the persona or "aspect of a person's character that is displayed to or perceived by others" (*OED,* "persona") performing authenticity through self-branding techniques, as part of a strategy for obtaining social and economic capital through the promotion of the self as commodity. The self-help literature that Varga discusses (e.g. Horn, *Personal Branding*; Sampson, *Build Your Personal Brand*) do not see these two conceptions of authenticity as opposed, but suggest instead that "creating an authentic 'personal brand' is not considered an adjustment of one's personality to external market requirements but as part of becoming oneself" (134), in the sense that, once a person identifies what makes them distinct and authentic, they should work to communicate that distinctiveness through their performances. Varga calls this "intersection of capitalism and authenticity" the "paradox of authenticity" (127).

Peterson uses the term "authenticity work" (1088) to describe the effort that goes into presenting oneself as authentic. Because representing oneself as authentic is an important self-branding strategy for building and maintaining an online audience, we might think of authenticity as a form of labour (Hearn 2008; Genz 2015; Marwick 2013) aimed at accumulating socio-cultural capital, which can sometimes be exchanged for monetary gain in the form of paid advertisements, sponsorship, free products, paid speaking invitations and book deals (to name

some blogger-specific examples. The term micro-celebrity is useful as both shorthand for referring to people whose online performances attract a large following, and a productive starting point for finding appropriate metrics of authenticity for discussing bloggers and their work. This is because micro-celebrity, as a subset of celebrity studies and related fields of popular culture and music studies, approaches authenticity as something that is enacted by a performer and then interpreted (and either accepted or rejected) by publics.

Celebrity and authenticity as we understand them today have a shared history. Charles L. Ponce de Leon connects the rise of celebrity culture with emergence of mass circulation print media. The increasing circulation of print media from the early modern period meant that the social elite had a means of hopefully increasing their renown, and the non-elite had a way of disseminating counter-discourses revealing the real corrupt versions of public figures. At the same time, public self-fashioning became an important activity for both the elite trying to maintain their image, and for the enterprising subject pursuing the social and economic mobilities ushered in by modernization. With this increased emphasis on self-fashioning came the common conviction that "all self-presentation in the public sphere was [...] artificial and unreliable as a guide to a person's real self" (29). By the mid-nineteenth century there was a rising mistrust of public personas and an insatiable interest in exposure journalism. In order to combat this tendency in journalism, public figures adapted strategies for performing authenticity, seeking by all means to "appear natural and sincere" (33). By the late 19th century, idealized and moralizing portraits of public figures seemed less credible to audiences accustomed to a steady diet of exposés targeting such representations. Instead, representations of real, complex, flawed human beings in mainstream mass media (34) came to prominence as a way of appearing more trustworthy. By the early 20th century, this emphasis on revealing a public figure's real self was

coupled with a growing interest in psychology and human personality, resulting in a widespread curiosity about how public figures "nurtured and expressed [their] individuality" in order to master the "art of living" (40). This demand that our celebrities be authentic while instructing us in the art of living is remarkably apparent in lifestyle blogging, where expectations of celebrity authenticity are increased by the fact that bloggers, as micro-celebrities, are supposed to more authentic than traditional celebrities.

Research describing the relationship between authenticity and popular music is helpful for thinking about authenticity as it is communicated through branding, performance, and as it is interpreted by audiences. At its core, authenticity in popular music is about communicating realness and sincerity. Barker and Taylor suggest that the word authentic is most often deployed in popular music discourse as the opposite of "faking it" (2002 ix). Whether or not a performer is faking is a judgement conferred by audiences. Studies of authenticity in popular music seem to agree that "audience is pivotal in conferring authenticity" (Fraley 43), and audience members have different expectations about how authenticity should be encoded and interpreted, which vary according to musical genre. Anthony Kwame Harrison suggests that "Authenticity aims to strike an agreement between the presentation of something or someone (as authentic) and the reception or acceptance of that presentation. Thus, authenticity is both constructed and contested, and therefore in a perpetual state of flux" (n. pag.). Allan Moore argues that authenticity is "a matter of interpretation" and is "ascribed, not inscribed" (210). He stipulates further that "academic consideration of authenticity should [...] shift from consideration of the intention of various originators towards the activities of various perceivers" (221). According to Moore, audience metrics for judging a celebrity's authenticity might include assessments of the integrity or honesty of the performer's self-expression and communication of emotion (212-214),

perceptions of how well the performer represents a pre-existing community or tradition's ideas and strategies for communicating them (218), and evaluations of whether a performer "succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is 'telling it like it is' for them" (220). This description of how audiences ascribe authenticity to performances is relevant when thinking about intimate publics' consumption of lifestyle content, and how publics' responses to content assign value to a blogger's model of the good life based on whether that representation resonates with the public's lived experiences, communal ethics, and points of shared investment.

A helpful way of familiarizing oneself with the demands that a particular genre exacts on its performers as they seek to communicate authenticity is by looking at the conversations that arise in situations where the authenticity of a performer or performance is most in question. Tara M. Tuttle's analysis of country singer Chely Wright's autobiography *Like Me* focuses on how the performer plays down her experience as a member of the LGBT community and focuses instead on her humble socioeconomic background, insisting "upon the very authenticity she knows will be called into question" (71). Tuttle uses this example to discuss how the contemporary country music industry's brand of authenticity relies on frequent references to performers' humble, rural, working class backgrounds. Identities other than straight and cis- are generally not represented within this genre. There is also a body of literature surrounding the phenomenon of hip-hop authenticity, where authenticity is tied to Black identity (e.g. Harrison 2008), and where white performers must try to legitimize their place within the industry through authenticity work such as autobiographical narrative describing humble socioeconomic origins.

In country music and hip hop, autobiographical content emphasizes the performer's economically disadvantaged upbringing (rural in country music, urban in hip hop) as key to the

genre's expectations about authenticity. This emphasis is especially important when other, non-normative factors like whiteness in hip-hop (Fraley 2009) and queerness in country music (Tuttle 2015) seem to call authenticity into question. Several studies focus on the white rapper Eminem (e.g. Armstrong 2004; Hess 2005), whose performances foreground his lack of economic privilege while acknowledging the different experience conferred by his whiteness, emphasizing both commonality and difference as authenticating strategies.

Authenticity discourse from music studies overlaps with how authenticity is performed and received in the publics surrounding lifestyle blogging. For example, in hip-hop and country music, as in lifestyle blogging, there is a pervasive denial of socio-economic privilege, coupled with the performance of emotional sincerity and intimacy, and demonstrations of solidarity with one's audience through emphases on shared experience.

Although there are continuities between authenticity work in traditional celebrity and in lifestyle blogger micro-celebrity, some distinctions must be made. As I have already alluded, micro-celebrity authenticity work introduces different conditions and expectations for the performance of authenticity. Marshall's 2014 introduction to *Celebrity and Power* acknowledges the fact that networked digital practice has led to the increased relevance of celebrity practice for normal individuals who are not traditional celebrities. He writes that, "through technology, the socially networked individual has become more prevalent in the creation of contemporary culture and a linchpin in the organization and flow of cultural forms and practices" (xxiv). New networking technologies introduce "new metrics of fame" including measurements of followers, likes, and views across different sites. As a result, more people are "engaged in processes of an attention economy that used to be the province of celebrities" (xxiv).

danah boyd and Alice Marwick view celebrity as a "an organic and ever-changing

performative practice" (2011, 140) and "a continuum that can be practiced across the spectrum of fame" (141). We might then think of celebrity and micro-celebrity as forming parts of the same continuum, and sharing a common set of practices that include "ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona" (140). Senft defines microcelebrity as "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good" (2012, 346). Marwick defines micro-celebrity as "a state of being famous to a niche group of people" as well as "a behaviour: the presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention" (114). Celebrity tactics are now a mainstream practice of online self-representation, even for those who do not desire a large following or fame. It encompasses things like managing one's web presence with consistency and professionalism in mind, which is basic practice for many casual social media users.

But micro-celebrity incorporates more aspects of celebrity practice than does normal social media management. In their examination of celebrity twitter practice, boyd and Marwick observe that, for both celebrity and micro-celebrity, online practice requires managing multiple audiences, encouraging a sense of connection with fans through the use of shared codes, fostering intimacy with one's audience by revealing personal details, and performing authenticity and sincerity. According to boyd and Marwick, authenticity is not just about whether the person is really who they claim to be (as opposed to a staff writer). Other signals of authenticity include typos/misspellings, being "personal, controversial, or negative" (149), and generally less managed content, fan interaction, and candid photos.

Even though Marwick argues that "authenticity is not an absolute quality, but a social judgment that is always made in distinction to something else" (120), she points us towards some patterns in how publics evaluate authenticity in online performance. Achieved micro-celebrity

"is a self-presentation strategy that includes creating a persona, sharing personal information about oneself, constructing intimate connections to create the illusion of friendship or closeness, acknowledging an audience and identifying them as fans, and strategically revealing information to increase or maintain this audience" (117). Further, micro-celebrity entails "strategically appealing to online fans by being 'authentic," where authenticity might mean, for example, sharing "direct interaction with admirers" or "the public discussion of deeply personal information" (114). Because micro-celebrities are viewed as less distant or removed from their audiences than normal celebrities, they respond to a perceived obligation to interact with followers, such as in comments and emails (119). For bloggers and social media influencers who rely on a likeable and authentic personal brand to retain followers and maintain high levels of visitor engagement, a typical piece of content might be met with dozens of comments, which the source then responds to individually. Given that an active lifestyle persona posts multiple times a week on their blog home page, and once a day or more on related social media accounts, this authenticity performance can be laborious—although the level of blogger responsiveness varies. Below, Liz of *The Young Adventuress* replies to her followers' comments with a series of emojis:

Illustration 17: Instagram post by @youngadventuress, Jan 26 2018. Captured Jan 30, 2018.

Micro-celebrity has some similarities to celebrity culture in general, but one notable difference is that micro-celebrities do not have the same reputation-management resources. There are no teams of people working to maintain the micro-celebrity's online brand. For this reason, micro-celebrities are also expected to be more authentic (Marwick 119), "presumably because they are not subject to the processes of the same star-making system" (119). Emma Maguire observes that, "In contrast to print media autobiographies that rely on publishing houses and agents to market an authorial self, the self-brand of a YouTuber relies on the absence (or at least the appearance of the absence) of commercial or corporate interference" (78). Theresa Senft highlights another way in which micro-celebrity is different from traditional celebrity, when she suggests that audiences' interest in web micro-celebrities "takes an ethical turn," where, "rather than speculating on who a Web personality 'really is,' viewers tend to debate the personality's obligations to those who made her *what* she is. This is because on the Web, popularity depends

upon a connection to one's audience, rather than an enforced separation from them" (*Camgirls* 25-26).

Although, as boyd and Marwick have noted, being "too managed" can contribute to the appearance of inauthenticity in micro-celebrity, in other instances, being not managed enough might cause a lifestyle persona to lose some followers. In the example below, Kate of *Adventurous Kate* posts a protest photo to Instagram with the caption proclaiming her refusal to hide her politics and feminism to retain a good relationship with followers who disagree. She cites negative comments she gets frequently, such as "Why do you talk about politics? You should stick to travel." Kate responds "I get that a lot. And 9 times out of 10 it's men telling me to stay in my lane." In an active comments section, Kate gives her followers more than emojis, though the result probably leads to some lost fans:

Illustration 18: Instagram post by @adventurouskate, Jan 20, 2018. Captured Jan 30, 2018.

Responding to a complaint that Kate's page blends travel posts with political posts instead of keeping the two separate, Kate responds "Sorry –if you want an account with pretty images and zero critical thinking, I'm not the one for you. Not your thing? You don't have to follow." Of course, the few followers Kate might lose in the aftermath of one of her political posts is probably negligible compared to the increased loyalty she wins from fans who relate to her professed political commitments—seeing Kate dismiss naysayers, as in the example above, might lead fans to trust in her credibility as someone who is so committed to her cause that she would give up followers to stay true to her values. In the post above, negative posts are outnumbered by shows of support, such as "Wonderfully said. This is our time!!! [flexing arm muscle emojis]" and "Yes to all of this! Politics affect us all - we should all care enough to stay informed AND engaged. ♡" These antagonistic interactions with right-wing followers on Instagram might actually be more careful and managed than they initially appear, and are an important component of Kate's authenticity performance and brand as someone who emphasizes her commitment to empowering women by encouraging solo female travel.

Anti-fans, Snark, and Authenticity

In order to offer a more complete illustration of how lifestyle content is consumed and negotiated within postfeminist intimate publics, I move now to a discussion of anti-fan publics. These kinds of participants are more easily identified in off-site venues dedicated to the discussion of online micro-celebrity. These venues, which often come in the form of parody blogs and discussion forums, are best understood through fan and anti-fan studies. In an environment where the choice of content to consume is seemingly endless, micro-celebrities are able to attract audiences who follow their content across sites and regularly come back to check for updates. But fandoms are not merely audiences who follow a source of content across sites

with regularity—Jenkins describes fandom as "a semistructural space where competing interpretations and evaluations of texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of mass media and their own relationship to it" (1992, 88). This leads to the formation of "popular expertise" and its own theories and criticisms. In the case of bloggers and their readers, this kind of speculation is more likely to come from anti-fan communities than from traditional fans. Although fan websites dedicated to traditional celebrities abound, micro-celebrities are far less likely to receive this kind of positive attention, and are more frequently the objects of critique in the form of anti-fan produced content.

In his work on anti-fans, Jonathan Gray looks at what he calls "sarcastic criticism" or snark in the form of acerbic commentary and recaps of tv shows and episodes considered bad (846). He observes that anti-fans form their own communities or hijack existing fan communities (847). Harman and Jones (2013) use *Fifty Shades of Gray* anti-fandom as a case study for how "anti-fans position themselves not only against and in opposition to the novels but also as superior to fans" (952) based of metrics of taste. And yet anti-fans find enjoyment in consuming and discussing that objects of their bile: as Francesca Haig (2014) observes in a discussion of *Twilight* anti-fans, "the criticisms aren't incidental to the pleasure taken in the texts; they appear, in large part, to constitute that pleasure" and that "the recognition itself [of *Twilight* as rubbish] and the analysis, discussion and parody that it permits, provide much of the fans' pleasure." Liz Giuffre describes anti-fandom as "a system of community and identity formation based on an agreed upon disapproval of a particular artist, genre, movement, or piece" (50). She differentiates it from the term hater, arguing that "unlike hate, which is arguably a destructive process, anti-fandom can be a constructive form of engagement" (53). Similarly, Harman and Jones suggest that anti-fandom activities involve close reading and critical engagement with texts. Marwick

describes the anti-fan phenomenon using the example of *Reblogging Donk,* a website devoted to posting snarky commentary in response to the posts of Internet-famous Julia Allison (152-153). Marwick suggests that Allison's online persona is the target of so much dislike because her web presence doesn't adhere to her audience's expectation that "social media celebrities are supposed to be authentic and responsive" and that online fame should be democratic and achievable only when the individual possesses "unique skills and talents" (157). Harman and Jones summarize the satisfactions inherent in snark as "readerly pleasures of performing and sharing distinctions of taste" (961).

Andrea Hunter's work on mommy bloggers (2016) also uses a case study of feedback from GOMI participants to better understand how mommy bloggers' use of commercial content provokes negative reactions from readers. Hunter attributes much of the dissatisfaction evidenced by critical publics to the sense that potential for authentic community has been lost, and suggests that backlash occurs when audiences perceive blogs as becoming too commercialized, and that "instead of providing alternate narratives of what it means to be a mother, and a woman, these blogs are accused of crafting narratives designed to be commercially successful, which often means glossing over the difficult, honest accounts of parenting that made them so attractive to their fans in the first place." I want to build off Hunter's work here to suggest that what she identifies as the community-building function of personal blogs, can also be thought of as an ongoing negotiation between bloggers and blog-consumers of what it means to live well as a contemporary female subject, a negotiation that is enacted through the discourses circulating within the online intimate publics of postfeminist sensibility in which both bloggers and blog-consumers participate.

Before moving on to a closer look at trends in authenticity discourse in the anti-fan

community GOMI, I should note that analyzing content within online intimate publics requires a degree of familiarity with the norms or rules of posting on specific sites and in different communities. That means taking the time the read extensively within the discourse communities (Swales 1990) formed by publics. For example, GOMI participants refer to ongoing or insider jokes in their forum discussions, and often base their usernames on references to particularly infamous discussions or jokes from the forum's history. These jokes are specific to the community, and the nuances of what is being said can only be understood after reading through much of the earlier posts and comments. In preparation for writing this dissertation, I spent a lot of time over the course of several years (beginning in 2013 when I submitted my first proposal for this project) observing the GOMI community and its commenting culture, using the method of "academic lurking" outlined by Jonathan Gray. In his work on anti-fans, which involved monitoring posts on a TV forum, Gray directs his attention to the "textualized output" of forum posters, rather than conducting interviews or giving surveys (847). I have used a similar strategy to Gray's, except that I also looked closely the blogs that audiences are responding to, and read broadly within the genre within which those blogs are situated. In his study of online comment cultures, Geert Lovink admits to being disturbed by what he perceives as commenters' "hostile anxiety to engage with other neighboring voices" which results in "an avalanche of random and repetitive comments" (58). Lovink is looking at the comments sections of YouTube videos, which do not seem to have the same kind of community membership norms that many smaller posting cultures do. However, I want to emphasize with this project that it takes extensive reading and observation within an online genre, and the audience networks connected to it, to get a sense of how meaning is negotiated within those networks.

Trends in Authenticity Work and Authenticity Discourse Associated with Lifestyle Blogging

My discussion of how intimate publics discuss and negotiate models of the good life proposed by lifestyle bloggers has focused on models based on the postfeminist retreat into nomadism narrative presented by solo female travel bloggers; originally, however, this work was intended to discuss several genres of lifestyle content alongside critical commentary from anti-fans. For this reason, my identification of trends in authenticity performance and discourse within the travel blogging industry is informed by broader reading of lifestyle content (and discussions of this content within publics) from several genres, including domestic genres like DIY or home-based blogs. Bearing in mind the current critical discourses surrounding authenticity, my reading of content from the intimate publics surrounding personal lifestyle blogs has revealed several recurring trends for the performance and assessment of authenticity that align with the conclusions others have drawn about authenticity in relation to celebrity and micro-celebrity—with some genre-specific distinctions. In the rest of this chapter, I focus on four recurring (and intersecting) themes in authenticity discourse that appear to be the most persistent and influential in online lifestyle genres. These recurring locations of authenticity and inauthenticity drive bloggers' performances and direct publics' evaluations of authenticity work.

It is important to note that while the GOMI subforum I studied closely was called "Travel Bloggers" and did not impose (at least directly) any further guideline for limiting the scope of what kinds of travel blogs would be discussed, the most active threads tended to focus on discussions of solo female travel blogs. In particular, both *Adventurous Kate* and *The Young Adventuress* had their own active threads on the forum. These are blogs that I have discussed at length in earlier chapters, citing them as representatives of a larger cultural narrative promoting a

retreat into nomadism as a model of the good life for postfeminist female subjects. Anti-fans focus much of their snark on blogs that emphasize the retreat into nomadism as a response to the contemporary female subject's experiences of malaise and dissatisfaction with the social and economic structures of middle class western life. To me, this suggests that members of critical intimate publics like GOMI can tell when they are being targeted by bloggers with a narrative of what they should do to live better. When the narrative or model being offered does not align with publics' understanding of what it means to live well as a contemporary female subject, and when the blogger as a source or guide for the good life is perceived by publics as inauthentic and therefore *not* an authority, participants in intimate publics can become anti-fans.

One area where authenticity work is essential for lifestyle bloggers is in the management of branded and sponsored content. Bloggers must find ways to integrate brands, as the support of these brands is essential to monetizing lifestyle content. Bloggers may try to convince consumers that they have not sold out through transparency about their relationship with brands and sponsors, while not drawing too much attention to the presence of this sponsored content. This kind of authenticity work is related to the existentialist tradition of authenticity as being true to one's personal commitments despite external pressures, with bloggers working to assure audiences that the brands they choose to work with are brands that align with the values and focus of their blogs—claims that critical publics might choose to reject. Hunter (2016) identifies "loss of authenticity" as a key theme in forum users' critiques, and partly defines this loss of authenticity as the move towards branded content and using the blog to sell products instead of telling stories. Specifically, she locates GOMI members' antagonism in their feelings of betrayal at having been "sold" to sponsors. Hunter applies theories of the "audience commodity" (e.g. Smythe 1981) and suggests that mommy bloggers' audiences are the real commodities being

sold, contending that "The reason the reaction on GOMI is so strong is that former and current blog readers are reacting to their own commodification." A problem bloggers face in their authenticity work is that, just when blogging success built largely on a self-branding strategy incorporating the performance of authenticity begins to translate into economic return, that blogger's ability to present the appearance of authenticity is weakened. Sarah Banet-Weiser gestures towards this paradox when she observes that "within contemporary consumer culture we take it for granted that authenticity, like anything else, can be branded" (13) while also maintaining that "what is understood (and experienced) as authentic is considered such precisely it is perceived as *not* commercial" (10).

Lifestyle bloggers must also be able to convince consumers that their modelling of the good life is not the direct result of special economic or demographic privilege, but the direct result of hard work or bootstrapping and unique expertise (being able to convince consumers that they have rare insight into the art of living well is key to producing lucrative lifestyle content). Authenticity, in this case, resides in the blogger's normal or average origins— which is usually conceived of by bloggers as being middle class in a rich Western country. In an analysis of the fashion blogging industry, Duffy and Hund observe that, for these bloggers, "realness [is] tantamount to accessibility—geographically, aesthetically, and most often, financially" and that authenticity or ordinariness closely tied to expressions of class (2015, 106). As noted above in my overview of authenticity in studies of popular music, it is important for audiences to feel that their experience of life is being validated (Moore 220). Like popular music fans, many blog consumers want to feel that the bloggers they follow demonstrate "commitment" and "solidarity" to the values and investments of their shared demographic (Marshall 163-164). Also like celebrities in popular music genres like country and hip hop, bloggers work to convince

consumers of their humble socioeconomic origins in order to appear more authentic (Harrison; Tuttle).

Another important strategy for crafting an authentic persona is the communication of intimacy and inwardness through the presentation of what I call existential backstages. Banet-Weiser suggests that self-disclosure is an important online branding strategy for communicating authenticity, writing that "Digitally-aided disclosure [...] relies on traditional discourses of the authentic self as one that is transparent, without artifice, open to others" (60). Marwick notes that the metrics of authenticity used by publics evaluate a person's displays of "hidden inner life" (120). Through these intimate disclosures, whether about events in the bloggers personal life, or meditations, anxieties, and doubts about what the good life means for the blogger and women like her, and how/whether it can really be achieved, the blogger speaks to an assumed intimate public of demographically-similar consumers who share the same concerns and have a similar vision of the good life. Such intimate disclosures can be powerful for consumers who feel their investments have been authentically-represented by the blogger, though this strategy backfires when participants in intimate publics feel their values and experiences are excluded from bloggers' representations of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject. Duffy and Hund write that "'realness' is coded as r*elatability to an imagined audience*" (111)—an audience that is typically imagined to be demographically homogenous, coming from a background and having a range of experiences similar to the blogger. One trope common to many solo female bloggers is using intimate registers to describe the labour-intensive nature of blogging, and the sacrifices and discomforts that this work entails. These kinds of descriptions seem intended to foster relatability, and pre-empt accusations of blogging not being a real job. In her discussion of the hidden labour underlying the "filtered" lives of lifestyle content producers Duffy observes

that “hyper-vigilance” in online persona work and self-branding involves “cloaking the less glamorous aspects of careers, through socially mediated, Valencia-filtered images of ‘*work that doesn’t seem like work*’” and that this idealized representation of the good life deflects from “the time, energy, and investments necessary to *earn a living doing what you love*” (215). While Duffy’s argument here about the glamourized nature representations of the good life is accurate to a degree, it overlooks a key strategy for performing authenticity or realness: the behind the scenes or backstage look at the labour of blogging.

Lastly, a recurring strategy that lifestyle content creators use for performing authenticity is to draw attention to how several others are inauthentic compared to the blogger. This might include people who haven’t retreated from the inauthentic workplace into a more authentic way of living, other people who engage in the activities specific to a blogger’s niche in a less authentic manner (e.g. mainstream tourists compared to the adventurous travel blogger), and other bloggers within the individual’s niche. In relation to the latter, Duffy and Hund observe of their fashion blogger interviewees that “Often, and in spite of their presumed aspirations of upward social mobility through entrepreneurial ventures, most shared the perspective that other content creators—especially the exalted few who reached star blogger/vlogger rank—had demonstrated behavior that was “inauthentic”” (106-107). By drawing attention to how other bloggers clumsily incorporate branded content or overlook the privileged circumstances that enable their idealized lifestyle, bloggers can imply that they are uniquely authentic among their peers. But perhaps most importantly, lifestyle bloggers assert that their current lifestyle is an authentic and aspirational model for the good life through repeated references to a previous, less authentic and less fulfilled self—the before self of the postfeminist nomadic makeover narrative examined in the previous chapter.

Re-visiting the Nomadic Makeover Narrative: Critical Intimate Publics Respond

I want to transition now to looking at how the critical intimate publics of postfeminist online culture respond to the makeover narrative in solo female travel blogs. Part of bloggers' modelling of the good life as one of retreat into nomadism is how they respond to a perceived exigence to balance larger than life components of their persona with relatability or authenticity, often through gestures towards hard work, humble or normal origins, and rebuttals of real or anticipated accusations of privilege. A reading of anti-fan critiques from the GOMI "Travel Bloggers" sub-forum indicates how bloggers' attempts to appear average are so common that they have become tropes within the travel blog genre. A pattern that emerges in the GOMI forums is that participants are not satisfied with how travel bloggers represent their makeover narrative as representing a lifestyle that is extraordinary and should be desired above a normal life, and as a lifestyle that is accessible to readers—if they follow the blogger's advice. The nomadic makeover narrative in travel blogging, and critical publics' responses to this trend, is tied to discourses of authenticity that fixate on others as examples of the inauthentic—in this case, inauthentic normal people back home, leading normal 9-5 lives, and the less authentic before version of the blogger herself. Additionally, the nomadic makeover narrative incorporates authenticity work that downplays evidence of unique privilege that enables the blogger to pursue a vision of the good life that others cannot.

Something worth noting is that the participants in GOMI anti-fan publics are far more likely to be critical of female travel bloggers, even when the faux-pas or inauthentic gestures being criticized are tropes common to male travel bloggers as well. I think we can partly attribute this problematic distinction to the fact that anti-fan commentary like the kind found on GOMI, despite its strong dislike of its objects, is still participating in the same intimate publics the blogs

in question address/assume as their audience. Just as certain bloggers assume an intimate, demographically-similar public as their superaddressee, publics might assume that demographically-similar bloggers are representing their experiences and investments, and they are therefore unhappy when this representation does not accurately reflect their understanding of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject. The intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, like the precedent of American women's culture outlined by Berlant, is largely concerned with the discussion of what it means to live well as a western, middle-class female in a postfeminist, neoliberal context. The ongoing topic of conversation within these publics, even when it is not explicitly identified, is the negotiation of how the postfeminist subject's values, experiences, and desires should best be expressed—a topic of conversation that makes popular male versions of the solo female travel blog less relevant than blogs where such questions are foregrounded. This might explain why blogs like *Adventurous Kate* and *The Young Adventuress,* though less popular than some of the other blogs mentioned in this chapter, are the most discussed blogs on GOMI. I would argue that GOMI's fascination with these particular bloggers has to do with how Kate and Liz both emphasize the subjective experience of the female solo blogger, with many of their posts focusing on what makes the life of the solo female traveller unique, alongside broader meditations on navigating emerging adulthood in general.

As noted in Chapter Two, usually, travel bloggers present the persona of someone who, despite having once led a perfectly average middle-class life chasing wealth through a typical 9-5 office job, has shifted her priorities in order to lead a life of frequent-to-constant travel funded by travel blogging and other freelance work. The content should be aspirational—desirable for readers, and the object of longing what ifs—but still authentic and accessible. Not surprisingly, achieving a convincing balance of aspirational and ordinary is difficult, and GOMI participants

frequently criticize bloggers for being either too average, or not average enough (or both simultaneously). Anti-fan critiques indicate how bloggers' attempts to appear average are so common that they have become tropes within the travel blog genre, and how attempts to be aspirational rely on making the unoriginal *appear* original. Conversely, travel bloggers are often accused of not being ordinary enough, most often because the ability to travel long-term in the first place is perceived as the result of uncommon privilege. Failure to address the privileged circumstances that allowed them to make the decision to travel long-term in the first place interferes with bloggers' ability to represent their lifestyle as aspirational for readers. The issue seems to be that, the more bloggers try to pre-emptively deflect criticism based on privilege by insisting on their ordinariness, echoing each other with similar narratives of achieving an extraordinary lifestyle through hard work and clever strategy, the more obvious the labour of appearing simultaneously aspirational and ordinary becomes to publics, so that such performances are registered as unoriginal, insincere, and inauthentic.

By insisting they are just like everybody else, travel bloggers fall into tropes common to their subgenre and direct attention to the authenticity labour that goes into distracting from privilege, inadvertently detracting from their ability to present authentic personas. GOMI participants in turn suggest that the unique privilege bloggers attempt to hide renders other claims of uniqueness unconvincing, due to the fact that bloggers' efforts to represent themselves as having unique insight into the art of living well are undermined by critics' perception that it is easy to live well when you are born into circumstances that allow for the decision to drop everything and travel.

Some of the most commonly recurring posts in travel blogs are variations of "how I afford to travel" or "how you can afford to travel." These kinds of posts are often targets of

criticism, with participants frequently objecting to bloggers' suggestion that anyone can afford long-term travel if they simply alter their priorities and spending habits. Many participants feel that bloggers' attempts to pass off their lifestyle as achievable are dishonest, harmfully downplaying factors like class, education, nationality, racialized background, and ability.

The majority of popular travel bloggers are born into relative privilege, usually possess a university degree and have worked high-paying white-collar jobs long enough to save the 10-15k bloggers usually cite as prerequisite to travelling 6+ months (*Adventurous Kate*, "How I Saved $13,000 for Travel in Just 7 Months"). Backpacker/budget travel bloggers often seek to undermine the work of privilege in making their aspirational lifestyle possible, instead emphasizing the hard work and sacrifice their retreat into nomadic entrepreneurialism has required. In doing so, they assume a socio-economically homogenous readership whose reservations about whether to commit to long-term travel are more likely to be based on doubts about giving up a good job in order to travel, than on doubts about the feasibility of finding a job paying more than minimum wage to allow for any kind of travel savings.

Bloggers sometimes provide lists of ideas for how to cut expenses and re-channel money into a travel savings account. These lists are full of what must be intended as helpful tips for how to cut costs in order to save up the chunk of money required to sustain long term travel: *The Young Adventuress* recommends abstaining from buying "$150 fuzzy boots" ("No More Excuses!") and *The Blonde Abroad* suggests subscribing to the dollar shave club (along with an affiliate link, which shows us that the blogger gets paid every time someone subscribes to the service via her site) instead of spending $25/month on disposable razors, painting your own nails instead of getting manicures, and turning the lights off when not in the room ("10 Easy Ways to Save Money to Travel the World"). After showing readers how they can save literally tens of

dollars, Kiersten concludes, “So when people ask me how do I afford to travel so much it’s quite simple. It’s how little I spend rather than how much I make.”

By including variations of the “How I Afford to Travel” post, travel bloggers are clearly trying to appear authentic through financial transparency. *Adventurous Kate* provides a very detailed account of her budget in the year leading up to her first long trip in a post called “How I Saved $13,000 For Travel in Just Seven Months.” She opens with the statement “I am going to be 100% honest with you and show you exactly how I did it.” Kate follows through on her promise, breaking down the sources of her income, and the changes she made, big and small, that allowed her to accelerate her savings, including starting a new job as “an account manager at a search marketing agency outside Boston,” that paid 50k a year. She also moved in with her parents for the final 2 months before her trip. After mentioning this point, Kate pre-empts commentary about the privilege of moving in with parents with an aside: “This is the part where a lot of people said, ‘Oh, she lived with her parents, that’s how she saved, the rest of this piece is irrelevant.’ Dude. That was for seven weeks out of the seven MONTHS.” The majority of the post is dedicated to explaining the small changes Kate made to her lifestyle, such as giving up her gym membership, and switching from shopping at Whole Foods to Trader Joes.

Kate’s post emphasizes that “You don’t need to make $50,000 a year and have a few freelance jobs to save money quickly and dramatically,” but is this really true? What Kate does not mention is that the savings goal she had set for her original several months’ trip did not account for what would happen *after* she presumably returned to the United States—we might assume that her plan was to stay with her parents for at least a few months while searching for a new job and saving enough money to get her own place again.

Like Kate, Kristen of *Be My Travel Muse* tries to pre-emptively address criticism from readers in her "How I Afford my Nomadic Lifestyle" (Sept 19, 2013): "Let me just start out by saying that I do not have a rich uncle who thought it would be nice to send me on an endless trip around the world, although that would be really nice!" She emphasizes that she comes from a similar starting place as her (presumed) audience: "I graduated with student loan debt just like everybody else whose parents aren't made of money, I paid my rent on my own after graduating, and I handled all of my bills myself." Atypically, however, Kristen goes on to admit, "The truth is, I held a well-paying job for about four years before taking off to travel."

Brooke Savard of *World of Wanderlust* does not mention what her main source of income was while saving in her "50 Ways I Saved (A LOT) of Money to Travel the World." Instead, she first gives a detailed overview of the (small) expenses she was able to cut from her budget ($5 coffees, expensive drinks and take-out). Then she lists the things she sold to make money, revealing, importantly, that she had valuable items to sell, including a car and $1500 worth of clothes. She only briefly mentions the fact that she moved back in with her parents and saved "oodles" of money that way. In the comments section of this post, a reader jokes, "I stopped drinking 5$ coffee 2 months ago and today I just bought my first private Caribbean island! Now I'm looking for a whole south american country. Thank you very much for your inspiration." Brooke's response of "Yeeeehaaaaa! Have a great trip!!" suggests that she missed the sarcasm in the comment, having failed to fully read it.

GOMI posters discuss a post on *True Colours*, (now called *Land of Marvels*, a couple-run travel blog) called "Travel Tips: Balancing a Home Base and Travelling," which gives a list of suggestions that includes calling internet and cable providers to try to get a better deal on these services, and doing freelance work on the side. A participant in the GOMI "Travel Bloggers"

thread responds, “What if you don’t already pay for luxuries like cable and you work more than 40 hours a week in a job that doesn’t really allow you to save and all savings you do have to go towards making sure your car can get you to work?” Another poster gripes that “A lot of travel bloggers seem to magically forget that they’re white first-worlders with a degree and parents to fall back on.” Another poster snarks, “If I started a separate account just for ‘special travel money’ I would be able to travel one way on the bus and get a cup of coffee at the end of the year.” In the comments section of this blog post, which also advises having a separate travel savings account and selling non-essential items, a poster called “Amanda” (who has her own blog, as commenters on blog posts often do) politely points out that the lifestyle described in this blog is still not achievable for many, even with the lifestyle adjustments outlined in the post:

> Personally, as a blog reader, something I’ve become disenchanted with is the idea that everyone can afford to travel. [...] Yes, most people of comfortable (not wealthy) means can cut back on shopping, nights out, etc to save up money to travel. [...] But there’s an (unintentional) arrogance to the idea that ‘if you cut back on your lifestyle you too can travel!’ It’s usually coming from a position of not living hand-to-mouth in the first place.

In a later comment, Amanda adds “Of course, one of the enjoyments in blogging is getting to experience clothing, places, food, etc that you can’t. (Like window shopping.) But it becomes harder relate to a blog writer when it becomes couched in terms of ‘with a little hard work so can you!’” By presuming that travel is a decision that anyone can make with just a few changes, travel bloggers isolate large swaths of readers who do not have the same ability to save large sums of money by making a few simple sacrifices.

Blogger *Snarky Nomad* calls attention to such posts in a blog entry titled “The Problem with ‘How I Afford to Travel’ Posts” (Sept 20 2013). The very fact that this blogger assumes that it will be self-evident what they are referencing when they mention “How I Afford to Travel

Posts" suggests that this kind of post has become a recognizable trope within the travel blog industry. The blog post reads,

> The readers asking these questions are probably aware of many of these strategies already, and if they look at the cost estimates for 1 month of travel, it's perfectly reasonable to wonder how a 22 year old can afford to do it for 12. You know what I rarely see? Travelers who flat out say 'yeah, you need a lot of money to travel. In fact if you want to go for a long-term trip during which you'll have no income then you'll need several thousand dollars.'

He goes on the add, "And I think it's rather disrespectful to say 'I just worked hard and saved' when the real answer was 'I had a job that paid way more than yours.'" A participant in the travel blogger forum at GOMI links to *Snarky Nomad's* post as an example of rare, refreshing honestly from a travel blogger about the financial realities of long-term travel, suggesting that financial transparency and openness about one's own privilege is a desirable aspect of authenticity work that bloggers often neglect.

A minor blog called *Adventure Year* links to Kate's post "How I Saved $13,000," citing it as realistic compared to other travel blog posts offering financial advice. In "Money Woes: Starting a Travel Budget" (July 29, 2013), the blogger, Amanda, complains that many of the "savings tips" style posts shared by travel bloggers recommend selling possessions: "But what if you don't have nice things to sell to cushion your savings fund in the first place?" she asks. Amanda proceeds to give her own tips, which include her earnest recommendation to first "perfect the art of income"—suggesting that the most important step to accelerating travel savings is finding a source of income to begin with.

Bloggers' efforts to downplay the privilege behind their extraordinary experiences and accomplishments might stem from a desire to manage the "anxieties of abundance" described by David Brooks (2000, 40). This term gestures towards the paradoxes surrounding a class of

people he calls the "bohemian bourgeoisie" to manage the tensions "between wordly success and inner virtue" (41). Educated, affluent people from wealthy countries embark on long-term travel in pursuit of authenticity (authentic experience, as well as existential authenticity), perhaps hoping that, in doing so, they can escape or rebel against the cultural injunction to join the workforce after finishing university and produce income, becoming consenting participants in late capitalist consumer society. These same educated, affluent people, while self-styling themselves as rejecting the mainstream through their decision to embark on extended travel, must grapple with the fact their very ability to travel is due to their privileged position within the same consumerist system they reject.

The Tourist in Travel Blogger Authenticity Discourse

I have noted above that one trend in bloggers' authenticity work is a tendency to locate the inauthentic in a variety of others. Two of these others are, first, the less authentic tourists whose version of travel is mainstream, safe, and therefore less adventurous than the model of travel presented by the postfeminist nomad, and, second, the less authentic bloggers writing in the same travel niche, whose faux-pas and lack of imagination (bloggers imply as part of their own authenticity performance) that reveal their inauthenticity. The travel blogger subject self-examines against the backdrop of the West rather than against an exotic foreign environment, and the blogger tends to make sense of her identity as a nomadic subject against the foil of the typical western middle class lifestyle and its accompanying templates and timelines, while demonstrating her own authenticity in contrast to the inauthentic experiences of mainstream tourists as opposed to adventurous travelers, as well as comparatively inauthentic travel bloggers, whose faux-pas, when called out, accentuate the blogger in question's realness.

According to Chaim Noy, "Authenticity is a central meta-narrative in tourism" (2009, 219). Work in tourism studies about authenticity usually mentions Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist* (1976) within the first few pages. MacCannell comments on the tendency among intellectuals to deride tourists: "they [tourists] are reproached for being satisfied with superficial experiences of other peoples and other places" (10). That is, tourists are critiqued for seemingly being satisfied with inauthentic experiences/attractions produced by the tourism industry for their consumption. When tourists (or self-styled travelers as opposed to tourists) critique other tourists, the criticism tends to be based on a "desire to go beyond the other 'mere' tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture" (12). But MacCannell argues that "all tourists desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel" (12)

It is clear that travel bloggers generally wish to represent themselves as travelers as opposed to tourists. Azariah (2016) suggests that travel discourse tends to represent the traveler's experience as "a difficult one, accompanied by hardship rather than ease." The traveler's experience is one of adventure as opposed to entertainment, and prioritizes exploration and discovery, with a focus on destinations that are perceived to be off the beaten track. That budget travel bloggers wish to be read as travelers as opposed to tourists is evident in their tendency to choose blog titles that incorporate variations of words like "wanderer," "adventurer," and "nomad."

As the past few decades of research in tourism and tourist studies shows, tourists seeking authenticity (or seeking to perform authenticity) largely define themselves in relation to other tourists. These inauthentic tourists might be identified as middle-aged, middle-class package tourists being shuffled along from attraction to attraction, or perhaps as the mainstream

backpacker imagined as a 21 year-old American on a post-grad "eurotrip." Chaim Noy examines how backpackers perform authenticity through the work of differentiation by observing how backpackers describe travel after the fact. In his interviews with Israeli backpackers, he notes that subjects "construct the identity category of 'backpacker' by ardently opposing it to 'tourist' or to 'mass tourist,' and in their manners of travel—and travel narratives—they repeatedly promote this distinction, assuring themselves and their audiences that they are backpackers, not tourists" (2007, 11). Richard and Wilson (2004) suggest that "what many backpackers regard as an 'authentic' destination is one untouched by other tourists" (5). Backpackers seek to set themselves apart from less authentic travellers by trying to travel off the beaten path, which, while certainly not a desire unique to backpackers within the broader spectrum of tourism, certainly appears to be an established part of the backpacker culture. Zoë Kinsley observes that "travellers have always examined their own identity in relation to those they encounter whilst on the move, but as recreational travel increases, the travelling gaze starts to turn to consider fellow travellers" instead of only comparing the self to the "locals" encountered in travel destinations (2016). Thompson notes that the "others" of travel writing can be the less-cultured people back home, compared to whom the travelling subject has a "greater breadth of knowledge or a greater degree of sophistication, open-mindedness and/or modernity" (122). An important part of how travel bloggers perform authenticity resides in their ability to differentiate themselves from mainstream tourists. Philip Xie observes that "Authenticity has its value only where there is perceived inauthenticity" (2010, 38), and an important labour of the blogger's authenticity work is locating inauthenticity within the larger domain of their genre niche.

Budget travel bloggers brand their content as off the beaten path travel. For example, *Adventurous Kate* uses "Off the Beaten Path" as one of her meta tags at the bottom of many

posts, and using this descriptor seems to be her preferred way of categorizing many of the travel destinations she blogs about (curiously, a post called "Welcome to the Florida Keys" is labelled with the "Off the Beaten Path" tag). A popular trope within travel blogging is to introduce a location as a country or region's "best kept secret" (thus positioning themselves as a benevolent travel expert sharing industry secrets for the benefit of their readership). *The Young Adventuress* introduces Asturias, Spain, in this way in "Asturias: Spain's best-kept secret" (Aug 25, 2015), and cites a lack of tourists as a key incentive for visiting: "It felt like I had the place to myself to explore! Undiscovered, hidden gem, off the beaten path." This discourse of discovery is common to the travel blog industry, and implies the social capital that accrues to the one who is the first to discover (that is, write about) the next big backpacker destination. Bragging about having a place all to oneself precedes travel blogging, of course—one famous literary example that examines this trope is Alex Garland's novel *The Beach* (1996), which describes (and criticizes) a backpacker's quest to find the perfect, untouristed piece of Thailand, an off the beaten path utopia that quickly descends into a dystopia. Another key element of the Off the Beaten Path trope is gesturing towards the inauthenticity of other, more popular tourist itineraries. As part of her introduction to the Bolaven plateau in Laos, *Adventurous Kate* explains that "most backpackers who visit Laos take the well-trod route from Vientiane to Vang Vieng to Luang Prabang, then promptly leave the country," implying that her own adventure in the Bolaven region is rare and adventurous ("Off the Beaten Path in Bolaven Plateau," Dec 20, 2010). As she reflects on her motorbike journey through the area, Kate writes "there's nothing like the feeling of riding through mostly untraveled territory. I noticed fewer than five foreigners in two days, and I was the only solo woman," quantifying her identity as an intrepid, lone female discoverer through the reference to five other foreigners (and no women).

One way that travel bloggers are critiqued within online intimate publics is for promoting their unoriginal travel itineraries as off the beaten path or adventurous. In the GOMI forums, participants' grievances focus less on the decision to visit and write about frequently touristed destinations and more on the adventurous persona bloggers attempt to project when they are, in fact, travelling on well-trodden tourist paths. In the "Adventurous Kate" thread at GOMI, one poster remarks that "people (especially Europeans and Australians) have been traveling in their 20s for generations, it's a right of passage in some places. But for people like Kate, it coincided with the rise of personal blogs. This seems to have led a lot of travel bloggers to think they are special and the only ones who have ever traveled."

One poster targets Liz of *Young Adventuress*, complaining that "This blogger considers herself a "travel writer," and an "adventuress," because she writes about her basic b***h travels to places like Spain and New Zealand" ("Travel Bloggers"). Another participant writes of Liz, "What irks me about her is that I just don't think she is an 'adventuress'. She's travelled to some amazing places but she is actually quite often on an organised tour! It's not like she' backpacking alone through a remote area" ("Travel Bloggers"). In the "Adventurous Kate" thread, a few participants make sure to put the "adventurous" part of the blog's title in quotations, with one user making sure that adventurous is always followed by "lol" in parenthesis, in order to indicate that she cannot use the two words together without breaking into laughter. Both *Adventurous Kate* and *The Young Adventuress* are micro-celebrity brands that rely on the category of the adventurer, drawing on the image of solo female traveller as one that is automatically remarkable because it is less common to travel alone, and even less common to travel alone as a woman. Anti-fans easily recognize that these bloggers are trying to market their personas as adventurous, and deconstruct their performances of the lone female adventurer persona, suggesting instead

that these bloggers are unoriginal and unremarkable, or "basic."

Managing Sponsors and Brands in Travel Blogger Authenticity

Personal lifestyle bloggers act as both authors and readers within the intimate publics they address, often positioning their work and personas in relation to other bloggers who occupy the same niche. By pointing out how other bloggers writing within the same genre are inauthentic, bloggers can draw attention to their own realness compared to the tropes of their genre. A trend emerges when we consider this tactic, which is that bloggers and the intimate publics in which they participate are preoccupied with the influence of authenticity on monetization, and monetization on authenticity. There is an identifiable paradox of success within the lifestyle blogging industry, which means that, the more successful a blogger becomes (successful here refers to things like click traffic, revenue from advertisements and affiliate links, offers to partner with brands), the harder it is to convince publics of one's authenticity. Because bloggers are aware that their persona's perceived authenticity is key to attracting a loyal and engaged following, tactics for preserving the appearance of authenticity despite success emerge, most notably pointing out other bloggers' inauthenticity. Different bloggers' approaches to sponsorship and affiliate links are key topics of conversation within the intimate publics surrounding personal travel blogs. Another recurring topic is tone, or the use of intimate versus impersonal or professional registers.

With regards to the scales of intimacy in personal blogging, it is important to distinguish metrics of success when identifying what degree of intimacy will most benefit aspiring bloggers wishing to increase their influence. As I have observed earlier in this work, Cardell and Douglas (2016) propose that professional travel bloggers are expected to produce travel narratives that are

> inevitably more 'literary' than travel blogs in other contexts might aspire to be. That is, while an audience of some kind is always implied, even for the most diaristic of travel bloggers, the professional blogger must also provide an affective story, one that will

> either inspire their audiences' own adventure or prove a correlate. Here the emphasis is less on the detail of travel, the logistics and facts, than on the narration of subjective, seemingly 'authentic' experience.

This is certainly true for travel bloggers whose prerogative is attracting a more engaged and loyal following—and bloggers like *Adventurous Kate* and *Young Adventuress*, while not the most popular travel bloggers in terms of sheer numbers of visitors, manage to monetize their content even when prioritizing the kind of reader that is attracted to more intimate registers and personalized content. Despite the correlation that Cardell and Douglas propose, we see complaints on GOMI about blog content becoming *less* literary as a blogger becomes more successful. In many of the most successful travel blogs, where the blogger is making a living from their content, we see lots of SEO-driven posts, short lists, and quick guides that will come up when potential readers search things like "how to save money for travel." This suggests that those wishing to be successful within the personal travel blogging genre must adopt at least some of the most guidebook-like strategies of the genre. The publics surrounding personal travel blogs are critical of this tendency of bloggers to create bland content in the pursuit of monetization: in the GOMI thread where posters discuss *Adventurous Kate*, some participants complain about how her content has become more sparse and boring in recent months. One poster is not surprised, explaining "This always happens when bloggers get big – they dump their blogs and only put out generic 'top 10' lists." Liz of *The Young Adventuress* makes a similar observation in her "How Not to Have a Boring Travel Blog" post, which is a quintessential example of the "other bloggers as inauthentic foils" strategy common in lifestyle blogging. In this post, Liz complains about other travel bloggers whose work is boring or unreadable, citing things like lack of honesty and bland sponsored hotel review posts as offending practices. Like the GOMI participant cited earlier, Liz suggests that "a lot of bloggers get boring after a while. I've noticed

that it usually happens when they are trying to make the transition between hobby blogger and professional blogger. The personality behind the blog starts to disappear behind the desire to seem 'professional.'"

These GOMI responses suggest that participants in the intimate publics surrounding lifestyle blogs have expectations for blogger authenticity that do not necessarily align with a more general, less participatory readership. The very guidebook-like strategies that increase traffic for bloggers can detract from their perceived authenticity within intimate publics as a distinct subset of the general public that frequents personal lifestyle blogs. This phenomenon gestures towards the incompatibility of authenticity with financial interest in lifestyle genres.

A problem bloggers face in their authenticity work is that blogging success (built largely on a self-branding strategy that incorporates the performance of authenticity) weakens the blogger's ability to present the appearance of authenticity. Cardell and Douglas note the paradox of success faced by personal travel bloggers when they argue that "The independent and often amateur status of the blogger thus becomes a key sign of the blog's authenticity and an important aspect of these sites for those interested in seeking out products or destinations free of advertising 'spin,'" and, relatedly, that "One of the key ethical challenges [...] is negotiating the vested interests of travel companies or other organizations that seek to organize the experience of travel bloggers and to influence what and how they write." Banet-Weiser gestures towards this paradox when she observes that "within contemporary consumer culture we take it for granted that authenticity, like anything else, can be branded" (2012, 13) while also maintaining that "what is understood (and experienced) as authentic is considered such precisely it is perceived as not commercial" (10). This is particularly true for travel bloggers, who perform authenticity partly by narrating their cultivation of existential authenticity through the ongoing process of

self-improvement towards an idealized goal (making an income through continuous travel) that paradoxically harmonizes an anti-capitalist desire to forgo material comforts in favour of a nomadic lifestyle with the conspicuously capitalist ideal of the expertly-branded entrepreneurial subject capable of supporting herself independently.

Common to all lifestyle genres is the difficulty of generating income from one's content while still presenting oneself as authentic. Acquiring sponsorships (usually, getting free stuff in return for reviews—for travel bloggers, this means free hotel stays, guided tours, and travel gadgets) is a coveted sign of success for many bloggers, but it is a challenge to incorporate sponsored posts into one's content seamlessly and transparently. With authenticity factoring so heavily into the likeability of their persona, any evidence of sponsored posts renders publics immediately skeptical of the blogger's authenticity due to the association of sponsorship with money, money with work, and work with the labour behind persona construction.

To a large extent, intimate publics judge travel blogger authenticity based on how they handle the delicate matter of monetization. Based on the kinds of criticisms that frequently appear in the GOMI forums, critical participants in the intimate publics surrounding personal travel blogs seem to require that travel bloggers appear to have a personal ethic that must be followed despite external pressures (these pressures often coming from the demands of the blogging industry itself). Lifestyle bloggers acquire income through advertisements, sponsorships, free products, paid speaking invitations and book deals. Bloggers are allowed, even expected, to show some uncertainty with regards to their personal life. But the expectation appears to be that bloggers should know their personal brand, only promote products that seem consistent with this brand, and talk about these products and the fact of being sponsored with transparency and apparent sincerity.

Paradoxically, the nomadic subjects of postfeminist lifestyle content appear to reject consumer culture, even as the financial viability of their labour *relies* on turning their visitors into consumers. One aspect of the ideal neoliberal female subject is her adaptability—and part of this adaptability, Pamela Thoma argues, is her willingness to revitalize the nation through "the naturalization of consumption as an indispensable element in individual psychic well-being, familial relations, and a peaceful social order, in the process obfuscating the materiality of consumption" (114). Thoma (2014) and Williams (2014) both draw attention to the example of the *Eat, Pray, Love* franchise to show how women are encouraged to consume as part of the project of individual fulfillment: in the wake of the massive success of Elizabeth Gilbert's travel/spiritual memoir, fans were encouraged to mimic Gilbert's introspective quest by investing in self-discovery in the form of purchases as big as all-inclusive Eat, Pray, Love retreats, to branded journals and prayer beads. On a smaller scale, blogger's income is dependent on sponsored posts and affiliate links—in short, on getting their readers to buy things. In lifestyle bloggers' narratives of retreat, the decision to embrace either domesticity or nomadism is usually framed as a rejection of consumerism and a move towards a simpler or minimalist lifestyle where subjects embrace thrift in exchange for increased freedom. Yet travel bloggers, for example, encourage readers to invest in themselves by spending money on travel, though this imperative is framed largely as a process of self-abnegation—a rejection of consumer culture. The focus is not on what must be bought (a plane ticket, a hostel bed, a backpack), but on what must be given up ($5 coffees, expensive boots, living alone).

Participants in the intimate public of travel blogs often invoke the authentic/inauthentic dichotomy in their responses to posts, accusing bloggers of concealing financial interests (e.g. sponsored posts). In order to successfully balance the demands of the authenticity work of self-

branding within their niche, budget travel bloggers both announce and conceal the financial interests behind their work in response to the demands of a genre that requires a careful balance between transparency and escapism in order to be successful. Bloggers adopt a defensive stance in their writing because of the prevalence of these kinds of reactions, even publishing posts dedicated to responding publicly and methodically to critical comments and emails (for example, Liz of *Young Adventuress* has a series of "Best Hate Comments" posts). One strategy for performing travel blogger authenticity is outright denying financial interest, as *Nomadic Matt* does on the front page of his blog:

> What separates this website from other travel blogs? Unlike other travel websites, you won't find sponsored content or paid trips here. Every place, restaurant, or attractions has been personally visited by me (or one of my guest columnists) and we pay our own way. We sleep in dorms and budget hotels, wait hours for buses, try those roadside street stalls, and test travel passes to see if they really do save money. We do it just like you would – because, like you, we're real travelers looking to see the world and help others do the same.

Liz of *Young Adventuress* in particular seems to struggle to accept sponsorships in a manner that satisfies her followers. In response to a post where Liz talks about facing fears in travel ("5 Common Fears"), one poster doubts that Liz's travel is authentically fraught with risk, asking "How can you have fears when pretty much all of your trips are now sponsored? When someone's looking out for you and making sure you're safe and having a good time so you'll write about it positively, you're not having the same experience/fears as someone who genuinely goes there as a solo female traveller" ("Young Adventuress") Liz's partnership with Starbucks VIA instant coffee is cited as a particularly egregious example of clumsy affiliate posts. Participants are particularly annoyed with the posts, because Liz has elsewhere talked about the importance of being in the moment and using social media authentically. In response to a viral parody Instagram account, Socality Barbie, that features a Barbie doll staged in some of the most

trope-ish settings common to lifestyle-themed social media accounts, Liz writes that "What Socality Barbie so cleverly draws attention [to] are people who are using the wildly popular #LiveAuthentic hashtag on Instagram, who are, well, anything but authentic because they all take the exact same photos. It all blurs together into one giant feed of dark green hues and beards" ("Why Experience Still Matters").

Liz goes on to remark of such posts, "Is that truly authentic living or did you just stage everything in your Instagram feed to seem authentic?" In response to Liz's meditation on social media authenticity, a GOMI poster writes, "Were Liz's sponsored Starbucks Via Instagram shots and placements in her blog [...] truly authentic and 'living in the moment'?" ("Travel Bloggers") Another poster complains that affiliate posts in travel blogs generally appear desperate, with bloggers accepting any kind of sponsorship they are offered in an attempt to monetize their blogs, with the result that "most of the content is so bat shit obvious you want to slap them" ("Travel Bloggers"). Participants are quick to point out Liz's hypocrisy, arguing that she is guilty of the very "poses" she criticizes, and frequently posts pictures of herself "looking out into the distance," an Instagram trope that is supposed to make the subject of the photo appear adventurous. "She moans about people not being in the moment- she has a selfie of herself swimming next to a turtle! Talk about not being in the moment!" ("Travel Bloggers") One poster draws attention to the constructedness of Liz's photos of herself—"Who is taking your photo Liz and how is that being in the moment if you're posing for your own photos?" ("Young Adventuress") By pointing out Liz's hypocrisy and drawing attention to how her Instagram resembles the social media accounts of other bloggers, GOMI participants make an argument for Liz's inauthenticity based on her lack of originality as a travel blogger, suggesting that the

persona she presents through the images on her Instagram account is nothing more than a patchwork of borrowed tropes.

Existential "Backstages" and Intimate Negotiations of the Nomadic "Good Life"

Travel bloggers who imagine their addressees are participating in the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture tend to incorporate intimate registers in their writing as part of their authenticity work. These intimate disclosures contribute to solo female travel bloggers' ongoing negotiation of what it means to lead a good life as a postfeminist nomadic subject, and it is through these behind the scenes intimate posts that travel bloggers tap into postfeminist sensibility's ongoing preoccupation with the normative timelines for western middle-class femininity and questions of whether it is possible to veer from those timelines without some form of loss or missing out.

In examining travel bloggers' representations of their personal pursuit of the good life, I think it is useful to keep in mind existentialist conceptions of authenticity as an effort to remain true to one's personal commitments despite external pressure. In the twenty-first century, questions of what it means to live authentically are inseparable from questions of what it means to manage one's online persona authentically. In his analysis of travel bloggers' "Appeal[s] to authenticity" (193) in self-branding, Van Neunen proposes a conception of authenticity that incorporates constructivist and existentialist definitions, noting how ideas about existentialist authenticity can serve as important elements of a constructivist rhetoric of authenticity" (194). That is, vaguely existentialist incitements to be yourself or find yourself through travel is key in many marketing strategies.

I would like to return, for a moment, to the tourist/traveller discourse described in an earlier section, in order to make use of a popular theory for understanding how authenticity is

constructed within the tourism industry, a model which I think can be usefully adapted to thinking about travel blogger authenticity. MacCannell's concept of staged authenticity uses Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959), which argues that people perform for others as though on a stage, giving backstage access to only some. He adapts this model to the tourism industry's production of authentic attractions aimed at tourists, expands the model to include several gradations on a scale working from "front stage," through several degrees of "back stage," arguing that tourists' demand for authentic experience are met by the tourism industry with false back stages, or "staged authenticity." These fake backstages are designed to reveal the "inner workings of the place," yet there is a "staged quality to the proceedings that lends to them an aura of superficiality, albeit a superficiality not always perceived as such by the tourist" (98). That is, the tourist does not necessarily realize that they are being confronted with an inauthentic (because manufactured) experience. Based on MacCannell's formulation of staged authenticity, we must conclude that "according to this model, tourists are doomed to fail in their search for authenticity" (Leite and Graburn 2009, 43).

It seems too simple to think of staged authenticity or the staged backstage as something that the tourism industry does and that tourists fall for. What about when it is the *tourists* who stage authenticity? Rather than thinking of authenticity as something that is staged for and consumed by tourists (although this could certainly be a helpful way of thinking about the marketing side of the tourism industry), we might think of travel blogs as stages themselves, where bloggers perform authenticity in ways designed to be easily consumable for their target audience. Personal bloggers addressing intimate publics like to invite readers behind the scenes of their personal life as part of their authenticity work. They *perform* the quest for/experience of

existential authenticity—something that can be more easily traced, and that doesn't require speculation about whether or not such experiences of authenticity really exist.

Critical publics are sensitive to the ways that such intimate disclosures could be staged. Borrowing MacCannell's concept of authenticity as something that is staged for others in a way that is meant to give the appearance of an insider's' look, we can think of lifestyle blogs as stages where bloggers perform authenticity in ways designed to be easily consumable for their target audience.

Critical participants in the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture are often concerned with whether a blogger's intimate disclosures about personal victories and dilemmas are sincere, or fabricated for effect/affect. They are also suspicious of whether a blogger appears to be acting in a way that is true to her personal commitments despite external factors (i.e. economic incentive or the constraints imposed by a blogging genre or site). A common critique used when casting a blogger's authenticity into doubt is to question whether that person stands for anything or whether they simply adapt depictions of who they really are in order to meet audience demands.

These publics do not seem to expect micro-celebrity bloggers to demonstrate perfect satisfaction with the degree of existential authenticity they have achieved—on the contrary, it is potentially more authentic to represent the journey toward personal authenticity as a struggle. Sarah Banet-Weiser suggests that self-disclosure is an important online branding strategy for communicating authenticity, writing that "Digitally-aided disclosure [...] relies on traditional discourses of the authentic self as one that is transparent, without artifice, open to others" (2012, 60). Travel bloggers frequently use these kinds of disclosures to foster intimacy with their audience and invite spectators into their inner quest for personal fulfilment, a tactic that GOMI

participants view with skepticism.

Travel bloggers create content that invites the public behind the scenes of the nomadic entrepreneurial lifestyle, a lifestyle that, according to bloggers, consists of much hard work, doubt, and loneliness. Whether this authenticity is a real window into the actual and existential labour that makes up the blogger's life, or into a staged backstage, is up for debate. As is usually the case, GOMI participants are not convinced that these performances are sincere, due to what they perceive as the constructedness of behind the scenes moments in travel blogs. It is obvious to commenters in the "Travel Bloggers" sub-forum that bloggers try to appear authentic by talking about the hardships of their lifestyle and by fostering intimacy through personal disclosures. These performances appear staged to GOMI participants, whether because the blogger is using tropes common to their subgenre, or because the performance in question is inconsistent with the blogger's previous expressions of identity. GOMI participants' skepticism towards obviously constructed performances indicates that micro-celebrities are perhaps not viewed as performers in the same way as traditional celebrities, in the sense that any evidence of strategy or pre-meditation in their self-disclosures takes away from the authenticity of these personas.

Within the travel blogging genre, there is a subgenre of posts where bloggers confess that (no matter how glamorous it may look to others), they do not always like their job because of the uncertain nature of the work and accompanying lifestyle. Efforts to represent the travel blogger life as difficult work seem to grate on participants who do not find bloggers' descriptions to be convincingly onerous (that the GOMI community in general does not consider travel blogging to be a legitimate occupation is clear in the sub-forum's sarcastic subheading: "Because Vacations are a Full Time Job"). One of the most frequently discussed blogs in the "Travel Bloggers" sub-

forum is *Adventurous Kate.* GOMI participants balk at a post titled "On Living in Perpetual Motion," which is a reflection on missing the conveniences of settled life, and includes the example of "spilling red wine on a white cashmere sweater and pouring the white wine and vinegar on it, as they're both stocked in your pantry" as an everyday thing that Kate used to take for granted. Anti-fans describe the posts as full of "humble brags" and "first world problems."

Amanda of *Living in Another Language* attracts negative attention from GOMI participants when she writes about the hardships of travel blogging in "Travel Blogging isn't for the Faint of Heart." Her points include the fact that travel blogging is harder to monetize than other genres of lifestyle blogging, that it is hard to find good Wi-Fi while travelling, and that "some readers have a certain disdain for travel bloggers" because they believe bloggers have acquired the wealth needed to travel through luck. In response to this accusation, Amanda maintains that travel bloggers work hard to fund their travel, whether their funds are acquired through travel blogging itself, or through previous employment. GOMI participants are unimpressed with the travel blogging backstage Amanda presents: one poster snarks that they cannot accept what they call the "poor pitiful me" attitude, and stipulates that "Either you love travel and travel writing enough to write a travel blog or you're so desperate for handouts that you can start another shitty lifestyle blog instead and get all of the free mason jars you can glitterglue" ("Travel Bloggers"). Another poster adds that "There's a difference between lifting the veil on the struggles and challenge[s] faced by professional travel bloggers and being a whiny spoiled entitled brat" ("Travel Bloggers"). In response to similar posts by *The Young Adventuress*, one participant writes "You can try all you want but you can't make your life sound hard. Oh no- you tell people you are going on a trip so then you are committed to writing about it? Yes, that's how jobs work, we have to commit to stuff. You only get a few hours sleep

because you are off on wonderful tours all day? Oh no- poor you!" ("Travel Bloggers") Another poster adds, "Girlfriend, you seriously have no idea what it's like to travel for real work as part of a real job" ("Travel Bloggers").

Based on the recurring criticisms we can observe within the intimate publics surrounding narratives of postfeminist retreats into nomadism, it seems fair to conclude that, in deciding whether to ascribe authenticity to various models of the good life, participants are invested in questions of what constitutes real work. Questions of work and authenticity are frequently sites of conflict for lifestyle bloggers and the publics they address. While bloggers represent their work as desirable because of its authenticity (authenticity, in this case, is presented as being detached from the traditional workforce, self-directed and independent in nature, and motivated by passion), and presumably attract readers based on their ability to represent this kind of authenticity, critiques from participants in intimate publics suggest that work is not real or authentic unless it is also hard to some extent. Questions of whether lifestyle content provides an accurate representation of the good life come down to whether the blogger is perceived as sharing the intimate public's values with regards to work: what kind of work contributes to society, what kind of work is sustainable, what kind of work is ethical, what kind of work merits respect. Perhaps this kind of critique comes from the desire, common among participants in intimate publics, to have their personal experiences and investments represented by the dominant narrative, which means that for all the legions of people who cannot quit their jobs to travel full time, the impulse is to deconstruct narratives that seem to propose this course as the best and most authentic option.

Intimate disclosures about travel bloggers' existential backstages are not always focused on the hardships of freelance writing. In the "Adventurous Kate" thread, there is much discussion

of Kate's romantic entanglements. GOMI participants appear to have conflicting expectations with regards to how bloggers should share the intimate details of their personal life. At times, participants are annoyed by Kate's reticence, and indicate that she could make herself appear more authentic if she was more forthcoming about the events of her private life. After Kate makes a vague post about having left her fiancé, one participant writes that she "would LOVE to know details but I guess she is too #headtravelblogger to share those kind of details. Which is a shame, because readers do love to see different sides to the bloggers they follow." When Kate finally shares the desired details about her break-up, it is in a Facebook comment on her fan page (which a forum user promptly screenshots for dissection in the thread). In their discussion of Kate's representation of her break-up, forum posters go back to Kate's initial gushing engagement post and point out inconsistencies. Kate expressed satisfaction in the initial blog post about how the engagement happened, but in a later Instagram post, she recalls how mortified she was that the proposal happened in a public place. Posters interpret this contrast in tone between two descriptions of the same event as a sign of inconsistency, which is taken as evidence that the blogger is first and foremost a performer that caters her intimate disclosures to the demands of the moment. The indication here is that publics want intimate expressions of emotions emerging out of the blogger's personal life, but expect that those expressions should be consistent over time, similar to how a blogger's general content is supposed to adhere to a distinguishable and consistent self-brand.

As a descendent of the travel memoir and associated travel writing genres, which have a long history of articulating subjectivity through comparisons and contrasts with the foreign other encountered over the course of the protagonist's travels, we might expect contemporary travel blogs—especially travel bloggers inclined to intimate registers—to feature meditations on

personal discoveries made as a result of the blogger's exposure to new cultures and places. Thompson observes that "the travel writer's act of self-fashioning often proceeds by a logic of differentiation, whereby the Other is constructed in some subtle or unsubtle way principally as a foil or counterpoint to the supposedly heroic, civilized and/or cultured protagonist" (119). Yet, despite a context seemingly rife with possibility for subject-articulation through narratives of cultural encounter, this common feature from the travel memoir does not appear to translate so easily to the personal travel blog (even those located more on the memoir end of the rhetorical spectrum).

Eat, Pray, Love, for example, is unabashedly a book about the self, and about examining the self against the backdrop of the other: Gilbert reflects that "It wasn't so much that I wanted to thoroughly explore the countries themselves; this has been done. It was more that I wanted to thoroughly explore one aspect of myself set against the backdrop of each country, in a place that has traditionally done that thing very well" (30). This kind of relationship between the nomadic subject and the places she encounters stands in contrast to conceptions of the nomadic as a way of knowing through the embrace of multiple subject positions (e.g. Braidotti 1994)—instead, the subject uses the backdrop of her travels as a launching point for retreating ever deeper into an individual and isolated subject position that can only make sense of alternate subject positions to the extent that the can be incorporated harmoniously into her personal narrative of the self in relation to the other. Kendra Marston (2016) examines this tendency in texts from what she calls the "travel romance" genre, with a focus on the film adaptations of *Eat Pray Love* and Frances Mayes' *Under the Tuscan Sun.* Both of these texts

> champion what bell hooks has termed 'eating the Other' as a fantasy liberation strategy for those middle-class white women who have failed to achieve the fulfillment promised to them in the American urban environment. The protagonists rediscover an authentic self that was presumed lost to the requirements of neoliberal femininity in the United States,

> ultimately through an engagement with the inhabitants of the tourist space who by necessity are reduced to racial cliché in their role as cultural rehabilitators (12-13)

The female subject's encounter with exotic locales and peoples "operate as empowering, affective extensions of the melancholic white self, with the pseudosymbiotic fusion of person and place allowing for a philosophical and spiritual 'transcendence' over neoliberal feminism's consumer capitalist logic" (25).

I want to nuance Marston's description of how the postfeminist female subjects of the travel romance narratives engage with the logic of neoliberal consumerism by emphasizing that the female personal travel bloggers examined in this chapter, while they share the travel-romance heroine's perception of having transcended the Western obsession with a specific kind of consumerism (chasing high wages and buying nice things), still tend to embrace neoliberal capitalism in more significant ways than they reject it. I am referring to the after self in the before/after paradigm of the postfeminist nomadic makeover narrative—the empowered entrepreneurial female subject whose embrace of the logic of neoliberal self-disciplining, self-managing, self-improving productive subject allows her to successfully make up for the deficiencies of contemporary western workplaces and self-protect against the financial uncertainties that follow from insufficient social safety nets.

Given the popularity of narratives like *Eat, Pray, Love* within the intimate publics of women's culture, we might expect personal travel bloggers who write to a presumed intimate public of postfeminist online culture to employ a similar tactic. In *Eat, Pray, Love,* for example, the protagonist embarks on a period of travel with the goal of learning from each of the cultures she encounters as part of an ongoing project of self-discovery and self-improvement, where the author summarizes her experience in each place she visits to one word that she feels best

describes the nature of her experience there—"Eat" in Italy, "Pray" in India, "Love" in Indonesia. However, in female personal travel blogs tending towards intimate registers, accounts of lessons learned from other cultures tend to be lighthearted in tone and simplistic in content: like *The Young Adventuress'* "How to Swear Like a Spaniard" and *Adventurous Kate's* "Learning to Drive Like a Vietnamese Madwoman." *Adventurous Kate* is what I would consider the ultimate example of a female travel blogger whose assumed addressee is a participant in postfeminist intimate publics, and of a blog that tends towards intimate registers, resulting in frequent meditations on things the blogger has learned over the course of her travels. Surprisingly, Kate actually has very little to say about what she has learned from her exposure to the distinct cultures of the many countries she has visited. Kate has a "Best of the Blog" page where she collects links to some of her most popular and personal favorite blog posts, divided by theme. Her posts about specific travel destinations tend to be informational and guidebook-like in tone, with information on the cost of travel in a given region, what food to try, which attractions to visit, and initial impressions of a place's general vibe, without much rumination on how she has been altered personally by the visit. Other posts mentioning specific destinations are focused on telling adventure stories—and Kate has a long list of these, resembling the social capital inventories of digital nomad lifestyle entrepreneurs, with posts like "Adventurous Kate Gets Shipwrecked in Indonesia" and "A Night with a Thai Mafia Don."

Kate's "Best of the Blog" page includes links to many posts focused on introspection and personal growth, but these tend to discuss travel generally and rarely mention insights drawn from specific cultural encounters. Under "Most Personal Posts," we see several reflections on recurring postfeminist topics and anxieties like dealing with aging and personal timelines, relationships, and identifying the things that will most contribute to one's personal happiness:

posts like “Break up, Moving On, and Leaving Chester,” in which Kate reflects on the end of a relationship, and “28 Things I’ve learned about Life, Love, and Happiness,” in which Kate meditates, on her 28th birthday, on what she has learned over the years about life, which mostly consists of broad aphorisms like “choose to spend your time with people who lift you up” and “be kind — always,” as well as a defense of singleness: “Choosing to be single and without kids does not mean that a person isn’t good with people or has some degree of mental problems.” What the solo female travel blog as a model for the good life presents as transformative is notsomuch exposure to the cultural other, but the transition to a different kind of relationship to work and lifestyle design. The subject’s lifestyle options and potentialities are still understood with reference to a western framework, and the main object of comparison is not the other encountered along one’s travels, but the other back home. Rather than a source of healing for the melancholic western female subject, the exotic locations of the personal travel blog function as settings for the accumulation of social capital necessary for making a compelling lifestyle manual.

Nomad authenticity within—and outside—critical intimate publics

In the “Travel Bloggers” thread, one poster summarizes all of her disappointments with the travel blogging industry (formatting my own):

> Things Travel bloggers do that annoy me:
> -Quit their jobs to travel forever and ever because they are so unique and will never go back to a regular life like the rest of you sheep. [...]
> -Think they travel ‘off the beaten path’ when they go to all the same places everyone else does.
> -Claim they are not lucky, they just worked really hard for this. I’m sure they did but there is a whole lot of luck involved in even having the chance to travel and blog (not being born into severe poverty in Asia, for example).
> -Presume everyone else hates their job/life and everyone wants to be like them. I can understand a dissatisfaction with life/job/society (it especially seems common with

> American travel bloggers who are perhaps frustrated with lack of vacation days, expensive healthcare) but still, not everyone in the US is dissatisfied with their job or life!

Through her airing of a laundry list personal annoyances, this GOMI participant summarizes several trends in how critical intimate publics identify inauthenticity in travel blogging, and, by extension, in postfeminist narratives of the retreat into nomadism as a model for the good life.

Similar criticisms circulate outside the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture. A *New Yorker* article called "Why I Quit My Job to Travel the World" (Veix 2016) satirizes the social media nomad figure by exaggerating the kinds of ethnocentric and privilege-blind statements that are so often objects of critique when critical publics direct their scrutiny towards travel bloggers. Statements like "I couldn't bear being chained to my desk in a stuffy office any longer […] So I decided to quit and travel the world, bringing only my passport, a small backpack, and my enormous trust fund" recall criticism from within the intimate publics surrounding the postfeminist narrative of the retreat into nomadism, in which participants take issue with the idea that accessing the good life is as simple as quitting one's corporate job to travel the world. Other aspects of the *New Yorker* article echo criticisms from the GOMI forums: for example, just as travel bloggers are criticized by GOMI members as presenting their basic or inauthentic tourist itineraries as adventurous, so too is the nomadic persona in the article unaware that his diverse travel encounters are quite the opposite. The speaker writes, "Everywhere I go, I meet such diverse groups of people. In hostels, I've shared beers with friendly British and Australian twenty-somethings. In hotels, I've sipped wine with friendly British and Australian forty-somethings." Finally, the *New Yorker* article directs skepticism towards obvious "staged backstages," and the traveler persona's efforts to appear authentic by confiding their struggles are hyperbolically clumsy: "Of course," the nomad writes, "this 'no reservations' life style isn't

for everyone. In many ways, it's harder than the old corporate grind. Many stores don't accept my Centurion card. Sometimes it's difficult to get even one bar of cell service, which makes Instagramming more gelato a real struggle."

The existence of the *New Yorker* piece above, and of similar articles like McSweeney's "Honest Excerpts from Your Acquaintance's Travel Blog" (Pearce 2016), suggests that the kinds of suspicions and problems raised by the anti-fan publics of GOMI are in fact persistent within a wider audience. The travel blogosphere invites doubts about authenticity due to travel blogging's invocation of long-running discourses from the tourism industry about the tourist vs traveler dichotomy, as well as travel's historic and contemporary associations with wealth, privilege, and the narrow, ethnocentric interpretations of value in foreign cultures as playgrounds for exploration perpetuated by youthful western travelers.

What is unique about the GOMI case is its members' clear investment in snark as a means of negotiating narratives of what is means to exist, travel, and live well as a contemporary postfeminist subject. While negative reactions to the inherent optimism about nomadism and the liberating potential of freelance work and entrepreneurialism are widespread, postfeminist intimate publics seem to take things personally by assuming that lifestyle blogger narratives are supposed to represent the lived reality of the intimate publics in which they participate. According to critical intimate publics like GOMI, lifestyle bloggers often fail to live up to a perceived ethical imperative to represent the experiences and investments of the communities they address with their models for the good life.

Conclusion: Repeating Retreat

A retreat into nomadism paradigm is emerging in recent postfeminist sensibility. In the preceding pages, I have traced how this cultural narrative is disseminated and negotiated through the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture. In the short space that remains, I wish to draw attention to two more retreats that I have observed through the writing of this work: first, the retreat of some participants in intimate publics from venues and topics of investment they previously held as important, and, second, the retreat *from* nomadism of some travel bloggers and digital nomad personas, as part of their ongoing re-assessment of what it means to live well, and to live authentically.

Retreat from *Get Off My Internets:* The Ethics of Snark

For those of us studying online texts and communities, a recurring problem is the fast-changing nature of our archives. I have relied on several case studies to demonstrate how intimate publics—including critical, anti-fan publics—contribute to the negotiation of models of the good life, with a particular focus on publics concerned with the negotiation of what it means to live as a *nomadic* female subject within postfeminist sensibility. Of necessity, I have described these publics as they existed in 2017, when I drafted the majority of this writing. But as of January 2018, there are hints of the impending breakdown of GOMI as a public founded on a particular brand of critique identified by community members as snark.

When I stumbled upon this forum in early 2013, my initial voyeuristic interest in forum members' unusual investment in blogger authenticity gradually developed into the research questions that brought me across Canada to the University of Alberta. *Get Off My Internets* has been integral for me in understanding and explaining how participants in postfeminist online

publics identify inauthenticity, and, by extension, collectively work towards narratives about the kinds of content that reflect the community's experiences and values enough to be considered acceptably authentic. I have been monitoring the GOMI community for five years now, and, recently, I have noted some evolutions in membership, and in the expressed commitments of participants. I have even traced migrations of subsets of this membership to other platforms. These evolutions and migrations provoke further questions.

By late 2017, the "Travel Blogger" subforum of GOMI had been deleted as part of an overall condensing of the website's content, and an effort to push participants in this community towards participating in a newer website (snark.blog) requiring membership and subscription fees to view and participate. The new, condensed GOMI is still an active forum, with the most popular threads still being updated every few minutes—except, as a sign of the shifting focus in how lifestyle content circulates online, some of the most active conversations are now dedicated to Instagram influencers (whose domain is limited to just one platform) rather than bloggers, who create content for several platforms. But the nature of the critique remains consistent, even as the chosen platforms of lifestyle content production changes. For example, in a thread dedicated to Instagrammer @_boss_mummy_, the third post (July 10, 2017) suggests that Georgie is inauthentic based on what is perceived as the unethical nature of her leveraging of cute kids to get free swag, and her false categorization of her husband as both "hot" and "Scottish." The poster in question writes, "Georgie is an absolute wanker. Pimps her kid and her step kids out for any old shit, constantly going on about her 'hot Scottish' husband (he is neither hot nor spent any time in Scotland since he was a small child by the way)."

The fact that GOMI retains its status quo of lampooning lifestyle influencers based on metrics of authenticity does not, however, mean that the community norms of exchange have not

gone unquestioned or uncriticized by participants within the group. One major shift has been the migration of a substantial subset of the forum population to the subreddit r/blogsnark. This alternate location for snark-based discourse is not formally mentioned anywhere on *Get Off My Internets*, nor is r/blogsnark officially associated with community. And yet the subreddit, ostensibly dedicated to snarking on blogs, devotes a comparable amount of threads to the discussion of GOMI itself. That is, GOMI denizens, and site creator Alice (username "partypants"), are key objects of critical discourse or snark within the r/blogsnark public. The subreddit is composed largely of former GOMI participants who have migrated to the reddit location as an expression of their dissatisfaction with the former site's interpretation of what it means to participate in an online community based on critique. r/blogsnark enforces stricter guidelines concerning what is counts as acceptable or ethical snark: the rules, formal and implicit, include no "doxxing" (locating and revealing private or identifying information about online personas, potentially placing the concerned party in danger), no directing of snark towards innocent children, and no snark based on body-shaming or unfair attacks on appearance.

The case of r/blogsnark suggests that the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture are not just about negotiating what it means to live as a contemporary female subject, but also what is means to *behave well* as a participant in these publics. While lifestyle bloggers are critiqued by both GOMI members and r/blogsnark participants for their inauthenticity, GOMI members are shamed by r/blogsnark participants for their incivility and lack of boundaries. In the thread titled "snarkers we have snarked" (Nov 2017), specific GOMI posters are singled out for critique. Discussions of individual GOMI participants are largely concerned with the boundaries between normal levels of interest in the lives of bloggers, and behaviour that they interpret as

excessive or unhinged. Participants sometimes level criticism towards so-called "commentariats" associated with particular threads on GOMI and their bad behavior.

In a thread titled "What was your GOMI tipping point?" (Oct 2016), posters are prompted to share their stories of leaving the GOMI discourse community, and to describe the final straws that prompted them to abandon the forum. The creator of the thread recalls how

> When I first found GOMI, I really loved it. I found it snarky, but civil, and overall pretty funny. I think there were a lot of great people contributing back then, and they set the general tone with their blog comments and forum posts.
> Over time, the tone changed (to me). It seemed like the comments were dumber and meaner. There seemed to be less room for disagreement, and fewer reasoned arguments, and more trolling and weird, mean fights

Other posters cite variations of a shared perception that the lighthearted snark they initially associated with the venue has been replaced by outright nastiness or vitriol. Conversations like this suggest that, within the discourse community at one point associated with GOMI, and now represented by r/blogsnark, snark is a term with more than casual connotation. It represents an object of *investment* and *ownership* to those who understand it as a specific way of connecting to lifestyle content, and, by extension, narratives of what it means to live as a contemporary female subject. The term carries with it ideas of membership in an anti-fan public whose participants understand their role as critics and skeptics as fundamentally constructive—based on an ethic of critique as a way of negotiating the messages surrounding shared points of investment for participants in the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture.

Clearly, a vocal subset of participants in the anti-fan publics represented by GOMI and r/blogsnark understand snark as something ethically distinct from gossip, sarcasm, or ridicule. This is nowhere better evidenced than in participants' reaction to a massive slip-up from GOMI founder Alice/PartyPants. In a thread from August 2017 ("No Explanation why PartyPants Broke

her Site"), participants respond to a blog post from the GOMI founder, in which she apologizes for banning forum members unfairly, admitting that the behavior stems from issues in her personal life. Participants in the subreddit are not satisfied with the apology, as it fails to address a major source of their disdain for PartyPants: her reaction to blogger *The Freckled Fox*'s announcement that her husband had been diagnosed with cancer (Meyers 2015). Familiarizing oneself with r/blogsnark discourse quickly reveals that PartyPants' perceived profiting from *Freckled Fox*'s grief was a deciding factor for many participants' migration from the GOMI forums. Criticisms of PartyPants' behavior echo one of the common trends in authenticity discourse discussed in Chapter Three: the idea that some methods for monetizing online content are inherently unethical. In this case, the unethical behavior is that PartyPants supposedly used controversial and inappropriate accusations to generate traffic and increase her profits. One poster references this controversy (which led to extreme stalking and doxxing from GOMI participants) when she proposes a revision to PartyPants' apology:

> If Alice wants to write an apology she needs to start like this:
>
> Dear Freckled Fox,
>
> I used your personal tragedy for pageclicks and ad revenue. I made money off the death of your husband.
>
> I encouraged a mob mentality. I speculated that you and your dying husband were lying grifters. I encouraged people to send you pure fucking hate.
>
> I did this for money. The crazier the speculation, the more money I made. I believed my own total fucking bullshit for no reason at all. I felt powerful.
>
> We zoomed in on your husband's Instagram, dissected the details of your dinner, decided that your husband was gay (SO GAY!), that you didn't even like each other, it was a marriage of convenience, you were his beard because gay mormons, we dug up the deed to your house, and looked through public records to get more medical information, decided your Mexico trip was fiction and that you just wanted to get away from all your

> kids because you don't even love them, and pages and pages and pages of speculation of how this exact scam you were running works.
>
> Then he died. Because he had cancer. I made money off of that too.

I conclude, then, with an acknowledgement that while this project has sought to identify, describe, and offer frameworks for thinking about the intimate publics of postfeminist online culture, more questions remain that merit investigation through other qualitative methods beyond observation. The case of r/blogsnark indicates that online intimate publics have rules for participation that are often implicit, going largely unacknowledged until they are perceived by members to be broken. Much of my work in this project has been directed towards getting a general understanding of how intimate publics and micro-publics coalesce around different lifestyle genres of online content, prompted by the affordances of networking technology to form discourse communities around various models of the good life according to postfeminist sensibility. As examples of the workings of these kinds of online intimate publics, I have looked at positive interactions based on expressions of identification from commenters on blogs posts and on Instagram, as well as snark from anti-fans on GOMI and r/blogsnark. The intimate public model has broad applicability when we consider the way that online sharing platforms coax participation in publics and micro-publics, and there is no shortage of examples of online discourse communities that presume intimacy among members, and that revolve around negotiations of specific models of the good life. Closer investigations of any one of these publics might consider the value of probing into questions about how members understand and invest in the goals of their communities, which might require direct engagement with participants through interviews or questionnaires. What do participants within intimate publics feel they owe each

other? What do they feel they owe to the rest of the world? What do they feel the world owes them?

Retreat from Nomadism: After the After Narrative

I have focused on tracing a theme within postfeminist online culture that intersects with neoliberal entrepreneurial culture broadly, and masculinized self-help culture more specifically, which is the makeover narrative of the ideal neoliberal subject's retreat from the discontents of the traditional white-collar workforce into entrepreneurial nomadism. But not all of these narratives end with the "happily ever after" of the self-made nomad success story: some travel bloggers and digital nomads eventually come home. Not surprisingly, this is a decision they feel has to be justified to the intimate publics consuming their content.

In their retreats *from* nomadism, postfeminist subjects represent their decisions to return to settled life, or to scale down on the amount of travelling they do, and how they situate that decision with reference to the pressing questions of postfeminist sensibility—questions of whether it is possible to have it all, especially within the context of timeline pressures and the anxieties of aging. The time crunch theme in postfeminist culture, which can be identified in media narratives about career types trying to find work-life balance, or about aging women trying to regain youth, has been analyzed extensively by Negra, who observes that postfeminist media "thrives on anxiety about aging" (2009, 12), and that in postfeminism, "Women are depicted as particularly beset by temporal problems that may frequently be resolved through minimization of their ambition and reversion to a more essential femininity" (48). A perennial question postfeminist culture encourages female subject to ask themselves is where the they are supposed to be within an imagined timeline of the normal woman's lifecycle.

Lifestyle bloggers engage with these time crunch-related questions too, particularly in narratives of retreat into nomadism, where travel bloggers reflect on and justify their decision to

forgo marriage and motherhood, while sometimes admitting to feelings of missing out. The postfeminist lifestyle narratives proposed by travel bloggers respond to (and appear to reject) 90s pop culture narratives of the time crunch—the shame of the 30-something singleton, the melancholia of the aging 40-something—by presenting an alternate trajectory that appears rebellious in its lack of concern about settling down within a rigid timeline. However, sometimes bloggers give intimate disclosures that reveal their uncertainty as to whether the earlier narrative can ever fully be abandoned. *Adventurous Kate* does this in a post reflecting on her "ghost life" in New York City ("Confronting My Ghost Life"), in which she meditates on numerous ways in which her life would be different if she has settled on a normal path instead of a life of constant travel. Even when bloggers seem to wholeheartedly reject the traditional love-marriage-family timeline, this rejection does not convincingly convey a feminist politic of renouncing normative behaviors ingrained by patriarchal culture, but rather expresses itself as a juxtapolitical empowerment narrative focused on the individual and her *choices* (choices, it is seldom recognized, available to a small subset of the population).

The postfeminist cultural narrative of retreat as the solution to insecurity, lack of mobility, and general malaise stemming from contemporary western society's economic and social shortcomings often fails to consider just how feasible perpetual nomadism can be, even for those who strongly believe in its potential as a model for the good life. Just as intimate publics fall apart or take new shape in response to negotiated codes of membership, so too do lifestyle bloggers (and other personas modelling narratives of how to live well as a postfeminist female subject) reserve the right to change their narratives: often presenting their decisions to shift focus in their pursuit of the good life to intimate publics as though anticipating critique.

Natalie Sisson, author of the popular nomad guide *The Suitcase Entrepreneur*, reveals her decision to return to her hometown to be near a sick parent in "Why I'm Unpacking my Suitcase and Choosing Freedom" (Oct 15, 2015). She frames this move within the context of the freedom and choice: "I've always said it's not just about having the freedom to work anywhere or anytime you want, or to travel the world, it's also about having more time and freedom to spend with your loved ones, family and friends when you choose too." Sisson's post comes across as more confident and optimistic than some of the other posts mentioned here, closing on a high note with "#choosefreedom!" Sisson's tone invokes postfeminist sensibility's focus on empowerment through choice—and her confidence that the freedom to choose one's path (be it a traditional female life path, or an alternative one) is something enjoyed by all equally.

Sisson, it should be noted, is one of the more popular authors in the digital nomad self-help genre and taps into a similar market to authors like Tim Ferris. Her positivity, even while alluding to a parent's illness, reflects the demands of that genre as participating in an optimistic vision for the potential of lifestyle design and entrepreneurial nomadism as remedies for the neoliberal subject's career dissatisfaction and general malaise. Some bloggers, those addressing a public assumed to be intimate and postfeminist in its sensibilities, challenge the optimism of lifestyle entrepreneurs and digital nomad self-help gurus. Specifically, the transformative power of travel—an assumption key to the success of travel blogs as autobiographical lifestyle guidebooks—is at times cast into doubt. In a post titled "Why I'm Quitting the Digital Nomad Life and Moving Back to My Hometown" (Jan 18 2016), Anna Wickham (*Annawickham.com*) similarly cites relationships are her primary reason for leaving nomadism, explaining "what I learned living the nomad dream was that there is nothing more important in my life than my relationships." In hindsight, she concludes that her two stints of living abroad as an expat/nomad

were reactions to times of uncertainty in her life. She concludes that, during these times, she "ran like hell" in the face of a normal, 9-5 life of drudgery.

Adventurous Kate's "About Me" page traces a three part postfeminist narrative: first, the unsatisfied, unfulfilled corporate subject; second, the liberated entrepreneurial nomadic subject; third, the experienced, self-actualized postfeminist subject who emphatically puts her own needs and desires above external pressures—whether that means the pressure to live according to the traditional timelines of western womanhood, or the pressure from publics to sustain a nomadic lifestyle that is no longer appealing. The decision to retreat from nomadism is framed as a step towards existential authenticity, and it is a decision that Kate addresses through multiple intimate disclosures tracing the process by which she comes to it.

Kate narrates leaving her job at 26 to travel Southeast Asia for six months, and her subsequent decision to shift her focus to monetizing her blog in order to continue travelling full time. She then explains that, after 5 years of travelling, "I decided it was time to slow down—so I moved to New York City. I've downsized my travel from 80-100% of the time to more a modest 25% of the time." She doesn't go into detail about this decision in her "About Me" section, but other blog posts provide more detail. In a post titled "Confronting My Ghost Life in New York," Kate, who is still travelling full time at this point, shares her encounter with an uncanny "what if" version of her life while visiting New York, where she had previously planned on living. She admits to feeling some regret:

> This could so easily be my life, I thought. I could live in Brooklyn, like I originally planned. I could go out to cool bars with friends and drink tequila-honey-lemon-spice cocktails. My sister's here, so many of my friends are here, and so many more pass through frequently. [...] And, as much as this thought scares me, having a traditional job would mean a break from the constant uncertainty of entrepreneurship

She goes on to list a series of possible life trajectories she could have travelled down, had she not retreated into nomadism: “there’s New York Kate, still working in the same industry and hating it and burning through her cash, but there’s also the divorced-at-27 Kate who never ended things with that guy. There’s the debt-free Kate who got a free college education because she didn’t immaturely turn her nose up at UMass.” The post concludes with her decision to focus on being content with her current life, despite her awareness that it “could have been the tiniest bit better in so many ways.”

In a post titled “Notes from the Brink of Age 32” (Kate is prone to marking each of her birthdays with a variation of “lessons learned”), Kate proposes that “Balance is a fallacy. No matter who you are or what you do for a living, you’re never going to achieve a perfect balance between all of the important things in your life,” tapping into the postfeminist discourse of whether it is possible for contemporary western women to have it all, and arriving at the conclusion that, no, it is not possible. In a different post, Kate demonstrates how she has had to give up some things (e.g. geographical flexibility and a life of adventure as a full-time travel blogger) in order to pursue other important things—namely, relationships. She summarizes her main motivations for returning to America: “I moved back to America for many reasons. I wanted to be closer to friends and family; I wanted the familiarity of an environment I knew; I wanted to date people who had more in common with me” (“Leaving is Easy”). Relationships and stability seem to be key reasons for many digital nomads returning to a (semi) settled life. After 6 years of full-time travel, Dani of *Globetrotter Girls* confesses being tired of this lifestyle (“The Evolution of a Nomad, Jan 28 2016). She admits to missing spending holidays with loved ones, spending regular time with a circle of friends, maintaining a workout routine, and cooking

in her own kitchen. She also mentions the difficulty of dating and maintaining a relationship with this lifestyle.

The prevalence of these narratives of retreating from nomadism, and the case of members of a defined, critical, intimate public migrating and forming a new public with different rules, implies that evolutions in the shared narratives and community norms of postfeminist intimate publics are inevitable. Participants in intimate publics based on specific models of the good life (and models of critique for evaluating narratives of the good life) will inevitably jump ship when a particular narrative or public no longer meets their needs, latching onto ways of living, and ways of reading, that better represent their understanding of, and hopes related to, the good life.

These retreats gesture towards a truth that, rather than destabilizing the work I have done in the previous chapters, actually suggests the importance of continuing to look closely at the intimate publics that coalesce around points of identification and/or disidentification within online sociality: the truth that narratives and models for the good life, while perennial in online self-representational content, will continue to shift and evolve, offering new models just as the old ones start to become recognizable; and the truth that, just as online intimate publics seem to emerge organically in online spaces around points of shared investment, so too do they fall apart organically, as points of contention inevitably arise. What we are left with is an image of online publics and micro-publics growing and dividing like cells around narratives for what it means to live well—taking form, assuming greater and greater influence up to a breaking point, and then diverging.

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