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Young Girls' Interaction with Beauty and Lifestyle Content on YouTube

A qualitative approach following the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method

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Master's Thesis in Screen Cultures

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01. December 2023

The master's thesis has been written to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Screen Cultures programme at the University of Oslo, Norway.

I was engaged in researching and writing this thesis from August 2022 until December 2023 and received supervision from Steffen Krüger, senior lecturer at the Department of Media and Communication.

Abstract

This thesis explores the significance of beauty and lifestyle videos on YouTube in the lives of young women. It uses the biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) to allow five women to share their personal life stories and their consumption of beauty and lifestyle content during their teenage years. In doing so, this thesis uncovers new meanings of the genre and how it is embedded in the personal lives of teenagers.

A broad theoretical field is integrated into the thesis. In addition to a general introduction to YouTube and the beauty and lifestyle genre, this thesis discusses the understanding of the individual and woman at the beginning of the 21st century with movements such as post-feminism and neo-liberalism. It also presents critical perspectives on the beauty and lifestyle genre, such as the argument that the genre provides space for female empowerment but also limits it by holding on to traditional beauty standards.

However, the focus is on the interviews, which both confirm and go beyond the findings of previous studies. The interview analyses show how beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube played an important and guiding role during adolescence and provided meaningful role models to validate preached beauty standards. Most importantly, the biographical approach showed how YouTube served as a compensation for the lack of role models in the personal context, most often the family context. Often videos were watched and guidance sought because the personal context did not provide it well enough. The last finding reinforces the importance of the personal context in relation to media use, and the project as a whole underlines how important the beauty and lifestyle genre is for young girls and how closely it is linked to forms of beauty, self-image and adolescence as a formative period.

Acknowledgements

CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

"...and that's why YouTube was the only place where you can get tips and where people tell you a lot of stories and you somehow feel close to it. And I think that's why it was such a big thing, because... Where from, well... I can't think of any other source where I could have got inspiration and tips. I couldn't get them from my mother either, or I didn't get them, you know? I somehow never had such a reference person otherwise. Yes." (PK, 20/21:34)

The process of growing up as a girl and becoming a woman is a significant period in life. The girl does not only shift from being particularly dependent on her parents to becoming more and more independent, she also experiences the processes of developing her personality, appearance and her role in new peer-groups. According to the sociologist Anthony Giddens, the processes that are experienced can be described as a "project of the self". Based on this approach, adolescence is defined as a phase in which the individual has to constantly make decisions about their behaviour, opinion and appearance.[1] It is accompanied by media material, such as books, films or "lifestyle news"[2], which may help the teenager to make her choices, and by the personal, social and cultural forms of the girl's life. The context may include the girl's nationality, her family background and the values and understandings of the time, amongst these particularly the public understanding of how a girl and a woman should be.

I – the student and writer of this thesis – regard adolescence as perhaps the most interesting stage of human development, and I remember the years in which I myself experienced adolescence as being demanding, exciting and, above all, extremely influenced by the social and cultural context of my time. This study will explore the time of girls' adolescence further, and it will especially focus on the years between 2000 and 2015, a particularly interesting time period in the Western European culture, both in relation to new technological emergences as well as new societal understandings of the individual. Accordingly, David Buckingham notes how this implies "some significant shifts in how identity is constructed and experienced in the contemporary world".[3] This includes a new understanding of productivity and working hours, of the individual in general and the role of women in the midst of all this.

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[1] Giddens, Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, 7.
[2] Buckingham, Introducing Identity, 10.
[3] Ibid, 11.

For instance, neoliberalism as a socio-economic philosophy communicated rising expectations of an individual with a high work ethic, a strong will to pursue personal dreams and extensive consumption patterns. David Harvey argues that neoliberalism actively promotes "strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade"[4], which ultimately leads to an individual that roots toward self-optimisation and consumption. Meanwhile, the neoliberal understanding of the individual was accompanied by a change in the public perception of the woman. Following feminist movements of the late 19th century, postfeminism emerged as a political and public consideration of feminism and the feminine. Instead of criticizing feminine features, it promotes the combination of "neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life [...] with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations".[5] Subsequently, Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that postfeminism presents an understanding of woman and the girl as both remaining in the traditional structures and exceeding them by being self-empowered and consumerist.[6]

In the context of (and inseparable from) neoliberalism and postfeminism, digital technologies came into play. Platforms such as Facebook and YouTube accompanied the teenage girl in the beginning of the 21st century, and it allowed the individual to find other sources of inspiration, of entertainment and of education. To emphasise once more: for the first time, adolescence could also happen in digital spaces! The accompanying changes were noticeable for young people like myself, and one of the interviewees in this study also notes: "Somehow we were just in the transition period from 'childhood without a smartphone' but 'youth then with a smartphone'." (JW, 3:18)

Consequently, media scholars started to pay more interest to the affordances of digital media platforms. Scholars such as Peter Vorderer started to understand the individual as being "permanently online, permanently connected"[7] and Sarah Banet-Weiser, professor of communication, notes that if teenagers are "living online", important processes of identity construction happen through media consumption, too.[8] Hence, it must be emphasised how the introduction of digital platforms changed the opportunities during adolescence and thereby, it changed adolescence itself.

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[4] Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 114. Quoted in: Chun, Habitual New Media, or Updating to Remain (Close to) the Same, 10.
[5] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change, 12.
[6] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube.
[7] Vorderer, Der Mediatisierte Lebenswandel; Permanently Online, Permanently Connected.
[8] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 7.

Based on these circumstances, this study explores the meaning of media during adolescence in more detail and it does so by letting women share their experiences themselves during in-depth interviews. Particularly, I focus on the platform YouTube as one of the first and largest video-based platforms. Founded in 2005, YouTube provides a space in which users can share, watch, comment and like video content. Especially in regards to amateur creators, it provided an opportunity to both share and watch video material, a novelty that blurred the traditional distinction between the producer and the consumer.

Subsequently, women started to upload content, too, and it soon resulted in a new genre of videos – the "beauty group".[9] The genre includes a wide range of videos that focus on beauty topics or the personal lives of the vloggers, such as make-up tutorials, personal talks or daily routines. Here, beauty and lifestyle-related content cannot be dismissed as irrelevant but must be understood as a large influence and market force. Since its emergence, it received much interest by teenage girls and young women as well as the beauty industry – with a rise in "beauty related content views" from five billion views in 2010 to 104 billion views in 2017, according to Statista.[10]

The affordances of the "beauty group" are particularly interesting, as the space in which the content and its reactions circulate is of an almost closed-off character. In it, mainly girls and women upload videos that are, in turn, watched and reviewed by girls. It allows for an independent design of the genre, the address of intimate topics, and the comparison with each other. Here, media research emphasises how its character implies a form of female empowerment on the one hand, and how it, on the other hand, aligns with the understandings of postfeminism. Scholars such as McRobbie and Banet-Weiser argue that it amplifies the understanding of a girl that is self-empowered but consumerist, and all of it in the frame of traditional gender performances.[11] Both aspects have been shared by the interviewees too, and I will discuss them thoroughly in this study.

1.1 Research Aim

Based on the presented context, I aim to explore the meaning of the lifestyle and beauty genre on YouTube and to pay particular attention to how young women consume beauty content and relate to it. This approach is not new, and numerous studies on the subject already exist. Nevertheless, I think that topics such as beauty practices, which are often dismissed in

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[9] Berryman and Kavka, I guess a lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend, 308.
[10] Statista, Annual beauty-related content views on YouTube from 2009 to 2018.
[11] Banet-Weiser, Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube. McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change.

public, need to be researched further – and with a particular focus on the personal stories of the interviewees. I base this approach on the argument in feminist media theory to pay attention to "the trivial; the everyday; the banal".[12] Accordingly, the following will focus on the commonly understood 'trivial' in the sense that it looks at a widespread interest and the thematization of daily activities – in this case the consumption of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content as a meaningful activity in the lives of young girls.

Furthermore, the focus on the first years of the 21st century allows to explore the meaning of YouTube as one of the first digital media platforms that affords a popular and exclusive feminine space, whose meaning in the individual context will be of particular interest.

This being said, this study aims at approaching the topic with an open methodology, one that allows to produce new knowledge based on the stories of the interviewees. It follows the humanistic approach that wishes to "examine the active construction of meanings in people's lives"[13] and aims at giving space to human meaning and human action in research, by being close to human experiences and letting the participants speak freely.[14] Furthermore, feminist media scholars such as McRobbie and van Zoonen stress on the importance to conduct "interviews with actual people rather than just studying texts" and to focus on the active participation of women in media, their production and critical reflection of and with media artefacts instead of their bare consumption.[15] Their arguments provide the foundation of how I approach the research topic – a perspective that seems intuitive regarding the fact that as a woman myself, I would like to hear more female perspectives.

Most importantly, this study aims at exploring the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos in relation to the individuals' context. I follow Hepp and Hasebrink who argue that media content is always linked to other practices (it is "cross-domain").[16] By paying attention to the different contexts in which media content is viewed, its meaning can be better understood and related to general socio-cultural understandings. This being said, rather than emphasising the content or the YouTubers themselves, I will examine the role that these videos play in the lives of young women and how the videos relate to other aspects of their

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[12] McRobbie, Postmodernism and popular culture; van Zoonen, Feminist media studies. Quoted in: Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 45.
[13] Humanism and Humanistic Research, 2.
[14] Ibid, 1.
[15] McRobbie, Postmodernism and popular culture; van Zoonen, Feminist media studies. Quoted in: Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 45.
[16] Hepp and Hasebrink, Kommunikative Figurationen. Ein Konzeptioneller Rahmen Zur Erforschung Kommunikativer Konstruktionsprozesse in Zeiten Tiefgreifender Mediatisierung, 334f.

daily experiences. By approaching the topic from the 'ground up', this study finally aims to find similarities or adjust the ascriptions on a larger cultural scale, and add more insights to the research field.

Based on this approach, I formulated the following research questions:

R1: What meaning do young women attribute to beauty and lifestyle-content on YouTube in relation to their years of adolescence?

R2: How does their meaning relate to their individual context?

R3: In what ways do their perspectives align with, challenge or expand on existent research?

1.2 Methodology

This study applies the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), which allows the interviewees to narrate their experiences freely and with the inclusion of their personal contexts. BNIM was introduced by the social research methodologist Tom Wengraf. It draws on several social research methods such as biographical and narrative, and more notably follows an in-depth hermeneutic approach with its associated research methods.[17] Its aim is to explore the complexity and specificity of lived experiences and "historically situated subjectivity".[18] It assumes that people try to make sense of their lives by telling stories, and that by listening to and interpreting these stories, it is possible to generate more complex and richer information about their personal meanings and emotional experiences.[19] Here, based on interpreting *what* the interviewee told and *how* they told it, the interviewer tries to understand the interviewees' life themes and their "case structure", which in turn helps to understand the different dimensions of YouTube use and allows to relate them to not only existent literature, but also wider social realities and cultural currents.

Using this approach, I conducted five narrative interviews with women between the ages of 20 and 30 who had experienced adolescence during the years when the YouTube beauty and lifestyle genre emerged and grew in popularity. They shared their personal experiences of adolescence and the consumption of beauty content in two subsessions. In the first session, interviewees were asked a "singular question inducing narrative" (SQUIN), which invited them to tell their story about their experiences with YouTube. After a short break, the second

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[17] Roseneil, The Vicissitudes of Post-colonial Citizenship and Belonging in Late Liberalism, 234.

[18] Wengraf, BNIM Short Guide bound with the BNIM Detailed Manual, 39.

[19] Roseneil, The Vicissitudes of Post-colonial Citizenship and Belonging in Late Liberalism, 234.

session followed, in which I picked up on themes that the respondents had shared in the first session and invited them to expand on these themes by asking "topic questions aimed at inducing narrative" (TQUIN).[20] Once the interviews were conducted, they were analysed using the BNIM method of interpretation and the 'Dubrovnik' method of analysis. By sequencing the text and extracting the main themes, I was able to analyse their stories and interpret their 'case structures'. This type of analysis allowed me to interpret the relationship between the case structure of the interviewees and the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content, and thus to understand what the platform actually means in its specific context of use.

That said, the use of a biographical approach is breaking new ground in media research and it has been a challenge to find similar studies in the field. Therefore, this study also aims to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of BNIM in media studies. For this reason, I have formulated a final research question:

> R4: How can biographical methods shed new light on existing research in media studies?

1.3 Relevance

The viewing statistics for beauty content on YouTube underline the importance of the beauty and lifestyle genre, and its exploration increases the understanding of its culture for an entire generation of adolescent women. I argue that YouTube needs to be understood as a highly present platform in terms of important developments during the teenage years, and especially before the expansion of other social media platforms. Exploring its significance also means understanding popular interests and activities, and thus a part of our society. Furthermore, by allowing young women to tell their life stories, this study contributes to the understanding of women's perspectives, whose experiences are often dismissed as irrelevant or stereotyped. The study of beauty, lifestyle, adolescence and the media recognises this importance and helps to understand its affordances in the individual lives of young women. When it comes to media consumption, media studies often focuses on the content itself or its specific use. Everything around it – the life and context of the consumer – is less explored. I think it is precisely this context that needs to be explored. On this basis, the meanings of media content can be better categorised and understood. For this reason, this study approaches media research by including everything beyond the medium and presents an understanding of

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[20] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 2.

media that is closely linked to the different environments of the interviewees. In addition, the integration of biographical approaches into media studies can provide methodological reflections on the advantages and limitations of BNIM for further research projects.

Finally, I must note that due to the limited resources of the interviewer, only a small number of individual narratives could be explored, representing only Western European perspectives. This aspect prevents many personal stories from being captured – at the same time, however, it makes it possible to become so personal in the first place. The limitation of conducting only a few interviews is inherent to the method, and the study must therefore be seen as part of the process of getting more women to share their experiences of media consumption, which will allow for the identification of social currents that can then be discussed in the light of broader sociological diagnoses.[21]

1.4 Findings

Approaching the field with a biographic-narrative interview method has led to findings that both highlight and extend the findings of existing research. The stories of the interviewees turned out to be deeply personal. All interviewees shared intimate details about their family structure and their years of adolescence, and they found the beauty and lifestyle genre on YouTube to be an important companion in relation to the topics of beauty practices, identification processes and the compensation of missed role models. The analysis resulted in three main findings regarding the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content.[22]

Firstly, YouTube played a significant role in connection to the understanding of beauty and the girls' self-appearance. All interviewees shared that they used beauty-related content in order to learn new make-up looks as well as to get inspiration regarding clothing styles. The interviewees also emphasised that the consumption of beauty-related content led to an increased consumption of make-up products and that it amplified the importance of traditional beauty standards – an aspect that the interviewees did not realise when they were young, but only from today's perspective.

Secondly, the beauty vloggers served as meaningful role models during the years of adolescence. All interviewees shared that they felt a feeling of closeness towards the beauty vloggers and they used them as orientation in the field of beauty and lifestyle, whose advice and appearance were copied. Subsequently, the interviewees also described that YouTube

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[21] Note: The limitations of the study will be discussed in more detail in "Reflections and Limitations", see p. 97.
[22] Note: The findings will be explored in more detail and in relation to existent research during the study, and especially in the analysis. See: Analysis II, p. 65.

beauty and lifestyle-related content served as a social activity and a communication topic among the interviewees' peer groups, which emphasises how YouTube beauty and lifestyle-related content affords processes of self-reflexivity and peer group reflections.

Lastly, and most importantly, the biographic approach revealed how YouTube serves as a compensation for missing role models in the personal context. The interviewees shared that beauty and lifestyle videos were watched either to compensate for the lack of a female role model in their personal context, to learn skills and pursue interests not provided by the family, or to reflect and compare insecurities and conflicts in their own family. The last finding highlights the importance of the personal environment and how directly media use is linked to it. In this case, YouTube was used specifically to make up for missing aspects of the girls' family context – and thus took on a very personal role in the interviewees' teenage years.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

During the research and interview process, I acquired a broad theoretical understanding, which allowed me to interpret the stories of the interviewees not only within their personal context but also in relation to the wider theoretical field. In this text, it is important to provide the reader with such framework too. It serves both as an orientation of the general contexts in which the interviewees experienced YouTube consumption as well as a deepening of the themes that the interviewees expanded upon in their narratives. Here, it combines contemporary studies as well as traditional theoretical literature, and explores two dimensions.

Firstly, an introduction to the platform YouTube and its media-related affordances and a more detailed elaboration on the beauty and lifestyle genre will be given. Based on the interviewees' narrations, which emphasised in great detail how beauty vloggers played a significant role during their teenage years, I will use the theoretical part to discuss the significance of beauty vloggers as role models and the importance of YouTube in relation to socialisation and identification processes.

Secondly, and in order to understand the affordances of YouTube beauty-related videos, I will introduce the general understandings of the woman and girlhood in relation to postfeminism that dominated the time in which the interviewees experienced adolescence (in the beginning of the 21st century). Here, critical dimensions will be discussed, too, by presenting the reflections of scholars such as Banet-Weiser and Weare.[23] They explored the critical

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[23] Banet-Weiser, Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube. Weare, Beauty Work a Case Study of Digital Video Production and Postfeminist Practices on YouTube's Icon Network.

affordances of beauty production in digital spaces in relation to the understanding of femininity – an aspect that the interviewees, too, stressed upon during their interview sessions.

Subsequently, I will expand upon the method that is being applied in this study – the biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM). After a brief introduction to the aim, history and structure of BNIM in general, the methodological procedure of this study is explained in more detail, including the interview process and the subsequent analysis as well as its ethical considerations. Additionally, this chapter will thoroughly evaluate the interview process. By reflecting on the interview and analysis process, I aim to both provide a further understanding of YouTube from the perspective of young women and to consider the use of biographical approaches as an interesting addition to media studies.

In chapters five and six, this study will present the analysis of the conducted interviews, and this is the part that was the most exciting to me. In order to provide enough space for the interviewees' stories and their use of beauty and lifestyle content, the analysis is divided in two parts. The first part will introduce the personal context of each interviewee and present their thematic fields and their overall case structure. The findings are based on the first steps of the analysis process, in which both the biographical data as well as the thematic fields of the narratives were analysed in regards to the interviewees' context and case structure. Although it may not seem to have much to do with the meaning of YouTube, it is an important part if one really wants to address the meaning of media from the point of view of the interviewees. Explaining their contexts helped me, and also helps the reader, to "examine the active construction of meanings in people's lives"[24] and to value the individual life stories rather than just studying their text. Thus, its presentation provides an overview of the contexts in which YouTube as a medium was explored, and it forms the basis for the second part. Here, and as the final chapter, the analysis will focus on the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content. It presents the findings which result from the thematic field analysis in relation to the specific meaning of YouTube. They are divided into three main findings, of which the first two discuss the meaning of YouTube in more general terms regarding the importance of beauty and of identification as well as socialisation processes. The last finding revolves around the specific relation between the interviewees' personal context and their use of YouTube content in order to compensate missing family roles and structures. In the analysis chapter, I will hereby discuss the findings and interrelate them to existing literature, which can be read upon in the theoretical framework.

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[24] Humanism and Humanistic Research, 2.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME I: YouTube

2.1 The platform YouTube and its affordances

2.1.1 YouTube as a multi-sided market

Founded in 2005, YouTube has established itself as well-known and heavily used, with more than 2.5 Billion monthly users[25] who collectively watch over one Billion hours of videos every day.[26] According to the introduction of "The YouTube Reader", the platform can be defined in many different ways, which might even be radically different to one another: It could, for instance, be a website or a database, or it could be a video library or a digital archive, in which videos of all lengths and topics can be uploaded and watched by individual users.[27] Regardless of the different definitions, the design of the platform is always the same in structure – and as this study focuses on the consumption of videos by young women, it is especially the user experience that is of matter here. In this regard, similar to other social media platforms, the start page in 2023 suggests a range of videos that are based on the users' channel subscriptions, their created watch lists and videos based on the users' watch history.[28] Further, the viewer can both watch videos right when they are being uploaded, or later, by specifically searching for a topic.[29] Exceeding the affordance of television to bring cinema into the peoples' home[30], YouTube further blurs the distinction between the private and the public. Often, YouTube creators upload videos that show themselves and their personal life and according to Peters and Seier, YouTube serves as "the best example of media in which the self can record and upload the minutest details of their life". [31] Furthermore, Banet-Weiser argues that it is the inclusion of personal topics that affords the combination of privacy and the public:

> "Many YouTube videos, like personal home pages or diaries, are both a public and private performance; public because they are displayed on a globally public social networking site, and private because they can answer the intensely personal question of 'who am I?'"[32]

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[25] Statista, Biggest Social Media Platforms 2023.
[26] Goodrow, "You know what's cool? A billion hours", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube.
[27] Snickars and Vonderau, The YouTube Reader, Introduction, 13.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Thelwall, Lifestyle information from YouTube influencers: Some consumption patterns, 1210.
[30] Creeber, Small Screen Aesthetics: from TV to the Internet, 85.
[31] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube, 187.
[32] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.

The possibility to upload and consume media artefacts that are tightly connected with 'ordinary' real-life activities distinguishes the platform from preceding forms of media such as television or cinema. Previously, the television or the cinema screen separated the viewer and the producer: while the producer was active by creating the content and screening it, the viewer was rather passive by consuming it.[33] Additionally, it was less about authenticity but more about the presentation of constructed video material that ultimately separated the 'ordinary', everyday life from the life on-screen.[34]

Contrarily, YouTube offers a space that explicitly desires the 'ordinary' and invites to break up the separation of production and consumption. Suddenly, the user could be both a producer and a consumer. For this, Weare proposes new terms such as the "prosumer" (producer and consumer) or the "prod-user" (producer and user).[35] This connection evoked new forms of video content and the uniqueness of social media platforms was introduced – spaces for "prosumers" to share, consume, rate and interact at the same time through features such as the comment bar and like/dislike buttons.

The blurriness of the previous dualisms between the creator and the spectator, or the professional and the ordinary, can be seen in the blend of different types of content, too. Here, Andrejevic takes the music industry as an example and shows how YouTube combines a variety of elements and actors until amateur videos mix up with professionally produced content. Based on his example, he defines YouTube as a "hybrid" medium:

> "[O]ne in which familiar music videos and copyrighted movie clips rub shoulders with original user-generated content and with content that combines original material with copyrighted material, such as user-created videos that include popular songs as part of their background or soundtrack, or mashups of copyrighted audio and video material."[36]

The mix of copyrighted material and user-generated content enhances the blend of professional industries and private creators, where both parties actively participate in YouTube's video diversity. The co-existence of the industry and the user[37] can be seen across all genres on YouTube. The platform invites individual users that upload and consume videos, it invites companies to advertise and larger media institutions and producers to extend their reach by offering their content, too.

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[33] Friedberg, The virtual window: from Alberti to Microsoft, 160ff.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 2.
[36] Andrejevic, Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of User-generated Labour, 407.
[37] Snickars and Vonderau, The YouTube Reader, Introduction, 11.

Thus, it may be too simple here to describe YouTube only as either a digital video archive or a website. In order to get an overview of the extent to which users (and here specifically: young girls) are affected and accompanied by YouTube, it must be made clear how multi-layered the platform is. Every genre entails the encounter of the user and producer, of the professional and the amateur, of brands and their advertisements, of a variety of cultural industries. And furthermore, YouTube provides paid content such as movies, exclusive content produced by YouTube as well as an 'advertisement-free' premium subscription.[38]

In line with this, Nieborg and Poell define YouTube as a multi-sided market, well managed by its organisers and algorithmic logics. By introducing the term "platformization", they emphasise how the regulations of digital media platforms are "fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries".[39] The consequence, according to Nieborg and Poell, is the platform dependency of cultural creators – such as YouTubers – and with it a compromised autonomy. Hence, challenged by the power and logic of YouTube's algorithms, "content developers are progressively orienting their production and circulation strategies toward the recommendation, ranking, and other kinds of end-user facing algorithms of major platforms."[40]

Therefore, while YouTube as a multi-sided market affords the interplay of several actors, it also affords that they all work within the platform's logics and structures. The producers face how freedom in theory is challenged by algorithmic restrictions in praxis. While they could upload all they want, it is uncertain if their videos would ever be watched – an aspect that will be the subject of further discussion in relation to the beauty genre (see Ch. 2.2). Subsequently, the producers' platform dependency is also connected to the dependency on the consumer; someone that – based on their algorithmically generated discovery page and personal preferences – chooses to watch a video.[41]

The theoretical understanding of YouTube also demonstrates that as soon as young girls interact on YouTube, they are part of the multi-sided market – even just by watching YouTube videos. The affordances of it become clear in the interviewees' narratives. They include aspects such as the algorithmic influence on their perception of beauty ideals or how the interviewees perceived the marketing of beauty products. In my study, the individual user

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[38] YouTube, YouTube Premium, https://www.youtube.com/premium.
[39] Nieborg and Poell, The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity, 4276.
[40] Ibid, 4280.
[41] The dependency on the algorithmic logics of YouTube, in particular regarding the production of beauty content, will be discussed in more detail in 'Theoretical Frames II', see page 28ff.

will therefore be acknowledged, not only as part of the multi-sided market but as the centre of it.

2.1.2 YouTube as a facilitator of mirroring and reflection processes

In the previous section, I discussed a general understanding of YouTube as a platform and highlighted its complexities and its opportunities. Especially the "user as producer" [42] is key to the concept of YouTube, and the platform even embedded it in its first logo, showing the slogan "Broadcast Yourself". To "broadcast yourself" sounds promising – and although not every user decides to upload videos, too, it must be discussed how the sheer possibility of becoming a producer changes the perception of the self. By communicating that it is "up to you", the platform enhances the options of performing of the formerly passive consumer, and encourages to become an active participant. Naturally, this affordance creates a sense of equality – however equal the platform might actually be. Either way, it *feels* like the distance between the medium and the user is being reduced, as well as the distance between the person that watches and the content that is being watched.

This aspect is vital to the understanding of young girls' consumption of beauty and lifestyle content. In this study, it implies that the interviewees were also given the feeling of being close to the medium and the vloggers, and of not being so different to them. It allows to better compare oneself with what is seen – an aspect that helps to understand the relationship between the platform, the producer and the user from the user's point of view.

Something similar is discussed by Peters and Seier. They argue that the production and consumption of YouTube videos involves various practices of self-staging that reinforce the relationship between the self and media apparatuses, and that it ultimately leads to processes of subjectification – allowing individuals to recognise, analyse and engage with themselves. Peters and Seier explore the process of subjectification through the analysis of "home dance videos" on YouTube, videos in which (often) girls dance their own invented choreographies to popular songs at home and film themselves. Accordingly, the engagement between the user and the media apparatus is comparable to a mirror, in which the users explore, share and construct their identities – both in the act of consuming and producing videos.[43]

Fossati, too, uses the metaphor of a mirror in order to describe the relationship between the user and the platform. Here, YouTube embodies aspects of a "mirror maze*"* and serves as an instant reflection of the consumer: "YouTube reflects you and you reflect (on) YouTube. On

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[42] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network., 2.
[43] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube, 187.

the other side of the mirror, all YouTubers are watching. [...] YouTube is hence a Mirror Maze." [44] When comparing YouTube to a mirror, the concept of 'reflection' often is implied. Similar to looking at a mirror and seeing ones' reflection, YouTube, too, allows the user to reflect upon different forms. Here, Fossati loosely sorts YouTube videos into four different categories, namely 1) reflections, 2) global reflections, 3) (meta) reflections and 4) the mirror paradox.

Reflections, in general terms, include "the YouTuber's reflections of and on themselves, life and everyday trivialities and big issues, special personal moments and global events." [45] Here, reflections are often met with the YouTuber's expression of "individual creativity". [46] And all of these videos, which can simply be trivial activities, can be forms of reflection, argues Fossati, as the gaze of the viewer is always placed behind the mirror of the screen. In tutorials, where the YouTuber uses the camera as a mirror to apply make-up, the screen can sometimes even be quite literally a mirror. [47] Secondly, some of these videos become material for global reflection, where the content is copied or re-uploaded and distributed throughout the community. Thus, they do not solely serve as self-reflections of the YouTuber anymore but allow global expressions. [48] One example, which was also mentioned in the interviews for this study, is beauty videos showing specific make-up tutorials, such as the "smokey eye make up". [49] It has been uploaded many times by various vloggers in the beauty and lifestyle genre, and was therefore spread throughout the community.

Thirdly, reflections can be meta reflections, too, when "YouTubers also reflect on all kinds of other media, and on YouTube itself". [50] This includes videos such as the recorded lecture about YouTube or reflections on movies: "Pulp Fiction in Motion Graphics" and "Matrix Style flipbook animation" are only a few that were ascribed to the category of meta reflections. Lastly, Fossati introduces the fourth category of reflections: The mirror paradox. Here, she describes videos that are endlessly reflecting each other. Often, this happens when videos are being reposted in different versions or when the actions that the video shows are being imitated in different contexts. [51]

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[44] Fossati, YouTube as a Mirror Maze, 458ff.
[45] Ibid, 462.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] A multiplicity of videos can be found when searching "Smokey Eye Make Up"; as an example serves a video by the creator Teni Panosian. It is titled "Brown Smokey Eye Make-Up Tutorial" and received 3,8 Million views, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlOU98MHmWU.
[50] Fossati, YouTube as a Mirror Maze, 462.
[51] Ibid, 462f.

Altogether, the metaphor of YouTube as a mirror shows that videos, through different kinds of reflection, always imply an engagement between the viewer, the producer and the material. It is precisely this engagement that forms the foundation of the study. It regards YouTube as a platform that gives its users the feeling of being active and close, both to the media content and to the vloggers who share it. The resulting interaction between the content and the users, the market and the creators allows for new forms of reflection and personal development, and can thus play an important role in the lives of young people.

Now that we have gone into more detail about the affordances of YouTube as a platform for the user in general, I will focus in more detail on the lifestyle and beauty genre – i.e. the material with which the interviewees were particularly concerned. The stories of the interviewees showed how their engagement also involved processes of reflection, both on the content and on the beauty vlogger as a role model that can be mirrored. In order to interpret the interviewees' stories, the beauty and lifestyle genre is discussed in more detail below.

2.2 The beauty and lifestyle genre on YouTube

Interactive media such as YouTube lead to "collapsing power relations between those who control information and those who consume it".[52] The distinction between creator and producer is blurring – and new forms of participation are emerging. Accordingly, new spaces have emerged in the early 21st century, including the growing interest of girls and women in producing their own content. Genres such as the beauty and lifestyle genre on YouTube have grown especially since 2010[53], allowing girls to create their own 'digital bubble' where they produce, consume and comment on videos in an almost closed, exclusive space. In 2017, which is roughly around the time in which the interviewees were at the end of their teenage years, the beauty genre had 104 billion views, according to Statista[54] and it has become one of the most watched genres on YouTube.[55]

Due to the interactivity that accompanies beauty videos and channels, Berryman and Kavka speak of a community rather than a genre, and they define the "beauty group" as:

> "Consist[ing] predominantly of women aged 14-34 who, either by posting videos themselves or contributing to discussions using YouTube's commenting function, have

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[52] Banet-Weiser, Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube, 21.
[53] Statista, YouTube: Annual Beauty Content Views 2018.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Deane, "YouTube Genre Analysis Article - Catherine Deane - Medium."

fostered a collaborative, knowledge-sharing community about make-up, skincare, hair and nails." [56]

In addition to the women that actively participate in the community, the beauty group also consists of an audience that watches the beauty channels and their videos on a regular basis. Similar to the beauty vloggers, the audience consists predominantly of young women and girls. They do not only watch to be entertained but also to be informed and inspired by the individual YouTuber.[57]

Even if the genre is termed as the "beauty group", it is not strictly bound to beauty related topics. Instead, beauty channels often upload videos that are related to other lifestyle topics, too, such as monologue videos about personal experiences and opinions, the filming of daily routines and activities or the introduction to food and fitness habits.[58] Berryman and Kavka divide this range of videos in two categories: Content videos and vlogs. While content videos "serve to constitute a YouTuber's brand and selling power", vlogs "function instead as video diary entries, documenting the purportedly 'unpolished' and 'unedited' reality of YouTubers' personae and lifestyles".[59] Here, typical content videos are make up- and fashion-tutorials or personal talks, whilst vlogs could show "a day in my life" or a "get ready with me for school".[60]

García-Rapp uses a slightly different approach in defining the different types of beauty and lifestyle content. She pays attention to the purpose of the videos, which results in four categories. By analysing the beauty vlogger *Bubz,* García-Rapp defines her videos as either content-oriented, market-oriented, relational or motivational. While *content-oriented* videos include tutorials such as demonstrations of hairstyles, *market-oriented* videos could be product reviews, *relational videos* could be vlogs and introductions to daily life, and *motivational videos* often deal with advice and thoughts on personal development, relationships or career paths.[61]

Through the regular upload of videos, some vloggers are able to monetize content by means of product placements and advertisement and for YouTubers with more than 10.000 followers

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[56] Berryman and Kavka, 'I Guess A Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend': The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers, 308.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Torjesen, The genre repertoires of Norwegian beauty and lifestyle influencers on Youtube, 170.

[59] Berriman and Thompson, Spectacles of intimacy? Mapping the moral landscape of teenage social media. Smith, Charlie is so 'English'-like: Nationality and the branded celebrity person in the age of YouTube. Quoted in: Berryman and Kavka, 'I Guess A Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend': The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers, 310.

[60] The following links show the variety of videos entitled "a day in my life" and "get ready with me for school": https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=a+day+in+my+life and https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=get+ready+with+me+for+school.

[61] García-Rapp, "My Friend Bubz.", 285.

it is often possible to entirely live off the management and production of their channel and profile.[62] This includes channels such as the British YouTuber Zoe Sugg with more than 4.9 Million subscriptions and the German YouTuber Ischtar Isik with 1.17 Million subscriptions.[63] However, the monetization of one's content is dependent on the visibility and popularity of the channel, and only a small percentage of vloggers reaches the amount of subscriptions that allows them to earn money by uploading videos. Only 3% of the YouTube accounts makes up for 85% of all views,[64] and according to Glatt, "no one small is getting recommended by The Algorithm."[65]

Bishop also emphasises the power of algorithms and argues that YouTube's algorithm controls the visibility by favouring certain types of content over others.[66] By analysing a selection of beauty vloggers, Bishop extracted several algorithmic signals that impact the visibility of the videos. They include key words and tags with which the vloggers categorize their own video, the generated closed capturing text (CC), a software by Google which translates the spoken word and searches for relevant themes in the video, or viewing statistics.[67] Bishop argues that this leads to a clear tendency among female creators to produce beauty and lifestyle content that panders to traditional stereotypes, while female channels in other genres are less visible:

> "I hypothesize that YouTube actively promotes hegemonic, feminized cultural outputs, created by beauty vloggers with significant embodied social and cultural capital. That is to say, for women on YouTube, the algorithm privileges and rewards feminized content deeply entwined with consumption, beauty, fashion, baking, friendships and boyfriends in the vein of the historical bedroom culture of the teenage magazine."[68]

As a result, the "beauty group" is not only shaped by women that upload, comment or watch videos but also by the algorithmic logic that impacts what kind of content channels upload and what videos the female viewers get to see first – the pressure to achieve visibility only in a certain genre automatically results in a homogenisation of the content. For the female viewers, too, it leads to a clear domination of beauty content, an aspect that the interviewees in this study addressed, too. This confirms the popularity of the beauty group during the

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[62] Bishop, Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip, 6.
[63] See: Zoe Sugg via https://www.youtube.com/@ZoeSugg, and Ischtar Isik via https://www.youtube.com/@IschtarIsik.
[64] Baertl, YouTube channels, uploads and views, 16.
[65] Glatt, "We're All Told Not to Put Our Eggs in One Basket": Uncertainty, Precarity and Cross-Platform Labor in the Online Video Influencer Industry, 3862.
[66] Bishop, Anxiety, Panic and Self-optimization, 70ff.
[67] Ibid, 75ff.
[68] Ibid, 69.

interviewees' teenage years and highlights once again the aspect of platformization on YouTube.

2.2.1 The beauty vlogger

The need to make a living from YouTube can be a challenge in the beauty and lifestyle genre. Especially "in a massively crowded field", the creator's trump is "their claim to authenticity".[69] The aim to be as real as possible is noticeable in all social media entertainment, including YouTube channels as well as Instagram and TikTok content.[70] This applies to beauty vlogging, too. Giles emphasises that "YouTubers are more 'authentic' and 'ordinary' than traditional celebrities: so authentic and ordinary that, precisely for these reasons, the word 'celebrity' may be inappropriate."[71] Instead, Marwick proposes the term "microcelebrity" to define the beauty vlogger, especially when referring to smaller YouTube channels.[72] According to Andò, their characteristics are to be "[o]rdinary people who acquire visibility and fame by exploiting online platforms, such as YouTube, which is a space for performing and connecting."[73] Microcelebrities build a high level of intimacy by strengthening their connections with fans through authentic narratives and engaging in relationships with the audience. Here, especially vlogs lead to a high level of authenticity, as they involve a more direct talking to the camera and relate to life experiences. Instead of seeming to be heavily planned or scripted, vlogs enact "both spontaneity and authenticity within the framework of intimate disclosure".[74] Furthermore, based on the categorization by García-Rapp, the highest point of intimacy is in relational and motivational videos, in which the beauty vlogger "talks and advises her viewers with an implicit sense of trust and closeness, much as a friend would do."[75] Subsequently, viewers return this feeling of trust by engaging in the comments section, where they often respond to the video in a similarly positive and intimate way. For example, one user reacted to a video by Ischtar Isik called "emotional moment", in which she shared her insecurities about relationships and her profession as a YouTuber:

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[69] Cunningham and Craig, Being really real on YouTube: authenticity, community and brand culture in social media entertainment, 74.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Giles, The Popularity and Appeal of YouTubers: 'Authenticity' and 'Ordinariness', 131.
[72] Marwick, Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age.
[73] Andò, The Ordinary Celebrity: Italian Young Vloggers and the Definition of Girlhood, 124.
[74] Berryman and Kavka, 'I Guess A Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend': The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers, 310.
[75] García-Rapp, "My Friend Bubz.", 285f.

"Ischtar, you are really incredibly likeable. Every time I see your vlogs I think to myself how can a person I don't even know personally make me so happy. Be it that you are so warm and so honest and encouraging or that we are so similar in the way you think about things. I'm 19 and I've never had a boyfriend either, I've finished my A-levels and I don't really know what I want to do and I'd rather look for videos of Youtubers than think about my life. :D Anyway, thank you for your vlogs/videos...<3"[76]

For viewers in particular, vlogging and the production of beauty and lifestyle content creates a sense of participation in an intimate relationship with the YouTuber, a process that Ferchaud et al. understand as the formation of a parasocial relationship.[77] Consequently, because of their authentic and natural narratives, YouTube vloggers "are easily appropriated and used as symbolic materials in building girlhood identity".[78] This aligns with the general metaphor of YouTube being a mirror in which identity can be explored and constructed, and might even be enhanced through the addressing of beauty and lifestyle related topics.

2.3 Identification processes online

The time in which four of the interviewees experienced adolescence (2008-2018) was accompanied by the emergence of digital platforms. They created new spaces that allowed the interviewees to present themselves, to watch others and to interact in the form of comments, likes and private messages with different actors. This aspect is crucial for this study. For the first time, adolescence was accompanied by the emergence of new content on digital platforms and physical interactions in everyday life. YouTube, a new platform at the time, was also part of the redefinition of the parameters of adolescence and girlhood. The platform and its content expanded the spaces in which processes of identification take place and it produced new forms of female teenage socialisation and identification. Accordingly, Banet-Weiser emphasises the benefits of digital platforms, both in regards of community-building and female empowerment as well as "creative identity-making".[79] If teenagers are "living online", argues Banet-Weiser, it means that part of their everyday life consists of "negotiating power relations and crafting gendered identity" in digital spaces.[80]

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[76] Comment by @Denizt8982, EMOTIONALER MOMENT | IschtarsLife, 23.08.2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWchq0oA0-g. Note that the comment has been translated from German to English.

[77] Ferchaud et al., Parasocial attributes and YouTube personalities: Exploring content trends across the most subscribed YouTube channels.

[78] Andò, The Ordinary Celebrity: Italian Young Vloggers and the Definition of Girlhood, 124.

[79] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 5.

[80] Ibid, 7.

Similarly, the sociologist Anthony Giddens describes this process – the growth of a person, and with it the steady development of one's characteristics – as the "project of the self".[81] In his work, he focuses particularly on adolescence as a key stage during the project in which social disciplines and the creation of one's look are being shaped. He, too, argues that the "project of the self" can now also take place on YouTube. And, finally, Peters and Seier emphasise that the teenagers' constant practice of new social disciplines and the modification of their appearance are not only being corrected by a "mirror or a friend" but can now "also be a YouTube video".[82] YouTube offers a breeding ground for crafting identity by providing girls a space to present themselves, to receive feedback from a multitude of other girls and to 'learn' other ways of presenting, styling, dressing, eating and living by watching YouTube videos related to these topics.

I will explore in the later analysis how significant this has been for the interviewees. Here serves first a look at a video by German YouTuber Ischtar Isik called 'beauty day routine', which is a good example of how creators and viewers interact and influence each other through a constant exchange of output and input. In 2014, the German YouTuber Ischtar Isik uploaded a video of herself showing her beauty routines, including a thorough cleansing of the facial skin and an extensive bath.[83] The video has been watched 750.000 times, and several accounts commented that they were inspired by her to also do a "beauty night":

"*Really great video Ischtar_you can really tell you put effort into it <3 I'm doing a beauty day tomorrow too, because of your video :D <3"*[84] Subsequently, other girls – including the creator of the video – read the comments, which potentially leads to more girls including the displayed activities in their daily routines and to the creator producing more content of this kind.

Similar to Giddens' understanding, Sarah Weber and Claudia Mitchell understand the interactions in youth online productions as self-reflexive.[85] Accordingly, the productions form a space in which upload, consumption and reaction circulate within the same audience group: "media made by youth are also viewed by those youth".[86] In regards to identification

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[81] Giddens, Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, 7.
[82] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube, 199.
[83] Ischtar Isik, "BEAUTY DAY ROUTINE – Wellness Für Zuhause."
[84] Comment by Cakepopsx3907, Ischtar Isik, "BEAUTY DAY ROUTINE – Wellness Für Zuhause." Note: The comment has been translated from German to English.
[85] Weber and Mitchell, Imaging, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies, 27.
[86] Ibid.

processes, it demonstrates "a conscious looking", argue Weber and Mitchell, "not only at their production (themselves), but how others are looking at their production".[87]

Furthermore, Peters and Seier elaborate on the notion of self-reflexivity and add the aspect of "self-referentiality". By exploring the genre of "home dance-videos" on YouTube they argue that:

> "[I]n forming an intersection of physical practices, self-relations and media techniques, the home-dance videos can be understood as an 'automediated' practice that not only represents a model of the self, but generates and multiplies self-referentialities."[88]

Through quoted pictures, gestures and poses, already existing forms of subjectification are being picked up on YouTube again and shift in their repetition.[89] The return of forms and its change can be seen in other genres, too, and it is especially apparent when the self is in the centre of the video.

The "project of the self" is therefore expanded by processes online – both by processes of self-reflexivity, where the same audience presents and reviews itself in the same space, and self-referentiality, where the self also refers to other forms of subjectification and other, former practices of the self. Thus, identification processes in online spaces such as YouTube can be described as a negotiation of the self by comparing, referencing and looking at the content of others.

It is precisely this "back and forth", the constant changing of the self through digital impressions, that is so exciting in this study. By letting the interviewees speak for themselves, theoretical constructs such as processes of self-reflectivity and self-referentiality are often reinforced, but just as often told differently than might have been expected from existing academic work. In any case, it is an opportunity to explore what YouTube in relation to the "project of the self" means to the interviewees. The individual context is also of interest here, and particularly the question of what backgrounds and motivations led the women to watch beauty and lifestyle videos. These can certainly be different, as Thelwall argues: "different people may consume the same resource (e.g. lifestyle magazine, YouTube channel) with a different mix of entertainment and active scanning motivations".[90]

Therefore, this framework argues that teenage girls' identity formation processes now take place in interactive, digital spaces. However, what the digital space looks like and what it

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube, 201.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Thelwall, Lifestyle information from YouTube influencers: Some consumption patterns, 1212.

means may differ from girl to girl. Giddens argues that it is necessary here to include all forms of interaction when thinking about female identity construction, whether they take place in online or offline spaces, or with different people, institutions or content. Identity formation is not an isolated activity but situated "in a media and cultural context that involves a dynamic between the self and others".[91]

In this study, I want to let young women themselves have their say in order to better find out what role YouTube videos played in their specific context and how they experienced adolescence through and with YouTube beauty and lifestyle content. The theoretical basis offers an interpretative framework and a comparative value.

2.4 Socialisation processes online

By now, I have explored how YouTube affords teenage girls a space to self-reflect and to form their identity. In this section, I will focus on the aspect that this is a process that is heavily based on the interactive dynamics of the platform – the sociality of it all. Here, YouTube allows teenagers to connect and to communicate with others, and by doing so, the platform often serves as a space in which communities emerge and role models are being found. Similar dynamics can be found in the beauty and lifestyle genre, and teenagers follow the videos of beauty vloggers both to self-reflect and to find like-minded others. Balleys et al. draw here on the notion of the "significant other" that was first introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1991).[92] Accordingly, teenagers' socialisation processes include finding new significant others. Significant others truly are significant to the individual, especially in adolescent years: they give meaning to the world, symbolize identification models and recognize the legitimacy of individuals. Until the teenage phase, the child's first agents are the family and parents. However, in order to gain autonomy, teenagers need to seek out to search new significant others.[93]

What has changed for teenagers through YouTube is *where* these role models can now be found, and the interviewees in this study also spoke at length about the vloggers as role models, as ideals they followed and trusted during their teenage years. This also means that digital figures now play an important role in the development of the self. Balleys et al. explain why YouTube is so well suited for finding role models. Their findings include, among others, that teenage vlogs are based on an eminently dialogical format which themes the outlines of a

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[91] Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, 7.
[92] Berger and Luckmann, The social construction of reality, 151. Quoted in: Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, 2.
[93] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, 2.

shared intimacy, and which often shares an assumed experience with a specific audience. Often, videos pick up on topics that apply to many teenage girls, ranging from videos in which the YouTuber opens up about her/his first time falling in love, her/his shopping habits or a 'haul' on what things to take on the first day of school after the summer holidays.[94] There is a sense of belonging and connection in these vlogs, and this is reinforced by the fact that viewers are regularly addressed.

Here, the search of social recognition correlates with the process of building shared identities. The findings of Balleys et al. are also confirmed by Thelwall.[95] Through the analysis of UK female lifestyle influencers and the users' viewing patterns, he argues that it is the informality of YouTube that makes it so appealing for young girls to seek advice here. The "chatty setting" – a YouTuber sits in front of the camera and talks about her relationship – results in a feeling of intimacy and privacy, in which teenage girls feel safe to ask for lifestyle advice or intimate information.[96]

The aspect of addressing the viewer is important here, because despite the obvious aspect that the vlogger does not even see the teenage girl in front of the screen, it evokes exactly that: a feeling of being seen and the message: "I am there for you" – although the "there" in the literal sense cannot actually apply.

As a further reason that emphasises the importance of the vlogger as a role model, Balleys et al. suggest that YouTubers might be able to provide more targeted information and practical advice on a variety of topics than the own friends circle. By offering their advice and experiences, and showing a (often very personal) glimpse into their world, YouTubers do not only serve as 'living information sources' but more so as role models and friends. By watching others in their daily routines and lives, the viewers find role models and develop social rules.[97]

And so, following a YouTuber does ultimately mean to follow a group of like-minded peers and – above all – connecting with someone that one feels to belong with. Often, this attachment is formed with multiple YouTube channels, as girls tend to watch different YouTubers. It aligns with the empowering function that YouTube affords: girls are allowed to choose and watch as many videos as they like, and when combined with algorithmic suggestions of other videos on the side, the duration and variety of video consumption becomes even more intense.

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[94] Note: A haul refers to videos that show, test or recommend various purchased products.
[95] Thelwall, Lifestyle Information from YouTube Influencers: some consumption patterns.
[96] Ibid, 1212.
[97] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, 1.

Exemplarily, García-Rapp analysed the relationship between the beauty vlogger "Bubz" and her viewers and explored how "[m]any viewers consider Bubz a positive influence in their lives – a 'role model' – and express admiration towards her."[98] Comments that include this admiration are as follows, and are often linked to a sense of identity work: *"ive been watching bubz for more than 10 years. She feels like a big sis"* [99] or *"I can still remember Chubbi amd Domo as puppies. It's been that long. We literally grew up with you, Lindi <3"*[100]

The attachment to YouTubers has to do with both the content they put forward and the format they use in the videos.[101] Especially through vlogs, YouTubers "give viewers the feeling of being connected not to a video but to a friend".[102] The YouTuber Bubz, for instance, uploaded both videos that focused on beauty (they were mostly market-oriented and content-oriented) and videos that focused on herself and her advice. García-Rapp argues that especially the latter leads to a higher attachment to Bubz as a YouTuber: "this is why her role as a trusted friend and advisor is rendered more relevant through these videos".[103]

In addition, the videos are a factor in viewers changing their lives and habits, serving as "self-development guidelines for 'being happier' and 'growing as a person'".[104] And so: "Bubz turns from a stranger to a skilled guru who teaches useful beauty techniques, to a friend who shares her daily life and stories. At the same time, viewers turn from random viewers to loyal subscribers and fans."[105]

This attachment implies that digital role models have a direct and strong influence on the everyday lives and feelings of teenagers – despite the fact that the vloggers have usually never seen their viewers and have no direct connection to their personal context. It must therefore be understood that this relationship is different from relationships with physical role models and that YouTubers convey other qualities and affordances in addition to their role model function. Consequently, there are also critical voices from the fields of media and social science: The admiration and copying of YouTube channels and their content have negative consequences, too. In this respect, Latzer et al. explored disordered eating and media

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[98] García-Rapp, "My Friend Bubz.", 288.
[99] Comment by the viewer fleivinha on a video by the YouTuber "bubzbeauty", named "Emotional Catch Up. How We Met.", published on 23.02.2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBRBLqr4SZg.
[100] Comment by the viewer notsoearnesthemingway582 on a video by the YouTuber "bubzbeauty", named "Emotional Catch Up. How We Met.", published on 23.02.2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBRBLqr4SZg.
[101] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, 7.
[102] Lange, Videos of affinity on YouTube, 83.
[103] García-Rapp, "My Friend Bubz.", 289.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid, 291.

exposure among adolescent girls.[106] Their findings include that higher media exposure, especially with platforms like YouTube and Facebook, correlates with higher levels of disordered eating and that a lower sense of empowerment in girls correlates with less parental involvement.[107] Furthermore, media messages advertising thinness "have been found to be more influential than both family and friends in the development of negative body image." [108] Therefore, YouTube channels and microcelebrities such as beauty vloggers have a significant impact in terms of the girls' identification and socialisation and the sense of "shared intimacy" might enhance insecurities, mental health issues and disordered eating behaviours. One characteristic that may help and serve as a buffer is the sense of empowerment, argue Latzer et al.[109] Above all, the family environment can give the child more self-confidence through affection and affirmation, and tools to reflect critically on media messages. The resulting increased sense of empowerment correlates with a healthier body image and lower levels of disordered eating. Thus, by gaining more control within ones' environment, the individual gains ability to withstand and critically understand and analyse social and peer pressure.[110]

This chapter aims to show how YouTube and the beauty genre can be understood in this study. Perhaps the most important finding, however, is the importance of the platform, and the research on the beauty genre in particular highlights how YouTube is inextricably linked to young girls' growing up. The integration of a digital platform into the important period of adolescence is exciting – especially for young girls, who at this stage are deeply engaged with the gendered role models that society sets for them. What it means to grow up with YouTube as well as with a socially imposed understanding of women is also a topic in the personal stories of the interviewees. They are in line with important findings and critiques in the field of feminist media studies, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

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[106] Latzer et al., Disordered eating and media exposure among adolescent girls: The role of parental involvement and sense of empowerment.
[107] Ibid, 375.
[108] Ibid, 377.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 385.

3. THEORETICAL FRAME II: Feminist media theory and its approaches

Feminist theory is multi-layered, and the understandings of different feminist cultural movements are as varied and diverse. During the time that the YouTube beauty and lifestyle genre emerged and in which the interviewees experienced adulthood and media culture, it was especially postfeminism as a theoretical concept that was discussed. Many feminist scholars have devoted themselves to the discussion of postfeminism, among them McRobbie, Tasker and Negra or Banet-Weiser. Accordingly, postfeminism is understood as a cultural, capitalistic and political reaction to feminism and it communicated womanhood and girlhood as the combination of "empowerment and consumerism"[111] – especially in and through media. The following section is dedicated to this concept, as many of the characteristics attributed to postfeminism can be found and reflected in the beauty and lifestyle genre. Video formats such as 'Hauls' or 'Make-Up-Tutorials' serve as good examples that encourage the combination of empowerment and consumerism, and they were watched frequently by the interviewees.

I understand that through the presence of postfeminist themes in beauty-related videos, such themes may have shaped the media consumption of the interviewees and influenced their understanding of the self. The following may therefore be read as an introduction to postfeminism and the understanding of femininity during the beginning of the 21st century. Subsequently, I will also introduce critical reflections of digital platforms such as YouTube in relation to postfeminist understandings – an aspect that showed to be very relevant in the interview analyses. Discussing postfeminism as a theoretical concept and its critiques therefore helps to understand the beliefs that surrounded and guided young women during adolescence, and it helps to better understand the different meanings of the beauty and lifestyle genre.

3.1 What is postfeminism?

Postfeminism as a "social and cultural space" emerged during the 1990s and the early 21st century and it re-defined the public understanding of the woman. According to McRobbie, the

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[111] Hollows and Moseley, Feminism in Popular Culture; McRobbie, The Aftermath; Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Quoted in: Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 3.

general public started to engage with the claims of feminist movements, "and to an extent incorporated [them] across civil society in institutional practices, in education, in the work environment, and in the media".[112] The woman was promoted as empowered and being allowed to have the freedom of choice, sexuality and action. Therefore, the postfeminist space is mostly a political and social response by Western governments and corporations to feminist values, and they brought forward 'modern' ideas of women and girls.[113] However, feminist media scholars argue that the reconsideration of the woman by the public is not to be mistaken as the 'success of feminism'. On the contrary, McRobbie points out that it seems like the Western governments took up these values in order to make sure feminism *does not re-emerge*. Accordingly, it resulted in a silencing of feminist criticism and, instead, a more vocal promotion of traditional gender attributes.[114]

The shift in the communication and understanding of the woman can be clearly seen in media artefacts, too, and especially in visual media that emerged during the beginning of the 21st century. Some of the most popular examples when referring to postfeminist media are the television series *Sex and the City (1998-2004)*, which emphasises shopping as an essential female hobby; or *Bridget Jones' Diary (2001),* in which the protagonist Bridget is financially independent but still fears that she will never end up with a man by her side.[115] Such examples imply the celebration of traditional gender attributes, and they underline the link between self-empowerment and female stereotypes.[116]

During postfeminism, media started to take girlhood stronger into account, too. According to Projansky, "American pop culture has documented an increased focus on girls and girlhood, marking the present and the recent past as a particularly intense and sustained 'moment of cultural obsession'".[117] Although Projansky focused on American film culture, it can be noted that other countries, too, paid particular focus on the presentation of girlhood. The German film culture (i.e. the film culture that the interviewees in my study primarily experienced) produced various movies in the beginning of the 21st century that displayed girlhood and teenage adolescence. Examples that experienced great popularity among girls and teenagers are "*Die Wilden Hühner"* (Wild Chicks) in book and film format, the film based on the

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[112] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change, 15.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Starr, Sex and the City. Maguire, Bridget Jones's Diary.
[116] Hollows and Moseley, Feminism in Popular Culture; McRobbie, The Aftermath; Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Referred to by: Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 3.
[117] Projansky, Mass magazine cover girls: Some reflections on postfeminist girls and postfeminist daughters, 41.

British Enid Blyton-story "*Hanni & Nanni*" or the film *"Freche Mädchen"*. Here, postmillennial media culture connotated girlhood with 'girl power', a term that the Cambridge dictionary describes as "feminine fun and female friendship".[118] This aligns with the postfeminist understanding of femininity, too, argues Projansky: "There has been a shift in how girlhood is presented in cinema. It is now often presented as "Girl Power". Meanwhile, feminism has changed. It is now not necessarily "anti-feminine and anti-popular" but rather 'feminist and feminine characteristics can be blended in a new, improved mix'."[119] Again, such themes can be found in German media culture, where the movies mentioned above often include girl groups that experience first attempts with make-up, first loves, insecurities or fun adventures *together,* which emphasises female power and fellowship.

Aligned with the general postfeminist embrace of feminine characteristics, 'Girl Power', too, responds to "long-standing feminist critiques of gender that define femininity as a patriarchal marker of female powerlessness and oppression."[120] Hence, girlhood and the ethos of "Girl Power" can be understood as a recognition of the postfeminist claim that women are both empowered and embracing traditional feminine stereotypes. This dualism – the celebration of both self-empowerment and femininity – is seen to be the key to the "tidal wave of celebratory post-feminism as though to say 'thank goodness, girls can be girls again, that time of dourness and censoriousness is over'".[121] Thus, McRobbie argues that postfeminist culture does not solely promote feminist claims but entangles them with patriarchal beliefs, in order to transport the public understanding that "feminism is no longer needed". [122]

I must emphasise that the interviewees in this study grew up with exactly this understanding, which conveyed "thank god, girls can be girls again". [123] As will be critically discussed later in feminist media theory, this ethos is also evident on digital platforms. The popularity and design of the beauty genre on YouTube reinforces this understanding and can be understood as a reflection of "girl power". Accordingly, the interviewees experienced the genre with a clear focus on women's appearance and related issues such as make-up, clothing and shopping trips.

The postfeminist definition of the woman is additionally connected to the emergence of neoliberalism. In her work *"Habitual New Media, or Updating to Remain (Close to) the*

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[118] "Girlhood." 2022. Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed November 30.
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/girlhood.

[119] Projansky, Mass magazine cover girls: Some reflections on postfeminist girls and postfeminist daughters, 77.

[120] Gwynne, Contesting feminisms, commercial femininities and the fashioning of adolescent girlhood in Wild Child (2008), 78.

[121] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change, 8.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

Same", Wendy Chun quotes David Harvey on the definition of neoliberalism. Accordingly, neoliberalism proposes the importance of "strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade"[124], which ultimately leads to an individual that tends towards self-optimization and consumption. The connection between the postfeminist understanding and the neoliberal understanding of the subject affords the key understanding of the woman during that time. Tasker and Negra argue that postfeminism is "anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self".[125] Align with processes of individualisation – "the diary, the life-plan, the career pathway"[126] – postfeminism commodifies "feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer".[127] Furthermore, "this formulation tends to confuse self-interest with individuality and elevates consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social ills and discontents".[128] Concludingly, the beginning of the 21st century, in which the interviewees grew up, normalised the combination of postfeminist and neoliberalist understandings of women, which results in the appeal to be self-empowered by consumption practices, which leads to a reproduction of traditional beauty standards and beliefs.

3.2 Female empowerment in digital space

Added to this is now the digital space, and it is important to look more closely at how postfeminist understandings are taken up or changed there – after all, the core of this study is the meaning of YouTube as a digital platform in the context of the interviewees.
In this regard, feminist media theory discusses how the digital space reinforces the understanding of women as empowered consumers. Here, the provision of more space can be understood as an additional form of empowerment. Whereas in public space, women are used to minimize themselves – such as by crossing legs in public transport – the web allows woman to create, steer and realize herself.[129] And therefore, the "contemporary interactive subject [...] realizes her individual empowerment through and within the flexible, open architecture of online spaces."[130] This affordance allows the woman to be an active participant, and challenges traditional patriarchal structures. As a concrete example, I highlight the possibility of dealing with personal and intimate issues through the production

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[124] Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 114. Quoted in: Chun, Habitual New Media, or Updating to Remain (Close to) the Same, 10.
[125] Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture, 2.
[126] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change, 19.
[127] Tasker and Negra, Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture, 2.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Young, Throwing like a girl: A phenomenology of feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality.
[130] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 3.

and consumption of YouTube videos. It allows the girl to actively address and deal with topics which may be publicly regarded as taboo-topics, such as insecurities regarding one's appearance or sexuality and related changes.

Furthermore, this empowerment applies to the distribution of the gaze, too, where digital spaces challenge social practices such as *the male gaze*. In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Mulvey argues that originally, the patriarchal structure results in the function of the woman as solely being the "signifier for the male other".[131] In visual media, this too leads to a clear distinction between what the male is allowed and what the female is (not). Mulvey states that the pleasure in looking has been split between male/active and female/passive.[132] Thus, the function of the female in visual media is to be looked at – to be the object of the male gaze. Accordingly, "the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly".[133] The notion of female/passive – the one to be looked at – is still present in digital spaces. However, spaces such as YouTube, and specifically the beauty genre challenge this understanding. In a space where almost all producers and spectators within the genre are female, there is practically no male that can gaze. On the contrary: now it is the women themselves who can look. Weare observes that "in the case of beauty content creation, women are both objectifying themselves to be gazed at and acting as gazers themselves, so YouTube affords women an opportunity to spectate."[134] This aligns with the argument of feminist theory that "women are very much doing things with media, not simply having media happen to them".[135] This argument also supports the focus of this paper. It is therefore even more important to look at the extent to which the women have used and understood media for themselves in order to cope in their personal contexts.

By being allowed to gaze, the woman is also able to judge and assess, and all of it happens within a female space that is not much interrupted of male agency. According to Weare, YouTube offers a space where girls "perform normative standards of femininity in front of the camera and then judge each other's brands of femininity by returning the gaze and interacting in the comments section".[136] Here, YouTube might be the first popular visual social media

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[131] Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, 834.
[132] Ibid, 837.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 21.
[135] Ibid, 45.
[136] Ibid, 22.

platform that affords a digital space for women to be *by* themselves, and it feeds into the postfeminist understanding of femininity and womanhood.

3.3 Critical understandings of YouTube beauty production

While Bishop and Glatt criticise the algorithmic pressure on female creators, Banet-Weiser focuses on the general attitudes of the time and argues how their beliefs strongly influence the content on YouTube. Accordingly, YouTube enhances the logics of "freedom, equality, innovation" and "entrepreneurship" – logics that are tightly connected to the neoliberalist understandings.[137] They situate young girls even more in the norms of "hegemonic consumer culture"[138], a culture that emphasises the woman online as a blend of "old gendered stereotypes, such as how a woman's body should look like" and "more progressive ideals such as capability, empowerment, and imagination".[139] This mix introduces the self-branded girl online as a "new category of womanhood"[140], as McRobbie termed it, or in the words of Anita Harris: the "can do-girl".[141] Banet-Weiser describes her as follows:

> "[T]he self-branded girl is encouraged to be self-reliant and empowered, especially within a consumer context. Indeed, she is encouraged to be a product within a neoliberal context; she authorizes herself to be consumed through her own self-production."[142]

Therefore, adolescence is not only about being and developing one's identity, but even more about defining and decorating oneself as a brand: the girl is supposed to produce the best version of herself. YouTube can be seen as an important tool in this process. Here, it is noticeable that often the videos that are most popular thematise beauty, fashion and brand related topics.[143] Subsequently, YouTube is not only an open space for female discourse but ultimately a site for the reflection of traditional topics, which entail first and foremost, beauty and make-up practices. Weare refers to Banet-Weiser and notes: "While the internet seemingly opens up 'space' for female bodies to occupy, the beliefs and values of offline social life are frequently adopted online, such as gender performance (Banet-Weiser, 2011)."[144]

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[137] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 10.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change, 56.
[141] Harris, Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century, 13.
[142] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 10f.
[143] Gwynne, Contesting Feminisms, Commercial Femininities and the Fashioning of Adolescent Girlhood in Wild Child (2008), 79.
[144] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube. Quoted in: Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 44.

The understanding of women is therefore not automatically rethought just because new digital places allow rethinking. Rather, traditional images continue to be conveyed, often with a clear focus on the appearance of women and their bodies. This includes the pressure to wear make-up in order to be socially included or to follow the ideal of the thin body.[145] Practices such as, according to Bordo, "diet, exercise, and, later on, chemicals and surgery aimed at a purely physical transformation"[146] are thus also communicated on YouTube and may lead to a lower self-esteem and higher risk of eating disorders – an aspect that was also briefly addressed in the previous chapter.[147]

Another aspect of criticism is the emphasis on realness in relation to the definition of beauty. Align with YouTube's aim of providing a platform where everyone can share their story and life, women, too, use YouTube to present themselves as "real" as possible – and simultaneously, the act of "being real" is equated to being perceived as both beautiful and achievable. In short: slim and natural is the digitally conveyed ideal image of the woman – however, McRobbie argues that the concept of "the real me" must rather be seen as a constructed idea of femininity instead of reality.[148] Weare concludes that rather than assuming that there is a 'real' version of the self, it must be understood as fluid and constantly shaped by the influences of idealised images of beauty: "In this sense, mainstream feminine beauty is the copy without an original; there is no "real me."[149]

Nevertheless, women "commit to manifesting it".[150] Weare notes how a key trope in the videos and vlogs is *authenticity.* Based on the postmodern understanding, Weare understands YouTube beauty production as "using authenticity as lens on a pre-existing historical social obligation to make one's self fit a "real" (the copy) woman".[151] The aim to be real by using authenticity can also be found in older media such as beauty shows on television and it is always to find "'inner' beauty through self-modification".[152] Similar practices can be found in the way beauty products are being promoted, note Soloaga and Guerrero. Their study of fashion films on YouTube (2016) found that beauty videos, both by individual YouTubers and by brands, aim to "dematerialize products" which then become "a real subjective element

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[145] Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body, 185ff.
[146] Ibid, 185.
[147] Latzer et al., Disordered eating and media exposure among adolescent girls: The role of parental involvement and sense of empowerment, 375.
[148] McRobbie, Postmodernism and popular culture.
[149] McRobbie, Postmodernism and popular culture. Quoted in: Weare, "Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network.", 24.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network., 25.

within their own life and personality".[153] Similar to the paradox of aiming at the "real me", YouTube beauty production entails the claim that the women that upload videos exercise choice, argues Weare, "when they willingly sign up to be "made over" figuratively and literally, a perspective that aligns with contemporary discourses of postfeminism."[154] Accordingly, "acts of beautification are rarely actually empowering"[155] and even if the digital space provides more freedom at first sight, rather, most beauty practices align with the traditional beauty standards. [156]

Based on these critical perspectives, the beauty and lifestyle genre on YouTube can be seen as a reflection of the understanding of women at the time, reinforcing Peters and Seiers' description that YouTube content is "the YouTuber's reflections of and on themselves".[157] Interestingly, the two key characteristics of postfeminist culture – self-empowerment and consumerism – afford a woman that needs to live through paradoxes in order to achieve the status of being self-empowered and consumerist. This applies to the understanding of space – and how much space a woman is able to use on the web – as well as to the understanding of beauty standards and the freedom of choice. In all these categories, the postfeminist understanding of the woman proposes more independency and freedom, when according to scholars such as McRobbie, the possibility of gaining more freedom is only possible by holding on to traditional, more restrictive practices.[158] Accordingly, the understanding of liberty and self-empowerment in the postfeminist context is to be critically examined, especially in combination "with the overarching themes of consumption as key to possessing power and feeling pleasure"[159] and with consideration of algorithmic logics that promote traditionally feminine videos and topics.

I include this critique on the beauty and lifestyle genre here because similar objections were also raised by the interviewees. They, too, experienced the pressure to live up to a certain body ideal and were specifically familiarised with forms of self-optimisation through product recommendations from the YouTubers. Their experiences emphasise that this criticism was not only raised on a theoretical level, but is also based on practical experience. At the same time, the theoretically formulated critiques become more important. Together with the

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[153] Soloaga and Guerrero, Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands, 50.

[154] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network., 23

[155] Ibid, 27.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Fossati, YouTube as a Mirror Maze, 462.

[158] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change.

[159] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network., 26.

introduction to YouTube and the beauty and lifestyle genre, they situate the experiences of the interviewees, to which I will now devote myself in detail in the following chapters.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Concern and approach

Up to this point, an overview of the theoretical framework has been given. It forms the basis for the analysis of the meaning of YouTube in the lived lives of individuals. This approach cannot be carried out quantitatively, nor is it wise to rely solely on a pre-designed interview guide. The interviewer may have a rough idea of what kind of life story the interviewee might have, but if one were to formulate questions entirely based on these ideas, it is likely that the interviewer would not explore the interviewee's actual and personal life story, but rather the aspects that the interviewer is interested in. Minimising limiting interviewing is an important aim of this study. Therefore, the interview method to be used in this study must be open enough to allow the participant to tell their story freely and in their own way, so that it is possible to get closer to the actual meaning and context of YouTube videos in the adolescent lives of the interviewees.

Therefore, this study aims to use a research method that allows the researcher to explore two things: Firstly, the interviewees' individual stories and socio-cultural circumstances, and secondly, their particular relationship with YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos.

The method used in this study is the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), developed by social research methodologist Tom Wengraf. To date, the method has mainly been used in historical and biographical research, with little use in media and screen studies. However, as it allows for in-depth exploration of respondents' life stories, it could help here to better understand the meaning of YouTube videos in the specific life contexts in which they have been used. This study uses BNIM in relation to media consumption as it provides an open structure that focuses on exploring personal stories by listening closely to the narratives of the interviewees so as to then refer the findings made using this method back to the existing literature on the topic.

4.2 BNIM as a method

The biographic-narrative interviewing method is part of the field of lightly structured in-depth interviews (LSDIs). It aims at exploring the complexity and specificity of lived experiences and "historically situated subjectivity".[160] Furthermore, it assumes that people try to make sense of their lives by telling stories, and that the "probing for particular incident

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[160] Wengraf, BNIM Short Guide bound with the BNIM Detailed Manual, 39.

narratives" draws out of the interviewee more complex and richer information about their personal meanings and emotional experience.[161]

The narrative approach of BNIM is based on the principle of *Gestalt*, a construct in psychology founded by Max Wertheimer.[162] The principle suggests that it is the form of the whole that needs attention as it is more than solely being the sum of its parts: "[W]e shall need to understand the structure; we shall need to have insight into it. There is then some possibility that the components themselves will be understood".[163] According to Hollway and Jefferson, this assumption can also be seen in the structuralist movement, which "emphasised that meanings could only be understood in relation to a larger whole, whether it be the culture, the sentence or the narrative".[164]

In BNIM, the principle of *Gestalt* means listening to the interviewee and letting them fully shape their narrative. The 'whole', which then becomes the unit for further questions and analysis, does not represent the person in its entirety. Rather, it is all that the person wants to relate to the question that he/she is answering. During the BNIM process, the researcher aims get to know the *Gestalt* of the relationship of the individual with the initiating question. Therefore, instead of the researcher giving too much of a marching order, the interviewee is allowed to frame and tell their story more freely. This leads both to getting to know the individual's life story as it happened and to getting to know what kind of narrative they choose to tell the story in. Letting the individual tell their story is particularly interesting in the context of media consumption, as it introduces the context in which media is used, and it is surprising that BNIM has not been applied more often in media research.

4.2.1 BNIM and its structure

Initially, the method is divided into two or three sessions. The first two sessions are held one after the other, including a short break. If desired, a third session can be held after a longer break of a few days. During the sessions, it is of interest to explore the interviewees' narrative – their life story and how they tell it. According to Wengraf, the design of BNIM aims at "the elicitation and provocation of storytelling, of narration".[165] Hence, all interview sessions aim at inducing narrative; however, there are differences in interactivity between the two sessions. While the first session serves to let the interviewee shape their own narrative –

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[161] Roseneil, The Vicissitudes of Post-colonial Citizenship and Belonging in Late Liberalism, 234.
[162] Hollway and Jefferson, The free association narrative interview method, 306.
[163] Murphy, Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology, 258f.
[164] Hollway and Jefferson, The free association narrative interview method, 307.
[165] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 2.

in other words, to simply let him/her tell his/her story – the second (and third) sessions are more strongly influenced by the interviewer's questions. This is done by asking a *single question aimed at inducing narrative* (SQUIN) [166] in the first session and by asking *topic questions aimed at inducing narrative* (TQUINs) in the second session.[167]

4.2.2 Subsession 1

According to Roseneil, the initial question (SQUIN) aims at letting the participant tell their story in their own way, "without interruption or further guidance".[168] It must encourage the participant to speak freely and create a safe space where the participant feels comfortable and confident to share their personal thoughts and stories. According to Wengraf, the classic form of a SQUIN that aims at inducing a narration of a general life story is as follows:

> "I would like you to tell me your life story, all the events and experiences which were important for you. Start wherever you like. Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for afterwards."[169]

The SQUIN then, hopefully, leads to the interviewee telling their life story. This might last five minutes or three hours. Here, based on the principle of *Gestalt*, it is crucial that the interviewee can develop their personal narration without too much intervention of the interviewer. Wengraf argues, too, that "[a]n interview that is 'run' by the interviewer turns into a too strongly structured and controlled pedagogic interrogation."[170] Instead of intervening thematically, the interviewer can support the narrative flow with gestures and sounds such as nodding or saying "yes". At the same time, the interviewer notes down the topics and key words that are said. The note sheet serves as a preparation for the second subsession, in which the interviewer delves deeper into specific aspects of the interview. After introducing the SQUIN and listening to the interviewee, the session ends. Here, it is crucial that the interviewee "indicates clearly that they have no more to say".[171] Under no circumstances does the interviewer end subsession one, but it is possible to check with the interviewee after a long break if they would like to add anything. Once the initial narrative has been completed, there is a break during which the interviewer can check his or her notes and make a note of any topics on which he or she would like to provoke further narrative.

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[166] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 2.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Roseneil, The Vicissitudes of Post-colonial Citizenship and Belonging in Late Liberalism, 234.
[169] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 10f.
[170] Ibid, 5.
[171] Ibid, 11.

4.2.3 Subsession 2

The second subsession is based on the story told in the first session and aims to explore some of the themes in more detail. It therefore involves a greater involvement of the interviewer. The follow-up questions allow a better understanding of the interviewee's life and narrative flow. Therefore, during the second session it is still crucial to try to ask narrative inducing questions, such as *"Could you tell me more about the time when you (...)?"* or *"How did this happen in particular?"*

Most of the questions the interviewer asks in the second session are based on the notes taken in the first session. The key here is to follow the structure that the interviewee narrated. The questions asked in the second session must be asked in the order of the interviewee's narrative in the first session.[172] Wengraf emphasises further: "Topics might be missed out BUT an earlier topic cannot be raised once a later one has been addressed".[173] In addition, topics that show similarities but were raised at different points in the interview should not be combined into one question – as a topic introduced by the interviewee is specifically placed in the context in which it was talked about, it may have been associated with different forms than it was at a later point in the interview and therefore have a different meaning.

In addition to asking questions prepared during the break, it is also possible to ask follow-up questions if a topic discussed by the interviewee in the second session invites more questions and deeper narratives.

Subsession two ends when the interviewer has finished going through the pre-formulated and emergent questions in the correct order and the interviewee has said as much as he or she wanted to. Again, it is important to let the interviewee decide if he or she wants to end the interview. In general, the interviewer should act as a facilitator, allowing the interviewee to develop his/her life story. This requires active listening in both sessions. Only then will the interviewer be able to support and non-directionally guide the interviewee in telling his/her story.

4.2.4 Reflection

Once the interview sessions have ended, it is important to reflect upon the interview process. At best, this happens right after the interview has ended. Here, it is best to note down first impressions of the interview situation, including initial ideas about the topics discussed and feelings about the interaction between the two actors. According to Schorn, "of special

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[172] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 34.
[173] Ibid.

interest is everything that – so to speak – took place 'between' the protagonists", such as "their interaction, atmosphere of conversation dynamics of conversation, specific 'scenes'".[174] The reflection is best written in a free associative flow. Naturally, the reflection is highly subjective and includes the interviewer's personal emotions, as well as perhaps the interviewer's own life story. Similarly, it must be acknowledged that both actors bring – consciously or unconsciously – their personal experiences, cultural and social backgrounds, expectations, hopes, fears and triggers into the interview sessions. Rather than seeing this subjectivity as detrimental to the validity of the study, subjective recognition and reflection must be seen as inevitable in qualitative research. Reflecting on it helps both the researcher and the reader to understand the interpersonal context in which the interview took place and was influenced. Finally, noting down first impressions and ideas about the key elements of the interviewee's narrative facilitates further analysis. They are the first, raw version of the interview interpretation process.

4.3 BNIM in this study

4.3.1 Structure and process

The structure of the Biographic-Narrative Interviewing Method (BNIM) serves as a guide, whilst alterations and simplifications can be made if they do not limit the approach of the study. The following will introduce the structure of this study in more detail.

The interviews that were made followed the multi-session structure, however due to limited time and a framed research topic – the aim is to particularly focus on the meaning and contextualisation of YouTube – I decided to only conduct two subsessions instead of three. This study follows the structure of the first two subsessions. Thus, subsession one was introduced by an initial question – the SQUIN – which was the same for all interviews. After the interviewees were allowed to tell their stories, the first subsession ended with the interviewee indicating that they had finished telling their story. There was then a 15-minute break during which I checked my notes and formulated further questions. In all interview sessions, the second subsession consisted of asking these questions as well as spontaneous questions that arose during the sessions. After session two, I took approximately one hour to reflect on the interview in a process of associative writing.

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[174] Schorn, Das „themenzentrierte Interview". Ein Verfahren zur Entschlüsselung manifester und latenter Aspekte subjektiver Wirklichkeit, Section 2.

4.3.2 The design of the SQUIN

The initial question (SQUIN) must aim at inducing narrative.[175] Further, it must encourage the participant to speak freely in a safe space where the participant feels comfortable and confident to share its personal thoughts and narrative. Based on these aims and the structure of a general SQUIN, the initial question was formulated as the following:

> I am interested in the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos in your life – why you used to – or still – watch them and how they were connected to your daily life. So... I'd like to ask you to tell me everything that comes to mind when you think about your watching of beauty and lifestyle videos on YouTube. You may begin when you saw your first video, or wherever you want, really. You can tell me everything that comes to your mind. There is no wrong topic or answer – I am interested in everything that is important to you. Please take the time you need. I will listen and I won't interrupt.[176]

Whilst subsession one consists only of one initial question, session two includes more participation of the interviewer and allows for the imposing of further questions. In the best case, the interviewer is able to fully draw from the narrative material that the interviewee provided. However, in case the first session did not provide enough material to prepare thematic questions, some questions were prepared in advance. It is important to note that the primary aim was to explore the issues presented by the interviewee in the first subsession. The pre-formulated questions were only used as a back-up and a possible exploration of topics related to the consumption and meaning of YouTube videos in previous research, in case there was enough time and a lack of topics.[177]

4.3.3 Practical information on the interview sessions

All interviews were conducted online, via the video call provider *Zoom*.[178] The conducting of online interviews has both advantages and disadvantages.
Naturally, due to a physical distance and two different locations, it might be more difficult to build an intimate connection with and trust to the interviewee. This makes it more difficult, too, to read the interviewees' reactions and feelings – which limits the possibility of the

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[175] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 2.

[176] During the interview process, only German women were being interviewed. Thus, the initial question was translated to German. The German version can be read upon in the Appendix, p. II.

[177] The follow-up questions are based on the material that was researched in media and youth studies before, and can be read upon in the Appendix, p. II-III.

[178] Zoom Video Communications, "One Platform to Connect | Zoom," Zoom, n.d., https://zoom.us/.

interviewer to react accordingly to what the interviewee indicates. This does not lead to large restrictions in subsession one but could limit the interaction and the free associative flow between both actors in subsession two.

On the other hand, the option of using a video call provider also offers a number of benefits. Especially due to busy and differing schedules of all interviewees, conducting the interviews digitally helps to reach all interview candidates better. In addition, the digital method saves on transport costs and possible booking of the interview venue, as well as saving time. Regarding the interview setting, choosing to conduct the sessions via *Zoom* allows the participant to stay in the place where they feel most comfortable. Besides, as physical interaction is limited, and more physical distance is created by the screen, the interviewee might feel less affected by the presence of the interviewer. This might help the narration to be more free-flowing and introspective, and less influenced by the interviewer.

Especially due to the reason that I, the interviewer, am based in Oslo, Norway and the interviewees are based in Germany, as well as the advantage of saving transportation time and costs, the option of video calling has been chosen.

Lastly, all interviews were audio recorded with an external device. The audio files served as transcription material and for further reflection.

4.3.4 Sampling

The sampling aimed to find women who had watched or were still watching beauty and lifestyle videos on YouTube. As the study wanted to explore their life stories and their relationship with YouTube in depth and to allow for a lot of space for analysis, only a few participants were interviewed. While this does not make the study representative, it allows for a deeper exploration of the topic, which in turn may provide interesting aspects for future research. When conducting a small sample, it is important to think about the characteristics of the participants. Here, the aim was to find five participants who had some aspects in common, as this would allow a better comparison and discussion of the interviewees and their individual, divergent life stories.

Firstly, all participants should be female and between the age of 20 and 30 years. The gender has been chosen due to the specific focus upon beauty and lifestyle videos. Studies show that especially young girls and women watch beauty and lifestyle content, and that its consumptions interrelate – in correlation with other (media) influences – with girls'

perspectives on beauty ideals and stigma.[179] To explore this relationship further was of particular interest in this study. Furthermore, the age was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, women who are now in their 20s and 30s were teenagers and young adults when the YouTube beauty and lifestyle genre developed and grew – many of the first YouTubers of this genre started producing videos during this time. As other social media platforms were not as popular during this time as they are now, the consumption of YouTube videos played a large part in the lives of many of the teenagers. Secondly, this study aims to explore the participants' life stories and how they narrate and make sense of their consumption of YouTube lifestyle and beauty videos. Choosing a sample that is now past their teenage years, but still close enough in age to remember those years well, allows for both detailed information about the topic as well as a reflective view of it.

Within the common characteristic of being between the ages of 20 and 30, it was still of interest to explore potential differences between the participants – both to get a better perspective of the decade being studied, and to explore potential differences in relation to the different years in which the women watched YouTube videos. Therefore, the sampling aimed to interview women of different ages within the ten-year period.

The third characteristic that the study looked for in its participants was the national background of the interviewees. This was because the interviewer also grew up in Germany and speaks the language, which makes it easier to develop trust and understanding of the other person's situation, and because a similar cultural background of the participants (the same nationality) allows for better comparative analyses.

No other characteristics were defined for the respondents. This open approach made it easier to conduct the interviews and to recruit from the personal circle of acquaintances. The interviewer asked close friends if they knew possible participants who met the following characteristics. Altogether, these guidelines led to a total of five participants that were being interviewed, with all of them being German and female between the age of 20 and 30 years. All interviewees were/are consuming YouTube videos, whilst one interviewee also used to upload videos in the beginning of her experience with YouTube. Furthermore, all interviewees have an academic background and have studied or still study at a German university at bachelor and master level. This was not a requirement, however it turned out to be practical as it made the recruiting easier and produced yet another characteristic that the participants have in common.

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[179] Latzer et al., Disordered eating and media exposure among adolescent girls: The role of parental involvement and sense of empowerment.

All interviews took place within six weeks, with approximately one week between each interview. This timetable allowed for a further reflection of each interview, a quick transcription process and enough time to prepare for the next interview.

4.3.5 Transcription

After the interviews were conducted, the recorded audio files were transcribed into text files. This was done using the open-source software *oTranscribe*, which allowed both the audio file and the text document to be edited in the same window.[180] In addition to the ease of use, the files were transcribed manually. This manual transcription allowed a better understanding of the text and a simultaneous revision of the introduced themes and meanings. While Wengraf presents several methods of transcription, including the subdivision of passages according to their subject matter, I chose to simply transcribe everything that was said without further subdivision. The reason for this was both to speed up the transcription of the interview and to produce a transcript that was as close as possible to the original audio file in order to be best prepared for analysis. The final transcript therefore shows what was said, with line numbers and time marks added to facilitate further interpretation of the material.[181]

4.4 Interpretation

According to Wengraf, interpreting BNIM interview material aims at reconstructing "the inter-relation between the lived-through past and the present story in the horizon of future expectations".[182] In short, the analysis constructs a 'structure of the case', which is based on the interpretation of the interviewees' biographical data and their narratives and is applied here with a focus on the meanings of YouTube in the lives of young women. This is achieved by following the general structure of the BNIM, but with some adjustments that allow for a more specific focus on the importance of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content. The structure and its adjustments are explained below.

4.4.1 Coding and analysing the data

All analyses are based on the material that is being collected and produced during the interview process. This includes the audio tape, its transcription, all reflection notes that I wrote during the process, the chronologies of the interviewees' lives and the description of

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[180] OTranscribe, https://otranscribe.com.
[181] The appendix provides three examples of the conducted interview sessions, with one extract of subsession one and two extracts of subsession two. See Appendix, p. III-VIII.
[182] Wengraf, Analysing/Interpreting SQUIN-BNIM Interview Materials: Answers to TQs, 3.

their biographical accounts. Based on this material, the first constructions are made: Firstly, the construction of a biographical data chronology and a brief biographical data analysis serve to provide an overview of the events in the interviewees' lives. Secondly, the text structure sequentialization (TSS) focuses on the interview transcript.[183] It breaks it into smaller sequences by indicating any speaker changes, topic changes or text sort changes (e.g. report, narration or evaluation).

By doing so, the thematic fields of the interviewees' stories can be extracted. Topics that occur often, in great length, with changing text sorts or with a particular connection to YouTube are noted down as thematic fields, and they are analysed later.

The construction of the biographical data and the text sequences provides the researcher with the foundations of the interview – the most important events and topics as well as the associated interview passages. They are then used to analyse the context of the interviewees and their stories about YouTube. This is done in three steps: a thematic field analysis, the construction of the 'case structure' and the interpretation of the meaning of YouTube.

1. *Thematic Field Analysis (TFA).* The thematic field analysis is the core of the study. It pays attention to the thematic fields of each narrative (based on the TSS) and analyses what meaning the interviewees might have ascribed to the topic and how it might be related to other life events, to the watching of YouTube videos and to the life story as a whole. Therefore, the thematic field analysis aims at reconstructing the interviewees' "interpretations of his or her own life, which may go beyond the subject's own intentions".[184]

In this study, the thematic field analysis differs from the traditional interpretation method in BNIM. Instead of working with "hypotheses" that focus on possible consequences of each life event, this study used the Dubrovnik-method of interpreting narrative texts in order to get closer to the meaning of the interviewees' narrations.

The Dubrovnik-method is inspired by the German psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer and developed for use in analysing qualitative empirical textual data.[185] According to Hjort, it is interested in "understanding the connection or interplay between psychological and social relations, as well as how different theoretical perspectives can contribute to this understanding". In combination with a biographic-narrative interview approach, the method

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[183] For an example of a TSS in this study, see Appendix, p. IX.
[184] Rosenthal, Reconstruction of life stories. Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews, 61.
[185] Hollway and Volmerg, Interpretation group method in the Dubrovnik tradition, 2.

serves to understand the meaning of the thematic fields better and relate them to the wider personal context, and ultimately, social and cultural context.

The Dubrovnik-method consists of reading the text, a self-reflection on one's own experiences and reactions to the text, and finally the analysis. By analysing *what* is said, the interpreter pays attention to the content of the text, such as "[w]hich people are involved" or "[w]hich situations occur".[186] By analysing *how* it is said, "the analysis deals more with the linguistic formulations."[187] It includes the choice of words, sentence structure, the use of metaphors and images and if a narrative occurs.[188] Lastly, by analysing *why* it is said, the text is related to its wider context. This includes both "contextual knowledge" and specific topics raised by the interviewee in other sequences, as well as theoretical perspectives.[189]

The analysis of each thematic field and its associated sequences eventually provides a complex picture of the interviewees' narrative, which helps to understand the general 'case structure'.

2. *Construction of a "case-structure".* This step follows the traditional BNIM interpretation method and is based on the results of the analyses. By now, it has been possible to identify the themes that were important to the interviewee, as well as the feelings and meanings attached to these themes and their interrelationship with other topics and the wider context. Now, the analysis focuses on the most significant thematic fields and identifies them as the case structure of the interviewees' narratives. They are characterised by entailing the greatest depth, impact and complexity in the interviewees' narratives. Identifying the main themes and how they are told helps to understand the overall story of the interviewee and their *Gestalt* – "what it's all about" – and it helps to better situate their understanding of YouTube videos.

4. *Interpretation of the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content.* Here, both the thematic fields of the interviewees and the sequences thematising experiences with YouTube are analysed. The aim is to answer the overall research question of the analysis process: *How is the story told and what is the role of YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos in it?* Therefore, the analyses of the sequences focus both on the meaning of YouTube in relation to the case structures of the interviewees, but also on the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content in general. This final step builds on the results of the previous analysis, because only by focussing on the personal stories does it become clear how YouTube is integrated and told in the individual cases. Additionally, by comparing all the narratives, this fourth step also

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[186] Hjort, Dubrovnik method English, 2
[187] Ibid, 3.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.

compares whether the personal ascriptions of meaning differ between the interviewees, how and in what context they differ, and where they have common ascriptions of meaning. The analysis therefore provides a comprehensive picture of the stories and meanings that were told. It interprets each interviewees' personal context and their significant thematic fields, it analyses the meaning of YouTube in the interviewees' case structures and, finally, compares the individual narratives with wider theoretical perspectives.

4.5 Ethical considerations

As the interview sessions focus on personal experiences of the interviewees, it is particularly important to consider the research ethics of this project. They include the transparency of the interview process as well as the consent and the anonymity of the interviewee.

1) *Transparency of the interview process.* It is important to inform the participant as thoroughly as possible of the implications of the interview process. This includes the aim of the interview, the process of storing and processing the data and how private information is being produced. In order to inform the participants, an information letter was formulated, which includes the purpose of the project, the reason for why the person has been asked to participate, what the participation involves, that its participation is voluntary, how the personal data is being used and controlled as well as for how long it will be stored, the participants' rights to withdraw and the people and institution responsible for the project.

2) *Consent of the interviewee.* The participation in the interviews must be voluntary and written consent by the interviewee must be given before the interview starts. This is done by signing the information letter that has been described above and which was also conceived as an "informed consent form".

3) *Anonymity of the interviewee.* All participants have the right to privacy and anonymity. Therefore, personal data will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and the Personal Data Act) and only the student and the project supervisor have had access to the personal data. In addition, all names are changed to ensure as much anonymity as possible. This applies to the names of the interviewees as well as any other individuals mentioned.

Based on these aspects, the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt) has been informed and consent was granted. Therefore, the interview process follows the national research agencies ethical guidelines.

4.6 Methodological Reflections

Exploring the specific use of YouTube in conjunction with a wide, unpredictable range of personal experiences led to an extensive interview and analysis process. The findings reinforce the importance of YouTube videos regarding girls' understanding of beauty and appearance during adolescence, and show that YouTube creators serve as important role models. Finally, the focus on the interviewees' biographies has brought new aspects to light which understand YouTube as a tool for compensating the lack of role models and guidance in the personal environment. These results reinforce that YouTube is not just a platform but an important companion during the "project of the self".

The biographic approach contributed greatly to the fact that so many personal experiences were allowed to be interpreted. In order to properly classify this study, a thorough reflection of the process is necessary. Therefore, before turning to the analysis, I will discuss both the limitations and the (sometimes surprising) advantages of this study – and in doing so, situate this study as a 'work-in-progress', from which future research projects might benefit from.

4.6.1 Interviews

Sampling

Although many women were found who used to or still watch lifestyle and beauty videos on YouTube, few were interested in participating in the process. This may be due to the biographical approach, which involves talking about one's personal life story and often requires a high level of trust and comfort to open up about. As a result, the number of respondents was limited and also quite homogeneous: All interviewees grew up in Germany during the years of 1990-2020. They experienced a politically and financially stable environment and grew up in a culturally educated family. Additionally, all interviewees absolved the highest form of school education in Germany, they were socially integrated and engaged in hobbies outside of school. While this cultural frame allowed for a better comparison between participants, the sample reflects a rather westernised perspective on the consumption of YouTube videos and is less devoted to other nationalities and cultural contexts.[190] However, the selective sample and their cultural overlaps offered to focus in-depth on the personal life stories of each interviewee. It allowed to compare and connect their

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[190] Here it must be considered that DN grew up with a Vietnamese background and therefore certainly picked up a lot from Vietnamese culture – however, since she does not mention this background in her interviews and shares very similar experiences to the other interviewees in all other areas, the Vietnamese context does not play a major role in her story. I therefore also understand DN to be westernised, especially in the period of puberty and teenage years.

understandings of YouTube consumption, and the difference in age helped to cover the years in which the platform emerged and the beauty genre expanded.

The interview sessions

The initial question was based on the general SQUIN introduced by Tom Wengraf [191] and narrowed the scope of the research. Fortunately, the introduction of the SQUIN in the interviews did indeed lead to the introduction of narrative.

However, the length of the first interview session was surprisingly short for me: none of the interviews lasted longer than 15 minutes. Additionally, the answers of the interviewees during subsession one were mostly limited to their experiences with YouTube videos and did not include any other personal life stories. Perhaps the interviewees felt it was more important to provide information about their consumption of YouTube videos than to include their personal context, including their social and cultural environment, in their answers.

Instead, it was subsession two that became deeper and more personal in all the interviews. Here, the interviewees often did not even mention YouTube and their experiences with it – instead they talked about their relationship with family members or their understanding of beauty ideals. Therefore, in contrast to the traditional BNIM approach, the structure as a whole – the *Gestalt* in their stories – only became clear in the second session. I do not see this as a limitation. The stories that the interviewees told over the entire interview run nevertheless provide a rich picture of each interviewee's life during adolescence, their attribution of meaning to YouTube and beauty-related content, and their reflections on these aspects. Here, the decision to conduct the interviews via video calls using *Zoom* may have provided a helpful distance between myself and the interviewee. It allowed the interviewees to be in their private space and to adjust their perspective, which may have given the interviewee a sense of control and therefore a better understanding of the self as a narrator rather than a sole respondent. In addition, I chose to relate to the interviewee's experiences and also to share personal stories about the consumption of YouTube videos.[192] It provided an understanding environment in which the interviewee opened up about personal experiences. Finally, posing intermediate, narrative questions in the second subsession helped the interviewees to orient themselves. Overall, it can be concluded that the structure of BNIM, the role of the interviewer as well as the questions posed led to interview sessions in which the interviewees felt comfortable and trusted the interviewer. Their different life stories and the meanings they

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[191] Wengraf, Preparing Lightly-Structured Depth Interviews: A Design for a BNIM-Type Biographic-Narrative Interview, 2.
[192] An example can be found in the appendix, see p. VIff.

ascribed to YouTube allowed for an in-depth analysis and the construction of different functionalities of YouTube, thanks to the comfortable atmosphere during the interviews.

4.6.2 Analysis

The analysis was carried out according to the guidelines of both the BNIM interpretation method and the Dubrovnik-method. Here, the analysis did not fully follow the suggestions of the traditional BNIM structure. Rather, I used its outline as a framework and adapted it to the context of the study.

Hence, the process followed the BNIM approach to collect the biographical data of the interviewees' personal lives, to structure their interviews and to select the most important thematic fields of their narratives. However, in order to analyse the extracted thematic fields, I followed the Dubrovnik-method instead of the traditional BNIM interpretation, and particularly the suggestion to generate hypotheses was disregarded. In doing so, I placed less emphasis on the possible *consequences* of the interviewees' life events and more on the *meaning* of their stories and the connection to the interviewees' case structure and their consumption of beauty-related content. Of course, this approach broke up the narrative as a whole – and in terms of BNIM, it could be understood as ignoring the overall meaning (Gestalt) of the story. In this study, however, I found that it worked surprisingly well to analyse smaller sections of text, the results of which were then linked to the meanings of other sections to form a case structure. I argue here that it was helpful to supplement the traditional BNIM interpretation with the Dubrovnik-method. It led to an understanding of what, how and why things were said and what the interviewees' stories might mean in relation to their consumption of YouTube videos.

4.6.3 Subjectivity as a driving force and limitation

Subjectivity in the interview process

During the interviews, I decided not only to listen and ask narrative-inducing questions, but also to share my own experiences that relate to the interviewees' narratives.
The reason is that I share several similarities with the interviewees: I am also female and grew up in Germany during a similar time period, I grew up with an academic background and was involved in sports and music, and I regularly watched beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube during adolescence. The similarities gave the interviews a more interactive character, and the introduction of personal experiences blurred the traditional distinction between 'interviewer/asking questions' and 'interviewee/answering questions'. This interview

style contrasts with the traditional BNIM method, which insists that the interviewer should intervene as little as possible. It can be argued that my interventions during the second subsession may have interfered with the interviewee's free narrative flow.[193] However, in this study – with a particular aim to explore the connection of individual contexts with the meaning of media consumption – it showed how sharing my own experiences during the interview sessions had various advantages.

Firstly, a higher level of interaction in the second subsession worked extremely well in terms of the dynamics of the interviews and the topics that were anticipated and narratives that were continued. Furthermore, the involvement helped the interviewee to share personal issues and to engage in subsequent evaluations of the adolescent period. It often led the interviewee to think and reflect on her use and meaning of YouTube. In addition, sharing my own experiences also helped to challenge my pre-formed understandings of YouTube. The interviewees' confirmation or rejection of my experiences helped to unpack the meaning of YouTube in their context – it acted as a corrective and prevented my subjective understanding of YouTube from influencing the interpretation. Finally, I reflected on the interview sessions afterwards, which included an evaluation of my own experience of the interview situations and a reflection on possible triggers or thoughts that were not based on the interviewees' experiences but were based on other, personal experiences.

In conclusion, I found that the combination of relating to the interviewees but allowing them to shape their narrative independently helped the interview process. It led to many in-depth interview segments in which the interviewees talked about issues related to their family, insecurities about their appearance or their experiences with YouTube videos.

Subjectivity during the analysis

This study assumes that the interpretation of the interviewees' narratives is not so much about the objective assessment of the experiences but rather that there must be an intersubjective understanding of what the experience meant. This approach is based on Habermas' discourse theory (*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, 1981).[194] It argues that during communication processes, the actors aim to find a mutual understanding of the content communicated – an "intersubjective truth". In this case, it means that there is no need for an objective interpretation of the content. Rather, the interviewer has to interpret the communicated meaning as closely as possible to the intended meaning of the interviewees' narrations.

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[193] More about *Gestalt,* see Methodology, p. 36ff.
[194] Habermas, Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns.

Here, the similarities between myself and the interviewee proved to be helpful during the interview process. Furthermore, in order to avoid an interpretation that is too much influenced by my own experience, the BNIM guidelines and the Dubrovnik-method were followed thoroughly as well as the feedback and support of the supervisor and other colleagues. Here, in order to capture other thoughts and interpretations, some passages of the interviews were interpreted in interview groups consisting of 2-3 persons – another practice that transformed subjectivity into intersubjectivity. Therefore, the interpretation process did imply a degree of subjectivity, but I must emphasise that it helped to understand the interviewees' contexts and did not influence the interpretation process to the extent that it moved away from the actual meanings and experiences of the interviewees.

4.6.4 BNIM as a method in Media Studies

The biographic-narrative approach was used to find out more about the specific contexts of the interviewees – and subsequently to understand media use according to the personal contexts of the individuals. In retrospect, it can be said that this method worked well to explore the research aims and questions. However, several adjustments have been made to the 'original' BNIM structure, such as the decision to include the Dubrovnik-method in the analysis process. Therefore, it would be wrong to say that this study followed a strictly biographical approach according to the BNIM method. Instead, BNIM was used primarily to capture the context and narrative of the interviewees.

Fortunately, it was precisely this approach – following the general BNIM structure and approaches and modifying the individual steps according to one's own topic – that provided in-depth narratives and new insights. The framing questions of the BNIM method were very helpful in capturing and interpreting the overall case structure of the interviewees. Throughout the process, the focus was on these questions: *What has the interviewee highlighted? What do the themes mean to them? What do they mean in relation to watching YouTube videos?*

Thus, the questions did not focus on the significance of each individual life event, but rather on life themes and their connection to YouTube. Here, the biographic-narrative approach helped to allow the interviewees to express their own thoughts, rather than being biased in what they said.

The advantage of the BNIM method becomes particularly clear in the third part of the analysis. The stories of the interviewees highlight that watching YouTube videos was not only about *what* was watched, but also about *why* it was watched. The fact that certain roles from

personal life were compensated by YouTube was not evident in the passages specifically about YouTube, but rather in the passages in which the interviewees talked about their relationships with family members and friends. Thus, the *why* could be answered by having the interviewees share their biographical context and experiences, and the BNIM method provided new insights that had not been illuminated in the literature. The results are discussed in the following part, the analysis.

5. ANALYSIS I

This chapter forms the first part of the final analysis and it presents each interviewees' case structure. It consists of both the presentation of each interviewee's *context* and the analysis of each interviewee's *thematic fields.*

None of the interviewees placed YouTube in the centre of their narrations – even though YouTube was included in the initial question and all interviewees were aware that the main task was to talk about their experience with beauty and lifestyle vlogs. Instead, especially during subsession two, the thematic fields concerned individual family structures, insecurities during adolescence, or the importance of one's self appearance and look. Based on the findings, I argue that YouTube serves not only as reflection or entertainment, but also as compensation, thereby complementing or countering the main themes of the individual. It means that the meaning of YouTube cannot be understood by itself but only in connection to other experiences. A biographical approach reveals these connections and thus helps to understand the significance of YouTube more comprehensively – also in a societal sense. Here, I emphasise that this chapter does not yet discuss any connections between the interviewees' case structures and the meaning of YouTube. Instead, based on the biographic data analysis and thematic field analysis, this chapter aims to understand the interviewees' underlying 'case structure' in which the meaning of YouTube is embedded. Some patience is therefore required until the connections between YouTube and the personal contexts are addressed, and YouTube again plays a central role in this work. This approach is based on the BNIM method, which emphasises listening to the individual's life story before making assumptions about specific practices. It also follows Hepp and Hasebrink's understanding that media content is always interrelated to other fields (it is "cross-domain"). Media change must therefore be understood not only in terms of media content, but above all in terms of other areas of life and use.[195]

Based on these assumptions, I will now use this chapter to introduce each interviewee and her 'case structure'. The relevance and meaning of YouTube in each case structure as well as passages that discussed YouTube more generally, will be analysed one chapter later.

5.1 Interviewee "JW"

General biographical data

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[195] Hepp and Hasebrink, Kommunikative Figurationen. Ein Konzeptioneller Rahmen Zur Erforschung Kommunikativer Konstruktionsprozesse in Zeiten Tiefgreifender Mediatisierung, 334f.

The first interviewee, JW, was born in 2002 in Germany. She grew up in a suburb close to Karlsruhe, a city in the southwest of Germany with around 300.000 inhabitants. The suburb itself counts around 12.000 inhabitants and accommodates both the primary and secondary school that JW attended, as well as her volleyball club and the most important infrastructure such as a train connection to Karlsruhe, supermarkets, doctors and restaurants.

JW grew up in a traditional German town house, and as part of a family of five: Her mother, who works as a primary school teacher, her father, who works as an engineer, and her two younger sisters, born in 2005 and 2009.

During her childhood and adolescence, JW went to primary and secondary school and graduated in 2020 with the highest German school degree – the "Abitur" that allows their graduates to attend University. Afterwards, JW moved two hours further south to a city called 'Ulm' and began to study Biochemistry – an occupation that she still did during the interviews.

In the interview, JW describes herself as having been ambitious and reliable in school. She received good grades in all of the courses and speaks lightly of her years at school. For example, she reflects:

> "I am usually very reliable and ambitious, I always have been. That is to say, somehow we didn't have that, that getting sick and staying at home, but somehow you were always at school. I also always looked forward to school, so I liked going to school."
> (JW, 4:18)[196]

Another reason that adds to the positive relationship JW had with her time at school was the opportunity to see her friends, and even though JW does not mention her friends often or during emotional or in-depth narrations throughout her interview, she nevertheless gives the impression of having had an existent and stable friends group during her time at school. Exemplarily, she talks about spending time with her friends in the suburban streets or during volleyball training, and together, they would often take the train to Karlsruhe and explore the city or go out for food. In subsession II, JW notes: *"It's really just easy in the village, you walk around, ring the doorbell, ask: 'Yes, do you have time?' And then go rollerblading or something."* (JW, 4:18) In addition to her hobby of playing volleyball and her joy of reading much, JW talks about her years of adolescence as being quite busy and varied:

> "Yes, we were generally just on the road a lot, so I didn't often sit around at home and was bored. I also read a lot, I still read a lot. [...] And we always did a lot on weekends, we had a camper van. And during the weekends and holidays we were often on the road

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[196] The reference is read as follows: (JK, 4:18) = (Pseudonym, quoted page number:total page number)

somehow – in Germany, in some city, saw a lot and visited some castle or other." (JW, 5:18)

Overall, JW presents her surrounding conditions as stable, and based on her biographic data and her narrations of her daily activities and interests, her context can be interpreted as nearly idyllic, safe and educated, with a stable support system of her friends and family and with different activities and experiences outside of school.

Significant Thematic Fields

Although research states that the years of adolescence are significant for finding new role models and for re-orientating oneself towards other peer groups[197], JW barely speaks of significant experiences with her friends or first sexual experiences. Instead, she often places her family in the centre of her narration. Here, JW talks about her family in a variety of textual forms, particularly report, narrative and evaluation, and she mentions her family in relation to several experiences. The themes that she connects to the family concept concern firstly, everything JW experienced regarding the relationship between her parents and secondly, her understanding of her role as the oldest daughter.

One of the main thematic fields that JW shares regards her parents' relationship with each other. During subsession two, she says: "Because with my parents, the relationship is... Well, they're still together, but it's difficult like that." (JW, 11:18) Further, JW describes how her parents would not show any affectionateness towards each other. For example, she cannot remember that they would hold hands or kiss during her years of adolescence, and neither does she see any intimate behaviour between her parents now. The missing intimacy in her parents' relationship affected JW, and she emphasises their difficulties in several passages. In her narrative, JW admits how she missed the tenderness between her mother and father, and how she often thought about that aspect during her teenage years.

Her wish for a more loving relationship between her parents is a central theme of JW's years of adolescence, and a desire for stability can be found throughout her narrations. When I asked, if JW had any expectations for her future when she was a teenager, she answers:

"Mhm, I think five years later would have been the time to finish school. And somehow you already had this image in your head, so yes, you have a plan afterwards, so, you know somehow, somehow they were all so grown up, so big. You know what you're going to do with your life, you're somehow in control. Most of the time, of course, it

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[197] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, Social Media and Society, 2.

was this dream image: In a relationship with someone, like that. Just such a

consolidated, so to speak, already consolidated life that you somehow know what you

want. Um. Not necessarily in terms of looks. Um. But just this life somehow, having a

plan for life." (JW, 6/7:18)

Key words such as "having a plan for life", "in control" or "in a relationship" enhance JW's desire for stability, both in her family and in her occupation. It ties in neatly with her description of her own family structures, in which the lack of a stable relationship between her parents becomes apparent.

In relation to her situation at home, JW often refers to her own role during adolescence. Particularly in relation to her siblings and parents, she describes herself as responsible and protective. For example, in a narrative about a typical family conflict, JW describes how her father often made unfair accusations against her mother, while JW describes how her mother often accepted such accusations and refused to argue back. In these instances, JW talks about wanting to be the mediator of these conflicts and wanting to step into the breach for her mother, which would often end in an argument between JW and her father. She argues:

"But yes, I just stood in between because I didn't want my mum to get the whole thing,

because it's partly unfair or was unfair. And then I couldn't sit down and just do that,

because she let it get to her or she didn't say anything in response, so to speak, and then

I felt responsible to say something or intervene." (JW, 13:18)

Her sense of responsibility is also seen in her relationship with her sisters. JW talks about how she had to reassure her sisters and how she tried to keep any worries about the family away from them:

"And I remember one time my sister kind of asked, 'Are they breaking up now?'

Somehow, when they were arguing. And I thought that was a terrible question, because

I felt so helpless all of a sudden and didn't want them to find out somehow, so I tried to

keep most of it away from them as much as possible." (JW, 13:18)

Perhaps because of her role as a big sister, her parents' harmony and fear of separation was a central issue in JW's life. JW talks about worrying and thinking about her situation a lot – also so that her sisters would not have to worry too much. Subsequently, JW describes her character as responsible and from her stories there is a certain pressure to be the responsible one to support the mother. Therefore, the family construct and JW's designated role within it is the central element of her stories. And although issues such as her experiences at school,

her ideals of beauty and her use of media platforms are also discussed, they do not appear as frequently or with the same intensity as experiences centred on her family.

In conclusion, the narratives involving JW's family show both a desire for a loving relationship between her parents and the resulting desire for stability – both regarding future occupations as well as partnerships and family structures. Finally, they show JW's character during that time: as the responsible protector of her siblings as well as the whole family concept.

5.2 Interviewee "PK"

General biographic data

The second interviewee, PK, was born in 1998 and was 24 years old at the time of the interviews. She grew up in a village near the eastern German city of Chemnitz. Rather rural, PK's childhood was spent in a family of five, socially positioned in the lower middle class. Her parents were pre-school teachers and raised PK and her brothers in a strongly Catholic way. PK is the middle child and the only daughter – an aspect she described as important throughout her narrative. Her older brother was born in 1996 and her younger brother in 2003. PK attended primary and secondary school conventionally, graduating from high school in 2017. She then moved to Leipzig, a city two hours west of Chemnitz, to study dentistry. She graduated in 2022 – which led to her working part-time in a dental practice and part-time in a café during the interview period.

As a teenager, PK took acting classes. She also enjoyed being active and outdoors, especially with her friends. Here she refers to experiences such as city tours during her teenage years, walks through the village and summer days at the local public swimming pool.

Significant Thematic Fields

PK talks about various difficulties and insecurities she experienced during her childhood and adolescence. One thematic area is her relationship with her parents, particularly her mother. She describes how it was difficult to discuss intimate issues, insecurities or problems with her mother, and therefore issues such as sexuality, puberty, menstruation or her first boyfriend were not discussed. PK remembers: "[E]verything that... Um... more modern things and I don't know, also sexuality and all kinds of things, has always been very difficult, so it hasn't really happened." (PK, 21:34)

Instead, her mother would write letters whenever she wanted to address an intimate topic. It emphasises the lack of verbal communication during PK's teenage years, which affected other

fields, too, such as the children's media use. Accordingly, PK's parents were critical of screen-based media, and while the television was accepted in limited doses, the computer was seen as a bad influence. Throughout the interview, PK states how she would often use platforms such as YouTube and Facebook in secret and how she would endlessly watch tv shows when her parents were away.

A second aspect of PK's adolescence that can be seen as disruptive is her time at school. At the age of twelve, PK decided that she wanted to transfer to another secondary school. Her reasons for the change were that she did not feel challenged enough and that she lacked more inspiration and 'input'. The move to a different, larger school was accompanied by a change in her personal life as she and her family moved to a larger house. Although they remained in the same village, PK describes this time as challenging: "I changed schools, we moved, it was kind of a lot. So, somehow, everything was so completely different." (PK, 1:34)

Another difficult period of adolescence that PK refers to in the interviews occurred a little later, when she was about 15 years old. Following a bout of flu during the summer holidays, and having lost some weight, PK developed an eating disorder, much of which revolved around severely restricting her food intake. PK describes this period in great detail, describing both the difficult interactions with her classmates and the exhilaration of refusing a meal:

"Yes, I don't know, and for me the feeling of going to bed kind of hungry was kind of amazing. So then I felt somehow really, really cool, or like: 'Yes, you've done something again'." (PK, 17:34)

In contrast to the detailed descriptions of the development of her eating disorder, PK ends this part of her story abruptly. This was due to a boyfriend she met a year later, who helped her to eat normally again: "And that just, yes, and that was just then, then I got together with [T.] at the end of ninth grade and then it was just gone anyway. Somehow." (PK, 9:34)

Interestingly, PK does not elaborate on *how* T. helped her to recover. By not providing any further explanation, as if his appearance did not need one, PK ascribes a form of power to the character of T. that is similar to the way in which saviour stories are told. This may be related to the views PK experienced within a religious family and it shows how her experiences within the family influenced other areas of PK's teenage years.

Throughout her interviews, PK reflects extensively on her own feelings and choices during her adolescence. Another key theme she mentions is her insecurities, especially from the age of 12, with the big change of school and moving to a new home. She explains: "I think I was a little bit, I think I was actually insecure..." (PK, 1:34) The insecurity she is reflecting on is

also evident in her use of words, such as the repetition of "I think" and the prolongation of the rather simple sentence: "I was insecure". Similarly, PK reflected on her time with an eating disorder: "Yes, I think that was somehow the peak, somehow, of the insecurity with oneself somehow. So... Yeah. Yes." (PK, 17:34)

In many passages, PK refers to different ways of compensating for feelings of insecurity. Interestingly, her methods are always linked to her appearance and self-presentation – both physical and digital. From a young age, PK became aware of her own appearance, a focus that was intensified by frequent validation of her appearance:

> "And so it was often reflected by others, by my surroundings, that I was good-looking and then it probably took over more and more...such a large space somehow from my...how do I define myself personally? Also so... More and more somehow to perfect my appearance, somehow in the sense of method XY or..." (PK, 6:34)

PK describes how she tried different methods of self-optimisation, such as dying her hair, trying different make-up and going shopping. Furthermore, the acts of self-optimisation were accompanied by her acts of self-presentation. As her teenage years aligned with the emergence of *Facebook*, *Schüler VZ*[198] and subsequently *Instagram*, PK started to upload images of herself. She describes feeling validated online as key to her adolescent years. However, she also explains how seeking validation online and through make-up and fashion routines left her confused rather than feeling empowered or confident. She reflects: "Well, I don't think I could have defined myself as a person at all, except that I have cool pictures on Facebook, or I don't know. So you know? It's kind of, kind of really weird." (PK, 6:34)

PK coherently describes how she finds it difficult to make sense of her adolescence. During the interview she wonders 'what she was doing' and often repeats the words 'strange', 'weird' and 'silly' in relation to her experiences. The constant devaluation of her actions and experiences shows how PK actively distances herself from her teenage self. In contrast, she valorises the post-school years as nurturing and empowering. Here PK draws on her interests in travel and crafting, and explains how she refuses to post pictures online or scroll through social media platforms. Even though the complexity and opacity of PK's narration makes it difficult to grasp her feelings and experiences of adolescence, it is her descriptions of insecurities that shape the majority of PK's experiences. While they are often related to her various ways of coping with them, they also reveal her current views. Here, PK shows

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[198] *SchülerVZ* was a German social media platform specifically dedicated to young students on which they could post, connect and chat with friends. The website launched in 2007, however due to a drop in user numbers (competing platforms such as Facebook became more popular), the platform shut down in 2013. Nevertheless, *SchülerVZ* experienced high popularity among teenagers and interviewees such as PK mentioned the platform frequently. More information in German: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/SchülerVZ.

through her choice of words how she does not understand or support her former actions and devaluates herself throughout her narrations:[199]

> "Now, looking back, I also think: What were we actually doing there the whole time? We had nothing to do. You know, we were kind of running around some shops... I don't know what we were doing there. And then we took some weird photos that we put on *SchülerVZ* or something like that. So, it was something quite...strange somehow." (PK, 2)

In combination with a confusing sentence and grammar structure, many filler words and phrases such as "I don't know" or "I think ...", the feeling of insecurity is still apparent in todays' reflection of it. Finally, PK's story shows in which ways her own sense of self has shaped her understanding of beauty, as well as her use of media platforms such as YouTube and it therefore offers a fruitful ground for further interpretation.

5.3 Interviewee "MH"

General biographic data

The third interviewee, MH, was born in 1998 in northern Germany. As her family have been farmers for several generations, MH grew up with her parents, grandparents and two older siblings. Her brother was born in 1996 and her sister, the eldest of the trio, in 1993. Like them, MH attended primary and secondary school in the nearest town, about a fifteen-minute drive away. She graduated in 2016 and decided to travel around Australia. After her return in 2017, MH moved to Leipzig, a city in the eastern part of Germany, and started her studies in Media and Communication. After graduating, she went on to do a Masters in Media Design, which she is still doing today.

At school, MH was attentive and motivated and received good grades in all her classes. During the interview she mentioned that she often felt that she was not challenged enough and that she did not need any support from her parents. Therefore, MH had enough time and capacity to engage in hobbies and social activities outside of school. Her main interest was in music and MH played the trumpet and piano during her time at secondary school. In addition, MH spent her afternoons with her friends, but due to the distance between the different villages, it was often difficult to get together.

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[199] In her interviews, PK shared: „So when you look at it with your adult head, you think to yourself: "Huh? Well, I don't understand what was so cool about it." (PK, 2:34) or „Now, in retrospect, I also think: What were we actually doing there all this time?" (PK, 2:34) or „And that was just really, really bad, so it looked like shit." (PK, 8:34)

Significant Thematic Fields

Two themes stood out during the interviews. The first theme related to MH's role within the family construct, a topic that was discussed in depth by all respondents. The second theme, however, relates to the field of beauty and lifestyle, and only MH as an interviewee openly described beauty routines as a hobby during adolescence. At the age of 12, MH became interested in different methods of applying make-up and learning different hairstyles. She described how she would learn how to do different hairstyles and then practice them with her friends at school. In addition, she would engage in learning different make-up looks by using media platforms such as YouTube – an aspect that will be further explored in Analysis II. It is clear from the narratives that MH paid a great deal of attention to her appearance: "I definitely also always wanted to look nicely done up in the face at least and...um...having my hair done." (MH, 8:25) Her interest in make-up is also socially conditioned. According to MH and the other interviewees, wearing make-up at school was common in their teenage years, and it underlines the social importance of girls' appearance.

MH also describes how her mother emphasised the importance of a slim figure and how both MH and her sister should weigh less: "That me and my sister, this is getting really personal now, also gave me the advice that...we could definitely be thinner." (MH, 21:25) The increased focus on an ideal appearance may have shaped MH's general interest in beauty methods, and the interviews emphasise how the topic of beauty and lifestyle shaped MH's adolescent years as one of the key themes.

MH then refers to her position in the family, which is the second theme that becomes central to her narrative. Interestingly, her narrative about her family is strongly intertwined with her interest in beauty and lifestyle methods. Here she positions herself at a distance from her family and evaluates: "So I was probably a bit of a...um...girly girl who watched make-up videos, who preferred to watch make-up videos than to touch anything outside." (MH, 11:25) Although her mother supported the ideas of fashion and make-up, she was not actively involved in make-up techniques. Instead, her mother worked mostly on the farm, helping with the day-to-day running of the business by cooking and helping around the sheds. Similarly, her older sister preferred to help outside rather than engage with the interests that MH had. The feeling of being different from her surrounding family is one that accompanies subsession II and illustrates the distinction between *them/outside* versus *I/inside*.

Her sense of being different from her family is best understood by MH's description of her relationship with her older sister:

"MH: Well, I have a big sister.

I: Mhm.

MH: But my big sister is not at all in this...she was always a bit...how should I describe it...not more crude, but just had other interests than me. Um...And has this whole thing that maybe...you always think of in Hollywood films, what the big sister teaches you during adolescence, how to put on make-up and how I braid my hair and all kinds of things, my sister just wasn't that." (MH, 6:25)

By pointing out the characteristics that her sister did not have, MH makes it clear what aspects she would have *liked* to see in her older sister. Here, in line with her interest in beauty and lifestyle, MH longed for a sister who could guide her in these areas by teaching her how to apply make-up or style her hair. MH then goes on to explain that her mother did not share her interest in beauty techniques and therefore could not teach MH. MH communicates the lack of a role model during her adolescence, a theme that is central to this time period and her use of media as compensation.

The focus on beauty and lifestyle is underlined by MH's narration of her focus on current trends during her teenage years. She explains how she was likely to absorb make-up or fashion trends, as well as media figures and their content as an ideal for her own routines and looks. On several occasions MH referred to how she always wanted to copy the looks of the YouTubers she watched and how the other girls at school had a strong influence on what MH would wear and apply. Therefore, her strong interest in beauty and lifestyle is closely linked to her school years and adolescence. As a result, MH claims that her interest in beauty diminished when she moved out:

"I think for me it was a very big development, leaving home and moving to a big city, that in itself was a huge development.... And that then in turn transferred to my media consumption, so...do I really want to...or do I think it's good for me at all to put on make-up all the time or is it really necessary to put on make-up or get ready two hours before I go somewhere? Do I really like it or did it only please those where I went, for example to school earlier? Because everyone there did it." (MH, 14:25)

While this aspect will be interpreted in more detail in the following chapter, it underlines here how MH's interest in beauty is closely linked to the influence of her schoolmates and the simultaneous feeling of being different from the rest of the family.

The narrative of a lack of supportive role models during adolescence and an increased awareness of her own appearance shapes MH's case structure and illustrates themes that the other interviewees also agreed with and that will be discussed further in Analysis II.

5.4 Interviewee "DN"

General biographic data

"DN" was born in 1996 and was 26 years old at the time of the interviews. With her parents, who worked as restaurant owners, and a three-year-old younger brother, DN spent her childhood first in the city of "Karlsruhe" and then moved to a smaller village outside the city in 2004. Here she continues her last two years of primary school and then attends secondary school.

DN's parents are both of Vietnamese origin and immigrated to Germany before DN was born. Interestingly, cultural background plays little part in DN's stories. During the interview, DN only says that although she grew up with Vietnamese food culture, she was otherwise strongly influenced by the West – especially because her parents were rarely at home and she grew up a lot with her friends. In the context of her stories about her teenage years, her relationship with her parents and the importance of YouTube, she does not mention her Vietnamese background, and as a result I will make little mention of DN's cultural background in the analysis.

Outside of school, DN played volleyball and gymnastics, and she continued to play sports after graduating from high school in 2014. In 2015, she started studying Sports Science in Tübingen, a city about two hours to the south. After graduating, she moved to Mainz and continued her studies in Sports Management, which she was still doing during the interview. During her time at school, DN took part in several other activities, many of which were voluntary. As well as attending volleyball or gymnastics training several times a week, DN also volunteered as a gymnastics referee. She was also involved in the student council and was a class representative. When DN turned 15, she worked in a bakery and as a waitress during the summer holidays, as well as occasionally helping out in her parents' restaurant. Finally, DN reports that she enjoyed spending time with her friends and mentions that she spent a lot of time with her best friend L., with whom she often stayed overnight.

Significant Thematic Fields

The amount of social and voluntary involvement led to a busy schedule during DN's adolescent years. In subsession II she reflects on how these activities made her feel needed:

> "And then, in retrospect, I think I often liked it, the feeling of being needed. Um, and that was an opportunity where I could get involved. Same at school or somehow, when there were tasks to be done voluntarily. I was kind of up for it." (DN, 5:18)

During the interviews it becomes clear how independent DN has grown up. Her high level of motivation and organisational skills can be seen in the number of activities she is involved in and the decisions she makes after leaving school, such as moving to different cities during her studies. Furthermore, her independence is most evident in the passages where DN talks about her family and her experience of growing up – again, a theme shared by most of the interviewees in their narratives.

DN grew up in a family environment with both her parents and her brother, but she describes that she did not experience a close family relationship with either her brother or her parents. Instead, due to her parents' work in the restaurant, DN spent most of her childhood in the absence of her parents: "But apart from that, I was at home, my brother and I were alone a lot. Because my parents worked a lot and were almost only home on Sundays, so we were actually very free." (DN, 5:18)

She goes on to describe how she would get up for school, prepare her lunch and leave the house all by herself, then do her homework and plan her daily activities independently. Conversely, DN explains how her parents became more trusting and even less directive: "Then I was actually allowed to do what I wanted. And accordingly, I actually always got pocket money and could just spend it as I pleased." (DN, 5:18)

Although DN uses the positively connotated words 'really free' and mentions the possibility of doing whatever she wants, her stories conveys a sense of loneliness and the prevalence of lack of parenthood during her adolescent years. A key aspect of her narrative is the lack of shared experiences and skills, and she states:

> "Because they were never there, I understand that they had to work and wanted us to have a financial basis and that we didn't lack anything. But on the other hand, they were so rarely there that they never got to know us and never knew what we do and how we do it and what we like to do and so on." (DN, 6:18)

She also mentions how they "did not really see anything of our lives". (DN, 5:18) The use of the phrases 'never got to know us' and the repetition of 'what we do' show how DN associates the experiences in a more negative way. DN also makes it clear that the events are in the past. As a result, she adds: "I'm not close with my parents either, like that." (DN, 6:18) Even though her experiences outside the family allow her to better understand the absence of her parents, the longing for a childhood with attentive parents is still present in her narrative, and it is reinforced in the narratives of other experiences that DN shared during the interview session. Later, DN refers to the conflicts she experienced with her parents, and she tells how they mostly took place during her adolescent years. Here DN always tells them in relation to

how her parents did not really know her and how they often misinterpreted situations or misjudged their daughters' abilities and interests. Topics of conflict often included DN's development during adolescence and her use of beauty products, fashion choices or first parties and holidays with friends.

DN describes one conflict in particular in great detail, and it seems to be at the centre of her whole story, almost symbolically reflecting the whole relationship with her parents. In three pages of transcript, DN describes how one morning her mother came up the stairs and into DN's room, something she had not done for years:

> "And suddenly she was awake and came up to my room and saw that I was wearing nail polish. And that wasn't the first time, it happened more often. And then she suddenly freaked out and said that Dad and she didn't think it was good that I was wearing nail polish and why I was doing it and so on, and that I shouldn't attach so much importance to my appearance and shouldn't go around looking so, I don't know, chic and bimbo-like." (DN, 6:18)

The use of the word "suddenly" confirms the intensity of the experience and it is interesting that DN remembers the wording of the conflict very well. She goes on to describe the conflict and how her mother (and her father) then moved on to other issues:

> "And then they somehow, well, that was also a big, big point of contention, but then they somehow started referring to my friends and said that they were just a bad influence for me and that they no longer wanted me to have contact with them and so on. And yes, that's when my world fell apart a bit. Because they were my support, so to speak, outside of school, because my parents weren't there. And [L.] was my best friend at school and that was so unchallenged." (DN, 6/7:18)

The passage reveals important aspects of DN's upbringing and clearly shows how distant her parents and DN grew up. The frightened surprise of her mother waking up and coming upstairs reveals the co-existence she experienced, and although they lived in the same house, it seems to have been 'next to' each other rather than 'with' each other.

It then becomes clear how important support from other social groups has been for DN. She mentions her best friend L. in particular and goes on to describe their relationship in the following passages. Here it becomes clear how DN's best friend L. and her family, especially L.'s mother, would provide a second family for DN's family at home. DN talks in great and positive detail about her experiences in their home and often spent the night there. She describes:

> "We really did everything together. And her mum drove us everywhere and then she picked us up everywhere and somehow she always went shopping with us. And did this and did that and was always there for us, for both of us. And we always made jokes about how she had almost adopted me." (DN, 8:18)

The emphasis of how L.'s mother would support them both in all situations reveals the lack of this that DN experienced in her own family. Finally, the humorous mention of adoption may indicate her underlying desire to have a more loving or even different family.

The role of the mother is also important in other passages. Often DN described the qualities of L.'s mother in detail and with a very positive connotation. In another story, when DN got very drunk at a party, she says:

> "Then I slept at [L.'s] place and [L.'s mother] took care of me, and I just, well.... I expected my parents to be super disappointed and somehow preach to me and stuff. And [L.'s mother] asked me how I was and if I needed anything and how that could happen, if it had any reason." (DN, 8:18)

The lack of a supportive family is conveyed through DN's experiences in L.'s family, and her stories show parallels with Freud's concept of "family romance" – a process by which young children slowly begin to find other explanations (such as "I must be adopted") and romances when their own parents do not meet the child's expectations.[200] Again, DN described her best friend's family as if it were almost her own, while her own family was only mentioned in relation to the theme of lack of relationship. Loneliness and lack of support at home can therefore be seen as the main theme of DN's narrative. Not only did it shape her experience and dominate her narrative, but it also laid the foundations for the formation of strong social bonds and the romanticisation of other families. Her narrative paints a picture of an adolescence in which DN sought validation from outside her family, resulting in a diverse range of skills and experiences as well as strong social bonds.

5.5 Interviewee "JK"

General biographic data

The final interviewee, JK, was born in 1993. She is the oldest of the five interviewees, a significant aspect in terms of her experience with digital media platforms such as YouTube, and will be interpreted in the following chapter.

JK grew up as the daughter of restaurant owners in West Germany. She has two older siblings, an older brother born in 1983 and an older sister born in 1987. As the youngest child,

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[200] Freud, Family Romances, 238.

JK reports that she remembers most fondly her relationship with her sister – a bond that she refers to frequently throughout the interview sessions and which is one of the key themes in JK's case structure.

JK started primary school in 1999 and secondary school in 2003. During this time, her family moved to a smaller town and JK changed schools. She experienced adolescence with her sister as a role model and a group of friends that she formed around the age of 15. This construct of her close friends and her sister forms the key frame of her narrative. During her teenage years, she also attended a 'girls only' gym and went to her first parties and social gatherings. In addition, JK took dance and cheerleading lessons – an interest she also pursued by watching live performances and 'behind the scene'-videos online. In 2012, at the age of 18, JK completed her A-levels and continues to live in the area. She now works as an accountant.

Significant Thematic Fields

In her narrative, JK divides her childhood and adolescence into two phases, with the age of 15 as the turning point. As she describes them, it becomes clear how differently JK remembers the two periods. Both her tone of voice and her description of her personality change, as can be seen in the following passage:

> "In any case, I was a homebody for quite a long time, um, I never wanted to meet up with friends or anything like that, because I was, well, totally weird, but my parents were always away a lot, they were always working a lot and then when I wasn't at home, I always felt quite insecure and was always homesick and felt uncomfortable everywhere, and yes, then slowly, at 15, at 16, that slowly went away and then, exactly, you also met up with friends sometimes. And yes, I was quite light-hearted then. And yes, you didn't think about anything because everything worked out that way. If you think about it today, that you have to take care of the household and all that, you didn't have that back then. I had the whole day to myself, except maybe school, but even that was easy. So how well you were doing then." (JK, 1:27)

The sudden change in tone and wording is striking. In the course of the narrative, she goes from using only negative words, and adding words such as "always" or "everywhere", to recounting only positive experiences, ending with a clear conclusion: "how well you were doing". The shift from insecurity to contentment marks one of her key experiences of adolescence, and it is clear how the second phase in particular – her life after her 15th birthday – dominated JK's narratives. The importance of her social position characterises the rest of

JK's narrative. While she does not dwell on the time when she often felt 'insecure' and 'homesick', she continues to focus on the experience of being in a group of friends and creating new, exciting experiences. Throughout the interview, JK mentions how they would watch films and go to parties together, watch their friends' YouTube videos, share their thoughts about boys and first intimacies, or just go to the gym and talk endlessly: "Sometimes we just laid on a mat and went home afterwards. (laughs) Because we had just talked ourselves silly..." (JK, 3:27)

All these experiences are narrated with the frequent use of the words "cool" and "exciting", and with the themes of fun and adventure combined with feminine activities, her narrative brings together the themes of the girls' magazines that were popular at the time – such as the German magazine "BRAVO" or "POPCORN".[201] And while she does talk about struggles during her teenage years, such as being very focused on her eating habits, she does not dwell on them and continues to narrate her teenage years in a light-hearted tone. JK's narrative emphasises the excitement of being a teenager (a strong opposition to PK's narrative, with phrases such as 'what were we even doing?'[202]) and it is closely linked to the social stability within her first group of friends, which can also be seen as an important compensation for the lack of social presence at home, and the aspect of having friends helped her to gain confidence and feel validated. It emphasises the experience of adolescence and underlines the story of herself thriving and becoming a 'cool girl' at school.

The second key theme in JK's narrative is her relationship with her older sister. Particularly during JK's teenage years, she became someone to imitate and seek advice from on issues such as beauty, fashion and overall appearance. Throughout her narrative, JK emphasises how much she wanted to be like her sister, who she describes as 'a queen'. Interestingly, JK attributes the role of 'a queen' to her sister's social status rather than to any particular characteristic. Accordingly, JK highlights her sister's popularity at school:

> "So I knew she was ultra popular in her level, I also got to high school at some point.... Ultra popular, a style of dress that was already considered, yes, actually, if you weren't dressed like that because, I don't know, somehow when you were still emo or punk or something, you just weren't that cool in the group she was in. She was always very popular and was...um, yes, it felt like she had the style that you had to have, sounds stupid now, but that you had to have in order to be popular at the time." (JK, 11:27)

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[201] BRAVO, https://www.bravo.de, Popcorn, https://www.maedchen.de/heft/popcorn-magazin.
[202] PK, 2:34.

JK also makes clear the importance of appearance during her teenage years and at school, linking a girl's social validity to her appearance. By emphasising her sister's status, JK also communicates her desire to be 'just as cool' – a desire she told her sister at the age of 12 (JK, 23:27). JK's sister was an important help here, showing her how to apply make-up in a 'gentle' way and allowing JK to watch her and her friends 'get ready'.[203] In addition, JK copied her sister's style of dress and was sometimes even able to wear her clothes. Overall, her sister's role as a role model helped JK to feel validated and to act 'right', especially in the social contexts of school – and JK identifies her sister as a crucial advantage over the other girls: "For example, girls who didn't have a big sister or who were perhaps the big sister themselves, I always had the feeling that they somehow had no idea what to do and felt so helpless." (JK, 12:27)

By drawing a clear distinction between the girls who were lucky enough to have a big sister and those who were not, JK implies how important her sister was to her appearance and social standing within the school. It is clearly linked to JK's general narrative of her adolescent years and the transition to social integration, and it creates a case structure for JK that revolves around her social standing within the school – guided and supported by the helping and orienting figure of her sister and the safety and validation of her other friends.

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[203] JK, 14:27.

6. ANALYSIS II

The previous chapter explored the interviewees' case structures, including their social and cultural context. Now, the second analysis chapter will focus on what different meanings of YouTube could be found in the interviewees' stories. Here, I have chosen to combine the discussion of the theory section with the analysis of the interviews. This is because it allows to directly compare the findings to the theoretical level or highlight how the findings differ from the existing literature. I can also illustrate the theoretical understanding with concrete examples from the interviews.

Based on the interpretation of the interviews, three main categories were identified, in which YouTube and the beauty and lifestyle genre beard a significant meaning. Firstly, all of the interviewees talked about how YouTube was a companion to their experience of beauty and girls' self-image. Furthermore, all used YouTube as a source of information and inspiration, and they spent a generous amount of time with watching make-up-tutorials and product 'hauls'.

Secondly, all interviewees opened up about their relationship to different YouTubers. With reference to their personal backgrounds, they named beauty YouTubers as important role models or 'gurus' who often take on the role of big sister – and thus, the interviewees attributed a close relationship to them. Therefore, the second category regards the girls' socialisation on and with YouTube, an aspect that played a significant role in all stories.

Thirdly, and lastly, the analysis focuses on the connection of each interviewee's life theme and their interpretation and use of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content. Here, it becomes apparent how – despite the overlapping stories and ascriptions of meaning – each interviewee used YouTube in ways that are closely connected to their *own* case structure. Out of the different functions that were discussed, the third category is related the most to the biographical approach. It offers individual meanings to how media can be integrated in different life stories, and it proposes to regard media consume as a mirror and compensator of personal insecurities, needs and missing role models.

All of these findings are based on the analyses using the BNIM and Dubrovnik-method. It allowed to better understand the biographies of the interviewees, filter their personal thoughts and experiences and then analyse them specifically in relation to YouTube. In the end, the findings emphasise how central the role of YouTube is and was in the context of the young women. Looking at the biographies therefore has a particular social relevance, as it was only by focusing on personal stories that I was able to understand the platform more fully – in the context of its use and impact.

Before exploring these meanings in more detail, the following will first take a closer look at the picture of the teenage years painted by all the interviewees. It illustrates how important adolescence was as a period and how closely it was linked to practices of beauty and make-up – aspects that are directly related to the use and meaning of YouTube.

6.1 The importance of adolescence as an amplifier of the girl's appearance

During the interviews with the five women, the stories revolved mainly around the time of adolescence. It was being described as significant and tumultuous, and it often included long narrations. The interviewees raised themes that they connected specifically to this time, and they shared their feelings and experiences during adolescence in more detail than they would regarding other age periods. Above all, the interviewees emphasised the richness of change that happened during adolescence. They talked about forming new relationships, arguing more with their parents, experiencing their first menstrual cycle, and going from not caring about their appearance to prioritising it over other aspects of their daily lives. It is a time of reorientation and complex change and for girls in particular, the biological transition from infancy to fertility implies a new awareness of the body, both of their own and that of others. Here, all interviewees shared how they began to be more self-aware at around the age of 13. DN remembers how it felt like she would "enter a new stage in life"[204] and she places particular emphasis on the importance of appearance:

> "And then it kind of slowly started that looks suddenly had such a high value and suddenly it was super important how you looked. Um, not even for yourself, but somehow also to get compliments from others, I would say. So, somehow it was totally important how you look to others and that you get validation from others on how you look and you can.... I don't know, that you look pretty or something." (DN, 4:18)

In her narration, the self can be understood as being consciously present within a social group – and similar to being on stage, the presence of the self involves the permission to be looked at. The importance of this aspect can be seen in the way DN repeats how important it is to look good and to receive compliments from others. Similar to DN's stories, PK shared how she became increasingly focused on the impression she made on others, both offline and online. (PK, 2/3:34)

Align with the understanding of Soloaga and Guerrero that "the inner aim is always to find beauty through self-modification"[205], the interviewees very quickly focused on the topic of

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[204] DN, 11:18.
[205] Soloaga and Guerrero, Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands, 50.

make-up, and the increased self-awareness ultimately led to the use of make-up-products. DN states: "It was a lot about appearance at that time, about outfits and clothes and boys and accordingly also about make-up."[206] The quasi-natural combination of these aspects (boys and make-up) is remarkable and it shows the understanding of woman as obliged to change in order to live up to the beauty ideals. Further in the interview, DN describes how she actually felt more grown up when she applied make-up: "And that you are also allowed to do it, and then you felt somehow more mature as soon as you had a bit of mascara on your face."[207] Similar to DN's argument that the 'interest in boys' led to an increased 'interest in make-up' is an experience shared by JK:

> "And I remember, for example, when it started so slowly: OK, I'll spend the night at a boy's house or something. I woke up in the morning and went straight to the bathroom and put on make-up, and then I went back.... And he wasn't even awake then. So how crazy that is." (JK, 14/15:27)

JK's and DN's stories align with the postfeminist understanding that evolved during that time, and which accentuates how, even though the woman is being promoted as an emancipated being, traditional gender attributes started to be promoted again, too.[208] This includes the objectification of the self by needing to look pretty and presentable for a gazing public. For example, JK talks about watching her sister "get ready" – where the phrase 'getting ready' implies putting on make-up and dressing to present the self.[209] Her understanding is therefore that the woman must be 'ready' participate in public life, and it reinforces Mulvey's understanding of the gaze, emphasising its validity not only in the media but also in physical interactions.[210] The use of make-up as an amplifier of the girl's appearance emphasises her metamorphosis into a desirable subject, ready to be gazed at.

I must emphasise once again how in all of the interviews, the process of self-modification was narrated as an essential element of adolescence, and the interviewees shared how make-up was part of their daily routine and their social activities. Clearly, every day was a day to put on make-up – even if it meant getting up extra early:

> "I definitely got up at 6 o'clock in the morning before school to put on a smokey eye make-up, which in retrospect was really unnecessary, especially since I was really tired, um, to get up so early in the morning and put on so much make-up for...school...Okay.

[206] DN, 10:18.
[207] DN, 11:18.
[208] McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change.
[209] JK, 14:27.
[210] Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.

But somehow everyone did that, everyone had some kind of... You came to school and everyone had glitter eye shadow on and you thought it was kind of nice." (MH, 8:25)

The frequent and comprehensive narrations of the use of make-up imply how the time of adolescence was coined as exactly that: The interviewees shared that the change from being a girl to being a woman implied the feeling of being a presentable woman, existent to be gazed at.[211] The result that comes from it is the increased interest in the optimization of one's self appearance by focusing on fashion, hair styles and make-up.

The brief analysis is intended to show what the interviewees' understanding of beauty and make-up was and how much it corresponds with the observations of the theoretical framework. It also serves as a background to the first finding, which looks in more detail at the interviewees' use of beauty and lifestyle videos in relation to their understanding of beauty.

6.2 YouTube in connection to:

Understandings of beauty and make-up practices

6.2.1 YouTube in relation to make-up practices

In connection with the importance of beauty and beauty products, all interviewees mentioned the use of YouTube. They shared that they watched beauty and lifestyle content in order to learn new make-up, fashion or beauty looks or that they watched the content in order to find new inspiration.[212] Furthermore, the interviewee MH reported that it was not just them that watched beauty videos during their teenage years, but all other girls watched them, too.[213] Interestingly, the interviewees narrated their understanding of beauty content on YouTube in a similar way. Instead of narrating YouTube as the antecedent factor to their understanding of beauty, the interviewees described how they had internalized specific beauty ideals and then watched YouTube videos in order to imitate the vloggers' practices, for example in order to find make-up looks and products that satisfy the prevalent beauty ideals.

PK's case structure, for instance, revolves around deep insecurities during her teenage years. During her narrations, she shares how she often turned to YouTube as a way of optimizing the parts of herself that she felt most insecure about:

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[211] Their experiences align with the notion of the gaze by Mulvey, see: Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.

[212] This refers to JW, PK, MH and DN.

[213] In Subsession II, MH shares: "So everybody knew that everybody consumes YouTube, but that was also like you said, such a personal thing." (MH, 5:25)

"And I think this helplessness, that you somehow don't really know how to get rid of it and what helps somehow, I think you sooner or later turn to YouTube tutorials, because... All the people were of a similar age to us, so to speak." (PK, 8:34)

PK's story shows how insecure she felt in her own body as a teenager and how much she wanted to change it: She disparagingly wants to get rid of what she doesn't like. At the same time, for her, getting rid of her "flaws" meant turning to YouTube. Hence, watching beauty and lifestyle videos cannot only be the trigger but also the consequence of the social meaning of beauty. In her narration, YouTube functions as a tool in order to react to her insecurities and she points out how the vloggers helped her by being by her side.

Her story also provides a counter-example to findings such as those of Latzer et al. that beauty content is regarded as a trigger for insecurities – although it must be emphasised that the two findings need not be mutually exclusive.[214] PK's narration simply points out that YouTube played a significant role during the girl's engagement with beauty and their self-appearances. It serves as a space for beauty-advice and the possibility for a make-over. All other interviewees reported that they would mainly find guidance and support by consuming aligning content on YouTube, such as make-up-tutorials and personal chat formats.

It is noteworthy that it had to be a digital platform to deal with beauty and personal insecurities revolving around it, instead of the personal peer group or family.[215] For example, MH shared how her family could not help her to apply the make-up in the way that it pleased her, which aligns with her general description of her family (which she experienced as being different than her): "So of course my mum and my sister also got ready and put on make-up and that's what you...Of course I always experienced that and also looked at it in parts, but it was never the way I kind of wanted it[.]" (MH, 7:25) Similarly, PK, shared how she secretly stole make-up products of her mother instead of asking her for help and advice: "[T]hat I stole my mum's lipstick from the cupboard for a moment." (PK, 8:34)

Both stories underline that the parents did not serve as role models in beauty and make-up matters. Although it aligns with the general aspect that children start to distance themselves from their parental shelter during puberty and turn towards other sources of inspiration,[216] it should be emphasised that in this case it is mainly online platforms where new role models are found. Although all interviewees shared experiences with their friends, they were seldom

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[214] Latzer et al., Disordered eating and media exposure among adolescent girls: The role of parental involvement and sense of empowerment.

[215] Only JK, who experienced a strong bond with her older sister, reported that she experienced the female support offline, in her personal peer group.

[216] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, Social Media and Society, 2.

in the centre of their narration.[217] Rather, the interviewees defined their friends as confederates that had similar problems and insecurities, and therefore did not function as gurus or leaders but as allies.[218]

The shift towards YouTube during the search of new inspiration confirms what Banet-Weiser already emphasised: if teenagers are "living online", important processes of identity constructions, too, happen through media consumption.[219] Accordingly, PK shares: "And I think that's how we came up with it: Yes, you can cover [the skin impurities] up and you can...somehow put make-up over it and that might look good." (PK, 9:34)

The stories of the interviewees go even further than Banet-Weiser's statement. They show that it is not just because of YouTube that the girls looked for make-up tips there. Instead, it is also down to their personal environment, which was unable to give them these tips. The biographies of the interviewees in particular show how their families were unable to keep up with the trends of the time or how they simply did not have a close enough relationship.[220] YouTube is a must, personal family and friends are not enough – a realisation that becomes clear through the understanding of the girls' personal life stories.

6.2.2 YouTube as a driver of beauty purchases

Turning to YouTube instead of your own family brings with it new affordances – after all, according to Nieborg and Poell, YouTube is a multi-sided market.[221] Subsequently, all interviewees also reflected on their consumption behaviour in the interview sessions. All could remember specific beauty products that they purchased during adolescence, and they valued them as a central part within the construct of adolescence, beauty and YouTube. It can be noted that beauty videos were particularly influential in regards to the product choices teenage girls would make. By watching formats such as tutorials, the products that were used by the vlogger exemplified what should be used themselves. The central product appeared to be an eyeshadow palette, and MH shares: "So my friends, for example, once gave me an eyeshadow palette for my birthday that I was super proud of. Um...because all YouTubers had it, it was the 'Sleek' palette."[222] By emphasising her feeling of being "super proud", MH

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[217] Here, only DN focused in more detail on the relationship to her friends and specifically the friendship to her best friend L., where she and her mother served as a substitute family during the last years of adolescence.
[218] MH, for example shares: "We entered: We want to do this and that, and then of course we made each other up and...things like that: "Hey, have you seen this and that?" - "No, I haven't seen it yet" - "Ok, then I'll show you"." (MH, 4:25)
[219] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 7.
[220] This finding excludes the story of JK, who was very close to her older sister during her time of adolescence.
[221] Nieborg and Poell, The platformization of cultural production: Theorizing the contingent cultural commodity, 4276.
[222] MH, 9:25.

points out the excitement that such products could evoke. Her narrative also shows which things had significance during the teenage years and why significance was attributed to them. By adding that all beauty vloggers had the palette, she shows how the possession of products implies a likeness among others and a feeling of belonging. It is interesting how mainstream products and their marketing are not criticised but romanticised by MH – even though there are algorithms behind it that advertise certain topics more strongly and vloggers who earn their money from beauty products (also due to the favouring of topics such as beauty). In MH's story, this is not taken up, instead a special nostalgia resonates.

The valuation of beauty products and the specific romanticised view upon them can be found in the other interview sessions, too. For example, JK shares what products she wanted to buy when she was a teenager and PK remembers the purchase of her first beauty product:

> "Definitely certain eyeshadow palettes, which then at some point... Well, they've been around for a while, but at some point there were these, now there are always these big eyeshadow palettes." (JK, 18:27)

> "Well, I think it started with the make-up things, so that you... I had somehow bought a 'Zoeva' palette, I don't know if that rings a bell?" (PK, 28:34)

The palette is an important matter, and it becomes apparent how all interviewees have ascribed a deeper meaning to the product. It really wasn't about simply *owning* this palette, but rather being one step closer to the role models of their time and all the rest of the teenage girls. Here, the interviewees' narratives show clear parallels to Soloaga and Guerrero's finding that beauty vloggers' videos often "aim to dematerialize products" and instead view the products as more of a "subjective element within their own life and personality".[223] By doing so, the stories, too, illustrate the market potential that the genre of beauty and lifestyle on YouTube had. Often, the interest in the girls' self-appearance and the following engagement with make-up resulted in purchases of make-up products, and the decisions were often based on the products that were shown on YouTube.

Even more superordinate, this aspect shows clear characteristics of the consumerist understanding of the time, which promotes a subject that uses "consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self".[224] Following this understanding, the consumption of products can be regarded as a meaningful act in the process of self-optimization and ultimately, self-fulfilment. It fits in well with statements like PK's, who tried to compensate for her insecurities with the help of products and appropriate YouTube videos:

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[223] Soloaga and Guerrero, Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands, 50.
[224] Tasker and Negra, Interrogating postfeminism: Gender of the politics of culture, 2.

"that you somehow don't really know how to get rid of it and what helps somehow". (PK, 8:34)

The meaning of beauty products therefore fits in well with the general meaning of beauty and the interviews emphasise the cultural importance of the product that goes far beyond the simple act of the purchase itself. Accordingly, owning a product also means being able to change (and beautify) yourself, to fight your flaws and to become part of the beauty group. Therefore, the interviewees' stories illustrate how the women experienced YouTube as an amplifier of consumerism, where what was bought was calmness, self-assuredness and a kind of armour against fundamental, existential insecurities. Their experiences confirm the critiques of scholars such as Banet-Weiser or Soloaga and Guerrero.[225] Similar to the ideas of postfeminism, the interviewees shared their experiences of using YouTube as an inspiration and tool, which results in a form of self-optimization by consumerism.

6.2.3 YouTube as an amplifier of beauty standards

Finally, the interviewees shared how their consumption of YouTube videos also shaped their understanding of overall beauty ideals and specifically the form and shape of the body. Three of the women shared how they began to focus on their body more intensely during their years of adolescence. For example, MH shared how already during her years of childhood, she developed a specific understanding of beauty and her own body, which is primarily based on the thought that she should be thinner. Her understanding is based on the influence of her mother, and MH shares how her food intake often got monitored and commented upon: "At home my mum always looked at the plate and commented: 'Do you really still want to eat that?' Um...Or, 'Move your body,' I used to run up and down the stairs when I was a kid because my mum would say, 'Hey, move your body today!'"[226] Similar understandings were also communicated in JK's story. She shares what the ideal during childhood and adolescence was:

> "The slimmer the better was the motto back then, and it affected me. Um... When I was 16 and 17 and 18, I was, well, I was slimmer than I should have been. I paid a lot of attention to it and I was thinner than I would have been if I had been..." (JK, 13:27)

The pause after "if I had been" is significant. Presumably it implies this ending: "if I had been content with my body as it was". In any case, the sentence conveys that she would have

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[225] Soloaga and Guerrero, Fashion films as a new communication format to build fashion brands. Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube.
[226] MH, 21:25.

wished for a different mindset at that age than the one in which she was thinner than she should have been; and a certain sadness about this resonates.

The third interviewee, PK, also experienced struggles with her eating behaviour and shares how she developed an eating disorder at the age of 15 – a time period that is described in more detail in Analysis I (see p. 48). She opens up how becoming thinner evoked a feeling of high-ness, a feeling that she also described as a form of validation in the process of adjusting her body to the cultural body ideals.

The understandings of the three interviewees align with the general beauty ideal that is being communicated heavily within society, and it promotes a body type that is healthy but slim, and should explicitly never be fat.[227] The stories show how these understandings are embedded in the personal context of the individuals and how they have concrete effects on everyday life. They also highlight the importance of analysing social norms, personal contexts and media use together in the context of an individual's experience – because in their personal life stories these are intertwined. MH is a good example. Her mother encourages her to be thinner because of societal ideals. At the same time, these ideas are also reflected in the media she watches, and she shares how YouTube has played an important role in reinforcing these beauty standards. It provided a source of comparison, with beauty vloggers serving as ideals to follow:

> "Where you think again: 'Wow, but she looks so much better than me', or 'she is so much thinner and why am I not like that?' Um...That is of course a big, big influencing factor in personal development." (MH, 21:25)

The fact that MH compared herself so much to the body images on YouTube confirms Weber and Mitchell that argue how strongly the teenage years are shaped by "conscious looking".[228] The girls followed what has been shown and through the feeling of closeness, the vloggers served as a mirror to which the girls wanted to conform – both in regards to beauty products such as the eyeshadow palette as well as the appearances of the beauty vloggers. Sophie Bishop notices how problematic this can be, as the algorithmic works on YouTube often promote "hegemonic, feminized cultural outputs, created by beauty vloggers with significant embodied social and cultural capital".[229] By doing so, it actively discriminates people that do not fit this frame, including black content creators or creators that upload content that does not

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[227] Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, 185ff.
[228] Weber and Mitchell, Imaging, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies, 27.
[229] Bishop, Anxiety, Panic and Self-optimization, 70.

involve the favoured, femininized topics.[230] This observation is also addressed by the interviewees, such as JW and JK. They share how the popular beauty vlogger often aligned with the beauty ideal that was prevalent during that time:

> "They were all kind of the same, kind of thing. So... In terms of behaviour, somehow similar in appearance, somehow this classic, how you imagine a woman or something. Um. Or what was considered the ideal, or what one wanted to do or achieve somehow." (JW, 4:18)

> "It could definitely be that in the period when you were 17 or 18, you were on YouTube more and more and you probably saw the same things. The people who uploaded things were always slim and pretty. So there was somehow no room for people who were not considered slim and pretty by the masses." (JK, 13:27)

Consequently, the frequent consumption of content that showed a very similar body type evoked a feeling of needing to fit this specific body type – an experience that both MH and JW shared specifically. In result, this led to an amplification of traditional beauty ideals among the interviewees. Accordingly, JW shares: "Yes, I also think that many videos somehow convey a false image. And I've already noticed that myself, that it... Somehow, you notice it too, somehow: is this right now, how I look, what I eat, these things? (JW, 3:18)" The experience aligns with the research findings of Latzer et al., too, that show how a higher media exposure leads to a higher disordered eating potential (DEP).[231] Supposedly, media content often reflects the set ideal of the female body, and the stories of JK or MH make it clear that this encourages comparisons that the girls want to live up to. The overall idea of the woman as thin is continued, and often results in the promotion of problematic and unhealthy practices, such as diets, over-exercise and surgery.[232] Additionally, the interviewees also criticised their understanding of beauty ideals in general. PK, for example, reflects upon her interests and priorities during adolescence. In subsession II, she shares her obsession with her self-appearance, and although she does not particularly address the consumption of YouTube content, she questions her general understandings of the time:

> "Also... That I perfected my appearance more and more, somehow in the sense of using method XY or... I don't know, it's just that it's always... It's actually really sad that I spent so much time in that period of time somehow only presenting myself to the outside world and then also only presenting myself online." (PK, 6:34)

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[230] Bishop, Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip, 11.
[231] Latzer et al., Disordered eating and media exposure among adolescent girls: The role of parental involvement and sense of empowerment.
[232] Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body, 185.

Such reflections can be found in other interviews, too. Whereas DN criticises how excessively she went shopping as a teenager, MH draws further on her beauty habits and reports how she started to reflect upon them once she turned older: "[D]o I think it's good for me at all to put on make-up all the time or is it really necessary to put on make-up or get ready two hours before I go somewhere?" (MH, 15:25)

The general critique of their previous understandings of beauty implies a critique of its involving practices, too. All interviewees shared how their insecurities led to a continuing engagement with their appearance – the 'trying to fix'-mentality, however, can first and foremost be seen as an amplifier of insecurities instead of a resolution of such.

These connections need to be emphasised once again: Due to the interviewees' fears and insecurities, which arise in part due to the personal context and ideals conveyed by the media, the girls turn to beauty vloggers, who in turn reinforce such insecurities by increasingly aligning their videos with (imagined) algorithmic demands for traditional ideas of beauty. Vloggers therefore take on the role of role models, and can also help the interviewees, but unhealthy body and female images are reinforced just as much.

Here, Peters and Seier's understanding of media as a mirror can be applied, and the consumption of YouTube beauty content not only serves as a mirror of personal interests but also as a mirror of traditionally gendered stereotypes[233] – primarily due to the algorithmic influence on what the teenage girls got to see on YouTube and the orientation of vloggers towards the favoured topics: "feminized cultural outputs".[234]

Concludingly, the stories of the interviewees support the understanding of a woman that ought to dress up and present herself in order to be validated. Furthermore, it shows how all interviewees consumed a variety of videos that promoted exactly this activity: the modification of the woman's appearance. This narrative aligns with the understanding of feminist media theory. Banet-Weiser emphasises how the opportunity of new, undefined space does not necessarily lead to new defined space. Instead, "the beliefs and values of offline social life are frequently adopted online, such as gender performance."[235] Further, Weare draws upon several scholars by noticing how "even if the digital space provides more freedom at first sight, rather, most women stick to the rules." [236]

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[233] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube (in Snickars and Vonderau, The YouTube Reader), 187.
[234] Bishop, Anxiety, Panic and Self-optimization, 70.
[235] Weare, Beauty work: a case study of digital video production and postfeminist practices on YouTube's icon network, 44.
[236] Ibid, 27.

The interviewees thus pick up pretty much exactly on what studies and discussions such as Banet-Weiser's and Bishop's have already made clear. What surpasses previous studies, however, is the way in which these negative effects of YouTube are reflected and narrated. None of the interviewees mention that they were already aware at the time that following beauty ideals and watching beauty videos also have negative consequences, that it makes them feel even more insecure and that they compare themselves more often. Instead, the interviewees only talk about these findings from today's perspective, and their narrative form is always reflective and evaluative. To put it bluntly, this means that what is criticised on a theoretical level did not play a role in the interviewees' teenage years. The influence of the algorithm, the shaping of the genre by traditional, stereotypical themes, the emphasis on beauty and the associated consumption and self-modification – none of this was reflected in the years in which the content was viewed and integrated into everyday life. This also means that there was no "I actually know that it's bad, but..."-structure in the interviewees' thought processes, but simply the feeling that YouTube offers something in their everyday lives that their private environment does not.

Based on the interviewees' stories, I argue that the personal environment and social ideals at the time have a major influence on the understanding of beauty (see for example MH's story). They are also closely related to why respondents turned to YouTube for beauty tips: Because their personal environment did not help the girls to achieve these ideals of beauty, but at the same time reinforced them. In regards to beauty, YouTube must therefore be viewed in two ways: As a support – seen as positive at that time by the interviewees – and as a reinforcement of traditional beauty standards and insecurities – seen as negative by the interviewees from today's perspective.

6.3 YouTube in connection to:

the teenagers' socialisation and identification processes

The interviewees shared that beauty and lifestyle content was extremely important when it came to their socialisation and personal development. Hence, the second part of this analysis is not necessarily about the content of the videos, but rather about how the videos were talked about, where they were watched and to what extent the interviewees identified with the roles of the vloggers. During the interview sessions, I found that the women frequently discussed the circumstances under which they viewed YouTube videos, as well as their feelings and thoughts concerning the YouTube vloggers. However, the interviewees would rarely delve into the specific details of the video content itself. This manner of discussing media

consumption is intriguing. It emphasises the importance of media in their contextual dimensions, rather than content per se, and therefore stresses the importance of biographical approaches. The consumption of YouTube content must therefore be regarded as a formative activity that is tightly connected with the socialisation and identity development of teenagers. In the following, I will discuss the second core message of this analysis – the social meaning of YouTube in the interviewees' contexts.

6.3.1 YouTube as a social activity with friends

The analysis showed that topics revolving around beauty and lifestyle inhered a significant meaning during female adolescence and they made up a large part of social activities and conversations. For example, DN shared how her friends and she became more and more interested in boys, make-up and fashion.[237] Her story highlights the socialness of these interests: "Then we would put make-up on each other, or everyone would do it themselves and the others would give tips, and at some point it was just a social activity." (DN, 10:18) Subsequently, the interest in YouTube beauty content was a social matter, too. Although the interviewees shared that they would not *watch* YouTube beauty content in their larger friend's groups, such as in school, they would *talk* about it. Hence, YouTube served primarily as a conversation topic in larger social settings such as school breaks or girls' groups:

> "And then we talked about it at school when a new video was released. What she was wearing, what it was about, it was not a huge part of the conversations, not the main part, but it was still talked about somehow." (JW, 6:18)

By discussing new beauty-related videos, a variety of topics circulated in the social group. Often, their conversations would – based on the video on YouTube – revolve around new make-up-trends or "what she was wearing" (JW, 6:18). By reflecting upon the vloggers' videos and topics, the group aligned and compared their behaviour with the one on screen. Thus, similar to the activity of applying make-up with friends, the activity of talking about YouTube content cannot only be seen as an entertaining activity during adolescence, but rather as a shared identification process. Through the act of comparing and discussing other girls' behaviours, the teenage group corrects each other in their own behaviour and defines their personalities further. Based on the argument of Banet-Weiser, this always happens with answering the personal question of "Who am I?". [238] YouTube in social settings must therefore be seen as an enabler of shared identification processes. Based on the interviewees'

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[237] DN, 10:18.
[238] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.

narrations, I would even extend Banet-Weiser's question to the social one of "Who are we as a group"?

This identification process happens through conversations about YouTube videos, and occasionally, some videos are closer to the groups' physical reality than others. In the interview of JK, she shares how it was also common among her friends to upload videos yourself:

> "For example, one of [F.'s] friends was actually called [J.], but she called herself [T.]. And then it was always: 'Yes, [T.] has uploaded a new video!' And then everyone would watch this video. And some thought it was good, some thought it was stupid. Um. And exactly, it was somehow funny and also exciting, because it was so new. It was so exciting somehow." (JK, 8:27)[239]

JK's describes the activity of watching videos as very circular. Her friend T. uploads a beauty-related video, which the group then watches and comments upon. Finally, T. receives these reactions, and uploads a new video. This consumption cycle aligns with the understanding by Weber and Mitchell who define beauty-related content on YouTube as "self-reflexive". It implies that the teenagers are discussing content that circulates "within the same audience group", and Banet-Weiser emphasises: "media made by youth are also viewed by those youth".[240]

JK's story shows that self-reflexivity can be seen as a key factor in the meaning of YouTube in larger social groups. YouTube reinforces the teenagers' engagement with themselves, and the platform makes this self-engagement even more exciting, as it offers new social spaces in which identity can be explored. Furthermore, the videos serve as a conversation topic that provides common interests without becoming too personal – and hence provides an opportunity to talk and socialise.

The socialness of the platform, however, also implies an "anti-socialness". The interview session with JW showed how YouTube beauty and lifestyle content could also lead to excluding others – namely those who were not as interested in such topics as the other girls. JW shared how she felt pressured to watch the discussed beauty content on YouTube in order to feel included:

> "[A]nd you noticed that if you somehow didn't watch it, then you were somehow briefly, briefly out of it, briefly not there. And that wasn't a nice feeling when you couldn't join in the conversation. Yes." (JW, 6:18)

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[239] For data protection reasons, the names of the persons mentioned have been abbreviated.
[240] Weber and Mitchell, Imaging, Keyboarding, and Posting Identities: Young People and New Media Technologies, 27.

By being bound to a very defined space during adolescence, the participation in social groups is crucial for the teenagers' feelings of being included, a pressure that many that experienced adolescence may remember. JW shares how in her case, it felt obligatory to be able to join in a conversation. Consequently, by choosing YouTube beauty content as such a conversation topic, it also becomes an obligation to *watch* them. It shows how social settings increase the importance of private consumption of beauty-related content, and thus aspects discussed in Chapter 6.2, such as the reinforcement of beauty ideals or beauty products.

Interestingly, only JK shared that she and her friends would watch T.'s latest upload in school, the other interviewees emphasised how it was unusual to watch YouTube videos in larger social groups. Rather, the activity of watching beauty videos was reserved for smaller groups or it was being described as a private activity. MH shares how she experienced the consumption of beauty videos:

> "I remember that I definitely watched YouTube videos with my best friends, but in the big clique or with the girls at school we talked about it... For example, about how we put on make-up or what we know or whatever, but... Or also that we watch YouTube videos or 'Oh, I saw this and that on YouTube'. But it was never, or at least I don't remember it, it was never a topic that we said, 'I watched such and such YouTuber. And she did this and that.'" (MH, 3:25)

Similarly, PK shared how, even today, she considers YouTube videos as a private interest that she would only share with her best friends.

> "So, it also wouldn't be like: 'Ah well, I watched a vlog from the YouTuber today, something like 35 minutes, great. And it was about that, that, that.' I wouldn't say it then either, so I wouldn't run up to every friend and say, 'Yeah, I kind of do that and it's really nice'. I don't do that at all." (PK, 23:34)

The stories of MH and PK imply how the actual consumption of videos is first and foremost a private matter. Detailed information about the consumption of the videos is regarded as too intimate – and it is only supposed to happen in private space, at most with the closest friends. According to MH, for instance, she would almost feel uncomfortable if she would share her consumption patterns in a large group. She describes:

> "So everyone knew that everyone consumes YouTube, but that was also, as you said, a completely personal thing and you also wanted to... It was also... It wasn't... Yes, in certain parts it was awkward when you sat in front of the computer with your little hand mirror and put on make-up." (MH, 5:25)

YouTube is therefore just as social as it is private – and according to the interviewees, there is also a clear demarcation where the social topics begin and the private one's end. Thus, it can be stated that the general construct of "YouTube beauty and lifestyle content" is indeed public – but the actual consumption and one's own feelings about the videos are not.

This finding aligns with Banet-Weiser's understanding. As discussed in the Theoretical Frame I, she states how YouTube videos, and especially intimate videos, can be regarded as both "public and private": "public because they are displayed on a globally public social networking site, and private because they can answer the intensely personal question of 'who am I?'"[241] Consequently, Banet-Weiser implies that YouTube content is not just 'any' content, but it is tightly connected to the identification processes of the consumer. This aligns with the perspective of MH, who shares:

> "And I would also, I don't know, I think it's weird, I just find the idea weird, knowing that I'm revealing myself like that in my...it's already a personal development in a way that you go through, through these YouTube videos, where I definitely wouldn't want everyone to know that about me." (MH, 5:25)

By using words such as "revealing" or "personal development", MH states clearly here that watching beauty content is an extremely intimate activity for her – so intimate that not even her circle of friends at school should know about it. This fact exceeds Banet-Weiser's statement that watching videos is a very personal matter. Rather, it emphasises that *under no circumstances* did this question of "who am I?" want to be discussed in the social group. Identity as a process and YouTube as a companion are thus actively repressed by MH, a behaviour that is reminiscent of dealing with one's own desires or feelings of shame. Accordingly, PK even describes the consumption of YouTube videos as a "guilty pleasure"[242], and the stories thus show how demarcated the private and public spheres really are.

Based on the famous theatrical metaphors used by Goffman in "*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life",* the metaphor of a stage and its backstage area comes to mind.[243] The stories present an image that compares the public space with the stage in which the teenager presents and compares itself with others, while the backstage area serves to prepare for these social appearances. Based on the interviewees' stories, I argue that YouTube serves as a mediator between these public and private processes. By publicly discussing the topics that are relevant during that time, the teenage girl absorbs what needs to be figured out in more detail at home,

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[241] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.
[242] PK, 23:34
[243] Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.

and through the private (and isolated) consumption of YouTube videos, the teenagers come then closer to answering the questions "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to be in public?".[244]

Concludingly, watching YouTube beauty content can be viewed as an important activity in regards to the teenagers' socialisation processes. The interviewees shared how in large groups, the content served as a conversation topic. It accompanied the overall interest in beauty and lifestyle forms, and by talking about such YouTube content and popular beauty vloggers, the social group performed forms of self-reflexivity – an adaptation and correction of the definition of the female teenage group. Furthermore, the interviewees emphasised how it is a very private matter to actually *watch* the videos. The consumption of beauty-related content on YouTube can therefore be seen as a highly intimate activity that is not meant to meet the public (or social) eye. This is where identification processes take place, which in turn serve the socialisation of the teenage girl. It makes it all the more important to look more closely at this private context and understand its facets – an approach I took by listening to and analysing the interviewees' life stories.

6.3.2 YouTube consumption in the private space

Despite its intimate and private nature, the interviewees also emphasised how much of watching YouTube videos is social. This applies not only to the role of the interviewees in social situations, as I discussed in the previous section, but also to the activity itself: YouTube in private is social. The interviewees mentioned two aspects in particular. Firstly, they emphasised the opportunity to experience other worlds by watching YouTube videos and secondly, the opportunity to build a relationship to the beauty vloggers themselves. Both aspects are frequently discussed in media research, and it shows that the interviewees' experiences speak to wider understandings.

The opportunity to participate in other worlds can be seen in the story of JK, which reports how she liked to discover new social worlds through YouTube:

"Then I also discovered this American thing – the stars and then they filmed their everyday life, and that was completely... Well, I had not been to America at that time either, so that, I was in America for the first time much, much later, but it felt like a different world. [...] It was like being immersed in another world, I would say." (JK, 16:27)

[244] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.

In her description, YouTube serves as a portal which offers access into other realities, such as the American culture. It seemed to be especially appealing to get more authentic and raw insights into a culture that is heavily promoted in media, and which JK also knew of from popular contemporary teen series such as *Pretty Little Liars* or *Gossip Girl*.[245] Additionally, JW, too, shared how she watched YouTube content in order to earn insights into other lives that she can then take part in, such as documentaries about different lifestyles or family vlogs.[246] Thus, YouTube can also be considered as a window which allows the participation in other realities and it aligns with the understanding by Banet-Weiser: YouTube – by being both a public and a private platform – allows the entanglement of public spaces and private settings.[247]

Of course, this affordance is not unique to YouTube. Other external sources, such as television, offer glimpses into other realities, too. However, YouTube extends the television in this regard. It offers more channels that focus on the private life of the creator, and it is possible to find a larger variety of social groups. Within the beauty and lifestyle genre, for instance, JW and JK found a possibility to follow like-minded individuals that shared the topics that were prominent in their social context.

Additionally, the interviewees shared how by watching and relating to digital figures, they were able to build a social relationship.[248] This point addresses perhaps the most popular one from media research when it comes to the beauty genre. It emphasises how instead of only offering perspectives into new *worlds*, YouTube also offered new relationships with other *individuals*. What is new is the bypassing of physical barriers: such relationships are not limited to the physical space. Therefore, the private space now allows socialisation processes with digital figures – the vloggers –, and the interviewees shared how they often served as role models: "I think that it was also on YouTube... And then they were so well known, and somehow everyone wanted to see them, and yes, I think they were somehow a role model."[249] JW's experience aligns with the Marwick's understanding of "microcelebrities".[250] Because of their personal output, the vloggers allow a better insight into their personal lives and

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[245] JK, 14:27. Pretty Little Liars (2010-2017) and Gossip Girl (2007-2012) were popular US-American teenage series that aired in 2010 and 2007 and also enjoyed great popularity in Germany.
[246] JW, 11:18.
[247] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.
[248] See: MH, 6:25. PK, 19:34. JW, 6:18.
[249] JW, 6:18.
[250] Marwick, Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age.

especially their authentic and ordinary presentation leads to a high popularity and the identification of the teenager with the vlogger.[251]

What I have noticed during this thesis is that the existing theoretical reflections are often dedicated to the platform itself or to the characteristics of the vloggers. However, the perspective of teenage girls, and therefore the reasons why they long for digital role models, is less often taken into account. The biographic-narrative approach made it possible to look at this perspective. By listening to the interviewees' stories, I was able to understand what aspects of their lives might have led them to turn to YouTube videos.

Here, JW, who described spending a lot of time alone during her teenage years, shared how interacting with YouTube vloggers served to compensate for social space and helped her not to feel alone.

> "And when it's dark and you're kind of alone anyway, I don't know, it's a good solution. And when you watch other people doing something, you don't know, you often don't feel quite so alone when you're lying somewhere." (JW, 2:4)

Interestingly, JW mentions the activity of watching YouTube videos as her first choice to compensate the feeling of being alone. Other options could have been to spend time with her family or to message her friends, as both components existed during her years of adolescence. However, there seemed to be a certain appeal for JW to follow the lives of unknown, but perhaps like-minded individuals that share parts of their lives online. Hence, the consumption of YouTube videos might not only serve the conquering of loneliness but it also offers a good way to be alone, together with oneself. It repeatedly raises the question of what the personal environment could not offer, which YouTube in turn did – a question that I was able to pursue through the biographic-narrative approach and which is examined in more detail in the following chapter.

In addition, the interviewees showed how their self-image during adolescence and the insecurities associated with it led them to watch beauty and lifestyle content. For example, JK shared that she turned to digital figures when she felt insecure in her peer group.

> "And when I then see a person – and maybe you don't know how to do it and what kind of things you have to say to be perceived like that – when you then see a person that you think is cool, then you think to yourself, 'Oh, that's already a small part of how I want to be, then I'll now be, I'll now try to be the same.'" (JK, 22:27)

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[251] Cunningham and Craig, The Popularity and Appeal of YouTubers: Authenticity and Ordinariness, 131.

This process resembles the regular orientation towards new role models and "significant others".[252] However, it is interesting how this orientation started to take place in digital spaces instead of the physical during the interviewees' years of adolescence. PK, too, shared how she used her preferred vloggers as a template for her own presentation:

> "So that has already contributed a lot to somehow steering one's self-image in a certain direction, how you could be, what you saw in the videos of your role models, so to speak, that you always tried to somehow come closer to a supposed ideal in your head and that you just... appeared a bit more self-confident to the outside world, somehow."
> (PK, 11:34)

PK highlights how the identification process of teenage girls has been relocated through the emergence of the beauty genre. By having the opportunity to find role models in privacy, the interviewees can "prepare" themselves even better for the "real world". Simultaneously, there seems to be a clear distinction between the presentation of the self (as: public) and the preparation of the self (as: private) – an aspect that once again emphasises how intimate the activity of watching beauty content is.

Peters and Seier are worth recalling. Drawing on Giddens' understanding of the "project of the self", they argue that the creation of one's appearance is shaped by constant practice and repetition, which is not only corrected by a "mirror or a friend" but can now "also be a YouTube video".[253] The interviews clearly show that this is not only a possibility, but that the beauty genre is a significant space where the 'project of the self' takes place during their teenage years.

Furthermore, to return to the socialness of these practices, the "project of the self" in this context can also be understood as a 'project of the *social* self'. Narrations such as those by JW and PK show how their adolescent identification process was less concerned with Banet-Weiser's question of "Who am I?"[254] and more concerned with the socially annotated question of 'Who do I *want and need* to be?'

This *project of the social self* through YouTube seemed to be particularly important during the interviewees' years of adolescence. They shared how along with the body changing, their self-appearance and the understanding of beauty became a key interest and how the interest waned again after the teenage years.[255] Accordingly, the social pressure regarding the

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[252] Balleys et al., Searching for Oneself on YouTube: Teenage Peer Socialization and Social Recognition Processes, Social Media and Society, 2.

[253] Peters and Seier, Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube, 199.

[254] Banet-Weiser, Branding the postfeminist self. Girls' video production and YouTube, 21.

[255] DN for example notes: "And all of a sudden it was like, 'Yes, we've now tried everything we could try, especially as far as make-up is concerned, but that's enough now.' And it was somehow exhausting to always

women's appearance might be one of the main reasons why the beauty and lifestyle genre on YouTube is so significant during the teenage years. YouTube helps in privacy to 'get ready' for social situations and it serves as a 'mirror-check' in social situations.

6.4 YouTube in connection to:

The personal context of the interviewees

The two previous analyses referred to the themes that all interviewees mentioned and justified in very similar ways. They include the use of YouTube in relation to beauty practices and the importance of vloggers as teenage role models. These findings have also been explored in detail in media studies. It confirms the importance of YouTube beauty content during the girls' years of adolescence, and it generalises and hence detaches their experiences from their specific personal life story to a certain degree. I argue that the following part is the most important, as it looks more closely at the meaning of YouTube in relation to the personal stories of the interviewees. What could be clarified here is *why* YouTube in particular served as a source for role models, and it could only be grasped by taking the interviewees' life stories into account. Based on the BNIM and the Dubrovnik-method, the analysis showed that in four out of five interviews, YouTube served as a significant form of compensation.[256] This aspect that something was missing, that had to be substituted by YouTube, seems to be the basis for all other ways of using the platform. Of course, YouTube was also used by the interviewees to learn how to do a "smokey eye make-up" or to copy characteristics of the vloggers. However, the underlying reason that YouTube was being used seemed to be in order to substitute a person or specific character trait that the interviewees felt like they were missing. This finding is important for general considerations about the use of YouTube. Suddenly the focus shifts from *what* the girls were watching to *why* they felt they needed to watch it in the first place.

Accordingly, the following will explore what the interviewees seemed to be missing and how YouTube served as a compensation.[257] It can be divided into three aspects – the compensation of lacking female role models, the compensation of lacking general parental support and the comparison and compensation of the family dynamics, specifically the parents' relationship.

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put on make-up and so on. And then I kind of realised for myself, 'Okay, I don't need this anymore, to go every day with make-up on.'" (DN, 11/12:18) Similar experiences were shared by MH and PK.

[256] It relates to those interviewees who experienced adolescence when YouTube and the beauty genre were already popular – DN, PK, MH and JW – and will therefore not focus in detail on the oldest of the interviewees, JK.

[257] The analysis will be particularly focused on the stories of interviewees MH, PK, DN and JW. JK experienced the 'beauty genre' more towards the end of her teenage years and did not communicate a vital affordance of compensation to it – her story will therefore not be drawn upon in detail.

6.4.1 YouTube as compensation for lack of role models

It is well-researched that the "beauty group" provides role models for young girls, a fact that was also addressed by the interviewees. Vloggers offer helpful advice on personal topics and through their intimate camera setting and style of speaking, young girls often connect to them on a personal level.[258] The exploration of the case structures, however, showed how the interviewees did not only find role models online, they also shared how they *missed* such role models in the physical life. Often, the narrations did not revolve around what the girls gained through YouTube but rather what was lacking in their personal environment. This becomes especially apparent in the narrations of MH and PK, and both connected the feeling of not knowing who to turn to with the consumption of YouTube videos.

Interestingly enough, it must be noted that none of the interviewees spoke about their father figure in more detail. On the contrary, they particularly expressed how they missed having a *female* role model during their teenage years, which suggests that there might be a general need for female role models during the girls' teenage years. I do not propose that the interviewees did not need or have a male role model during adolescence. Rather, I observe how in regards of questions on beauty, insecurities about the body changing or socio-cultural pressures related to the girls' appearance, the importance of a female role model was expressed – and that in all interviews. It confirms the prevailing stereotypical thinking that links beauty with femininity. At the same time, it can plausibly argued that it is the reason why female role models are sought and needed. In the following, I will take a closer look at how this aspect impacted the personal life stories of PK and MH.

PK, as we explored in Analysis I, grew up with her parents and two brothers. Already here, she recalls during the subsession how she missed having a sister: "I didn't have a sister either, I didn't have a sister. I would have loved to have one, at that age I always wanted to have a sister." (PK, 20:34) While many only children generally want a sibling, PK clearly shows how much she would have liked a sibling of the opposite sex. The underlying dissatisfaction of only having brothers is interesting. It shows that the brothers could not live up to what PK expected in the role of sibling – whereas a girl could. Her story emphasises the differences in the socialisation of girls and boys, and it is significant how PK noticed these differences and in the course of it would have rather wished for a sister. Hence, the family structure must have

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[258] See: Theory I, "The beauty vlogger", and: Berryman and Kavka, I Guess a Lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend.

made an impact on her, and she reflects upon it especially in relation to her teenage years – as she adds "at that age".

PK then expands on her family structures and connects the aspect of growing up with brothers to the relationship with her parents. Here, she shares that her parents did not seem to be aware of her struggles and insecurities during adolescence, as well as of her consumption of beauty-related content on YouTube. Implicitly, she refers to her distinction of brothers versus sisters and defines it as a precedent for her parents' lacking awareness:

> "I have to be honest and say that I think it passed my parents by. Especially because I don't think my brothers had it like that. [...] But I think the whole... 'How do I show myself to the outside world?' And YouTube... I don't think [my brother] was aware of it at all, because I don't think he had this... 'I want to look good somehow.'" (PK, 14:34)

The argument that her older brother in particular did not seem to have such insecurities suggests that PK ascribes the increased importance of beauty and one's appearance to girls rather than boys. This aligns with the cultural understanding of the woman as object, onto which specific ideas are being projected upon.[259] Certainly, the pressure of aligning with such beauty ideas explains the desire for a female role model, which cannot be fulfilled by the existence of her brothers. Coherently, PK did not communicate much with her parents, which underlines the missing role model in her family. As elaborated in Analysis I, she shared how her mother could not address intimate or sexually related topics: "And she also didn't want to talk to me openly about it, but then she wrote me some kind of letters, especially about sexuality. She wrote me letters because she couldn't talk to me about it." (PK, 21:34) Consequently, there was no communication about the topics that PK was intrigued by or insecure about during her years of adolescence. By using words such as "didn't want to", "couldn't talk to me", PK also shows how she understands the non-communication as her mother turning away from her. Hence, whilst PK grew up in a well-structured and educated family, topics that are of vital importance during adolescence could not be addressed and talked about. Additionally, PK shares how her peer group, too, did not afford a space in which she could open up about any insecurities.

> "Somehow I think I was always seen as a big sister because I was a big person, tall for my height, and many of my friends always saw me as the responsible part of the family. And I think that's why I never had a reference person who I somehow saw as a big sister or as a role model." (PK, 20:34)

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[259] Mulvey, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.

PK shares how her physical trait of being tall impacted her behaviour in social groups. Her narration emphasises how the individuals' outer appearance influences the judgement of others – and how, in turn, the judgement of others influences one's own feeling of comfort and safety, an aspect that made it difficult for PK to open up to her friends about intimate topics or insecurities.

The situation of not having any female role models or attachment figures in her family and friends' group as well as her insecurities during adolescence can be regarded as a key factor in PK's years of adolescence. She shared in detail how she could not express her feelings often, and how she – instead of talking about her insecurities – tried to cover them. Her story conveys the impression of being left alone: There was no one in her family or group of friends who understood or listened to her about intimate matters.

In this setting, YouTube comes in. PK shares how the beauty genre and their creators offered a space in which PK could address her concerns:

> "And that's why YouTube was the only place where you can get tips and where people tell you a lot of stories and you're somehow close to it. And I think that's why it was such a big thing, because... Where from, well... I can't think of any other source where you could have got inspiration and tips. I couldn't get them from my mother either, or I didn't get them somehow, so you know? I somehow never had such a reference person otherwise. Yes." (PK, 20/21:34)

PK's experience raises an explicit connection between the missing physical role model and the substituting digital role model. It implies that YouTube suddenly becomes part of PK's personal story, and that it is being used specifically as a substitute for an important reference person (her mother). Here, YouTube afforded role models that feel adequate enough to substitute the private context. It is also important to note that this substitution is not congruent. Although PK uses it to balance out the characteristics of her mother or friends, the vloggers also bring other characteristics with them. Comparable to a puzzle, PK replaces a missing piece of her puzzle with a puzzle piece of the same shape from another puzzle – the motif on it may therefore be completely different.

In this case, however, a different motif seemed to be good, and PK shares how close she felt to the creators. Here, the factors intimacy and authenticity become apparent once more:

> "I always thought it was really cool because they showed so much private stuff: 'And that's my brother and blah blah blah'. You always felt so close, so... as if you already knew them somehow, yes, so very close to them." (PK, 19:34)

Interestingly, PK did not address the feeling of closeness in relation to her family or friends, although they are the figures that were geographically nearest, but she rather felt connected to the YouTube vloggers that she watched. Her experiences align with the aspect that YouTube vlogs build a high intimacy, especially in videos in which the beauty vlogger "talks and advises her viewers with an implicit sense of trust and closeness, much as a friend would do."[260] It explains, too, why YouTube serves so well as a compensation. By being personal and close to the camera, vloggers achieve to build a connection with the viewer. Especially in a context in which the viewer does not have any comparable role models, beauty and lifestyle creators hence manage to compensate for physical friends and family. YouTube thus takes up an essential part of PK's biography. Through YouTube, she could substitute characteristics of her mother or her friends with 'better' ones of the vloggers.

MH shares a similar story, although in her case, she goes into more detail about her relationship with her sister. MH expressed how she felt misunderstood by her and that she could not share intimate topics or ask her sister for help in situations such as whilst applying make-up. We remember the quote in her case structure, regarding her sister:

> "But my big sister is not at all in this...she was always a bit...how should I describe it...not more crude, but just had other interests than me, so. Um...And has this whole thing that maybe...you always think of in Hollywood films, what the big sister gives you for the time, how to put on make-up and how I braid my hair and all kinds of things, my sister just wasn't that." (MH, 6:25)

MH's story clearly shows that in her teenage years she needed a sister to show her the way ("what the sister gives you for the time"). And above all, it was important to her that she showed her the way that MH *wanted* to take ("put on make-up", "braid my hair"). Here, align with her case structure, MH feels different to her sister.[261] Her story implies how she would have rather had a sister that shared her interests and which, by being older and thus more experienced, could give her advice and serve as a template to follow. MH's story can also be viewed here on a general level. It illustrates, why the older sister may be so desired by young girls. The younger sister is presented with a character whose circumstances are so similar that she is all the more likely to imitate her.

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[260] García-Rapp, "My friend Bubz", 285f.
[261] MH grows up on the countryside and feels different than her family and friends, she shares a strong interest in beauty themes and cannot find a similar interest in the people closest to her.

In this case, however, MH expressed how her sister could not satisfy this wish, and how YouTube served here, too, as a substitution for the female role model which MH could not find in the same extent in her closest environment.

> "That's why YouTubers, especially Ischtar Isik, who comes to my mind now, were a great substitute for sisters, for all these topics: Beauty topics, fashion topics, um, yes.... Which I haven't really learned from my surroundings. Well, yes. My mum was also rarely a chic in inverted commas, or that she could have taught me anything." (MH, 6:25)

MH shows firstly, that her mother could not do justice to these aspects either and, secondly, how important it was to learn these skills as a teenager. Align with a similar narrative of PK, the interviews encourage to pose the question why their role models could not provide the help that the teenage girls wished for during adolescence. Here, PK pointed out the general communication barriers with her parents as a key reason for turning towards beauty vloggers. MH, however, did not specifically dwell on a lacking communication. Rather, she named different interests of her mother and sister. Besides individual character traits, the age difference between mother and daughter – and in this case also between the sisters – possibly prohibited a mutual understanding. As MH experienced adolescence simultaneal to the emergence of digital technologies, she might have also developed a different understanding of the teenage girl than her mother and older sister – an understanding that aligns with Buckingham's argument that the 21st century entailed "some significant shifts in how identity is constructed and experienced in the contemporary world".[262] In both cases, YouTube exceeds the limitations of the interviewees' personal environment. The genre is thus closely linked to the biography of the women, but also transcends it. The gap experienced by the interviewees due to the absence of the sister/mother/girlfriend's characteristics or skills was filled by a digital reference person who brings other characteristics and affordances – some of which I discussed in the previous chapters.

6.4.2 Learning skills on YouTube

The second form of compensation emphasises how YouTube served as a provider of certain skills that could be learned and imitated, and which were not taught by personal attachment figures such as the interviewees' parents or friends. This, too, describes a compensation of absent or deficient role models in the personal life. However, it differs from the first aspect, where the interviewees watched YouTube videos in order to substitute

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[262] Buckingham, Introducing Identity, 11.

personal bonds. Now, the interviewees used YouTube to access certain skills and tools that they aimed to substitute. Hence, whereas the basis in both cases is that the interviewee lacked a role model, it is now less about looking for a personal bond on YouTube and more about certain activities in the videos.

The use of YouTube for such reason is especially apparent in DN's narrative. Analyses based on the Dubrovnik-method suggest that the way DN watched YouTube videos is closely linked to her family structure. In particular, the relationship with her parents is one of the key components of her interviews and forms the case structure of her personal life story. DN, as I discussed in Analysis I, grew up with her parents and an older brother, however, she states quickly how her parents worked a lot in their own restaurant and therefore, they did not spend much time at home.[263] Although DN mentions the freedom that this situation allowed, she focuses more often on the aspects that she missed during childhood and adolescence, and how her parents could not experience her brother and herself growing up. (DN, 6:18) Consequently, DN did not really experience a childhood with much guidance or care from her parents: "Which was sometimes a bit difficult because they wanted to educate us somehow but it was really difficult because they didn't really get to know anything about our lives." (DN, 5:18) DN makes it clear that she grew up largely on her own and that this was a difficult time for her, a feeling that seems self-evident – after all, childhood and adolescence are some of the most vulnerable periods of life. The absence of her parents also implies the absence of attachment figures that could teach her skills or engage in activities with her: DN also emphasises that "they never knew what we were doing or how we are doing it and what we like to do".[264] The feeling of being left alone accompanies her stories. They also reveal how high her level of autonomy and independency was. For example, DN scheduled her daily life by herself, she had to organize her meals and she formed an expansive social circle that she also described as "her whole world".[265] Lastly, she emphasised how distanced she was to her parents and often repeated how she could do whatever she would want.[266]

Along with her narration of the family life at home, certain coping mechanisms become apparent during her interview sessions, too. Two of these aspects have been interpreted in more detail in her analysis of her life story (Analysis I). They include the efforts to build and

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[263] See DN, 5:18: „But apart from that, I was at home, my brother and I were alone a lot. Because my parents worked a lot and were almost only home on Sundays, so we were actually very free."
[264] DN, 6:18.
[265] DN, 7:18. Furthermore, DN organized meals and scheduled her own life (DN, 12) and engaged heavily in socializing (DN, 5:18).
[266] DN emphasised: "My parents, well, I'm not close with my parents at all." and further: "[A]nd then I was actually allowed to do what I wanted to do." (DN, 5:18)

engage in a strong social network that served as a safety net and source of validation[267], and the strong relationship with her best friend L. and her family as an important and close support whose relationship compensated for many aspects that DN missed in her relationship with her parents.[268]

The third way in which DN coped with her parents' absence can be seen in the way she taught herself skills and pursued her interests independently. This is where YouTube comes in as a platform. In the interviews, DN elaborates on the different skills she has learned by watching appropriate YouTube videos – with a wide range from learning simple manual skills to complex activities. Again, YouTube can be understood as a form of substitution that goes beyond the capabilities of the role models the teenager wanted to replace. Furthermore, DN's story shows how YouTube acts as an 'individualiser': Even without her parents' support, she has managed to educate herself. Accordingly, there is a sense of pride and excitement in the way she shares the skills she has learned through YouTube. For instance, DN learned how to sew and how to stitch through YouTube[269], how to solve the puzzle "Rubik's Cube"[270] or how to fold towels and bedsheets,[271] and even the different techniques of how to fold a scarf:

> "And then sometimes before school in the morning I would watch YouTube videos on how to tie scarves. Or I would watch it the night before or the day before and then again in the morning so that I could learn exactly how to tie it, just a tutorial like that. And then I went to school with different scarf techniques. I must have kept this up for half a year, always wearing a different scarf and a different scarf-tying technique to school. (laughs)" (DN, 3:18)

There is a recognisable adherence to manual activities in DN's stories. She meticulously describes how she wanted to tie her scarf very precisely and how much time this activity took. The scarf, as a symbol of holding on and holding together, may have literally helped to build a façade when things were difficult inside (her parents' house). Other skills she has learnt confirm the urge to maintain and develop these skills. DN learned how to apply make-up and how to fix her bike, and even engaged in complex hobbies through YouTube – such as learning to play the piano or involve in sports and gymnastics:

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[267] DN: "I think that the support I was lacking at home, so to speak, I looked for it somewhere else. Or the confirmation too. Um. And that actually worked quite well for me." (DN, 9:18)
[268] DN reports how L.'s mother went shopping with them, regularly picked them up from school or took care of DN when she had too much alcohol. Here, DN enhanced how her parents never did such things: "She took care of me, and I just, well... I expected my parents to be so disappointed and somehow preach to me and so on. And she asked me how I was and whether I needed anything and how that could happen, whether it had any reason." (DN, 8:18)
[269] DN, 4:18.
[270] DN, 5:18.
[271] DN, 4:18.

"I watched a lot of sports videos, of course. Um. Especially after the 2008 Olympic Games, I was so into gymnastics and I was really into the hype, and I watched a lot of videos of the girls doing gymnastics. And then at some point I stuck a sticky tape on the floor. Because I had a really big room at my parents', like 30 square metres or so under the roof, and I stuck a strip of masking tape on the floor and that was my balance beam. And then I always did a few gymnastic exercises in my room. (laughs)" (DN, 5:7)

Her in-depth narration of watching gymnastics videos as an inspiration for doing sports herself shows how YouTube serves as an amplifier of DN's interests, and as an expansion of the limited resources that she had in her family context. By being a 'digital window', YouTube offered new perspectives and instructions, which DN then transferred into haptic activities. The concatenation of the physical and the digital space can be felt throughout DN's narrations, whether that implies her detailed narrations of what skills she learned due to YouTube videos or in her positively connotated descriptions of the beauty and lifestyle content she watched. Hence, the platform allowed DN to exceed formerly set boundaries and engage in acts of self-empowerment. Her stories show how important the consumption of YouTube and of commodities via YouTube (such as the scarf or make-up products or the bike that she learned to fix) can be. They serve both as an escape from restricted family households and as a substitute for such aspects of restriction. In both ways, DN used the consumption of videos and tools as a self-configuration and self-cohering strategy: It allowed her to get out and be more.

This analogy offers second thoughts on previously discussed concepts of the modern girl, such as the works of Banet-Weiser or Harris. Within her context and similar to the understanding of the "self-branded girl", DN is "encouraged to be self-reliant and empowered"[272] and she could very much be described as a "can-do-girl", as Harris termed it. [273] However, the understanding of DN as being "self-reliant and empowered"[274] differs to the demonstrated theoretical understandings. In DN's context, YouTube acts as an actual provider of skills and possibilities, which DN connotated in a positive way and did not report any negative experiences with it in her narrations. Hence, her story contrasts Harris' understanding of the "can-do-girl", as Harris proposes the term as the external, societal and political understanding of the woman during the period of postfeminism – how a woman *should* be – and which Harris critically reflects upon.[275] In regards to DN's narrative,

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[272] Banet-Weiser, Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube, 10f.
[273] Harris, Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century, 13.
[274] Banet-Weiser, Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube, 10f.
[275] Harris, Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century, 13.

however, the term "can-do-girl" can be proposed in order to describe the possibilities that DN experienced through the consumption of YouTube videos and its commodities, namely the plurality of things she "can do" now.

This significance of YouTube, namely as a substitution and thus as an enabler aligns with the stories of MH. She shares how she also used YouTube as a platform on which she could educate herself and learn skills that her mother or sister could not teach her:

> "I also learned how to braid hair through YouTube. So Fishtail braid or French braid, Dutch braid, I learned that through YouTube and I can still do that today through YouTube. Because my sister couldn't do it and my mum couldn't do it."[276] (MH, 6:25)

Again, her story shows how YouTube is not only a platform that allows the compensation of role models by providing authentic and intimate creators but, in connection to it, it is also a platform that compensates the lack of 'teachers' by providing videos that do explain and teach such topics of interest.

Therefore, I argue that YouTube content not only offers a consumerist perspective on the 'can-do girl', but also a perspective on a girl who can actually do more because she has access to more. In conjunction with the commodities it includes (e.g. make-up products), it allowed the interviewees to compensate for the personal absence of their private lives. Their stories offer a counter-perspective to the understanding of the 'modern woman' through digital media, which is not only supposed to fulfil empowerment through the consumption of (advertised) products, but can also use YouTube as a form of empowerment through the acquisition of skills and information. The aspect of YouTube as an enabler is crucial to understanding the platform, and I must reiterate how closely it is tied to the needs and relationships of individuals' personal life stories.

6.4.3 YouTube in relation to family dynamics

JW shared a third way of compensating for the lack of personal relationships or role models. Her story is about using beauty content as a source of comparison or participation – similar to the discussion in Theoretical Frames I where YouTube was described as a mirror for girls to reflect on their appearance. In this case, JW also watched YouTube vlogs in order to compare her personal situation to the content provided on-screen. However, JW did not directly focus on herself. Her aim was neither to compare her body, appearance or behaviour, nor did she want to seek an individual role model on YouTube. Rather, JW used YouTube

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[276] MH refers here to different techniques of braiding which vary in the way of crossing the sections of hair. If further interested, this article may help: https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/beauty/hair/a37456427/dutch-braid-vs-french-braid/.

beauty-content to compare her *family context.* During the interview session, she shared in-depth how she liked to follow other families and their daily lives on YouTube. During JW's years of adolescence (around 2013-2017), channels such as "Team Harrison" shared daily routines of their life as a married couple and, eventually, of their life with children. Video formats included daily vlogs, hauls of baby clothes or talks in a "question and answer"-style.[277] The aspect of JW's engagement with other families and their lives on YouTube allowed her to compare her own family with the one on screen and to participate in other structures, and this is intertwined with insecurities about her own family. She describes how – even though her parents are still married – their relationship has often been conflictual and distanced, and she admits that she often hoped for more harmony and physical touch: "Just this not even when you go on a trip, that the parents hold hands or a kiss or this, this tenderness between the two." (JW, 12:18) Words such as "not even when you go on a trip" show how desperate JW would have liked more closeness between her parents and her stories resonate with helplessness and longing. Thoughts like *'If only it had been just once in a while'* resonate. In the same way that YouTube served as an escape and substitute for the other interviewees, JW's desire for a more loving relationship led to the consumption of other families' relationships on YouTube:

> "And I found it kind of interesting to see how it works in other families, because somehow you don't often get to see it. And to see how loving the relationship between the parents is in some cases." (JW, 11:18)

JW's desire to be able to compare and classify her parents' behaviour becomes clear, in line with the fact that YouTube seemed to be one of the only ways of doing so. Her activity of following other lives resembles the qualities of a mirror, a metaphor often used when exploring processes of identification in relation to media consumption. Often, digital content is understood as a mirror that allows (or confronts) the individual to compare and adjust their own behaviour or appearance. According to Fossati, "YouTube reflects you and you reflect (on) YouTube."[278] In JW's case, the mirror does not lead to processes of self-optimization. Instead, the consumption of family vlogs served more as a source to better understand her own family and helped her to contextualise her situation. Here, the digital family content she watched, such as the "Team Harrison"-channel, offered a more harmonious perspective on parental relationships, and she found their dynamic more loving than her family's relationship. However, JW also shared how she experienced similarities between her own

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[277] Team Harrison, https://www.youtube.com/@TeamHarrisonOfficial/videos.
[278] Fossati, YouTube as a Mirror Maze, 458ff.

family and the content she watched on YouTube. The consumption of family vlogs was both contrasting and reassuring to her own place and being:

> "And I also thought it was super great that they showed some of it on YouTube. Um. And you yourself are like, yes, 'it's as normal as we are. It's just as normal a family as we are.' I thought that was nice to see too." (JW, 11:18)

There is a palpable sense of relief in JW's story ("it was super great") and it underlines how important it is for her to be able to categorise her parent's behaviour. Her insecurity and longing for more tenderness between her parents are thus transformed into a form of reassurance by watching YouTube videos. Hence, YouTube as a source of comparison is not only important when it comes to individual forms during adolescence, but also in regards to the understanding of one's family dynamics. This calming of uncertainties is also a form of compensation. What the parents could not do, JW does on her own by watching and comparing YouTube videos. In addition, JW states that she also watched the videos to escape from her own family. She agrees with the interviewer's thoughts that she herself has often watched YouTube to distract herself from her own situation and adds:

> "Yes, it's possible that this played a subconscious role for me. Because the desire or something like 'how it could be different', or how it is different, just to get out of one's own family." (JW, 12:18)

This "how it could be different" is a central aspect that falls into YouTube's hands and that all interviewees address. Again, YouTube content serves as a form of distraction or substitution for the personal context of the individual and thereby provides an extension of private space: JW is now allowed to cross the defined family structure, which in turn helps her to understand and cope with the family dynamics of which she is a part.

But more important is the fact that this desire for something different exists at all. In JW's case, it shows that there is a need to compare and validate her own family, and ultimately a need to escape it digitally. Again, the significance of YouTube is directly linked to the individual's family context, and it shows how absolutely crucial it is to understand this context by focusing on the girls' biographies.

Overall, the connection of the interviewees' personal life stories and their experiences with YouTube shows how what is frequently and broadly labelled as entertainment takes on deeply personal, supportive functions. In particular, beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube was closely connected to the personal lives of the interviewees – and more specifically, it seemed

to be directly connected to each individual's *family* context.[279] In different ways, the content helped the interviewees to understand, compare or substitute certain aspects of their family structure. MH and PK shared how YouTube served as a substitution for a missing role model in relation to beauty and the female identity, and with this replacement also as an extension of the role models whose traits they sought to replace. Furthermore, DN shared how she used YouTube as a tool-kit that could be accessed in order to substitute the general parental support, and that it afforded strategies of self-empowerment and self-configuration. And, lastly, JW used family vlogs in order to compare and participate in family structures that differed from her own.

It is significant here that the interviewees clearly emphasised that certain roles were not sufficiently fulfilled in their family environment, and that this lack especially mattered during the years of changing and growing up. Hence, their stories did not only emphasise the meaning of platforms such as YouTube, but they also showed the importance of the family structure. The analysis of each interviewee's personal life story helped to understand the context in which YouTube was used, and therefore helped to understand what exactly YouTube was being used for and what this extension of a limited space meant for the interviewee. BNIM allowed not only to define different affordances of YouTube, such as mirroring or substitution, but also to explore what lies behind it – what it mirrors and what it substitutes in the interviewees' personal lives.

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[279] Note again: This aspect only regards the four interviewees who experienced adolescence during a time in which YouTube already was established, including JW, PK, MH and DN.

7. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle content in the lives of teenage girls. As there is already a comprehensive research field regarding the production of beauty content, the focus was not particularly on the content itself, but on its meaning in the individual context. Therefore, this study aimed to capture the viewers' perspectives and focus on both their viewing experiences and their personal life stories to better understand how and why girls place such a high value on YouTube beauty and lifestyle content.

The research questions for this exploratory study were as follows:

> RQ1: What meanings do young women attribute to beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube in relation to their adolescent years?
>
> RQ2: How does their meaning relate to their particular context?
>
> RQ3: How do their perspectives align with, challenge or extend existing research?
>
> RQ4: How can biographical methods shed new light on existing research?

To explore these questions, I conducted five qualitative interviews with young women between the ages of 20 and 30. They were regular viewers of beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube and all found the genre to be an important part of their teenage years and the first years of adulthood.

The interview process followed the biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM). It allowed the interviewees to tell their life stories freely and from their point of view, both with and without a connection to their use of YouTube. The stories were then analysed by following the Dubrovnik-method and the BNIM interpretation structure, in terms of the interviewees' case structures and their attributions of meaning to YouTube beauty and lifestyle content. As a result, it was less about what I wanted to explore as an interviewer and more about what the women wanted to tell – the stories are therefore closer to their own experiences and the personal meanings of YouTube.

7.1 Findings

The interviewees gave different impressions of their adolescence in Germany – characterised by suburban idylls, the importance of the family and various interests outside school, such as playing volleyball or gymnastics, dancing, playing instruments or reading. Most importantly, the analysis of the life stories showed that YouTube beauty content was firmly embedded in the context of the interviewees. YouTube beauty content was also not described as 'just' entertainment. Instead, the women used YouTube in relation to highly

personal and intimate issues, looking to the genre for tips, inspiration and new role models. YouTube beauty content must therefore be seen as an important companion during girls' teenage years.

The close analysis of the life stories using BNIM and the Dubrovnik-method led to three main findings. Two of these relate to the general importance of beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube. The final finding highlights how YouTube beauty videos played a central role in the personal life stories of the interviewees by compensating for the lack of characteristics of family members or friends that the interviewees wished for.

1) The analysis suggests that YouTube plays a significant role in the importance of beauty, fashion and self-presentation for girls during adolescence. According to the interviewees, related content on YouTube in the form of 'hauls' and 'make-up tutorials' was frequently watched in order to learn and adopt beauty practices. Their stories reinforce Giddens' understanding of media as a guide in the "project of the self" and the importance of the platform in the girls' development of their own appearance. However, the interviews also showed that the consumption of beauty-related content reinforced the meaning of beauty, the consumption of make-up products and mostly conveyed traditional understandings.

This aspect is in line with existing critiques of YouTube as an amplifier of postmodern and neoliberal practices, such as the consumption of beauty products in order to self-modify oneself and feel empowered. What is thought-provoking here is the aspect that the interviewees only reflected on and criticised these points in retrospect, while the consumption of beauty content in their teenage years was perceived as positive and helpful. In regards to beauty, YouTube must therefore be seen in two ways, both as a support for insecurities about beauty standards and as a reinforcement of such (traditional) beauty standards and insecurities, due to algorithms that favour traditionally feminine topics and vloggers who deal more extensively with these topics in their videos.

2) YouTube plays an important role in teenagers' identification and socialisation processes. The interviewees shared that they could connect with the vloggers and build an intimate relationship. The vloggers often served as female role models in terms of beauty, relationships and lifestyle advice, whose advice and appearance were taken on board and imitated. The finding agrees with previous research, such as that by Berryman and Kavka or García-Rapp, whose studies also focused on the importance of YouTube vloggers as role models.[280] The interviewees also described how YouTube beauty and lifestyle content served as a social

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[280] Berryman and Kavka, I Guess a Lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend. García-Rapp, "My Friend Bubz".

activity and topic of communication among the interviewees' peer groups. Their stories reinforced how YouTube beauty and lifestyle content enabled processes of self-reflection and group reflection. Thus, the platform served as a provider of individual and social 'templates' that could be copied and referenced in both self and social group processes.

3) What underlies both findings and forms the most important point of this analysis is *why* YouTube was so closely linked to the interviewees' teenage years in the first place. Here, the biographic approach revealed that YouTube served as a form of compensation or substitution for individually experienced lacks or deficiencies in the interviewees' personal context. In the interviews, four out of five respondents said that they felt left alone when it came to certain issues or general activities, and that they felt unable to turn to family members or friends for help or information. In turn, YouTube performed this function and is therefore a medium that is extremely close to the intimate processes of the self. Accordingly, the interviewees watched beauty and lifestyle content to compensate for the lack of female role models in their personal context, or to learn skills and pursue interests that were not provided by the family, or to reflect and compare insecurities and conflicts in their own family.

7.2 Relevance and future perspective

The findings have confirmed much of what has been discussed and criticised in theory, such as the reinforcement of the importance of beauty and cosmetics or the potential of YouTube vloggers as role models. However, in addition to picking up on already existing affordances, the individual stories make one thing very clear: The consumption of YouTube videos in the area of beauty and lifestyle is not just a simple entertainment or pastime. Instead, it is closely tied with the need for security in the family construct, the desire for guidance in the teenage phase and with the pressure to make up, dress and present oneself according to a certain image due to traditional, postfeminist and neoliberalist influences. The interviews show that this desire for guidance was 'solved' by YouTube and the consumption of beauty and lifestyle content happened mainly in the stories where the family environment could not fulfil this desire – by being either absent, conflictual or 'unsuitable' for the task (for example, the mother or sister role did not meet the child's needs). This finding means, on the one hand, that YouTube played an important role in the teenage years of the interviewees and secondly, that the interviewees were missing something in their family environment. It also means that YouTube is the *replacement* of missing roles or character traits and not necessarily the *displacement* of already existing roles.

This form of substitution also ensured that new aspects were added to the interviewees' lives, such as strongly homogeneous role and body images or product recommendations, but also tips and instructions that helped the interviewees. Many aspects that were taken up by the interviewees, but also discussed in previous research projects, can therefore be seen here as a consequence of the interviewees' personal life stories – because they play a large part in why the interviewees engaged so much with beauty and lifestyle content on YouTube.

The use of a biographic-narrative approach allowed the interviewees to share their experiences about their family in the first place, which then initiated narratives about media as an important compensation. Biographic-narrative approaches can therefore be particularly helpful in understanding why individuals use YouTube vloggers as role models or their videos as guidance, and which aspects in their individual contexts were experienced as missing or lacking during adolescence.

At the same time, I must emphasise that I have only focused on the platform YouTube and its meanings. Teenage girls today experience phases of personal change with other social media platforms such as *Instagram* and *TikTok* – platforms that offer different features than YouTube and have a larger variety of beauty and lifestyle content. The stories told by the interviewees therefore also pose questions for today's teenage generation: How are new platforms integrated into the personal lives of teenage girls today? How much of the "project of the self" takes place there? Are there also things here that the platform substitutes from their own context, such as the role of mother or sister? And finally, how is the understanding of beauty changing as a result of new social media platforms and the beauty content conveyed there?

This conclusion encourages further research not only into women's and girls' media use, but also into their private contexts, asking what needs and insecurities girls have in their teenage years, what wishes and demands they make on their role models (especially their guardians), and what affordances the substitution with beauty and lifestyle content implies. I therefore hope that future research will more often consider the personal context of the interviewees, the meaning of media and its relevance on a societal level in a coherent way. BNIM as a method could help to understand the individual's stories and the connection with their media use. Therefore, and in conclusion, it is exactly the kind of approach that can create more understanding – in media use research as well as in media education and social research in general.

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APPENDIX

The appendix serves to give an impression of the research method by means of excerpts and examples. It is to be understood as an example of the individual steps of the BNIM method. Many of the steps were carried out in German and translated afterwards for illustration.

The appendix is structured as follows:

I. SQUIN

I am interested in the meaning of YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos in your life – why you used to – or still – watch them and how they were connected to your daily life.

So... I'd like to ask you to tell me everything that comes to mind when you think about your watching of beauty and lifestyle videos on YouTube. You may begin when you saw your first video, or wherever you want, really.

You can tell me everything that comes to your mind. There is no wrong topic or answer – I am interested in everything that is important to you. Please take the time you need. I will listen and I won't interrupt.

Ich bin daran interessiert, was YouTube Beauty und Lifestyle-Videos eigentlich bedeuten – also warum wir als junge Frauen sie oft geguckt haben oder immer noch schauen und wie die Videos mit dem Alltag und dem restlichen Leben verbunden sind.

Ich möchte deshalb, dass du mir deine Geschichte dazu erzählst: Was für eine Verbindung hast du zu YouTube Videos und wie sah diese Verbindung in den letzten Jahren aus? Du kannst gerne ab dem Zeitpunkt beginnen, an dem du die Videos das erste Mal geschaut hast – oder wo immer du anfangen möchtest.

Erzähl mir alles was dir einfällt. Es gibt kein richtig oder falsch – ich bin an allem interessiert, was für dich irgendeine Bedeutung hat. Nimm dir die Zeit, die du brauchst. Ich höre einfach zu und werde dich nicht unterbrechen.

II. The research structure: Following questions

The following questions were freely formulated, based on the categories introduced earlier. They were a rather intuitive set of questions, not set in stone, and were never used in their full length, but rather in situations that allowed for further questions on the topic introduced by the interviewee.

- Could you tell me what YouTube means to you in general?
- Could you tell me more about your experience of watching the videos?
- Could you tell me more about your relationship with the YouTubers?
- What was it like during the years you watched the videos? Did you talk to your friends about the media you consumed, such as Instagram stories/films or videos?

- How much would you talk to your family about the YouTube beauty and lifestyle videos you watch?

III. Interview-extract I

Extract of: MH, Subsession I, p. 1-2

I: Exactly. So, um, I'm generally interested in what significance YouTube has and especially what beauty and lifestyle vlogs and videos mean in the everyday lives and lives of young women. So how we watched them, how often and why and, um, what it actually does to our everyday life and how they are connected to our everyday life. And that's why I would like you to just tell me your story about YouTube and the kind of videos that you watch – so what kind of connection did you build with YouTube videos and what did that connection look like in the last years, how did it maybe develop. And you can just tell me everything from the time when you watched the first video and became aware of it for the first time, or it doesn't really matter, you can just tell me from whenever you have the feeling that it has a meaning.

MH: Okay, so –

I: And I –

MH: Oh, I see (laughs).

I: (laughs) Exactly, so just tell me everything you can think of. As much as you want, I'm interested in everything, there's no right or wrong at all, it can be super rambling or not. If it has meaning for you, then it's great. And I actually just listen to you and don't interrupt you.

MH: Ok. Um, I don't know exactly when I watched a YouTube video for the first time, I think it was always implemented a bit in my childhood, youth, because as children – my siblings and I – we always had a little computer room, slash playroom. There was always a computer in there and at some point, I think I was 12, 11, 13, I can't say exactly, in any case more than ten years ago...um, my brother started watching YouTube videos and then I kind of did too.

And at the beginning it wasn't, uh, vlogs or YouTubers or anything with content, but really just music, karaoke videos, um, sing-alongs and so on. And then at some point this whole bubble opened up for me... of YouTube lifestyle videos, I would call it now. And when I went to secondary school, and people were a bit more concerned with clothes and make-up and whatever else, I started watching all these videos. How do I put on make-up, um, what do all the girls who are on YouTube wear... And they were all a bit older than me, so always about 1, 2, 3 years older and you looked up to them...um...and then I especially... Should I also say the YouTubers I watched? Is that interesting?

I: Mhm. Yes. Everything.

MH: I mainly watched the classic YouTubers who were famous at the time, like DagiBee, BibisBeautyPalace, um, Daruum at the very beginning, her name was... what's her name, Niilam Faruuq? Exactly, I definitely watched her a lot and um... I got all my "expertise" for make-up and dressing from her and above all I talked a lot with my friends about it and we watched YouTube videos together and that somehow took up a large part of my youth. Um... After school, when I didn't have to do any homework, I would go on YouTube and watch a few YouTube videos. Um... and then in the course of my school years, the older I got up to the 11th, 12th grade, it got more and more that you didn't just watch make-up videos and clothes videos, but also the vlogs that were being made a lot at the time. So "I'm going shopping in the city centre" or "I'm going to school" and then, when I watched the YouTubers – well, exactly, I also watched Ischtar Isik a lot, Shanti Tan... erm...

I: Mhm.

MH: I grew up with them, and at some point they had a theme week at school. And that always came to me two or three years later, but I already knew all about it through YouTube, because the YouTubers had already set an example for me, so to speak.

Um, and at that time it was not yet the case that... Well, they recommended products and I certainly bought things that they used, but definitely not in the way it is done today. I didn't have any money of my own with which I could have bought it and my parents wouldn't have wanted that either, so I was already very... um... or consumed more consciously... or no, not more consciously, that's nonsense, I just didn't have the money to buy it. Um...

I: Mhm.

MH: And um...exactly. So I don't think I let myself be influenced so much by the products, but I did let myself be influenced by the way they made things, um....and that went on all the time until I was actually, yeah I would say 21, 22. I'm almost 25 now. Um....

When I was in Australia after high school, I didn't watch that much YouTube, just because I didn't have that much time and there were better things to do than watch videos on the internet.

IV. Interview-extract II

Extract of: DN, Subsession II, p. 6-7

DN: (laughs) I lost the thread. Um. Hm. Yeah, definitely. Yes, it... Just, I would say, just when puberty started or that came with: OK, I kind of got my period or... In any case, it was

all a bit tricky when I went through puberty. That was about the age I was then. And then, when they realised, okay, I've grown up a bit and other issues are more important. Before that I was still more of a child. And then I suddenly got my period and breasts and had to wear a bra and no idea what. I think that was the phase where it wasn't so easy for them either. And then I tried to try out all sorts of things here and there and I don't think they found that cool. Because I think they just didn't want to see it. I don't know why, we never talked about it. But it was tricky sometimes. We often found some kind of compromise and then, in the end, it returned to normal one or two years later. Suddenly I didn't put on any make-up and when I did, my mum would say: "Hey, you look really beautiful today, what happened?" I was like, 'wow thank you'... (laughs)

I: But how did you talk about it then, what did it look like when your parents brought it up, or these arguments – how did they come about?

DN: Um, I don't really know exactly. So it was really random, that's why I was always so confused about what their problem was. So in general, everything is a bit of a difficult subject. My parents, well, I'm not close with my parents either. And because they were never there, I understand that they had to work and wanted us to have a financial basis and that we didn't lack anything. But on the other hand, they were so rarely there that they never got to know us and never knew what we do and how we do it and what we like to do and so on. And then I just did what I felt like doing, what I felt like doing, and just tried things out.

And then, for example, they just came up at some point.... I went to school in the morning and got dressed, and then my mum, my mum suddenly came up to my room. And that was the age when my parents never got up with me to go to school, because I just got up myself, got dressed, fixed my lunch, then I left. And suddenly she was awake and came up to my room and saw that I was wearing nail polish. And that wasn't the first time, so it happened more often. And then she suddenly went crazy and said that Dad and she didn't think it was good that I was wearing nail polish and why I was doing it and so on, and that I shouldn't attach so much importance to my appearance and that I shouldn't be so, I don't know, chic and walk around like a bimbo. And then they somehow, well, that was also a big, big point of contention, but then they somehow started to relate it to my friends and say that they were just a bad influence for me and that they no longer wanted me to have contact with them and so. And yes, that's when my world fell apart a bit. Because they were my support, so to speak, outside of school, because my parents weren't there. And [L.] was my best friend at school and that was so unchallenged. And we did a lot together and I was often at home with them because her mum was always there, her dad worked full time and her mum I think part time

or something. Or not at all at the time, I don't remember, but she was at home a lot. And [L.] lived a bit closer to the school and somehow I was often with her and we ate at their place or I slept there or I don't know what. And her mum was always there, so we spent a lot of time together. And, um, I don't know if they didn't like it or what, and then suddenly they said that they wanted me to have no more contact with [L.] and then the fight broke out because I didn't understand what their problem was. Because it wasn't the first time I'd worn nail polish and suddenly they made such a big deal out of it, even though they'd never really talked about it before. And then all of a sudden to somehow relate it to other people, so huh, sure, the environment somehow has an influence, but it's not just because of that. And, yes, then the conversation was also somehow... So I left, went to school. (laughs) And then it wasn't such a nice day at school, and then I went home and we didn't talk about it anymore, so the subject was simply over. And I don't even know how we stayed or what happened next. I think I simply repressed it, but of course nothing changed in the friendship, nor in my behaviour at first. It came back at some point, only a year later, and then it suddenly worked again. And that's how it was more often. Sometimes they had an outburst and thought, I don't know, they can't control their child any more or they don't know what their child is doing, I don't know what they thought, they have to show some kind of boundaries now, so that I still know that they are my parents and that they are in charge here until I am of age. And... But then it was kind of good again all of a sudden, really random, I don't know. (laughs) So in retrospect... Yes, and I think they noticed at some point that I wasn't doing so well and that I was just... That I was just missing something, and sometimes I slept at Leonie's two nights in a row and wasn't home for a whole day because I was away for two nights. And then my mum would call and ask how I was, where I was and what I was doing. And then suddenly it worked, but before that it never did. Um, but yes, I don't know. That was already... And somehow, yes. Difficult subject.

V. Interview-extract III

Extract of: JW, Subsession II, p. 11-13

I: Yes. Why family vlogs like that? Can you remember what you found cool or exciting about them?

JW: I think it was just exciting to see how family life is elsewhere or how it works there. Um. And especially, I found it super exciting to observe the relationship between the parents. Because with my parents the relationship is... They're still together, but it's difficult.

And I found it kind of interesting to see how it works in other families, because somehow you don't get to see it. And to see how loving the relationship between the parents is in some cases,

I found that... I thought it was a pity to see it that way, because you thought to yourself: 'OK, and it's not like that with me'. But somehow it was also funny, because many things are always similar in every family. There are arguments between siblings everywhere.

And I also thought it was great that they showed some of it on YouTube. Um. And you realise, yes, it's as normal as we are. It's just as normal a family as we are. I also found that nice to see.

I: Mhm. Was it like that at that time, too, that your parents...? Did they argue or what did it look like when it wasn't so loving?

JW: Not necessarily quarrelling, just that not even when you go on a trip, that the parents hold hands or a kiss or this, this tenderness between the two. So, or you just didn't notice them at all, that can also be the case, of course. But I don't really think that's the case today, but um, the tenderness between them. It was never the tenderness towards us or the affectionate way towards us, but always between the two of them, so that you didn't really notice it.

I: Mhm. Would you have wished for that more during that period? Or why did it somehow reassure you to look at others and compare them, 'How is that'?

JW: Yes, it certainly calmed me down. Even today I find it a pity and often think about it, especially when I was at home again. So it was certainly the case that I wished that things would be different.

I: Yes, I can remember it very well, my parents separated from each other when I was a teenager, from the age of 14 to 19, but they also were back together from time to time. So it was a real back and forth, and I can also remember that I tried to build up security by participating in other lives – through YouTube, for example, maybe also a bit through friends, but a lot simply by watching videos where you can watch what others are doing, because that gives you the feeling that you are still participating and that it is perhaps not so important how great it is at home.

JW: Yes, it could well be that that is subconsciously part of it for me. Because the search or something like 'how it could be different', or how it is different, just out of your own family. And I think, especially as the eldest sister, I also find that you still have this in the back of your mind: 'Yes, what if they separate now?' And then my younger siblings, they suffer even more than I do. You have to be able to give your siblings a sense of security, that it's not so bad for them.

I: Yes, did you...Would you also describe yourself as having always tried to be so responsible and 'It's all good, guys, no problem, I'll hold the fort' and take on that role in the sibling relationship?

JW: Mhm, I think I've tried it many times. But I also have to say that I'm not the type of person who, when my dad or my mum have a fight or something doesn't go right, I don't sit there silently. Instead, I say something. And that often leads to conflicts, or to a loud, noisy argument. Um. But somehow I didn't want my siblings to get involved. So then I was the black sheep at that moment, then I got into trouble or was yelled at for a moment. But then it was okay for me, because I'm generally the one who only gets hit at that moment.

And I remember one time my sister kind of asked, "Are they breaking up now?" Sometime, when they were arguing. And I thought that was a terrible question, because I felt so helpless all of a sudden and didn't want them to find out somehow, so I tried to keep the biggest thing away from them as much as possible.

VI. Analysis: Extract of the TSS

DN's TSS is based on an 88-page table that sequenced the interview content and then categorised each passage according to the BNIM structure, including attention to speaker change, topic change and DARNE text sorts. Based on the sequencing, the following table was generated, which gives an overview of which themes DN used in her narratives, how often they appeared and in which text sorts she narrated her experiences. It is used as an example of the result of the TSS, which was carried out in a similar way during the analysis of the rest of the interview session.

Subsession I

Topic // *keywords*	Textsorts	References
YouTube/begin/make-up videos	Report Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN6 SichtungstabelleSQUIN7
Adolescence/make-up	Report Narrative Report Evaluation Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN8 SichtungstabelleSQUIN9 SichtungstabelleSQUIN10 SichtungstabelleSQUIN20 SichtungstabelleSQUIN22
YouTube/ make-up videos	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN11
Make-Up/purchase of products	Report Narrative Description	SichtungstabelleSQUIN12 SichtungstabelleSQUIN13 SichtungstabelleSQUIN14

	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN15
Adolescence/make-up/ YouTube-videos	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN17
	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN18
Today/make-up	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN19
Adolescence/make-up/mother	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN21
	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN23
Tenth grade/make-up	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN24
A-Levels/make-up	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN25
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN26
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN27
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN28
School/scarfs	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN30
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN33
School/scarfs/YouTube-videos	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN31
YouTube/tutorials	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN34
	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN36
YouTube/easy to learn	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN35
YouTube/tutorials/manual work	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN37
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN38
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN39
	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN40
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN42
Media/inspirations	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN41
Today/make-up	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN44
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN45
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN46
Today/YouTube/learning skills	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN47
2008/sports videos/gymnastics	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN50
2008/sports videos/walkman	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN51
2008/gymnastics/bedroom	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN52
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN54
YouTube/tutorials/rubik's-cube	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN55
	Description/Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN57
Today/rubik's-cube	Report	SichtungstabelleSQUIN58
YouTube/music genre	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN64
10 years old/learning the piano	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN69
16 years old/learning the piano/YouTube	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSQUIN70
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN72
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSQUIN74

Subsession II

Topic // *keywords*	Textsorts	References
YouTube/make-up	Report	SichtungstabelleSub6
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub10
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub11
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub12
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub13
	Report/Argument	SichtungstabelleSub14
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub15
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub16
Make-up/friends	Report	SichtungstabelleSub7
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub9
Make-up/tv series	Report	SichtungstabelleSub8
Make-up/friends/BRAVO	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub17
Adolescence/"Treff"	Description	SichtungstabelleSub19
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub20
Adolescence/BRAVO	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub21
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub22
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub23
Adolescence/make-up/trends	Description	SichtungstabelleSub25
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub26
	Report/Description	SichtungstabelleSub27
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub29
	Description	SichtungstabelleSub31
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub33
Adolescence/make-up/Inspiration	Report	SichtungstabelleSub37
YouTube/genres/vlogs	Report	SichtungstabelleSub39
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub41
YouTube/genres/make-up videos	Report	SichtungstabelleSub40
Adolescence/daily activities	Report	SichtungstabelleSub43
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub44
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub45
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub46
Adolescence/finances/pocket money	Report	SichtungstabelleSub48
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub51
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub52
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub53
Adolescence/finances/jobs	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub49
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub50
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub54
Adolescence/self-appearance	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub56
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub57
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub58
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub60

	Report	SichtungstabelleSub62
Fifth grade/self-appearance	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub59
Adolescence/shopping	Report	SichtungstabelleSub63
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub64
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub65
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub67
Adolescence/character/engagement	Report	SichtungstabelleSub71
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub72
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub73
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub74
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub75
Adolescence/parents/relationship	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub76
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub77
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub78
Adolescence/parents/make-up	Report	SichtungstabelleSub79
Adolescence/parents/relationship	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub84
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub85
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub86
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub89
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub90
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub91
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub92
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub93
	Narrative/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub94
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub96
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub97
	Narrative/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub98
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub99
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub100
Today/parents/relationship	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub87
Adolescence/reference person	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub95
Adolescence/reference person/L. /father	Report/Description	SichtungstabelleSub106
Adolescence/reference person/L. /mother	Argumentation/Report	SichtungstabelleSub107
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub111
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub112
Adolescence/reference person/L.	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub108
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub109
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub110
Adolescence/alcohol use	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub114
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub115
	Narrative/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub116
Adolescence/parents/relationship	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub118
	Narrative/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub120

	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub121
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub122
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub123
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub124
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub126
Adolescence/reference person	Argumentation/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub130
Primary school/moving	Report	SichtungstabelleSub132
Primary school//Karlsruhe/friends	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub133
	Report/Description	SichtungstabelleSub136
Primary school/suburb/friends	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub134
	Description	SichtungstabelleSub135
	Report/Description	SichtungstabelleSub137
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub138
new school/decision	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub139
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub140
	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub141
Primary school/suburb	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub143
Primary school/gymnastics	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub144
social activities with friends	Report	SichtungstabelleSub148
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub149
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub150
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub151
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub152
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub154
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub155
Adolescence/growing older	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub156
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub157
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub158
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub159
Secondary school/Social peer groups	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub162
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub163
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub164
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub166
Secondary school/new interests	Report	SichtungstabelleSub165
Secondary school/make-up	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub167
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub168
	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub169
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub171
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub172
Outfits/indecisiveness	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub170
Secondary school/fitness	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub173
	Narrative/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub174
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub176

	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub178
Fitness/sports videos	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub180
Fitness/eating habits	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub181
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub182
	Narrative/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub183
	Narrative/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub184
Secondary school/YouTube	Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub186
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub188
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub190
Secondary school/smartphone	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub189
YouTube/tutorials	Report	SichtungstabelleSub192
school/rubik's cube	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub194
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub195
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub196
Learning to knit	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub197
	Narrative/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub198
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub199
	Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub201
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub203
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub204
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub206
Keeping the hands busy	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub208
	Argumentation/Report	SichtungstabelleSub209
Studies/YouTube	Report	SichtungstabelleSub215
Covid/YouTube	Report	SichtungstabelleSub216
Bachelor studies/YouTube	Report	SichtungstabelleSub217
Master's/YouTube	Report	SichtungstabelleSub218
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub219
YouTube/functions	Description/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub221
	Description/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub223
YouTube/relationship to YouTubers	Report	SichtungstabelleSub225
YouTube/relationship to YouTubers	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub227
	Report	SichtungstabelleSub229
YouTube/relationship to YouTubers/representation	Report	SichtungstabelleSub231
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub233
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub236
Make-up/representation	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub237
Growing up/sense of belonging	Report/Narrative	SichtungstabelleSub241
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub242
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub243
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub244
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub245
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub246

	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub248
School/teacher	Report	SichtungstabelleSub252
	Report/Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub254
YouTube/friends	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub262
YouTube/vlogs	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub263
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub265
Social media	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub267
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub268
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub269
	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub271
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub272
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub273
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub274
Podcasts	Argumentation/Report	SichtungstabelleSub274
Comparison with others	Argumentation/ Evaluation	SichtungstabelleSub281
Media/interest and specific search	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub282
Apps/potential for addiction	Report/Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub284
	Argumentation	SichtungstabelleSub286

Main themes that were extracted out of DN's TSS:

- Make-up as an important topic in teenage years, especially among friends

- Full, varied, committed everyday life through hobbies and voluntary work

- YouTube as a "tutorial source", as a knowledge resource

- Parents as a missing role in everyday life

- Best friend and her family as a close reference person

VII. Analysis: Extract of the Dubrovnik-Analysis

Interview: MH, analysis session II, subsession II, p. 6, 171 – p. 7, 205

EXPERIENCE

- super reflective

- detached, but also a bit sad

- Sister and mother did not come off so well

WHAT IS SAID?

- In this part, MH tells why YouTube played such a big role in the first place and what kind of connection she had with the YouTubers.

- The focus here is mainly on what her big sister (and also her mum) couldn't teach her and what she then acquired accordingly through YouTube
- "always thinking like that in Hollywood films, what big sister gives you for the time, how to put on make-up and how I braid my hair and all sorts of things, my sister just wasn't that."
- Sister is described as "more pragmatic", "rougher", "pubescent" and "bitchy".
- her mum was also not so "posh" and could not have taught her anything either

- through this gap – i.e. through the sister, but who could not (did not) advise her on the topics of make-up, fashion, appearance – YouTube became more significant.
- MH describes the YouTubers as "sister substitutes, for all these topics: Beauty topics, clothes topics"
- MH cites the example of hair braiding here: "I also learned to braid hair through YouTube."
- "Because my sister couldn't do it and my mum couldn't do it."
- in conclusion, MH tells us that she is now the one who is asked for topics related to make-up, appearance, hair
- "am now also still the one in the family who is asked: 'Hey, can you paint my fingernails', 'I want to go there and there today, can you do my make-up', 'Can you do my hair', simply for the reason that I have learned this through YouTube."

HOW IS IT SAID?
- MH starts directly with her big sister. This direct reference is not so obvious when we look at the question: "What kind of relationship did you actually have with the YouTubers with whom you had the closest relationship?"
- MH doesn't start with her relationship with the YouTubers, but with her relationship with her sister!
- Hence: main reason or most important point must be her big sister, or lack of certain qualities
  - Affirmation: YouTube is much more compensation for certain roles than anything else
- The sister is also described in such a way that it is clear that there are things missing about her: "Well, I have a big sister like that. But my big sister is not at all in this...she was always a bit...how should I describe it...not rougher, but just had other interests than me, like that."
- Narrative: Sister is not how I imagine a big sister to be or how I would like her to be.
- "rougher", "just not at all...", "just other interests"
  - Resonates: Desire for other characteristics of the sister and disappointment about it

- "You didn't do your job, sis."

- precisely this disappointment is described once again. MH points out the apparently classic image of the big sister drawn by Hollywood films: "always thinking like that in Hollywood films, what your big sister gives you for the time, how to put on make-up and how I braid my hair and all kinds of things, that just wasn't my sister."

- First of all: importance of Hollywood films for young girls big! Important reference points when it comes to socialisation, and developing one's own personality.

- Very succinctly put: "My sister was none of those things."

- Did not teach her how to apply make-up or braid hair

- Directly afterwards, MH jumps back to her sister and describes that her sister was the opposite: "a bit more pragmatic", too old ("I think the distance between us is just a bit too big"), "very pubescent and bitchy".

- Reference mainly to the negative qualities (MH does not go into what positive qualities her sister has)

- Through these negative references: Disappointment with the condition is evident, as is the lack of the qualities MH desires.

- MH concludes – she thus sees the relationship with YouTubers as a direct result of this condition – that YouTubers were the substitute: "yes, that's why YouTubers, especially Ischtar Isik, who comes to my mind now so at a stroke, were a big sister substitute, for all these topics: Beauty topics, clothes topics, um, yeah..."

- "That's why": Reference, argumentation

- Substitute: sister couldn't help here, hence YouTube. Here also direct reference to Ischtar Isik (German YouTuber who was big at the time).

- the mum couldn't help either: "My mum was also never so often chic in inverted commas, um, or that she could have taught me anything."

- 'Chic' *(German: Schickimicki)*: interesting how all the issues are also valued. *Schickimicki* implies a devaluation – on the other hand, MH wishes that the sister and mum could have taught her that, too

- MH brings up an example: "this is really a really profane topic, but I also learned to braid hair through YouTube. Because my sister couldn't do it and my mum couldn't do it."

- Profane: implies that the sister and mum themselves could not do something so simple

- "Because my sister couldn't do it and my mum couldn't do it": failure of family members led MH to YouTube

- The mother and sister do not embody the role of the woman as MH would like for her own learning of the role. Topics like make-up, clothes she could not learn here - by describing the sister with derogatory adjectives, the frustration or disappointment about this becomes clear. At the same time, MH seems very reflective.

- It is important for MH to have such a role model from whom she can learn these topics.
- Considers it necessary to learn hair and make-up skills in order to grow up.
- Accordingly, MH has now grown into the role of showing this to her mum and sister:
- "am now also still the one in the family who is asked", "Hey, can you paint my fingernails", "I want to go there and there today, can you do my make-up", "Can you do my hair", "simply for the reason that I have acquired this through YouTube"
  - YouTube as a self-empowerment tool
  - Learning skills through YouTube – "Do it Yourself-era" and "can-do girl"

- Concluding: "therefore YouTube and the YouTubers were a very big substitute for the big sister or the mum or the best friend who can already do things."
- Reflective and argumentative, this is the conclusion
- "who can already do things": Mum and sister just couldn't do that in that area.

LEARNINGS
- MH describes her mum and her big sister as roles that could not teach her about make-up, clothes, hair and appearance: especially the big sister is described as a person with deficits in these areas and is generally described in a rather pejorative way.
- YouTube offers a way out here, through which MH was able to appropriate things for herself. The YouTubers embody a substitute for the sister or mother here. YouTube here again compensates and self-empowers from a social or family construct that cannot impart desired qualities.
- But again, it is important to note that the starting point is the sister/mother with missing qualities and not the YouTuber with better qualities!

- YouTube as a big sister, however, coincides with the analyses of other research: young people build a social bond with female YouTubers and see them as role models, often in concrete comparison to big sisters or the mother role.

- The skills and themes that MH was keen to learn are again related to the external: the transformation of the female body through hairstyles, make-up or clothing. MH presents here the themes of the time and the themes of her generation. She also describes preoccupation with appearance as an adolescent development.

- YOUTUBE AS A SUBSTITUTE