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# Networked Celebrity: The Shared Fame of YouTube Vlogging Communities

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## Abstract

The digital age has sent the entertainment industry into an upheaval, restructuring not only the various companies that create media content but also our very understanding of concepts associated with entertainment, concepts such as the celebrity. Whereas film stars previously found fame and prestige in Hollywood's biggest productions, the celebrities of social media find their content significantly scaled down, often using their own daily lives as the source of their reputation. This paper proposes a new term to describe celebrities native to social media: networked celebrity, which considers how the networked structure of social media feeds into the celebrity's prestige and reputation. The paper argues that networked celebrities draw restrictive circles, using their exclusive associations with other celebrities and industry professionals to articulate their celebrity status. The vlog becomes a tool for such restriction, creating a network based on physical co-presence while also framing these interactions as part of one's daily and personal lives. In featuring a cast of friends doubling as co-workers and creative inspiration, the vlog flattens the distinction between personal and professional networks, allowing the networked celebrity to balance signs of professional success with those of personal pleasure so central to social media's central rhetoric of authenticity. In creating a more communal and authentic form of celebrity, networked celebrities personalize the professional and professionalize the personal, introducing a new stratification of celebrity that exists between the collectivist notions of social media and the individualistic notions of traditional celebrity.

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“So, 2014...” says Sammy Paul<sup>1</sup> at the introduction of his monthly vlog series, *Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook*. The initial series, consisting of 12 videos created over the year of 2014, documents Sammy's life as he prepares for college graduation, moves to a new house, works on various film sets, and hangs out with his friends. At the end of the year, Sammy says goodbye to the series, but mysteriously claims that it will continue on. As he and his mates count down to 2015, Sammy passes the camera to Jack Howard,<sup>2</sup> his friend and fellow YouTuber who then begins his monthly vlog series under the same title. Though Jack only succeeds in finishing 3 months of the year, his friends and fellow YouTubers, Hazel Hayes,<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Layton<sup>4</sup> and Chloe Dungeat<sup>5</sup> take up the monthly vlog on their channels to document the next few years of their lives together.

A project like *Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook* requires seeing YouTubers as existing in a community or network. The network, as a paradigmatic structure, pervades research on the

Internet, as it is apt to describe the technical as well as cultural logic of social media. As Alice Marwick and danah boyd famously argue, social media consists of networked publics, or “spaces constructed through networked technologies and imagined communities that emerge as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to networks, social media also holds an affinity for the personal and the private, prioritizing the idea of authenticity as a central criterion by which social media is assessed. Foregoing the high barriers of entry found in traditional media like film and television, the Internet, and especially social media, theoretically allows those with an account to more or less represent themselves and reveal the details of their daily lives, no matter how mundane.

Early research on the vlog, or the video log, epitomizes this idea of authentic self-disclosure by painting the picture of a lone figure in their bedroom, discussing their personal lives with a camera.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the proliferation of

networks online, which connotes ample social and community connection, some researchers interpret the vlog as “a response to the perceived loss of community” in the era of the Internet,<sup>8</sup> given its seemingly lonely format. While subsequent research has demonstrated how vlogs can form virtual networks, rarely has research considered how individual vlogs can, and often do, show multiple people in the same space. The image of the isolated vlogger also overlooks the vlogger’s position within an attention economy online. Since the popularization of sites like YouTube and Instagram, many content creators have gained significant followings for their work, turning them into celebrities and helping them build careers around their online output. Though authentic self-disclosure remains a central theme, vlogs have become increasingly complicated by monetization and professionalization. This complication, however, has not propelled all creators towards traditional institutions of celebrity that prioritize individual fame and distinction, in no small part because of the importance of community and authenticity in the rhetoric of social media. Instead, these creators represent a novel conceptualization of celebrity, one that balances a professional career in media with a narrative of intimate personal musings.

This paper aims to explore the gap that exists at the intersection of social media studies, celebrity studies, and research on the vlog by proposing a new term to describe celebrities native to social media: networked celebrity. Following the terminological tradition of terms like networked publics, networked celebrity considers how the network structure of social media changes the concept of celebrity. Beyond the idea that social media facilitates more direct connection between celebrities and audiences, networked celebrity considers how celebrities sometimes draw a more restrictive circle, using their exclusive associations with other celebrities and industry professionals to articulate their celebrity status. The vlog becomes a tool for such restriction, creating a network based on physical co-presence and real-world interactions. In featuring a cast of friends doubling as co-workers and creative inspiration, the vlog flattens the distinction between personal and professional networks, allowing the networked celebrity to balance signs of professional success with those of personal pleasure. Yet, far from buying into

these signs uncritically, networked celebrities also use their vlogs to contemplate their authenticity online, as well as reveal the potential precarities of professional labor appearing as personalized fun. Therefore, networked celebrity is a complex term, highlighting only a few of the dynamic elements of being a celebrity native to social media. In creating a more communal and authentic form of celebrity, networked celebrities personalize the professional and professionalize the personal, introducing a new stratification of celebrity that exists between the collectivist notions of social media and the individualistic notions of traditional celebrity.

### **Celebrity as a Relational and Authentic Being**

Whether on the level of entire platforms or specific communities, social media relies heavily on the structure of the network. On platforms like YouTube, for example, “community is a constitutive cultural logic,” with both content creators and the platform itself strategically promoting social engagement as a major part of YouTube’s core values.<sup>9</sup> Several case studies have documented how vlogging, in particular, can create tight-knit communities, from mothers vlogging about their pregnancies<sup>10</sup> to Black teen girls vlogging about self-love and hair care.<sup>11</sup> These studies describe users creating virtual networks as they share emotional experiences and feel the bonding effects of self-disclosure.<sup>12</sup> These virtual communities pervade social media, making our conceptualization of the individual online as highly relational.

The community rhetoric also “bring[s] with it values and discourses around authenticity,” another central mechanism in YouTube’s cultural logic.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the pragmatic networks of professional settings, the networks on YouTube often find their appeal in casual, personal connections. As Stuart Cunningham and David Craig delineate, authenticity on YouTube comes in three modes: as an antithesis to the artificiality of other screen media like film and television, as a tenet of the direct interaction between creator and audience, and as a discursive logic that subordinates economic motivations under authentic human connection.<sup>14</sup> These modes combine to suggest on a narrative level that people on YouTube are more genuine, casual, and willing to share that which the mainstream media excludes, such as content deemed too

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mundane or too candid. Two popular types of content can be seen as results of this authenticity: the recording of one's daily life and behind-the-scenes moments from other media productions. These are commonly found in vlogs, which feature the daily activities and personal thoughts of the creator.

Despite social media being a recent technological development, discourses surrounding community and authenticity have arguably always been a part of our conceptualization of celebrity. In early Hollywood fan magazines, for example, inter-celebrity gossip encouraged readers to view celebrities as communal beings.<sup>15</sup> As sociologist Robert van Krieken suggests, people tend to consume celebrity images through a social lens, focusing on the various connections between celebrities, regardless of whether those connections existed in reality.<sup>16</sup> Van Krieken coins the term "core celebrities," which describes a group of individuals so well-known, they become common ground for conversations and value judgements.<sup>17</sup> This concept of the core evokes the core-periphery structure common in network theory, which suggests that the consumption of celebrity images situates celebrities within networks of other celebrities. While some are more interconnected and integral to the network than others, everyone in the network can be considered part of a coveted stratification, since membership within this network of celebrities suggests a certain level of prestige and distinction from the general public.

This distinction is further bolstered by the separation between inter-celebrity gossip and the celebrities' professional performances. Under the strict control of major Hollywood studios, film stars, in particular, demonstrate sociologist Erving Goffman's dichotomy of the front and backstage. Goffman suggests that, with every front-facing performance, there is a back region, a "place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted".<sup>18</sup> Simply put, the backstage is where the performer can relax, diverge from their assigned role, and engage in more authentic interactions. Though Goffman's concepts originally describe sociological behaviors and real-world interactions, the definitions and sets of behaviors he ascribes to the front and back regions can be abstracted and we can, in turn, read these regions as their own rhetorical and symbolic

systems. For example, in relation to the production of media like television and radio, Goffman states that the "back region tends to be defined as all places where the camera is not focussed".<sup>19</sup> In behind-the-scenes footage, the main film camera is focused on fictional performances, and spaces behind the camera are seen as occupying a more authentic backstage, even though they too are also being recorded. The behind-the-scenes footage is not an actual backstage but rather appeals to the backstage rhetoric by emphasizing its position outside the scope of the production's main camera. For a film star, if the front stage is a fictional performance within a film, then the backstage incorporates the rest of the film star's life, which would include publicity material that shows the film star in theoretically unscripted situations, along with the inter-celebrity gossip and the personal tabloid narratives previously discussed. In separating the star's fictional performance from their personal lives, the studio partakes in a Goffman-esque dichotomy and positions the star's relational existence with other celebrities as distinct from their professional work.

This separation also works to assign value to the film, which acts as the source of the star's professional worth and prestige. As Paul McDonald describes, the star image represents branding that is meant to refer audiences back to the film.<sup>20</sup> This prioritization of the film posits that the star's value is in their ability to help sell a professional product. Therefore, though their backstage narrative might feed into their star brand, the prestige of the traditional Hollywood film star must ultimately refer back to the success of their front-stage performance.

Under this strict separation, the introduction of social media bolsters the film star's backstage presence. Since they, like the general public, can capitalize on social media's low barrier of entry, stars can theoretically bypass traditional publicity apparatuses and connect with audiences in more direct and authentic ways.<sup>21</sup> Though social media is now used, rather ubiquitously, as part of film marketing and promotion, the content of film stars' own social media presence remains in a backstage rhetoric, as it is rare for them to post as their fictionalized roles. Just as with fan magazines and tabloids, for the film star, social media is distinct and subordinate to their professional oeuvre.

In contrast, for networked celebrities, whose careers exist primarily on social media, this backstage becomes a new front stage. These celebrities now find the personal content they put online as the main subject matter for their professional reputation. Without the prestige of being in a Hollywood blockbuster, the networked celebrity must, instead, demonstrate signs of professional success from within the backstage rhetoric that forms the basis for their career.

Luckily, they were not the first celebrities to face this issue. In describing the twentieth-century celebrity, Joshua Gamson states that “as technology and publicity apparatuses grew, [the system of celebrity-creation] became more and more publicly visible, integrated into discussions of celebrity.”<sup>22</sup> Given their success with previous stars, publicity apparatuses themselves can turn into a symbol of fame, making their attention highly coveted and potentially enough to elevate an individual’s prestige and status. Priority is no longer given to the fictional performance or the professionally-produced film but is, instead, allotted to the backstage narrative of how the celebrity is constructed and what their celebrity lifestyle looks like.<sup>23</sup> Simply put, these are the celebrities who are famous for being celebrities.<sup>24</sup> This new, backstage-oriented conceptualization of celebrity does away with professional performances and the value it represents, opting instead for the illusion of fame and prestige, maintained not by the Hollywood film but by the publicity apparatus itself. As Goffman examines, performance and impression management often require a team, in which a set of individuals co-operate in staging a single routine and in maintaining everyone’s impressions.<sup>25</sup> The team, in turn, contains a director who assigns roles and dictates the terms of the team’s overall performance.<sup>26</sup> Following this logic, the publicity apparatus serves as both the team and the director, helping bolster the celebrity’s illusion of fame while also actively shaping what that fame would look like. Many front-stage careers can be built on this backstage narrative of creating a celebrity, thus blurring the line that used to separate a celebrity’s professional projects from their personal journeys.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of obvious professional output, the company kept by the celebrity (i.e. the presence of the publicity team and the celebrity’s access to industry elites)

becomes what portrays the celebrities as distinct from the general public. While previously, studios banished the celebrities’ social interactions into the restricted territories of tabloids and fan magazines, this new conceptualization of the celebrity puts the celebrity’s relational existence front and center. Their networks become the source of their fame and elevated status.

Despite focusing on the fine arts, and not publicity apparatuses specifically, Howard Becker’s concept of the art world can help describe the networks with which the celebrity interacts. Becker describes the art world as “the network of people whose cooperative activity, organised via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for.”<sup>28</sup> In the context of the celebrity, the art world likely already exists, both as publicity apparatuses and as any other team required to help produce the celebrity’s professional output. In turning the camera onto the backstage, social media content captures the celebrity working with the art world and flattens the difference between the two. These interactions illustrate how the celebrity belongs to a larger entertainment industry, a cog in a larger system. Even though this seems to demote the celebrity in a traditional sense, for networked celebrities, who mostly begin as non-professional users, this association with the industry actually helps to elevate one’s status by demonstrating one’s access to exclusive circles. To maintain relatability and authenticity, though, networked celebrities personalize these professional relationships. The vlog often portrays art world connections as casual and fun, and in some communities, as consisting of close friendships and romantic relationships.

These hybrid contexts also work to personalize the depiction of labor on social media. There has been ample research suggesting that authenticity and economic motivations do not mix.<sup>29</sup> While some of the economic drives and precarities of online labor are indeed hidden, this argument should not be mistaken to mean that all representations of online labor are erased. On YouTube, many creators do open up about revenue streams, career aspirations, and sometimes even labor precarity, all of which can also bolster one’s professionalism. Like the art world, however, labor must similarly be naturalized and turned personal. Even though many do reveal the economic gains

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behind making videos online, communicating an authentic, passion-driven motivation is still a priority. This leads to portraying professional labor as driven by personal satisfaction. As Nancy Baym warns in regard to her concept of relational labor, portraying an act as personal complicates the need for compensation. She describes relational labor as “regular, ongoing communication with audiences over time to build social relationships that foster paid work”.<sup>30</sup> Under the blanket rule of authenticity, this communication feels casual, as if the audience is a friend, making it difficult to then justify why this communication is part of professionalization and should thus be paid for.<sup>31</sup> For networked celebrities, relational labor can also be seen in relationships with other celebrities and the art world, since they appear friendly but also support professional success. Despite signs of professionalization, networked celebrities might not necessarily receive compensation for their efforts, often aimed at establishing a basis for future reward. Lack of payment, or even evolving forms of payment that are too fast to keep up with, are just some of the many precarities to online labor, which networked celebrities do reflect upon but are unable to resolve.

In the context of these complicated dynamics, the format of the vlog becomes a site for articulating and reflecting on the conditions of the networked celebrity. Under the framework of documenting one’s personal life, the vlog can make professional development appear more casual, showing off one’s success while also avoiding alienating the audience. By bringing the camera around to different social settings, vlogging features the people who take part in the vlogger’s life, evoking notions of intimacy and exclusivity. Exclusivity is especially important if other members of the network also exhibit signs of Internet fame, since this turns the community into one made up of networked celebrities and makes membership itself a way of reaffirming celebrity status. Vlogging helps construct this network not only in its depiction of people but also in its own association with Internet fame. As Dalmeit Singh Chawla’s article, “The young vloggers and their fans who are changing the face of youth culture” exhibits, vlogging has entered popular culture as closely associated with online fame.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the act of vlogging becomes an articulation

of Internet fame. Networked celebrities, in turn, often vlog each other vlogging, as part of a mutual reaffirmation of the networked celebrity status. In this way, vlogs become the ideal site for constructing both the relational and the fame-oriented elements of the networked celebrity.

### Analysis of the Network: Physical Co-presence and Art World Membership

*Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook (PMS)*, given how it documents the personal and professional lives of multiple creators who interact frequently with each other, presents a complex case study for the relational fame of networked celebrities. The series consists of five iterations from five creators: Sammy Paul’s *Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook* (January–December 2014),<sup>33</sup> Jack Howard’s *Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook* (January–March 2015),<sup>34</sup> Hazel Hayes’ *Time of the Month* (January 2015–October 2016),<sup>35</sup> Daniel J. Layton’s *Pretentious Monthly Scrapbook* (January 2016–September 2017),<sup>36</sup> and Chloe Dungate’s *Little Moments* (January 2016–current).<sup>37</sup> I chose these five iterations based on two criteria: that these creators regularly appear in each others’ vlogs and that later iterations all directly cite Sammy as an inspiration for their project. These five iterations of *PMS* provide a clearly-defined

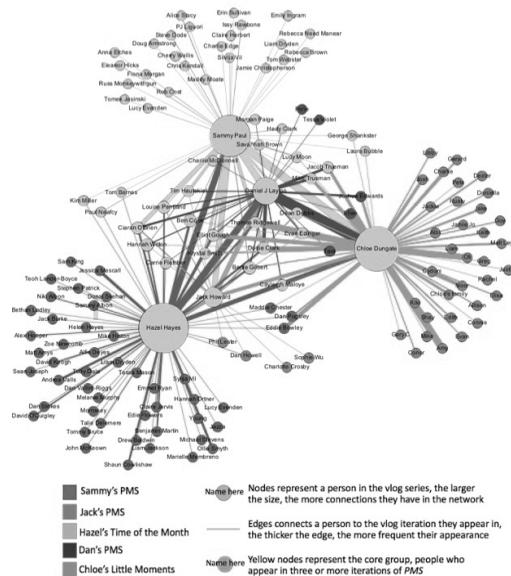


Figure 1: Network visualization of the people that appear in a random sample of 46 vlogs in *PMS* <https://cinema.usc.edu/spectator/41.1/young1.jpg>

sample of vlogs that can serve as a jumping point for analyzing the networked celebrity.

In order to first demonstrate how vlogs can establish a network based on co-presence, I utilize a network visualization, Figure 1, to map out some of the people who physically appear in the *PMS* vlogs, since network visualization is a common tool used in past research on virtual networks.<sup>38</sup> Not only does this network combat previous descriptions of the lone vlogger by showing the appearance of many others within the vlog format, it also visually supports the aptness of following a terminological tradition that foregrounds the network. The visualization also helps reveal a core-periphery structure, which has been found in virtual vlogging communities<sup>39</sup> and theoretically hypothesized with terms like “core celebrities”.<sup>40</sup> This structure suggests that members of the community do not share equally in the attention they receive from the series; those in the core at the center of the network, the celebrities that appear most often and in multiple iterations, receive a significant portion of the series’ screen time, which, in turn, increases their recognizability and solidifies their membership within the group. Their repeated appearance helps develop the celebrities’ personalities onscreen, facilitating emotional investment and loyalty from audiences. This allows networked celebrities to bolster their status and connection to audiences across vlogs from multiple channels and creators, further illustrating a shared sense of fame.

Beyond physical proximity, this network also demonstrates the professionalism that would label it an art world. Despite the vlog series being a major project for these creators, they also take on more conventional film productions, or “main channel sketches,” which are scripted shorts with higher production values. In Sammy’s September episode, he shows himself working as the Assistant Director on Jack and Dean’s (Jack’s other channel he shares with Dean Dobbs)<sup>41</sup> video “The Last Supper”.<sup>42</sup> In Jack’s January vlog, he stars in Sammy and Bertie Gilbert’s<sup>43</sup> short “Rocks that Bleed”.<sup>44</sup> While Sammy, in 2014, shows Hazel co-writing a comedy series called *Unnecessary Otter* with him,<sup>45</sup> Hazel’s own June 2016 episode shows her starring in Thomas Ridgewell (Tom)’s<sup>46</sup> sketch, “The Confession 3”, on which Jack also

helps out.<sup>47</sup> In Chloe’s May 2016 vlog, she shows herself working as Costume and Catering on Tom’s sketch, “Fire Man”, in which Sammy stars.<sup>48</sup> Dan’s May 2016 episode shows him and Hazel working on Jack and Dean’s “The Shredder”.<sup>49</sup> This support also extends to paratextual productions, as seen in Dan’s May 2017 episode, when he shows Chloe designing merchandise for his channel. Many of the *PMS* vlogs then juxtapose these filmmaking moments with social gatherings that present the same people in more casual settings, obscuring the divide between the art world and the personal sphere. Membership in this art world thus differentiates these creators from the average viewer in both their professional skill and their personal connections with other professionals.

### **Analysis of the Vlog: Articulating the Networked Celebrity Identity**

Beyond the common tropes that exist across the iterations, each iteration of *PMS* still holds a unique perspective, suitable for exploring a different aspect of the networked celebrity, from the aesthetic treatment of daily life to one’s position within larger media landscapes. While these creators do not provide definitive answers, the series illustrates how their contemplations help articulate what it means to be a networked celebrity on YouTube.

For Dan, the relational existence of the networked celebrity is at the forefront of his articulation. Some of his first appearances actually occur in Sammy’s series, such as in September 2014, when Dan hijacks Sammy’s phone and films himself saying, “I’ve taken what was a nice little project of Sammy’s and a little bit made it all about me.[...] What you guys don’t know is that this is like a microcosm of my entire career.” Despite being meant as self-deprecating and sarcastic, the joke does touch on how Dan, as primarily an actor, takes on less of an authorial position than some of the other creators. His iteration of the series provides a more quotidian atmosphere, often using the act of vlogging and of incorporating other creators as ways of articulating his position within the network. In his February 2016 vlog, for example, Dan captures Hazel and Chloe vlogging simultaneously behind him. Beyond visually epitomizing the network of vlogs, channels, and creators involved in the series, this

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three-way vlogging highlights his membership in a community that vlogs, with the act of vlogging being a way to perform the identity of a networked celebrity. As Gerry Bloustien theorizes in his study of teenage girls and videocams, identity is a process of becoming that can be constructed through the use of a camera.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, the networked celebrity does not necessarily precede the act of vlogging but is constructed through the process of creating the vlog. This process can be collaborative as well, since the vlog often incorporates multiple perspectives. Moments of seeing the creator in third person or of others hijacking the camera entirely draw attention to the recruitment of other camera holders, which turns vlogging into a collective activity. Dan's moment in Sammy's vlog would be one example, as would Dan's drunken monologue in his January 2016 episode, which he himself does not even remember. These moments challenge the notion of an isolated vlogger and show the communal nature of vlogging.

For Chloe, the articulation of community seems even more personal and affectively meaningful. Early in her series, she contemplates on the inability to apply a professional, narrative logic to her daily life, saying, "It annoys me that my life is formless, like I'm missing some kind of narrative arch." She goes on, though, to suggest a sort of acceptance for this lack of narrative coherence, arguing that just because some moments do not flow together logically does not mean that they lack emotional significance. Her comments reflect the formal technique of the montage, which all of the iterations use. The montage strings together moments that do not have a clear narrative or chronological flow but that contribute to an overall emotion as expressed by the music. These moments find their sentimental value through their focus on community: most of the shots contain two or more people, smiling at the camera, enjoying one another's company. These montages provide a kind of antidote to the pragmatic impression of seeing the community as an art world; in moments of personal sentimentality, this community is also there, showing the genuine human connection that exists alongside or even thanks to mutual professional support. Despite this being Chloe's philosophy, one example that exhibits this concept well is in the ending of Hazel's December 2015 *Time of the Month*, which presents a montage with editing so quick, the individual shots melt into one another

and prevent logical comprehension. The impression left is that of shared moments, of bodies inhabiting the frame together, of a networked existence in both the personal and professional spheres.

In the rest of Hazel's *Time of the Month*, however, she contributes significantly to the articulation of professionalization. Out of the five creators analyzed, she is most frequently in contact with the institutions of traditional media, negotiating with Hollywood studios like Lionsgate and Legendary, or interviewing famous actors like Stephen Fry. In her February 2016 vlog, Hazel attends the BAFTAs as, in her words, "behind the scenes, presenter-y people," though her starstruckness at the pre-party and her feeling out of place at the venue demonstrate a position outside the institution of traditional stardom. While access to the BAFTAs grants her a level of prestige, as a member of the "presenter-y people", Hazel is still different from the nominees she interviews. Her own fame is, instead, most visible in the space of YouTube conventions, where Hazel can hold meet-and-greets with her audience (two examples can be found in the April and August 2016 episodes). Unlike the BAFTAs, these meet-and-greets take on the authenticity and intimacy at the core of YouTube's cultural logic, featuring fans and celebrities chatting casually and exchanging hugs. In their focus on individual creators and their often tiered admissions, however, YouTube conventions are far from egalitarian. Meet-and-greets single out creators with larger followings and reaffirm a viewer/creator divide, forming a hierarchy among users. As neither a traditional star at the BAFTAs nor a casual viewer at YouTube conventions, Hazel illustrates the existence of an intermediate stratification for networked celebrities, one that can integrate professional prestige with approachability.

This stratification is shared with and defined by other members of Hazel's community as well. At the conventions, Hazel holds combined meet-and-greets with her friends (eg. Jack, Tom, Dodie Clark<sup>51</sup>) which facilitates the consumption of these celebrities as a group. The sense of a shared audience is so strong that even when Hazel is not listed on the meet-and-greet, she is able to find her viewers among those of her friends. One audience member she talks to even calls out Dan, who is absent from the convention, indicating a pattern of viewing the celebrities as intimately related to one another.

On top of meet-and-greets, YouTubers regularly have screenings and performances at conventions; Hazel, in June 2016, shows Jack and Dean screening their series, *Jack and Dean of All Trades*, at VidCon 2016.<sup>52</sup> Not only are Jack and Dean's professional careers and status as celebrities reaffirmed in this moment, but Hazel's intimate connection with them allows their success to reflect positively on her as well. Part of her celebrity status comes from her membership to this community of networked celebrities, whose attendance of YouTube conventions helps highlight their celebrity status.

In contrast to the moments of professional success previously described, in his own vlogs, Jack demonstrates the precarity of online labor and professionalization. Ever since his first episode, Jack emphasizes the importance of production quality. On several occasions, he turns another camera onto the vlogging camera to explain how he is filming his vlog, which, as with the anamorphic lens and complex lighting in the January episode, exhibits technical sophistication. Jack jokes in his January episode, "I'm gonna be busier than I have ever been, so I've given myself another project," which shows how he considers the vlog to be a project equal to any other, one that requires time, effort, and professional investment. After completing only three months of the year, Jack posts a follow-up video, "We Need To Talk", in which he explains how the stress of documenting his life has had a toll on his mental health.<sup>53</sup> Jack's journey reveals how laborious it is to professionalize one's personal life and how this process can sometimes fail. For networked celebrities, vlogs are not subordinate to other projects but an integral part of their professional oeuvre, yet, due to the quotidian content, it might be difficult to recognize the vlogs' professional value. While creators do face precarity and a potential pressure to downplay their labor, active reflection on this precarity is nevertheless still visible in vlogs and follow-up videos, further illustrating the complex and multifaceted discourses at play within the networked celebrity.

Despite being the first iteration, it is Sammy's *PMS* that explores this multiplicity the most, thanks to his stylized approach to representing his daily life. Just in the January episode alone, Sammy borrows aesthetic techniques from multiple cinematic genres, such as a 1:1 mobile-camera ratio to depict a hiking adventure, a black

and white palette to satirize French arthouse films, and an Edgar Wright-inspired montage to show his journey through a city. At the end of the video, he pretends to return home from a film shoot only to call himself out for pretending. The moment epitomizes the proverbial wrench that the vlog throws into Goffman's original conceptualization of performance, which views the backstage as places where the camera is not pointed.<sup>54</sup> The act of vlogging entails bringing a camera into private locations or behind-the-scenes spaces normally offscreen, and doing so turns these traditionally backstage spaces into front stages. Sammy reflects on this new front stage through both his stylization of the vlog and his recognition of artificiality. Yet, in recognizing artificiality, Sammy also creates a rupture, a moment in which he knowingly counters his own performance, which aligns the vlog once more to Goffman's definition of the backstage. The rupture shows an alternative kind of authenticity, one based on a reflexive recognition that the vlog is as much a front stage, useful for identity construction, as it is a backstage, useful for reflecting on such construction. Sammy's vlogs remind us that networked celebrities are complex and creative, constantly redefining the standards of online content, rather than ascribing to set conditions. In their ambiguous position between the personal and professional, between traditional and social media, networked celebrities are ideally placed to play with ideas of authenticity and artificiality, of personal pleasures and professional development, and of individual distinction and collective success, as they construct new articulations of celebrity for the social media context.

## Conclusion

The networked celebrity is therefore a complex term that attempts to describe a few of the many moving parts of being a celebrity native to social media. In featuring the personal narratives typical to social media content as an integral part of their professional oeuvre, networked celebrities build their fame on a backstage rhetoric. While their access to traditional media marks their distinction from the general public, they still maintain their authentic and quotidian roots to avoid alienating an audience who expects a casual mode of address from social media content. These celebrities also

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construct, among themselves, communities that respond to the naturalization of relational labor by supporting both one's professional career and one's need for genuine friendship. Part of this construction comes from the process of vlogging itself, which helps networked celebrities articulate their identities as content creators with a significant following and a social-media-

specific skill-set. These communities, in turn, become the basis for a new stratification of fame between the individualist notions of traditional stardom and the collectivist notions of social media. This new position epitomizes how the networked celebrity complicates dichotomies and engages in a constant process of becoming, foregoing a fixed identity for a more relational one.

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### Notes

- 1 What I'm Doing Now. Home [YouTube Channel]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/user/WhatImDoingNow>
- 2 JackHoward. Home [YouTube Channel]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/user/JackHoward>
- 3 Hazel Hayes. Home [YouTube Channel]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/user/ChewingSand>
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