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Book review

Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies
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Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017. 320 pages, $35 (hbk), ISBN: 9780300218176.

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DOI: 10.1177/1354856519835129

Over the past decade, we have witnessed the meteoric rise of social media platforms as they have become core to the generation of (popular) culture and the practices of daily life, and concurrently the emergence of a new category of celebrity: the influencer. While influencers come in many forms, from Insta-famous fashion gurus modelling on impossibly beautiful beaches to dynamic gamers interacting with their livestream audiences on Twitch, YouTube and Facebook, one thing is clear – the thought of channelling one's social media passion project into a fulfilling career is alluring for many. In this most timely and important book, (*Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*, Brooke Erin Duffy turns our attention to one particular genre of social media work, the deeply gendered world of beauty, lifestyle and fashion content. Trained as a communications scholar, Duffy deftly weaves together her expertise at the intersection of media, culture and technology and draws on literature on the creative industries, digital labour and feminist media studies.

The core thesis of the book is that contrary to journalistic representations that highlight the exceptional few who have achieved extraordinary success, the vast majority of individuals carry out endless 'aspirational labour' on social media platforms, approaching their unpaid work online as investments in a future self that will hopefully be able to 'do what they love' for a living (p. x). Duffy carried out 55 in-depth interviews with (mostly) female bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers over a 3-year period (2013–2016), as well as conducting participant observation at a range of industry events. The result is a book full of rich detail that delivers on its aim to 'amplify the voices and experiences of young female aspirants' (p. 229) in order to problematize the Silicon Valley-esque narrative that with hard work and gumption *anyone* can 'make it' in this industry where 'pleasure, passion, and profit meld' (p. 227).

The book draws two particularly poignant conclusions. Firstly, Duffy highlights the 'inherently rigged' nature of brand-blogger relations in this industry. Aspiring social media producers are urged to promote corporate brands' products and messages not for money but for 'potential exposure', in the hopes that someday they will become a paid brand ambassador (p. 221). And secondly, she contends that despite meritocratic and idealistic rhetoric, traditional inequalities across the intersections of race, class and gender persist, and indeed the barriers to entry remain

'staggeringly high' in social media work. As is the case in the tech and creative industries, the social media producers most likely to rise to the top hail from privilege: they tend to be white, educated, and possess family connections and financial support (p. 223).

It is Duffy's attendance to and respect for her interviewees, rooted in feminist research methods, that is the greatest strength of the book. Rather than present a sweeping and damning critique of the industry or those that work within it, as is sometimes the case with works arising from critical political economy perspectives, she instead paints a more nuanced picture that reflects creators' complex subjective experiences and feelings of ambivalence. Duffy does not treat them as 'cultural dupes', instead choosing to foreground the tensions 'between labor and leisure, between the internal self and external publics, between authenticity and self-promotion, and between creativity and commerce' (p. 219). In the pursuit of earning a living, social media producers traverse a tightrope: they need to appear credible and professional in order to court brand collaborations and thus to earn a living, while at the same time defending against audience accusations of having 'sold out'. As such, the book may invite critiques from those hoping for a more outright disavowal of this highly commercialized form of creative work. However, for me this embracing of contradiction provides a refreshing and compelling depiction of the messy everyday lives of those carrying out this aspirational labour.

While close attention is paid to mainstream media representations of the social media fashion and beauty industry, and the extensive interviews which make up the majority of the data for the book provide highly valuable insights into the experiences, aspirations and anxieties of social media producers, supplementing these with more analysis of the media that these individuals are creating would have enhanced the book. Duffy's subjects are producers and innovators of culture, and it therefore would have been illuminating to analyse *what they do*, in addition to what they *say they do*. Closer attention to the media texts borne out of this industry might have helped readers to make sense of what is at stake in the production of a culture so heavily wedded to brands logics, considering particularly the majority young female audiences of such content. I found myself wondering exactly what types of culture these women are producing and sustaining via their blogs, vlogs and Instagram accounts, and how these might be analysed or critiqued within the feminist framework of the book?

As a PhD student myself researching YouTube content creators, Duffy's final chapter 'The Aspirational Labour of an Academic' had a particularly profound impact. She details the striking comparisons between the work of social media producers and scholars, namely the necessity of carrying out free labour and self-promotion, as well as increasingly unstable working conditions. Duffy's willingness to turn the critical lens upon her own profession, and her desire to build bridges between these two seemingly disparate industries, highlights both her high regard for her interviewees and her critical thinking. It encourages readers to take this form of labour more seriously, further challenging the popular representations of social media creators as narcissistic, entitled or lazy. This highly accessible and engaging book is a must-read for students, researchers and indeed anyone interested in the intersections of creative labour, social media and gender.

Author biography

Zoë Glatt is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Media & Communications at the London School of Economics. She is conducting ethnographic research both online and offline with professional YouTube content creators, including becoming a YouTuber herself, in order to explore experiences of creative labour that is carried out in multi-platform environments. She holds an MA in Digital Media from Goldsmiths University and a BA Social Anthropology from SOAS University.