Algorithmic Hotness: Young Women's "Promotion" and "Reconnaissance" Work via Social Media Body Images

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Abstract

This article examines how the circulation of images on mobile and algorithmic social media platforms is gendered. We draw on data from a research project that examines the interplay between promotion, drinking culture, and social media. In this project, informants documented flows of images between their social media accounts and a nightlife precinct. We show how the human capacity to use bodies to affect other bodies, and to make critical judgments about bodies, is vital to algorithmic media platforms that aim to profit from calculative judgements about the affective dimensions of human life. We propose an expanded register of "body heat" on social media as both the symbolic labor of producing, maintaining, and digitally mediating a body that conforms to heterosexy visual codes and the affective labor of using a hot body to affect other bodies through movement, touch, and excessive consumption. The escalating capacity of social media platforms to calibrate flows of attention depends on the "hot" bodies of users and user's work in curating "hot" body images to upload. Hot female bodies are critical to nightlife *promotion* via social media, in attracting viewer attention. Hot female bodies are also key to moments of nightlife *reconnaissance*: they are registered in the databases and sorted by the algorithms of social media platforms, enabling viewers to make judgments about the desirability of locations in the nightlife precinct.

Keywords

social media, gender, algorithmic culture, promotional labor, male gaze, young women, body images, affect, nightlife economy

Introduction

This article examines how the circulation of images on mobile and algorithmic social media platforms is gendered. We draw on data from a research project examining the interplay between promotion, drinking culture, and social media. In this project, informants documented flows of images between their social media accounts and a nightlife precinct. We propose the concept of "body heat" on social media as the affective labor of: (1) producing, maintaining, and digitally mediating a body that conforms to "heterosexy" (Dobson, 2015) visual codes and (2) using a hot body to affect other bodies through movements, touch, and excessive consumption. The escalating capacity of social media platforms to calibrate flows of attention depends on users' work in curating flows of "hot" body images. Hot female bodies are critical to nightlife *promotion* via social media, because they attract attention. Hot female bodies are also key to moments of nightlife *reconnaissance*; they are registered in the databases and sorted by the algorithms of social media platforms, enabling viewers to make judgments about the desirability of locations in the nightlife precinct. Human users make judgments about social life that are registered on media platforms as data when they like, tag, swipe right, and so on. These data are accumulated in databases and congeals over time into algorithmic procedures (Carah, 2014b). The assumptions about gendered desire that are naturalized via productions of visual and affective hotness similarly become formatted into the procedural choices of a media platform. Put simply, images of hot female bodies generate more likes, tags, and views, and, over time, algorithms learn to make them more visible in the effort to translate data generated via humans' capacities to affect one another into profit.

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Studying Nightlife and Media Platforms

Informants who participated in nightlife precincts as consumers, promoters, or performers were recruited for this study. Throughout this article, we distinguish between informants and participants. Informants worked with Nicholas Carah, who conducted the fieldwork, to collect images and conduct interviews. Participants were peers interviewed by informants. Informants met with Nicholas Carah to discuss nightlife practices and identify social media platforms to observe. Informants collected images for up to a month from social media feeds relating to nightlife and alcohol consumption. In total, informants collected 1,022 images from Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Following image collection, the informants and the researcher discussed the images and identified associated peers, promoters, and performers to participate in peer interview. Informants were trained to conduct peer interviews in a conversational and semi-structured manner using a tailored question guide as a stimulus. Informants then participated in an open-ended interview with the researcher about the images they collected and practices they explored in their peer interviews.

We did not attempt to ensure a balance between male and female informants or participants. Two informants were male; the other 10 were female. Gender neutral pseudonyms are used for informants in the analysis that follows. The weighting toward female informants coheres with the researcher's previous experience examining this cultural setting: females are more often the subjects and producers of nightlife images (see Carah, 2014b; Carah & Shaul, 2016). Of the peer interviews conducted by informants, 25 were with males and 13 were with females. The majority of the images collected and catalogued by informants featured subjects they identified as female. Female bodies accounted for 458 images, whereas only 149 images solely featured males. Totally, 191 images featured a mix of male and female bodies. The iterative engagement between researcher and informants allows for reflection, cross-checking, and analysis of the images and interviews. Peer interviews generate vernacular accounts because the interview participants share a common understanding and language of the practices they are discussing. A limitation is that informants are not trained researchers and so may have limited interview skills. The researcher mitigated this with training on interview technique, feedback on initial interviews, and using the interviews conducted by informants as a stimulus to further analysis rather than definitive evidence. The insights generated in peer interviews were discussed in detail in an interview between researcher and informant.

A central figure in the promotion of nightlife on social media is the "promoter." But promotion actually encompasses several different roles in the nightlife economy. We distinguish four types of promotional laborers: promoters, promos, photographers, and consumers. All undertake the productive activity of creating flows of digital images that affect others. These flows of images create value for nightlife venues, alcohol brands, and media platforms. We make a distinction between "promoters" and "promos." Promoters are formally employed by a club, nightlife, or entertainment company. They are paid to undertake a range of marketing activities. Promos (mostly female) tend to be employed informally by promoters and are paid in a variety of cash and in-kind rewards like access to a club, free drinks, and other nightlife perks. For instance, a promo might be paid AU$50 cash for getting 25 people to come to a club night and a set amount for every 50 people after that. In addition, they might get free access to the club for themselves and their friends plus a bar tab. Many promos gain a sense of value from being able to dispense free drinks and club entry within their peer network. Promoters recruit promos to generate attention for their club and events on social media. As we discuss, notions of creative capacity and self-awareness are important in accounts of promo work, while a vernacular understanding of the male gaze as structuring attention on and offline becomes evident in the relationship between promoters and promos.

We begin by situating our account in relation to existing research on young women's use of social media and the kind of gendered images they produce. We outline key arguments about how media platforms shape social and cultural life, and how algorithms on social media structure visibility in order to suggest the need for more synthesis between research examining users' gendered identities and the political economy of media platforms. We then develop three claims drawn from an analysis of how informants and their peers make sense of gender in relation to the flows of images and the nightlife practices they depict and facilitate. We draw attention to the gendered nature of producing, circulating, and monitoring flows of images in the nightlife economy. First, we outline some accounts of *promotion* in the nightlife economy that illustrate how female bodies are used to calibrate flows of attention between nightlife venues and media platforms. Second, we examine how hot female bodies are implicated in practices of *reconnaissance*, such as compiling, filtering, sorting, and judging, in efforts to modulate action and consumption in the nightlife economy. We suggest two modes of "body heat" are at work in the circulation of images of nightlife on algorithmic media platforms: visually hot bodies and the capacity of living bodies to affect one another. The article suggests the need for future research to analyze the interplay between commercial media, branding, and lived gendered experiences in order to better understand the (re)production of gender via social media platforms and cultures.

Gender and the (Re)production of Femininity in Algorithmic Media

Girls' and young women's online identities and digital media production practices have received much more scholarly

attention than have young men's, and there is now a substantial body of research on girls' and young women's digital constructions of identity and self-branding via social media (Banet-Weiser, 2011, 2012; Brandes & Levin, 2013; Dobson, 2014a, 2015; Kanai, 2015b; Keller, 2015; Mazzarella, 2010; Ringrose, 2013; Warfield, 2015). Feminists have long seen the Internet as a place where challenge and subversion of normative feminine identities might be possible, due to the apparently more textual and less embodied nature of communication online and an assumed greater level of conscious control over one's identity performance than in "real life" (Haraway, 1991; Turkle, 1995). A resurgence of this kind of hope occurred with the popularization of social network sites. As Dobson (2015) outlines, while broadcast media representations are largely authored, produced, controlled, and distributed by men, the control over one's own representation afforded by social media participation has been seen as a potential tool for women's empowerment. This is despite the fact that the largest social network site corporations are owned and controlled largely by men (Marwick, 2013). The questions that have driven much of this feminist scholarship center around the kind of images and self-representations girls and young women produce via algorithmic media and how normative femininity is produced, reproduced, and challenged in contemporary digital contexts.

What has emerged is not a straightforward picture of the "empowering" potential of digital self-representation, or challenges to normative feminine identities, but rather a complex picture of gender and power as productive and restraining in what has been characterized as a neoliberal, postfeminist, digital context (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2015). Control over one's digital identity and the ability to produce and upload self-images via social network sites maybe experienced by young women as pleasurable, fun, empowering, and also as an intense pressure, as anxiety-producing, and competitive (Brandes & Levin, 2013; Dobson, 2014a; Ringrose, 2013; Steeves, 2015). Producing a digital identity is both an empowering and a "disciplinary practice" (Banet-Weiser, 2011), via which normative femininity is regulated along longstanding lines of class, sexuality, and physical appearance. As Kanai (2015a) reminds us, "control" over one's image is not simply a power that young women can *yield* via algorithmic media. Rather, it is precisely the social and cultural imperative to produce and to "control" images that functions as a key form of surveillance and discipline operationalized in neoliberal, postfeminist digital cultures.

The kind of gendered identities that circulate prevalently and repetitively in social media spaces have received less attention than young women's everyday practices of using social media. Given so much recent feminist activism that happens through digital and social media (Keller, 2012; Powell, 2015), and also given sustained critical attention to the political potential of self-representation, self-photography, and "everyday activism" (Dobson, 2015; Vivienne & Burgess,

2013), we do not want to overstate the determination of normative gender and social reproduction on social media. But in corporately owned social media, where value generation is key and a logic of branding underpins the development of platform protocols, there is clearly a political economy of gendered visual images that needs to be accounted for in analyses of identity and self-representation. Social media platforms develop in response to the commercial imperatives of brands and enterprises that invest in them. The economic agenda of brands and clubs like those we examine here structures the visibility of young women's images of themselves and other bodies. The body imaging work engaged in by young promotional workers illuminates the co-constitutive and entangled nature of *commercial* and *self*-branding, identified by Banet-Weiser (2012). She argues that brands cannot be easily separated or opposed to "authentic" culture, but rather, have centrally shaped identities and cultural practices.

Similarly, a growing body of work on digital media platforms argues that cultural practices and social relations are shaped platform architecture. Van Dijck (2013) argues that structural design impacts cultural practices "far beyond the platform proper." Her work highlights the ways in which content is structured hierarchically in an "attention economy" where "attention means eyeballs or (unconscious) exposure" (p. 21). She argues that "popularity is not simply out there, ready to be measured: it is, rather, engineered through algorithms that prompt users to rank things, ideas, or people in relation to other things, ideas, or people" (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 62). Bucher (2012) outlines the way Facebook's news feed algorithm privileges the content of "high value" users. Bucher (2012) suggests, "Visibility is not something ubiquitous, but rather something scarce" and competitive (p. 1172) (see also Dahlberg, 2015; Marwick, 2015). Both Gillespie (2014) and Hallinan and Striphas (2014) draw attention to the interplay between human actors and algorithmic procedures. For Gillespie (2014), users become "entangled" with algorithms, reshaping their media practices in ways that deliver them attention or visibility on algorithmic media platforms. For Hallinan and Striphas (2014), cultural forms begin to "address" the decision-making of algorithms. In the case of the nightlife economy, promotional workers and club patrons gradually recognize what kinds of images, posted on what platforms, at what times of the night generate a privileged position on the platform's feed and favorable attention from other users.

We refer to social media as "algorithmic media" (Carah, 2014a) in order to highlight the key role played by a platform's algorithms in structuring content and making it visible based on predictions of value generation. In this context, as we suggest, only some bodies are seen by clubs, brands, and by individuals uploading images, as capable of generating the kind of affective engagement, or "body heat," that can be converted into value and profit. Couldry and Van Dijck (2015) argue that

Researching the social/media relation today must mean more than merely describing how the latest platforms work [. . .]. It must mean at least researching how social media platforms (and the plural production cultures that generate them) have come to propose a certain version of "the social," and how users go on to enact it. (p. 2)

This article contributes to this agenda of examining how the social is formed via cycles of human–media platform interaction.

Hot Bodies and the Capacity to Affect

Charlie and her friend both worked as promos for a club night. Both were women in their early 20s. Charlie had a following of about 5,000 on Instagram. In their view, there are two kinds of promos: those who generate attention with their creativity and those that generate attention with only their "hot body." Charlie's friend described how she posted an image of herself fully clothed in a bath looking "like a drowned rat" to promote a performance by an act called, "The Baths." The anecdote emphasized both the creativity of the image and the deliberate performance of her body allegedly outside of heterosexy norms to distinguish herself from a "fresher" who simply posts photos of herself in the club "looking hot." The ambivalence of Charlie and her friend toward "hot" promos is characterized by a clear view that "creative" promo work involves more time and skill and is more valuable to the club in the long term, while recognizing that "hot" promos generate a lot of attention for the club.

Charlie's friend described how the club's promoters spent "all day" on Facebook "stalking" hot girls and saying, "hey, do you want to promo?" They agreed that promoters recruited both kinds of promos but, in their view, the creative ones were more valuable to the club over time because they built more durable networks between the club and their peer network. Both "hot" and "creative" promos use their bodies to generate attention on algorithmic media in the sense that the work involves going to the club and circulating images of themselves and their peers in order to boost attendance and alcohol consumption. The critical difference in the view of these informants is that "hot" promos simply position their bodies in the club, while "creative" promos use a range of communicative strategies to *augment* images of their body. These "creative" promos demonstrated a capacity to think in the strategic promotional mindset of the club and its promoter. They suggested that if hot promos attracted too many "freshers" and "frothers" (terms designating young people who party "excessively" and lose control of their ability to make apt judgments), it would alienate the "hip" clientele that made the club night popular. One way, they described hipness was the practice in their club of DJs "ironically" playing pop records by artists like Beyonce and Taylor Swift. The current clientele understood this is what made the club night so much fun, whereas freshers and frothers did not get

the irony, and overly serious hipsters refused the irony, preferring serious dance music.

Implicit in the effort to make the distinction between "creative" and *only* "hot" promo work is a discourse of classed feminine respectability (Skeggs, 2005) as not available via straightforward and "traditional" forms of sexual objectification, but as potentially available via more "sophisticated" postfeminist significations of irony and self-aware "sexual subjectification" (Gill, 2007). Critical to making their work and algorithmic media activity meaningful and respectable is distancing themselves from media practices perhaps perceived, in Banet-Weiser's (2011) words, as more of a "tired re-hashing of the objectification of female bodies" (p. 283). In suggesting themselves as being capable of making judgments about "the right people" to bring to the club, and giving evidence of their creative strategies to attract attention, they mobilize instead postfeminist notions of a new social arrangement based on popular cultural narratives of empowerment as available via a combination of hotness *and* classed notions of sexual savviness, literacy, and sophistication (Dobson, 2015, pp. 74-75).

While Charlie and her friend illustrated a clear distinction between "hot" and "creative" promos, other informants emphasized the primary importance of conventionally "hot" bodies in promo work. Harley conducted an interview with a male nightlife photographer where the photographer explained that clubs demand photos of "hot girls" because both guys and girls wanted to go to clubs that had "hot girls." When working for bars, he was told explicitly by promoters to "avoid certain groups." Many bars told him:

only take photos of hot people. Usually they would say only girls too. This is because having more girls represented at a venue makes it seem less threatening to other girls I guess. If they see lots of other girls there they will want to go there rather than a room full of attractive guys, where they would be a little intimidated. That's the logic I've been told by bars.

Reflecting on this in a later interview with the researcher, Harley explained that hot girls "get used to having photos of them taken all the time. And so then girls who see these girls getting photographed, they want to be those girls." The photographer explained that photographers identify particular girls who go to a club and build relationships over time with them, those girls then seek out that photographer, seeing him as "their" photographer who they can trust to take "desirable" images of them. A vernacular theory of the male gaze as mobilized through the camera itself (Mulvey, 1989), and internalized by the young women being photographed, is implied throughout this account. Later, Harley returned to this theory, explaining that girls seek out male photographers because they want to be seen as desirable by guys and other girls, while guys want to see images of girls. The photographer told Harley that girls are both more likely to want to be photographed in the club and more likely to

follow their photos online with likes and tags. Evident here is a naturalization of gendered social processes and desires. Also evident is the productive activity women undertake in seeking out photos of themselves online, sharing them, cataloguing them, and adding metadata to them in the form of likes, comments, and tags. Young women stimulate the production of content for algorithmic media, and then code and organize data about their bodies in ways that are essentialized as driven by girls' and women's "natural" desire for attention.

Promotion: Alcohol and Affective Exchanges

Promos go to work in particular times and spaces. They post content the afternoon before a club night to generate a door list. In the club anywhere between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., they mediate flows of attention between bodies within the club and media platforms like Snapchat, Tinder, Facebook, and Instagram in real time. Later in the night, as the atmosphere in the club builds stimulated by the music, the consumption of alcohol, and drugs, and the warmth generated by a growing crush of bodies, they find the flows of attention between the club and media platforms intensified. A promo friend explained to Charlie, "I always get likes when I post late in the night because people are really drunk by that point and they're just, ha, ha, ha . . . liking the photos with no inhibition, if that makes sense?" Promos who are drunk are less inhibited in the production of images. They are prepared to position and photograph their bodies in more overtly sexualized, provocative, and aggressive ways. The images they create are seen by others who are often also intoxicated. The disinhibition brought on by the consumption of alcohol and drugs increases the intensity of image creation, circulation, and engagement.

Quinn described the atmosphere of a club she attended regularly as "so drunk." She explained how the club encourages young women to display themselves in sexualized ways for photographers. Recalling a wet t-shirt competition, a friend was unwittingly photographed participating in, she explained, "I didn't even know she went in the competition but the next day there were photos of her in a wet t-shirt with her entire chest displayed in this white t-shirt and it was like, yeah." The club had posted the photo on Facebook. Quinn explained that

> the girls are told to take off their dresses and they're given a white t-shirt and like people just pour alcohol and cold beer on them and then they're just in their underwear and this white t-shirt and they post them on Facebook. Everyone tags them.

The images Quinn describes here are one example of a kind of nightlife imagery of young women displaying cleavage, kissing each other, and of men with hands inside their underwear or between their legs, common in club photo albums.

Reflecting on this incident Quinn thought that "females are very much more open to getting their photos taken when they've had a bit of alcohol . . . I think it's just the pretty ones that will get their photos taken a lot." The wet t-shirt competition, along with other activities and objects promoters introduce in club spaces, is a moment engineered to make bodies available for digital mediation in specific ways, and in turn to stimulate attention via algorithmic media that extends the visibility of the club and generates valuable data. In another instance, an alcohol brand brought an oversized cardboard cut-out of a bottle of spirits into the club and encouraged patrons to pose for photos "skolling" out of the bottle. The cardboard bottle stimulated performances of movement and excess that were then captured and circulated by photographers. Following Hearn (2008), promoters design the club experience to intensify the "will to image" of club goers.

The temporal moment in which images are generated is critical. Pitcher (2006) theorizes wet t-shirt and other club activities associated with "spring-break" in the United States as Bakhtinian "carnivalesque" spaces, in which the transgression of sexual and moral mores is *temporarily* permissible for white, middle-class girls, who, outside of such spaces, are more strictly bound by notions of "respectable" femininity. Digital mediation becomes pertinent as the young women who participate in the wet t-shirt competition in the club might not choose to do so if they had not been consuming alcohol or were not temporarily affected by the "carnivalesque" atmosphere of the club. Furthermore, the promos and club goers taking and circulating images of the moment are usually also consuming alcohol. Quinn explained that the day after, her friend contacted the club, who refused to take down the photo. She messaged friends on Facebook asking as many of them as she could to report the photo, until eventually Facebook took it down. The opportunities and risks for promos increase as they and the other bodies they seek to affect on and offline become more intoxicated. Exchanges with other bodies become more volatile as the night progresses, and promos and photographers move about the club. Some clubs amplify this intoxication. Quinn noted that in the club that held the wet t-shirt competitions there "really is no inhibitions . . . you're just, you're there, you're drunk . . . you can't go to (club name) sober." A nightlife photographer explained that "people don't approach the photographer sober, I'll never get asked by sober people to take a photo." He thought this was because girls feared being rejected by photographer: he had observed other photographers say to girls who request photos " 'nah, you're not hot enough' or 'you don't suit the club's scene' or something like that."

At key moments late at night in the club, among a crowd of intoxicated people, particular kinds of bodies thus become available as devices for generating attention. They are mostly female and often described by informants as "hot," but they also intensify their affective capacities—or "hotness"—by sexual or violent actions and poses, consuming excessively,

and exposing their body both for cameras and to others physically present. Promo work then can be theorized as the harnessing of various kinds of "hotness." Promos and photographers both point to the importance of "hot" bodies in the sense of bodies that meet particular pre-defined gendered characteristics of beauty and sexual desirability. As discussed, promos also point to their creative capacities to stimulate and channel affect via images of themselves. We argue this creativity can be seen as the capacity to mobilize "body heat" in particular moments and spaces that attract the attention and desire of others and generate value in clubs and on media platforms.

Reconnaissance: Compiling and Sorting Hot Bodies

A critical part of the promotional labor in the nightlife precinct is the effort to register the attention and affect hot bodies produce on the databases of social media. To this end, a series of *reconnaissance* practices extend around the images produced and circulated in the nightlife economy. Reconnaissance practices involve making judgments that calibrate both flows of images and relationships in the nightlife precinct. Club goers use their devices to audit the hotness of bodies in a club, promoters scan albums to find hot promos to promote the club, photographers select particular bodies as the subjects of images, and then subject those bodies to further scrutiny, editing, filtering, and photo-shopping before digital circulation.

Reconnaissance work begins with scouting for potential patrons. A male promo explained to Charlie that he used to go to nearby clubs to look for potential female patrons that had the right look for his club and then bring them over with offers of free drinks. The clubs realized and banned him from entering. He now uses social media to scout for hot female patrons during the night. For example, he goes on Tinder and sets his "discovery preferences" to the right age range for the club and the smallest possible radius to search for girls within the area. He "swipes right" for girls that match the look for the club. If he gets a match, he chats to them; he explains the conversation as follows:

> Oh, yeah, what do you do? And they're like, oh, I do whatever, who cares what they do. You're like, yeah, that's very cool, that's very cool, and they're like, what do you do? And you're like, oh, I work in a nightclub. So they go like, oh, really, where? I'm like (club name), have you ever been? They're like, even though they like, oh, yeah, I really like, or my friends really like it, or, oh, I've been meaning to go there. You're like, oh, yeah, sweet, well, just let me know if you're going out and I'll put you on the free entry list and you can come in.

For this promo, Tinder is a device for locating and enticing the "right" kind of hot bodies into his club. His club has also partnered with Tinder to run themed nights where they encourage patrons to use the app in the club. Patrons set their location to "the vicinity of the club . . . and then they just you know, shake and see what comes up." The smartphone together with apps like Tinder augment the experience of the club with a live database of potentially available hot bodies. Hearn (2008) describes social networking sites as "inventories" of bodies; smartphone apps like Tinder enable tools for sorting databases of bodies within a nightlife precinct in real time.

The photo albums generated by nightlife photographers in clubs double as a source of data that promoters use to make a range of judgments about the ongoing management of the club. Charlie explains that the promoters "go through the photos and see who gets likes on their photos to see how well they're networking on social media." Parker describes similar practices with a friend who is a club promoter: they go through albums together and go "yep we need more of those chicks—because he always bring me into this—would a girl listen (to this artist) . . . essentially they need girls, (the club) doesn't have enough girls." This promoter also tracks the photos against particular club nights, themes, and performers to see how different entertainment offerings effect club attendance by gender and appearance. The photo album is used as data for evaluating the night and making decisions about how particular combinations of entertainment produce hot bodies in the club and flows of images emanating from the club.

Generating photo albums that function both as promotional material for the club and data about the club's clientele involves employing a photographer who both judges the right bodies to be photographed and that patrons—particularly "hot girls"—want to be photographed by. Both the club and its patrons have to trust that the photographer can capture and convey the mood in a desirable way. Describing a hip photographer everyone wanted to be photographed by, Parker explained that

> honestly, it's because he had a beard and he was that guy that everyone knew and if you knew him, when I was an 18 year old frother and I knew him, I was like I'm killing it. Everyone was like how do you know the photographer, you're so cool.

The photographer was skilled at composing and editing images that captured affectively intense and heated moments in the club of "people skolling drinks or standing on a bar or hot chicks hooking up, essentially."

A promoter told Parker that he asked photographers to only photograph "hot chicks":

Promoter: I'm, I am ruthless.
Parker: And do you edit them before they come through?
Promoter: One hundred percent. I delete all the ugly people shamelessly.
Parker: (laughs).
Promoter: It's a superficial industry.

The promoter was clearly playing up his "ruthlessness" for the amusement of Parker and making light of his awareness of the sexist nature of these practices. Reflecting on this in a discussion with the researcher, Parker said, "literally this is going to sound so sexist, but the way that he sees it, guys spend the money so we want hot girls in the pictures." Like other informants, promos, and photographers, Parker makes sense of this, again, by offering a vernacular theory of the male gaze and a naturalization of gendered desires around looking at images: "because girls want to look at girls and guys want to look at girls." This decision-making on the part of the promoter is reflected in the accounts of club goers. Informants and their peers reported both being ignored by photographers in clubs if they were not "hot enough," or did not fit the "vibe" of the club, and photographers telling them they were only looking for "beautiful girls" (Frankie).

While promoters use digital images to make judgments about club patrons and promos to curate the club image via sorting female bodies, club patrons use mobile image platforms for their own reconnaissance purposes. These accounts illustrate the way different platforms support the transmission and constitution of the different types of hotness. Quinn explained that as she moves from pre-drinks, to the train ride into The Valley, to a favorite cocktail bar, she logs these activities on her Facebook profile and in turn sees other peers in the nightlife precinct. Following a night out, images are archived as potentially useful records of information about bodies from the night out. She explained, for instance, that peers might wait for a club photographer to post photos and then go through to see if someone they were dancing with or talking to is in the photos; if they are tagged to the image then they can be located and friended on Facebook. Informants described the use of Snapchat, in particular, to convey in real time the mood and feeling of a night out to peers. Snapchat images convey bodies, not with carefully composed shots, but with grainy, out of focus images and peaking audio. These images give a sense of the hazy atmosphere, movement, bodily flow, and affective heat of a night out. Charlie explained, "you want to convey euphoria no matter how shit of a time you're having" in the moment.

Snapchat enables club goers to both intensify and audit the atmosphere of potential venues. From within a venue, a club goer can entice peers by shooting images and videos that convey body heat and movement. From outside a club, potential club goers can audit footage they are sent by peers to determine if they want to go to the club. As Charlie explained, Snapchat is a "cool hunting" mechanism that helps patrons determine where to go next. Harley explained that if people's Snapchat images appear messy and blurry and they sound and look drunk then "most people I know will associate that immediately with having a good time . . . having fun and then maybe trying to make you jealous and trying to make you interact with them." A friend relayed to Harper how young men use Snapchat to convince their peers which club to go to,

so if we're out and we're trying to get him to come out and, you know, he's like "are there girls at the bar?" We're like "yeah, of course there are." He goes, "take a photo." We're like, "no, come here." So I guess that's what he uses Snapchat for.

Recalling this conversation, Harper told the researcher,

they always do that . . . a lot of guys will be like "I'm not going unless it's really good. It has to be really good for me to get out of bed or for me to get going." So then they'll say, "oh there are heaps of girls here."

Other informants (Harper, Harley, and Jessie) described similar uses of Snapchat to capture and convey the visual and affective hotness of a venue in an effort to entice other friends to join them.

In these accounts, which we have categorized as reconnaissance practices, images function as data promotional laborers and nightlife patrons use to sort, classify, and audit bodies in particular spaces and times, and guided by vernacular theories and assumptions of a "male gaze." Participants sought bodies that were both visually and affectively hot as evidenced by dancing, talking, posing, posting, and consuming excessively. Promos and club patrons, we suggest, learn to produce, convey, and locate "hotness" via the protocols of the platforms they use. A promo is following Tinder's protocols when he uses the app as a database of bodies he can select for his club, while a club goer is following Snapchat's protocols when they use grainy snippets of footage to evaluate the hotness of bodies in a club in the moment. Platforms like Tinder, Facebook, and Snapchat, when used within the flow of a night out, enable promos and club patrons to mobilize the club precinct as a database of nearby bodies that might warrant attention and affective exchange. This database of bodies is live, locative, and responsive.

Hot Bodies and Commercial Algorithmic Media Platforms

Based on the observations of informants, we argue that "hotness" functions as both a set of dominant, relatively stable, gendered visual characteristics of a body that constitute heterosexiness and as the capacity to deploy one's body to affect others. Dobson (2014b) has argued that different types of hotness (what she calls "sexiness" and "laddishness") are politically key in postfeminist cultural representations of femininity. While visual hotness or sexiness is still signaled as the most valuable form of social currency for young women, "excessive" and "laddish" representations of young women serve to foster a sense of unambiguous social change and "progress" in terms of new leisure spaces and sexual freedoms apparently open to women in the postfeminist era (McRobbie, 2007). The visual hotness that constitutes feminine heterosexiness involves both "aesthetic" and digital labor. Gill and Scharff (2016) have noted the increased

importance of "aesthetic labour" for women in postfeminist cultures. Gill has argued that in the postfeminist era, physical traits constructed as "hotness"—centrally, slimness, large breasts, curvaceousness, white tanned skin—have come to be defined as the primary characteristics of femininity. Thus, Gill (2007) suggests, "bodily properties" are now seen as more important than psychological traits in defining femininity (p. 91). While some bodily properties are much less easily acquired than others (e.g., one must "possess" and cannot easily "acquire" a certain white but tannable skin), much work and maintenance goes into the construction of feminine hot bodily properties via exercise regimes, diet, hair color and styling, make-up purchase and application skills, shaving, waxing, and potentially surgery.

In addition to the aesthetic work of producing and maintaining the feminine body, performatively constituting visual hotness also centrally involves the work of digitally mediating this body. This requires learning the best bodily positions and camera angles to capture a hot body, editing images, and consulting with peers to gain feedback and social consensus on hotness (Warfield, 2015). These activities produce a culturally specific semiotic literacy of hotness and enable young women's bodily images to consistently function symbolically within the "hotness" visual paradigm set. This work is critically important in algorithmic media systems geared toward recognizing and reproducing flows of content that stimulate valuable attention. While the algorithms of media platforms are not presently capable of recognizing the visual characteristics of heterosexy hotness, their trajectory suggests this is not implausible. Platforms can, for instance, already recognize faces within images and suggest them for tagging to users. At present, the algorithms of a platform like Facebook recognize visual hotness by proxy. When visually hot bodies attract the engagement of users—when users pause over an image in a feed and like it, share it, or tag it—Facebook's algorithm recognizes this engagement and makes this image more visible in other users' feeds. Thus, the algorithm recognizes and then amplifies the human practice of paying attention to hot bodies. The more algorithms become tuned to these practices and "build them in," the more individuals are incentivized to calibrate their behavior toward performing hotness in recognizable and conventional ways.

Second, and relatedly, hotness extends to the capacity to affect others by putting a body into intensified modes of performance and consumption. Dancing, touching, alcohol consumption, and physical intimacy all play a role in the work of promos, photographers, and consumers as they interact with each other and circulate nightlife images. Visually hot bodies and bodies that are generating "heat" in the sense of transferring energy and movement do the work of stimulating and channeling affect via social media platforms. In a nightlife precinct, in a packed club, on a dance floor bodies are both visually and physically hot. These hot bodies can stimulate other bodies to reach out, touch one another, click on a piece of content, come to the club, and consume alcohol. While

promos perform the aesthetic and symbolic labor of producing, maintaining, and positioning a hot body to be captured by a camera, they are also able to deploy their bodily energy to affect others.

This capacity to affect has two dimensions. First, the capacity to narrate affect via the deliberate management of emotions, dispositions, and feelings in order to elicit desired responses from others (Dowling, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011), and, second, the capacity to make oneself available to an open-ended flow of affect between bodies and between bodies and media platforms (Wissinger, 2007). The capacity to narrate affect rests on this more general capacity to make the body available to flows of affective stimulus. Here, "affective hotness" is the creative ability to harness, switch, and transfer attention and reaction within a social setting. Promos capture and switch affect via media devices to both stimulate the attention of others and register those affective exchanges in databases. The databases and algorithms of social media rely on the affective capacities of promos to put bodies into motion with each other in ways that can be registered and recognized as data. This capacity is important in media systems that increasingly seek to manage populations—for instance, by setting them into particular patterns of consumption—in ways that extend beyond the representational.

The account of body heat as affective labor offered here can be productively understood within the larger effort to expand the sensory capacities of media platforms. A critical dimension of "affective computing" is the effort to develop the smartphone as a "mood probe" able to gather and use information about users' emotional states (Andrejevic, 2015). The smartphone "mood probe" is set in motion by promos. They "knit" these devices and their sensory capacities into the affective circuits of the nightlife precinct. The smartphone is a kind of "communicative prostheses" that links bodies in expanding ways into the decision-making capacities of media platforms (Andrejevic, 2015). Promos are employed on the basis of what their body looks like, but also their capacity to stimulate and calibrate the attention of other bodies on the dance floor, in the club, at the bar and on the screen of a phone.

Conclusion: Algorithmic Decisions and Social (Re)production

Throughout the interplay between bodies and algorithmic media platforms discussed in this article, female bodies play the most active and important roles. According to the accounts of promotional labors, young women are more likely to appear in images, to create images, and to "code" images once uploaded on algorithmic media. Producing visual and affective hotness can be seen as central to the work of social reproduction traditionally performed by women (Jarrett, 2014). In theorizing the role of women in social reproduction via digital media, Jarrett (2014)

explicates the value of digital immaterial labor not just in terms of producing surplus value for digital media corporations, but also in terms of social reproduction which sustains the social order of capitalism. She suggests that it is the "socially generative layer of value creation . . . that is a feature of 'women's work'" on algorithmic media platforms. The work of social reproduction, she suggests, is "typically not the onerous imposition associated with the subjugation of the laboring body into the system of exchanges, but social, cultural, and interpersonal rituals that are individually affirming and meaningful" (p. 22). The reproduction of both long-standing and more specifically postfeminist-gendered bodily aesthetics and heterosexual scripts that occurs through the production of visual and affective hotness can be seen as an example of social reproduction to which young women contribute significantly. As Banet-Weiser (2011, 2012) reminds us, such contributions are made in a postfeminist digital context where participation is structured by both social pressures and rewards. Nonetheless, the data discussed can be said to demonstrate how an assumed male gaze continues to structure the capacities of bodies to affect each other and also over-determines the gendered social scripts and encounters via which bodies do affect each other. While men are normatively assumed to "embody" the male gaze, women are normatively assumed to "internalise" it in looking at themselves and other women (Mulvey, 1989).

We want to highlight that this kind of gendered social reproduction is based on, and enabled by, cultural assumptions and performative repetition (Butler, 1990), rather than essential bodily "truths" and desires. Thus, we do see possibilities for social shifts. Analyzing the interplay between media platforms, branding, and lived gendered experiences in order to better understand the (re)production of gender in algorithmic media cultures is critically important. When studying corporately owned platforms, researchers must pay attention not only to "above the line" advertising models or conversely, only to, individual's media practices and self-representation. Rather, we suggest the need to analyze emerging "below the line" promotional circuits, and the interplay between commercial platform's profit agendas and individuals' media and self-branding practices.

In the case we have examined in this article, the work of promotional laborers involves "tuning" social action in the nightlife precinct with the digital flow of body images, using one to calibrate the other in ways that capitalize on visual and affective body heat. Via this account of how gendered visual and affective hotness is produced, we have illustrated the interplay between the human and algorithmic dimensions of media platforms that are used to organize market processes in the nightlife economy. Promos' efforts to produce hotness visually and affectively are attuned to both the material relationships in club spaces and the way those relationships are calibrated as images on algorithmic media platforms. Both, as we have seen, are currently overdetermined by the *assumption* that a heterosexual male gaze structures male and female

desire to look at bodies. Repeated visual and affective performances of hotness continually reproduce the heterosexual male gaze as a dominant lived experience for young men and women. This operation of the gaze, and more broadly, the capacity of bodies to affect one another, appears to be iteratively translated into the protocols and procedures of algorithmic media. Thus, only some bodies are seen and are *made capable* of generating the kind of attention, engagement, and affect that can be converted into valuable algorithmic data in postfeminist digital cultures.

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