The World of Influencers:

Labor, Power, and Celebrity on Social Media

COMM 355

Instructor: Angèle Christin

Course Description

Over the past decade, influencers and online content creators have become highly visible on social media platforms. From fashion and travel influencers posting glamourous pictures on Instagram to YouTubers and TikTokers sharing dance moves, car repair tips, and beauty routines for dark skin, the diversity and promise of social media creation has turned the job of "influencer" as one of the most desirable careers for teenagers. In this course, we will draw on classical frameworks in communication, sociology, and organization studies to examine these forms of cultural production through the lenses of labor, power, and celebrity dynamics in contemporary societies.

***

Week 1 – April 1. Celebrity Culture and Media in Perspective

Lilti, Antoine. 2008. "The Writing of Paranoia: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Paradoxes of Celebrity." *Representations* 103 (1): 53–83.

Marcus, Sharon. 2019. Introduction and Chapter 5, "Multiplication," in *The Drama of Celebrity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gamson, Joshua. 1994. Chapter 1, "The Great and the Gifted: Celebrity in the Early Twentieth Century." In *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Turner, Graeme, Bonner, Frances, and P. David Marshall. 2006. "Producing Celebrity." In P. David Marshall (ed.). *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Additional Readings:

Benjamin, Walter. 1968. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* by Walter Benjamin, Ed. and Intro. Hannah Arendt.

Dyer, Richards. 1979. *Stars*. London: British Film Institute.

Hinerman, Stephen. 2006. "(Don't) Leave Me Alone: Tabloid Narrative and the Michael Jackson Child Abuse Scandal." In P. David Marshall (ed.). *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Week 2 – April 8. From Television to Reality Television
*** *Guest Workshop: Prof. Arturo Arriagada, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez* ***

Gitlin, Todd. 2000. Prologue and Chapter 2, "Predicting the Unpredictable," in *Inside Prime Time*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Grindstaff, Laura. 2002. Prologue and Chapter 3, "Talk as Work: Routinizing the Production Process." In *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hearn, Alison. 2006. "'John, A 20-Year-Old Boston Native with a Great Sense of Humour': On the Spectacularization of the Self and the Incorporation of Identity in the Age of Reality Television." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 2(2): 131–147.

Andrejevic, Mark. 2003. Chapter 1, "Between the New Medium and the Old," and Chapter 4, "The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of Big Brother," in *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

(+ a research paper circulated by Prof. Arturo Arriagada, title TBD)

Additional Readings:

Klinenberg, Eric. 2007. *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Langer, John. "Television's 'Personality System.'" In P. David Marshall (ed.). *The Celebrity Culture Reader*. New York: Routledge.

Gamson, Joshua. 1998. Chapter 3, "Truth Told in Lies," in *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 3 – April 15. Early Theories of Digital Production

Benkler, Yochai. 2006. Introduction and Chapter 3, "Peer Production and Sharing," in *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* Cambridge: MIT Press

Terranova, Tiziana. 2000. "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy." *Social Text* 63 (18): 33–58.

Kreiss, Daniel, Finn, Megan, and Turner, Fred. 2011. "The Limits of Peer Production: Some Reminders from Max Weber for the Network Society." *New Media & Society*, *13*(2), 243-259.

Additional Readings:

Boczkowski, Pablo J. 2005. Chapter 1 and 4 in *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. MIT Press.

Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. Introduction and Chapter 3, "What Constitutes Meaningful Participation," in *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: NYU Press.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an
    Information Civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* 30(1): 75-89.

Week 4 – April 22. Gender and Digital Production: CamGirls, Gurus, and Entrepreneurs
*** *Guest Workshop: Prof. Rachel O'Neill (London School of Economics)* ***

Senft, Theresa M. 2008. Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in
    the Age of Social Networks*. London: Peter Lang.
Marwick, Alice E. 2013. Introduction and Chapter 4 in *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and
    Branding in the Social Media Age*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Abidin, Crystal. 2016. "'Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online?':
    Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity." *Social Media + Society*: 1-17.
Duffy, Brooke E. 2018. Preface and Chapter 1, "Entrepreneurial Wishes and Career Dreams," in
    (Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love. New Haven: Yale University Press.
O'Neill, Rachel. 2021. "'Glow from the Inside Out': Deliciously Ella and the Politics of
    'Healthy Eating.'" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24(6): 1282-1303.

Additional Readings:
Jarrett, Kylie. 2013. "The Relevance of 'Women's Work": Social Reproduction and Immaterial
    Labor in Digital Media." *Television & New Media* 15(1): 14-29.
Duffy, Brooke Erin, and Emily Hund. 2015. "'Having it All' on Social Media: Entrepreneurial
    Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers." *Social Media + Society* 1-15.
Siles, Ignacio. 2017. *Networked Selves: Trajectories of Blogging in the United States and
    France*. New York: Peter Lang.
O'Neill, Rachel. 2020. "Pursuing 'Wellness': Considerations for Media Studies." *Television &
    New Media*, 21(6): 628-634.

Week 5 – April 29. Social Media Production Between Authenticity and Branding

Goffman, Erving. 1959. Pp. 1-34 in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York:
    Doubleday.
Marwick, Alice E., and boyd, danah. 2011. "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter
    Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience." *New Media & Society*, 13(1): 114-
    133.
Cunningham, Stuart, and David Craig. 2017. "Being 'Really Real' on YouTube: Authenticity,
    Community and Brand Culture in Social Media Entertainment." *Media International
    Australia* 164(1): 71–81.
Grazian, David. 2018. "Demystifying Authenticity in the Sociology of Culture." In Grindstaff,
    Laura, Ming-Cheng M. Lo, and John R. Hall (Eds), *Routledge Handbook of Cultural
    Sociology*. London: Routledge.
Haimson, Oliver L., Tianxiao Liu, Ben Zefeng Zhang, and Shanley Corvite. 2021. "The Online
    Authenticity Paradox: What Being 'Authentic' on Social Media Means, and Barriers to
    Achieving It." CSCW Proceedings.
Arriagada, Arturo, and Sophie Bishop. 2021. "Between Commerciality and Authenticity: The

Imaginary of Social Media Influencers in the Platform Economy." *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 14(4): 568-586.

Additional Readings:
Abidin, Crystal. 2018. *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.
Taylor, T.L. 2018. Chapter 1, "Broadcasting Ourselves," and Chapter 3, "Home Studios: Transforming Private Play into Public Entertainment" in *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 6 – May 6. Platformed Creation, Algorithms, and Visibility

Duffy, Brooke E., Thomas Poell, and David B. Nieborg. 2019. "Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship." *Social Media + Society* 5(4): 1–8.
Petre, Caitlin, Brooke E. Duffy, and Emily Hund. 2019. "'Gaming the System': Platform Paternalism and the Politics of Algorithmic Visibility." *Social Media + Society* 5(4).
Bishop, Sophie. 2019. "Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip." *New Media & Society*, Online First.
Christin, Angèle, and Rebecca Lewis. 2021. "The Drama of Metrics: Status, Spectacle, and Resistance Among YouTube Drama Creators." *Social Media + Society* 7(1).
Stuart, Forrest. 2020. Introduction and Chapter 2, "Algorithms, Analytics, and AK-47s," in *Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Kellogg, Katherine C., Valentine, Melissa A., & Angèle Christin. 2020. "Algorithms at Work: The New Contested Terrain of Control." *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(1), 366-410.

Additional Readings:
Poell, Thomas, Nieborg, David B., & Duffy, Brooke E. 2022. *Platforms and cultural production*. New York: Polity.
Bucher, Taina. 2018. *If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Glatt, Zoë. 2021. "We're All Told Not to Put our Eggs in One Basket": Uncertainty, Precarity And Cross-Platform Labor in the Online Video Influencer Industry. Forthcoming, *International Journal of Communication*.
Bishop, Sophie. 2021. "Influencer Management Tools: Algorithmic Cultures, Brand Safety, and Bias." *Social Media+ Society*, 7(1).

Week 7 – May 7. Platform Governance and Content Moderation

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2010. "The Politics of 'Platforms.'" *New Media & Society* 12 (3): 347–64.
Gillespie, Tarleton. 2018. Chapter 1, "All Platforms Moderate," in *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
West, Sarah Myers. 2018. "Censored, Suspended, Shadowbanned: User Interpretations of

Content Moderation on Social Media Platforms. *New Media & Society* 20(11): 4366–4383.

Cunningham, Stuart, and David Craig. 2019. "Creator Governance in Social Media Entertainment." *Social Media + Society* 5(4).

Caplan, Robyn, and Tarleton Gillespie. 2020. "Tiered Governance and Demonetization: The Shifting Terms of Labor and Compensation in the Platform Economy." *Social Media + Society*: 1–13.

Additional Readings:

Caplan, Robyn, and danah boyd. 2018. "Isomorphism through Algorithms: Institutional Dependencies in the case of Facebook." *Big Data & Society*. Online First.

Vallas, Steve, and Juliet Schor. 2020. "What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 40. Online First.

Week 8 – May 13. The Work of Audiences, Offline and Online

Hall, Stuart. 1973. "Encoding/Decoding." Pp. 90-103 in Simon During (ed.). 2007. *The Cultural Studies Reader.* London: Routledge.

Ang, Ien. 1989. Introduction and Chapter 1, "Dallas Between Reality and Fiction," in *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.

Gamson, Joshua. 1994. Chapter 7, "Can't Beat the Real Thing: Production Awareness and the Problem of Authenticity," in *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Turow, Joseph. 2005. "Audience Construction and Culture Production: Marketing Surveillance in the Digital Age." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597(1):103–21.

Baym, Nancy. 2018. Introduction and Chapter 3, "Audiences," in *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*. New York: NYU Press.

Additional Readings:

Smythe, Dallas W. 1981. "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work." Pp. 22-51 in *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*. Norwood: Ablex.

Liebes, Tamar, and Elihu Katz. 1993. Introduction and Chapter 6 in *The Export of Meaning. Cross-Cultural Readings of* Dallas. London: Polity.

Anderson, Chris W. 2011. "Deliberative, Agonistic, and Algorithmic Audiences: Journalism's Vision of Its Public in an Age of Audience Transparency." *International Journal of Communication* 5: 519-547.

Week 9 – May 20. Social Media Publics and Counterpublics
*** *Guest Workshop: Rebecca Lewis (Stanford University)* ***

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26: 56–80.

Schudson, Michael. 1995. "Was There Ever a Public Sphere?" Pp. 189-203 in *The Power of News*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lewis, Rebecca. 2018. "Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube." White Paper, September. *Data & Society Research Institute*.

Brock, André. 2020. Introduction and Chapter 3, "'The Black Purposes of Space Travel": Black Twitter as Black Technoculture." *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*. New York: NYU Press.

Gray, Kishonna. 2020. Introduction and Chapter 4, "#Me2, Me4, Black Women, and Misogynoir: Transmediated Gaming Practices as Intersectional Counterpublics," in *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press.

Additional Readings:

Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, Cambridge MA: MIT Press. Pp. 1-56, 73-88, 236-50.

Papacharissi, Zizi. 2008. "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere, and Beyond." Pp. 230–45 in *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by A. Chadwick and P. N. Howard. London: Routledge.

Jackson, Sarah J., Bailey, Moya, and Welles, Brooke F. 2020. Introduction and Chapter 2, "Visions of Black Feminism: #FastTailedGirls, #YouOKSis, #SayHerName," in *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Week 10 – May 27. The Contradictions of 'Cancel Culture'

Nakamura, Lisa. 2015. "The Unwanted Labour of Social Media: Women of Colour Call out Culture as Venture Community Management." *New Formations* 86: 106–112.

Clark, Meredith D. 2020. "DRAG THEM: A Brief Etymology of So-Called 'Cancel Culture.'" *Communication and the Public* 5(3–4): 88–92.

Lawson, Caitlin E. 2021 "Skin Deep: Callout Strategies, Influencers, and Racism in the Online Beauty Community." *New Media & Society* 23(3): 596–612.

Marwick, Alice. 2021. "Morally Motivated Networked Harassment as Normative Reinforcement." *Social Media + Society*: 1–13.

Lewis, Rebecca, and Angèle Christin. 2022. "Platform Drama: 'Cancel Culture,' Celebrity, and the Struggle for Accountability on YouTube." Forthcoming, *New Media & Society*.