(Re-)framing the Homeless Experience: Exploring Homeless Lives and Identities on TikTok and YouTube

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KEYWORDS

PUBLICATION DATE

HOW TO CITE

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_Abstract

Despite the ongoing prevalence of homelessness throughout the world, the experience remains highly stigmatized. Presentations of homelessness in traditional media tend to render subjects faceless, nameless, static, and passive, dehumanizing them in the process. In response to this presentation, some homeless individuals are using social media to share their lives and experiences. This _Article examines the social media posts of two young homeless women. It explores their experience and presentation of homelessness in their daily videos on TikTok and YouTube. Acting as a confessional and relational diary online, posting on social media allows these women to challenge existing perceptions and narratives about homelessness by showing their authentic day-to-day experience of it. By sharing their lives online, these women offer their viewers a deeply intimate, vulnerable, and relational window into the experience of homelessness, which challenges the faceless, nameless and largely invisible experience depicted in traditional media. They achieve this by sharing their routines of self-care and care for others; by participating in public space and community; and by performing gratitude, selflessness, hard work, and humility. Sharing their experience of homelessness on social media enables these women to craft a self-presentation, framing themselves as more-than-homeless.

_Introduction

Despite growing rates of homelessness throughout the world, the phenomenon continues to be highly stigmatized, and the individuals affected, dehumanized.[1] Homeless people are depicted as lamentable,[2] dirty,[3] lazy,[4] undeserving,[5] and a threat to society.[6] They exist as "shadowy"[7] figures on the outskirts of society, unwelcome and undesirable in public space.[8] Their homelessness is viewed as a personal failing[9] as a result of weak character.[10] When presented in traditional news media, homeless individuals are depicted "in ways that render […] them faceless and nameless, or in some cases completely invisible."[11] They are often photographed from a distance, in positions that make the individual's face hard to identify, reducing the subject to the stigma of their circumstance, rather than recognizing their individual story or value.[12] When their faces are photographed, they usually demonstrate no eye contact and the photo caption rarely includes the subject's name.[13] These depictions sensationalize homeless subjects, contributing to stigma.[14]

In response to this stigma, a growing number of homeless individuals are sharing their experiences on social media sites such as TikTok and YouTube. These participatory, video sharing sites offer individuals the opportunity to share their

everyday lives and stories, and connect with others in the process.[15] Video sharing platforms constitute domains "of self expression, community, and public confession."[16] The medium of the video "helps us to represent subjectivity as plural, intertextual, and interrelational,"[17] which allows homeless individuals to challenge the "us" and "them" mentality which is inherent in stigmatization.[18] Furthermore, similar to the online diary,[19] the vlog acts as a playground for identity[20] and a vehicle for transformation.[21] As Tobias Raun found in his exploration of transgender vloggers on YouTube, the vlog "is an important part of a process of self-invention, serving as a testing ground for experimentations with, and manifestations of (new) identities."[22]

User generated video content, shared on participatory sites such as TikTok and YouTube shifts the power balance away from traditional media, allowing everyday individuals to engage in the production and dissemination of their stories.[23] Sometimes described as citizen journalism, many people around the world now have the ability to document, record and publish stories.[24] In the age of social media and the "broadcast era"[25] what is most often broadcasted is the self. Over the last two decades many people have taken up the invitation to "broadcast yourself,"[26] engaging in what Anthony Giddens calls "the project of the self"[27]—a particular time in our history where individuals are obsessed with constructing and presenting the self in public, online. These online presentations of the self have the potential to reach an audience of millions, and have resulted in new industries of micro-celebrities, such as influencers.[28] They also present new challenges around authenticity,[29] visibility,[30] and labor.[31] Importantly, these mediated practices have completely disrupted storytelling in our society, empowering individuals to take agency over their narratives and author their presentations in contrast to their presentations in traditional media. As Fransen-Taylor and Narayan found in their exploration of homelessness in cyberspace, social media provides homeless individuals "with an opportunity to challenge stereotypes" "from a position of equality."[32] Though achieving equality through social media involves a significant amount of unseen labor.[33]

We analyze the TikTok shorts and YouTube vlogs of two young homeless women, Ashley and Sarah. Both women self-identify as homeless, although their experience of homelessness differ: Ashley couch-surfed and then lived in her car for a year, while Sarah slept in a homeless shelter for four months. By broadcasting, in real time, their experience of homelessness, Ashley and Sarah challenge the presentations of the

faceless, nameless, invisible individual; instead, they offer a view of homeless subjects who are diverse, intimate, vulnerable, and deeply relatable. Rather than positioning homeless subjects as Other[34]—which is what stigma achieves—sharing their lives on TikTok and YouTube frames homeless individuals as being just like us. In the case of Ashley and Sarah, sharing videos about their experience allows these young women to share their experience of homelessness in a way that invites dialogue and relationship. Sharing videos invites the viewer to participate in the individual's journey, their struggles, and triumphs. For Ashley and Sarah, TikTok and YouTube offer the opportunity to frame homelessness as a circumstance and not their defining characteristic. As Josie Jolley argues in her auto-ethnography of homelessness, individuals "are neither ontologically nor existentially reduced to [their] homelessness."[35] Jolley suggests that ongoing renegotiations of the self "resist a subsumption into the singular mass of 'the homeless,' becoming instead someone more-than-homeless."[36] We argue that sharing videos is part of this renegotiation, making it a powerful act of self-formation and agency. Critically, it is through mundane practices that the homeless negotiate themselves to become more-than-homeless,[37] and it is precisely the mundane practices of everyday life that our homeless subjects share through their shorts and vlogs.

Ashley's and Sarah's shorts and vlogs offer them a space in which to play with different presentations of their homeless experience. Their videos empower them to challenge existing social narratives about homelessness and exercise agency in crafting new narratives. Rather than passive victims of circumstance or weak characters suffering from personal failing, shorts and vlogs allow Ashely and Sarah to offer alternative presentations of women who take care of themselves and others, who participate in society as producers and consumers, who are hard-working and humble, who are deeply self-reflexive and grateful, and who are homeless. Importantly, it is through the diary-like sharing of their everyday lives online that Ashley and Sarah present themselves as more-than-homeless.

To explore these subjects, we analyze four months of homeless content produced by both women. We analyze 162 day-in-the-life shorts posted on TikTok by Ashley, between June and September 2022, as well as seven longer-form videos posted on YouTube. And we analyze 170 day-in-the-life vlogs and some additional videos (such as Q&A videos) posted on YouTube by Sarah between September 2023 and January

2024. Though both women continue to produce content, our analysis is limited to the content they published on TikTok (Ashley) and YouTube (both) that *showed* them living in their car (Ashley) or shelter (Sarah), *discussed* their experience of being homeless, or *referenced* "homeless" or "homelessness" in the title, description or text across the screen during any part of the video. The inclusion of "Day XX" in their titles, descriptions or texts across the screen on any video was considered a reference to their homelessness, as both women apply this naming convention to their videos about homelessness. All videos that met these criteria were collected,[38] meaning the URL, title, date, and "Day XX" was recorded in a table. A description of each video, its content, and relevance to the study was added by us.[39] We also noted additional information, such as comments, number of views, and likes. All the videos were watched by one of us[40] and relevant parts of each video were manually transcribed and manually coded in our shared table.[41] We took turns with the data to ensure we were both familiar with the subject's development, and to ensure we were interpreting the emerging themes in the same way. We discussed these themes regularly over the months of our analysis, and checked each other's coding. We analyzed the videos using thematic analysis:[42] it enabled us to identify recurring patterns (themes) in our data set relating to how Ashley and Sarah used their videos to socially position themselves.[43] Recognizing that thematic analysis involves a significant amount of interpretation by the researchers across all stages of the research process,[44] we acknowledge that our themes were premised on our assumption that Ashley's and Sarah's video content is deliberate and functional,[45] and therefore the themes we identified and analyzed are those that related to (and that we interpreted as) the form and functions of their video content.[46]

When producing our findings, we grappled with two conflicting ethical priorities. At the time of writing, all the videos we analyzed were publicly available and published by Ashley and Sarah on platforms that require them to give consent that their content can be publicly accessed. Though the efficacy of these consent processes warrants critical investigation[47] the platforms Ashley and Sarah choose for their self-presentation—including the global popularity of TikTok and YouTube and the reproductive nature of content shared on the site—should be viewed as a deliberate decision. Although homelessness is a vulnerable and marginalized social status, we initially chose not to anonymize Ashley and Sarah because, as Ümit Kennedy reflects,

making the subjects "anonymous would be to deny them ownership and attribution of their published intellectual and creative property [which] is not only disempowering for the vloggers who deserve to be recognized for their published work, but it is fundamentally wrong—unethical."[48] We wanted to respect Ashley's and Sarah's agency and authorship in publishing their experience and crafting a homeless identity of their own making. Changing their names would undermine their deliberate attempt to craft their identity and narrative in public. We also wanted to honor the conscious work that Ashley and Sarah conducted to make homelessness visible, relational, and intimate. However, we also acknowledge that despite their conscious and public work to reframe homelessness, our subjects may one day choose to remove their content from TikTok and YouTube, and by doing so, may choose to distance themselves from this stigma and self-presentation. We wish to honor our subjects' right to control their online narrative and identity now and in the future. We recognize that self-presentation online is not fixed but always in motion,[49] and we acknowledge that self-presentation in public can come at great personal cost[50] which can sometime lead to the subject deleting part or all of their content.[51] We therefore chose to anonymize them, removing any identifying information from their quotes, and referencing their videos only with the relevant label of "Day XX."[52]

We recognize that there are complex and problematic functions that shape Ashley's and Sarah's self-presentations online that warrant thorough and thoughtful investigation. This _Article is limited to the content that Ashley and Sarah have publicly shared online, to their framing of their experience, and what they chose to show and tell. We therefore focus primarily on content creation as an act of individual agency in response to homeless stigmatization in mainstream media in this _Article. We argue that Ashely and Sarah achieve this through diary-like audio-visual installments of their homeless lives. The following sections of the _Article are shaped by the themes that emerged through analysis of Ashley's and Sarah's respective four months of content. These themes are based on what Ashley and Sarah showed and discussed in their videos, highlighting the homeless and more-than-homeless experience they chose to craft and publish. We recognize that further study, including in-depth interviews with the subjects, would offer a richer exploration of the complexities of their self-presentation online, including the labor and emotional cost involved in prolonged self-presentation on social media,[53] the work of managing

authenticity and visibility on platforms shaped by algorithms and viewer engagement,[54] and the role of the audience in affirming or rejecting the identity being shared online.[55] The following sections of this _Article explore the major themes that emerged in Ashley's and Sarah's content and how these themes challenge and reframe homelessness in society, beginning with their diary-like format.

_Online Diary

By filming their everyday lives while homeless, Ashley and Sarah are publishing an online diary in real time. Their shorts and vlogs mimic the conventions of the diary. Kennedy writes that video logs, such as shorts and vlogs are "a contemporary form of the published diary online; an arena for self in which [individuals] document and share their daily lives, and in doing so, become themselves."[56] Ashley and Sarah use their video content as an arena for the self: a space for self-reflection, self-negotiation and becoming. The online diary serves important functions both for the individuals, and socially. In her book *De@r World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary*, Kylie Cardell writes, "In all kinds of ways, contemporary diaries make visible the intimate and personal, they blur and destabilize conventional boundaries between public and private, and they foreground processes of formation and reformation of subjectivity in self-presentation."[57]

Shorts and vlogs offer "intimacy and self-disclosure in daily or weekly installments."[58] They extend the diary through familiar conventions "such as dated entries, the way they are discursively constituted, and [their] unfinished nature."[59] Importantly, they empower "'other' kinds of subjects" as the diary has always done.[60] Cardell argues that diaries offer a space for marginal subjects "peripheral to matters of public importance or historical significance,"[61] which has historically led critics to consider the genre both unprofessional[62] and structureless.[63] For all the criticism it has received, the diary in all its traditional and contemporary forms, has also been celebrated as radical[64] and empowering, as it allows marginal subjects to share their everyday lives, and in doing so, bring intimate, private, and mundane experiences in to the public sphere, facilitating the construction of new public identities.[65]

The format of Ashley's and Sarah's posts on TikTok and YouTube mimics the diary, with daily dated entries. Ashley posts her daily life on TikTok, naming her posts using the convention "DAY XXX HOMELESS," followed by a short summary

of the main activity that day. In most videos she includes short clips of her day with background music and a description below the video giving more insight into her feelings. She shares TikToks about her experience of living in her car from Day 217 of her homeless journey. Finally, on Day 379, she moves into an apartment.[66] We analyze the videos posted on TikTok and YouTube in this time span, which show or discuss her experience of homelessness.[67] For her part, Sarah posts her daily life on YouTube, uploading a video (on average, ten minutes in length) every day to the platform. We analyze the videos spanning Day 1 through Day 120, featuring the four months that she slept in the homeless shelter.[68] Sarah gives each video a title, for example "Today was just a weird day,"[69] and labels each with "Day XX" in the description bar below the video.[70] Sarah's videos are linear and sequential; they start in the morning when she leaves the homeless shelter by 7 a.m., and end in the evening when she enters the homeless shelter after 5 p.m.[71]

Both women express a desire to document and share their experience publicly. As Sarah says in her very first video on YouTube, "I'm starting a new journey in my life and so we decided to document the process."[72] Sarah and Ashley often use 'we' or 'us' when referring to themselves.[73] Similarly, Ashley expresses the same sentiment in her first TikTok short, "my first video of us[74] starting our adventure publicly."[75] Adding a text overlay to her short, she writes, "follow along to see how we survive,"[76] inviting the audience to participate in her journey. Both women explain their situation as hitting "rock bottom"[77] and sharing their experience with others offers them an opportunity for connection. As Sarah explains, "I came on here basically from rock bottom just asking for advice […] and just like someone to listen or like someone that has maybe been in the same situation."[78]

Their videos are incredibly intimate and at times portray both women feeling intensely vulnerable. Extending the diary as space for confession[79] and intimate self-disclosure,[80] Sarah uses the vlog to address the darkest parts of herself—particularly her former drug addiction which ultimately led to her homelessness. Recognizing the pain that led her to drugs and the consequent pain that her drug addiction caused,[81] she states that she never wants to go back to that life,[82] and that she battles her addiction daily. In one particularly intimate vlog, she describes her internal dialogue.

> I know exactly where to get drugs, I have money to […] it would make the
> shelter honestly better like. […] That's the addict in me […] Drugs are not the

answer. […] I really just have to like fight my own brain right now. […] I hate that about me. I hate that my mind does that. […] I can't change that part about me. I'm just going to try and not listen to it. […] It's tough. I feel so weak and like pathetic. […] You're not doing drugs, shut up.[83]

While editing, and after posting this vlog, she states that she feels intensely vulnerable and "exposed."[84] As Kennedy found in her auto-ethnography of vlogging, sharing life online demands authenticity and vulnerability from the vlogger, which can be deeply uncomfortable and costly.[85] Sarah explains the vulnerability she feels the following day after posting the vlog.

> I'm like still trying to edit this video and I'm getting so nervous. It's like super vulnerable for me. Oooh, I don't like it at all. I'm scared […] I feel extremely exposed [...] Oh gosh […] I'm nervous [...] It's uncomfortable. I have nothing to lose, I'm at the bottom. And if I can help one person, and if that person is myself, like posting the video and staying accountable, so be it. I feel so uncomfortable […] I'm uncomfortable in my own skin right now. I hate it.[86]

Though the practice of sharing life online demands intimacy, it enables Ashley and Sarah to re-construct their identity, and their viewers play a part in this process. For Sarah, sharing her life online is a process of self-discovery and transformation.[87] Vlogging enables and documents this transformation. As Sarah states in one vlog, "I feel the change inside of me. Like actually becoming the person I have always wanted to become."[88] Later in the same vlogs, she says, "I'm so happy I started these video diary things" and "thank you so much for watching them."[89] Through daily vlogging Sarah is "narrativising"[90] her life, reconstructing her self-perception and self-presentation in public. The audience plays an important role in this identity construction online[91] as they witness and affirm this transformation.

> Like YouTube and all of you guys have like been a really really big part of my recovery because it holds myself accountable like […] it's aiding definitely in my recovery and my just like discipline and my responsibility and it's I think it's really really healthy for me. I still don't know what I'm doing, but […] sharing my life with you guys whether it's boring, hard, happy, whatever. It's been really good for me so I really appreciate you guys for watching because you're really helping me.[92]

Ashley and Sarah use TikTok and YouTube as a personal diary, to document their experience of homelessness and re-construct their narrative and identity in the process. By sharing their everyday experience of homelessness through their personal online diaries, they position themselves socially as more-than-homeless. They achieve this in three key ways: through routines of self-care, participation in society, and performing certain character traits. We discuss each in depth next.

_Self-care

Traditional presentations of homelessness show individuals from the fringes of society, invisible, and locked out of public spaces and activity because of their appearance and ascribed characteristics. They are often depicted as a "lamentable sight:"[93] dirty, disheveled, diseased, and foul smelling.[94] Their circumstances assume an appearance that is undesirable and unacceptable. Furthermore, they are characterized as undisciplined, lazy, dependent, and incapable.[95] Therefore, they are deemed incapable of participating in conventional routines of self-care. These traditional presentations negate the diversity of the homeless experience. They fail to show how homeless individuals perform and prioritize self-care despite being homeless. Ashley and Sarah demonstrate extensive routines of self-care, which become personal rituals.

Conscious of the "stigma of dirt"[96] attached to homelessness, both Ashley and Sarah post extensive cleaning routines on their channels. Many of Ashley's TikToks show her cleaning and organizing her car, which she lives and sleeps in, and this activity is ongoing: "we spent […] hours cleaning and it still doesn't feel clean."[97] Similarly, Sarah frequently films herself cleaning the limited spaces she frequents and organizing her possessions. She often talks about keeping her space in the homeless shelter and her gym locker clean, saying, "I love cleaning, it's so fun, I like a clean environment."[98] Routines of self-care, such as cleaning, enable feelings of empowerment, and help Ashley and Sarah feel a sense of control over precarious circumstances. As Ottilie Stolte and Darrin Hodgetts observe, individuals develop strategies and tactics, such as small everyday acts, "to assert control over particular settings."[99] Cleaning fosters a sense of control over their environment, as Sarah states, "I don't like being surrounded by germs but that's okay we'll take all the precautions that we can [to] protect our body as much as we can and then the environment as well."[100] Ashley and Sarah both observe the "importance of bodily practices of cleanliness in negotiating the stigma of dirt,"[101] and they extend this beyond their physical environments.

Both Ashley and Sarah place great importance on their appearance. Despite not being able to accumulate many personal items—Sarah is limited to a backpack and later two lockers, and Ashley to her car and a storage unit—they both prioritize their appearance with elaborate self-care routines and products. Ashley puts on make-up,

wears eyelash extensions, shows herself taking care of her blonde dyed hair with special shampoo and brushes, paints her nails, and uses a wide range of shower products. Similarly, Sarah uses public bathrooms (in the shelter, cafes, work, and gym) to perform a daily routine of styling her curly hair back into a neat bun, doing a multi-step skin care routine, followed by a make-up routine. These simple self-care routines impact how she feels about herself.

> It's crazy how different I feel if I just do my hair. [...] It's so worth it. I love investing in myself. Same with like eating healthy and going to the gym. Self-love, baby![102]

While the homeless body is often depicted as foul, diseased, and decaying,[103] Sarah takes care of her health and body to the point of obsession. One of the first things Sarah does when she receives her first paycheck is purchase a gym membership. Thereafter, she visits the gym every afternoon after work and every morning on the weekends. After her workout, she uses the gym facilities to shower, do her hair, perform her extensive skin care routine, and take myriad vitamins and supplements. Bryan C. Clift suggests the body is a site for transformation and power,[104] and for Sarah, going to the gym every day is a "technique of self-care and discipline."[105] While the homeless body typically represents "failure" and "ungovernability,"[106] the active body represents "commitment, control, discipline, productivity, and self-responsibility,"[107] which has a huge positive effect on Sarah's emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

For Sarah and Ashley, their routines of self-care often involve the consumption of 'luxury goods'—such as vitamin water and a gym membership for Sarah and branded clothing and take away food for Ashley—that go beyond what most would view as necessities. Both Ashley and Sarah work salaried jobs, and Sarah receives government assistance and benefits,[108] which support their consumption of self-care products (such as vitamins). The two women therefore have some financial means—not usually associated with homelessness—offering a particular and underexplored experience of the diversity within the "invisible homeless."[109] Ashley in particular, emphasizes her status as "home-LESS, not poor, not living on the streets, just homeless."[110]

Even though they are homeless, and Sarah's income is low,[111] they both prioritize purchases that make them feel better about themselves, be it emotionally, physically,

or mentally. For example, every morning before work, Sarah buys two health shots from the supermarket and drinks them while she waits for the bus. She gives her online viewers a little review of each shot and its effects throughout the day. She frequently chooses to spend money on better quality products for the benefit of her health. For example, in one vlog she explains her decision to buy tampons, saying,

> They do have free tampons at the shelter, but they are not the nicest and for $7 I'm going to get the kind that I like. I think that's a justified cost—it's my body.[112]

Homelessness has long been associated with poor health, and especially poor mental health,[113] with each affecting the other.[114] For those who experience homelessness, the "erosion of a sense of self and dignity" can have a profound effect on wellbeing.[115] Both Ashley and Sarah document this effect, and their many strategies to overcome it. One strategy is their extensive daily self-care routines, which Sarah calls "self-love."[116] In one vlog, Sarah explains that she does her hair everyday as a strategy to help her face the day, especially when she is feeling down.

> We usually don't do our hair unless we're working but we were just feeling a [bit] weak today, we're having a down day and whenever I do my hair or like do something to clean up my appearance I always feel stronger so. And it did help, I do feel a little bit better.[117]

Sarah also actively seeks out ways to improve her mental health: on her days off, she often travels to find open water, considering it good for her well-being. "I just saw water and I walked to the water. They say it's good for your mental health to look at open bodies of water so it's so nice."[118]

Ashley's and Sarah's routines of self-care enable them to participate in society—in public and social spaces—without appearing homeless. Through their self-care routines, they position themselves "closer to the 'normal' by taking distance from the stigmatized 'dirty homeless.'"[119] Their ability to participate in society and community without being visibly homeless, further improves their physical, mental, and emotional health, which we explore in the next section.

_Space

One of the greatest challenges of being homeless for Ashley and Sarah is the "embodied struggle for place,"[120] or, more accurately, the experience of "placelessness."[121] To be homeless "is by definition to be a person without a place of one's own, to be someone who is dis-placed or out-of-place."[122] Samira Kawash

describes placelessness as "the nonexistence of the homeless body—having no *place* to be and having no place to *be*."[123] Both women feel this lack of place keenly, and express it often in their homeless videos. For Ashley her only space is her car, and for Sarah it is the homeless shelter which she can only enter after 5 p.m. and must vacate at 7 a.m. each morning with all her belongings. Deciding where to go is a daily struggle for Sarah. Leaving a coffee shop, Sarah says,

> I don't know where to go, I feel like I'm just like in the way right now, I don't know um it's a icky feeling so I'm going to go—I don't really want to go back to the day shelter but I guess that's the only place I'm not like loitering.[124]

Sarah spends her free days moving between spaces, between coffee shops, parks (weather permitting), cinemas, libraries, museums, and art galleries, events such as farmers markets and a day shelter.[125] She exists "in a perpetual state of movement."[126] Kawash states that "the homeless are forced into constant motion not because they are going somewhere, but because they have nowhere to go."[127] As Sarah explains, "this is one of those days like I just want to sit down […] but I am forced to walk around."[128]

The challenge of place is particularly difficult when Sarah is sick or feeling low. As she explains, as a homeless person, "I don't have any comfort place to go."[129] By contrast, for people with homes, she says, "oh work was exhausting so you go home to your pet or comfy bed"—Sarah does not experience this relief, comfort, or sanctuary when returning to the shelter in the evening. This lack of comfort was particularly felt when she was unwell—so unwell that she was unable to work but still had to vacate the shelter at 7 a.m. On this occasion, Sarah spent most of the day sitting in a chair at the public library where she was woken up when she fell asleep.[130]

Though homeless people are typically unwelcome and locked out of public spaces, and even perceived as a threat to the space,[131] for Sarah, public spaces such as libraries, galleries and museums are a lifeline. They offer her a space to *be*, where her homelessness is invisible, and she can feel normal. Her self-care routine enables her to 'blend in' in spaces where the visibly homeless are unwelcome. The spaces Sarah uses are free to enter and intellectually stimulating. They give her something to engage with and think about, which falls outside the bounds of the activities we associate with homelessness. In this regard, Sarah describes museums and galleries as calming and soothing. She says, "something about museums, they're so soothing and

like you know when you walk past some art and it just like connects with you."[132] Later she offers a critique of the art: "so I don't really think I like contemporary art […] not the vibe for me personally, but I do think the sculpture garden's pretty cool up on the rooftop."[133]

The way that Sarah and Ashley use public space stands in contrast to traditional depictions of homelessness that assume homeless people, and particularly homeless women, "are out of place in the public realm,"[134] only appearing in a "shadowy way, if at all."[135] While both women try to reduce their visibility as homeless—for example, Ashley tints her car windows to try to be less visible and safer when sleeping—this demonstrates they are "adept at being in, and using [public] spaces for their own needs" and benefits.[136] As Hodgetts et al. found, homeless people often develop innovative ways to "read" and "rewrite" the landscape of the city to better meet their needs.[137] For example, Sarah moves her entire self-care routine to the gym, or buys a ticket to the cinema when she needs a comfortable place to rest or sleep. As Casey et al. write in their exploration of homeless women, "[far] from existing 'in the shadows' or being restricted to the institutional spaces of homelessness these women were boldly, and often visibly, carrying out their daily functions in public."[138] This is certainly true for Ashley and Sarah, with Ashley changing her clothes in a car park and Sarah saying, "It's weird how normalized getting ready in public bathrooms has become for me. Like gym, the shelter, here, coffee shops. It doesn't faze me anymore."[139] Sarah uses spaces throughout the city in a way that helps her take care of her needs. Her implementation of daily health rituals enables her "to transform a *landscape of despair* into a *landscape of care*."[140] Sarah and Ashley are not "passive consumers of space;"[141] rather they "re-appropriate local settings in unanticipated ways" to meet their needs.[142] This conscious re-appropriation of public space is an act of resistance against "the absorption of homelessness into their identity and perceptions of self."[143]

Participating in spaces as others do, offers these women a sense of belonging that has a positive effect on their sense of self. However, belonging is based on the ability to hide their homelessness and moving between feeling 'normal' and 'homeless' can be very distressing. There are times at the gym where Sarah feels her homelessness is visible to others, and this causes her extreme discomfort.

> In the locker room I don't know why I got super insecure and embarrassed […] because you can like tell that [I'm] living out of my backpack […] they're just like normal people going to the gym and I'm like a homeless […] recovering addict. I felt so out of place […] I dunno I just feel like I did not belong at all.[144]

Similarly, on occasions when she is able to spend time with her sister, Sarah finds the transition between normal and homeless spaces very challenging. Having enjoyed the comfort of being "in a house and on a couch and in […] warmth and coziness," she then feels "really panicky when I have to come back to the homeless shelter because it's just such a drastic difference of life."[145] Standing outside the shelter, she says, "I just feel like off right now. I don't really want to go inside but I have to […] I'm just having a hard time adjusting to like feeling normal for a second."[146]

Though adjusting to different spaces is challenging, participating in public and social spaces and activities, such as going to work, benefit both Ashley and Sarah immensely. The routine of work, the commute, the sense of contributing to society, contact with colleagues, the physical space it offers, and the time it consumes, all contribute to a sense of purpose and belonging. As Ashley explains, work offers her a clean and safe place to be where she could relate to others.

> My work was my home essentially at the time […] some days we were cut short because we weren't busy enough so we would close down the clinic early […] and sometimes I was really sad that the clinic was closing early because I was like I don't have anywhere to go […] it's hot outside or its cold outside whatever the case may be and like I [don't] have anywhere to go except the park and I don't want to go to the park like I just want to rest here under shelter with an accessible clean restroom and have people to talk to.[147]

For Sarah, work offers her a way to participate in society after years of drug addiction, where she existed on the margins of social norms and routines. Because of her past, the structure and routine of work is healing. On her first day of work, she says, "I'm weirdly so excited like to have some structure in my life. […] I'm part of society. […] I'm working, woohoo!"[148] Sarah derives joy from working, "it's crazy the days that I am working I'm so much happier than like my off days. Like it feels so productive […] it just is really good for my mood and my self-esteem and I like it."[149]

Ashley and Sarah not only expertly navigate public space in their local contexts, they also demonstrate a mastery of public space online. Both women successfully manage authenticity, visibility, consistency, and community on TikTok and YouTube. Though they do not discuss it in their videos, managing these important features[150] of online self-presentation requires an enormous amount of conscious but

unseen work,[151] and this work often comes at a great personal cost.[152] Ashely and Sarah managed this labor in the timeframe that we analyze very effectively. This success is measured by their growing online following (views and subscriptions) on both platforms. Through their consistent online presence, they join a growing group of marginalized subjects who have carved out space for public self-presentation and transformation online.[153] They navigate public space, offline and online, both meaningfully engaging in society and in public self-presentation. In addition to self-care and managing space, Sarah and Ashley also engage in deliberate identity work online, explored in the next section.

_#homelessandhumble

Literature exploring homelessness over the last century has documented the stigma and one-dimensional nature of the homeless identity in society.[154] Some have explored the considerable amount of work involved in embracing or rejecting the homeless identity,[155] or repositioning oneself as more-than-homeless.[156] Associations of homelessness with lack of discipline, weak character, laziness, and un-deservingness abound in society,[157] and are ever-present. Such attitudes portray homelessness as a personal failure, implicitly assigning blame to the individual.[158] Ashley and Sarah, however, exemplify a different picture. Throughout their online presentations, they make a consistent effort to portray themselves as grateful, productive, hardworking, selfless, and patient. Cameron Parsell recognizes that homeless individuals "can enact and use identities: both related to and distinct from their homelessness."[159] Parsell suggests that identity is "multifaceted," "worked at," and "purposeful."[160] Both Ashley and Sarah conduct this purposeful identity work, positioning themselves as homeless individuals who are worthy, successful and deserving.

Rejecting a social narrative of failure, both women present themselves "as the responsible author of her own success"[161] engaging in what David Farrugia calls "active subjectivity."[162] Ashley and Sarah adopt the language of responsibility and accountability throughout their videos, positioning themselves as actively working towards improvement. As Ashley states in one TikTok, "really […] life is what you make it."[163] This message is positively reinforced by her audience, as evidenced by a follower who sends Ashley a sweater with "trying my best" printed on it.[164] By

adopting a framework of personal responsibility, Ashley and Sarah not only reject the stigma of homelessness as personal failing, but they also reject their positioning of homeless individuals as victims of systemic failure or circumstance.[165] Instead, Ashley and Sarah position themselves as worthy individuals based on the character traits they demonstrate throughout their videos, such as gratitude and humility.

Both women adopt a position of gratitude for their circumstances. As a recovering drug addict, Sarah speaks of her gratitude to be alive, and actively finds things to be grateful for. As she says in one early vlog, "I'm literally trying to be grateful for every single from big to small aspect of my life."[166] Gratitude is a method of personal survival and a mark of difference from her old life.[167] Gratitude is equally important to Ashley, who makes a concerted effort to present herself as grateful and humble throughout her homeless journey. In her first TikTok Ashley states, "I don't ever want anyone to think that we're ungrateful or we're not appreciative because we are."[168] When she receives a gift from a follower (which she does often), Ashley states:

> You all have been so good to us. The love, support and words of encouragement are forever embedded into our hearts. I hope you know, none of you go unnoticed. [...] from the bottom of our hearts [...] thank you thank you thank you [...] #homeless #homelessandhumble #newapartment #godisgood #gratefulandblessed.[169]

Though expressing gratitude and humility may be problematic if it is strategically necessary for social acceptance,[170] Ashley and Sarah use this expression to position themselves as worthy and deserving: it signals their effort to positively frame their experience. This effort is rewarded by their viewers, who offer affirmation in the form of comments and gifts. Sarah and Ashley combine gratitude and humility with productivity and hard work to reinforce their deservingness of success. While having to earn social affirmation and prove their worthiness to receive material benefits may be a toxic aspect of navigating success on social media platforms, Ashley's and Sarah's navigation of this complex relational dynamic online is worthy of the attention. Ashley shows herself working in the urgent care clinic and as a photographer, shooting and editing photos. On days where she is working, she posts a quote or video highlighting that it is a work day.[171] Sarah also uses words of gratitude to remind herself and her viewers of her hard work.

> I'm just so grateful that I overcame the things that I did and I didn't quit and I made the hard choices because they were worth it to stop bad habits and they were worth it to start good habits even if they're difficult and painful like working and getting up early.[172]

Ashley uses the hashtag #homelessandhumble in a similar way, to signal her worthiness and to highlight personal humility despite her current hardships. The use of the hashtag and the expression of humility and hard work demonstrate a concerted effort to construct an identity that is positive and desirable in society. By positioning herself as humble, the hashtag works to guard from any negative comments about the gifts she received, and it also works to influence her audience by eliciting empathy for her circumstance and admiration for her attitude. Through this connection of homelessness and humility, Ashley distances herself from negative stereotypes ascribed to homeless people by instead performing a positive and highly valued characteristic.[173]

Ashley and Sarah conduct this identity work throughout their videos by performing acts of selflessness. Ashley frequently donates gifts that she receives but does not need, while Sarah buys things for other homeless people, shares leftover food from work, and gives cash to those in need. In a striking act of generosity, Sarah gives her snow boots (which she took great pains to acquire)[174] to a barefoot woman outside the shelter, saying, "we're a community, we gotta help each other out."[175] Sarah finds great joy in giving, eagerly anticipating the chance to give a blanket to her terminally ill "bunkie."[176] As Sarah states, "I don't really need much, I'm happy with literally nothing."[177]

The combination of gratitude, hard work, and selflessness allows Ashley and Sarah to position their later success as a personal achievement that is earned and deserved. When they finally secure apartments, after months of living in a shelter (Sarah) and a car (Ashley), they frame the move as an accomplishment, achieved through patience and perseverance. As Sarah says in her moving vlog, "I'm off to bigger and better things. All because of my hard work and patience and perseverance, even when I got denied and appealed it."[178]

While they demonstrate the emotional toll of being homeless—the lack of security and stability, lack of control over physical environment and lack of comfort—they "do not 'carry' the symbolic burden of homelessness"[179] of being unworthy or undeserving. Rather, Ashley and Sarah actively work to present themselves as worthy

and deserving through their gratitude, selflessness, hard work, patience, and perseverance. We should note that the social affirmation and material benefits that Ashley and Sarah received may not be accessible to homeless individuals who do not have stability or work, who are not able to create or publish content online,[180] or who are not able to master the performative expression of humility online. For those who can perform this identity work online, like Ashley and Sarah, their audience plays an important role in affirming this self-presentation, which is explored next.

_Role of Viewers

The audience plays an active role in Ashley's and Sarah's online narratives and identities. Both the presence and response from viewers—in the form of view counts, likes and subscriptions,[181] as well as comments, emails, and direct messages—actively shape Ashley's and Sarah's videos. Both women directly respond to viewers in their videos, descriptions, comments, and titles. They also change the format of their content for the sake of their relationship with their audience. For example, Sarah intermittently makes Q&A videos responding to her viewers' questions, while Ashley frequently films TikTok Lives,[182] interacting and connecting with her audience.

Viewers become "friends"[183] and active participants in these women's lives, which helps to curb the isolation typically experienced by homeless people.[184] As Fransen-Taylor and Narayan found in their exploration of homelessness in cyberspace, "social media provide a vehicle for both social inclusion and social participation" and position the homeless individual as an equal[185] rather than "other."[186] On one occasion when Sarah was sitting alone in a restaurant, she says "It's really cool […] I'm never actually eating alone, I'm eating with four thousand of my friends online."[187] Sarah refers to her viewers as her community who have been with her throughout her homeless journey.

> You're kind of my only community right now besides like […] some friends at the shelter but […] this is like my […] video diary like I can just be my open honest vulnerable self and you guys are incredibly supportive and kind […] there's a part of me that [will] forever be grateful for YouTube […] I don't know where my head would be mentally if I didn't have this and I didn't have any of you guys.[188]

The main form of communication between viewer and vlogger is through comments, to which both women refer. In one vlog Sarah says, "your guys' comments do really hit me […] I really think you guys are saying such kind words, it means so much […]

I'm so happy to have such a cool little community."[189] Though the comments section can be affirming and supportive it can also be a place for criticism, which Ashley frequently anticipates in her shorts. For example, in one short she says, "considering I eat once a day these days, no one should come after me in the comments lol" and "yes I'm in fact wearing the same thing as yesterday :)."[190] Replying to comments and managing relationships with viewers requires a considerable amount of invisible labor and adds to the burden of sharing one's life online.[191]

Though maintaining relationships with their viewers requires work, Ashley and Sarah value their online community to the point that they frame their success as a collective achievement. Both Ashely and Sarah thank their viewers when they eventually move into their apartments. When Sarah moves into her one-room apartment after four months of sleeping in a homeless shelter she says, "you guys, we did it! I love you all! Thank you for coming along on my journey! […] We did it, we did it, we did this, all of us, together."[192] Similarly, Ashley also acknowledges the role of her audience in offering her support, encouragement, and practical help. In her last homeless TikTok before she moves into an apartment, she posts a video about moving in.[193] In the description of this TikTok she addresses her audience, thanking them for their support.

> I'm in awe of you all sweet souls and this journey y'all have helped me on. A place we can finally call home. A journey we can share with you. […] Needless to say, we can thank you a million x over and over for being here and supporting us all the way through […] From the depths of my heart. Thank you.[194]

Viewers play the important role of affirming Ashley's and Sarah's identities as more-than-homeless. They encourage and support them with likes, subscriptions, gifts, and particularly through comments. The two women use comments to relate to their viewers, fostering a community, which they rely on, in turn, to get through their homeless journey. Viewers become an important and influential part of Ashley's and Sarah's lives, as they relationally share in the homeless experience, and in the eventual achievement of getting a home.

_Conclusion

Ashley and Sarah demonstrate how shorts and vlogs can be used as powerful tools for self-presentation and transformation. Sharing their homeless lives on TikTok and YouTube enables them to present themselves as more-than-homeless. The diary-like

videos of their day-to-day lives offer a rare and intimate view into an experience that is often invisible to the public. Ashley and Sarah invite their viewers into their limited spaces, their private routines, and their vulnerable thoughts and feelings. In doing so, they develop and foster a relationship with their viewers: showing their care routines —for their mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing, as well as care for others. Ashley and Sarah use their videos to document their participation and contribution to society, as active users of public space, working members of society, and women in their community. They also use their videos to express gratitude, humility, document their hard work and selflessness, thus performing a specific personhood. Through their public videos, Ashley and Sarah challenge the stigma of unworthiness typically associated with homelessness. Their presentations of homelessness frame the individual as worthy and deserving of taking up space in society. Though the necessity to demonstrate worthiness just to take up space is itself socially problematic, their ability to use social media as a tool to reframe their homelessness is significant.

By crafting complex and diverse digital self-presentations, these homeless individuals take the opportunity to reclaim control over their narrative, subverting the power away from traditional social presentations. This public negotiation of ascribed characteristics opens the opportunity for a democratization of voice and inclusive storytelling that can redistribute power dynamics and create new forms of visibility while fostering a sense of agency and empowerment for people experiencing homelessness. While sharing homelessness in this way empowers some individuals, such means of self-presentation are not accessible to all homeless people, and it remains to be seen how these social media narratives and identities affect the presentation of homelessness in traditional media, as well as the stigma of homelessness more broadly in society.

Though this work positions homeless content creation as an act of agency that reframes the homeless experience in society, its limitations present many opportunities for future research. The affordances and functions of the platforms homeless subjects use for self-presentation, and the impact of these on their narrative and identity, all demand critical investigation. How homeless subjects manage authenticity, visibility, and the unseen labor on social media present important questions. Furthermore, whether these platforms empower alternative homeless

identities is yet to be seen. Our examples offer homeless subjects who take great pride in care for themselves and others, who present their hard work, but also humility. It is worth exploring whether subjects who do not display these desirable characteristics would receive the same encouragement or empowering success online. Alternative methodologies would greatly enrich and develop this research to further explore how social media platforms limit and empower homeless identities and narratives.

_Endnotes

1   See Elizabeth A. Bowen and Nicole Capozziello, "Faceless, Nameless, Invisible: A Visual Content Analysis of Photographs in U.S. Media Coverage about Homelessness," *Housing Studies* 39, no. 3 (2024): 746–765; Pernilla Omerov, Åsa G. Craftman, Elisabet Mattsson and Anna Klarare, "Homeless Persons' Experiences of Health- and Social Care: A Systematic Integrative Review," *Health & Social Care in the Community* 28, no. 1 (2020): 1–11; Chris Chamberlain and Guy Johnson, "From Long-Term Homelessness to Stable Housing: Investigating 'Liminality'," *Housing Studies* 33, no. 8 (2018): 1246–1263; Gina C. Torino and Amanda G. Sisselman-Borgia, "Homeless Microaggressions: Implications for Education, Research, and Practice," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 26, no. 1–2 (2017): 153–165.

2   Jessica Gerrard and David Farrugia, "The 'Lamentable Sight' of Homelessness and the Society of the Spectacle," *Urban Studies* 52, no. 12 (2015): 2219–2233.

3   Samira Kawash, "The Homeless Body," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1998): 319–339.

4   Bryan C. Clift, "Governing Homelessness through Running," *Body & Society* 25, no. 2 (2019): 88–118.

5   Leslie Irvine, Kristina N. Kahl, and Jesse M. Smith, "Confrontations and Donations: Encounters between Homeless Pet Owners and the Public," *The Sociological Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2012): 25–43.

6   Rionach Casey, Rosalind Goudie, and Kesia Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces: Strategies of Resistance," *Housing Studies* 23, no. 6 (2008): 899–916.

7   Julia Wardhaugh, "The Unaccommodated Woman: Home, Homelessness and Identity," *The Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1999): 91–109.

8   Casey, Goudie, and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces;" Phil Hubbard, "Sexuality, Immorality and the City: Red Light Districts and the Marginalisation of Female Street Prostitutes," *Gender Place and Culture* 5, no. 1 (1998): 55–72; Alan Radley, Darrin Hodgetts and Andrea Cullen, "Fear, Romance and Transience in the Lives of Homeless Women," *Social and Cultural Geography* 7, no. 3 (2006): 437–461; Teela Sanders, "The Risks of Street Prostitution: Punters, Police and Protesters," *Urban Studies* 41, no. 9 (2004): 1703–1717; David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 1995).

9   David Farrugia, "The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness: Towards a Theory of Youth Homelessness as Embodied Subjectivity," *Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (2011): 71–87.

10   Randall Amster, "Patterns of Exclusion: Sanitizing Space, Criminalizing Homelessness," *Social Justice* 30, no. 1 (2003): 195–221; Clift, "Governing Homelessness;" Vincent J. Del Casino and Christine L. Jocoy, "Neoliberal Subjectivities, the 'New' Homelessness, and Struggles over Spaces of/in the City," *Antipode* 40, no. 2 (2008): 192–199; Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out,*

on the Road: The Homeless in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Talmadge Wright, *Out of Place: Homeless Mobilizations, Subcities, and Contested Landscapes* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997).

[11] Bowen and Capozziello, "Faceless, Nameless, Invisible," 757.

[12] Bowen and Capozziello, "Faceless, Nameless, Invisible."

[13] Bowen and Capozziello, "Faceless, Nameless, Invisible."

[14] Bowen and Capozziello, "Faceless, Nameless, Invisible;" Ryan Christopher Jones, "How Photography Exploits the Vulnerable," accessed July 30, 2024, *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/opinion/photography-exploitation-opioid.html>.

[15] Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (University of Toronto Press, 2010); Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Newark: Polity Press, 2018); D. Bondy Valdovinos Kaye, Jing Zeng and Patrik Wikström, *TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2022).

[16] Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, 4.

[17] Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, 76.

[18] Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 363–385.

[19] Kylie Cardell, *Dear World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

[20] Ümit Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the Automedial Identities and Narratives of Australian Mummy Vlogging," (Western Sydney University thesis: Doctoral thesis, 2019), <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.7/uws:51579>.

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[22] Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation," 367.

[23] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Burgess and Green, *YouTube*; Zizi Papacharissi, "The Presentation of Self in Virtual Life: Characteristics of Personal Home Pages," *Journal of Mass Communication* 79, no. 3 (2002): 643–660; Kaye, Zeng and Wikström, *TikTok: Creativity and Culture*.

[24] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Paul Longley Arthur, "Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing," in *Save As… Digital Memories*, eds. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 44–59.

[25] Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading, eds., *Save As… Digital Memories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[26] See Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube."

[27] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

[28] Alice Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Crystal Abidin, "#familygoals: Family Influencers, Calibrated Amateurism, and Justifying Young Digital Labor," *Social Media + Society* 3, no. 2 (2017): 1–15; Li Chen, Yanjie Yan and Andrew N. Smith, "What Drives Digital Engagement

With Sponsored Videos? An Investigation of Video Influencers' Authenticity Management Strategies," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 51, (2022): 198–221.

29   See Crystal Abidin's discussion of calibrated amateurism in "#familygoals."

30   See Sophie Bishop's discussion of the YouTube algorithm and how it influences visibility in "Anxiety, Panic and Self-Optimization: Inequalities and the YouTube Algorithm," *New Media & Society* 22, no. 1 (2018): 69–84.

31   See Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund's exploration of the labor involved in self-presentation on social media in "'Having It All' on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding among Fashion Bloggers," *Social Media + Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 1–11; and Ümit Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube: Vlogs, Automedia and Autoethnography," *Life Writing* 18, no. 4 (2021): 563–578.

32   Pamela Fransen-Taylor and Bhuva Narayan, "#Homeless but at Home in Cyberspace," *Proceedings of ISIC: the Information Behaviour Conference*, Part 1, Zadar, Croatia, September 20–23, 2016, <https://informationr.net/ir/21-4/isic/isic1610.html#lup13>.

33   Duffy and Hund, "'Having it All';" Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube."

34   Deborah Lupton, "Risk and Emotion: Towards an Alternative Theoretical Perspective," *Health, Risk & Society* 15, no. 8 (2013): 634–647.

35   Josie Jolley, "Embodying Plurality: Becoming More-than-homeless," *Transactions – Institute of British Geographers* 45, no. 3 (2020): 635–648, here: 635.

36   Jolley, "Embodying Plurality," 635.

37   Jolley, "Embodying Plurality."

38   The video URL, title, date and "Day XX" was recorded. A description of the video, its content and relevance, was written by the researcher. Relevant parts of the video were transcribed and coded, and any additional information such as the video description, comments, number of views and likes, were noted.

39   The two researchers involved in this study are the two authors of this _Article.

40   We took turns with Sarah's YouTube videos, analyzing roughly 5 at a time each, in chronological order, to ensure we were both familiar with the subject and their development, and to ensure we were both interpreting the themes the same way. We regularly discussed themes during the months of analysis.

41   Relevant parts of each video were transcribed and manually coded according to recurring themes that emerged in the videos (such as self-care, space, gratitude etc.). These themes form the sections of this _Article.

42   Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. See also Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297–98; Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(Com)Ing a Knowing Researcher," *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (2023): 1–6.

43   The patterns that emerged encompassed what was said (spoken), shown in, and written in and contextually around (on the web page of) each video (including the video title, description box, and in the comments section). The patterns that emerged were interesting to us in that they illuminated the forms and functions of sharing homelessness on TikTok and YouTube. These patterns formed broad themes which we used to categorize our data set.

[44] Our interest in specific aspects of this practice (in its forms and functions) would lend us towards what Braun and Clarke outline as inductive (meaning our themes emerged from our data set and were not predetermined), using latent thematic analysis (meaning the themes were developed using interpretation) with a contextualist perspective (meaning we approached the data set as a deliberate process of meaning making on the part of the subjects in response to a broader socio-cultural positioning).

[45] We approached our data with an assumption that it served important functions (in offering a different presentation of homelessness in society than what has traditionally been presented) and mimicked certain forms (such as the diary online). These assumptions were based on our previous research and understanding of existing scholarship, they informed what we were interested in discovering, and they shaped our interpretation throughout all aspects of the research process.

[46] And that we consider significant and meaningful to understanding why Ashley and Sarah filmed and shared their lives while homeless, and what role (if any) these videos play in society.

[47] See Kennedy "Becoming;" and Michael Zimmer "'But the Data Is Already Public': On the Ethics of Research in Facebook," *Ethics and Information Technology* 12, no. 4 (2010): 313–325.

[48] Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube," 81.

[49] See Ümit Kennedy and Emma Maguire, "The Texts and Subjects of Automediality," *M/C Journal* 21, no. 2 (2018). Doi: 10.5204/mcj.1395.

[50] See Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube."

[51] See Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube" and "Becoming on YouTube."

[52] To ensure that the video titles could not be searched. We felt it important to keep the "Day XX" label so that we could validate our quotes if we ever needed to.

[53] Duffy and Hund, "'Having it All';" Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube."

[54] Abidin, "#familygaols;" Ümit Kennedy, "'THESE VLOGS AREN'T REAL': Managing Authenticity and Privacy as Family Influencers," *M/C Journal* 27, no. 6 (2024). Doi: 10.5204/mcj.3080; Bishop, "Anxiety, Panic and Self-Optimization" and "Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip," *New Media + Society* 21, no. 11 (2019): 2589–2606.

[55] Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube" and "THESE VLOGS AREN'T REAL."

[56] Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube," 86.

[57] Cardell, *Dear World*, 3.

[58] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube," 569.

[59] Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube," 98.

[60] Cardell, *Dear World*, 4.

[61] Cardell, *Dear World*, 4.

[62] Cardell, *Dear World*.

[63] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, eds. Paul John Eakin and Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[64] See Lori Kido Lopez, "The Radical Act of 'Mommy Blogging': Redefining Motherhood Through the Blogosphere," *New Media & Society* 11, no. 5 (2009): 729–747.

[65] See Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube."

[66] Ashley's original TikTok account was permanently banned for reasons that are unclear. Many of the videos we analyze were originally posted on the first account and later re-posted to the new account by Ashley. We did not begin our analysis of Ashley until after her original

account was banned. We believe she re-posted in the same order as her original posts and did not alter the names or descriptions of the posts, although we cannot be certain of this.

[67] Ashley has some videos posted on TikTok and YouTube that do not show or discuss homelessness. We do not analyze these.

[68] Sarah continues to post daily on YouTube, however the analysis discussed in this _Article features only her homeless vlogs.

[69] Sarah, Day 92. The title shared here does not show up when searched.

[70] We use Sarah's "Day X" label to reference her videos in this _Article.

[71] Individuals are only permitted in the shelter between 5pm–7am, and no filming is allowed in the shelter. The shelter is a women's sleep shelter.

[72] Sarah, Day 1.

[73] It is usually clear that there is no one else present when recording the clip, other than Ashley's pet.

[74] Referring to herself and her pet.

[75] Ashley, Day 217.

[76] Ashley, Day 217.

[77] Ashley, Day 217.

[78] Ashley, YouTube 'Part 2' video.

[79] Which originates with Christian confessional writing such as Augustine's *Confessions* (written between 397 and 400) and Rousseau's *Confessions* published in 1782.

[80] See Cardell, *Diary Online*; Kennedy, "Becoming on YouTube" and "Arriving on YouTube."

[81] Sarah, Day 78.

[82] Sarah, Day 79.

[83] Sarah, Day 80.

[84] Sarah, Day 81.

[85] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube." And unsustainable in the long term.

[86] Sarah, Day 81.

[87] Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation;" Kennedy, "Exploring YouTube as a Transformative Tool."

[88] Sarah, Day 62.

[89] Sarah, Day 62.

[90] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube;" Alberta Natasia Adji, *Women Vloggers, Cultures & Nature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

[91] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube" and "THESE VLOGS AREN'T REAL."

[92] Sarah, Day 97.

[93] Gerrard and Farrugia, "The 'Lamentable Sight' of Homelessness."

[94] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 90.

[95] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 92; Amster, "Patterns of Exclusion;" Del Casino and Jocoy, "Neoliberal Subjectivities;" Kusmer, *Down and Out*.

[96] Panos Bourlessas, "Thick Skins in Place, Thick Skins out of Place: Re-placing Homeless Bodies in

Spaces of Care," *Social & Cultural Geography* 23, no. 5 (2020): 1–19, here: 12.

[97] Ashley, Day 351.

[98] Sarah, Day 32.

[99] Ottilie Stolte and Darrin Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places: Health Tactics in a Homeless Lifeworld," *Journal of Health Psychology* 20, no. 2 (2015): 144–153, here: 145.

[100] Sarah, Day 84.

[101] Bourlessas, "Thick Skins in Place, Thick Skins out of Place," 12.

[102] Sarah, Day 77.

[103] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 90.

[104] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 89.

[105] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 106.

[106] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 92.

[107] Clift, "Governing Homelessness," 92.

[108] We are unsure whether Ashley received government assistance and benefits.

[109] Here, it is important to note that the consumption displayed by Ashley and Sarah is only an option for those with a source of income and is not possible for all homeless individuals.

[110] Ashley, YouTube 'Part 1' video.

[111] We are unsure of Ashley's salary amount.

[112] Sarah, Day 36.

[113] Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places;" Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (New York: AM Kelly, 1861).

[114] See reference to the "interwoven nature of mental and physical health for homeless people" in Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places," 149; Diana Johnson, Darrin Hodgetts, and Linda Waimarie Nikora, "A Humanistic Approach to Addressing the Needs of Maori Homeless People With Mental Health Concerns," *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 53, no.1 (2013): 94–113.

[115] Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places," 148; Johnson, Hodgetts and Nikora, "A Humanistic Approach;" Darrin Hodgetts et al., "Health Inequalities and Homelessness: Considering Material, Spatial and Relational Dimensions," *Journal of Health Psychology* 12 no. 5 (2007): 709–25.

[116] Sarah, Day 77.

[117] Sarah, Day 48.

[118] Sarah, Day 12.

[119] Bourlessas, "Thick Skins in Place, Thick Skins out of Place," 13.

[120] Cameron Duff, "The Affective Right to the City," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 4 (2017): 516–529, here: 516.

[121] Kawash, "The Homeless Body."

[122] Wardhaugh, "The Unaccommodated Woman," 111.

[123] Kawash, "The Homeless Body," 329.

[124] Sarah, Day 56.

[125] The day shelter Sarah refers to offers a space for homeless people to congregate and access facilities such as a limited number of computers, or a fortnightly pedicure service. The day shelter offers free lunch each day and other services such as bus passes.

[126] Kawash, "The Homeless Body," 327.

[127] Kawash, "The Homeless Body," 327.

[128] Sarah, Day 56.

[129] Sarah, Day 44.

[130] Months later when she is ill but has the benefit of her salary, she pays $10 to go to a cinema to sleep in a comfortable chair.

[131] Casey, Goudie and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces," 904–905; Hubbard, "Sexuality, Immorality and the City;" Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, "Fear, Romance;" Sanders, "The Risks of Street Prostitution;" Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*.

[132] Sarah, Day 2.

[133] Sarah, Day 4.

[134] Casey, Goudie and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces," 905.

[135] Wardhaugh, "The Unaccommodated Woman," 104.

[136] Casey, Goudie and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces," 903.

[137] Derrin Hodgetts et al., "The Mobile Hermit and the City: Places, Objects and Sounds for a Social Psychology of Homelessness," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 2 (2010): 285–303.

[138] Casey, Goudie and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces," 903.

[139] Sarah, Day 115.

[140] Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places," 145.

[141] Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places," 145; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[142] Stolte and Hodgetts, "Being Healthy in Unhealthy Places," 145.

[143] Casey, Goudie and Reeve, "Homeless Women in Public Spaces," 904.

[144] Sarah, Day 89. Sarah is able to overcome this feeling of discomfort through habitual use of the gym.

[145] Sarah, Day 67.

[146] Sarah, Day 67.

[147] Ashley, YouTube 'Healing' video.

[148] Sarah, Day 8.

[149] Sarah, Day 22.

[150] We note that authenticity is a core value on YouTube, see Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*; visibility is an affordance, see Alexander Ronzhyn, Ana Sofía Cardenal and Albert Batlle Rubio, "Defining Affordances in Social Media Research: A Literature Review," *Social Media + Society* 25, no. 11 (2023): 3165–3188; consistency is a requirement for success, and community is an important function of this type of content creation, see Kennedy "Arriving on YouTube."

[151] See Duffy and Hund, "'Having it All';" Abidin, "#familygaols;" Bishop, "Anxiety, Panic and Self-Optimization" and "Managing Visibility."

[152] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube."

153   Such as mothers, see Kennedy "Becoming on YouTube;" and transgender vloggers, see Raun, "Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation."

154   Cameron Parsell, "Homeless Identities: Enacted and Ascribed," *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 3 (2011): 442–461; Randall E. Osborne, "'I May Be Homeless, But I'm Not Helpless': The Costs and Benefits of Identifying with Homelessness," *Self and Identity* 1, no. 1 (2002): 43–52.

155   Wardhaugh, "The Unaccommodated Woman."

156   Jolley, "Embodying Plurality."

157   Amster, "Patterns of Exclusion;" Clift, "Governing Homelessness;" Del Casino and Jocoy, "Neoliberal Subjectivities;" Kusmer, *Down and Out*; Wright, *Out of Place*.

158   Farrugia, "The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness."

159   Parsell, "Homeless Identities," 443.

160   Parsell, "Homeless Identities," 444.

161   Farrugia, "The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness," 82.

162   Farrugia, "The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness," 81.

163   Ashley, Day 313.

164   Ashley, Day 318.

165   Clift, "Governing Homelessness."

166   Sarah, Day 13.

167   Sarah, Day 32.

168   Ashley, TikTok 'Journey' video.

169   Ashley, Day 323.

170   And especially in relation to a marginalized and traditionally disempowered group.

171   Ashley, Day 341.

172   Sarah, Day 32.

173   The continuous use of the hashtag might also be connected to Ashley's religious beliefs in which humility is a moral virtue.

174   Sarah spent many weeks scouring thrift stores, shelter donations to try and find a pair of snow boots that fit well. She needed the boots as snow was soaking her canvas sneakers on her daily commute to work. She documented the hours spent searching on the weekends, and her disappointment when she couldn't find any. It was a huge triumph when she eventually found a pair that fit.

175   Sarah, Day 65.

176   Sarah, Day 66.

177   Sarah, Day 35.

178   Sarah, Day 120.

179   Farrugia, "The Symbolic Burden of Homelessness," 83.

180   Due to a lack of access to, or literacy with, technological devices such as a smartphone or camera, video-editing software, or a reliable internet connection.

181   At the time of writing this, Ashley has over 1 million followers and over 31 million likes on TikTok and over 1 million YouTube subscribers; and Sarah has over 15 thousand subscribers on YouTube.

[182] Lives (live-streaming) refer to the streaming of a video in real time.

[183] Sarah, Day 31.

[184] Jessica Rea, "Social Relationships, Stigma, and Wellbeing Through Experiences of Homelessness in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Social Issues* 79, no. 1 (2023): 465–493; Bower, Conroy and Perz, "Australian Homeless Persons' Experiences of Social Connectedness, Isolation and Loneliness."

[185] Fransen-Taylor and Narayan, "#Homeless but at Home in Cyberspace."

[186] Lupton, "Risk and Emotion."

[187] Sarah, Day 97.

[188] Sarah, Day 53.

[189] Sarah, Day 64.

[190] Ashley, Day 287.

[191] Kennedy, "Arriving on YouTube;" Duffy and Hund, "'Having It All'" This may explain why Sarah disabled her comments section after she found an apartment.

[192] Sarah, Day 120.

[193] Ashley, Day 379.

[194] Ashley, Day 379.