Example of a Proposal 1

**Title:** Presenting the ‘perfect’ woman: An exploratory study into the construction of femininity amongst vloggers on the female media platform YouTube.

**Key words:** Vlogs, femininity, YouTube, presentation of self, social media, media.

**Introduction:**

Gender is a social structural phenomenon, repeatedly constructed through our everyday lives and lifestyle choices (Jackson and Scott, 2002; Richardson, 2007). It has become a routine performance ingrained into our everyday lives which can be ‘put on and discarded at your will’ (Butler, 199: x). Gender has been theorized in terms of personality traits of behaviours which are increasingly documented by vloggers who upload them for public consumption, to the biggest and most frequently visited visit video sharing site in the world, YouTube (Alexa, 2013; Flosi, 2013). Feminist thinking has argued that YouTube enables young women to become media and cultural producers within the comfort of their own homes, freeing them from the patriarchal environment of the Labour Force (Duffy, 2016). However, the construction of femininity within these lifestyle vlogs has received little to no attention in the research literature, although the scope of research on vlogging or vlogging communities in general has occurred (see Harley and Fitzpatrick, 2009a; 2009b). With only 7 out of the top 15 most subscribed to bloggers on YouTube being female, it is obvious that there is a prominent gender bifurcation of the content uploaded. Therefore, my research will utilize a qualitative approach to explore the ways in which female lifestyle vloggers construct and perform femininity on YouTube Through the on-screen documented behaviours and practices, in order to develop new discussions about the prevalence of female stereotypes on YouTube.

Finding your Way: The introduction identifies the research problem, scope of study and gap in knowledge. Use of statistics here as evidence helps to convince us that this is an important topic.

**Literature Review:**

Amongst a backdrop of scholarship addressing the growth of new digital culture identities, vlogging has become a popular area of sociological interests, as it is described as one of the most popular form of expression online (Lau and Chen, 2012). With YouTube holding the largest percentage of logs on the web (Sinton, 2010), the visual narration of people's personal lives and lifestyles has become a YouTube phenomenon which some have examined as a form of social interaction and micro-celebrity performance (Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2011; Jerslev, 2015). Despite this, much of the research and digital culture Industries, specifically vlogging, ignores subjectivities of gender and femininity and the manifestation of female stereotypes on YouTube.

There is an expanding body of literature that investigates vlogging and vlogging communities on YouTube. For example, Jerslev (2015) investigated the ways in which video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube, have temporarily altered celebrity cultures. She refers to the term ‘celebrification’ to describe how the performance of a celebrity has become a part of the daily practice of millions of consumers managing themselves as a spectacle for public consumption (Hackley and Hackley, 2015: 469). Furthermore, Snelson (2015) conducted an exploratory study into the characteristics, content, context and motivations of school
related blogs, revealing that vloggers tended to be young, film in a variety of settings

and for variety of reasons. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the scholarship omits important considerations of the construction of gender and femininity.

Despite this, there has been a critical re-examination of the interrelationship between gender, creativity and labour and social mediated contexts by Duffy (2016). She described how gender disparities continue to play digital media platforms like YouTube and agrees with Ouellette’s (in Andrejevic et al., 2014: 1095) assessment that ‘the subject implied by much scholarship on digital labour is male. As well as this, Bishop (2018) has investigated the ways in which YouTube’s algorithm creates a highly gendered hierarchy of male vloggers, which suggests that the small amount of literature within this field focuses largely on men and masculinities.

The reviewed literature justifies the importance of my research into the construction of femininity by female vloggers through their on-screen behaviours and performances. With flogging being a relatively new form of media (Aran et al., 2014) and the underdeveloped understanding of femininity and female stereotypes in academia surrounding digital media, my research takes an unprecedented position amongst the field of sociology.

Finding your Way: The literature review provides clear background context for the study, highlights problems with existing work and begins to indicate how this new project might address some of these omissions

**Aims and Objectives:**

* To explore the construction of femininity through female vloggers appearance and behaviours on YouTube in relation to the ‘female stereotype’ described in literature.
* To describe the way in which gender norms plague female vloggers on screen activities that convey a stereotypically female performance, relating to Butler's theory of gender.
* To investigate the extent to which female vloggers conform to, or oppose, the ‘female stereotype’ on screen.

Finding your Way: These aims and objectives make the direction of the project clear, they are also doable. You could provide some specific research questions here too in order to make it even better!

**Method and Methodology:**

This exploratory research project will employ a qualitative approach using ethnographic content analysis to provide insightful answers to its research questions.

YouTube's the vlogging communities have become a ‘celebrity circuits’ with many vloggers accumulating millions of views and subscribers, giving them a micro celebrity status (Jerslev, 2015). This poses some challenges to recruitment. To alleviate these issues I will employ a strategy similar to Lange (2008), who adopted ethnographic content analysis in her study of YouTube as the method provided strong strategies for studying online content and community. Similarly, I will conduct non-participatory content analysis of vlogs uploaded by a sample of female vloggers on YouTube. Ethnographic content analysis will involve the ‘searching out of underlying themes’ in the vlogs selected, whilst remaining systematic but not rigid (Bryman, 2012: 563). This method is relevant in my explorative study as

it allows a ‘constant discovery and comparison of relevant situations, settings,

styles, images, meanings and nuances’, allowing for a focus on the construction

of femininity within vlogs in order to answer the research aims (Bryman, 2012: 563).

I will use purposive sampling to select my participants based on pre-specified criteria,
including female, English speaking and aged between 18 and 25. These prerequisites are
appropriate due to central focus of the explorative study. The search phrase I will use to forage YouTube for vloggers will be ‘female lifestyle vloggers’, selecting them based on the pre-specified criteria mentioned before in order to meet the research objectives. All vlogs uploaded by participants between May 1st 2018 and June 31st 2018 will be probed for key patterns relating to the vloggers presentation of self, setting, voice, and habits in relation to the literature on femininity and vlogging reviewed. The sample size will be relatively small at 10 participants due to time restraints, with the possibility to increase depending on the volume of vlogs uploaded within the specified period until I have reached saturation (Bryman, 2012).

Finding your Way: This section clearly justifies the research strategy; it is strengthened by showing how it will build upon previous research and providing examples of these, the explanation of methods is thorough and supported by references. To improve, so more on methodology could be added.

**Ethical Issues:**

These vlogs will not be produced specifically for my research and are therefore open to interpretation and analysis, thus posing limited ethical risks, as access is free and available to anyone (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Whilst the risks are limited, I will ensure to follow the appropriate protocol outlined by my department and institution, undertaking ethics procedures in order to check and assess risks associated with the research.

Finding your Way: This section clearly identifies ethical considerations that relate to this specific method. A strength of this section is that despite the limited ethical considerations, it shows an awareness of the importance of ethics more widely by indicating that they will follow appropriate procedures. To improve, a link to the department procedures, or some brief further details of what this might entail could be included.

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