LUND UNIVERSITY

Set in Motion

Paradoxical narratives of becoming Swedish digital media influencers

Nilsson, Gabriella

Published in:
Gender, Work and Organization

DOI:
10.1111/gwao.13068

2024

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Nilsson, G. (2024). Set in Motion: Paradoxical narratives of becoming Swedish digital media influencers. *Gender, Work and Organization*, *31*(2), 337–352. Article 13068. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13068

Total number of authors:
1

General rights
Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.
• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Read more about Creative commons licenses: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

Check for updates

Received: 16 May 2022 | Revised: 22 May 2023 | Accepted: 31 August 2023

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13068

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Set in motion. Paradoxical narratives of becoming Swedish digital media influencers

Gabriella Nilsson

Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Division of Ethnology, Lund University, Lund, Sweden

Correspondence
Gabriella Nilsson.
Email: gabriella.nilsson@kultur.lu.se

Funding information
The Swedish Research Council

Abstract

This article analyzes how Swedish digital media influencers make sense of their careers in print media interviews and autobiographical books. I explore how influencers use metaphors involving motion, speed and acceleration to describe, explain and legitimate the various circumstances and phases of their career development, and how these metaphors may be viewed in the wider context of social acceleration and conflicting gender norms. I show that the valorization of neoliberal ideals that promote individuality, flexibility, entrepreneurship, and passion as the basis for career choices is facilitated by the rapidly changing technology that influencers use. This does not imply, however, that female influencers are empowered or breaking norms. Instead, their narratives reflect traditional gender norms, such as assigning themselves passive roles in their career development. This analysis illustrates a paradox in the work of influencers: it is fast-paced and ever-changing, dependent on algorithms and platforms run by multinational companies, but at the same time, it must be slow, static, and authentic, organically growing through listening, sensing and the building of relationships. I show that neoliberal ideals around work are intertwined with traditional notions of femininity, and that these ideals reinforce a normative view of women's work—including notions of never-idle hands and a perpetual availability to serve the needs of others—as "non-work."

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2023 The Authors. Gender, Work & Organization published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

KEYWORDS
career, digital media, entrepreneur, influencer, neoliberalism, post-feminism, social acceleration, work

1 | INTRODUCTION: A HIGH-SPEED PHENOMENON?

The feminine-coded concept of the "influencer" has exploded in the last decades since the advent of Web 2.0. Girls and young women, especially, have forged a space for themselves as content creators in digital media, and are now increasingly transforming their private life narratives and self-representations into digital businesses (Kearny, 2006: 16; Abidin, 2016; Marwick, 2015; Raun, 2018). This article focuses on how this transformation is achieved. Based on materials containing Swedish female digital media influencers' career narratives, I explore their experiences of the process of reaching a level at which they are able to support themselves financially through their digital work. I view their career narratives through the lens of German sociologist Hartmut Rosa's (2015) theory of social acceleration. I selected this lens because digital media influencers' career narratives often seem to revolve around movement, acceleration and speed. A similar acceleration curve reappears in most of their narratives: a slow start is suddenly interrupted by a powerful acceleration, which then reaches a plateau of continued high speed. Rosa believes that although cultural studies scholars throughout the modern era have been preoccupied with the idea that everything is moving increasingly faster, we have failed to specify the areas in which acceleration is and is not taking place. I suggest that the career narratives of digital media influencers offer an area in which ideas about social acceleration can be studied and problematized. This article contributes to research on the sphere of work by providing an example of how traditional gender norms continue to persist and adapt despite evolving ideals around work and rapidly advancing technology.

Rosa highlights three dimensions of acceleration to frame how societal change happens: technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change and the acceleration of the pace of life, all of which are interconnected in an autodynamic process he calls an acceleration circle (Rosa, 2015: 71ff). In this article, female digital media influencers' career narratives, as they appear in media interviews and autobiographical books, are situated within this acceleration circle. The aim is to explore how influencers make sense of their career development. I study how, and why, they use metaphors of movement, acceleration and speed to describe, explain and legitimate the various circumstances and phases of their careers, and how this can be seen in the wider context of social acceleration and conflicting gender norms. How do paradoxes, seemingly contradictory ideals, emerge in these narratives when neoliberal norms for work are intertwined with traditional notions of femininity?

In this Section 1 will introduce and contextualize Rosa's theory to outline the circumstances—the acceleration circle—that shape the life and work of digital media influencers as their careers are set in motion. According to Rosa, technical acceleration, the first acceleration dimension, refers to the intentional increase in speed in a multitude of innovations and processes, as digital development is an acceleration of the communication processes through which influencers live and make a living. This technical acceleration is what has made working as an influencer possible, but simultaneously what makes it challenging. There is a general perception that what characterizes digitalization in particular is increased speed and more than anything, that the work of an influencer is a high-speed job. In her book *Break the Internet*, Olivia Yallop sees the influencer industry "echoing patterns from the tech industry upon which it is built—move fast and break things" (Yallop, 2021: 34).

Digital platforms such as YouTube and Instagram are described as being constantly in motion, demanding flexibility from those who rely on them to earn their livelihood: "[YouTube] is not a medium where you 'just post something.' It's a relationship, it's a listening, fast and ongoing. It is always in motion. What worked 2 years ago is dead now and you have to constantly listen to your audience" (Jonsson, 2017). When new platforms are introduced, such as TikTok a few years ago, they are perceived to be even faster in character and, consequently, so is the work. "TikTok fame is just so much more intensive, so much more rapid… It can literally happen overnight" (Yallop, 2021: 101). Although the

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

print media still openly mocks female influencers and trivializes their work (Nilsson, 2021), at the same time there is an unmistakable fascination with the astronomical figures that surround this high-speed industry, such as 20-year-old American Dixie Jane D'Amelio's over 50 million followers on TikTok. This rapid technological development is associated with equally rapid economic growth: the influencer marketing industry, for instance, was projected to produce global turnover of approximately $16.4 billion in 2022 (Geyser, 2022). The speed at which digital technologies have been adopted and their transformative effect on economies is in fact so profound that there is talk of a fourth industrial revolution (Fleming, 2015). This revolution involves, in large part, young women setting themselves in motion in presumably new ways. But to what extent is it novel for women to constantly be in motion, adaptively listening, sensing, and multitasking? In this article, I challenge the notion that motion and multitasking by women, and more specifically female influencers, can be primarily attributed to increased digitalization.

While technological acceleration *takes place* in society, the acceleration of social change, the second acceleration dimension in Rosa's theory, entails changes *in* society, such as rapidly changing functional, value and action spheres (Rosa, 2015: 76). The labor market in neoliberal societies, with its changed prerequisites and ideals, is an example of one such sphere relevant to influencers. Confidence in the individual's ability as an entrepreneur to find success and happiness via a personal ethos devoted to enterprise seems to be warranted (Andersson & Kalonaityte, 2021: 419; Petersson McIntyre, 2021). Moreover, Stephanie Taylor argues that in a neoliberal society, the entrepreneur is no longer fundamentally masculine, but a "feminized figure who works on a small scale, mostly alone and from home, motivated by the hope of self-fulfillment and freedom" (2015: 174f). In particular, digital media has become a space where an entrepreneurial femininity is depicted (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Some, including influencers themselves, see the growing influencer industry as a shift in power: young women who have been fed harmful beauty ideals throughout their youth now use those experiences to create careers for themselves (Nilsson, 2018: 160). Peter Fleming disagrees in his book *The Mythology of Work*, arguing that "the real world behind the gloss of the 'entrepreneur' is actually sanctioned poverty, insecurity, precarity and an impossible life-structure, designed to absorb the externalities of rich corporations and the neoliberal state" (2015:39). In a similar vein, Lauren Berlant (2011) describes the dreams and fantasies of the good life offered by neoliberalism in terms of "cruel optimism." The entrepreneurial ideal has developed in parallel with the "post-feminist turn": the assumption that gender equality has already been reached, and that the limits to success can be located within women themselves; that "women can 'have it all' if they only dare to adopt to a go-getter attitude" (Andersson & Kalonaityte, 2021: 417). This belief is then intertwined with the neoliberal ideal of being passionate about work (Duffy, 2016; Hong, 2015; Hope & Richards, 2015). The influencer industry seems to express the very embodiment of these new ideals around work. I show in this article, however, that the notion that neoliberal work-related ideals, in practice, mean something new for women, can be challenged. Have not women always been expected to find ways to convert the unpaid work they perform at home into economic value, without it being counted as real work, and to feel satisfaction and joy while doing so? In view of this, what is new might be that digital media has offered women tools to monetize this work more easily.

The third acceleration dimension, the acceleration of the pace of life, refers to the idea that we increase the number of action and experience episodes per unit of time as a result of reduced time resources (Rosa, 2015: 32). For influencers, this means having to gradually produce more content in a shorter period of time, so that the boundary between work and leisure evaporates. In other words, their work becomes part of 24/7 capitalism (Crary, 2013) in the social factory that never sleeps (Fleming, 2015). Fleming writes that this perpetual motion creates a situation in which "many jobs are no longer external to us—as was the case when we confronted the assembly line… but also between and in us" (2015: 37). He uses the phrase "I, job" to describe how work is transformed into "something we are, rather than something we simply do among other things" (2015: 37). According to Taylor and Luckman, what is most significant about the new normal of working lives is the affective weight attached to personalized work, the motivation this provides for how people *want* to work, and simultaneously the subtle forms of self-exploitation that people accept (Taylor & Luckman, 2018: 2). Duffy (2016) believes this opens the door to aspirational labor: unpaid work performed in anticipation of success, but without any guarantees. The acceleration of the pace of life is central

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

to the career narratives of the influencers analyzed here. The dimension of speed aside, however, a 24/7 schedule is not particularly at odds with how women's work has traditionally been carried out, nor is the "I, job" experience. In this sense, is not the blurred line between work and leisure that characterizes the careers of influencers really a return to the normative view of women's work as never-ending "non-work"?

To explain the relationship between acceleration dimensions, Rosa describes the acceleration circle as an autodynamic process (2015: 33ff). As indicated above, technical acceleration such as the rapid proliferation of mobile technology is a strong facilitator of accelerating social change in the form of neoliberal individualization and the "entrepreneurization" of the work sphere. As social change in turn arouses fear in the individual of falling behind, individualization accelerates the pace of life, and work and life become intertwined. In order to cope with the acceleration in the pace of life, further technical development is required, closing the circle.

Rosa does not elaborate on the gendered implications of his theory, such as acceleration being almost completely associated with men and masculinity. Although a dominant metaphor for acceleration tends to be that of a race car on a straightaway, I argue that it is beneficial to expand this understanding by considering other examples, such as a figure skater who utilizes the power of inertia to perform pirouettes. Doing so allows us to identify manifestations of acceleration in unexpected contexts and, as a result, acknowledge that the perpetual pace of women's lives—their ceaseless presence in a social factory that never sleeps—is not necessarily a new phenomenon, nor is it necessarily changing. Thus, in this article, I examine a seemingly contradictory ideal that exists within digital work and is embodied by the "feminized entrepreneur," the influencer. While the ever-accelerating, norm-breaking nature of work in neoliberal society is often associated with freedom, it paradoxically appears to reinforce traditional feminine ideals of constant busyness and never-ending availability to serve the needs of others.

My analysis is based on two categories of material that include career narratives. The first category consists of autobiographical books written by female Swedish digital media influencers. The "dual forces of Web 2.0 and 'the age of memoir'" (McNeill & Zuern, 2015) have provided strong incentives in recent years to publish books written by influencers. Autobiographical books serve a strategic function in the influencer career as a way to create legitimacy and control the chronology of their life narratives, including their career narratives (Nilsson, 2022). I identified about forty books published between 2016, when the phenomenon of "influencing" emerged in Sweden, and 2021, when this study began, as belonging to the genre. Of the forty books initially identified and briefly read, I selected twelve that most explicitly focused on describing different phases of the influencer's career development.[1] The majority of authors were young women, several of whom were in their teens. All were "macro-influencers" with hundreds of thousands or millions of followers and subscribers on a multitude of platforms. The majority made their living entirely from digital work and would be considered affluent. Often, they supported their partners and families with their earnings.

The second category consists of longer print media interviews with influencers published in Swedish newspapers and magazines during the same period. A search for articles about the influencer phenomenon in the Retriever Research database generated over 6000 substantial articles. These were categorized manually for use in various sub-studies within a larger project.[2] For the analysis in this article, I selected about a hundred articles that I categorized as career interviews, or "portraits," of influencers, many of which were published in local newspapers from the subjects' hometowns. This news genre lends itself particularly well to investigating career narratives, since journalists are curious about how one develops a career as an influencer. Although there was some overlap, not all influencers in this category were as successful as those who wrote autobiographical books, though they still largely supported themselves on the proceeds of their work.

The selected books and articles were closely read multiple times to search for patterns using ethnographic content analysis. Ethnographic content analysis involves a reflexive movement between data selection, coding and interpretation, as well as an acceptance of the fact that categories and analytical themes will emerge throughout the study (Altheide, 1987). What stood out in the material I reviewed was the recurrent use of metaphors by the influencers involving movement, acceleration and speed, employed by them to make sense of the different phases of their careers. The material was thus coded manually with a focus on these metaphors. I selected Rosa's theory as

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the analytical framework in order to contextualize and elaborate this use of metaphors further. All quotes from the material, as well as the book titles, were translated from Swedish by the author for use in this article.

2 | A SLOW, FUN JOURNEY

Influencers reflecting on their career beginnings did not mention high speed as a factor. Instead, they described a gradual process of development, using phrases like "step by step" and "slowly but surely." In fact, they considered a slow start to be a fundamental aspect of their work: "Becoming an influencer is not a quick process," wrote influencer Linda Hörnfeldt. "Those who chase followers and likes and views have missed the whole point" (Hörnfeldt, 2018: 21f). "My channels have grown organically," influencer Ida Warg wrote. "I did not become big overnight but have gradually gained followers. That's why my followers are so loyal" (2019: 93ff). The fact that progress at the beginning of their careers was not characterized by high speed does not imply that the work was stagnant and motionless. Travel metaphors were commonly used to describe their careers from a longer-term perspective—their career had been a journey. Above all, many used the metaphoric journey to describe how an individual change was intertwined with their career, most commonly a "health journey" or "exercise journey" that began as their personal self-improvement project. Other "projects" such as renovating a house or becoming a parent were also described as journeys. As more and more readers or viewers gradually took part in the results, or "followed the journey," the ingredients necessary for a career came together. Although the project itself was something they actively pursued, they portrayed themselves as passive in relation to the resulting career opportunity.

It may seem paradoxical that slowness is such a positively charged concept to describe a rapidly changing digital business, but for influencers slowness is intended to connote intimacy and authenticity, two of their most important assets. The influencer's success relies upon relationships and a sense of trust between influencer and follower that can only be built up slowly and over time. According to Hörnfeldt, influencer marketing is in fact an example of "slow marketing" that decelerates the pace in a marketing world where everything else has to go "fast, fast, fast" (Hörnfeldt, 2018: 22). Though apparently at the epicenter of digital development, the feminized work of the influencer is presented as an exception to other forms of (masculinized) high-speed digital work. The influencers' narration of this phase of their careers largely aligns with a normative relationship-building femininity and notions of a traditional gender role that is passive and immobile. At the same time, they highlight slowness, and by extension femininity, as a counterpoint to an overly fast world—a voluntary deceleration, in Rosa's terms.

In addition to this initial slowness, many influencers described how their digital work began as something they did for pleasure: "As a fun thing, Joanna started making films about the family's everyday life, with the children's first visit to the hairdresser and the dentist.... 'In the beginning it was just a hobby, we had no idea we would get so many viewers'" (Mama, 2019). When family influencer Joanna André from The Swedish Family looks back in this quote, there is a lack of intentionality. Getting hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of views of events like children's dental visits and, by extension, being able to support the whole family on their YouTube channel, is not presented as a stated goal, but as a chance outcome. Here, too, the narrative appears paradoxical: while having fun at work is a central neoliberal ideal and an expression of accelerating social changes in work-related norms, the lack of intent and purpose is more in line with how women's work and achievements have been traditionally devalued. As Duffy and Hund have pointed out, this sort of glossy notion of a self-enterprise such as influencing "obscures the labor, discipline, and capital necessary" to succeed (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

In fact, not everyone described the slow career development as fun. Influencer Nellie Berntsson wrote: "The blog journey has really been a fucking roller coaster ride. There is no better way to describe it" (2016: 15). For Berntsson and others, their narratives seem to be in opposition to the neoliberal dream of having fun at work, and instead reminiscent of what Brooke Erin Duffy (2016) problematized using the term aspirational labor: "Aspirational labourers pursue productive activities that hold the promise of social and economic capital; yet the reward system for these aspirants is highly uneven" (Duffy, 2016: 441); in other words, the reward system is a roller coaster ride.

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

In line with their devaluation of this type of work, when journalists seek to understand the background to influencers' career choices, childhood hobbies are more often highlighted as explanations than interests in entrepreneurship, digitalization and running businesses (Nilsson, 2021). As young girls, the story goes, influencers enjoyed writing, painting, dressing up and redecorating their rooms, which led them to creative work. Describing Anna Nyström, the most followed Swedish creator on Instagram with over eight million international followers, Sweden's leading business magazine *Dagens industri* wrote: "She had always been interested in photography and painting. Growing up, she took painting lessons and when the family got their first digital camera, it was she who grabbed it" (Letser, 2020). In narratives like these, which are based on chance or childhood hobbies, there is nothing that foreshadows record turnover and followers in their millions. Nor do the narratives signal that they unfolded in an ever-accelerating, high-speed digital culture that "moves fast and breaks things" (Yallop, 2021: 34). Instead, small scale, pleasantness and intimacy are evoked as characteristics of budding feminine entrepreneurship.

While narratives of how a previous hobby turned into a livelihood are admittedly reminiscent of a neoliberal ideal (Duffy, 2016: 441, Hong, 2015; Hope & Richards, 2015), highlighting unintentionality and chance as decisive factors can be understood as an adaptation of the narrative to norms of feminine passivity. Just as the tendency of women to devalue themselves has a long history, there is a long tradition of belittling women's work by either rendering women's existence invisible or incorrectly describing their work as an insignificant or childish leisure activity with no economic value. Ashton and Patel (2018), however, have challenged the assumption that there are low barriers to entry in new digital occupations such as influencing. They argue that journalistic coverage overstates the accessibility of vlogging careers (their area of interest), and obscures the various forms of expertise required. Obviously, Anna Nyström did not move directly from liking "photography and painting" as a young girl as described above to turning over several million SEK per year without strategic entrepreneurial work. As she herself put it: "It is no coincidence that I am where I am today. It is important that people understand this. I have not made any hasty decisions, which I think is an important explanation for why my account has grown so large" (Letser, 2020). Nevertheless, chance is a predominant element in influencers' career narratives, whether these are self-authored or produced by journalists.

The first phase of the typical narrative about becoming an influencer seems paradoxical in many ways. Digital work is new, fast and changing, and the freedom of mobility and flexibility concurs with neoliberal work-related ideals. At the same time, chance, childhood hobbies and personal self-improvement projects, all of them seemingly in line with traditional female gender norms, are highlighted as the background to the sudden emergence of a career opportunity. Why is it that female influencers in their autobiographies, as well as the journalists who reproduce their stories in newspaper articles, so clearly adhere to a traditional narrative structure in which women are passive and their work and strategic decisions are devalued?

3 | TECHNICAL ACCELERATION

At a certain point in their careers, the influencers studied here recounted that the slow motion characterizing their early work without warning powerfully accelerated, a rapid increase measured by their number of followers. To revisit the example of the feminine figure skater as a metaphor for acceleration in unexpected directions and settings, the story goes that while pursuing their hobbies, they picked up speed from inertia and ended up in an ongoing pirouette. Many describe the acceleration as a "surprise" that was difficult to trace back and explain. It all just "blew up" after a "magic line" seemed to have been crossed. Influencer Lina Rask recalled this acceleration on her Instagram account:

> In November 2016 I reached the milestone of 4,000 followers. What I did not expect was that it would soon explode. One morning I woke up with 2,000 new followers. I thought I was mistaken but the numbers were clear.… Going from 4,000 followers to 50,000 in one month was insane. That should be the end of it, I thought. But the account did not stop growing. (Rask, 2018: 186)

The influencers described growth using metaphors such as "having a tailwind," "spreading like wildfire," or the "ball being set in motion"—in other words, as being caused by external forces beyond their control. Again, despite their

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

"slowly but surely" long-term work, they assigned themselves passive roles in their success, in line with traditional norms of femininity. The increase in followers caused surprise, amazement, or fear: "I didn't understand anything. I was almost a little frightened and thought, 'what do you want from me?'" (Milton, 2019). Their perception of not being actively accountable for the increase in their number of followers, however—and this is what makes Rosa's theory particularly relevant—cannot be attributed solely to the passivity and modesty associated with the gender norm. Acceleration at this point has more to do with algorithms and financial incentives for the companies behind the platforms—i.e., "magic"—than with active work. Technological processes largely beyond the control of the individual are responsible for setting tailwinds, wildfires and balls in motion. Up to a certain milestone, the increase in the number of followers is linear, or "organic," as influencer Ida Warg labeled it in the previous section. This implies that each new follower is independent of other new followers. Gaining new followers at the beginning of one's career is therefore perceived as requiring, and does require, hard digital work achieved "step by step," as several influencers in this study recounted.

Once this milestone is reached, however, the increase becomes exponential. That influencers experience the acceleration as an inexplicable explosion, something that "just happened," is not surprising, since it is only indirectly the influencers themselves who started the acceleration by pleasing what Hallinan and Striphas call "a court of algorithmic appeal" (2016: 129). The more popular the account, the more traffic and consequently more money is received by the companies behind the platforms, who let their algorithms prioritize the number of followers and their engagement. More followers generates increased engagement, which in turn increases visibility, thereby generating more followers (Cotter, 2019: 903f). Though the increase in followers is seemingly based on affinity, and influencers continue to portray their relationship with followers as intimate and authentic (since intimacy and authenticity is what they sell), the acceleration is very much a technological acceleration in the sense of Rosa's theory. Technological acceleration is crucial for the influencer's career, as the increased speed is linked to the opportunity to earn money. Regardless of whether or not the initial slow work started as a fun hobby, technological acceleration is a prerequisite for career advancement and for the opportunity to make a living as an influencer. As a result, it constitutes the initial dimension in what will come to form an acceleration circle.

Many influencers seemed curious as to what it was that pleased the algorithm. Although surprised by the sudden acceleration awarded to them, using metaphors such as "explosion" and "lighter fluid," they returned to their interpretations of what had functioned as the activation energy. For many, the explosion was quite explicit: it was possible to see, hear and feel on their phones in the form of notifications and the associated sounds and vibrations. For influencer Linda-Marie Nilsson, who throughout her upbringing had been bullied for being overweight, a single photo paved the way for her career as a body-positive influencer (Nilsson, 2022). She described how everything changed after she posted a photo of herself on Facebook wearing a bikini on the beach. Overnight, the picture received more than 80,000 likes, she received thousands of encouraging emails, and international newspapers and TV channels contacted her for interviews. In her autobiography *That is How I Learned to Love my Body*, she recounted the experience of acceleration in real time:

> I cannot tear my eyes away from what is going on in my phone. It vibrates again and again. I look at the small screen in my hand. It has been going on for hours and it is not stopping. Like after like rolls in on a picture that I posted on my Facebook account earlier that evening. The email is constantly ringing. Ring, ring, ring. Friend request after friend request from people I have never seen before almost causes my computer to crash. (Linda-Marie Nilsson, 2018: 66f)

As the philosopher and speed theorist Paul Virilio (2009) sees it, every increase in speed brought about by technological development entails a potential crash, like a train wreck. In this stage of influencers' career narratives, it is the technological equipment that cannot withstand the pressure of a powerful acceleration in the number of followers and likes: "It really exploded. The notification manager broke down. It completely crashed. It could not take the pressure" (Hedström, 2019: 149). Unlike the race car driver who crashes after deliberately pursuing high speed, however,

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the explosions on influencers' digital platforms are portrayed as involuntary, again downplaying the active, strategic work behind their success.

4 | BREAKING FREE

The technological acceleration the influencers experience forces a reaction. The sudden increase in followers and revenue needs to be met by some new action, a social change. As Rosa (2015) described it, this is what leads to the initiation of an autodynamic process, an acceleration circle, as technological development influences new social patterns of action, which in turn put pressure on the individual to increase the pace of life so as not to fall behind. In a narrative that evokes the acceleration of a pirouette, influencer Jonna Lundell recalled the experience of how an uncontrollable increase in speed put her at a crossroads:

> Everything just spins. Faster and faster. After a while, it becomes too much at once for me. I feel I am not good enough… Eventually we cross a line when I can no longer receive study grants because I have earned too much. I am starting to think about dropping out of school. (Lundell & Lundell, 2019: 68f)

The experience of standing at a crossroads recurs in the material, posed as a choice between quitting the increasingly time-consuming digital work completely, since it competes with school or paid work, or investing wholeheartedly in one's personal brand and daring to stand on one's own two feet and be self-employed. After the rapid acceleration, there is no perceived way back to the time when digital work was characterized by slowness (Yallop, 2021: 224). Hence, the narratives at this stage shift from talking about passivity to talking about activity.

The situation described by Jonna Lundell above highlights a central feature in the neoliberal work ideal. Work is expected to be fun, pleasurable and something to identify with. Simultaneously, however, the individual is called upon to take responsibility for converting the self-fulfilling potential of a certain enterprise—or "journey," to employ the word used by the influencers in this study—into financial gain. Doing so requires the active making of strategic decisions. Seemingly, from this point on, passivity, chance and lack of intentionality no longer dominate the influencers' narratives. Instead, going forward, their narratives focus on dramatic and courageous norm breaking. By pursuing a career as an influencer, they have "broken free," "thrown themselves into it" or "dared to jump." In her autobiography, *My Own Way*, Ida Warg recalled the concerns that preceded her decision: "It would be a real dream, imagine making a living on the blog! It would be proper freedom! At the same time, it is of course a super scary step to resign from a permanent job. It may not fly at all—what would I do then?" (Warg, 2019: 87).

Though the flexibility and autonomy associated with the model of the entrepreneur are valued neoliberal ideals (Taylor & Luckman, 2018: 4), "freedom" in neoliberal society cannot take the form of aimlessness. Instead, freedom must be controlled and guided by an overriding plan (Allvin et al., 2006: 95). While "throwing oneself into it" and the like may connote something unplanned and uncontrollable, at this point in the narrative many influencers actually remarked on the strategic decisions behind their success. As influencer Elin Häggberg (2019) put it: "Starting a blog did not mean sitting down at the computer and uploading a picture and some text at random. From the beginning, my idea was that it would be a business with clear goals, and I set up a strategy for how I would get there." In fact, the influencers' "entrepreneurial spirit" is sometimes highlighted as an explanation for their decision to break free, to break the norms: "You have to have something special to succeed, be unique… I am breaking the norm. I am going my own way, pushing myself… an entrepreneur, simply" (Westberg, 2018). Seemingly, the role of the feminized entrepreneur requires transgressing gender norms.

The narratives in this study on the process of becoming an influencer are clearly characterized by paradox and ambiguity. The influencers' careers came about by chance, but also because they made strategic decisions. They were passive but at the same time active, adhering to norms of femininity but at the same time breaking free from them. Their journey was slow, but simultaneously experienced as a "fucking roller coaster ride." They claimed to have an

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

intimate relationship with their followers, but at the same time, these followers were generated by algorithms beyond their control. Different aspects of these paradoxes are highlighted in different parts of the narratives, suggesting that they function as dramaturgical tools (cf. Nilsson, 2022).

5 | KEEPING UP THE PACE

Once influencers have achieved success and the opportunity to earn their livelihoods through acceleration and enterprization, they must still work to maintain their careers. Having reached the top, or perhaps rather an elevated plateau where digital work can be continued as a lucrative business, might at first appear be an arrival at a state of inertia, since the need for further "climbing" is over. Maintaining their careers, however, cannot be accomplished through inactivity. Instead, their continued work focuses on sustaining the achieved speed or managing to keep everything continuing to "spin," to use Jonna Lundell's word from the previous section. According to Rosa's theory, technological acceleration followed by abrupt shifts in the social ideals of the work sphere calls for an acceleration in the pace of life so that the influencer does not fall behind. This leads to an experience that can be likened to trying to go up a down escalator. Influencers must work faster and faster just to stay in place, to stay the same, to keep the pace. If they do not go faster, if they do not grow, they do not "stay the same," but become smaller or slower (Rosa, 2015). Simply put, it requires a greater amount of work in a shorter amount of time to stay on top than to get there in the first place. To sustain one's career, further acceleration is required. From this plateau of success, however, acceleration must be achieved despite the saturation factor that inexorably flattens out too-rapidly-moving upward curves. In other words, at some point in the influencer's career, the maximum number of available followers will be reached, particularly in a small country like Sweden. As Rosa describes it, certain forms of inertia are inevitable and are related to either natural limits to speed resulting from reaching the boundary of what (so far) can be achieved, or to dysfunctional side effects of acceleration, such as technological breakdown or disease.

At the same time, the platforms themselves are perceived to be faster: "TikTok is faster and more demanding than any of its predecessors: accelerated trend cycles are harder than ever to keep up with, and can keep influencers locked in for even longer than before. Going viral [once] isn't enough anymore… 'You have to be a viral person, more so than just producing viral content'" (Yallop, 2021: 252). Seemingly, as described in a previous section, a single viral post can trigger acceleration, but once on the speed plateau, an influencer needs to be a viral person to remain there. Simultaneously, ever-increased speed fosters inflation and deflation. According to Yallop, "thanks to TikTok, influencer metrics have been recalibrated, virality itself has been devalued"—in other words the influencer economy has been debased (2021: 101).

For the influencers in this study, maintaining their careers presupposes self-monitoring: they must have their ears to the ground and be constantly at the forefront of digital development (Hörnfeldt, 2018), as well as adopt a "can do and must do better" ethos (McRobbie, 2015). If, in the opening stages of their narratives, passivity and chance were intertwined, here, on the contrary, the link between activity and responsibility is exaggerated. Their initial success may have been a coincidence, but they alone are answerable for any failure. Influencer Janni Delér described the self-inflicted pressure this involves:

> I am my own boss, and it is not in my nature to disappoint the boss. I am extremely bad at giving myself time off, which has led me to work every single day for 3.5 years. Would like to go away for a few days and leave the computer at home. Actually, I can do it, but I don't. It might have been easier if there were boring things to opt out of, but who says no thanks to the question: Do you want to go to the Maldives? (Blix, 2017).

At this stage in their careers, the influencers' work can be defined as boundless, flexible in relation to temporal, spatial and organizational boundaries (Allvin et al., 2006). It is characterized by a commitment to a 24/7 news cycle. As Yallop describes it: "Every single influencer is their own TV channel. There can be no dead air, you've got to fill it with content" (Yallop, 2021: 98). Many influencers wrote that it was only in this phase of their careers, on this plateau of continued high speed, that the work's inherent demands for constant motion, the weaving together of work and

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

leisure, became clear to them. When digital work was a hobby, life included other elements, such as school or labor, but now, since they are self-employed, work is life and life is work (Crary, 2013). In her 2016 book *I Am Not Perfect, Unfortunately*, Mikaela Forni described how the pace of work necessary to avoid inertia gradually stepped up and caused the boundary between work and leisure to become increasingly fluid.

> I tell myself that my job is simple and luxurious, because that is what everyone says. That my job should not feel like a real job because it includes spa visits, nice dinners, luxury lunches and getting my hair fixed.... No one understands that as long as something takes time from one's private life, it is work. No matter what you do, it is work.... My job never ends, it keeps going and it does not rest. I cannot go home from work; it follows me wherever I go. (Forni, 2016: 111)

Realizing that everything that takes time away from one's private life is work, regardless of how fun and luxurious it might be, is perhaps when the "new mystique" of the feminized entrepreneur (Taylor, 2015: 174f) is exposed as nothing more than a return to the feminine ideal of never-idle hands and perpetual availability to serve the needs of others. Remaining active—not "wasting time"—and especially not allowing one's hands to be idle has traditionally been a strong feminine ideal, although this activity has not necessarily been considered work in a masculinized, capitalist sense. This recalls how Mikaela Forni described being an influencer as a job that follows her wherever she goes without anyone acknowledging it as a real job. The influencers' narratives show that neoliberal ideals of boundless work that emphasize freedom, flexibility and self-realization are easily intertwined with, and perhaps contribute to maintaining rather than challenging, traditional norms of femininity.

Rosa distinguishes between objective acceleration of the pace of life, which causes the individual to strive to do more things faster, and subjective acceleration of the pace of life, the individual's experience of lacking time and a stressful compulsion to acceleration. In her blog post "I'm so f*cking tired of this," influencer Annica Englund (2018) disclosed this compulsion and her feelings of burnout in the face of the required pace: "When you work at 180 km per hour and then slow down, the anxiety comes. Then it is important to speed everything up again and stay focused on the job, so you do not feel the anxiety." Working every single day for 3.5 years, as Janni Delér recounted above, and working at 180 km per hour, as Annica Englund spoke of, are workloads that many influencers recognize as harmful to their health, yet still, they continue. For Annica Englund the work appears to be both illness-causing and a way of self-medicating. Instead of recovering, she increases the pace of work further to counteract surges of anxiety. Similarly, Magdalena Peterson McIntyre asserts that "entrepreneurial subjects see themselves, and their bodies, as assets that can be exploited for purposes of entrepreneurship.... They are active, embrace risk, deal with difficulties, hide losses and damage" (Petersson McIntyre, 2021: 1063).

Allvin et al. describe how work in neoliberal societies has become both a development project and a survival project. The more flexible work becomes, the more obscure the demarcation between work and the rest of life. The boundary is instead individually negotiated and it is up to the individual to discipline her work so that it does not begin to leak from one side of the barrier to the other. Simultaneously, a failure to maintain the necessary high speed is attributed to the individual influencer, as "postfeminism tends to locate the causes of not getting ahead in the business world within women themselves, and suggests that the right strategic choices will enable a spectacular career" (Andersson & Kalonaityte, 2021: 419). At the same time, the ideal of having fun and loving one's job makes it difficult to say no to things that, objectively, are believed to bring happiness (Hope & Richards, 2015). As Janni Delér put it above: Who says no thanks to going to the Maldives?

6 | RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Maintaining acceleration and thereby maintaining a career as an influencer is achieved not only by working hard and often, by increasing the pace of life, but also through flexibility in relation to technological acceleration, by

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

acknowledging and accepting that one is part of an acceleration circle. Allvin et al. write that in neoliberal society "working a lot, well and quickly with something that has already become old and no one wants anymore is not only meaningless, it is a waste of time" (Allvin et al., 2006: 10). Working with digital media thus presupposes constant sensitivity, mobility and movement, not least because the algorithms and the popularity of platforms are constantly changing. As influencers move ahead, they need to move in parallel with and keep up with technological developments. Rest is not an option for those who want to maintain their careers. As influencer Janni Delér put it, "Before, we thought Facebook would be the biggest thing forever, but no one uses it anymore.... And when people got tired of Instagram's custom filters, YouTube got a boost. The medium always finds new forms" (Blix, 2017).

Although many of the influencers studied here described freedom as a driving motivation for choosing their line of work, Allvin et al. remind us that in a neoliberal society, increased autonomy and perceived control over work locally is paired with reduced control on the larger scale, such as over the demands of the industry and the market (Allvin et al., 2006: 10). Thus, there is an inescapable uncertainty linked to the influencers' experience, since the digital platforms, the workspaces they in practice borrow to carry out their work, are subject to change at any time. In regard to this, the male influencer Mirza Bico wrote:

> We all play a game on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. We do not have the power, but those who own the platforms do. We may follow their rules as best we can... But there are no guarantees... As an influencer, what you build and live on is highly dependent on others. Not only people, but companies, services and technology that can change all your conditions in an instant. (Bico, 2018: 134)

Cotter describes a similar anxiety among influencers about being at the mercy of platforms and algorithms—a sentiment that reflects their vulnerability and powerlessness (Cotter, 2019: 902). As Yallop sees it, "influencers are trapped in a permanent state of precarious codependency with their hosts: they don't own their audience but merely rent it off a platform, and they exist at the whims of a constantly changing creator landscape" (Yallop, 2021: 226). A recurring topic of conversation and fear among influencers is therefore changes to the platforms: "Did you lose Instagram followers last night too? I know many did, and I am quite convinced that it was about Instagram continuing that cleansing, you know. Of fake accounts and such... Frustrating, right?!" (Bylund, 2019).

Like the experience of sudden acceleration discussed above, algorithms are seen as mysterious and powerful (Cotter, 2019: 904); an algorithm is a "god-like entity that's omniscient, omnipotent and opaque, ruling over its subjects" (Yallop, 2021: 227). Consequently, to use Nieborg and Poells' (2018) term, there is a demand for "platformization," for influencers to align themselves with the platform's demands in order to achieve visibility, since visibility drives income (Bishop, 2019: 2591). Influencers need to make themselves "algorithmically recognizable" (Gillespie, 2017: 2), which has been shown to require the production of content that conforms to gender norms. In line with Rosa's view on how technical acceleration demands an acceleration of the pace of life, Cotter writes, "you gotta adapt or get left behind" (Cotter, 2019: 902). The influencers' knowledge of and approach to algorithms and platforms thus further highlights the paradox between activity and passivity that seems to characterize digital work throughout their careers. On the one hand, they must submit to the god-like algorithm by conforming to traditional gender norms, and on the other hand, they themselves are responsible for identifying and turning these norms into lucrative businesses.

7 | RESTRAINED BY CELEBRITY

Based on the stressful situation caused by high-speed work, some influencers expressed that they did not want further increases in followers. "Before, I just wanted more and more followers, I was involved in all that. But after a while I got fed up with it" (Tranås Tidning, 2019). Some felt the need to reduce speed in order to be able to stand up

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

for their work and be true to themselves. "Who wants millions of followers if it requires me to exploit my own body and move away from my personality?," Ida Warg wrote. "I know there is a risk of changing tracks now that my channels are starting to grow but I have to follow my gut feeling" (Warg, 2019: 99f). Perhaps this insight can be likened to the figure skater's need to regularly reduce speed in order to reinvigorate the pirouette.

In contrast, many influencers described how they felt that instead of moving forward, they were involuntarily being held back by the negative consequences of their celebrity. "We really just want to be an ordinary family," said Jonna Lundell, speaking of having to take safety measures in order to be able to visit a playground with her children because of the large number of fans who followed her constantly (Dahlgren, 2019). Many reported recurring problems with unwelcome visitors outside their homes. Not even Jonna Jinton, who lived in the remote countryside in the north of Sweden, was safe from unwanted attention:

> During the summer, people have passed by daily to check out where she lives; not infrequently they want to stop by for a chat. "Those who come really like me. That's a nice thing. But it restricts my freedom. I do not feel safe going out into the yard and being myself." (Rydén, 2019)

Allvin et al. use the term "locked-in" to describe the experience of being in the wrong workplace or wrong profession (Allvin et al., 2006: 157). This term could also be used, however, to understand Jonna Lundell and Jonna Jinton's experiences of having their mobility restrained by celebrity, of being locked in their homes. Their experience is similar to what Rosa (2015) refers to as frenetic standstill, the crystallization of speed into inertia, whereby everything moves at breakneck speed but actual mobility is limited. To escape the state of frenetic standstill, some chose to downsize or abandon life as an influencer—by leaving one or more platforms, for example, It is above all the most successful influencers who have the opportunity to free themselves from lock-in by redistributing their work efforts, reducing their presence on digital media while at the same time investing more time in their personal brands or a professional TV producer career. Yallop recounts the situation of one of her interviewees: "It is only now, with 17m followers, she feels free to take a break from the relentless posting cycle" (Yallop, 2021: 100). For those less successful, allowing for inertia while avoiding a crash seems achievable only by actively reversing the direction of movement—perhaps by ending their careers and "returning home," as Linda Hörnfeldt described it: "I have returned to my roots. For ten years, I have felt like a mosquito was buzzing in my ear. Now it is completely silent" (Edstrand, 2020).

8 | CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this article, I suggested that the career narratives of digital media influencers offer an area where ideas about social acceleration can be studied and problematized from a gender perspective. I applied Rosa's acceleration circle to contextualize the metaphors of motion, acceleration and speed influencers use to make sense of their career development, with the aim of studying how influencers described, explained and legitimated the different circumstances and phases of their careers, as well as exploring how they relate to potentially conflicting gender norms.

In line with Fleming (2015) and others, I argue that technical acceleration in the form of increased digitalization in general, and rapid changes in digital media platforms and algorithms in particular, have opened the door to an acceleration of changes in the work sphere. More specifically, neoliberal ideals that advocate individuality, flexibility, entrepreneurship and passion as a basis for an individual's choice of profession are facilitated by technology, which, in turn, accelerates the pace of life. The careers of digital media influencers appear at first to be at the very epicenter of this acceleration circle. There is an obvious fascination with the astronomical figures that characterize the media image of influencers—with the "key players, star earners, freshly minted teenage millionaires, record-breaking sales and internet-breaking viral moments" (Yallop, 2021: 32). As a result, the work of influencers appears to reflect a norm-breaking shift in power. Young women have seized the digital moment and forged a space for themselves

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

where they may turn the beauty ideals they have been fed throughout their youth into prosperous careers, while at the same time retaining their passion (cf. Duffy, 2016; Kearny, 2006).

When influencers describe their careers, however, their narratives do not necessarily make them appear novel or empowered. They continue to adhere to traditional gender norms, assigning themselves a passive role during much of the development of their careers—which, so the story goes, have largely come about without any action on their part. The feminized work of the influencer thus stands out as an exception to other forms of (masculinized) high-speed digital work; instead, the typical influencer narrative aligns with a relationship-building femininity and notions of a traditional gender role as intimate, passive and static. Influencers understate their own strategic, entrepreneurial thinking, their skills in mastering and operating digital technologies, and their ability as individuals to stand out and engage with hundreds of thousands of people via their digital content. More than anything, the different stages of their narratives seem characterized by paradox and ambiguity. Their digital work is fast and ever-changing but at the same time, it must be slow and systematic. They need to please the algorithmic court of appeal while simultaneously working organically to foster authentic relationships. Their 24/7 intertwining of work and leisure is fun and luxurious but at the same time an anxiety-inducing "fucking roller coaster ride." They have broken free but find themselves restrained by celebrity. The influencers' use of different movement metaphors in various stages of their narratives can be seen as an attempt to sort out these paradoxes.

It appears that these paradoxes emerge partly because neoliberal ideals around work are intertwined with traditional notions of femininity in the form of the feminized entrepreneur. In fact, what this study suggests is that for women, neoliberal work ideals and the social factory that never sleeps in general, and the merging of work and leisure in the lives of digital media influencers in particular, are not new at all. Instead, they signify a reinforcement of traditional feminine ideals and a normative view of women's work as "non-work" that entails never-idle hands and a perpetual availability to the needs of others in the form of being always in motion, flexibly listening, sensing, and multi-tasking. Perhaps this is the reason women, especially, have been able to forge themselves this space in digital media, as Kearny (2006) described it. The metaphor of the figure skater who creates acceleration from inertia in the pirouette illustrates that the crystallization of acceleration that Rosa calls frenetic standstill is a feminine, reproductive acceleration in place.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was written as part of "Influencer Lifeworlds: New Work in a Changing Time," a project financed by the Swedish Research Council, 2020–2024. Aside from the data analyzed in this paper, the project involves material in the form of digital content produced by influencers as well as interviews with influencers. The Swedish Research Council, 2019–03142.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicting interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID

Gabriella Nilsson https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7995-6838

ENDNOTES

[1] The twelve books included Jag, Nattid. Om livet, kärleken, mobbingen och kändisskapet [I, Nattid. About life, love, bullying and celebrity] (Natalie Danielsson, 2019); Ibland mår jag inte så bra [Sometimes I Don't Feel So Well] (Therese Lindgren, 2017); Så lärde jag mig att älska min kropp [That is How I Learned to Love My Body] (Linda-Marie Nilsson, 2018); To Love and Let Go. En berättelse om kärlek, sorg och tacksamhet [To Love and Let Go. A Story about Love, Grief, and Thankfulness] (Rachel Brathen, 2019); Vi mot världen [Us Against the World] (Joakim Lundell and Jonna Lundell, 2019); Jag

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

är inte perfekt, tyvärr. Om ångest, oro och konsten att vara snäll mot sig själv [I'm Not Perfect, Unfortunately. About Anxiety, Worry and the Art of Being Kind to Oneself] (Michaela Forni, 2016); Jag är Nellie [I am Nellie] (Nelie Berntsson, 2016); Min egen väg [My Own Way] (Ida Warg, 2019), Älskad och hatad [Loved and Hated] (Alexandra Nilsson, 2016); PMS-kossan [PMS-Cow] (Jonna Lundell, 2019); Your Best Life (Margaux Dietz, 2019); Känn ingen skam [Don't Be Ashmed] (Lina Rask, 2018); Ni vann aldrig [You Never Won] (Lisa Jonsson, 2018)

[2] This paper was written as part of "Influencer Lifeworlds: New Work in a Changing Time," a project financed by the Swedish Research Council, 2020–2024. Aside from the data analyzed in this paper, the project involves material in the form of digital content produced by influencers as well as interviews with influencers.

REFERENCES

Abidin, Crystal. 2016. "Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online? Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity." *Social Media + Society* 8(2): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342.

Alexandersson, Anna, and Viktorija Kalonaityte. 2021. "Girl Bosses, Punk Poodles, and Pink Smoothies: Girlhood as Enterprising Femininity." *Gender, Work and Organization* 2021(28): 416–438. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12582.

Allvin, Michael, Gunnar Aronsson, Tom Hagström, Gunn Johansson, and Ulf Lundberg. 2006. *Gränslöst arbete. Socialpsykologiska perspektiv på det nya arbetslivet*. [Boundless labor. Social psychological perspectives on the new world of work] Malmö: Liber.

Altheide, David L. 1987. "Ethnographic Content Analysis." *Qualitative Sociology* 10(1): 65–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00988269.

Ashton, Daniel, and Karen Patel. 2018. "Vlogging Careers: Everyday Expertise, Collaboration and Authenticity." In *The New Normal of Working Lives. Critical Studies in Contemporary Work and Employment*, edited by Taylor Stephanie and Luckman Susan, 147–169. Palgrave Macmillan.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke university press.

Berntsson, Nellie. 2016. *Jag är Nellie. [I am Nellie]*. Stockholm: Bonnier Carlsen.

Bico, Mirza. 2018. *Hej, jag heter Mirza och jag är influencer*. [Hi, my name is Mirza and I am an influencer] Pug Förlag.

Bishop, Sophie. 2019. "Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip." *New Media and Society* 21(11–12): 2589–2606. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819854731.

Blix, Josephine. 2017. *Janni Delér: Jag kan leva gott och resa jorden runt för att jag är 'en sån där influencer*. ["I can live well and travel the world because I am 'one of those influencers'"] Elle.

Brathen, Rachel. 2019. *To Love and Let Go: En berättelse om kärlek, sorg och tacksamhet [To Love and Let Go: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Gratitude]*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Ester Bonnier.

Bylund, Alexandra. 2019. Instagram-post.

Cotter, Kelley. 2019. "Playing the Visibility Game: How Digital Influencers and Algorithms Negotiate Influence on Instagram." *New Media and Society* 21(4): 895–913. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818815684.

Crary, Jonathan. 2013. *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso.

Dahlgren, Stina. 2019. "Joakim och Jonna Lundells nya beslut: Då lämnar vi Sverige. [Joakim and Jonna Lundell's New Decision: Then We Will leave Sweden!]." *Hänt*.

Danielsson, Nathalie. 2019. *Jag, Nattid: Om Livet kärleken, mobbingen och kändisskapet [I, Nattid: On Life, Love, bullying, and Celebrity]*. Stockholm: Bokfabriken AB.

Dietz, Margaux. 2019. *Your best Life*. Stockholm: Bookmark Förlag.

Duffy, Brooke Erin. 2016. "The Romance of Work: Gender and Aspirational labour in the Digital Culture Industries." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19(4): 441–457. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915572186.

Duffy, Brooke Erin, and Emily Hund. 2015. *Having it All" on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers*, 1–11. Social Media + Society.

Edstrand, Maria. 2020. "Influencern köpte ett 1800- talshus på landet. [Influencer Bought a 19th Century House in the Countryside]." *Örnsköldsviks Allehanda*.

Englund, Annica. 2018. *I'm so f*cking tired of this*. Annicaenglund.se.

Fleming, Peter. 2015. *The mythology of Work. How Capitalism persists despite itself*. London: Pluto press.

Forni, Michaela. 2016. *Jag är inte perfekt, tyvärr: Om ångest, oro och konsten att vara snäll mot sig själv [I'm not perfect, Unfortunately: On anxiety, Worry, and the art of being kind to oneself]*. Stockholm: Lava förlag.

Geyser, Werner. 2022. *The State of Influencer Marketing 2022: Benchmark Report*. Influencer Marketing Hub.

Gillespie, Tarleton. 2017. "Algorithmically Recognizable: Santorum's Google Problem, and Google's Santorum Problem." *Information, Communication and Society* 20(1): 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2016.1199721.

Häggberg, Elin. 2019. "Så du vill bli en influencer – men har du en plan? [So you want to become an influencer - but Do you have a plan?" *Nollnitton*.

Hallinan, Blake, and Ted Striphas. 2016. "Recommended for You." *New Media and Society* 18(1): 117–137. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814538646.

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Hanna, Rydén. 2019. *Influencer till skogs. [Influencer in the forest]*. Göteborgs-Posten.
Hedström, Hampus. 2019. *Det skolan inte lärde dig*. [What school did not teach you], Lind and co.
Hong, Renyi. 2015. "Finding Passion in Work: Media, Passion and Career Guides." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18(2): 190–206. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549414563295.
Hope, Sophie, and Jenny Richards. 2015. "Loving Work: Drawing Attention to Pleasure and Pain in the Body of the Cultural Worker." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18(2): 117–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549414563299.
Hörnfeldt, Linda. 2018. *Yrke: Influencer. Så gör du karriär på nätet*. [Occupation: Influencer. How to Make a Career Online]. Brombergs.
Jonsson, Karin. 2017. *Stefan gör film med Youtubes största*. ["Stefan makes Film with YouTube's Biggest"]. Östersunds-Posten.
Jonsson, Lisa. 2018. *Ni vann aldrig: så tog jag mig levande genom högstadiet*. [You never won: How I got through high school alive], Bokförlaget Forum.
Kearny, Mary Celeste. 2006. *Girls make media*. Routledge.
Letser, Malin. 2020. "Jag har alltid varit privat av mig. [I Have Always Been a Private Person]." *Dagens Industri*.
Lindgren, Therese. 2017. *Ibland mår jag inte så bra [Sometimes I don't feel so Well]*. Stockholm: Månpocket/Bokförlaget Forum.
Lundell, Joakim, and Jonna Lundell. 2019. *Vi mot världen*. [Us against the world] Bokförlaget Forum.
Mama. 2019. "Swedish family-Joanna: "Youtube har gjort mig till en bättre mamma". ["Youtube has made me a better mum"] Mamaredaktionen." *Mama*.
Marwick, Alice E. 2015. "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention economy." *Public Culture* 27(1): 137–160. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2798379.
McIntyre, Magdalena, Petersson. 2021. "Commodifying Feminism: Economic Choice and Agency in the Context of lifestyle Influencers and Gender Consultant." *Gender, Work and Organization* 28: 1059–1078.
McNeill, Laurie, and John David Zuern. 2015. "Online Lives 2.0: Introduction." *Biography: AnInterdisciplinary Quarterly* 38(2). https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2015.0012.
McRobbie, Angela. 2015. "Notes on the Perfect. Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times." *Australian Feminist Studies* 30(83): 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2015.1011485.
Milton, Leone. 2019. *Vi vill inspirera om livet på landet" Landsbygdens influerare Helena Löfstedt och Linda Hörnfeldt. ["We Want to inspire about Life in the Countryside*. Rural influencers Helena Löfstedt and Linda Hörnfeldt] Land.
Nieborg, D. B., and T. Poell. 2018. *The platformization of Cultural production: theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity*, Vol. 20, 4275–4292. New Media and Society.
Nilsson, Alexandra. 2016. *Hatad och älskad*. [Hated and Loved] Calidris förlag.
Nilsson, Gabriella. 2021. "Detesting Influencers: Print Media Perspectives on the Phantasmagoria of Influencer Life Worlds." *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 51: 42–61.
Nilsson, Gabriella. 2022. "Autobiographical Convergences: A Cultural Analysis of Books by Digital media Influencers." *Biography* 45(1): 67–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2022.0018.
Nilsson, Linda-Marie. 2018. *Så Lärde jag mig att älska min kropp*. [How I learnt to love my body] Stockholm: Norstedts.
Rask, Lina. 2018. *Känn ingen skam [Don't be ashamed]*. Stockholm: Lava förlag.
Raun, Tobias. 2018. "Capitalizing Intimacy: New Subcultural Forms of micro-celebrity Strategies and Affective labour on YouTube." *Convergence* 24(1): 99–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736983.
Rosa, Hartmut. 2015. *Social acceleration. A new theory of modernity*. New York: Columbia university press.
Taylor, Stephanie. 2015. "A New mystique? Working for Yourself in the Neoliberal economy." *The Sociological Review* 63(S1): 174–187. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12248.
Taylor, Stephanie, and Susan Luckman. 2018. *The new normal of Working Lives. Critical Studies in Contemporary Work and Employment*. Palgrave Macmillan.
Tranås, Tidning. 2019. Jag vill inte att Instagram ska ta över mitt Liv. [I don't Want Instagram to take over my Life] No name.
Virilio, Paul. 2009. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. MIT Press.
Warg, Ida. 2019. *Min egen väg [My own Way]*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Forum.
Westberg, Magnus. 2018. *Klara Lovisa Lever och jobbar på Instagram. [Klara Lovisa Lives and Works on Instagram]*. Vestmanlands Läns Tidning.
Yallop, Olivia. 2021. *Break the internet*. London: Scribe publications.

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Gabriella Nilsson is an Associate Professor in Ethnology at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences. Throughout her career, she has taken interest in how power is played out in society as well as in interpersonal relationships. Currently she is managing the project "Influencer lifeworlds. New work in a changing time" funded by the Swedish Research Council.

How to cite this article: Nilsson, Gabriella. 2024. "Set in Motion. Paradoxical Narratives of Becoming Swedish Digital Media Influencers." *Gender, Work & Organization* 31(2): 337–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13068.

14680432, 2024, 2, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13068 by LUND UNIVERSITY, Wiley Online Library on [13/02/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License