6.7 Gender Stereotypes, Body Standards and Beauty Norms

The findings of the corpus analysis indicate that the platform logics of TikTok and the socio-technical interactions between the platform and its users and content creators exert a significant influence on the visibility of jazz repertoires on the platform. Moreover, they also shape the potential for success of certain (groups of) musicians on TikTok. As has already been demonstrated, this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among relatively young, female, *white* individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who conform to specific conventional beauty standards. These ideals pertain, on the one hand, to the physical appearance of the musicians and, on the other hand, to how they present themselves on TikTok. Upon first observation, it would seem that female jazz musicians in particular attach significant value to their appearance, encompassing elements such as makeup, hairstyles, and attire. While such processes are not exclusive to TikTok but are a ubiquitous feature throughout the entertainment industry (and beyond), the interviews demonstrate that a distinct *beauty action* (Degele 2006) is particularly evident on TikTok. The algorithmic imaginaries of the musicians are of significant consequence in this regard, at times exerting a decisive influence on their actions with regard to how they portray themselves on TikTok.

In the course of the interviews, all the musicians emphasized that, from their perspective, certain normative ideals of beauty play an important role on TikTok. In particular, they noted that conforming to a certain physical ideal is sometimes described as one of the basic requirements for success on the platform. These assumptions are typically derived from prolonged observations of the platform's logic. In certain instances, musicians have specific ideas about the best way to present themselves on TikTok. These ideas then become guiding principles, influencing the image of jazz that emerges on the platform to a similar degree as ideas about promising musical repertoires and musical features. Caity Gyorgy provides a summary of the relevance of certain beauty ideals based on her own experience:

> If I don't wear makeup, my videos don't do well. If my hair is, like, up in a bun, it doesn't do as well. […] In a lot of my videos, you know, I've got, like, the full makeup on. Like, sometimes, if I'm making a TikTok, I will go and I put my fake eyelashes on. I glue them on, and just so that I can do the TikTok and that it will do well. […] They do better when you look better. […] The ones that aren't doing as well are the ones where I'm not really wearing makeup.

> Or, yeah, I had my hair in braids for one. Didn't do as well. […] It's definitely a factor. If I do my makeup, they do better. If I don't, they don't do as well. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

Identifying promising patterns is of great importance, both in terms of which repertoires are performed and which specific techniques (or tricks) are employed to make the TikTok videos more engaging. This process also has a significant impact on the way content creators present their own bodies. This is evident in numerous other interview passages that are strikingly similar in content to the above statement by Caity Gyorgy. For example, Stella Cole emphasizes: "It's definitely something that I've noticed. Videos perform better if I look better. I've posted some of my, like, musically some of my best videos, I think. And they haven't done well because I maybe wasn't close up enough to the camera so people could see my face or I wasn't wearing makeup." It is evident that a particular visual presentation appears to increase the probability of success. As Brooklyn Stafford observes, creators must acknowledge this logic of success to a certain extent, which she is willing to accept:

> Sometimes you do have to play the game. And if you have attributes that work, you have to milk it, right? If you know that pretty sells, if conventionally attractive sells, then: hey, if it's working for you, then do it, right? Like, you have nothing to lose. […] Just the reality of what TikTok wants to push is conventionally attractive. That's just what I've seen. It's stupid. But, you know, that's just the weird world we live in today, you know? (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

Such assumptions are not arbitrary; rather, they are based on concrete experiences made by musicians with how they appear on the platform and the corresponding reactions of TikTok users. To illustrate, Rachel Chiu describes an incident during a live stream on TikTok in which she altered her attire and subsequently observed a notable surge in the number of views:

> One time I was singing "All My Life," and I don't know if you've ever seen the videos that are, like, get ready with me, where […] these girls are doing makeup, and then they're singing. So I've been doing that where I was just singing, I was getting ready for a banquet at my school. I started off the video without any makeup on. I was wearing, like, this old t-shirt that I had. And by the end of my live stream, I went to the side and I changed into my dress, and I asked for advice: Oh, which earring should I wear – while I was singing.

> And I noticed that the number of views went up by so much more after I had my makeup on, my hair done, my dress on. I had way more views than I did when I had that old t-shirt on and no makeup. So I think it does affect the level of success in the video to a certain degree. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Although Rachel is describing her experience in the context of a live stream and not in the short-form video context typical of TikTok, the huge relevance of beauty ideals and body standards on the platform can nonetheless be observed. Moreover, it is possible to draw conclusions from this interview passage about how algorithmic moderation contributes to the perpetuation of normative beauty ideals. In order to reach a larger number of users with her live stream, Rachel's video had to be featured on the For You pages of as many TikTok users as possible. The abrupt surge in views subsequent to her outfit change indicates that her live stream was algorithmically prioritized, subsequently garnering the attention of numerous users. In other words, the TikTok algorithm was required to take the initiative. With regard to the design of short-form videos, certain learning processes also occur over time with respect to how content creators stage their own bodies. For instance, Stella Cole illustrates how, over an extended period, she discerned which staging techniques were most conducive to success, subsequently designing her videos in accordance with these criteria:

> I would definitely look at what videos did well and I'd be, like, okay, I'll keep doing that. So I figured out that people or the algorithm, whichever it is, really like when I – it's, like, a close-up of my face. […] I'm a very smiley person, so I'm usually smiling anyway. But people are always, like, oh, your smile is so nice. It makes me feel so happy. And so usually: pretty singing, sort of happier songs, smiling in my videos. (Stella Cole, interview)

At this juncture, it becomes evident that the musicians' conceptualizations of potential pathways to success are largely informed by both the platform algorithms and the user reactions on TikTok. This underscores the fact that their imaginaries extend beyond the algorithms themselves, as the term algorithmic imaginaries would suggest. Instead, they encompass the broader events and interactions that occur on the platform. As Stella's statement illustrates, even successful content creators are unable to ascertain the extent to which algorithms, users, or their interactions are responsible for specific processes on the platform.

The experiences of the musicians interviewed indicate that beauty ideals and body standards play a key role not only on TikTok, but also on other digital platforms. Caity Gyorgy, for example, shares her experiences with Instagram: "I know that the videos where I have my makeup done do a lot better than the ones where I don't. […] I noticed that years ago on Instagram. You know, when you post a video, when you've got a full face of makeup, people like that one more than the one where you don't have makeup on." This phenomenon, observed on social media platforms over an extended period of time, appears to manifest similarly on TikTok. Furthermore, it can be argued that the prevalent attitudes and behaviors in society at large are reflected and negotiated within digital spaces. For example, the prioritization of so-called *standard beautiful bodies* is not exclusive to digital platforms; however, it may be intensified in digital spaces. Ultimately, according to Brooklyn Stafford, the importance of appearance on TikTok is on par with that of musical performance:

> The visual aspect is so important. It's almost as important as the content you're playing. And people find their niches too, right? You don't have to be, like, freaking – I don't know – Bella Hadid to be successful on TikTok. But being presentable, like, looking your best is very important, too, right? […] At the end of the day, […] when I look good, it definitely helps. It never fails to help to look good in a video. (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

Nevertheless, the musicians frequently assert that decisions about their performance on TikTok are ultimately based on their personal preferences and are therefore a matter of self-determination. Caity Gyorgy, for instance, maintains that the authority to make such decisions resides with her alone. She further states that she does not wear makeup with the intention of aligning her appearance with the expectations of strangers on the platform: "When I'm making my TikToks, I know that the videos do better when I have my makeup on, and that's fine. But I'm not putting my makeup to help other people, you know, like, not make comments on my videos. […] I've had social media since I was 14, I've always put on makeup, you know." In essence, Caity's argument is that the decision to leverage physical attributes for the purpose of enhancing one's success in the TikTok content creator realm is ultimately at the discretion of the creators themselves.

Concurrently, several interviewees asserted that TikTok users have specific expectations regarding their physical appearance and that they occasionally feel compelled to align with particular beauty standards. It bears pointing out

that this phenomenon is not exclusive to TikTok. Caity Gyorgy, for instance, offers insights into the responses of her Instagram audience to videos in which she is not wearing makeup: "[That] happened on my transcription account on Instagram. I posted transcriptions where I don't wear makeup, and I've had people saying, like, you look sick, are you okay? And I'm, like, yeah, I'm fine. I just don't have an even skin tone." In the context of TikTok, Rachel Chiu notes that users have certain expectations regarding the appearance of content creators:

> I think TikTok really exposes that, and I think that's where it's a little difficult because people on there – you can't control what they say, but they can be quite judgmental. And as a woman you feel like you have to be presentable. And if you're singing, like, jazz music, you need to look very, like, gentle and fair, you know what I mean? So I think there are definitely unspoken expectations for women. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Similarly, Caity Gyorgy articulates a perspective that is, at its core, at odds with the aforementioned expectations. She states that these expectations are fundamentally incompatible with her personal values:

> I think there's an expectation for people to look good, and for people's videos to do well, it's sort of expected that they put effort into their appearance, as well as the content. I think the appearance sort of factors into the quality of content in some ways. Not that I believe in that. It shouldn't be a thing, of course. But I think that the appearance does definitely affect how people perceive the quality of content. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

It is evident that the musicians are under considerable pressure to justify their actions. While young women are particularly influenced by the platform logic of TikTok to conform to the conventional standards of beauty, it is crucial for them to highlight that such performance practices may not align with their personal ideals.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to circumvent this subject entirely. As previously stated, musicians frequently peruse the comments appended to their videos in order to better understand users' preferences and expectations. Additionally, comments are frequently directed at the musicians' appearance. Stacey Ryan's video for "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" (Ryan 2020), previously referenced, serves as an illustrative example:

> You can't help but notice if you're wearing maybe a lower cut shirt or makeup, you do get the comments. […] On the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" video – I remember because it was all older people, right, who are seeing it or a lot more because it was shown to an older audience. And I remember getting one or two comments being, like, wow, I really like your shirt, with, like, a winky face or something. And I, you know, I was, like – I don't think these comments are inevitable, but you definitely notice them, you know, when you get them, they definitely stand out for sure. (Stacey Ryan, interview)

In such circumstances, the musicians interviewed may also feel compelled to justify or even apologize for a certain look or appearance in their videos if it does not conform to the prevailing beauty standards. As a case in point, a video by Stella Cole was viewed and discussed with all the musicians as part of the interviews. This was done in order to facilitate a discussion about the role of beauty standards on TikTok with the interviewees. In the video captioned "Reply to @_amyjhs where my Julie London stans at?" (Cole 2020), in response to a user request, Stella provides a reply within the comment field that is visible within the video frame: "Please can you sing some Julie London 🫀." Stella then performs an excerpt from the 1953 song "Cry Me a River," written by Arthur Hamilton and made popular in 1955 by Julie London. In regard to the discourse surrounding beauty standards on the platform, Stella's concise verbal statement in this video is of paramount importance. "Yes, I am in pajamas. Yes, my hair is in two braids. Yes, I'm filming a TikTok." This video does indeed deviate from the majority of Stella's other TikTok videos in terms of its staging. She is wearing a relatively loose hooded sweatshirt, with no discernible makeup, and her hair is pulled back with a headband and braided at the sides. Furthermore, the video is not illuminated with a ring light or other professional lighting, which results in a relatively dark overall appearance. There are striking contrasts to most other videos, where Stella can be seen wearing makeup, her hair loose and styled, and well lit.

After viewing the video in question, all of the musicians interviewed proceeded to debate the extent to which beauty standards play a pivotal role on TikTok. They noted that, for those who have achieved a certain level of success in content creation, there is an inherent pressure to apologize to users if their appearance does not align with the prevailing body standards and beauty norms. In response, all of the interviewees corroborated the relevance of beauty standards, and in some cases, they recounted their personal experiences with the previously described pressure to validate themselves: For example, after view-

ing Stella Cole's video, Rachel Chiu went on to show the interviewer one of her own videos, which had not previously been uploaded to TikTok and bears a striking resemblance to Stella's video. Rachel then proceeded to describe the background of the video in question:

> I haven't posted this, that's why you can't see it […] I was basically saying in the video: […] I have acne everywhere. I'm not wearing any makeup. It's 3 am and I'm so tired. I just finished school. I look like a mess. I guess that's a little bit similar to the video you showed me. So I think we are as women, like, pretty aware that we have to look presentable. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

The sentiment articulated by Rachel on the necessity of aligning with specific beauty standards on TikTok, particularly as a woman, resonates with numerous musicians interviewed for this study. Stacey Ryan also describes how she occasionally feels compelled to justify her physical appearance to TikTok users:

> I remember posting a couple of times and being, like, oh, so I look terrible. […] I had a sunburn once and I was, like, I already know I'm sunburnt, you don't have to tell me. You do feel the need to justify why you look the way you look if it's not good, which is terrible. […] You just feel the need to make sure they know that […] you don't look like that every day or you just really wanted to post a video. Like, a lot of people, you see they're, like, oh, I look like crap, but I just love this song and I feel, like, that's a reaction that we all have definitely to posting a video where you maybe don't look your best or don't feel your best. (Stacey Ryan, interview)

However, the musicians are not only responding to the perceived expectations of the TikTok audience, they are also responding to the expectations that are sometimes placed on them by people in the music industry. Stella Cole explains that her video – the one that was discussed with all the musicians interviewed for this study – is part of her strategy for dealing with these expectations and to sometimes deliberately subvert them:

> You've seen probably a couple of times me being, like, sorry, I'm not wearing makeup, but I'm filming a video anyway. Because it just feels – I don't know why I would apologize for it. That's kind of messed up, honestly, but it just feels to me – like I was saying earlier. In my experience with putting myself singing or acting on video, it's important to look, like, put together. And I guess to me, put together means that I have my hair and makeup done. And

> then people, certain people in the industry, like managers or producers or whatever, who have talked to me, are, like, it's important that on your videos you look—you have this sort of, like, Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor energy, which is code for saying, like, you have to be extremely beautiful at all times and make that a part of your brand. You have to have sort of well-done hair and the red lipstick, and that's what people want to see. They don't want to see you in a t-shirt. So I guess me apologizing for not wearing makeup is me acknowledging, like, yeah, I know you guys want to see me, I know how you want to perceive me, and I'm not going to do that right now, but I'm still in the mood to sing. (Stella Cole, interview)

The interviewees do not always wish to meet the expectations placed on them, although they frequently defer to the logic of success in the context of TikTok, which is influenced by beauty ideals and body norms. Videos like the one by Stella Cole discussed here represent a minority of cases. Some musicians question the value of posting videos without staging their bodies in a particular manner. Rachel Chiu offers a perspective on this issue: "Sometimes I want to record a video but I'm, like, […] I'm not wearing makeup or I'm not wearing something that I should be wearing for a video, right? I'm wearing my pajamas or whatever." Furthermore, Stacey Ryan notes that her TikTok-related production practices are occasionally shaped by the expectations associated with her staging. She asserts that she occasionally refrains from recording videos if she does not feel adequately presentable:

> A lot of the time a TikTok inspiration comes, like, it's nighttime and you're already in your pajamas. I feel, like, you shouldn't let that hold you back. And a lot of people it doesn't. But then again, you start thinking in your head: Oh no, what if I have this amazing idea and I sound really good right now, but I don't look good. And then you don't make the TikTok. (Stacey Ryan, interview)

It should be noted that some interviewees raised these issues proactively, prior to being specifically questioned about them during the course of the interviews. This was particularly prevalent in the interviews with female musicians, although the intensity of this varied.

However, it is similarly crucial for the interviewees to assert that a particular appearance is not a guarantee of success on TikTok. Once more, their personal experiences and observations of the platform's underlying logic serve as the foundation for this interpretation. In recalling her initial experiences

with virality on TikTok, Brooklyn Stafford attributes a portion of her success to her appearance in the videos. However, she also emphasizes the importance of combining specific physical attributes and a distinctive look with creative ideas to achieve success on the platform:

> I kind of found that [a certain look] was important when I did – when the first video went off. […] I had a nice crop top, little red pants, like, my abs were showing, and that went off. […] [M]aybe it was a combination of – it was obviously a combination of looking good and having a good idea, right? You're not going to just get views because you're pretty, just get views because it's a good piece. But that's just from my experience. That first video that went off, as opposed to my first videos, which I look kind of frumpy, you know. (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

Moreover, the interviewees stressed that, when viewed through the lens of TikTok's platform logic, it is evident that the visual presentation of content creators plays a pivotal role in determining success. This is related to the attention principles of TikTok, which stipulate that creators must capture users' attention within the first few seconds. Rachel Chiu argues: "You have two seconds to attract someone's attention before they scroll away. So, whether that be with your music, or your voice, or with your makeup or appearances. You have to find a way to make sure you grab that person's attention." Additionally, Sam Ambers emphasizes the significance of a distinctive visual presentation as a pivotal strategy for garnering the attention of both users and platform algorithms, a concept he has repeatedly highlighted throughout the interview:

> I feel, like, if I have to make sure that I'm looking as good as possible for every video, I think that would drive me insane. I don't think I can do that to myself. […] But it's very true, though. It is very true that looks – I mean, it's about first impressions as well. You want to look nice and presentable and, you know, it does help if you're attractive. Being attractive helps tick the algorithmic boxes, basically. (Sam Ambers, interview)

It is noteworthy that one of the two male interviewees highlighted the potential challenges associated with maintaining a consistent and meticulous approach to personal grooming over an extended period of time. It is evident that the specific expectations regarding appearance on TikTok have a significant impact on the work of female musicians, although male interviewees do not deny the influence of certain beauty standards on their videos, or at the very least, on

their strategic considerations. For instance, Erny Nunez typically dons a suit in his videos, a choice he regards as deliberate. This sartorial choice distinguishes him from other male singers on TikTok. Moreover, he is inherently in competition with female singers on the platform, who attach considerable significance to their appearance:

> There is a certain set of beauty standards that are proposed. And so, for me, as a Hispanic singer and probably one of the biggest male jazz singers on this app, I find that if it were just me wearing a normal t-shirt and just singing songs, I wouldn't get as much traction compared to my female counterparts because they put the time and effort to look as pretty as possible. But I think that putting the suit on is unexpected. You don't see many male people on this app just having suits on all the time. That's very rare. I do agree that beauty does have a big impact. (Erny Nunez, interview)

From Sam Ambers' perspective, physical appearance is a significant factor for male musicians as well:

> It is so important and it's genuinely something that I've been slacking on. I'm not even joking. […] [T]he main motivation for wanting to get in a better shape or to look better is because I know that it will result in – well, I expect that it will improve results on TikTok. […] If you see someone that's really attractive on the For You page, you're going to give them more of a chance than someone that you don't find attractive. I think that's pretty basic. […] I've got a mate called Adam and he does music and his demographic is, like, 82% or 80% female. So he says to me, the main thing about his videos is looking good. Well, not the main thing, but a very important thing is looking good. […] If you look good, you've got a decent chance of keeping viewer attention of people commenting, saying, oh my God, you look brilliant and people following you because you're good looking. (Sam Ambers, interview)

Although the orientation towards certain beauty standards is part of their daily business, the musicians occasionally experience discomfort with their actions on the platform or with the expectations placed on them. Some of them describe a state of frustration regarding the apparent relevance of certain beauty standards. This is largely attributable to the fact that the interviewees are acutely aware that their behavior could be perceived as opportunistic, given that their appearance evidently contributes to their success on the platform.

Stella Cole presents her perspective on the role of beauty standards on TikTok and their broader relevance:

> I'll be honest, I think it's very important and I wish it weren't. And that has been one of the most frustrating things about the platform for me, even as I've found success with it. And, you know, it's weird to be, like, yeah, I'm conventionally attractive, but I think that it's […] easier for people who are conventionally attractive, 100%. (Stella Cole, interview)

Additionally, Stella asserts that the remarks made by TikTok users regarding her physical appearance can, at times, be perceived as disparaging. She characterizes her experiences on the platform in this context as being particularly distressing:

> Any comments on your appearance are just, like, always going to be weird. Even if it's a compliment, it's always just still going to feel sort of weird that there are hundreds of thousands of people on the internet commenting on my appearance. I posted one video from 54 Below a couple of weeks ago. It was, like, from the side, and my stomach didn't look completely flat because my stomach isn't completely flat. And so many people were, like, are you pregnant? Why do you keep touching your stomach? Are you pregnant? And I'm someone who's definitely struggled with body image and stuff like most women have. And that was hard. I was, like, this sucks, and it's definitely not fun. (Stella Cole, interview)

Stella notes that it is particularly troubling that such comments are typically made by male viewers who are significantly older than the musicians who were interviewed for this study:

> I get a lot of comments from older men and they're not commenting on the music or my voice. It's, like, oh, you're so beautiful. I want to marry you. Oh my goodness. Imagine waking up to this voice every morning, so gorgeous. That smile, those eyes, and it's, like, thank you. That's very nice. When it's not coming from old men, it feels, you know, it's, like, oh, that's a compliment. (Stella Cole, interview)

The ability to respond to negative comments is a significant challenge for many of the individuals interviewed, particularly when the comments target their physical appearance and are based on conventional beauty standards. Addi-

tionally, it can be particularly distressing when commentators make derogatory or offensive remarks. The issue was broached by nearly all interviewees, even in the absence of a direct inquiry, indicating that those who excel in content creation on TikTok are persistently confronted with such comments and, at times, perceive them as a significant source of stress.

Kellin Hanas' statements are particularly noteworthy in this regard. She cites her experience of going viral with one of her most popular videos, captioned "bop dooba doo da bwiada women in jazz babyy 😇🎺" (Hanas 2021a). In the video, Kellin presents herself ironically as a single woman seeking a partner and displays her ability to play fast bebop licks on the trumpet, in addition to engaging in activities stereotypically associated with women, such as cooking and cleaning (see chapter 6.4.1). The video rapidly gained a considerable degree of popularity, not only on TikTok but also on Reddit and iFunny. Kellin was subjected to a multitude of comments, a considerable proportion of which targeted her physical appearance. She offers the following account of her experience:

> Oh my gosh, I've read some horrible things about myself, which I shouldn't. But it's so hard not to do when there's thousands of comments. You're, like, I'm going to read all of these and thank God most of them are good and very supportive and great. But then you get down to the bottom and you see people commenting on – oh boy, when I went viral on Reddit, I was the top post on Reddit for a day, that was just 2,000 comments. You know, maybe 500 of them were something about my playing. And then the other half of that was just people commenting on how I weighed too much, things that they would do to me sexually. Just awful, awful comments. And as a young person living in this age of social media, it's so hard not to look at what people are saying about you because you know it's there. So you want validation and you want to feel better about yourself. And even if it's bad stuff about you, you keep reading and reading and reading because it's addicting. So yeah, […] I'm pretty sure I've read every comment at this point. It's so hard not to. […] And so eventually, between Reddit and TikTok and iFunny it had at least six or seven million views and at least 6,000, 7,000 comments. And this was, like, the first one where people really started to take a hit at. You know, people didn't even care about the trumpet playing. It was just all about my body. […] I've been minorly Instagram famous for a while since I was in high school in the music community. And so I would, you know, I'd get comments on my appearance all the time by, you know, older men since I was 16. But this was a different level – I have 6,000 people talking about my body. […] So there

> have been times where I've been – I really like the video. I think it's funny. I think I did a good job with it, but I definitely have – there have been points where I've been, like, oh, I regret uploading this. I wish I never uploaded this. It doesn't make me look bad. It's just that disgusting people took it in a different way. […] So, this was definitely one of those videos for me where I'm, like: You know, it went viral and it's a good video, but oh boy, the aftermath of it in terms of who was seeing it and talking about it was concerning and definitely really, really hard to deal with. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

One recurring argument is that musicians are often judged on the basis of their appearance in the context of TikTok because the platform reproduces and perpetuates certain stereotypes that have long been prevalent in the entertainment industry. Caity Gyorgy notes that similar issues are present on other digital media platforms and in other contexts:

> I think it's not limited to […] TikTok. That's on Facebook, it's on Instagram as well. It's very interesting. It sucks. But to an extent, I mean, that's sort of the culture. If you look at pop stars and stuff as well. Like, the pop star isn't gonna go out on tour and not wear crazy outfits and have their hair and makeup done. I'm not gonna go to an awards show on the weekend and not have my hair done and not wear fake eyelashes. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

Stella Cole, who has also worked in television, film, and theater, offers a similar perspective, emphasizing that in these industries, appearance is the most crucial criterion:

> Like I said, I come from a background in theater and a background in film and television. And when you're being cast in film and TV, you know that half of it, if not more than half of it, is based on the way you look. It's based on what someone looks at you and what their immediate impression is of you. Just based off your appearance, that matters so much. Like, what you're wearing matters, what kind of makeup you're wearing matters. Your hairstyle, your hair color, your weight. I wish all of that didn't matter. And it's the most frustrating part of being an actor for me, certainly. But what I'm saying is I'm used to having all of that matter. And so it's not surprising to me that on TikTok that also matters because I think there is a culture, not only in America where most of my following is, but worldwide that – when people are conventionally attractive, they're valued more to society. Their art is valued more. Most pop singers are pretty conventionally attractive, and if they're not, then they

> change parts of their face or body or hair until they do fit into the convention. (Stella Cole, interview)

It is evident that female artists have historically been subjected to considerable pressure to conform to conventional standards of beauty as stage personas. This phenomenon has also affected female jazz musicians for decades (see McGee 2009). This suggests that the practice of promoting a narrow standard of beauty in the entertainment industry is being perpetuated on TikTok, while algorithms are now influencing such processes on digital media platforms as well, potentially exacerbating the strong fixation on what is considered to be the normatively beautiful body type.

Nevertheless, the interviewees also expressed a desire to disassociate themselves from the perpetuation of these stereotypes on TikTok. In reference to a duet video with Laufey in which she is seen wearing a loose-fitting sweatshirt, Rachel Chiu stated that she initially had reservations about recording and posting a video in that particular outfit. Ultimately, however, she decided to proceed with the video, citing a certain degree of self-assurance as the motivating factor behind her decision:

> When I filmed that one with Laufey, I thought: Should I go change? Is this, you know, unprofessional? But at the same time, this is part of who I am. I love wearing this thing and, you know, it's comfortable and I'm not gonna change just to do the video. So, I just did it. There are videos where I'm not wearing makeup. Where it's just who I am. But I think that does have to do with the level of confidence as well. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Stacey Ryan underscores her intention of moving away from conventional staging techniques in order to prioritize the musical aspect. She attributes this shift to her growing success and extensive experience on TikTok, suggesting that certain aspects of popularity, which are often extremely important to content creators on the platform, may no longer be as crucial for her:

> I tend not to think about that kind of stuff anymore, because you always do when you're starting out, but the more you go on, the more you get comfortable, obviously, and the more you just don't care as much. And I don't mean that in a bad way. You just don't really care if someone says: Oh, your hair looks gross, you know, because you're, like, yeah, it does. And? What's that going to change about the music in the way that this video sounds? (Stacey Ryan, interview)

Nevertheless, as the preceding discussions have demonstrated, it may prove challenging for musicians to deviate from these conventional staging norms. This is because the popularization logics that shape the content on the TikTok platform exert a significant influence, prompting content creators to replicate established stereotypes surrounding body standards and beauty ideals.

It is evident that the sexist stereotypes prevalent on TikTok are not the sole factor contributing to the platform's problematic content. Racist statements also abound in the comment sections. The interviewees are acutely aware of this issue, with Stella Cole emphasizing that she believes it is "easier for people who are *white* to succeed on TikTok's platform," and subsequently speaking of a "colorist or racist algorithm." Rachel Chiu has a particular insight into this phenomenon. While the majority of comments under her videos are positive, some users occasionally engage in the reproduction of racial stereotypes about Asian people. Rachel offers the following commentary on this phenomenon:

> I've talked about all the positive comments I get, but I also get a few negative comments here and there, I also get some strange comments. There's a lot of comments about *race* for sure. Like, one comment I get a lot is about me being Asian and maybe Chinese. And I think they mean it in a good way, but sometimes it comes off a little backhanded, like, they would make comments, like, oh, we need more Asians in jazz or there's not enough of that. […] To me, it's, like, they're putting a label to it, you know what I mean? And also, I think it shows their lack of understanding and maybe visibility to other ethnicities because I know there's a lot of Asians in jazz. There's a lot of people I know who are Asians who do jazz. I watch a lot of videos of people in Japan doing jazz music. It's a whole different field there. […] And so, I think *race* definitely has a play in it. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Furthermore, she has observed that discussions in the comment sections frequently deviate from the subject matter of the videos themselves. The comments on one of her videos, in which she plays the guzheng, serve as an example to illustrate this:

> I've been really lucky to not have a lot of mean comments or anything like that. But usually – it's, like, with the video of me with my guzheng. I noticed that's where a lot of the comments about *race* or ethnicity comes in. Yeah, I was playing that and out of nowhere, people started talking about the Chinese government and they started talking about the different sides of it and stuff like that. […] [T]hey're like: Oh, can you play this exact song again? But

> this time, can you wear your traditional clothes? So I think they mean it in good ways, but it does come off a little strange to me sometimes. And it does make me a little uncomfortable. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Rachel's description demonstrates that the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors on TikTok is not limited to the expression of sexist stereotypes. Rather, multiple forms of discrimination often coexist and reinforce one another. This is particularly evident in the specific context of jazz on TikTok, where the analysis of the corpus reveals that the majority of individuals who achieve success in this domain are *white*. It is also important for interviewees to emphasize that individuals can identify a niche for themselves on TikTok, regardless of conventional notions of physical attractiveness. This is a reasonable assumption given the vast amount of content and the large number of content creators and users on the platform. However, it does not appear to be the case with regard to the popularity peaks of specific cultural spheres. In this regard, the results of the present study corroborate those of Kaye, Zeng, and Wikström (2022, 95–96) on the homogeneity of the most successful TikTok creators, who are predominantly young, *white*, conventionally attractive U.S. Americans. It can be reasonably inferred that, with a few exceptions, the group of individuals who are able to assert themselves in the field of popularity peaks on TikTok is primarily homogeneous.

However, based on Caity Gyorgy's observations, TikTok also occasionally serves as a constructive platform for feminist discourse. She has frequently received support from her community when her videos have been met with derogatory comments from male users. This is where TikTok differs from Facebook, according to Caity. In particular, male users on Facebook have been observed to prevent certain discussions from taking place in the first place, as Caity recalls. She cites her experiences with sexism during jam sessions and entrance exams at conservatories, where she was repeatedly labeled as less competent than her male counterparts due to her gender. She has, on occasion, disseminated and evaluated such experiences via the social networks she utilizes, and she also articulates similar criticisms in her TikTok videos. She currently prefers to communicate these issues on TikTok, where she can rely on the most robust support from female users:

> I don't post on Facebook anymore, because all of these men and people in my community that I really looked up to were just saying: Oh, this is not happening, this isn't true. And I'm, like, it is happening, you're just being an ass! So I

> think TikTok is great because you don't really get that. And if people do comment stuff like that, and are, like, this doesn't happen, then you get an army of other women in music. […] You know, there's this great backing. There's this great support system, and I love that. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

In light of this experience, Caity suggests that TikTok can also be used as a platform to draw attention to specific grievances, particularly sexism, within the field of jazz. Caity asserts that it is not imperative for musicians to create solemn-looking videos in order to convey such matters. Given the prevalence of comedic content on TikTok, musicians have the potential to address more profound issues with subtle allusions, provided that the audience can relate to the content:

> There's the ones about, like, you know, being a woman in the music and lots of people can relate to that too. And I also think it's good to post that because a lot of people in the comment sections on those videos are, like, I had no idea this was happening. Like, I can't believe this happened to you and I'm, like, well, it has and it has not stopping and it keeps happening. And so I guess the comedic ones are just sort of based on my experiences and I post them sort of to be funny but also just to sort of raise awareness. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

It can thus be argued that the platform may provide musicians with the opportunity to disseminate feminist or other socially critical messages. Kellin Hanas, for instance, employs a comparable approach in her videos, presenting the role of women in jazz in a manner that is both humorous and critical. Nevertheless, the analysis of the popularity peaks in jazz on TikTok reveals that the platform primarily incites actions that perpetuate sexist stereotypes, rather than prompting a critical examination of these stereotypes.

6.8 TikTok as "Opportunity Generator"

The preceding explanations demonstrate that musicians frequently invest a considerable amount of time and energy in their TikTok careers and in professionalizing their activities on the platform. Consequently, it is evident that their presence on TikTok constitutes a significant aspect of their artistic output. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees perceived TikTok to be the primary aspect of their musical endeavors or a substantial source of revenue. Rather,