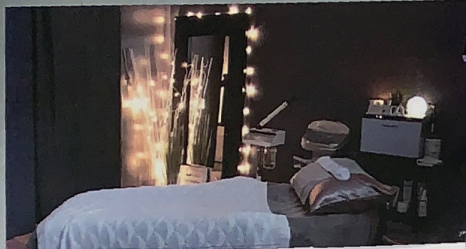


# Self-Employed Beauty Professionals in the Neoliberal Economy: Valuing Femininity, Individualism, Freedom, and Flexibility in Pursuit of Self-Actualization

Nina Tamara Barbosa Ponce



## Introduction

My project explores the visible rise of home-based beauty services in the neoliberal economy. Under neoliberalism there has been a shift from full-time work to part-time flexible work, which triumphs on individual choice. In addition, self-employed beauty professionals recognize emerging trends of self-care and view the body as an asset and product of their work. To understand the shift from full-time work to flexible work and its relation to emerging self-care trends I propose the following question: How is the pursuit towards individual choice and emerging trends of self-care shaping work conditions for self-employed beauty professionals?

## Argument

I argue that Capitalism has commodified femininity under neoliberalism. Self-employed beauticians use their skills, time, and consumption to realize their entrepreneurial potential. This creates inequalities in a female dominated market, because the beauty industry enables and produces certain beauty ideals that must be produced by self-employed women who want to compete in the global market, giving them little to nothing in return. I support my argument by building from the work of Robin Truth Goodman "Gender Work: Feminism After Neoliberalism" (2013) and Heather Widdows "Perfect Me: Beauty as an Ethical Ideal" (2018).

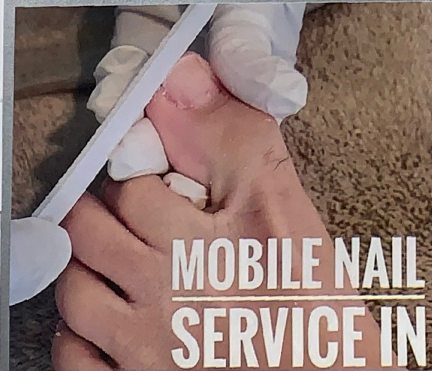
## Methodology

I chose both of my interlocutors based on their experience working in the beauty industry. My methods to collect data included interviews and participant observation. I used a questionnaire as a guide to collect data during my interviews. I have followed my interlocutors on their social media platforms as part of my observations and received a tour of one of my interlocutors workplace.

## Body Labour

Body labour: explores the embodied dimensions of emotional labor and the intersections of race, gender, and class in shaping its performance (Kang 822, 2003)  
 Body work: is the extended physical contact between bodies (Kang 823, 2003)  
 Female Gaze: Critical judgment, which occurs upon entry into the world of beauty, is at once social and subjective; it is aimed at other women and at oneself (Goldstein 150, 1993)  
 Body labour and body work are central to the work of self-employed beauticians. Due to the intensity of some of the treatments and the female gaze, the women who seek services require a safe space provided by self-employed beauticians, as Lorena explains:

"I like my job because it is different. Canadians are more reserve, they don't like strangers going into their home. In my country people are more open, but here people don't like going out when roads are bad, have mobility issues, or are insecure about their bodies. I have all the patience in the world and I am very attentive, it's one-on-one people like that. I'm different than other estheticians, because I travel to my clients home, they love it and they recommend me!"



## Flexible Work

Work life balance (WLB) can be understood as part of the emergence of flexible work, under neoliberalism power is given to the individual to make choices to suit their lifestyle (Fleetwood 388, 2007). However, self-employed beauty professionals struggle to maintain a good WLB. Agata's instagram post reflects this struggle:

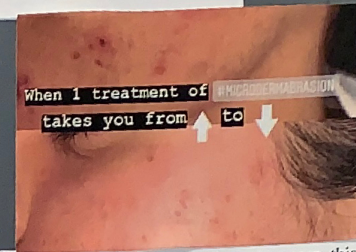
*It's time I separate life and work*

Therefore...  
 all DM's, emails,  
 & texts about  
 appointments  
 will be answered  
 DURING work hours.

\* I will answer first thing in the mornings if any messages are left \*

## Corporeality

Self-employed beauty professionals see the body as an asset, product, and brand to freedom and empowerment in the neoliberal market economy (Abidin, Gwynne 399, 2017). The consumption of services and products motivate them to realize their entrepreneurial potential. Social media provide a platform where they can share their work and compete in the global market of beauty. Agata explained:



"I think it is going to boom, I've never seen this industry be as popular as it is now. Not just for mature clients, but the amount of young people who are getting dragged into all of this, cosmetic injections and cosmetics have never been this popular. Again social media is a good thing, but it is also a bad thing, it takes only one person to do it and then everyone else wants it. I find that who ever is getting into this industry now is getting into it at a very good time because everybody is about themselves, and their appearance, I don't think it is going to stop anytime soon, because younger ages are starting to do it, younger and younger each year."

## Conclusion

Self-employed beauty professionals work under neoliberal ideals of valuing individualism, freedom, and flexibility in the pursuit of self-actualization. Yet, in the messiness of everyday life their expectations don't meet the reality of the work they produce daily. Neoliberalism has blurred the lines between private and public life, it has commodified our most intimate insecurities and interactions. The beauty industry thrives on the work self-employed beauticians produce and share on social media platforms such as Instagram, giving them little to nothing in return.

## Acknowledgments

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