WE NEED TO TALK:
YOUTUBE AND MENTAL HEALTH
WITHIN THE BEAUTY COMMUNITY

By

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Abstract

Since YouTube first became accessible to the public in 2005 it has dominated new media with an estimated 1.8 billion users and over 1 billion hours of watch time in a single day. YouTube is an American video-sharing website that has turned into a multi-billion dollar industry. The active content creators on this platform have been able to monetize their videos and creativity, enough, that many use YouTube as their main source of income. Despite having the freedom to make videos, YouTubers must follow the rules and guidelines to stay in the YouTube community, as well as, trying to stay in the algorithm to get their videos pushed for further views and success. This added stress of not only trying to produce top quality content but also to appease the standards of YouTube can prove to be a lot for YouTubers. This paper will examine the mental health concerns that YouTubers, specifically beauty influencers, can be subjected to and how YouTubers use their platform to talk about mental issues in general. Mental health in America is very stigmatized due to the independency that is imbedded in the culture. Being a beauty influencer is thought as being easy work since not much is known about what it really means to be a content creator. This paper will also aim to provide more insight into the life of what it means to be a YouTuber through my own online ethnographic research and participant observation.

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https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w5od-OtT_T0eBqigVS3JGU3bYsqDxv0lXdrNPDzJCxA/edit?usp=sharing

Introduction:

YouTube has become one of the most popular social media networks used. With the help of YouTube, people have been able to achieve success through entrepreneurship by creating content online and creating a brand for themselves. One type of community that has been created through YouTube is the beauty community in which beauty influencers talk about beauty and more. Through online ethnographic research, as well as participant observation in the beauty community on YouTube, I would like to open a conversation about mental health in social media. My title "We Need to Talk" is often used YouTube videos where there is a conversation about something important or to get to know more about someone or something. I want this paper to be a start for the conversation. I will first further explain YouTube, how YouTube works and the possible effects it has on content creators' mental health, the beauty community and the beauty influencer. Not only is YouTube a good place to talk about mental health, but is also a place where mental illness need to looked into as well. Mental illness is stigmatized in the United States and I believe that by having influencers on a platform such as YouTube talk about mental health that it will create a space where conversations can be held and stigmas ended. I will look into some of the positive as well as the negative sides of YouTube and social media. Further in this paper, I will also examine three videos uploaded by beauty influencers that live in the U.S. that talk about the issue of mental illness. The first is MannyMua and his video titled "We NEED to talk...Im Sorry". The second is Nyma Tang and her video "HUDA BEAUTY TANTOUR + GRWM". Lastly, I will look at grav3yardgirl and her video "We Need to Talk…". These three videos highlight the discussion of anxiety and depression. I will look at what the beauty influencers say in the video as well as looking at their comment sections to see what kinds of discussion happen about mental illness. The end of this paper will look into my time on

YouTube. Through my participant observation I found it increasingly difficult to keep my mental health in tact while trying to make YouTube videos. I would like to share my story to show how YouTube can have a negative impact on the well being of its users.

What is YouTube?

YouTube first launched in 2005 and is a video sharing and streaming website. Different types of videos are uploaded such as gaming, do-it-yourself tutorials, art, comedy sketches, and beauty and lifestyle. Something that makes YouTube so accessible and intriguing is that content creator can upload videos onto the platform for free and could freely upload videos of all sorts while engaging and creating with the audience. YouTube is not traditional media where there is a one way relationship with those who are producing content and those who consume it (Snickars 2009:90). Instead, YouTube blurs this line because the audience is influencing what content is produced and is engaging with how the producers interacts with a consumer and vice versa. The audience is no longer passively watching; instead they are co-creating the content that is put out (Hanna 2011:1). Currently, YouTube is one of the most used social media platforms with 73% of U.S. adults reporting to using the site (Perrin and Anderson 2019). Globally, as of May of 2018, 1.8 billion people log into YouTube monthly (Statista 2019a). Due to the success from its initial launch, Google purchased it in 2006, less than a year after its launch, for 1.65 billion dollars (X 2016). YouTube's industry started from this point on. In 2007, a Partner Program was introduced onto YouTube which allowed creators to monetize their videos and thus they could make videos and make money by letting advertisements run during their video (Garcia-Rapp 2017). Content creators take a small percentage of this ad revenue. Not only can money be made through ads, YouTubers take a portion of YouTube Red, a subscription service provided on YouTube, and any paid sponsorships they sign contracts with (Garcia-Rapp 2017). Through

YouTube, content creators can make money off of videos and if they have enough income coming in they can turn this into a full time job. Financial stability on YouTube is more secure for those who have gained a larger following because more money would be made through ads if more people watch their videos. Content creators were what made YouTube in the beginning. They produced the content and had people coming back. YouTube has drastically changed from when it first started though. For example, YouTube now makes its own original productions that can only be accessed with the subscription, as well having deals with other companies that let you watch traditional media, such as television and movies, on the platform. Videos in the beginning of YouTube would be uploaded and engagement was limited to comments, liking/disliking, sharing, and subscribing. The YouTube of today, includes all the previously mentioned functions along with having a community page that allows creators to post non-video posts onto their channel and communicate with viewers outside of the comment section, the ability to live stream and live chat, and the recently added JOIN page options in which content creators have the ability to set a monthly fee for subscribers and in turn they will receive extra content and embellishments that non-paying subscribers will not have access to. YouTube has created a space where entrepreneurship can rise, but with an increase to accessibility for success there are also more rules being added. The rules created by YouTube are not the only ones content creators need to abide by, but also the rules created by consumers. Both of these rules have constricting and conforming effects on YouTubers in determining what kind of videos they can produce.

Beauty Influencers:

I will highlight the content creators within the beauty community in my paper. These type of content creators make videos surrounding beauty, skincare, fashion, and through my online

research, I have seen that they are also going into lifestyle as well documenting their everyday lives through vlogs, video blog posts. Creators within the community will either call themselves an influencer or a beauty guru. An influencer is "a type of micro celebrity who accumulate a following online on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal, everyday lives" (Abdin 2016:86). Influencers have the ability to get paid to promote products, but they also showcase products that they like or use on a daily basis. A beauty guru, is also a type of influencer, but "the label of 'guru' on YouTube is applied to content creators, who focus on producing how to videos, which teach certain skills or describe how to do something" (Choi and Behm-Morawitz 2017:82). This group of people make videos related to beauty including their favorites, hauls, routines and much more. There is no explicit term that those in the beauty community use to call themselves, but these two are the most commonly used. Throughout this paper I will predominantly be using the term beauty influencers to refer to creators in the beauty community.

In the beauty community, I always noticed how the influencers are always polished looking. They have their hair and nails done, are wearing nice outfits, wearing jewelry, and overall looking the best that they can be. Influencers have to look good since they are in beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. Although everything is structured and designed in social media I feel like YouTube is able to provide a glimpse into the realness of online personalities. With still-shot photos everything can be edited, but since YouTube is about moving pictures, it cannot be done as easily. Beauty influencers also show how their faces look like without any makeup on and you can see that they are real people too. Although YouTube is still fabricated it allows viewers a chance to see some glimmers of authenticity.

Beauty influencers gain popularity due to their authenticity (Garcia-Rapp 2016). Beauty influencers, most likely, are regular people who love makeup and want to share their thoughts about it. The content many influencers initially produce is amateur (Fischer 2014). YouTube is about video sharing whether it be amateur or professionally filmed videos. Beauty influencers have a mix between amateurism and professionalism being viewed as an ordinary experts (Riboni 2017:126). They can still not know everything but they know more than the average consumer. Being authentic and honest are two things that are expected and demanded from subscribers (Garcia-Rapp 2016). Since influencers can obtain sponsorships from brands from reviewing their products, the audience wants to know that everything they are saying is true and not just about getting money. The reason why people want to become an influencer is important to subscribers as well because if influencers started for fame it could indicate that they do not care about their audience and are not trustworthy. Being authentic means that influencers are credible and rightfully motivated (Garcia-Rapp 2016) and that more people will trust coming back to them for a review of a product. Influencers have higher engagement rates than beauty brands (Pixability 2018) and this shows how valuable influencers have become for the beauty industry, especially when new products are released. Since they are viewed as being less biased than companies their reviews are more desired than a brand. Influencers that have a big following tend to receive PR packages, which they can test and promote for brands driving up sales. This goes into the issues with consumerism as I mentioned previously, but the opinions of influencers are held to a higher standard than brands if they are trustworthy and because they can try so many different products out.

Beauty influencers also tend to be young and female (Choi and Behm-Morawitz 2017) but this has slowly been changing. Makeup has been deemed by society to be a women's only

habit, but with social media males have been able to highlight that makeup is genderless and can be used by anyone no matter their identification (Montell 2019). Male beauty influencers have been rising on YouTube with some prominent figures being PatrcikStarrr, MannyMua, Bretman Rock, Wayne Goss, James Charles, and jeffreestar. Women are still predominantly the ones who are advertised in the beauty industry, but there have been some changes.

The beauty influencer is someone on YouTube who talks about all things beauty and beyond. There have been changes in beauty and it is becoming more inclusive. Just like the term used to label them, a beauty influencer has the power and influence to encourage people what to think and talk about even if it is not beauty related. Topics like mental health and mental illness are things that a beauty influencer can and has been shown to talk about. I will highlight how videos uploaded by MannyMua, Nyma Tang, and grav3yardgirl open a discussion about mental illness and mental illness in regards to YouTube. A beauty influencer can also be influenced as well and the changes within YouTube have also affected them as well.

Increased Change Within YouTube and the Possible Mental Health Implications:

There are two changes that have happened within YouTube that I want to highlight in this section. I have noted that these changes have had an impact on content creators and opens a space for us to look at the possible negative effects it has on the mental health of YouTubers. First, I want to recognize the changes due to the Partner Program which added advertisers as another player in video production and creation. Second, I want to examine the algorithm which control what and who get promoted on the platform. These changes not only impact those who make videos regarding beauty but also to countless content creators who make videos on YouTube.

Through the Partner Program, content creators were given an opportunity to make money from their videos. Instead of YouTube being about the relationship between content creators and the company as well as the content creator and the consumer, a new factor was added into the relationship. Burgess and Green state that "YouTube needs advertising, but to attract advertisers that site also requires inoffensive, non-infringing content" in order to show that there is ad-friendly material that provides a safe space for advertisements to be shown (Snickars 2009:392). The advertiser needs to know that their name will not be tarnished or associated with any possible scandals. Unfortunately, the advertiser is being considered more than the YouTuber. Various aspects go into the process of flagging a video for not being ad friendly. There is no person that would be able to monitor all the videos there is a machine that is programmed to cross-reference aspects of videos like the title, tags, description, and even closed captionings and if they find a word that could be negative a video could get demonetized (The TRUTH About the YouTube ADPOCALYPSE 2017). For example, Thrift Thick, a channel that focuses on making honest beauty reviews, released a video titled "Depression, Anxiety & Panic Disorder | My Story" and despite it being educational about mental health it got demonetized. Mental health is viewed as something that is not acceptable to have ads run through. This can stress other content creators who might want to talk about their personal struggles by controlling what gets uploaded. YouTubers spend countless hours editing videos, but would they spend the time knowing that they would not get paid? I would like to conduct a study and see what YouTubers think about this. By demonetizing videos about mental health, it also adds to negative stigmas of mental illness by punishing the creator and enforcing the idea that mental health should not be talked about. This is also an issue for content creators who rely on YouTube as a main source of income. They do not get money for a video that they could have spent hours making and have to

wait for a manual review to take place if they want to contest it. The first hours of a YouTube video are critical due to my second point of discussion, the YouTube algorithm.

The YouTube algorithm is what dictates what videos get recommended (Davidson et al. 2010). YouTubers have to try and figure out the algorithm to try and get their videos pushed and promoted. If a video were to get demonetized when first uploaded it can negatively affect creators because "videos on YouTube have a short life cycle from upload to viral in the order of days requiring constant freshness of recommendation" (Davidson et al. 2010:294). The most views happen within the first days of upload and if they get demonetized once they are uploaded they lose revenue and if they get cleared through the manual process many people would have already watched their video and they would no longer be able to get the money for it. The algorithm is also stressful because not everyone can figure out how to input themselves into it. For example, YouTuber blair walnuts, who does video surrounding beauty, lifestyle, and fashion, uploaded a video titled "maybe quitting youtube (not clickbait)" where she discussed the impact of copyright strikes, which is when copyrighted material that could be used in a video are claimed by the owner of the original content, as well as the difficulties of figuring out the algorithm. She talks about having to look at trending topics and key words and making videos that are relevant to what others on the platform are talking about. "For producers of media content both large and small, the viral effect of YouTube means their works can enter the global mediasphere and quickly gain exposure" (Snickars 2009:393) and which is why many want to have access into the algorithm. There are several consequences that I have seen as a result of this. When a trend or topic, a challenge such as 'Doing My Makeup with Tiny Hands' for example, is caught by the algorithm multiple YouTubers make videos about it hoping that they will get noticed by algorithm and pushed in the recommended section. The algorithm does not

allow creators to have creativity anymore because now it becomes about numbers and making what is popular and not what a person wants. YouTuber, bestdressed, recently went to Instagram to rant about how YouTube does not allow creativity because a vlog about her 21st birthday got demonetized because she mentions drinking. She states that she put a lot of work and time into the video in order to highlight the milestone year, but was immediately punished due to demonetization. Bestdressed mentions if she were to make a video about a haul of items she purchased she would not have the same issue. These haul videos are popular and it is a reason why many people do them on YouTube. Instead of YouTube letting creators have a chance to upload things they want creators have to follow what is viral, which in her instance is clothing hauls. Another YouTuber, grav3yardgirl, that I will talk about later in this paper mentions the struggle she had with adapting to the change of the algorithm because she was no longer getting the same number of views as before and she became absorbed with getting numbers instead of producing content that she enjoyed. She describes the feelings of losing interest in YouTube and the burnout that she experienced because of it. She critiqued social media by commenting that it turns people into numbers and if someone's numbers are not high enough that could lead to them not feeling worthy and depressed just like it happened to her.

Content creators are no longer allowed to create videos that they enjoy. They are forced to either choose between a video that they know will get promoted more and in return get a higher pay out or make videos that will not do well but will be creatively freeing. This added stress of making sure that videos are advertisement friendly can silence topics that can actually be educational and helpful. YouTubers internalize the algorithm by conforming to the standards that YouTube enforces and making sure that the videos are trending, positive, entertaining, and adhere to the standard that YouTube enforces (Bishop 2017).

The Beauty Community on YouTube

Several communities have been formed surrounding certain topics or points of interest. Beauty is popular topic on YouTube with beauty related content having generated more than 165 billion views in 2018 (Statista 2019b). As of 2015, more than 180,000 beauty related channels are active on YouTube (Pixability 2015). Beauty related content is not only being actively consumed, but also produced. Burgess and Green (2009:63) state that "the architecture of YouTube does not overtly invite community-building, collaboration, or purposeful group work". Creating communities requires effort on YouTube because people could easily just individually participate on the platform and not want to associate with others. Despite this the beauty community has been able to create an area for everything beauty related to be discussed. People can meet each other at conventions held by YouTube or beauty related events. By creating spaces outside of the platform there is a possibility for more social connection to be made. Popular tags or challenges are replicated by those within the community and some even collaborate by meeting face to face and filming videos together to post on each of their channels.

The beauty community has created its own language and lexicon that are used by influencers (Riboni 2017). Their vocabulary include the names and knowledge of different types of products being used such as: foundation, concealer, blush, bb cream, highlight, and bronzer as well as the application tools such as: a beauty blender, crease brush, fan brush, and flat ended blending brush. They beauty influencers have to be able to know how to use this vocabulary to explain their videos, especially the ones that show application. The community creates its own language that those outside of it may not understand. For example, if some people read a title of a YouTube video that went, GRWM, not a lot of people would know what it meant. A GRWM "Get Ready With Me" is when content creators get ready on camera and usually talk to their

subscribers. This type of video is very popular and I even did one for my participant observation since it is a perfect way for someone to talk about whatever they want while getting ready for their day.

The beauty community is also a culture of consumerism (Fischer 2014). Influencers not only covertly encourage their subscribers to buy more products, but beauty influencers themselves feel a need to always buy the new big iteam. Also, some beauty influencers create their own makeup lines, collaborations with brands, or their own merchandise and their subscribers would possibly pay in order to support the people they look up to. Videos about makeup encourage people to spend more in order to test out the latest product. Serein Wu, a beauty influencer on YouTube uploaded a video titled “WE NEED TO TALK | Depression, Downside of YouTube & What’s Next?” in which she talks about creating videos such as hauls, showing all the products YouTubers buy, and doing reviews only helped a shopping problem she had while also putting herself in financial stress. She would buy products to test and try and in the end it would go to waste because she could not use all of them. She also mentions that she does not want to keep doing unboxing videos, videos where PR packages are opened in front of the camera, and encourage others to spend. If people are not as lucky to receive PR packages, boxes sent by brands that have not yet released products, then they have to go out and buy them if their audience wants a review. If videos about a certain product are popular then beauty influencers might also want their video to be viewed so they will go out and buy the product. I found this to also be a problem for myself, I did not have any financial stability when I started my participant observation but I wanted to buy new items and not keep using the same products. The audience and influencer need to realize when they should not buy something, but it can be hard to do when there are so many new products that come out that you are told are good as well.

The beauty community has slowly been changing with a rise of scandals and drama that have influencers tearing each other down rather than helping each other up. Influencers with a lot of subscribers are the ones that mostly get involved. Videos created about the drama are reported by drama channels such as, Here For The Tea who created the term Dramageddon to describe the biggest scandals within the beauty community on YouTube. When videos about these scandals gain traction the algorithm pushes these videos out more and smaller beauty influencers cannot get their content out to reach the audience or they get bombarded with questions asking to comment on the situation. Many do not acknowledge what is happening and in their videos also have the possibility of gaining more views from those who are tired of hearing about drama. Communities change and the people in them do too. The beauty community seems to be divided by the side that get involved in the drama that attack one another and the side that is there to talk about beauty and all things related to it.

Overall, beauty channels and videos are a large portion of views on YouTube and their community can talk about a variety of topics. They have an influence over people and can discuss sensitive topics such as mental health is they please. They can be a change that society needs when it comes to mental health and mental illnesses because they can help break stigmas.

Mental Illness in the United States: Common but Stigmatized

In the United States, mental illnesses are a common occurrence with an estimated one out of five adults living with a mental illness. Research conducted by the National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement, reported that 49.5% of adolescents from the ages of thirteen to eighteen live with some kind of mental health condition (National Institute of Mental Health 2019). Despite numerous amounts of people struggling with some mental health concerns there is still a negative stigma placed on mental illness. Mental illnesses are not something as tangible

as a diseases that are able to be detected through pathogens or physical appearances. While diseases are defined as a natural entity that can be identified through various bodily signs [and] is established through a diagnosis by a professional healer (Singer and Baer 2012:63) an illness is more subjective and is more about how an individual experiences their sickness (Singer and Baer 2012:66). Not everyone needs an official diagnosis to know that they have mental disorder, but through talking to medical professionals it is easier to determine what kind of disorder someone has. Mental illness involves the internal struggle someone has and can be seen as an invisible disease. Since others cannot see anything physically wrong it can be disregarded or not taken as seriously as it is. In a study conducted by Robison et al. (2018:52), they measured the attitudes toward mental health on social media and found that depression, a type of mental illness, is more stigmatized because it is seen as a lack of personal control. Those with mental illnesses are seen as weak for not being able to "get over" the emotions and feelings that they deal with. Mental illnesses are not something that can be controlled easily and finding a way to "control" it requires some outside help. Seeking help is not easy for everyone though. Since mental illnesses are so stigmatized it can difficult for those who suffer to get help because they do not want to talk about it or possibly they cannot discuss it face-to-face with others because the illness is so bad that it hinders the ability to socialize (Naslund et al. 2016:114).

Mental Illness Stigmas and Makeup:

They way people, who suffer with mental illnesses, look or act can also influenced due to stigmas. People can be influenced to wear makeup in order to hide dark circles or make oneself feel better just by adding an extra layer that can hide what is really going on. A study conducted by the Renfrew Center Foundation about makeup reports that there are also psychological reasons as to why some women wear makeup with 48% of women reporting they like they way

they look with it compared to a bare face and 32% stating that it makes them feel good (The Renfrew Center Foundation 2012). There are several reasons why people wear makeup, and using it to help with mental health is also one of them. Makeup then becomes more than just makeup and it becomes a way to help mitigate the suffering one goes through. YouTube beauty tutorials not only help show how to get ready for a day, but also how one can make themselves feel the best even when it does not feel that way internally. There are tips shown that help one look as best as they can and hide that they are even suffering with mental illness. Since many people already do not recognize the internal struggles people are going through, makeup adds another layer to hide what is really happening.

YouTube: The Good and the Ugly

Just like with anything in life there are positives and negatives. Social media is no exception and there are several good and bad qualities about it. I want to address a positive and negative aspects of social media when it comes to mental health. YouTube has created a space where issues such as mental health can be discussed and conversations can be held between a variety of people. These conversations create positive change toward such a stigmatized topic such as mental illness. YouTube has also created a space where people can escape reality for a bit. Despite YouTube being a great tool for creating positive spaces, it can also be negative. Another negative aspect of YouTube and social media is that using it can become addictive for people and could have negative effects. Even if one wants to quit sometimes it is not easy to do and then social media burnout can happen because of it (Han 2018).

Social media consists of online social networking. Multiple studies have been conducted in order to determine whether social media has an effect on mental health. The studies have shown to be inconclusive as to whether social media has a direct impact either negatively or

positively leaving it as being subjective to the person and how they use it (Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy 2017). People use the internet for a variety of reasons and some people can depend on it more than others. One way that people can use social media is by watching YouTube videos. YouTube creates a space if even for ten minutes of a day an escape to watch something entertaining and letting you forget any struggles. For those who use it to meet others, it can provide the opportunity to meet people they would not be able to in real life. This increases their circle of people and offers more social interaction. A study by Baumeister and Leary, concluded that "people who communicate more have more social resources, and those with more social resources have better psychological functioning, lower levels of stress, and greater happiness" (Bessire et al. 2008:47-48). Having a bigger social circle can help increase the positive mental state of a person. Using social media to increase one's social circle can help those who do not have the support they need in the real world. Mckenna and Bargh labelled this as the social compensation hypothesis (Bessire et al. 2008). The internet is not confined by time and location and it allows people from all over the world to talk to one another. People can find others who are in similar situations as them and create a community that understands each other. Finding a community online can be easier to do than in real life whether it be because of a person's personality or if they struggle with any disabilities. "For individuals with stigmatised illnesses, such as serious mental illness, social media may make it possible to connect with those who share similar health conditions and to seek or disclose health information without having to reveal one's personal identity (Naslund et al. 2016:114). By having online conversation the stigmas against mental illness can be reduced. YouTube is a site that has been opening discussions about mental health with popular beauty influencers opening about personal struggles with mental illness and allowing a conversation to be had about them. Comment

sections can be used as support, not only for the subscribers but for a creator as well. The comment sections can be just as negative as they are positive though. Internet trolls and haters who purposely go onto comments to write hateful and shocking comments are not uncommon. Influencers and commentators can get attacked and harassed by comments like these. Some influencers might even have to go as far as getting a moderator for their comment sections in order to diminish harmful comments. Spaces like these, when used right, can be great but we cannot deny the negative aspect of it as well.

As much as social media can be a positive space for change that does not mean that there are not negative sides to it. An addiction or dependence on social media can further hinder one's mental health (Glaser et al. 2018). Some people can become too dependent on their online community and it hinder their ability to socialize in the real world, but the tools learned from an online community should be used as a way to help oneself in the real world (Naslund et al. 2016). Addiction to social media is about the behavior of individuals and can be very subjective. Some may know when to stop, but others could find it difficult. For example, for influencers who use social media as a main source of income, like beauty influencers, being on social media is important because if they do not log on they risk their financial stability. Being a social media influencer is not a job that you can clock in and out of. Social media does not sleep and nor does the influencer. Due to the constant need to be on social media, some influencers can experience burnout. The definition of burnout by Maslach et al. states that "burnout is usually defined as the combination of three clusters of symptoms, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (Bianchi et al. 2013:782). Burnout can lead to people just having to complete a video because they have to and have a person become hyper-critical of their work and leading them to believe that they are not good enough. People may want to quit or take

a break, but that leaves them in a position of losing their place in the YouTube algorithm, losing funds, views, and etc. and "when the user wants to quit, but feels too costly to do so, the conflict can lead to the users burnout on social media" (Han 2018: 123). Social media burnout does not only happen to influencers, it can happen to anyone who uses social media networks a lot.

It is important to not only highlight the positives and negatives that audiences may experience because of social media, but also look into how influencers who are always online can struggle as well. With a 24/7 job, it can be difficult for influencers to do what they do. When influencers share their struggles, their platform gives them the opportunity to open bigger discussions about mental health and fight stigmas that have been placed on diverse topics. These are not the only benefits and downfalls of using social media networks such as YouTube, but these are the ones I found to be most prevalent while conducting my online ethnographic work.

Beauty Influencers and Mental Illness

Despite it being stigmatized, there are beauty influencers that share their experiences with struggling with mental health issues and open a space for others to talk and have a conversation about their struggles. They can either make a dedicated video that addresses soley mental illness and personal struggles or it can be subtopic within a video that can have nothing to do with mental health. In this paper I want to highlight three beauty gurus, MannyMua, Nyma Tang, and grav3yardgirl and their videos about struggling with depression and anxiety. MannyMua made a video that was only about his battle with his mental health. This video was unlike his others because 1) he was not using or talking about anything beauty related and 2) he had a casual backdrop as opposed to the more professional and planned backdrop indicating that this video is a more relaxed one. Nyma Tang on the other hand talked about her struggles with mental health in a more subliminal manner. Her video was focused around a review of a new makeup product

and has the conversation about mental health in the beginning. Grav3yardgirl also had a dedicated video that had the same two points I mentioned for Manny's video and discusses how YouTube enhanced some of her mental illness. Despite the fact that these three influencers talk about the same mental illnesses they address them in a variety of different ways and situations which are common to the beauty community.

Beauty Influencers and Mental Illness: MannyMua

Manny Mua, or Manuel Gutierrez, is a twenty-eight year old, Mexican-American male beauty influencer that has been making beauty videos on YouTube since 2014. His videos consist of tutorials, challenges, reviews, vlogs and many more topics that relate to beauty and fashion. He currently stands at 4.8 million subscribers, and was considered one of the Top Rising Beauty Influencers for the growth his channel through showing the diversity of beauty and his collaborations with other influencers (Pixability 2018). Manny created and founded his makeup brand, Lunar Beauty, in early June of 2018. Despite the success of his launch he uploaded a video that addressed the struggles he was facing at the time. MannyMua released a video titled "We NEED to talk… Im sorry" late June of 2018 addressing his struggle with his anxiety and depression. He stood at an estimated five million subscribers (Trackalytics 2019a) when he posted his video and it currently has 2.8 million views.

We NEED to talk… Im sorry: Video Details

I want to address some of the production qualities of the video such as setting, time, and thumbnail. The video is not a professional looking video as he is recording it on the floor of his bedroom and does not have the glamorous setup that many influencers focus on. This adds a layer of realness to the topic he is talking about. This video stands at twelve minutes and it is

about his conversation about mental health. Lastly, his thumbnail is a photo of himself without makeup wiping away a tear.

In the beginning of the video, he highlights that he understand it is a random video to upload to his channel, since it is not about makeup or beauty related, but he wanted his subscribers to know what is really happening to him. He states that he wants to be "candid and honest and upfront" about a topic that he says he would rather want to keep private. Content creators have the freedom to make whatever type of video they want, but sometimes they must sacrifice any revenue if a video is not advertisement friendly. As I have mentioned previously, some videos educating the public on mental health have been demonetized, but unfortunately this information is only made available to the creator. It would be interesting to see if this video was demonetized or if the creator chose to not put ads. In the video, he highlights his personal feelings of unmotivation and the persistent feeling of always being sad. Manny mentions that his stress from the launch of his makeup company along with the death of his family dog is what triggered his anxiety which also led to him also triggering his depression. He mentions that there is a family history of depression and acknowledges that has suffered with mental health issues since he was young but still gets frustrated when he cannot find a reason why he feels overwhelmingly sad. Manny mentions that he talks about his anxiety more about his depression and tries to keep the latter more hidden. He apologizes to his subscribers for not being the strong person he tries to show, but that it is okay to recognize when you are struggling and need some help or even someone share your emotions with. He claims that YouTube has been like a diary for him and he wanted to let the people who watch his video that they are not alone and it is not their fault for not feeling the best all the time. He offers apps, websites, and numbers in his description box that his subscribers can go to if they need help and he also states that they can

talk to him. In the end of the video, he wants to let his fans know that there is a person behind MannyMua and Manny is a real person that struggles as well. He is not the glamorous MannyMua he posts all the time but he is able to find happiness through his subscribers and thanks them for the positive impact they had on his life. YouTubers are often seen as a kind of micro celebrity since they are always in the public eye and this can lead viewers to dissociate the YouTuber and no longer view them as a person, but instead, view them as the person they watch for entertainment disassociating them from the real feelings a person goes through.

We NEED to talk… Im sorry: Comments

His video has over 40,000 comments on it and a vast majority of them are positive and open a space for his subscribers to talk about their struggles as well. One comment reads:

> "Thank you so much for making this video, I've struggled with mental illness for nearly my entire life and having someone who I admire so much open about it in such a genuine way means so much. You've helped me through some of the hardest times of my life and I hope you find people like that in your own life ♡".

This message is one of the many that his subscribers left him appreciating that he opened up about his struggles understanding how hard it can be when it comes to mental health. This comment only received six likes, but it still resonates with what Manny wants to be and create for his subscribers. Although this quote did not reach as many likes as the others, it showed how space can be created to let people talk about mental health. As much as this video was a place for him to be open about his struggles and trying to create a safe place for conversation, there were also negative comments. This is reality, not everything is received well or accepted. Aside from troll comments that are only there for shock, some attacked his character and genuity. These

comments tended to be made after Manny was involved in a huge scandal within the beauty community. For context, he was being accused of being a social climber and using other influencers for personal growth of his channel. As I have mentioned earlier, viewers want to watch someone authentic and when Manny was accused of using people for fame it led to many not trusting his character. These allegations were denied by Manny, but once it is out for the world to see and hear it could not be forgotten. Everyone has an opinion and can comment and judge those who put themselves out there. Whether it is true or not someone went as far as commenting:

> "This is actually really manipulative. It's scary because the really depressed out there would probably not make a video like this".

The replies to this comment either agreed and said that this was a tactic to be more relatable or they try and defend, not only Manny, but others who suffer with any mental illness. This comment assumed that nobody who actually suffers with depressions speaks about the struggles they are going through. Comments like this reinforce the negative stigma that mental illnesses have and create more damaging effects for anyone who suffers with mental health disorders. Not everyone is the same when it comes to how to deal with their illnesses, but that does not mean they are not real.

Beauty Influencers and Mental Illness: Nyma Tang

Nyma Tang is a twenty-eight year old, Sudanese, female beauty influencer and has been making videos since 2016 and her first video talks about tips to help with time management and anxiety. She gained popularity for making videos about makeup for people with deep darker complexions and addresses the changes that need to happen in the makeup industry to include all

skin tones no matter how dark or light. Her videos consists of reviews, tutorials, recreations, and vlogs. She currently stands at one million subscribers and has collaborated with brands such as MAC Cosmetics to release her own lipstick. On May of 2019, she posted a video titled “HUDA BEAUTY TANTOUR + GRWM” that currently has over 424,000 views and she was on the cusp of reaching her current one million subscribers.

HUDA BEAUTY TANTOUR + GRWM: Video Details

I will also be examining production qualities such as setting, time, and thumbnail for this video as well. The video is professional looking as she uses her usual backdrop that she uses for the rest of the video. Since this video is supposed to highlight a product review it makes sense as to why she would keep her normal setup. The video stands at roughly twenty minutes with eleven minutes discussing her conversation about mental illness. Her thumbnail highlights the product being reviewed and it also has no mention to the topic of mental health.

Her video started with her explaining that she has wanted to talk about the topic of anxiety and depression for a while but it has taken her a lot of time to finally feel comfortable to say anything to the public. She states that she is anxious to talk about the subject because once it is online it cannot be taken back. In the midst of introducing the topic of discussion she mentions an instance of incorrectly using the term OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder, to explain how meticulous she is about her foundations. She understands how diminishing it can be for those who seriously suffer with OCD by using it in such a casual manner and the negative effects it can have (Robinson et al. 2018) and apologizes for it. Nyma then proceeds to extensively talk about her struggle with anxiety and how debilitating it can be for her since her anxiety can physically take a toll on her and not having control over your body can be discouraging. Anxiety was something she never considered to be a health condition, but it was not until she went to therapy

that it could be helped medically. Nyma believed that God had made her that way and there was nothing she could do about it. Through therapy, she has found coping mechanisms to mitigate how much her anxiety controls her but she is still working on helping herself. People are scared to talk about anxiety because it can be daunting to admit and the stigma about it. She felt like she had to talk about it because the day before she filmed she had anxiety, that snowballed into depression, that just led to her feeling sad all day and not wanting to get out of bed. Nyma admits that she never wanted to say the D word, depression, and denied that she even had it. It was not until her boyfriend encouraged her to seek help that she realized she needed to take care of herself because she could not deny the reality of it anymore. Nyma concludes the portion of her video discussing mental illness with telling her audience that anxiety and depression are real and to seek help if they are really bad. The more people talk about it, the more people feel comfortable and the more we can save lives and ourselves. This portion of her video only lasted eleven minutes and then she continued with her review of the product listed in the title.

HUDA BEAUTY TANTOUR + GRWM: Comments

Nyma's video has over 1,700 comments after about a week of being posted. Since this video was not only about mental health or even indicated that mental health would be talked about in the video there are far less comments about it than in Manny's video. The conversation seems to be a mix talking about the color of the reviewed products, how beautiful Nyma is, and people commenting about their own personal struggles with mental illness. A notable comment, that I found, is one that Nyma made herself by stating:

> "Hey guys I talked a lot in the beginning of this video about something really important, but if you're only here for the Huda Review that starts at 11:21 ♡♡".

This quote struck out to me because since she put a timestamp for the product review she understood that there might be some people who would not want to hear what she wanted to say. Since her video was not solely on mental health as well as her title not having an indication that something like mental health would be discussed I believed that she did not want to bother the people who only came for the review. This allows people a choice to listen to what she has to say and some may choose to skip it because it can be triggering or they could not care about the topic. It would be interesting to see how many people decided to skip the beginning of the video and if such a number could be measured I am also interested seeing why people skipped if they did. Even with the skip option, many comments still had words of encouragement and thanked her for speaking out about it. One comment that obtained close to 600 likes read:

> "I love your transparency and honesty...being someone who suffers from anxiety and depression and did silently for a long time, it helps when you don't feel like you're alone".

So many people end up struggling alone when it comes to mental illness and conversations like this allow people to open up more about what is really happening. People still were able to have conversations in the comments about dealing with anxiety and depression. You never know when someone is having a hard time and this video shows how support is there even when you never expected it.

Beauty Influencers and Mental Illness: grav3yardgirl

The last beauty influencer that I want to discuss is grav3yardgirl, Bunny Meyer. Bunny is a thirty three year old, Caucasian-American, female beauty influencer and entertainer who has

been making videos since 2010. Her videos cover a wide variety of aspects with her first covering paranormal investigations, and then about reviews on makeup and products, and lifestyle videos. She currently stands at 8.6 million subscribers and has the most compared to Manny and Nyma. Bunny was one of the most followed influencers who had a collaboration with a brand in 2018 (Pixability 2018). Her collaboration with Tarte Cosmetics surrounded around her brand and subscriber name the swamp family. On July of 2018 she uploaded a video titled “We Need to Talk…” that currently has 2.3 million views and she had just over 8.8 million subscribers (Trackalytics 2019b).

We Need to Talk…: Video Details

As for the video production qualities of this video in terms of the setting, time, and thumbnail this video was the most different from the previous two. This video was recorded inside of her Tesla as she was parked by a park. Like Manny’s video this informal setting makes the video more relatable to the viewer and sparks more authenticity. The total run time of the video was the longest with thirty-six minutes. Lastly, also like Manny’s video her thumbnail is a picture of her crying and wiping her nose. Photos like these attract the audience to click the video more especially since they had similar titles which are vague because they do not address what they need to talk about.

In the beginning of her video, she states that this video is one she has been trying to make for the past two months and has reshot it more than twenty times because she feels like she could never fully articulate what she wanted to address without blubber crying. She wanted to make this video after a series she completed with another popular YouTuber where they looked into how to revive her channel. After the collab, she was processing her anxiety and depression which seemed to heighten with her reading negative comments. Bunny mentions that she never had a

lot of people in her offline social circle that she could resonate with and it is because of that loneliness that she went to YouTube so reading hate comments make her feel as if though she is letting down the people she loves the most and have helped her find herself when she was most lost. The negative comments could even be trivial but she mentions that her depression and anxiety heighten the self deprecation and can trigger a reaction. YouTube is like a therapeutic journal for her. An area that allows her to speak on issues she's going through, but also being able to talk to subscribers that she calls her friends and family. Talking to her subscribers, or her swamp family, is taken away when she already feels like she is in a negative space and cannot handle the hate and she feels as if though she loses a connection that is so important to her and it just make her mental illness worse. Bunny states that she had a rough last year and personally it takes her a while to be comfortable and adjust to any transitions. The series she completed was looking to reinvent herself as grav3yardgirl 2.0, but it is hard to do when she is trying to unpack all the emotional baggage she has been carrying. Bunny mentions that small things like even getting out of bed were a big accomplishment for her and something that she could celebrate. Due to the algorithm change she feels as though she was obsessed with looking at the numbers and was no longer happy with YouTube and was creating content for the sake of it. She no longer felt a connection with her videos and felt burntout. Bunny wants the old relationship she had with YouTube and her subscribers back because they have done so much for her and she wants to create and spread happiness. She wants to show people the real side of herself and be open instead of keeping it private. She tells her audience to not lose hope because she never believed that she was going to live past the age of twenty-five due to her suicidal thoughts but it is because of YouTube she has been able to live out her most impossible dreams. Bunny's final

thoughts were about not wanting to burden her audience when she posts heavier topics because she wants it to be an entertaining place where people can escape to.

We Need to Talk…: Comments

Bunny's video currently has over 28,000 comments. Despite Manny having less followers than Bunny he has more engagement in his comments section and in view count as well. I believe this spike of comments had to do with his scandal and a wave of hate comments going back to his older videos, but is interesting to see. Bunny's video had some of the most positive and constructive criticism out of the three videos I mentioned. For example, Bunny mentions that she wants the real side of herself to be shown through the new content she wants to create and one comment states:

> "Drop the whole 'Grav3yardgirl' she died years ago when the paranormal stuff ended. Rebrand as 'Bunny Meyer' and be YOU and do what YOU want to and stop pretending to be this character that you are not".

This comment can seem harsh, but it does address the issues that Bunny mentions in her video. She no longer wants to keep everything private and wants to show the true side to herself. Grav3yardgirl is the persona she created for YouTube, but she needs to show that Bunny is herself and is everything that grav3yardgirl was but better. I feel as though her audience really wants to help her out and gives her points to take into consideration for the change she said she wants to take. Almost every comment as I scrolled was positive, with the negative comments highlighting the fact the she was crying inside of a Tesla, an expensive brand of vehicle, or her extravagant sunglasses but almost none seemed very hurtful. As in Manny's comment section as well, her comment section also defended her and told people to see the bigger issue which is the talk about mental health. Bunny's

comment section also feels like there was more conversation happening than in the other two. Many comments have replies as well as several being liked. They discuss Bunny's situation as well as providing encouragement for others.

We NEED to talk… Im sorry, HUDA BEAUTY TANTOUR + GRWM, and We Need to Talk...: Discussion

The reason that I chose these three beauty influencers is that their videos highlighted the good and ugly of YouTube I discussed earlier. These videos also hit a personal chord with me and, for that reason as well, is why I wanted to include them in this paper. For Manny's video it highlighted the how the comment section can be very useful and absolutely horrendous. This may have been heightened due to his scandal, but this video was recorded before anything was reported. The people who posted negative comments had to actively find the video in order to leave their messages. Even if the video talks about the vulnerable and weak point that he was in there was no mercy from some people. Manny's video also addressed the topic of influencers being people too. Although their subscribers interact with them by watching their videos, they have real lives and emotions behind the scene and they are not always their YouTube persona. I used Nyma's video in order to show how YouTubers can feel bad for putting videos out that address issues surrounding mental health, when some use the site as an escape from their mental issues. By putting a timestamp, it gives people an opportunity to skip discussions about important topics whether because they already struggle and do not want to be reminded or because they do not care about having a conversation. Further, by including it in a video that had no indicator that mental health would be a discussion point, I felt that it also shows how some things need to be talked about and sometimes when it is when you least expect it, but the conversation needs to happen, nevertheless, because there can be so much more positive change

with opening up and having a healthy discussion as shown in her comment section. Another important point made was how some serious conditions are used incorrectly by people and trivialize the experience of those who suffer. Lastly, Bunny's video gives us a perspective about how YouTube can affect established influencers who have to adapt with the changes within the platform and still try and maintain their individual character with the numbers. Bunny's video also gives us a further look into how trying to do your job as a YouTube content creator can be when you are dealing with not only mental illness, but social media burnout. The comment section on her video had her subscribers giving feedback and constructive criticism about how she can achieve her personal and career goals.

All three of these videos talked about mental illness, specifically about anxiety and depression. No matter the video, the comment section was open to those who wanted to share their experiences with mental illness and/or have a conversation about mental health. By not only having a YouTuber talk about their experience with mental illness, but reading the numerous comments left by strangers it gives people the assurance that they are not going through their battle by themselves and there are people who are experiencing it with them and fighting on with them. In the U.S., people are so afraid of speaking up because they fear that they will be judged but with more people openly speaking up about mental health the more progress there can be towards ending the stigma for those who suffer with mental health issues. There are still no studies which look into how YouTube videos and their comments can bring about a positive change towards mental illness and I would like to conduct more research into this. From my observations I have seen that these videos allow people to speak openly about any personal struggles they are going through and seeing successful beauty influencers shows them that mental illness does not discriminate and it can happen to anyone.

Personal Experience With YouTube Through Participant Observation

During the summer of 2018, I spent approximately two months immersing myself in the lifestyle of a beauty YouTuber through participant observation. I have watched YouTube videos since I was a child and being able to become a YouTuber myself was something like a dream come true for me. I have had a YouTube channel since I first created an email account back in 2013, but I never posted until June of 2018. I was starting my channel from nothing so I established some personal goals to this project because many people who start YouTube channels do so because they want to achieve something through it. By giving myself goals I wanted to emulate the drive that people have to become successful on YouTube, especially since my active time on YouTube would not be long. My goals were to post twice a week and gain fifty subscribers by the end of my ethnographic work. Despite the short amount of time that I spent within the community it had a huge impact on my mental state and I concluded that I would have to stop my role as a YouTuber and continue to do my research as a viewer through online ethnography.

When creating my channel I had to think about what my niche in the YouTube community would be. I do not go anywhere so I did not want to try and be a vlogger. I never really played any video games so I could not be a gamer channel. Eventually I decided that the best part of YouTube for myself was the beauty community. Makeup has always been a hobby of mine and many of the videos I watched in my free time were about beauty. Deciding that I wanted to go into the beauty community on YouTube I made all my other social media accounts beauty related.

Participant Observation: Preparing for YouTube

In order to fully immerse myself into the YouTube platform I used other popular social media to gain further exposure and traction for my first YouTube video. YouTube is interconnected with other social media and many other influencers use all of their other social media to promote their videos. I used a secondary Instagram account that I had made for a previous school project and transformed it into my "Public Figure" profile. I had to give myself this label because of Instagram's "business profile" which allows its users to receive further analytics about their page and any posts that they make. Turning your page into a business profile is beneficial for those who which to reach an audience that they do not have access to with the features of a basic Instagram account (InfluencerMarketingHub 2019). Instagram was the main way I promoted myself because I already had a following on there and at my peak I reached ninety followers.

On June 1st, I created a promotional video that I posted on my personal Instagram account and secondary Public Figure account in order to get people interested in my page and also inform them that I was starting a school project in which I would turn myself into a beauty YouTuber and examine what it meant to live in this online community. I asked those who watched the promotion video to follow my Instagram for updates and also to subscribe to my YouTube channel for my upcoming videos. There were a decent amount of my friends and family who followed my secondary account after and only a couple subscribed to my channel that night. The following day I prepared myself to film my first video. I decided that my first video would be a GRWM + Get To Know Me video. Get To Know Me videos are a type of challenge or tag where a digital conversation takes place about a variety of topics. A GRWM, or a Get Ready With Me, is when the content creator talks to their audience usually while doing

their makeup. Having this in mind, I wrote down a list of twenty questions that I either found online or made up myself the night before so I would know what to talk about. I did not have any professional equipment to film with or to use for my lighting so I waited until the sun was shining bright and propped my phone on a pile of boxes and bins to get my desired angle. I connected a microphone that I had purchased to my phone.

The month before I officially started my participant observation I had to gather the needed materials to make my YouTube videos and also to start thinking of ideas for my channel content. I created a journal in which I would write my ideas and materials that I had gotten for my channel. I had very limited funds and resources and I knew I was not going to be able to buy or even rent a nice camera for my videos so I recorded them on my smartphone. I needed to think about the editing software that I could use, and although my phone has editing options on it I could not use them because the options I had in mind could not be easily completed. I decided to use free trials of Adobe Premiere Pro which lasted seven days each and I used different emails from my family members to do this. The University of California, Riverside does provide this program free to students on campus, but I did not drive and could not access this resource and it really discouraged me. I purchased a microphone to use in order to reduce the echoes as well as background noise. If I did not have the best quality video, I at least wanted a good sounding one. My backdrop was the wall of my bedroom, although I tried to get backdrops for a more professional look to my channel but I did not have the money to buy them. Makeup was the only thing I had in abundance and did not have to stress much about in the beginning. Despite the planning and preparations things became a lot harder right from the start.

YouTube and Difficulties: Things Are Not Always As They Seem

I initially went in with high hope and much enthusiasm because I assumed that it would be easy and fun. By the end of my first month though, I realized that everything was not as I imagined it to be like. The first problem I faced was about recording on my smartphone. The raw time of my first video was approximately two hours and it took a lot of storage from my phone. I realized after filming my first video, that I would have to delete the recordings of each one after to make sure there was adequate storage for all the videos I wanted to film. Another difficulty was when it came down to exporting the video off of my phone onto my laptop. My video ended up being split into two videos with each of being around an hour each. I did not know how to do upload my footage onto my laptop and I found that my best option was to wait for Google Photos to download the video from my phone onto its cloud storage. Google Photos is a feature on Google that allows its users to backup their photos and videos by syncing your phone's gallery to their storage. My pictures will usually upload in a couple of seconds, but the videos took a couple hours before I could even start to edit them. My next difficulty was learning how to use Adobe Premiere Pro's editing layout. I never used their software before and had a learning curve to get over, but I was eventually able to learn the basics. Since I was using free trials, I was on a time constraint and could not spend multiple days trying to edit one video. My first video took me around six to seven hours to edit and cut and also layer background music into my video. I finished around one in the morning and by the end of it I was completely exhausted. My footage went down from two hours to seventeen minutes. At last, it was finally time to upload my video and the upload time said that it would take several hours before actually uploading on YouTube. Giving up for the night I let it upload while I slept and I would tackle it again in the morning. When I woke up I realized error occurred that made my video be surrounded by black borders,

and even to this day I have not figured out why. I tried to fix it but I could not so I accepted defeat. My final difficulty was not remembering to make a thumbnail for my video. In a frantic attempt to find something that was not only from filming day but also semi-professional and clickable, I uploaded a picture I had taken of myself. My first experience with YouTube left me completely crushed and the only thing I could do after filming was to cry.

YouTube and Mental Illness: My Personal Struggle With Maintaining My Mental Health

I was very anxious about having to start a YouTube channel, mainly, because I was afraid of the response that I could possibly receive, but I put those thoughts aside and kept up with my plans to start. All throughout the process of preparing for YouTube I was very excited and happy about being able to try and create content. This all ended when I actually finished filming my first video. My original plan with YouTube was to create the videos and post them online as well as recording weekly vlog style entries to document my feelings and the process. I learned that it was more than I could handle so I stopped. The first and only vlog entry I recorded showed just how much this process was going to take its toll on me. I never wanted to go look back at the video but when I did re-watch it it was very upsetting to see just how bad things were for me.

My mental state when I decided to start the YouTube participant observation was not at the best place. My anxiety was already very high, my depression was getting worse every day, my self confidence was basically at zero, and overall, I was not the best that I could be. I officially got diagnosed with severe clinical depression and severe anxiety when I was seventeen years old in high school. I missed half of my last two years at school because of it and to be quite honest I never imagined living to see myself graduate high school and in a couple of months graduating college. My anxiety was so bad that I could not go to school and I had to go on independent study. I went to therapy but I hated every second of it and eventually I was able to

get myself out of the whole thing. I took it upon myself, and with the help of medication, to try and overcome my mental illness and eventually it got better. Fast forward three years into future, I was going through the same cycle again. The part that was difficult for me this time was that I felt like I needed to complete this research for school. No matter what, even when I feel like I will break, when it comes to school and work, I feel the need to give it my best and try and only when I know that I gave it my all but I still managed to fail will I accept defeat because I know there was nothing else that I could do. This is what this whole experience was like for me. I tried to give it my best and despite my best efforts to keep on going I could not do it. I quit before putting more of myself on the line. Being in such a dark place again, where I was considering suicide and I never wanted to leave my room or get out of bed, and having to put myself online was not the easiest. I went in thinking it was going to be easy, but it was not. It was hard for me to even change clothes or brush my teeth or put on a fake smile for hours while I filmed. When I had to edit these videos, all I would was pin point everything I did not like about myself. The way I spoke a little too soft, or that I kept saying 'uhm' when I was fumbling on my words, the way the camera angles made by double chins look, how sausage-like my fingers looked, how disheveled my hair was, my ungroomed nails, my shoulders, my confidence. Everything just looked horrible to me. I never uploaded any more videos to my account because I knew that I would not want them online for the world to see. I was not scared of what the public had to say at this point, I was scared of what I saying to myself and the memories I would have associated with them. I filmed, edited, and kept these videos to myself and I was terrified of the day I would have to watch them again. I was able to experience the part that we see when we watch YouTube, but I also experienced the things that are not always talked about. It has been almost a year since I recorded my first video. I had to rewatch them for this paper and it is so sad to see

how defeated I was because of my mental illness. I was terrified of this part in my paper because I did not want to see the state that I was in before. My mental state is a little better in the present as I write this, but I still suffer. The pain that I was feeling a year ago can be heard in my voice and in the way that I present myself and I'm glad I never uploaded anything else during that time.

When I watch videos like the ones MannyMua, Nyma Tang, and grav3yardgirl posted, I wonder if they think about the same things I did and I feel bad for them. They may not be going through all that, but who's to say that maybe someone else on YouTube is not feeling the pain. I feel that having to do YouTube within the beauty community only increased my suffering. I felt like I needed to fix everything and look polished, but I could not do it. I would like to conduct studies to see if and how YouTube amplifies any negative mental illnesses within the creators. Social media is just as much about the people who consume it as it is the people who produce it.

Conclusion:

I want this paper to highlight the severe problem that is mental illness and how mental health in social media, such as YouTube, needs to be examined not only on audiences, but those behind the scenes too. I learned much more than I thought I would through my research and despite the setbacks I enjoyed doing it. Mental health is not something that should be treated as a taboo subject or creators should feel bad or punished for doing. Being able to use a platform that can reach millions of people to talk about mental illness is a great starting point for change. People can look beautiful on the outside, but feel ugly on the inside.

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