THE BUSINESS OF FEMINISM:
RHETORICS OF IDENTITY IN YOUTUBE'S BEAUTY COMMUNITY

By

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ABSTRACT

THE BUSINESS OF FEMINISM:
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The Business of Feminism: Rhetorics of Identity in YouTube's Beauty Community
seeks to understand an online community comprised of millions of women who watch
and sometimes produce videos about makeup and fashion. I present case studies of two
Asian-American women who describe their roles in building identity, community, and
entrepreneurial enterprises in the community—actions that are as essential to their
survivance and cultural sustainability as to their financial stability. I explore the tension
between this community's highly commercial nature (its members, many of whom are
entrepreneurs profiting from YouTube's Partner Program, often participate in dominant
discourses of female gender performance and consumerism) and its uses for women of
color as a space to use rhetorical moves to build for themselves and others positions of
power and expertise. My theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon
draws from post-positivist realist theories of identity that account for the experiences of
the women in the beauty community. I interrogate the uses of theories that espouse a
fluid, postmodern/cyborg feminism for understanding this phenomenon; such theories
assume identities that are largely inaccessible to women of color, who cannot escape their
material, embodied, marked identities. Post-positivist realist theories afford an
experience-based approach to identity that assumes that we can learn about the nature of
power and conditions of oppression from the experiences of others. This orientation
serves as the foundation for the way I understand and approach identity and feminism in

this project. Data for this study consists of participants' transcribed YouTube videos and three rounds of interviews. Methods include a coding scheme that I developed for analysis of the videos, as well as interview scripts.

The beauty community is a space in which feminist rhetorical practices occur alongside and intertwined with commercial and professional activity. Feminisms practiced in this community do not always align with the feminist theory of the academy. My findings therefore introduce a complicating narrative, to cyberfeminism in particular, and make visible a rhetoric of identity operating in this community that I believe can generate new work on digital identity. This work has implications for feminist as well professional writing studies in understanding of how minority women situate themselves in positions of power in online settings. In this community, commercial and identity-building activities are not mutually exclusive. They exist perpetually in tension with each other. I present data in which it is apparent that women use storytelling as a rhetorical move to construct their identities as gendered, raced minorities. I also argue that the women in the beauty community can be considered professional writers, whose work I refer to as technical communication in the vernacular. I offer implications of this study for understanding feminist rhetorical theory, cyberfeminism, and professional and technical writing studies.

For my mom, Hiromi.

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CHAPTER ONE:

BUT FEMINISM DOESN'T EXIST HERE, RIGHT?

The Beauty Community as a Means of Survival

I was two years into my doctoral studies at a large research university in the
Midwest. Though I had expected to slowly acclimate to life in my new home, what I
experienced was quite different. I felt a creeping sense of isolation, despite my admission
to a top-notch program and a strong community of scholars. I was born in and spent most
of my life in Hawai'i. I am of mixed (half second-generation Japanese American, half
Caucasian) heritage. This was not unusual in Hawai'i. Yet, as months passed I felt
increasingly aware of my differences in my new location. I was sometimes mistaken for a
foreigner—much to the disappointment of foreigners who were hoping to find someone
else with whom they could share stories and experiences. At the same time, I resisted any
one particular label. In my academic life, I did not want to identify as a "person of color"
for quite some time because I felt doing so came with a set of expectations and
performances that made me feel so aware of my differences that I was uncomfortable.
Whiteness is part of my identity, too—the legacy of which, I was very much aware as
implicated in the settler-colonial history of my home state, Hawai'i. As my studies
progressed and I began to identify as a feminist scholar, I found that many of the
canonical texts in this body of work did not account for the discomfort that I felt, or the
discrepancy between the freedoms these theories would supposedly afford me and the
constraints that I actually experienced in expressing my identities and activities.

I found YouTube's beauty community, an online community of millions of
women who create and watch videos about makeup and beauty, in 2012. I chose to

become a member, because it was a space in which I could hear stories that were familiar, see faces that at least looked a little like my own, and feel my own experiences validated. I spent increasing amounts of time interacting with other members of the community, building relationships with them, and learning the shared language of the community. Other women in the community described living in parts of the country where they felt a sense of isolation too, of experiencing pain and sometimes embarrassment, and using the community because in was a space where they felt they could belong. As my personal investment in the community increased, I began creating videos for the community. Some of the videos were makeup tutorials, and some were reviews of Asian beauty products. I monetized the videos and was invited to join YouTube's Partner program when my channel reached 20,000 views (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Screenshot from a video that I created for the beauty community on my YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads: "Skin79 Super Beblesh Balm (Korean brand);" help problem skin: Skin79 Korean BB cream!; sparklysesamecat; 2 videos; 50,459 views, 172 likes, 6 dislikes

Yet, as my channel grew, I felt an increasing sense of terror and anxiety that I would be "found out"—as an academic, as a feminist, someone who should know better than to participate in activities that seem fundamentally at odds with the professional identity that I had so carefully cultivated over the years. I was participating in discourses of consumerism, female gender performance, and appearance that did not align with my beliefs about who I should be as a woman of color, and liberal academic. I was thinking entrepreneurially while also thinking critically about my entrepreneurial actions. It did not occur to me until much later that this tension that I experienced between my personal

and professional identities as a result of my participation in the beauty community could birth a research project.

The activities of the women who participate in the beauty community are often contradictory to what "second-wave" feminists might consider as feminist in nature, and don't explicitly seem to resist patriarchal structures and discourses. I was all too aware of these contradictions, and felt a sense of shame in my participation. Postmodern feminist theorists such as Kristeva, Irigaray, Butler, and Haraway, claim that "woman" as a stable identity is itself an essentialist concept, and draw on French poststructuralists such as Saussure and Lacan to deconstruct the notion of a core or stable identity to which woman, as a signifier, refers. Much of my training as an academic in humanities (and I don't believe that I am alone in this regard) was shaped by these theories. While they are integral to innumerable resistance movements that have let to important societal change, many canonical postmodern feminist theories of identity—some of which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two—assume that all women have access to the idealized, fluid and unstable identities that resist patriarchal ideology. As subsequent theorists, such as Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff, point out, however, we have much to learn about the nature of oppression—and about ourselves—from the *experiences* of women, and to deny the reality of identities as they are rooted in experience is to deprive ourselves of this knowledge. This project engages with the question of what we can learn about the activities of women in digital/professional worlds *and* about ourselves, when we understand identity as not unstable but material, embodied, and situated. Because I also make the argument that some of the participants' rhetorical activities are feminist in nature, it is engages the question of why we value what we do as feminists and

academics. Through these lenses, I approached the project with several research questions: I wanted to know what was the nature of the phenomenon known as the community, whether participants felt a sense of belonging, and how participants constructed the community. These are questions with which I frame this project and use to as a basis to make sense of the data that I collected.

Lisa

As it turns out, I was not the only one who felt this discomfort between my professional identity and the identity I performed on my YouTube channel. Two women, both of whom self-identify as Asian American, agreed to participate in my study of the beauty community, and one of these women, Lisa[1] reported feeling a similar kind of tension between her YouTube activity and her professional identity. Lisa has a large channel, with average view counts for each video in the hundreds of thousands and a few videos with over a million views (see figure 2).

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[1] Pseudonyms were used in this study to protect participant identities

Figure 2: Screenshot from one of Lisa's most popular videos on her YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads: "Comedone Pusher or Extractor (link below!);" Get rid of blackheads and clogged pores WARNING GRAPHIC . . .; PERFECT BEAUTY; 369 videos; 4,220,961 views, 7,571 likes, 1,590 dislikes

Lisa told me that when she began participating in the beauty community years ago, she was still working full-time in a corporate job. She told me that her involvement in the community started in part because she suffered from skin problems, and "on YouTube you're able to find millions of people, right? And people who are like you, it can be hard to find people who have acne as bad as you, who are as open about it, and who are like you." She added, "I also lived in Minnesota, so finding Asian people who have the same skin type and all that was really difficult. So that's kind of why I really became obsessed with YouTube" (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012). Lisa told me that despite her involvement with the beauty community, she felt a sense of discomfort with the identity

that she was creating online and the identity that she lived as a corporate professional. When I asked her to tell me more about this sense of discomfort, she told me that:

> I'm afraid people will judge me. I mean I'm a very type A person, um, and I've always succeeding in like math and sciences, and you know, you know, taking like multivariable calculus and stuff like that, and I didn't want people to find this side of me because I thought that they wouldn't think that I was as smart, or as serious . . . I don't understand why if a girl is into beauty, why she would be taken less seriously, but I was afraid of, you know like, future employers seeing this, or you know, just like, people having a preconceived notion or something like that. So it was actually like I didn't go public with my YouTube until after I quit my corporate job. (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012).

Lisa's statement implies that intelligent women should know better than to participate in this type of activity. This anxiety suggests that not everyone experiences online spaces, or has access to some identities, in the same way. Her experience speaks to the power of multiple discourses in shaping the experiences that individuals have that are influenced by an individual's social location, or race, gender, class, and sex (Alcoff *Visible Identities*). For Lisa, her gendered identity marks her visibly and creates a set of expectations about how she should behave as an intelligent woman. These identity markers conflict with the accepted behaviors for one who is intelligent, good at math, and successful. Lisa told me that in spite of this, she made the decision to go full-time with her YouTube channel identity. She has since left her corporate job. For Lisa, YouTube has become a career. She is quite successful in engaging with her audience and an influential member of the community. She has branded herself as the "Oprah of Beauty,"

creating rather risky videos in which she divulges much about herself, her perceived

flaws, and how she learned to accept and embrace them. In fact, her videos leave a very

strong impression on her viewers:

> [People] send me really long emails, very tear jerking, almost an autobiography
> about themselves, about one of the stories I portrayed because they finally found
> someone they can relate to and they realize, ok this girl is like this and now she's
> ok so maybe I can be that way . . . they see me going through that and I guess I
> used to be really afraid of showing my skin, but when I did it felt very relieving
> and people really liked me for that. (Personal Interview, November 2012)

Lisa uses rhetorical moves that I discuss in Chapter Four, which enable her to use

YouTube, intended as a commercial space, for both entrepreneurial and identity work.

Some of Lisa's identity work involves telling the story of who she is in a way that

disrupts what have become norms about how intelligent women should behave. Lisa also

tells stories about her experiences as the only Asian child at school, and of being

ridiculed in her Minnesota hometown. This identity work is complicated because it is also

part of her brand, which she implements as a way to attract viewers and generate income

from her channel as well as spin off her startup beauty community,

yourperfectbeauty.com. Lisa is a businesswoman, an entrepreneur. The identity work that

she does is intertwined with her work in expanding and selling her business, and her

participation in discourses of consumerism. Success in the community to Lisa is

measurable in numbers: "I think everyone has a number [of subscribers] and I think it

keeps going up," she says (Personal Interview, June 2013).

Esther

Esther reveals notably less about herself, both in her videos and in her interviews for this project. Yet, she still tells me that her participation in the beauty community stemmed from a sense of isolation. Her statement resonates with me, as I had participated in the community for similar reasons. She said that she "always had an interest in beauty and fashion related things so. Of course web surfing, probably like um, Makeup Alley, those type of websites. And one thing let to another, I ended up on YouTube, watching videos." When I asked her why she began participating in the community, she told me that she "had just recently got married, and moved to Georgia where I didn't know anybody" (Esther, Personal interview, March 2013). Ester began participating by watching videos, but she soon realized that she could "create my own channel and become part of the community instead of just like commenting . . . to actually make videos, to inspire others and be inspired" (Esther, Personal interview, March 2013). Her videos feature content such as do-it-yourself beauty tips and tricks, nail, hair, and makeup tutorials, and outfit ideas (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Screenshot from one of Esther's most popular videos on her YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads: "Take Sally's Xtreme Purple Pizzazz and apply it to a makeup sponge;" Pretty Purple Gradient Nails; MaibeautyX; 41 videos; 29,172 views; 93 likes; 4 dislikes

Esther told me that freedom of self-expression and identity were important reasons for

her participation in the community:

> When I created this channel, I wanted to be able to be myself. Because I know
>
> like, it's hard to try to be yourself in an environment where like you don't have a
>
> lot of friends, and it's kind of hard to fit in. So with my channel, I hoped that I
>
> could just be myself, just share with everyone like easy tips, and hopefully in the
>
> future I'll be able to um, I don't know, expand in some way. I haven't really

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thought about it because my channel's not that big. It's a pretty small channel.

(Esther, Personal Interview, March 2013).

Esther also tells me that she hopes that entrepreneurship can become a bigger part of her participation in the community. In fact, success to her also has to do with numbers. In her last interview with me, Ester tells me that success has to do with having "a big audience." She tells me that she hopes her channel will grow in the future:

As of right now it's just a hobby, but if I could branch out into entrepreneurship, that would be great. But I haven't put much thought into it, like I said, my channel's tiny. I mean I guess I just started this channel to inspire and be inspired by the beauty community, you know, by what other people have to show or share.

(Personal Interview, March 2013)

Many of the excerpts I have been sharing come from my last interviews with Lisa and Esther, and by this time, I felt conflicted by the findings that resulted from the study. In the last interview, in which I asked questions about the nature of success in the community, both participants told me that success to them ultimately had to do with numbers of subscribers, which translated to revenue from advertisements and sponsorships. Yet in earlier interviews, I had learned that identity building was an important part of participation in the beauty community—especially given their experiences as women of color and their reported feelings of isolation. Could this aspect of their identities be reconciled with their ideas about success as profit-making? With their participation in dominant discourses of female gender performance and appearance? I wanted to hear different stories from those I was given. I wanted to hear stories that aligned with my own identity as an academic who valued certain kinds of resistance that

fit with my beliefs about what resistance should look like. I finished the interviews

feeling as though I had perhaps done something wrong. I had activated the business side

of these participants' identities. They were not going to give me stories about the kinds of

resistance I was interested in hearing about. They were telling me about their identities as

entrepreneurs who knowingly participate in neoliberal market practices and discourses of

consumerism. Here was that creeping sense of discomfort again that arose from my own

participation in this community. My participants were resisting my own beliefs and

values as an academic, and articulating the parts of my own identity that I experienced as

conflicting. What might we learn from knowing that for Lisa, Esther, and possibly many

other women who come from diverse and underrepresented groups, these parts of their

identities are not experienced as conflicting, but as intertwined and existing in tension

with each other?

Can Feminist Activity Happen In The Beauty Community?

In June of 2013, the YouTube user tadelesmith uploaded a video titled "Feminist

Makeup Tutorial (PARODY). According to *Viral Viral Viral*, the tutorial reached over a

quarter million views in less than a week; currently the video has reached about 600,650

views. Mainstream online feminist/pop culture blogs and magazines such as *Jezebel*

featured the video, followed by *Cosmo UK* and other news sites. In the video, user

tadelesmith goes through the motions of a typical makeup tutorial that would appear in

the beauty community. In beauty guru fashion, she applies primer to her face, followed

by foundation, and narrates each step with a witty instruction. At one point she tells the

audience to "Apply a rosy blush to the apples of your cheeks, so that you'll still look cute

even when you're covered in the blood of a thousand men." This "feminist makeup

tutorial" (see figure 4) offered instructions on how to both apply makeup *and* resist the patriarchy.

Figure 4: Screenshot from tadelesmith's makeup tutorial parody on her YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads: "Feminist Makeup Tutorial (PARODY);" tadelesmith; 48 videos; 981,209 views, 29,248 likes, 616 dislikes

I am interested in the use of "PARODY" in the title of this video. Was this a parody of the many makeup tutorials that women made in the community? The application of "feminist" suggests that this distinction makes this particular tutorial stand out from the rest of the makeup tutorials in the community, which are perhaps not understood as feminist in nature. Tadelesmith draws on the mainstream understanding of feminism as resistance to patriarchal structures in the construction of her argument. Strong, intelligent women, she seems to say, resist patriarchy in particular kinds of ways. Upon receiving an

overwhelming response, which she reported was unexpected (some of which was even angry), tadelesmith released this statement on her YouTube channel:

> This video is not intended to offend anyone; if you want to take anything from it (which you don't have to), it's meant to play on some common misconceptions about feminism. there [sic] is a difference between feminism and misandry, and this video is a satire based on the fact that these two things get mixed up all too often. (tadelesmith)

Tadelesmith's comments seem to suggest just the opposite of what I had initially thought she was arguing in her parody: feminism to her may *not* be the narrow and exclusionary definition mainstream understanding of feminism, much of which seems to still be based on first-wave feminism—that is, the feminism of the 1960's, often associated with women's rights and liberation. Feminism, she says, is not "misandry," after all. It can be more than these things. Indeed, we have some say in articulating what is feminism. I am interested in her choice to make this argument by creating a parody of a video genre for which the beauty community became popular and for which it is most known. To use the makeup tutorial to call into question mainstream ideas about feminism suggestions relationships between the beauty community and feminist rhetorical practices, though the relationship is not as clear in this video. Perhaps the overwhelming response that tadelesmith received is an indicator that women's activities in this community are not yet well enough understood, and often misunderstood, in light of mainstream feminism.

As I conducted this research project, I knew from my own experience that I would be concerned with the concept and experience of difference as it relates to identity politics in and outside of the community. I developed a methodology that would account

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for these experiences, with the hope that we might learn from, rather than disregard, difference and the conditions under which it is constructed. This methodology is shaped by my own experiences (and thus shaped by my own identity) as multiracial woman of color, and as a person who believes that these markers of difference are invaluable to the work that I do and to the outcomes of this project. Difference shapes the spaces (both physical and virtual) that we occupy and use, and it also shapes the ways in which we can use them. I developed a methodology that would enable me to see the different uses of the online space known as the beauty community, and the ways in which the notion of difference is implicated in those uses and both constrains and enables participation. I was also interested in how difference was at times even leveraged as part of a marketing strategy and the implications of this leveraging as a rhetorical act for the theories of digital and professional identity that we use in rhetoric and writing studies. For this reason I chose to use a post-positivist realist feminist theory of identity, drawing on Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff's work, as a theoretical frame of inquiry. Post-positivist realist identity theory has the accounts for individual experiences and relies on "our ability to acknowledge and understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social location" (Moya *Learning* 85). It reconnects the divide between identity and experience enacted by postmodernism and operates on the assumption that we can learn about the nature of oppression through the experiences of others. This theory works with my own understanding of how social location shapes experience, and would help me understand how social location also shape participants' identity-building and professional activities and experiences in the community.

The research methodology that I developed for this project stems from, and aligns with, my position as a critical, reflexive researcher. Because my position as a researcher in this project is both critical and reflexive, it is most appropriate that my research methodology reflect this stance. I developed my critical research practices using Sullivan and Porter's definition of critical research, which "sees methodology as heuristic . . . we see research generating situated knowledge—or rather a kind of pragmatic know-how (18) rather than universal knowledge. In *Learning From Experience* Moya elaborates on the postpositivist realist methodological approach, arguing that "objective" empirical knowledge, insofar as its biases and presuppositions are made transparent, is a more productive mode of inquiry:

> Because I have given up the dream of transcendence, I understand objective
> knowledge as an ongoing process involving the careful analysis of the different
> kinds of subjective or theoretical bias and interest through which humans
> apprehend the world. Rather than trying to free my inquiry from bias, I work to
> bring into view the presuppositions I am working with . . . . (Moya *Learning* 14)

I have taken this approach in this research project, and in doing so, attempt to make transparent my own desires, privileges, and disciplinary and institutional inclinations. The data that I present is undoubtedly shaped by these factors, but—I hope—still yields meaningful questions and implications. This approach fits well with Moya's post-positivist feminist understanding of experience and identity as local and situated, as well as shaped by "social location," which has also influenced my approach to research. These theories can be put into conversation with each other as they complement each other, and

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both of these theoretical approaches inform my methodology. I discuss this methodology in further detail in Chapter Three.

The tools for this research study consist of three interview scripts. The interview scripts are preceded by a pilot study. Data types for this study consist of transcribed YouTube videos and three rounds of interviews of the two participants who persisted through the duration of the study. I chose to transcribe and code the content of the YouTube videos to help me answer the question of what is the nature of the phenomenon and refer to the interview data to support my findings.

As part of my analysis, I borrow from critical discourse analysis methods. The coding scheme that I used was developed to "see" in a detailed way use of language in relation to experience and identity (to address the question: *Who are the participants? Do they feel a sense of belonging?*) and community (to address the question: *what is the nature of this thing?)*. Throughout the coding process I engaged Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff to argue for the importance of experience to in understanding the rhetorical activities of women who are marked as other; these theories informed and shaped the codes, meaning that in my analysis of data I focused specifically on these kinds of rhetorical moves. My coding process enabled me to see that there were multiple significant rhetorical moves happening in the videos that I analyzed that would help me address my research questions. I coded a total of nine videos using the coding scheme that I developed in my pilot study and analytical passes, which ultimately shaped these findings. My analysis of the data, as well as implications for feminist studies as well as digital rhetoric and professional writing studies, and presented in chapters Four and Five, respectively.

Based on my experiences and my data, I have found that many kinds of feminist, digital, and professional rhetorical practices—many of which we still know little to nothing about—exist in this community. These practices may not always align with the values of the academy, particularly for those trained in the humanities, for reasons that I elaborate on in Chapter Two. In this project I explore several of these practices, which I believe are feminist in nature, as a way of better understanding the rhetorical work and writing lives of women outside of academia who perform in ways that are complicated and seemingly at odds with the beliefs that we hold about who can be a feminist and what feminism looks like. I argue that my participants engage in feminist rhetorical practices and explore the implications of this argument cyberfeminism and feminist rhetorics. I believe that the data in this study sheds light on some of the rhetorical practices of women of color who belong to underrepresented groups with the belief that if feminist rhetorical study is to be more inclusive of such it must acknowledge their presences and their practices, which are intertwined with their lives as entrepreneurs (and, as I argue in Chapter Five, technical and professional communicators) and their experiences as women of color.

In one of my last conversations with Lisa, she asked me how I imagined my future, given my career as an academic and my participation in the community. I described to her my own anxiety about participating in the community given my upcoming foray into the academic job market. Perhaps someone would search for me on YouTube and find one of my videos. They would see my blatant participation in consumer-driven activities and gender norms. They would make assumptions about me. "I'm probably going to have to shut down my YouTube channel at some point," I told

her, "just because I'm not really comfortable with finding people finding me, when I'm out there looking for a job, because it's risky you know?" She then asked the question that would guide this research project: "*But don't you think, when you start your new job, part of your identity will be, don't you think a part of you will be lost without your YouTube?"* (Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013). What would be lost if I shut down my channel? Lisa was right—though I created genres of videos that were largely consumer driven in nature, some of which were attempts at getting the attention of a company that might be interested in sponsorship—my identity as a feminist academic, as a woman of mixed race whose experiences have shaped me, was wrapped up in every second of video that I created, in my participation with other members of the community, and in my reasons for becoming part of this community. I could not separate the deepest parts of my identity from the content that I created for my channel. Lisa ended her interview by telling me: "*I always think if something were to happen to my YouTube, a part of me would be missing."*

CHAPTER TWO:

TOWARDS A POST-POSITIVIST THEORY OF (DIGITAL) IDENTITY

Introduction

My first participation in the beauty community took the form of videos in which I

reviewed, and sometimes recommended, makeup and beauty products for other women.

This kind of activity might be understood as the kind of expression of consumer

preferences that is most often critiqued in much of feminist literature—a critique that I

lay out and address in relation to this phenomenon in the following pages. At the time of

my participation, I believed women wanted to see reviews and demonstrations of Asian

beauty products from another Asian American female consumer with a similar skin type

and tone. Many of these products were imported from Japan and Korea. One of the

participants in my study, Lisa, told me that her participation in the beauty community

started with a search for products that would be compatible with Asian skin. This led me

to believe that content produced in the community was often composed with a consumer

audience in mind, with the assumption that women were interested in finding more

information about products they were interested in purchasing. Yet, as I have mentioned

previously, I was also drawn to making videos in the community because I could connect

and belong in a way that I could not where I was living currently *and* because I could

monetize the videos and make a small profit. Becoming a YouTube Partner felt like a big

achievement: I belonged…to both the community and the corporation. At the same time,

I would often ask myself how I could participate in the community and still call myself a

feminist. I was terrified of being found out by my fellow academics. I understood and

experienced the community to be deeply shaped by consumer logics, in which I was

implicated and willingly participated. In this chapter, I first address several lines of thinking that I have encountered as this project unfolded, including questions about resistance, and whether and how these women's rhetorical activities can be understood as feminist in nature, given poststructuralist and cyberfeminist critiques, movements, and values. I present these critiques alongside my understanding of the consumer logics that operate in the community, and attempt to provide a detailed glimpse of the prosumer activity in the community as well as a postpositivist realist framework with which we might begin to understand the complexity of the community. Finally, I draw on numerous theories of identity that help us understand how women of color situate themselves in positions of power in the beauty community in ways that seem, on the surface, contradictory to many (primarily poststructuralist) academic feminist beliefs and political values.

There are several lines of thinking that are possible in understanding this project, and the place of feminist theory, in my findings and, by extension, in the community from which I have gathered my data. I have heard several versions of a question that is one interpretation of this project: to what extent is this a project about my research participants' inability to access the feminist theories of the academy? Is their seeming inability to fully resist patriarchal discourses and enact academic feminist theory a product of their inability to access our theories? Are these participants aware of the rhetorical strategies and tactics that they use, and can we understand these actions to be feminist in nature if they are not explicitly labeled as such by the participants? Finally, how can I refer to participants' rhetorical acts as feminist in nature if they clearly participate in some activities that conflict with the values of academic feminism? While I

acknowledge that these are possible lines of thinking in regards to this project, I present in this chapter my own rationale for a different interpretation. Rather than understand this project as taking up issues of access to academic feminism, I have chosen to focus on how my research participants render for themselves their experiences in creating positions of power in highly public and commercially mediated spaces.

Some Feminist Approaches Relevant to This Project

In order to understand the postpositivist realist theories of identity that I draw on for this project and their necessity to the larger debate about identity politics it will first be important to take a step back and recall where and why this debate takes root. While this project was designed from the very beginning as a feminist inquiry, the seemingly conflicting nature of participants' activities as both feminist and commercial in nature make it difficult at times to see the relationship between feminism and the community. Postmodern feminist theory, or what is often referred to as "second wave" feminist theory, has also shaped many of our expectations about what feminism should look like. In this chapter I will refer to this type of feminism as postmodern feminism, or feminism that was influenced by postmodern thinking. Postmodern theories of identity have a legacy in, and continue to influence, English departments in the humanities, in particular, beliefs that problematize essentialist notions of identity and difference. According to Alcoff, "identity is a growth industry in the academy, across the humanities and social sciences . . . simultaneous to this academic commodification of identity is an increasing tendency to view identity as politically and metaphysically problematic" ("Who's Afraid" 312). But why has identity politics itself been regarded as problematic in the humanities, and what effect has this had on feminist movements? Where do these beliefs and values

come from, and how have they shaped our responses to and expectations of cultural phenomena like the beauty community? In *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* Moya traces the origins of this set of values back to French poststructualism, noting that

> U.S. scholars in the humanities who have been influenced by poststructuralist theory have undermined conventional understandings of identity by discounting the possibility of objective knowledge. Instead of asking how we know who we are, poststructuralist-inspired critics are inclined to suggest that we cannot know; rather than investigate the nature of the self, they are likely to suggest that it has no nature. (6)

We must go further to trace this influence back to Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of the arbitrary nature of the sign in *Course on General Linguistics*, in which he argues that words are not referents for the real, definitive object, but signifiers in a system of ideologically constructed signs (Saussure). This negation that in language, a sign refers to a definitive essence of a thing became the core of poststructuralist feminist thinking that resists and subverts the concept of an essential, definitive female sex. French psychoanalytic feminism, including Luce Irigaray's *The Sex Which is Not One*, as well as Kristeva's "Woman Can Never Be Defined," take up this theoretical orientation and make way for Butler, who draws on and critiques these earlier theories. Butler argues that the gendered body is performative, and this performance "suggest[s] that is has no ontological status apart form the various acts which constitute its reality" (*Gender Trouble* 136). "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact,'" she asks, "or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained

performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?"

(Butler viii). It is this notion of having no ontological status, this postmodern theoretical

orientation, that postpositivist realist theorists, such as Moya and Alcoff, critique. For the

purposes of understanding this orientation and its implications for feminism in the

humanities, however, I will further discuss Irigaray, Kristeva, Butler, and Haraway in the

following passages before introducing postpositivist realist critiques of these theories.

In her essay "Women's Time," Kristeva critiques what she calls the "second

phase" of feminism, one of two generations that remains "*outside* the linear time of

history and politics" (Moi, in Kristeva 187). Kristeva explains that this generation of

feminism is marked "by demanding recognition of an irreducible identity, without equal

in the opposite sex and, as such, exploded, plural, fluid, in a certain way non-identical,

this feminism situates itself outside the linear time of identities which communicate

through projection and revindication" ("Women's Time" 194). Here, Kristeva attempts to

reconcile what she perceives (in a structuralist fashion) as two distinct feminist

approaches and temporalities—the first approach being the women's suffrage movements

which argue for their place in linear time, and the second, as outside of linear temporality,

by suggesting a third possibility that accounts for maternal time. Several years later, in

"Woman Can Never Be Defined," Kristeva takes a slightly different approach, in which

she negates the possibility of defining woman at all: "A woman cannot be; it is something

which does not even belong in the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can

only be negative, at odds with what already exists" (*New French Feminisms* 166). In this

influential piece, to which Butler later responds in *Gender Trouble*, Kristeva argues that

"an effective feminism could only be a wholly negative feminism." That is, this feminism is at odds with an always already phallogocentric construction of meaning.

While for Kristeva there is no "woman," for Irigaray woman is "Other": "This is the fundamental characteristic of woman," she says. "She is Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other" (Irigaray 9). Irigaray believes that "Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as an essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential" (17). Irigaray's approach differs from Kristeva's in that woman is not characterized by a negative but instead feels the pull of the "two components necessary to each other," yet at the same time is Other to both of those components. For Irigaray, Woman is Other to representation itself.

Butler, whose work in postmodern feminism is influenced by Saussure's *Course on General Linguistics* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, is perhaps most well-known for her book *Gender Trouble.* In *Gender Trouble*, in which she calls into question identity as it has "internal features" and asks whether the same regulatory practices of "gender formation and division" also "constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject"—much like the regulatory practices that become internalized in Foucault's disciplined subject. To Foucault, ". . . discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies . . . it dissociates power from the body" (138)—and the most powerful kinds of discipline don't need to be enforced because the *subjects are so practiced that they continue to discipline themselves without needing to be punished when they transgress.* Similarly in Butler, the body is a "variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, *a signifying practice* within a cultural field of gender

hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" [emphasis mine] (Butler 139). "To what

extent," Butler asks, "is 'identity' a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of

experience?" (16) This approach, in which identity is no longer attached to experience, is

characteristic of Butler's thinking and the "second wave" and early "third wave" feminist

movements, and along with much of postmodern theory, catalyzed the shift in thinking

about identity politics in the humanities as something of a dirty word (Alcoff, "Who's

Afraid"). "Gender," according to Butler, is no more than "the repeated stylization of the

body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time

to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). Alcoff explains

that for Butler, the problem with "recognition as an individual group" with a distinct

identity lies in the "danger in turning towards an identifying source: interpellation

becomes the price for recognition" (Alcoff, "Who's Afraid" 321). Identity construction to

Butler is a "methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal" (*Gender

Trouble* 5). To accept an identity, then, "is tantamount to accepting dominant scripts and

performing the identities Power has invented" (Alcoff, "Who's Afraid" 321). When

Butler asks whether "the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable

subject [is] an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations" it is clear to see

why identity as a concept has become so separate from experience in the humanities. To

claim any one identity would be an act of "reification . . . contrary to feminist aims"

(Butler 5). Alcoff argues that this type of approach as part of a postmodern feminist

movement is characterized by "deconstructing everything and refusing to construct

anything" (*Visible Identities* 166), a theoretical problem that she identifies as

characteristic of much of postmodern feminist theory.

Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* continues Butler's project in *Gender Trouble*, and Haraway attempts to deconstruct many of the boundaries (e.g., organic, technological; animal, human) that are taken for granted as "natural" or "normal" to human life. In postmodern fashion, Haraway criticizes a feminism that is based on the notion of a fixed or stable female identity, and proposes a unified language of resistance. The hybridized cyborg is idealized in *Manifesto*: "So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work," says Haraway (296). Haraway's idealized cyborg identity is based on the "woman of color": these women, according to Haraway, possess a "superb literacy" of struggle and survival (312). It is this literacy and language that Haraway claims is "the technology of the cyborgs"—the language of resistance that will, supposedly, unify oppressed women. Haraway's cyborg is "uncontainable, unruly, and ultimately undecidable" ideal"—cyborg bodies "defy the natural givenness of gender identity" (Balsamo 39). "It might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies," Haraway says in *Manifesto* (295). Haraway's claim to the struggles that women of color experience, and the idealization of their identities as models for subversion, reveal the dangers of this kind of feminism. By arguing for a unified language of resistance based on struggle (and in her misreading of Cherie Moraga's statement that we must not rank our oppressions—a statement that Moya later critiques heavily in *Learning from Experience*) she assumes that all of our struggles are in fact the same. Moya further critiques the fluidity and indeterminate nature of the cyborg, and the "lack of any essential criterion for determining who can be a woman of color"

since by this reasoning, "anyone can be a woman of color" (Moya *Learning* 32). Haraway, in fact, exploits the experiences of women of color in her theory of the ideal cyborg identity. Yet, the legacy of Haraway's cyborg still exists, particularly in how we conceptualize and value resistance.

Nayar's discussion of cyber-culture and digital identity attempts to reconcile Haraway's cyborg with later critiques of its failure to account for the needs and experiences of marginalized women. Nayar claims that "Cyber-bodies are technologically modified or networked bodies that seem to transcend, at least for a time, their immediate physical, geographic locations by being able to *be* or *do* things elsewhere or through other means," (66) which seems initially quite similar to Haraway's cyborg. Nayar gets around the problems by arguing that for some minority and marginalized groups, rather than transcend the body and occupy a unified subversive identity, these individuals are able to "experience a different order of reality via technology" that is "reconfiguration" of the human rather than transcendence (78). This reconfiguration is "the posthuman, the cyborg" and "we are able to store, retrieve, and alter human form, structure, and interaction" such that "Cyborgization today is thus only a culmination of a process of the organic-technology interaction . . . The body's primary constructive and creative power is expanded through the new interactional possibilities opened up by digital media and artificial reality." (78) Nayar argues that rather than an embodiment/disembodiment identity split we might imagine instead a "recursive identity formation of cyberculture" (79). While Nayar's characterization of identity formation attempts to improve on Haraway's theory in *Cyborg Manifesto*, the problem remains of whether cyberculture

truly allows individuals to "experience a different order of reality" in which the politics of their offline identities are not implicated.

According to Haraway, the cyborg is a figure idealized after the struggle and resistance of women of color, and who resists and subverts any essentializing identification; as post-positivist realist feminism has taught us, however, this resistance is based on the assumption that everyone has access to this new, fluid, amorphous identity that lives outside of the terms of race and gender. Moya and Markus, however, in their most recent collection remind us that "No one lives outside the web of relationships that create and maintain race and ethnicity. Even when someone resists having . . . [race and ethnicity] imposed on himself or herself, his or her identity will be formed in relation to that process" (Moya and Markus 19). That is to say, even in an online environment, identities form in relation to experience. As social processes these identity markers "cannot be the work of an individual alone but are the product of a society as a whole" (20). As a way of understanding and contextualizing this project I find the implications of these statements particularly suggestive for understanding identity formation online. Baym says that, "Far from being a realm apart from the offline life, the many external contexts in which the participants live their everyday lives and are otherwise embedded— including culture, profession, physical contexts of computer use, domestic life, and more—both shape and are continually referenced in online practice" (128). Feminist theory has increasingly moved to the realm of online feminism in an attempt the ways in which women use online spaces for resistance movements and activities. Cyberfeminst theory attempts to account for women's online identities and actions and how these

actions enable structural change in both online and offline environments. In the following section I briefly review several cyberfeminist texts that are relevant to this project.

Cyberfeminism

Women in this community engage in feminist rhetorical practices. Yet, these feminist rhetorical practices do not always align with the political values of academic feminist theory, particularly those practices that seem at first to reify discourses of beauty and consumerism, as I have demonstrated in previous passages. One body of work within feminist studies that stems from postmodern feminism, known as Cyberfeminism, brings feminist theory into the realm of networked environments. I have found this body of work useful. According to Paasonen (2009), cyberfeminism is "a critical feminist stance that aims to both denaturalize ways in which girls and women are addressed in online content production and site design, and to connect such investigations to feminist media studies and feminist theory 'offline'" (24). This definition is similar to that which Wilding gives us (n.d.). Both authors claim that cyberfeminism in practice necessitates an alignment with feminist theory "offline." But feminist theory "offline" has been created largely by academics who possess some degree of privilege in articulating a feminism that is not accessible by all women, especially women who are marked as Other or who participate in activities that do not immediately align with feminist politics. Gajjala and Oh argue that they "suspect that digital technologies, intertwined with neoliberal market logic, exercise subtle, indeed invisible, power . . . How do we intervene when cyberfeminism is not considered to embody feminist politics but is used as a buzzword to celebrate women's mere presence and self-expression online?" (2). While this is indeed a concern in regards to this project, and the YouTube platform certainly stems from this

same neoliberal market logic, the participants in my study show an awareness of this power and demonstrate how they modify this power and use it for their rhetorical purposes—both personal and entrepreneurial. This suggests that in the community, cyberfeminism might be more than a "buzzword." While participants might not describe themselves as cyberfeminists, their reasons for participating go far beyond mere presence and self-expression. While digital technologies and neoliberal market logics do exercise subtle powers, so too do women in the community.

"Cyberfeminism" is not a popular or even well known term in the beauty community. One study participant, Lisa, said in her video that she prefers to use the term "girl power" in reference to her own position in the community as a woman who has developed power and influence for herself and others. Yet, data suggests that the community is more than a place for women's' presence and self-expression, particularly as women of diverse backgrounds construct and use the beauty community for identity work that is as essential to cultural sustainability as to commercialism, entrepreneurship, and profit. Tollar Collins argues that material rhetorics are concerned with the "rhetoric of women who are not feminist prototypes, women whose texts may even be implicated in patterns of hierarchy and domination" (550). Although these women are not feminist prototypes, they engage in feminist rhetorical practices that I believe are important to understanding the nature of feminist acts as they happen in online spaces. In her address titled "Where is the Feminism in Cyberfeminism?" Faith Wilding describes what she believes is a mismatch between cyberfeminism in its broadest definition-- intersections of women, their lives, and technology that resist oppressive patriarchal systems—and the

actual practices of cyberfeminist groups. Her questions compel us to think about the lack

of "women in visible positions of leadership in the electronic world" (n.p.)

Wilding interrogates the activities of cyberfeminist groups on the Internet,

questioning their alignment with her understanding of feminism: "Being bad grrrls on the

Internet is not by itself going to challenge the status quo," she says. Wilding suggests that

"if grrrl energy and invention were to be coupled with engaged political theory and

practice….Imagine!" (n.p.) In the foreword to their collection *Webbing Cyberfeminist*

Practices, Blair, Gajjala, and Tulley raise similar questions, arguing that such questions

continue "to dominate the field of cyberfeminist studies" (2). In their collection

Cyberfeminism 2.0, Gajjala and Oh ask: "What does it mean to be 'cyberfeminist' at a

time when women are omnipresent on the Internet as consumers and as paid free

consumers?" (1). These questions might be addressed, at least in part, through my

experiences and analyses of YouTube's beauty community—a space that is not

understood, at least on the surface, as a feminist space (as I have noted in the Introduction

to this section). While it is undoubtedly true that many women on the Internet, including

the women who participate in YouTube's beauty community, are consumers—and that

the community is fueled by some of the same economic drives of the multinational

corporations whose ads are ever present on YouTube—this consumerism is only part of

the complex reality of participating in the community. In fact, this consumerism is

intertwined with some of these women's actions, which I elaborate on and refer to as

feminist rhetorical acts in Chapter Four. If feminist rhetorical study is to be more

inclusive of women who are underrepresented both in and outside of the academy, it must

first acknowledge their presences and their practices, even if they do not immediately

32

align with feminist theories. Cyberfeminism has done the important work of rendering visible to academic discourse the complex feminist activity that has happened and continues to happen in online spaces. Women's feminist movements happen in spaces that we often know little about, and sometimes don't have access to as academics, and cyberfeminism as a body of work has expanded the scope of what we know to be feminism. What some cyberfeminist theories assume, however, is a direct and explicit relationship between academic feminist values and feminist acts as they happen online. This assumption takes for granted that women in these online spaces have access to, or want to have access to, feminist theories. What cyberfeminism does not yet provide is a framework for understanding those activities that don't necessarily fit with feminist political values. Postfeminism has attempted to make room for women's activities that don't align with the values of second-wave, postmodern feminism, accounting for the consumer-oriented activities that women sometimes engage in. In the following section I discuss postfeminism and consumer discourses and their implications for this project.

<div align="center">Postfeminism and Consumer Logics</div>

A contemporary movement in feminism—sometimes called "third wave" feminism, the type that maintains that women can wear makeup and engage in other consumer-oriented behaviors and still engage in resistance to patriarchy—emerged as a response to second-wave feminism. This body of work, sometimes referred to as "third wave" feminism, attempted to "[reclaim] beauty practices as enjoyable, self-chosen, and skilled feminine pursuits" (Lazar 37). This movement, according to McRobie, was intended as a more appealing brand of feminism in light of the growing consumer culture of online spaces, particularly given the decline of feminism's popularity in mainstream

culture following its critique of normative beauty practices (Lazar 37). This "third wave"

has come under considerable critique, however. Susanna Paasonen points out glaring

inconsistencies between the theories of "the subversive possibilities of the Internet as a

site for trying out multiple identities, reworking fluid and unfixed gender boundaries" and

the reality of "the ways commercial services, information society agendas, and guide

books address women as Internet users" (89). Her argument is important because it

recognizes the failure of many online spaces designated as "women's spaces" to advance

the position of women in these environments or afford them positions of power. She

notes that commercially produced sites for women on the Internet, such as beinggirl.com,

which is owned and mediated by Tampax, are "prone to reproduce and reinforce vary

familiar gender structures" (89) without producing any meaningful change. So-called

"third-wave" feminism, according to McRobbie, is guilty of this very thing: "This pro-

capitalist femininity-focused repertoire," she says, "plays directly into the hands of

corporate consumer culture eager to tap into this market on the basis of young women's

rising incomes" (McRobbie n.p). Such spaces can masquerade as online feminist spaces

when they do not afford opportunities for structural change or resistance and are little

more than the expression of consumer preference. Popular culture's undoing of feminism

following the 80s and 90s, she says, led to the "tropes of freedom and choice" that

eventually dismantled feminism for the mainstream female consumer and led to a

"postfeminist" state characterized by rampant consumer culture. While this dismantling

would make way for what McRobbie refers to as "vernacular features of resistance"

(n.p.) that are concerned with the tactics of the everyday—deCerteau's *the Practice of*

Everyday Life, for example—this dismantling would also compromise the gains that first-

and second-wave feminism have made. McRobbie maintains that

> When feminist cultural studies pursued this pathway, a concern to understand
>
> dynamics of power and constraint gave way to celebratory connections with the
>
> ordinary women . . . who created their own, now seemingly autonomous pleasures
>
> and rituals of enjoyable femininity from the goods made available by consumer
>
> culture . . . Just how oppositional were these seemingly subversive practices? . . .
>
> What value did they deliver to women in the context of the relations of power and
>
> powerlessness within which they still found themselves inscribed? (McRobbie)

According to this assessment of third wave feminism, little structural change has

occurred. Femininity has become attached to the consumption of material goods and

another means of reifying patriarchal structures. In her critique of postfeminism and call

for a reinvented feminist politics, McRobbie points to the young woman who "is offered

a notional form of equality, concretized in education and employment, and through

participation in consumer culture and civil society, in place of what a reinvented feminist

politics might have to offer" (McRobbie n.p.). This critique, which seems theoretically

quite similar to Habermas' critique of the function of the public sphere and which also

critical of consumer culture, while useful in some contexts seems to revert to the

postmodern tendency to define subversion and resistance in ways that may not account

for the rhetorical meaning-making and identity-building activities that can happen within

consumer culture and commercially-mediated spaces. The "value" that is delivered "to

women in the context of the relations of power and powerlessness within which they still

found themselves inscribed" cannot be determined solely on a model that does not fully

account for their experiences or inquire into the reasons why women choose to participate in these spaces. Women may find themselves inscribed within contexts of relations of powerlessness, perhaps, but before making such assumptions it is worth investigating why women choose to participate in these commercially mediated spaces. After all, not all women have access to the privileges necessary to totally resist such activities, and many women, such as my research participants, benefit from their participation in numerous ways. Their actions may not serve the agenda of feminist politics, but this does not mean that they should be dismissed as having little or no use to feminism.

Resistance, and Why We Value It

In the beauty community, women's actions appear, on the surface, to contradict the kind of resistance to patriarchy that many have come to understand as necessary for an act to be "feminist" in nature. In this section, I unpack this assumption and examine its origins. I also argue for why this unpacking and interrogation of those assumptions are necessary as part of a critical practice in feminist rhetorical studies. In their recent book, *Feminist Rhetorical Practices,* Royster and Kirsch point to a need for change in feminist rhetorical studies, arguing that we listen more closely to the women we research for and with, and question our values and "whether and how we value and accredit" knowledge. In doing so, they argue, we "gain a deeper understanding by going repeatedly not to our assumptions and expectations but to the women—to their writing, their work, and their worlds, seeking to ground our inquiries in the evidence of the women's lives" (20). This is the stance I have taken in this project, and while I draw from a feminist theoretical framework, I ground my findings, and the assumptions those findings call into question, in the data, which is rooted in stories of the women in the beauty community. Royster and

Kirsch point to the exigency of their project, and the need for globalizing our perspectives as feminists situated in rhetoric and writing studies, such that feminism might be understood as a diverse, transnational, and global project in which

> Feminist rhetorical scholars are actively engaging in the push toward better-informed perspectives of rhetoric and writing as global enterprises, addressing various practices in other geographical locations through feminist-informed lenses; rescuing, recovering, and (re)inscribing women rhetors both distinctively in locations around the world and in terms of the connections and interconnections of their performances across national boundaries; and participating in the effort to recast perspectives of rhetoric as a transnational, global phenomenon rather than a Western one. (24)

While my project also aims to engage in the "push toward better-informed perspectives of rhetoric and writing as global enterprises" via a feminist rhetorical framework, and while I believe that this work is also an attempt to locate feminist rhetorical practices as they are global, rather than Western, phenomena, I have found that doing so necessitates a willingness to resist the urge to rescue, recover, and (re)inscribe women rhetors. To resinscribe the women of the beauty community in certain feminist political terms and values makes it difficult to allow these women's stories to shift (and truly globalize) our perspectives. I argue that feminism has a place in understanding the entrepreneurial, identity-building, and digital writing activities in which these women participate, but only if it accounts for these activities and the politics of these women's identities, and does not exclude or attempt to recast them as being anything other than what they are. I have turned to postpositivist realist theory, which I explain in the following section, to shed

light on why much of poststructuralist feminism is inclined to favor amorphous, fluid

identities, and how this has influenced our desire for and value of explicit forms of

resistance and subversion in ways that are not always useful to, and in fact are sometimes

damaging and exploitative of, women of color whose experiences of oppression are often

different from our own.

A Postpositivist Realist Approach

Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff—whose theories of postpositivist realism I will draw from

here to better understand how feminist values were shaped by postmodern theories—

claim that for many women, it is simply not possible to transgress and subvert their

material, lived identities, and to do so necessitates a degree of privilege afforded mostly

to white women. This body of work recognizes that many postmodern theories of identity

have not been adequate for women who are marked in particular ways, even if they have

been useful to others. The kind of idealization of the woman of color as seen in

Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* assumes a model for feminist resistance based on

problematic assumptions about who can be a woman of color, and who has access (and

can make use of) their struggle for resistance purposes (Moya, *Learning* 32). One of the

central problems with this theory is that it is not based on the actual experiences of

women of color; it is beneficial and accessible (and hence valuable) to white women

primarily. In fact, Haraway misappropriates the work of Cherie Moraga in *Cyborg*,

reading Moraga's text as a statement that all women experience oppression equally, and

thus, it is impossible to rank the oppressions (*Learning 33*). Moya responds to *Cyborg* by

pointing to Moraga's original text and revealing Haraway's misreading, while also

recognizing the central problem with Haraway's text: "With this misappropriation,

Haraway authorizes herself to speak for actual women of color, to dismiss our own interpretations of our experiences of oppression" (*Learning* 33). This problematic and dangerous self –authorization to speak on account of groups of women who experience oppression differently, as well as the flattening of difference, becomes the object of critique for the postpositivist realist movement. This problem is also one of the primary reasons why postmodern feminist theory does not provide enough of the theoretical and analytical tools that we need to understand the beauty community. As the next two chapters will make clear, the experiences of my case participants in the beauty community do not align with much feminist thinking, including cyberfeminist thinking. Yet my case participants understand themselves as having agency. In making sense of their experiences, I am arguing that we must be critical and aware of our disciplinary tendencies and desires, and especially the ways in which these tendencies may dismiss these women's actual interpretations of their experiences. We can, in fact, learn about these women's experiences with the tools that post-positivist realism provides. While a postmodern approach to inquiry might suggest that objectivity is impossible, realism maintains that empirical study can produce knowledge, but acknowledges that this knowledge is contextual and situated. Moya sums this up in her own stance by stating that "As a realist, I conceive of objectivity as an ideal of inquiry *necessarily involving a theoretical bias and interest*, rather than as a condition of absolute and achieved certainty that is context-transcendent, subject independent, and free of theoretical bias" [emphasis mine] (*Learning* 14). Of course, the recognition of objectivity as "an ideal" that is itself situated in theoretical bias and interest is key to realism's usefulness here.

According to Alcoff, some poststructuralists acknowledge that "Social identities are often carried on the body, materially inscribed, perceived at a glance by well-disciplined perceptual practices, and thus hardly the mere epiphenomena of discourse," but that "This, some postructuralists will argue, is not their claim." These theorists understand "identities [as] produced through domination itself and as such should be transgressed against and subverted ("Who's Afraid" 318)—a feature that we saw in the postmodern theories discussed in the sections above. Yet, as I explain in previous passages, this understanding of identity can be dangerous for certain groups, even as it attempts to dismantle the conditions of oppression for all women. Models for transgression based on the struggles of women of color may prove useless to those very women. A key and important feature of Moya's theory is its insistence that some identities can be politically progressive *not because they are transgressive or indeterminate in nature* but because they can "provide [us] with information we all need to understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality operate to uphold existing regimes of power in our society" (81). That is, they teach us how these regimes of power are resisted and complicated with rhetorical moves that also bring together and maintain a community. These may be women "who have been oppressed in a particular way" and who "have experiences—experiences that people who are not oppressed in the same way usually lack" (Moya 81) and therefore cannot fully understand. Theories of resistance and subversion are rather useless if they do not account for such experiences. These people might also, because of their experiences, choose to resist or work within (perhaps simultaneously) discourses in multiple and varying ways. Moya explains that the mistake often made in essentialist or postmodern theories of identity "lies in assuming

that our options for theorizing identities are inscribed within the

postmodernism/essentialism binary—that we are either completely fixed and unitary or

unstable and fragmented selves" (80). Moya critiques both Haraway and Butler,

specifically, for their treatment of difference and assumption of

> a postmodern "subject" of feminism whose identity is unstable, shifting, and
>
> contradictory: "she" can claim no grounded tie to any aspect of "her" identit(ies)
>
> because "her" anti-imperialist, shifting, and contradictory politics have no
>
> epistemic basis in *experience*. Ironically, although both Haraway and Butler lay
>
> claim to an anti-imperialist project, their strategies of resistance to oppression lack
>
> efficacy in a material world. Their attempts to disrupt gender categories (Butler)
>
> or to conjure away identity politics (Haraway) make it difficult to figure out who
>
> is "us" and who is "them," who is the "oppressed" and who is the "oppressor,"
>
> who shares our interests and whose interests are opposed to ours . . . "Difference"
>
> is magically subverted, and we find out that we really are all the same after all!
>
> (Moya *Learning* 36)

In a similar vein, Alcoff argues that the "acknowledgement of the important differences

in social identity does not lead inexorably to political relativism or fragmentation, but

that, quite the reverse, it is the refusal to acknowledge the importance of the differences

in our identities that has led us to distrust, miscommunication, and thus disunity" (Alcoff

6). As noted previously, Haraway's argument for unity based on the common experience

of struggle assumes a kind of sameness in experiences of oppression that flattens the

experiences of women of color. Both Moya and Alcoff directly address postmodern

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feminism's erasure of difference, and argue for identities as they cannot be separated from conditions of experience:

> . . . realism about identity involves a commitment to the idea that identities refer outward—albeit in partial and occasionally inaccurate ways—to the social world within which they emerge. Contra postmodernist theorists, who argue that the relationship between identities and the "real" or "material realm" is arbitrary, I argue that the "real" is causally relevant to our epistemic endeavors (including the formation of our identities) because it shapes and limits our knowledge-generating experiences. (Moya *Learning* 13)

The idea that identities refer outward—that they refer to a world about which we can learn, and not to an arbitrary, constructed "real"—is an important framework, and one with which I approach this project. How can we best learn about ourselves and each other in way that is critical and aware of our own situated, contextual biases, and how can we begin to collect data about our social worlds, if there is no "real" to which identities refer? Empirical studies rely on data and observation with the assumption that there is a "real" about which we can produce knowledge, and such studies can provide valuable insights about the experiences of particular groups who may not be included in otherwise abstract theories, or as in the case of Haraway's *Manifesto*, are problematically spoken for. Postpositivist realism provides a critical, essential framework for approaching this kind of empirical work.

What does resistance look like in this community when it does happen? How can some of these women be understand as doing feminist rhetorical practices when they don't appear to be resisting anything, at least on the surface? My understanding of

resistance as it happens in the community must be prefaced with the understanding that

resistance in the beauty community happens alongside reification and reinforcement. My

understanding of resistance comes from participants' reports that they feel a sense of

power, of knowing that they are shaping both the community space and the interests of

the larger corporate space, in their activities. Resistance and reification are not mutually

exclusive in this space, and resistance will not take any obvious forms or align with one

particular body of feminist theory; nor do all women in this community value resistance

and struggle in the ways that we have. This is not an issue of access (or lack thereof) to

feminist theory. These women have developed their own "inherent rhetorical dexterities"

(Martinez) as women of color living particular kinds of lives, and some of these

dexterities function in a way that positions these women as powerful and influential, but

that do not necessarily resonate with the (at times problematic) values that earlier

feminists have proposed. Perhaps the most useful models for thinking about resistance in

these terms come from de Certeau and Powell. de Certeau's work represents a move from

grand theory to the practices of the everyday. For de Certeau, small (conscious or not)

resistance happens in everyday, tactical moves. The place of the tactic "belongs to the

other" (xix). It is important to remember however that when resistance does happen in

this particular community it cannot be simply labeled as tactical or strategic, because it is

often both of these things, and interactions and rhetorical moves flow back and forth

between these characterizations. In *Rhetorics of Survivance,* Powell listens to the way

two Native American writers, "consciously or unconsciously" use language as acts of

survivance to "reimagine, and literally, re-figure 'the Indian'" (400). Powell says "It is

this *use* that I argue transforms their object status within colonial discourse into a subject

status, a presence instead of an absence" (400). Powell's emphasis on *use* as a way to reimagine and refigure colonial discourse opens up the possibility to think about acts of resistance that are not tied to the values of European postmodern feminist theory but are instead situated within the rhetorical *use* of digital writing in the community.

I also draw from material rhetorics in my understanding of the beauty community and how, as a medium, YouTube videos are used in ways that can both reify at the same time as they resist what is arguably a patriarchal commercial space. I explore a material, experience-based approach in part because of the way in which material rhetoric makes possible the study of the "rhetoric of women who are not feminist prototypes, women whose texts may even be implicated in patterns of hierarchy and domination" (Tollar Collins 550). According to Tollar Collins, the central role of feminist material rhetoric is "discovering material practices as mechanisms for controlling women's discourse and shaping representations of gender" (548). Tollar Collins refers to the material rhetoric of texts in the traditional sense; however, I believe that this approach might be modified a bit to account for digital video as a (self) published medium. The material practices of shooting the video, editing the footage, and publishing the finished product to YouTube are all part of the text; the decisions to include a particular scene (for example, shooting the video in a messy bedroom) is a deliberate choice, according to participants. Yet, as much as these material practices control discourse in some senses, because YouTube videos are often self-shot, and self-published, the "accretion" that happens in the text differs from written text, in which an "accretion of voices, often male, can layer over a woman's text, revise it, correct it" (Tollar Collins 555). In this case the women who create the videos assert agency in choosing to distribute them via YouTube, and the

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choices that these women make in every stage of creating the video are rhetorical, they are embodied, and they are deliberate. Tollar Collins reminds us that "the embodied texts, the material elements of their production and distribution, with particular attention to how publishing decisions and practices affect ethos as it functions in women's texts and women's reading" (Tollar Collins 546). Attention to the publishing decisions and practices that these women make part of their work as entrepreneurs sheds light on how these conditions may have changed. This change has opened up new conversations about the place of feminism in a world now dominated by self-published texts, such as YouTube videos, that appear in commercially mediated spaces.

Theories of Identity in Digital Rhetorics

While feminist theories have been helpful in understanding the rhetorical activities of women in the beauty community, they do not fully account for some of these activities. I draw on several theories of identity in this section that I believe are complementary to the postpositivist realist theories of identity that provide the framework for this project. Manuel Castells provides a theory of identity that is useful in understanding identity as it is constructed in a continually changing online space. As some have pointed out, the videos that women create for the community are themselves a kind of digital ephemera; community members often remove their videos, change their privacy settings, or even shut down their channels for varying reasons, rendering the videos that they create inaccessible to their audiences. Sometimes community members seek publication in a different medium or technological platform. How can we account for identity work when such work appears in a platform that is constantly changing? In addition to acknowledging that individuals often construct multiple identities both on and

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offline, Castells discusses three forms of identity building, one of which is particularly helpful in understanding the identity work that women do in the community. In my understanding of identity in this project I draw from his concept of project identity, which accounts for the rhetorical work these women do because of its emphasis on *use*. Castells defines project identity as "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (8). Emphasis on *use*, rather than the characteristics of the finished product itself, makes possible greater attention to rhetorical moves that participants make with the affordances of the technologies they choose, rather than the capabilities of the technologies themselves. The cultural materials available will likely change as technologies and platforms shift, and individuals adapt to these changes. Their uses of these cultural materials, however, remain an important phenomenon to understand. A unique feature of the beauty community is the vernacular nature of the videos that women produce: participants do not often produce their videos with high-end studio equipment; rather, they make use of whatever means available to shoot, edit, and publish their videos. Understanding the uses of rhetorical tools within this medium can be helpful in understanding why vernacular video has become a delivery system of choice for many women in the community. YouTube itself might be considered a kind of cultural material that women use to redefine and leverage their identities for power.

Several other theories of digital identity provide some context for accounting for and understanding the nature of identity work in the beauty community. According to Zappen, digital rhetoric involves not only persuasion for the purpose of moving

audiences to action or belief, but also self-expression for the purpose of exploring individual and group identities; it serves to promote participation and creative collaboration for the purpose "of building communities of shared interest" (12). Given the data I have gathered from my study of the beauty community it appears that the community also functions in these ways with regard to identity and self-expression, and Zappen's theory provides another framework for understanding the identity-building rhetorical moves that occur in the community. Zappen's concept of "interactivity" involves the processes of forming identities and communities as complex interactions, both online and offline, between ourselves and others, thus providing context and meaning for the term "interactivity" (Zappen 322). What is interesting about this theory is that accounts for movement and interaction between online and offline identities and does not assume that one might be able to "reconfigure" their online identities in a way that escapes the political implications of their offline identities. Zappen also draws on Carolyn Miller, who argues that identity formation and ethos in online environments involves not just the Aristotelian concepts of establishing credibility and past reputation but also a "product of the ongoing performance itself, made on the fly, in the course of interaction"(qtd. in Zappen 269) that makes sense in the context of vernacular video production. This model enables us to imagine the ways in which members of the community exercise their agency in those kairotic moments of representation, both online and offline.

My account of feminist approaches and critiques, while by no means exhaustive, is intended to give a glimpse into one of the major conversations in feminism and how this conversation contextualizes the way my project might be read. My account of

relevant feminist theory is also intended to help us arrive at a more critical understanding of our own positions as academics and feminists and illustrate how some theoretical movements, e.g., postmodern or "second wave" feminism, have influenced our thinking and our values as feminists in ways that have been both useful and damaging to women, particularly those women whose struggles and identities have been idealized and misappropriated. Understanding the complexity of the beauty community (and how and why it is constructed and used) requires a framework that will account for the differences in experiences that these women present in this online space, as well as the relationships and interactions that they build with each other and with larger commercial entities. According to Grabill and Pigg, "Work in digital rhetoric on identity and agency has struggled to account for these relationships with precision with respect to people's lived experiences" (103). This project is an attempt to *listen to* those experiences as they figure into online identity-building practices. The beauty community is complex and malleable in nature. It is shaped by politics of race and gender, and it also shapes them. It is deeply consumer oriented and technologically mediated. Issues of digital identity lie under the surface of the videos and are apparent in my interviews with the women who participated in my study. My research has led me to feminist theories of identity as a way of understanding how women actively shape the space through their rhetorical moves and how women of color in particular create and maintain positions of power in the community. In this process, I found that much of the theory in European and American postmodern feminism does not account for the kinds of activities in which these women engage; yet, readers who encounter this project will likely do some from that theoretical orientation. The purpose of this chapter is not to deny the power that these theoretical

movements have had in revealing conditions of oppression for women. But I hope to make apparent that conditions of oppression are not the same for *all* women, and these theories are not the most appropriate for understanding the ways in which the women in the community have constructed their identities from the experiences that have shaped their lives. I believe that we have much to learn from them, and I have designed this study in a way that I hope enables careful rhetorical listening to the stories and video data that I have collected over the course of this study. In the next chapter, I provide detailed descriptions of the analytical tools and processes with which I attempt to understand the nature of this phenomenon as well as the reasons for which women choose to participate. I also show how a postpositivist realist theoretical framework can be operationalized and integrated into analytical tools that I designed for the study.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that I have developed for my study of YouTube's beauty community, the theoretical frameworks with which I developed my own methodology, and the methods that I developed as a means of operationalizing this methodology. I also address the rationale for the research questions that I developed for this project, and show how these research questions changed over time as the trajectory of the project shifted.

When conducting this research project, I knew from my own experience that I would be concerned with difference, not as an essentializing identity marker, but as it is constructed in way that can tell us more about identities as they are constructed and experienced. I based this notion on the idea that not all marginalization in spaces such as the beauty community is experienced the same way, and therefore not all tactical and systematic responses to marginalization are the same or have the same rationale. I was also interested in the stories that the members of the community might tell about their particular experiences and identities with hopes of learning more about how these factors shaped and are shaped by the online space they occupy. While some have argued that difference and identity politics has accomplished little more that essentializing and fragmentation, Linda Alcoff argues that the "acknowledgement of the important differences in social identity does not lead inexorably to political relativism or fragmentation, but that, quite the reverse, *it is the refusal to acknowledge the importance of the differences in our identities that has led us to distrust, miscommunication, and thus*

disunity" (Alcoff *Visible* 6) [emphasis mine]. I developed a methodology around this notion of difference as a productive space from which we might build and learn from as a field that is concerned with rhetoric, as not all rhetorical tactics and strategies, and not all rhetorical situations, are experienced and understood in the same way by everyone involved in a given situation—and yet, they can be used for unification purposes by marginalized groups in spaces that are otherwise marked as ideologically oppressive. Hence, this methodology is shaped by own experiences (and thus shaped by my own identity) as multiracial woman of color, and as a person who believes that these markers of difference are invaluable to the work that I do and to the outcomes of this project. Difference shapes the spaces (both physical and virtual) that we occupy and use, and it also shapes the ways in which we can use them. I needed a methodology that would enable me to see the different uses of the online space known as the beauty community, and the ways in which the notion of difference is implicated in those uses—particularly in the building of a phenomena that participants believe is a unifying space for women, including some women who identify with groups that have been marginalized historically. Hence I attempted to create a methodology that accounts for, rather than erases, individual stories and experiences, particularly experiences that are framed by and shaped by difference.

Research Questions

The methodology that I developed was intended to address several research questions, which shifted over time as the project progressed and the data indicated a need for change. Here, I will explain the initial research questions, the rationale for the initial questions, and show how these questions changed over time. Initially the research

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questions were designed to address the nature of social relationships between participants in the beauty community: the relationships between female participants in the beauty community, as well as the nature of the phenomenon itself. I was interested in the ways in which these women used the online space, particularly ways that seemed to resist or complicate the dominant discourses of appearance, gender norms and consumerism that seemed to dominate the space. At the beginning stages of this project, the primary questions were as follows: 1) Who are the participants in this phenomenon? 2) What is this phenomenon?

The first question was supplemented by subquestions:

- In what ways do participants identify?

- Do participants feel a sense of belonging?

- Is there a shared language that indicates belonging?

These first research questions were informed by experience-based theories of identity, particularly a post-positivist realist feminist theory of identity, to understand this aspect of the phenomenon. In *Learning From Experience*, Moya lays out post-positivist realism as an empirical approach to inquiry that assumes (unlike postmodernism) that there is, in fact, a "real" and that we can learn about the nature of the real through inquiry. Moya argues that in doing so, "objective" knowledge must be understood as still situated, subject to bias, local, and contextual. As a realist, she says,

> I conceive of objectivity as an ideal of inquiry necessarily involving a theoretical
> bias and interest, rather than as a condition of absolute and achieved certainty that
> is context-transcendent, subject independent, and free of theoretical bias . . .
> Because I have given up the dream of transcendence, I understand objective

knowledge as an ongoing process involving the careful analysis of the different

kinds of subjective or theoretical bias and interest through which humans

apprehend the world. (14)

Post-positivist realist identity theory as a methodological framework enables researchers

to account for the individual experiences of participants as they shape and are shaped by

"social location" (Alcoff *Visible* 6) and relies on "our ability to acknowledge and

understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social

location" (Moya 85). This approach made sense given my own understanding of how

social location shapes experience, and would help me understand how social location

would also shape participants' experiences of the beauty community (I later learned from

the women who participated in the study that their participation in the community would

reveal also the way their social location influenced their experiences in their real,

physical lives outside of the community—in fact, it would be hard to separate these

things). This approach also fit well with the critical research practice (see Methodology,

below) that I use as a researcher whose work is situated within my own disciplinary

training, contextual, and grounded.

Moya explains that the mistake often made in essentialist or postmodern theories

of identity "lies in assuming that our options for theorizing identities are inscribed within

the postmodernism/essentialism binary—that we are either completely fixed and unitary

or unstable and fragmented selves" (80). The problem with relying solely on a

postmodern feminist theory of identity lies in the way that "Postmodernists reinscribe,

albeit unintentionally, a kind of universalizing sameness (we are all marginal now!) that

their celebration of 'difference' had tried so hard to avoid" (Moya *Learning* 68).

Postpositivist realism accounts for the individual lived experiences of participants in this study, for the differences between and amongst them and how this shapes their experiences and responses to oppression, and the fact that while "members of a group may share experiences as a result of their (voluntary or involuntary) membership in that group, they [do not] all come to the same conclusions about those experiences" (82). In fact, their conclusions about those experiences vary wildly, and the first research question was intended to capture those variations. Moya further argues that "The kinds of identities . . . women construct for themselves will both condition and be conditioned by the kinds of interpretations they give to the experiences they have" (82). So, this philosophical approach was used as a rationale for this first question—for the importance of understanding who are the participants, with the implied understanding that even though all of the participants somehow identify with the community, their experiences of the community, actions within the community, and their abilities to participate in different ways were not the same. This experience-based nature of this question guided my research methods (see Methods, below) in that while it drew on a philosophical lens, it required empirical methods that assume that we can gather information about the nature of the world. Interviews and critical discourse analyses were the tools that I used to help me in the data-gathering process.

The second question that I developed (What is this thing that is referred to as the "beauty community?) was also comprised of both a philosophical and empirical component and encompassed multiple subquestions:

- How is this phenomenon constructed by its participants?

- What other stakeholders and entities are present?

- Can the beauty community be understood as a workplace?

- Can the beauty community be understood as a public or civic space?

My initial intent was to include theories of publicness and public spheres to address the subquestions, but as the project progressed I quickly learned that this would be too large a task, and that publicness and public spheres were not the focus of the project. Questions about how this phenomenon is "work" and whether this phenomenon can be considered a type of workspace also seemed relevant, and I had planned to incorporate Blythe and Amidon, as well as Herndl and Licona, to complicate the notion of identity in traditional vs. virtual workplaces. This approach also proved too broad, and as the project progressed I set these questions aside: while they are perhaps relevant to understanding this phenomenon, they are not the focus of this study. The only sub-question that I chose to keep as part of the study was "How is this phenomenon constructed by its participants?" as this would help me better understand the nature of the phenomenon. The empirical component of the question, "What is this thing that is referred to as the "beauty community" would also be driven by participant interviews as well as by analysis of secondary sources such as blogs, news articles, social media, and other open literatures, and by the language and structure of the host technology, YouTube.

At mid-point in my study, the research questions had shifted to better focus on the phenomenon of interest:

- What is this phenomenon?

- Who are the participants in this phenomenon?

- Do participants feel a sense of belonging?

- How is this phenomenon constructed by its participants?

These four questions guided the remainder of the study, and while I developed further and more specific questions, they served as the major questions around which I would arrange and attempt to understand the data.

Methodology

The research methodology that I developed for this project stems from, and aligns with, my position as a critical, reflexive researcher (and also woman of color) with unique experiences that are shaped by my particular identity. Because my position as a researcher in this project is both critical and reflexive, it is most appropriate that my research methodology reflect this stance. In this section, I explain the theoretical frames that shaped the methodology for this project as well as how they align with my own position as a researcher. I developed my own stance as a critical researcher (and hence my critical research practices) by using Sullivan and Porter's definition of critical research, which "sees methodology as heuristic . . . we see research generating situated knowledge—or rather a kind of pragmatic know-how (18) rather than universal knowledge. They further argue that a critical research perspective "sees knowledge as local, as contingent, and as grounded not in universal structures but in local, situated practices" (18). This approach fits well with Alcoff and Moya's post-positivist realist understandings of experience and identity, too, as local and situated, as well as shaped by what Alcoff refers to as social location. These theories can be put into conversation with each other as they complement each other and both inform my methodology. My understanding of research practices, then, is that they are always rhetorical; they shape and are shaped by the researcher and the data. That is to say, I am shaped by my research practices as much as I shape them. That being said, it is appropriate that the philosophical

components of my research align with my identity as a critical, post-positivist realist, feminist researcher; my identity is both one of privilege as an academic at a large research institution and one of marginality as a mixed-race woman of color underrepresented in the field and in the academic institution who engages in practices that are risky given my academic identity. My experiences as an academic and also as an individual are shaped by my identities and by a racial discourse that marks me as a person of color; my experiences as a feminist are different from other women who identify as feminists and who are not marked in the same way. A critical, reflexive methodology that accounts for these differences, and is able to "see" these differences, will also value and seek out so that we might learn from, rather than erase, them. It is important to me that any research methodology that I draw from account for the individual experiences and interpretations of those experiences that shape researched and researchers. Moreover, this approach has continuously shaped this research project, has shaped my treatment of the data and my interactions with the participants in the project. Reflexive practices are a crucial part of this research project and the methods that I employ, and reflect the methodological practices that I have adopted.

Because I am committed to a reflexive, critical approach to research, I am also drawing on Adele Clarke's work in *Situational Analysis*. A situational analysis research methodology is appropriate because, as according to Clarke, "all knowledges are understood by major segments of scholarly worlds and beyond as *situated* knowledges . . . produced and consumed by particular groups of people, historically and geographically locatable" (xxv); situational analysis is offered as a way to resist problematic "claims of universality" (xxv)—and this is precisely the kind of critical, reflexive understanding that

I have aimed to bring to this project. Furthermore, situational analysis as a methodology

takes nonhuman actors into account in the research situation as a kind of reflexive

practice, which in the case of my object of study is relevant as many nonhuman actors

comprise the situation and perhaps escape my initial analysis. The kinds of data that I

choose to study for this project—interviews and coded videos--emerged from this

methodology.

Because the traditional grounded theory approach does not take into account the

surrounded situational elements (such as institutions and other discursive presences) that

influence the data and outcomes of the study; to address this issue, I will use Clarke's

situational analysis as a supplement to the more traditional approach (e. g. Glaser &

Strauss). Clarke's approach takes a "situation-centered approach that in addition to

studying action also explicitly includes the analysis of the full situation, including

discourses—narrative, visual, and historical" (xxxii); situational analysis, then, aligns

with my own theoretical positioning that accounts for the situational differences between

individuals, their subjectivities and lived experiences as they are influenced by these

situational elements. Finally, Clarke's argument for "Generating sensitizing concepts and

theoretical integration toward provocative yet provisional analytics and grounded

theorizing as an *ongoing process rather than the development of substantive and formal

theories*" (xxxiii) (emphasis mine) as well as for accounting for the "Individual and

collective differences in our situatedness and practices" (xxx), because they fit well with

the critical methodological stance that I take from Sullivan and Porter and with the theory

of identity that I build from Moya and Alcoff, will present in my own reflexive practices

of ongoing situational maps and a reflective research journal.

Methods

Introduction To Methods Used

The initial methods for this study were first developed in a pilot study with one

participant before I tested and revised them multiple times for the dissertation study. I

first determined that I would need several types of data to address my research questions

because of the nature of my research questions: I was interested in the nature of the

phenomenon as well as who were the participants in the phenomenon. I determined that

the objects of analysis in this study would be interviews with participants and their video

artifacts, as these data types would most directly help me address my research questions

of who are the participants in the phenomenon and what is the nature of the phenomenon.

I was not interested in the comments that users leave on videos because I was most

interested in the rhetorical moves that are made by the video-producing members of the

community. I was primarily interested in the video-producing members of the community

because of the risks that are involved in producing and revealing one's identity to an

audience this way; these risks are not present, or are not the same, for members of the

community who do not produce videos, and participate by only watching videos or by

commenting on videos. I was also not concerned with the comments on the videos

because the objects of the study were the videos and the reasoning and process behind the

videos. Analysis of video artifacts alone, however, would not suffice because, as I state in

my methodology section, experience-based knowledge is valuable to this project, which

draws on a post-structuralist realist theoretical frame, and to the stance that I bring as a

researcher; moreover, it is essential in enabling me to account for some of the things that

discourse analysis alone cannot "see." To address the research questions in the study,

then, I determined that I would need to conduct interviews with participants; interviews would also serve as a means of maintaining my stance as a critical researcher who engages participants in the research and data analysis process.

Using Moya's theoretical framework meant that I would also give participants opportunities to discuss their own experiences, their responses to my questions, and to reflect on them—and that these reflections may impact the way my data and tools take shape. This theoretical framework prompted me to build these reflective and critical moments into the research process. Participants were encouraged to question and provide feedback on my analyses and my data in all three rounds of the interview. I also notified participants in the recruitment phase and during the interviews that they have access to my data (both the interview data and the data that is transcribed from their YouTube videos) at any time as well as the products that came out of the research process, including conference presentations, this dissertation, and any subsequent publications.

Tools and Instruments

The tools for this research study consist of three interview scripts. The interview scripts are preceded by a pilot study in which I attempted to use different approaches to the interview with one of the study participants. In the pilot study, I developed an email survey for participants with the expectation that the survey would generate usable results. I learned that research participants are not likely to write (and value) long, rich responses in the way that researchers do. The participant's responses, while useful, were short, and were not detailed and thick in the way that I'd hoped. I decided instead to conduct phone interviews. At this point I had determined that the purpose of the pilot interview was both

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to test the first round of interview questions, and also to establish and build a relationship with the participant.

In the pilot study, I tested an interview script that was informed by Halbritter and Lindquist's research methodology in "Time, Lives, and Videotape," in which the authors argue that in the interview process, "discovery can be enabled by a purposeful deferral of disciplinary intervention at particular stages in the research process" and by "strategically deferring interpretive closure" (173). This method makes use of artifact-based interview questions in which participants bring and discuss artifacts that represent themselves and their writing lives. I had intended to modify and use the artifact-based interviewing method for my participants; however, in the pilot study, Lisa, when given the option to discuss an artifact that represented her participation in the beauty community, indicated that she would prefer to continue the conversation as we had been rather than shift the focus to an artifact that was not visible to both of us. For this reason, I chose not to use the artifact-based interview method for my study, and instead chose to develop and ask questions to participants that were directly related to my own research questions. Lisa's responses to the questions in my pilot interview were important to the trajectory of the research project; her responses confirmed for me that issues of identity are indeed relevant to the study of this phenomenon, and so I chose to keep the initial research question (and related subquestions) about participant identity in the project.

I attained IRB approval for the interview methods and questions before conducting the first round of interviews. Please see the Appendix for the interview questions used in this study to collect data. The first round of interviews was conducted using questions that I developed in the pilot study and included two participants. The

purpose of the first round of interviews was to gain a better understanding of the nature of the phenomenon and its participants, as well as to establish and develop relationships with the participants in the study. The questions in the first round of interviews (see Appendix) were developed from, and were therefore nearly same as, the questions developed in the pilot study interview with Lisa. After attaining IRB approval to use Lisa's pilot interview retroactively as data for the study, I also included Lisa's pilot study interview in the first round of interviews.

The questions for the second round of interviews (see Appendix) were developed from the data generated in my first interpretive pass. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to gain further information about the nature of the phenomenon, the boundaries of the phenomenon, the language particular to the community, and also to engage participants in a reflexive research process by seeking their feedback on my coding scheme and interpretations of the data. Because I draw on Sullivan and Porter's critical research methodology for this project, this reflexive process is essential to my interview practices; therefore, I used this interview as an opportunity to share with participants the themes that had emerged in the data analysis and ask participants for feedback and suggestions. I shared my coding scheme with the participants and asked for feedback. This round of interviews included two participants (one of the participants from the first round of interviews did not respond to my request for a subsequent interview).

I developed questions for the third round of interviews after a round of sketching out themes and developing "focal points" from the first two interpretive passes. The themes of success and risk emerged as major themes in the data, and I had not yet asked

participants any questions specifically about these themes, so the purpose of the third interview was to check if these were indeed themes. I would later refer to this interview as the one in which I activated the "business side" of my participants. The questions in the third round dealt more directly with the ideas of success and risk-taking (see Appendix). Because I had developed a relationship with participants by this point, I felt that I could ask more direct questions about the nature of success in the community as well as the nature of risk-taking and the stakes of creating videos for the community. The interview also served as a critical activity in which I could ask participants to provide feedback on the data and themes that had emerged so far.

<div align="center">Recruiting Participants for the Study</div>

My initial intent in recruiting participants for this study was to represent a range of channel and audience sizes so that I would be able to capture the rhetorical moves made by women who create videos for a range of audiences of different sizes. My goal was to recruit three to five participants who represented a range of channel sizes, from very small channels with fewer total view counts to large channels with high view counts. I contacted about 100 people using the IRB approved recruitment script through their YouTube accounts, and by emailing them directly if they provided email addresses on their YouTube channels. Contacting people in the community this way proved to be extremely difficult. Few people responded, partly, I suspected, because of my lack of face-to-face contact with them. Out of the people who responded, even fewer agreed to participate when they learned that interviews would be recorded, and that they would have to provide some contact information (either a Skype account or a phone number) for me to contact them. Three participants did sign the electronic IRB consent form and

agree to the study. These three participants represented different channel sizes—one very large channel with high traffic (about 30,000 subscribers), a medium sized channel (about 2,000 subscribers) and a small channel (about 300 subscribers). Two of these participants persisted through the three rounds of interviews; the participant with the medium sized channel did not respond to requests for a second and third interview.

Recruitment for the study also involved developing relationships with participants. The primary way in, which I did, this was by practicing reciprocity: giving participants something in return for their time that they believed was valuable. Reciprocity is also an important part of my critical approach to research and working a community; I asked participants what they wanted from me in return for their time, and they indicated to me what they wanted. For both of the participants who persisted through the length of the study, what they perceived to be of value was gaining audience members. Both asked that I play a role in helping them gain subscribers to their channels. I did this by creating videos on my own YouTube channel in which I mentioned and encouraged my viewers to visit their channels. I also shared my "core audience" (subscribers to my channel who continued to visit and be active on my channel) with one participant who indicated that this was what this participant valued and wanted from me.

Data Types and Data Analysis

The data types for this study consist of transcribed YouTube videos and three rounds of interviews of the two participants who persisted through the duration of the study. I chose to transcribe and code the content of the YouTube videos to help me answer the question of what is the nature of the phenomenon. I considered developing and using a multimedia discourse analysis tool to also account for the visual elements of

the videos; however, in my interviews with participants, they indicated that these visual elements were not as important to them in the composing process as the other elements of the videos. There is also a dearth of methods in rhetoric and writing studies for coding the visual components of digital video, and developing an entirely new method for doing so was beyond the scope of this project. For this reason I did not pursue the multimedia discourse analysis and chose to focus only on the spoken elements of the videos (what was said) and support this data with participant interviews. My approach to critical discourse analysis also evolved through the duration of the study; the pilot study drew on Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis as well as Bazerman's model for critical discourse analysis in Composition & Rhetoric. I determined in the pilot study that Fairclough wasn't completely transparent in his rationale for his research methods; reasoning was sometimes unclear in his choice of codes and coding rationale, so I chose not to adopt all of Fairclough's methods. I also developed further codes in each round of analysis and refined the codes after studying the data.

Analytical Passes

The analytical passes for this research study underwent multiple revisions and evolved as the study progressed. I started the project with the intention that each interpretive pass would consist of several layers of analysis: an initial interpretation of data with implications, and a meta-analysis, particularly of the theories and experiences that inform those analyses. I planned to have a round of situational analysis (Clarke) after each analytical pass; situational mapping would be one of the critical practices that I wanted to integrate into each pass. Furthermore, each data set, in this initial plan, would undergo multiple passes. I also knew from the beginning stages of the project that the

coding scheme would undergo significant revision through the research process. I then

developed this organizational tool to help me visualize the analytical passes and the kinds

of data, tools, outcomes, and theories they would entail (see table 1).

Data Type	Tools	Outcomes	Theories
Transcribed verbal data from videos	Coding scheme	Understanding of rhetorical moves that enable construction of community/identity	CDA (Fairclough, Bazerman); Post-positivist realism (Moya, Moraga, Alcoff)
Transcribed visual data from videos	Multimodal coding scheme	Understanding of visual rhetorical moves that enable construction of community/identity	Multi-modal discourse analysis (Halliday; O'Halloran; Tan; Blythe)
All interviews	Rhetorical analysis	Understanding of narrative as meaning-making activity Identifying indicators of experience as important to identity Understanding materiality and embodiment as important to experience and identity	Moya, Moraga, Alcoff, and also Lindquist and Halbritter Moya, Moraga Moya, Moraga, Alcoff, Powell
Finished first passes	Thematic/narrative analysis using Situational maps	Maintaining critical, reflexive research practices; formative to determine and develop second passes	Clarke; Sullivan and Porter

Table 1: Data types, tools, outcomes, and theories

After creating this visualization of the data types, tools, outcomes, and theories, I started

by making several versions of a coding scheme to address my research questions. I have

revised my coding scheme significantly, and in the following section I will discuss the

earlier iterations of the scheme and my rationale for revising the codes to their current

(and final) version.

Initial Coding Scheme

I developed the initial scheme for the dissertation study using data and feedback

from the coding scheme that I tested in my pilot study (see table 2).

Code	Unit	Significance
	Common or shared cultural experiences	School, parents, emotions
	VB: modal (can, may, could, should, must)	Indications invitation to act
	Pronoun: we/us	Relational: indicates social relationships
	Pronoun: you	Direct address invites audience participation
	Imperative or subjunctive mood; direct audience address	Subject "you" implies audience participation, future action
	Formal language	Question to audience implies audience participation
	Informal language	Indicates relational vocabulary (nature of social relationships)
	Reference other participants	Indicates relational vocabulary (nature of social relationships)
	Beauty community shared language	Haul, review, tutorial, swatch, tag, etc. indicate participation
	Reference production quality of video	Consideration to audience; quality of video
	Identity reference	Identity
	VB: simple future (will, be going to)	Express plan, promise, prediction indications existence of community, continuity, future action

Table 2: Initial coding scheme developed from pilot study

I recognized after conducting the pilot study that a single coding scheme would be

insufficient for understanding or accounting for differences in individual experience and I

didn't believe that markers of "difference" as they are experienced and lived by people

could be measured with codes or quantified in a productive way, and to do so would be

counterintuitive to the Moya methodology that I use; still, I was coding for markers of

identity and community-building moves. At this point the purpose of an interpretative pass was to seek these markers of identity and community- building moves, recognizing the importance of the identity markers to the existence of the community and addressing the question of the nature of the phenomenon. The focus of the coding scheme, then, was not "descriptors of identity" (as in first iteration in the prospectus) but rather, how identity markers were leveraged for rhetorical purposes, how they were used to support, maintain, and/or construct this community, and whether/how they were used in the making of this phenomenon. The most significant change that speaks to this shift in the coding scheme was the elimination of the smaller units in the "identity-building moves" that existed in the pilot study category of codes and a focus instead on the larger units as rhetorical units. This also better fits my revision of the coding scheme to focus on expressions of community building (this entailed coding for rhetorical units that indicate expressions of maintaining or building the beauty community—an expression of a plan or promise of community continuity) at the unit of rhetorical move (most likely a sentence or two) rather than at the word level (simple future verbs and pronoun use, which I coded for in the pilot study). I was also interested in identity as it could be leveraged or expressed as a means or way of establishing or building group identity or community—I considered this expression a rhetorical move in the interest of building and maintaining the community. At this point I also noted that these codes would not and were not intended to see everything, and I did not expect that they would offer a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon—but that they might get at one way of seeing it (see table 3).

Community-building moves: establishing continuity	
Simple-future verbs	Plan, promise, or prediction of community continuity beyond this video
Participatory pronoun use	Expression of social connection
Informal language	Indicator of nature of social relationship
Audience greeting and closing	Acknowledgement of community existence
Beauty community shared language	Invites engagement with insider knowledge
Reference to production quality of video	Expresses consideration for audience, existence beyond video
Audience moves: modes of interaction with audience	
Imperative or subjunctive mood	Audience participation
Interrogative mood	Audience participation
Product description	Audience instruction
Beauty process	Audience instruction
Product evaluation	Audience instruction
Product demonstration	Audience instruction
Identity-building moves: establishing participant identity	
References to dominant discourses	Indicates existence and knowledge of dominant power structure
References to experience or reaction in rel. to discourse	Rhetorical use of experience-based knowledge
Experience-based testimony	Rhetorical use of experience-based knowledge
References to cultural experience	Rhetorical use of experience-based knowledge
Adjectival descriptor of identity	Establishing self-identity
Emotions and affect	Indicates rhetorical moves in relation to identity
Social locations: gender, race, class, sex	Indicates social experience mediated by identity

Table 3: Second, revised coding scheme used to analyze transcribed video data

The most significant revision to this coding scheme involved the shift to rhetorical moves instead of individual verbs and other words as T-units. This means that the final version of coding that I conducted was not critical discourse analysis, but rather, coding for larger rhetorical moves. I revised the codes to fit into three categories--community-building moves, audience moves, and identity-building moves; I expanded the codes to include new codes that were not used in the previous version. I noticed that a fair amount of content was not accounted for in the previous version, so I created codes that

accounted for audience instruction, which were not included in the previous coding

scheme. The video that I coded in the pilot contained a high frequency of relational

pronouns (You/we), modal verbs, and informal language; all of these initial codes

became part of the "audience moves" category in this iteration of the scheme. I also

created new codes to better address my research questions in relation to identity and

subjectivity, and also in alignment with my research stance as a postpositivist feminist

critical researcher—these were the identity-building moves, which I defined as references

to social locators, emotions and affect, adjectival descriptors of identity, references to

dominant discourse, and references to experience or reaction in relation to discourse. I

received feedback in which I learned that this coding scheme was still in need of revision;

the "adjectival descriptor of identity" as an element to be coded was problematic;

furthermore, the codes did not demonstrate a clear enough relationship to the research

questions. At this point I consulted Miles' and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* to

aid in building a more refined coding scheme to code for the rhetorical moves that I

identified after revisiting the data. The result was a coding scheme that comprised of ten

refined codes (see table 4).

CODE	DESCRIPTION	ARGUMENT
CONT	Promise of future contact (via greeting, closing, or otherwise)	Persistence of relationships over time; expression of a desire to continue relationships and relationship-building
STOR	Use of story or narrative	Significance of experience to identity (see Moya), establishing trust with audience, relationship-building
INST	Delivery of instruction to audience, demonstration of how to use or achieve a product or technique	Audience facilitation, necessitates credibility and trust
ACT	A call to action, e.g., buy, try, or use a product	Use of ethos to direct action, establishing trust with audience, a move that is participatory in nature
LANG	Use of beauty community shared language and terms	Shared knowledge and experience, credibility (ethos)
EMO	Expression of emotion, affect	Relationship-building, establishing trust with audience, use of pathos
DISC	Positioning self in relation to a dominant discourse of beauty or appearance	Significance of experience to identity (Moya), establishing credibility
REF	Reference to other community member	Relationship- and community- building; credibility
EVAL	Evaluation of a product or service	Drawing on credibility and expertise to make a recommendation, relationship-building
AUD	Direct audience address	Importance of audience, audience participation

Table 4: Ten refined codes used to analyze transcribed video data

This coding scheme was developed after two revisions and was designed to better

account for the rhetorical moves that directly correspond with my research questions and

my theoretical framework; hence the codes correspond to Moya and Moraga's post-

positivist realist theories of identity, which are based on the premise that there is a "real,"

and that we can understand the nature of the real (and thus learn about the nature of real conditions of oppression as they are experienced by those who are marked in different ways). The codes indicate continuity (CONT), story (STOR), instruction (INSTR), action (ACT), language (LANG), emotion (EMO), discourse (DISC), reference (REF), evaluation (EVAL), and audience (AUD). The coding scheme was developed to "see" in a detailed way use of language in the videos in relation to experience and identity (who are the participants) and community identification (what is this thing). This scheme differs most from the last in that I am more concerned with rhetorical moves: things that happen in the videos that have some persuasive potential to the audience in relation to the themes of identity, experience, and community. These could be relationship-building moves, such as the use of story and personal narrative, or facilitation moves such as instruction to the audience. For example, if I code for STOR, I am making the argument that in this instance, there is a move being made that makes use of story/personal experience that is significant to understanding the role of storytelling in this phenomenon. This kind of move also indicates the significance of experience to identity--a theoretical frame that I took from Moya. I believe that this is a move that has to do with establishing trust with the audience and developing a relationship with the audience. Finding STOR in the data tells me that there are rhetorical moves happening in the video that have to do with relationship building between members of the community and also moves that have to do with experience and identity, that can help us know who these participants are. I developed a rationale for each of these codes and a rationale for why each of these codes is significant.

Identifying Rhetorical Moves

As part of my analysis, I used critical discourse analysis methods that were developed in a pilot study to code a sample set of videos that were composed by my research participants. The coding scheme that I developed for the study was influenced in part by Fairclough's *Discourse and Power*; I modified this approach, however, to focus on rhetorical moves as T-units. I draw heavily on the theoretical frameworks of Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff to argue for the importance of experience to identity, particularly for those women who are marked as other; these theories informed and shaped the codes, meaning that in my analysis of data I focused specifically on these kinds of rhetorical moves. My coding process enabled me to see that there were multiple significant rhetorical moves happening in the videos that I analyzed that would help me address my research questions. All of these moves demonstrate a high degree of concern with audience (and this finding is supported by what participants have told me in their interviews, as I discuss shortly); all of these moves might be understood as moves that construct an audience and/or contribute to the building of the community. The community might be understood, then, as a space where audiences are also highly valued—not only for monetary reasons (view counts that generate revenue for both Google and for the users who create videos) but also for reasons that are related to the other functions of the community as a storytelling, identity-building, and instructional space.

Coding Process and Emerging Themes

During the research process, I coded a total of nine videos using the coding scheme that I developed in my pilot study and first analytical passes. My initial rationale in selecting

the videos to code was to represent different points chronologically in each participant's YouTube career: I chose videos that would represent a range of experience levels based on early and more recent time frames for each channel. This proved an unsuccessful strategy, however, as some videos naturally contain more dialogue than others, and I was primarily concerned with the language (spoken) components of the videos. Some genres of videos (e.g., makeup tutorials) contain less speaking because the subject of the video may not speak while applying makeup to her face. As a result, it happens that many of the videos that I chose to analyze were chosen because they contained dialogue that could be transcribed, and don't necessarily represent a chronological range in videos. It also happens that most of the videos that contain large amounts of dialogue are of the genres known as "haul" and "review" videos. I will elaborate further on what this means and define these genres, as well as their rhetorical significance, in my analysis below. Finally, it is important to note that after the analytical passes in which I used discourse analysis, I used theoretical sampling to further develop the conceptual categories that emerged from the data, adding several videos to the sample, which I will discuss in the next section. "Because this is a case study of two participants that would be supported by three rounds of interview data, I chose not to bring in data from other members of the community.

The coding scheme that I developed (after testing and modifying several earlier iterations of a coding scheme) helped me identify ten recurrent themes in the videos that I will refer to as rhetorical moves. While these themes each signify a different kind of rhetorical move, all of them demonstrate to some extent a concern with audience; "audience" was itself a theme that I initially treated as an individual emergent theme before realizing that it encompassed all of the themes that I had found; therefore,

"audience" became an overarching theme indicating that understanding audience as it is constructed in this community would be essential to understanding the workings of the community itself. The coding scheme that I used was developed to "see" in a detailed way use of language in relation to experience and identity (to address the question: Who are the participants? Do they feel a sense of belonging?) and community construction (to address the question: what is the nature of this thing?); the relationship between language use, experience, and identity, particularly the importance of experience to identity-building, was understood through the post-structuralist realist feminist theories of Moya, Moraga, and Alcoff that I engaged throughout this study to help me understand this phenomenon.

It is also important to note that after revising my coding schemes several times and conducting analytical passes, as part of my critical research practice, I presented my findings to my participants, who verified that these themes and my interpretations of their meanings seemed accurate. The themes that I found are not fixed or concrete; they are a small sliver of the activity that happens in a community that is constantly changing—a sliver that I chose to focus on because of my own experiences as a participant, because of my training as a graduate student in rhetoric and composition, and because of my own research interests. They are by no means a representation of the community in its entirety. While all of these codes emerged in the data, I will provide in the following section examples of the codes that emerged as more frequent. These codes are also relevant because they drove the interviews that I conducted with participants.

Continuity, or a Promise of Future Contact

This rhetorical move, coded as "CONT," would appear most often in the greeting or closing of a video (though this was not always the case) and I believe that its presence suggests, most importantly, that this phenomenon is indeed a thing: it exists, at least in part, because its users assume that future interactions with each other will take place. It is also an argument for the persistence of relationships in the community and the expression of a desire to build those relationships. Here is an example of this theme as it appears in one of the videos that I coded:

> "Let me know what you want for next week's perfect beauty Monday video. And I'll talk to you girls later and don't forget to let me know if you like this look or if you don't like it. If you don't like it, I won't do it as often. Or maybe I'll just do it from now on, because it really differentiates me from everyone else on YouTube—what do you think? I'll see you girls later!" (daiserz89, "How to be Confident")

In this example, the unit was coded as both "CONT" (continuity) and "AUD" (audience) because as rhetorical moves both assumes future contact by asking the audience to indicate what content they would like to see in the future and also directly engage the audience in moments of interactivity with the subject ("don't forget to let me know if you like this look," "If you don't like it, I won't do it as often," etc.). This rhetorical move also establishes trust with the audience; audiences feel that the subject will trust them enough to ask for their suggestions and feedback.

Here is another example of CONT (as well as AUD, which I discuss below) from the data:

"I just wanted to let you guys know that I will be starting outfit of the day videos, and makeup tutorials, which I'm trying to get started on, but I feel like the lighting in my apartment is not fit for those type [sic] of videos . . . If you guys have any tips on that, please leave them below, it'll be very helpful for me!"

(Esther, "Forever 21 Haul")

Again, the participant establishes an interactive relationship with her audience by requesting feedback ("if you guys have any tips…"), indicating that she trusts the audience and believes that the audience has useful knowledge that she might use to improve her videos. There is also an element of shared community language in this video (which is coded as LANG): Ester assumes that the audience knows what she means by "outfit of the day videos" and "makeup tutorials" and that the audience has seen enough of this genre of video to give feedback on how she might create her own videos for this genre.

This theme is supported by evidence from participant interviews. One participant, Lisa, indicated that her audience interacts with her by providing feedback regularly to help her determine what they would like to see in her videos: when asked how she knows what is an appropriate video for her audience, she says, "They just ask me. I get messages from then, [and] emails" (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012). This is significant because it indicates that these relationships exist and persist; these persistent relationships become the foundation, or, to use Lisa's term, the "core" of the community.

Storytelling as Kinship and Identity-Building

This rhetorical move makes use of storytelling as a rhetorical move and draws on personal experience as the basis of the story told in the video. This is one of the more

prevalent themes that emerged from the data in both frequency of codes and also in

conversations that I had with participants during their interviews. I believe that this kind

of move indicates that personal experience is significant to identity-building: it is a

rhetorical move that suggests that the beauty community is a space where important

identity work takes place and is key to constructing an audience that is likely to feel a

sense of kinship. This is an important element because, according to Levina, connectivity

"for the feminist movement was evident even before the emergence of digital

technology" (13). Storytelling, then, does the rhetorical work of constructing an audience

that, at least in part, is attentive to these participants' lives and experiences, or at least, an

audience that values storytelling as part of relationship-building between women. The

participants in the study told me about this notion of relationship-building through

storytelling and the role storytelling plays in constructing an audience:

> You know what's funny is that the videos I do tell stories, they don't get that
>
> many views. Because people want to know how these products help them. Like
>
> the acne videos, how to grow long hair, those get the most views. But I feel like
>
> the story part, is where I get my core users, you know. Like, so even if they don't
>
> get a lot of views, they're like... my core group, really likes me because of that. So
>
> I keep doing that. (Lisa, Personal Interview, April 2013).

As Lisa points out above, audiences may not seek out particular videos because of the

storytelling elements—i.e., new audiences are not going to look for a particular story;

rather, they are most likely to search within the beauty community for a particular

makeup or skincare product to determine whether that product will be useful for them.

Lisa notes that it is the storytelling, however, that helps her establish her "core"

audience—her regulars, she tells me—those who are likely to come back to her channel again and again, with whom she develops an ongoing relationship:

> They send me really long emails, very tear jerking, almost an autobiography about themselves, about one of the stories I portrayed because they finally found someone they can relate to and they realize, ok this girl is like this and now she's ok so maybe I can be that way . . . they see me going through that and I guess I used to be really afraid of showing my skin, but when I did it felt very relieving and people really liked me for that. (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012)

Lisa also indicates that she is quite aware of the effectiveness of this rhetorical strategy in helping her to retain her audience, or what she refers to as "core users" who are likely to return to her channel; this is a strategy that she will continue to use as she produces videos. In my analyses of Lisa's videos, I notice that her storytelling is particularly frank and open; she is willing to share quite a bit of personal experience with her audience. Lisa tells me that she is quite aware of this rhetorical strategy and its effectiveness:

> That's really how people started to love me. Um, all the other stuff I talk about, like the products and hauls and tutorials, there's other gurus who do it better than I do. But, the openness I am able to speak about stuff like that, I think is what really attracts my core audience. And that's what I think separates me from everybody else. Which is why I call myself "Oprah Beauty," because I do think I have that kind of vibe to my videos. So I keep doing that because that's what people like about me. (Lisa, Personal Interview, April 2013)

Ester also tells me that storytelling plays a role in her videos; for her, storytelling is a way of helping the audience become "more comfortable getting to know me. Some of them

might think the same way that I think, or experience things that I have, and then they can relate to things that I've gone through" (Esther, Personal Interview, April 2013). Grabill and Pigg argue in online spaces, identity is

> performed and leveraged in small, momentary, and fleeting acts. These identity performances work productively as non-rational argumentative moves within online discussions. Those who do not hold traditional forms of expertise participate by performing identity in ways that extend beyond establishing individual credibility. These performances create argumentative space by shaping how the conversation unfolds and enables the exchange of information and knowledge. (101)

Storytelling as identity work functions by shaping a conversation between members of the community; as a rhetorical move, it enables those who "do not hold traditional forms of expertise" (e.g., they are not skincare experts, or makeup artists) to leverage their identities (and their ethos) as a means of carving out a space for engagement and interaction to take place between and amongst community members.

<div align="center">Instruction</div>

This rhetorical move that I identified in the data, as the name indicates, is instructional in nature; it is a facilitation move that teaches the audience how to do something—this can be a material practice, such as how to style a particular item of clothing; it might also be rooted in a material practice (such as applying makeup) but have much deeper implications that speak to expressions of individual desire and agency (such as how to achieve a smoky eye look for Asian eyes, or how to do makeup in the style of a Korean pop-star).

I believe that it is of significance that YouTube's beauty community, as an instructional space, has been of particular use to women of Asian and Asian American descent; as such, this group enjoys a high level of visibility in the community—a function that begins to address Gajjala and Oh's questions of whether cyberfeminism might not be an embodiment of feminist politics but merely the presence, and self expression, of women in online spaces. When I asked my research participant, Lisa, why she believed so many women of Asian and Asian American are highly visible and popular in the community. In an email dated June 26, 2013, Lisa replied, telling me that "I think you don't see a lot of asian [sic] women in media as supermodels/celebrities so maybe we need a place to share information since asian [sic] features are much different from other races' features" (Lisa). One of these features, Lisa points out, is the Asian eyelid, which can sometimes appear as an eyelid with a single, rather than double, fold—also known as a monolid. In her email, Lisa went on to explain that "the struggle for me was 'how do i make my eyes look like i have a crease when i don't' and my own skin issues. that's why i was so into makeup because i had to struggle with those techniques (they weren't straightforward) so i had to work a lot harder at it" [sic] (Lisa). As I discuss in Chapter Five, this move became increasingly important to this project as I began to understand much of the instruction in the community as a kind of professional writing, or technical communication.

A Call to Action

This move, coded in the data as ACT, appears on the surface to be that which the community is often criticized for: a space that seems to validate the Habermasian definition of a public sphere—one whose purpose is no longer to effect change, but

simply to produce positive or negative feedback. Indeed, this kind of discourse happens in the community; as one participant tells me, being part of the community means that "I have so much more makeup than I ever would have wanted to have" (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012). My own participation in the community resulted in a similar shopping spree of makeup and skincare products that participants raved about in their videos and encouraged their viewers to purchase. Many members of the community are also sponsored by beauty companies; these members will often promote sponsored products, creating an air of distrust within the community as to whether a member's opinion is "genuine" or "sponsored.' Yet, the data reveals that this is not the only call to action that appears in the videos. The establishment of ethos through storytelling can leveraged to compel community members to act on a number of ways, including consumer-driven actions (e.g., buying product).

Shared Language

This move indicates usage of terms that are circulated and shared within the beauty community. Such words, such as *haul* and *review*, carry specific meaning in the community that most members are familiar with and use in their videos. I believe that use of shared language is a means of establishing ethos as a community member, and also a way of establishing connection with others. In my interviews with Lisa and Esther, I asked if they could help me generate a list of specific words that were used in the community that might become part of a "beauty community glossary." Lisa and Esther reported that there were many words that are circulated within the community and that constitute shared knowledge amongst community members. Such words include "haul,"

"subscribe," and "link is in the down bar." We did not compile and exhaustive list of shared terms, but established that such terms exist in the beauty community.

In one of her videos, Esther begins her dialogue by greeting the audience: "Hey guys, It's [Esther], and today I have a haul to share with you guys . . . I got request to film a mini haul, so here it is" ("Mini Clothing Haul"). She does not explain what "haul" means; rather, she assumes that the audience has previous knowledge of this term. In fact, her audience is so familiar with the term that one member makes a request using the phrase "haul." There is no explanation in the video of the phrase, which indicates that the audience is expected to know (or find an explanation for) the term. In the videos that I analyzed, this was frequently the case, and shared terms were used with no definition or explanation; rather, it was assumed that audience members would be familiar with the terms.

Evaluation

This move involves evaluating a product or service (such as a beauty product). It also often involves making a recommendation to the audience based on experience and expertise that comes with using the product. This is the rhetorical move that is perhaps one of the unique characteristics of the community, because while it necessitates some degree of expertise and can result in sponsorships (and entrepreneurial opportunities) for women, it is also the move that is most commercial in nature. The presence of this move indicates one of the tensions that I identified in my analysis of data in the community between discourses that are typically understood as conflicting, but which I argue in my analysis is a productive tension between discourses that are not mutually exclusive. In Lisa's "Asian Hair" video, this move appears more frequently than any other. Lisa

evaluates a hair product and recommends that the audience search for the product on eBay:

> The last thing I use is Moroccan oil. Moroccan argan oil. I've been loving this
> stuff, and I got this for eight dollars at Walgreens and the brand is called Organix .
> . . I compared this with CHI silk infusion, and honestly chi silk infusion smells
> like cat fertilizer compared to this . . . You know just eBay Moroccan argan oil
> and it should be good and your hair will be really smooth and soft like mine.
> (Lisa, "Asian Hair")

This move is related to the ACT move in that it can often result in a call to action, where audiences are urged to act upon the recommendation (as we see in the last portion of the data above) and are asked or told to purchase the product.

Situational Analysis

The codes that I explained above emerged from three rounds of analysis as most frequent and relevant to this study, and guided the interviews that I conducted. Clarke's *Situational Analysis* played an important role in my reflexive and critical research practices and as a practice to help me see the emergence of these important themes or focal points in the data. I drew from *Situational Analysis* to create a mapping practice that would enable me to progress from conceptual themes theoretical sampling, such that at the appropriate point in my data collection process new data collection would be guided by the conceptual categories that emerged. I began the situational analysis by following the guidelines that are outlined in Clarke, starting with the questions: What nonhuman things really "matter" in this situation of inquiry, and to whom or what? Further, what

ideas, concepts, discourses, symbols, sites of debate, and cultural "stuff" may "matter" in this situation? What facilitates access? What hinders access?

In my situational mapping process I developed an expansive, messy situational map. I included concepts that came to my mind from my own experiences in the beauty community, and I also revisited the first two rounds of interviews and also included concepts, discourses, material things, and cultural objects and concepts. These were the first things that I put on the map, followed by the other human and nonhuman actors that came to mind when I asked the questions of what things really matter in the situation that is the beauty community, what ideas, concepts, discourses, symbols, etc. are present in the situation.

When creating the first messy situational map other concepts emerged, so I followed the guidelines in Clarke as I developed the situational map. This is what Clarke refers to as a "quick and dirty relational analysis based on the situational map" (Clarke 102). The procedure according to Clarke involves creating photocopies of the original situational map; in my own mapping I used colored ink to do the relational mapping. The next step was to "take each element in turn and think about it in relation to each other element on the map. Literally center on one element and draw lines between it and the others and specify the nature of that relationship by describing the nature of that line" (Clarke 102). The purpose of the relational maps is to "help the analyst to decide which stories--which relations--to pursue" (102). I used different colors to circle elements on the map that seem to be related, though most of the descriptions on how these things are related is not actually written on the map. I ended up with some distinct groupings in different colors, that I then began listing so I could more easily see what was in those

groupings. These groupings became the focal points in the data—the emergent themes—that I then used for my theoretical sampling practices. I used the same situational mapping technique in the second situational map that I conducted in the study, drawing on data gathered from the refined coding process and interviews.

The methodology, methods, and tools that I used in this study were selected because they best fit with my own critical stance as a researcher, my identity as a feminist academic and as a woman of color, and also because I sought to answer both empirical and philosophical research questions. In a larger version of this study, I believe that these tools could be further developed to understand data that was too plentiful to include in the scope of this project (e.g., user comments on the videos that I chose to analyze) and could make use of additional analytical tools. As I mention previously, the scope of this project was such that I was only able to capture a small slice of the data that is present in the many artifacts that are created for and used by members of the community. This data includes, but is not limited to, visual components of the digital videos, audio components of the videos, captions, user comments that are generated in response to the videos, and other ephemera that are produced with other connected platforms are part of the rhetorical experience of a "channel." I also believe that the mixed methods that I developed are replicable for use in analyzing similar phenomenon in a way that accounts for the stories and experiences that participants experience. In the next section, I present in detail the data gathered and analyzed using these tools and methods and provide findings and implications for my research.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CYBERFEMINISM IN THE BEAUTY COMMUNITY

"Knowing that I'm shaping this community means power. I feel powerful. And I think I like that." –Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013

In this study, I identified several rhetorical practices of women in the beauty community that might be understood as feminist rhetorical practices, even if they do not explicitly appear as such. As we see in the following data, members of the community make use of a global corporate platform—YouTube—in order to address the needs and interests of women by representing themselves in ways that resist certain normative discourses while reinforcing others. Participants do rhetorical work in the videos that they produce that constructs the ways that women experience the community as a commercial platform and as an identity-building space. Their feminist rhetorical practices, however, are intertwined with their commercial activities as entrepreneurs as well as their experiences as women of color.

I experienced the tension between my personal and professional identities firsthand as a participant in the beauty community, sharing participant Lisa's fear of being "found out" as a member by friends and colleagues. In one of her interviews with me, participant Lisa (who I introduce in Chapter One) hints at the operation of a dominant discourse at play in this online space, one of female gender performance and appearance, and expresses her anxiety over participating in this discourse while also maintaining her other identities, such as her professional identity. She reported in her first interview that when she first began making videos for the community, she did not want anyone to find out—that she feared being perceived as less capable and intelligent by her

corporate colleagues. Her statement implies that intelligent women should know better than to participate in this type of activity. This anxiety suggests that not everyone experiences online spaces in the same way—their social locations shape their experiences, their access, and their participation. Despite this anxiety, Lisa continues to participate in this community, as do many other women, many of whom also identify as women of color. In fact, Lisa uses her videos as medium to address some of these issues locations head-on In this section, I present findings from my coding and interviewing and implications for these findings for feminist (specifically, cyberfeminist) theory.

Feminist Rhetorical Practices

I believe that women in this community engage in feminist rhetorical practices. Yet, as I demonstrated in my discussion of cyberfeminism in Chapter Two, these feminist rhetorical practices do not always align with feminist rhetorical theory, particularly those practices that seem at first to be uncritical of dominant discourses of beauty and consumerism. According to Paasonen, cyberfeminism is "a *critical feminist stance* that aims to both denaturalize ways in which girls and women are addressed in online content production and site design, *and* to connect such investigations to feminist media studies and feminist theory 'offline'" (24). This definition is similar to that which Wilding provides (n.d.). Both authors claim that cyberfeminism in practice necessitates an alignment with feminist theory "offline." But feminist theory "offline" that has been created largely by academics who possess some degree of privilege in articulating a feminism that is not accessible by all women, especially women who are marked as Other or who participate in activities that do not immediately align with feminist politics. In my study, I found several rhetorical practices of women in the beauty community that might

be understood as feminist rhetorical practices, even if they are not explicitly labeled as such. That is, women repurpose a global corporate platform—YouTube—in order to address the needs and interests of women by representing themselves in ways that resist certain normative discourses while reinforcing others. As I demonstrate in this chapter, my participants do rhetorical work that constructs the ways that women experience the community as a commercial platform and as an identity-building space. Their feminism, however, is intertwined with their practices as entrepreneurs and their experiences as women of color. Gajjala and Oh argue that they "suspect that digital technologies, intertwined with neoliberal market logic, exercise subtle, indeed invisible, power . . . How do we intervene when cyberfeminism is not considered to embody feminist politics but is used as a buzzword to celebrate women's mere presence and self-expression online?" (Gajjala and Oh 2). While this is indeed a concern and the YouTube platform certainly stems from this same neoliberal market logic, the participants in my study show an awareness of this power and demonstrate how they modify this power and use it for their rhetorical purposes—both personal and entrepreneurial. "Cyberfeminism" may not be a term circulated in the community. One of my participants, Lisa, said in her video that she prefers to use the term "girl power" in reference to her own position in the community. Yet, my data suggests that the community is more than a place for women's' presence and self-expression, particularly as women of diverse backgrounds construct and use the beauty community for identity work that is as essential to cultural sustainability as to commercialism, entrepreneurship, and profit. Tollar Collins argues that material rhetorics are concerned with the "rhetoric of women who are not feminist prototypes, women whose texts may even be implicated in patterns of hierarchy and

domination" (550). I extend this framework to the texts (videos) of the women who participated in my study.

In this chapter, I explain several concepts that have emerged from my data analysis as important components of this online community of women, with supporting evidence from participant interviews that indicate that the concepts of *instruction, storytelling*, and *constructing an audience* are persistent rhetorical strategies that women use in this space as a means of identity work and constructing this community. I will also discuss the significance of each of these rhetorical moves in regards to my initial research questions (*What is this phenomenon? Who participates in this phenomenon?*) as well as how they emerged from the data during the research process. These concepts emerged in the process of multiple rounds of developing and refining the qualitative discourse analysis tools that I used. Finally, I present these findings in relationship to the body of scholarship known as cyberfeminism.

Cyberfeminism and Consumerism

During the early phases of this research project, I presented some initial findings, mostly in the form of observations about the community and the development of a research methodology, to a small audience at a regional conference. While the audience seemed interested in the project, one man raised his hand, offering his interpretation of what I had gathered so far about the community: "Of course, this community is all about women teaching other women how to look attractive for men." He was referencing the function of the makeup tutorial, of course. This is a common misinterpretation of the beauty community. While it is true that this is a space where women can (and often do) learn norms of female gender performance, the community is in fact not for or about

men: it is an online space primarily used by and for women, where women express their

needs and how they can be met through participation in the community. I demonstrate

this aspect of the community in the examples below. This is one of the characteristics

about the beauty community that make it possible to understand as a space in which

feminist rhetorical practices happen. Figure five illustrates some of the videos participant

Lisa offers on her channel intended to meet the needs of her mostly young, female

audience.
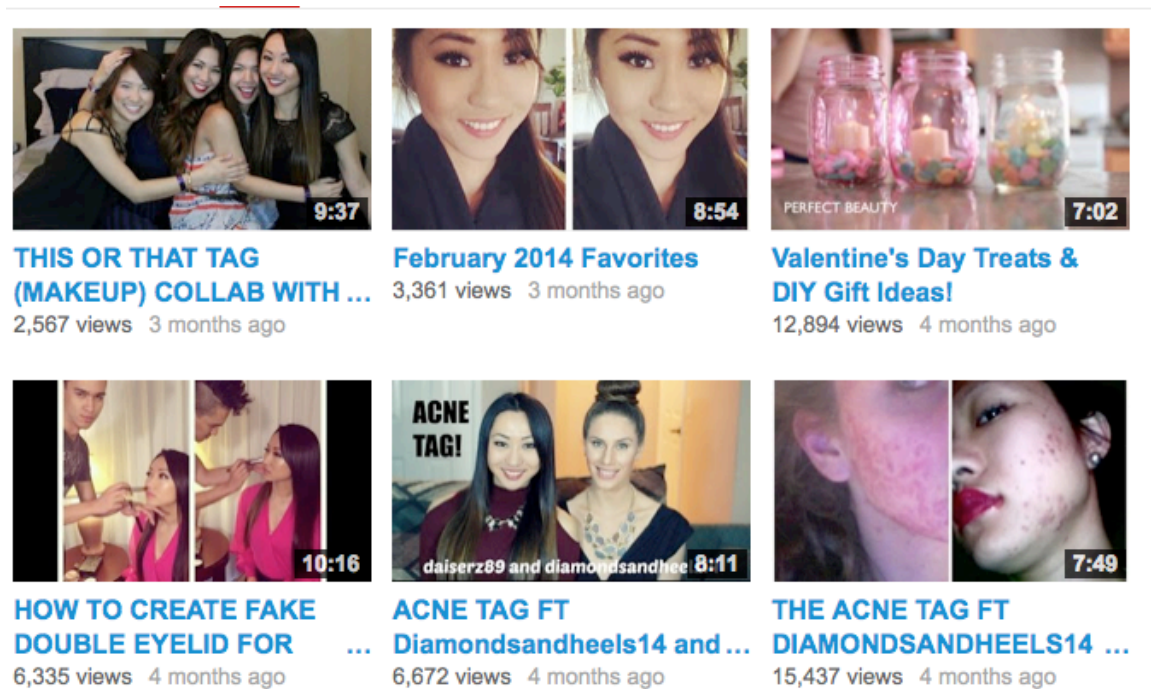
Figure 5: Screenshot of six videos on Lisa's YouTube channel. The above screenshot of six videos reads, from left to right and top to bottom: THIS OR THAT TAG (MAKEUP) COLLAB WITH…; 2.567 views, 3 months ago; February 2014 Favorites; 3,361 views, 3 months ago; Valentine's Day Treats & DIY Gift Ideas!; 12,894 views, 4 months ago; HOW TO CREATE FAKE DOUBLE EYELID FOR…; 6,335 views, 4 months ago; ACNE TAG FT Diamondsandheels14 and…; 6,672 views, 4 months ago; THE ACNE TAG FT DIAMONDSANDHEELS14…; 15,437 views, 4 months ago

Lisa makes videos for young women, including young women who have

experienced negative feelings because of their perceived differences. For example, one of

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her videos, "Get Ready With Me in 3 Minutes: Ulzzang Eyes" is a tutorial for a Korean style of makeup (known as "ulzzang"—a pretty, polished style of makeup) that young women can do in a short amount of time. She also has video titled "Be Yourself," a tutorial in which she tells viewers a story about her motivations for creating a YouTube channel and expresses her feelings of loyalty to the identity that she created despite offers from corporate sponsors to purchase her channel. Other videos include a Taylor Swift outfit inspiration video and a video about educating young women about healthy eating practices suggest that Lisa constructs an audience of younger women who are interested in learning about both self-acceptance and self-improvement. She also includes videos about how to be successful as an entrepreneur in the beauty community, how to "be yourself," and how to get into college along with makeup tutorials, hair tutorials, outfit ideas, and product reviews. When I asked Lisa how she generates ideas for content, she told me that audience feedback, both positive and negative, plays a role in helping her come up with new ideas:

> Feedback . . . goes up and down, you know, sometimes I post a video and it's like terrible feedback … and then some of the videos it's like oh my god you're my favorite guru. I honestly don't think the feedback hurts. I really don't have problems with the negative feedback . . . What I love about YouTube is just being so different, and connecting with other women like you and getting trusted beauty advice. (Lisa, November 2012).

In fact, Lisa tells me that she has received very strong and at times emotional reactions from her audience. Lisa does not produce her videos in isolation. She is highly involved with her audience, seeking and receiving feedback regularly from women who watch her

channel about the kinds of content that they find most meaningful and useful. Audience members go so far as to send Lisa personal emails, rather than just comment on her channel, to provide her with feedback:

> They send me really long emails, very tear jerking, almost an autobiography about themselves, about one of the stories I portrayed because they finally found someone they can relate to and they realize, ok this girl is like this and now she's ok so maybe I can be that way . . . They see me going through that and I guess I used to be really afraid of showing my skin, but when I did it felt very relieving and people really liked me for that. (Lisa, April 2013).

In her interview with me, Lisa tells me about her interactions with the audience that she constructs: "A lot of girls look up to me" on YouTube, she says. "I don't have to be just a girl who's really into makeup. *I can do other things*" (emphasis mine) (Lisa, Personal Communication, June 2013). Lisa's rhetorical work is twofold. First, she constructs a female audience that plays a role in shaping her content and her channel, creating a space for women in which feedback from other women is valuable. Second, she performs an identity as a woman of color that is complex. She participates in certain dominant discourses of female gender performance while denaturalizing norms of (Asian) race and identity, constructing her own identity as multifaceted and complex. She is neither solely education- nor career-driven, the stereotype of the successful Asian American (the "model minority), nor is she the weak, passive, and silent Asian American female. In her videos and in her interviews, Lisa describers herself as fashion-forward, resourceful, an entrepreneur, the child of immigrant parents, Chinese-American, budget-conscious,

powerful, influential, college graduate, interested in "girl power," a "guru," as well as flawed, as having experienced hardship, racism, and isolation.

Esther's channel is quite different from Lisa's—both in the kinds of videos that she makes (most of her videos are in the tutorial and haul genres, which I define and explain in the next section) and in the size of her audience (most of her view counts are in the hundreds, while Lisa's are in the tens of thousands). Ester also offers a variety of videos on her channel (see figure 6).
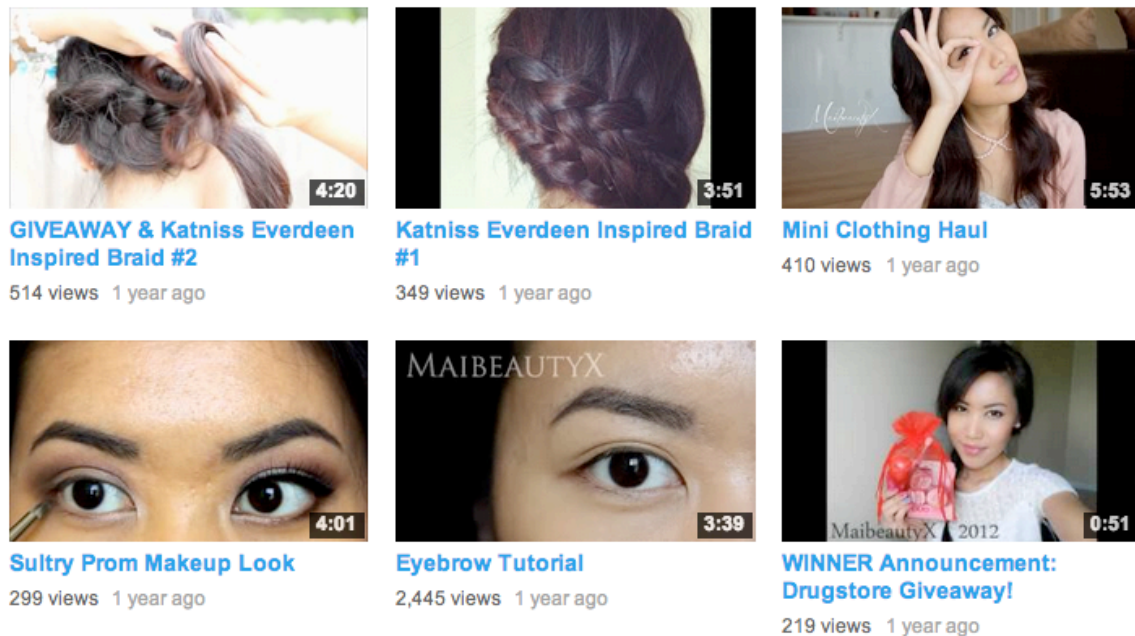
Figure 6: Screenshot of six videos on Esther's YouTube channel. The above screenshot of six videos reads, from left to right and top to bottom: GIVEAWAY & Katniss Everdeen Inspired Braid #2; 514 views, 1 year ago; Katniss Everdeen Inspired Braid #1; 349 views, 1 year ago; Mini Clothing Haul; 410 views, 1 year ago; Sultry Prom Makeup Look; 299 views, 1 year ago; MaiBeautyX Eyebrow Tutorial; 2,445 views, 1 year ago; WINNER Announcement: Drugstore Giveaway!; 219 views, 1 year ago

This sample also includes two hair tutorials for a character from the *Hunger Games* movie series and a prom makeup tutorial, indicating that Ester also views her audience as, at least in part, younger women, and also constructs an audience that is interested in popular culture and quick tips for makeup and fashion. In her interview, Esther told me

that her audience is comprised of "people who are interested in the same thing as I am" and that she tends to keep her videos short and to the point, so she believes her audience also "are people who actually *just want to learn something* and be done with it" (emphasis mine) (Personal Communication, March 2013). It is important to note that she views her audience as having shared interests with her—indicating that the beauty community, for her, is a space to connect with others, and also a space where learning happens. She assumes an audience that is willing to learn from her and discusses her strategy for effective teaching: delivery of information should be quick and concise. This is important because Esther positions herself as a teacher in the community, a woman with valuable knowledge to share with others. Ester repurposes the platform as an instructional space. Her videos instruct audiences on how they can perform certain norms of gender and appearance in the form of clothing and makeup. Yet as an instructor, Esther puts herself in the position of choosing what gets represented and how—a position rarely afforded to women, especially women of color.

My short descriptions of the types of videos produced by my two case participants and their own views of the purposes and audiences may seem to contrast my claims with regard to feminist theory and practice. This contrast or tension is one of the key outcomes of my project. Members of the beauty community employ at times tactical and other times systemic moves. These uses complicate the notion of the beauty community as a purely commercial, consumer-driven space. The identities of the women in the community as they are embodied in the videos they produce are intertwined with their practices as businesswomen and entrepreneurs. According to Gajjala and Oh, cyberfeminism "necessitates an awareness of how power plays not only in different

locations online but also in institutions that shape the layout and experience of cyberspace" (1); it is concerned with "issues of [women's'] empowerment online" (Levina 14). As I will detail more fully in what follows, the beauty community can be understood as a place where women shape the experience of the YouTube platform for its members.

My analysis of participant videos also supports my argument that members of the beauty community construct an audience of women whose feedback is sought and valued, in turn shaping the content of the community. The codes that emerged in my analysis (see chapter 3 for details on analysis) all share a high level of concern with audience—this concern is one of the major themes that runs through the data in this study. Several of the codes indicate a direct invitation for audience feedback or participation. In Lisa's videos, for example, eleven percent (11%) of the content that I analyzed was coded as "AUD," which indicates directly and explicitly addressing the audience in a way that invites participation and interactivity. In Esther's videos, the same code appeared in nine percent (9%) of the content that I analyzed. These numbers may not appear high in frequency, but they make up a significant portion of data that suggests that audience participation and feedback are integral to the community. Women play a direct role in determining what content that is valuable in the community—which has in turn shaped the platform, YouTube. The makeup tutorial genre, for which the community has become known, become popularized when Michelle Phan, perhaps one of the most visible members of the community with 4.8 million subscribers at the time of this writing, began creating tutorials in 2006. Users can now select "Howto & Style" as a category for their channel content, which links channels with similar content. In this highly visible

platform, women play an integral role in shaping the content members produce, which in turn shapes the interface and experience of the YouTube platform.

Participants in this study demonstrate an awareness of how power works in online spaces shaped powerfully by institutions like Google and YouTube. They both resist and work within these systems to their advantage. Participants use one rhetorical strategy in particular, which is hinted at above—storytelling—to do the work of constructing the community; this is an important rhetorical move for building identity and culture. I elaborate on this rhetorical move and its significance at length in the sections below. The community can also be understood as an entrepreneurial space, where women learn through practice the strategies that they use as entrepreneurs. In this section, I explore both of these aspects of the community and how they can contribute to and push at the boundaries of our understanding of cyberfeminism and feminist rhetorical practices. I will discuss two genres of videos, hauls and reviews, as texts that embody this complex coexistence.

Hauls and Reviews

In my analysis of videos from participant channels, the top three most frequent codes were EVAL (evaluation), STOR (storytelling), and INST (instruction) (see chapter 3 for details on analysis). This means that participants used these rhetorical moves most frequently in their videos. I cross-checked this information with the participants, who agreed that they make these moves frequently in their videos. As I discuss in the methodology chapter of this project, the videos that I chose to analyze were mostly from the haul and review genres of video, although some tutorials were included in the data set. I find this frequency of codes compelling because while evaluation of a product

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(which situates the subject of the video rhetorically as an expert) is somewhat expected in a video that is meant to review a product, the emergence of storytelling as a theme in the videos was unexpected. In this section, I discuss two genres of videos that are frequently used in the community, the haul and review video, and their significance to this project.

Haul and Review Videos

I would like to devote some time to unpacking the genre of the "haul" video before proceeding with further analysis. Many of the videos that I selected for this study are haul and review-type videos. Tutorials are also present in the data sample, but the genres of videos that contained the most speaking in the channels that I selected were "hauls" and "reviews." Not all of the videos fall into these genres, but many do. This is significant because these genres of videos serve different purposes for the community, and hence might be said to have different rhetorical purposes for their audiences. I have tried to define two of these genres here using what participants have told me in their interviews.

While the concepts of "tutorial" and "review" are fairly straightforward as types of videos and appear in numerous other types of videos outside of the beauty community as well as outside of YouTube, the haul video is unique to the beauty community and deserves further explanation. Lisa, my participant, told me that if she were to create a glossary of most used terms in the beauty community, "haul" would be included as an important term. The purpose of a haul video, according to Lisa, is for participants to "share what they bought [and] to get feedback" on purchased items (Lisa, Personal Interview, April 2013). According to Esther, a haul video involves "people talking about how they found the product and going about their day" (Personal Interview, April 2013).

Haul videos, then, are videos in which subjects show and discuss merchandise that they purchase. Purchased items can be from the same retailer (for example, one might film a "Walgreens haul," or a video documenting items purchased at Walgreens) or from different retailers (for example, "drugstore makeup haul"). Often in the beauty community this merchandise will be beauty products, clothing, or makeup. Review videos are quite similar to haul videos; the difference between a haul and a review video is simply the presence of evaluation (EVAL) in which the subject evaluates or gives an assessment of the products purchased. Sometimes the reviews are lengthy and detailed, and at other times, reviews are brief. Haul and review videos overlap quite a bit in subject matter—both focus primarily on recently purchased (or gratis) product. In figure 7, Lisa provides detailed information on beauty products in her haul video.

Figure 7: Screenshot from Lisa's "Beauty Products Haul" video on her YouTube channel

Similarly, in figure 8, Esther discusses clothing that she has recently purchased in her mini clothing haul video.

Figure 8: Screenshot from Esther's "Mini Clothing Haul" video on her YouTube channel

When I ask Lisa to tell me more about the haul video in particular, her comments suggest that tension surrounds the genre, because of conceptions about the videos that point to a culture that promotes and encourages spending:

I think it's fine [but] I think its kind of ridiculous the stuff people buy. Um, because I think when you see these haul videos you're way more inclined to spend. And you realize that this is the top 1% of the population who cares so much about this. So I think it does put a different perception of people's reality, which may or may not be healthy. (Personal Interview, April 2013).

As Lisa mentions, haul videos often encourage participants to go out and purchase the items in the video. They can generate hype around certain kinds of product and some participants in the community use haul videos to advertise products for which they were sponsored. As someone who participated in the community and created haul videos, I

agree with Lisa's statement that haul videos encourage spending—both for the creator of the video and for the consumer. The beauty community has been the subject of criticism from participants and from mainstream media for its emphasis on material goods and products. In her conversation with me, Lisa tells me that since joining the beauty community, she has become much more aware of her buying habits, which have changed since she began participating in the community:

> Now when I buy stuff, I think oh, you know, should I feature this in a video? What would get more views? Or when I buy, I think oh, maybe I could get a lookbook out of this. So [participating] says you have an obsession over material things, and I don't think that benefits or is very healthy. But you know for me . . . I don't really take it that seriously, so I'm not going to go out and buy Louis Vuitton bags just because someone else has it on YouTube . . . I do love making [haul videos] but I've tried not making them because I'm afraid of what people might think of me, they might judge me based on my haul videos, you know, like this girl is very materialistic or superficial . . . I try to do the mundane episode about non-superficial things just to balance it out. (Personal Interview, November 2012).

As Lisa states above, the community, and the haul video in particular, can be a sensitive topic. Yet, the high frequency of storytelling in haul and review videos (19% and 33% of total content in Lisa's and Esther's video data, respectively) indicates that perhaps something else is happening in these videos. Data from my interviews and analysis of videos suggest that storytelling plays a role in identity work in these videos.

The kinds of identity work that appear in the haul and review videos are not limited to discussions related to consumerism and identification with consumer choices, which was one of Habermas' critiques about so-called public spheres. While this kind of work is undeniably part of the rhetoric of the haul and review videos, the storytelling involved in the videos serves specific rhetorical purposes. I demonstrate and elaborate on these rhetorical moves and their purposes in the following sections.

Storytelling as Identity Work

Storytelling as it is used in this community is a rhetorical move. It is also a form of identity work—work that serves to articulate and realize the complex (and sometimes conflicting) nature of identity. I believe that identity work is important in this community because it can serve to reconcile or make sense of the at times conflicting nature of identity. It also works as a mechanism of cultural sustainability and community-building for participants who may otherwise feel isolated or separated from their home cultures. When resistance to normalizing and oppressive discourse happens in the community, it is in the form of storytelling to assert a complex, and often seemingly contradictory, identity.
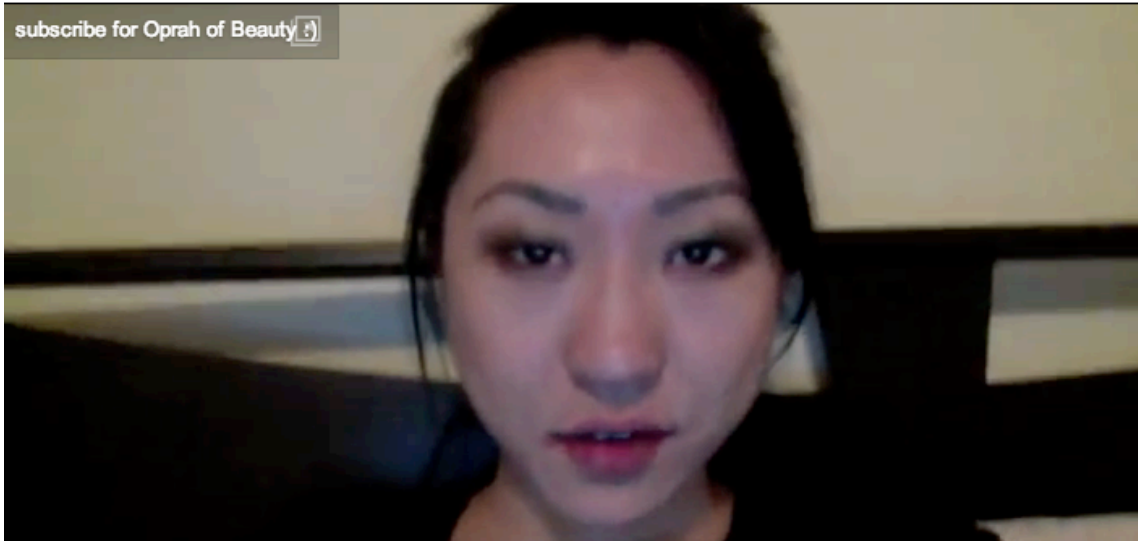
Figure 9: Screenshot from Lisa's "Be Yourself" tutorial on her YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads: subscribe for Oprah of Beauty

In her "Be Yourself" tutorial for the beauty community (see figure 9), Lisa discusses her past experiences of feeling isolated because of her identity as a woman of color growing up in Minnesota. She describes her first experiences on the Internet and how she used services such as Angelfire and Geocites to construct a (white) American version of her identity online:

> I remember when I was twelve years old . . . I taught myself how to make these websites. And I created a blog . . . and I had this girl on here, I had a persona. And her name was Jennifer Foster. And I myself at twelve years old, I called myself Jennifer Foster, and I was a blonde haired girl with divorced parents. And I created this persona on the Internet that fit in with everything I saw around me. And maybe it was because I created her as a persona to fit in, because I didn't feel like I fit in with you know, people at school or whatever. So I created this online identity because behind a computer . . . I felt like I could fit in. (Lisa, "Be Yourself!")

Lisa goes on to discuss how this identity changed after she created her YouTube channel. While she would get "dolled up" for the beauty community, she says that this version of her identity was "a place for me to just be me." This kind of rhetorical identity work in the community can denaturalize some of the norms of race and appearance that members might experience offline. She then expresses a sense of conflict between the feeling of constructing a more accurate identity and being true to herself, and the "noise" of the advertising platform, YouTube:

> . . . My YouTube, when I first started it, was a place for me to just be me. For me to be who I am, and to have a voice and to feel like someone wanted to watch . . . Sure I'd get dolled up and stuff, for fun, but it wasn't like I was trying to impress anybody. And I want to remember that the reason why I have this, why it's called [channel name], and what it means, still is intact. That this is me. Sometimes I get lost in so much noise. YouTube has become an advertising platform and it's become a business for people . . . Because as you grow and as companies reach out with you and people want to partner with you and all that, it was weird that it was never about that, it was just me being me, and 30 eyeballs wanted to watch me . . . . (Lisa, "Be Yourself!").

Lisa explains that when she first began participating in the community, it was not about making money. Rather, it was a place to create an audience to an identity that she felt was more true to her. In one of her interviews with me, Lisa told me that "I feel like being on YouTube, people like me because of who I am. The honesty and stuff. Whereas in real life, you're not really sure. (Lisa, Personal Interview, October 2012). Yet, in this video, she also talks about the growth of her channel, and how she has worked to keep this part

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of her identity "intact." She is in tears in the video as she tells the audience about this sense of conflict; in the corner of the video a link appears: "like cause I cried on YouTUBE lol." "Likes" appear at the bottom of the video as ratings: this video has 492 likes and 18 dislikes--overwhelmingly positive ratings. Lisa includes a link that pops up in her video to encourage users to rate her video positively for her willingness to cry in front of her audience. Perhaps this is because for Lisa, this complicated identity, one in which she is true to herself, is also part of her brand (the "Oprah" of beauty)—the brand that she has built to increase traffic to her channel.

Esther, the other participant in my study, says that for her storytelling serves not only to create connections through shared interests with her audience, but also to "get the audience more comfortable getting to know me." This is important to her because "Some of them might think the same way that I think, or experience things that I have, and then they can relate to things that I've gone through. And with that there will be a connection, somehow, that they can connect with me." (Esther, Personal Interview, April 2013). Connecting with an audience can be a way of establishing credibility. Esther tells stories so that this will be a comfortable and enjoyable process. In figure 10, Esther gives viewers advice and provides a review of acne medications that she currently uses.

Figure 10: Screenshot from Esther's "How To: Deal With Acne" tutorial on her YouTube channel

In her "How To: Deal With Acne" video, Esther tells stories about her experiences dealing with acne and how these experiences made her feel. She talks about being embarrassed in a way that her audience may be able to relate to:

> During my first year of college, I had an extremely bad breakout. Like all over my face, and it was pretty embarrassing to go out in public. I have to say, acne is such an emotional road, like to me. Because it really made me have extremely low self-esteem. I didn't have any confidence. You know when talking to people I'd just try not to give eye contact, because if I give eye contact they're going to look at me and my face. (Esther, "How To: Deal With Acne")

After telling these stories, she reviews several prescription acne medications that she received from her doctor. Finally, she recommends that her audience seek the help of a dermatologist if they are able to, pointing out that it took her years to save enough money

to see the specialist, and recommends a skincare routine that she has found success with. Esther constructs an identity that is complex and knowledgeable. She positions herself such that she has useful information to share with others about a common problem. Establishing shared experiences through storytelling is an important step in which Esther builds her identity and also her credibility, both of which are important to attracting and retaining an audience.

Castells argues that individuals or collective actors rarely have only one identity; rather, there may be "a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role-sets" (Castells 6). In the beauty community role-sets are reinforced as much as they are resisted. Furthermore, the beauty community is a place in which identities are always in a state of change. According to Hall, "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think . . . we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 210). What's more, these changing identities carry with them their offline implications: performing these identities in an online space does not grant them amorphous, cyborg invisibility. Baym says that "Far from being a realm apart from the offline life, the many external contexts in which the participants live their everyday lives and are otherwise embedded—including culture, profession, physical contexts of computer use, domestic life, and more—both shape and are continually referenced in online practice" (Baym 128). Participants' everyday lives, their offline identities, are implicated in the identities that they construct online in the community. Castells discusses three forms of identity

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building. In my understanding of identity in this project I invoke in his concept of project identity, which he defines as "when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure" (8). This is where I see feminism happening in the beauty community. The building of an identity via storytelling that redefines the woman of color as occupying a position of power and expertise transforms the structure of the community, the audience, and the platform as a whole.

What is the Beauty Community?

To conclude this chapter, I want to take up one of the larger questions of my project: what is this phenomenon called "the beauty community"? My argument about the role of storytelling is necessary to understand in order to venture an answer to this larger question. But in this section, I discuss other ways in which participants repurpose an otherwise global commercial platform, YouTube. They do so by positioning themselves as powerful and knowledgeable. This move is related to storytelling as identity work but also distinct from it. Many of the most visible women in the community self identify as women of color. Michelle Phan, one of the most famous and powerful members of the community, identifies as Vietnamese-American; another highly visible "guru," Lindsey Tsang (Bubzbeauty) identifies as Chinese. My participant, Lisa, self identifies in her videos as Chinese-American. These are not only women in positions of power, they are also women of color, many of whom use storytelling as a rhetorical move in their videos to discuss experiences of racial profiling, disempowerment, and marginalization.

The beauty community is also a place where they can uphold some of those very same conditions, for example, by participating in dominant discourses of beauty and appearance. After all, to be popular in this space, "you have to be pretty" (Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013). With this in mind, I want to revisit for a moment Wilding's concern for the lack of "women in visible positions of leadership in the electronic world" (n.p.), a critique of so-called cyberfeminist groups on the Internet. It is significant to note that participant Lisa equates power with her role in constructing this community:

> Knowing that I'm shaping this community means power. I feel powerful. And I think I like that (laughs). I would say that I'm a little more business oriented and ambitious than a lot of other girls. And so I think it's good to have someone on YouTube that is trying to start something on her own. On the Internet. (Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013).

Lisa takes a more entrepreneurial approach to her participation in the community; at the time of this writing, she has nearly 50,000 subscribers to her channel and has published 279 videos. Lisa's participation in the community is a full-time job, for which she makes a profit, as well as a business endeavor. She is currently working on a startup website that she spun off of the success of her YouTube channel. Lisa is one of many participants in the community with a large following. If cyberfeminism is to be defined in part by the presence of women in visible positions of leadership, the beauty community can be understood as a complex cyberfeminist space. It is highly significant, then, that these women demonstrate an awareness that they actively construct this space. Lisa reveals this awareness in the following statement:

I think a lot of people don't do it for the same reasons I am, which is why I'm

very different. I think a lot of girls are doing it for fame and free stuff, and you

know, monetary reasons, but for me, I try to stay away from that as much as

possible. The people who get into it, it's a lot of work. It's so much work. *I never*

realized how hard it is to build a community, or to build a brand. (Lisa, Personal

Interview, November 2012.

Interestingly, Lisa, though successful in building a large following on her YouTube

channel, says that her reasons for participation are not motivated by fame or sponsorship.

Still, she sees her role in the community as both constructing the community and

constructing her personal brand—signifying that she is also aware of the entrepreneurial

nature of her participation. Lisa positions herself as a powerful and knowledgeable

woman, and also as a *brand.* This is important because participants play an active role in

the construction of the community and are aware of their potential leadership roles in the

community, shaping it in to a women's entrepreneurial space as well as a space that is

important to identity-building. These discourses appear to be in conflict with each other,

especially to those trained to value certain discourses over others, but in fact, they are not

conflicting. They reside in tension with each other, and in some sense, support each other

(brand building is identity work).

In the beauty community, one of the is the repurposing of technology for the

individual needs of the women in the community, many of whom are women of color or

who belong to marginalized groups (both online and offline). The beauty community is a

place where women's needs are met. Many participants feature tutorials on how to do

makeup styles for the Asian "monolid," for example. They also feature makeup tutorials

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that show users how to replicate the makeup of popular Asian figures, such as K-pop (Korean popular music) bands. In one of our conversations, Lisa tells me that she believes that Asian and Asian American women particular enjoy high visibility in the community because:

> I think you don't see a lot of asian [sic] women in media as supermodels/celebrities so maybe we need a place to share information since asian [sic] features are much different from other races' features. (Lisa, Personal Communication, June 2013).

Her comment points to a need for information about makeup application and product that is specific to the features of Asian women; when I asked her why she first started participating in the beauty community, she noted that for her, finding a way to address this need was one of the reasons for her participation:

> The struggle for me was 'how do I make my eyes look like I have a crease when I don't and my own skin issues. That's why I was so into makeup because [sic] I had to struggle with those techniques (they weren't straightforward) so I had to work a lot harder at it. (Lisa, Personal Communication, June 2013).

In her interview with me, Esther tells me a story about why she chose to discuss her struggle with acne in her review of prescription acne medications. Esther talks about providing information for others who may be searching for solutions to similar problems, anticipating the needs of an audience who may have shared experiences with her:

> I knew there were other people out there searching for help, you know, especially from people who have gone through it firsthand—I feel that that's the most helpful, more than someone who has very little acne on their face and they're

talking about acne like they have an experience. That's why I decided to share my

story—because I've gone through it. You know I just want to put it out there,

because if anyone is looking for what I have to offer then they can find it helpful.

(Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012).

While Lisa and Esther talk about an important aspect of the community—meeting the

needs of the participants—they also tell me about their lives as entrepreneurs. As I

mentioned previously in this chapter, the beauty community is also a business place for

women. YouTube videos can be monetized to generate revenue for every ad shown and

every click on ads shown. Participants who are receptive to feedback and are able to meet

the needs of their audiences with their videos are more successful at attracting and

retaining an audience. View counts are valuable to these participants, as are the number

of subscribers that they attract. Lisa tells me that for her, success in the community has to

do with reaching her goal for number of subscribers and view counts:

I think everyone has a number (of subscribers), and I think it keeps going up. At

first, I was like oh, I just want one thousand, then it was five thousand, ten

thousand, now I want and now I want a hundred thousand . . . If you talk to

companies, they really like advertising on YouTube because you can see real time

data on traffic whereas for blogs and websites you have to figure it out yourself.

So they [companies] also rank people [YouTubers] by number of subscribers.

(Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013).

For Lisa, the number of subscribers that she has is directly related to both the growth of

her channel (and revenue made from each click) as well as growth of a base of users that

she accesses to grow her startup business. Esther's response, while slightly different from

Lisa's because of the smaller size of her channel, also points to the importance of subscribers, and she notes that for her, having a successful channel means "just seeing the number of views go up, and knowing that it's not just me watching my own videos" (Esther, Personal Interview, June 2013). For both of these participants, numbers are revenue and therefore highly valued.

Participants have shaped the experience of this online space for members of the community. It may appear that the institution and structure of a site may dominate the possibilities for uses of that site. For someone like myself, an academic trained in the humanities, it is tempting to imagine how participants could possibly resist the dominant themes of consumerism that are built into the interface of the site. Baym points out, however, that the structure of a site itself does not alone shape the experience of that site; that is, "knowing the structure and purpose of a site . . . does not tell us how it will be used nor what its consequences will be for any of its users" and that "different people may have very different experiences of the same spaces, pointing to the importance considering the participants and their perspectives as well as the spaces" when analyzing an online community (Baym 129). Knowing the structure and purpose of YouTube is important to understanding the nature of this community, but understanding the ways in which these structures are put to use (in ways that deviate from the purposes of the institutions and corporations which created the site) necessitate also stepping away from and being critical of our own desires as academics and researchers.

It may be difficult at first to understand the community as a space that deviates from certain norms because some rhetorical acts are so closely intertwined with activities that appear to be aligned with dominant and oppressive discourses. Although it is true

that discourses of consumerism can be sources of power in the community, the community is unique in that individuals such as my research participant, who report feelings of disempowerment in other parts of their lives because of their statuses as minorities/women of color, report feeling empowered in this space because of their roles in constructing the community and meeting the specific needs of particular groups of women. According to the findings in this study, storytelling in the beauty community functions as a kind of identity work—rhetorical work in which a complex and experience-based identity it established. Storytelling can be a tool for women to resist normalizing and oppressive discourse, for asserting an identity that redefines social structure, and for revealing the mechanisms by which those discourses (such as racial discourse) operate. This storytelling enables women to position themselves as knowledgeable and powerful within the context of a highly consumption-driven space; in this sense, it is a cyberfeminist space. At the same time, the women participate in and reinforce dominant discourses of gender performance, beauty, and consumerism, and teach other members to participate in these discourses. Identity building as rhetorical work is also part of the creation and maintenance of a brand; many women who participate in the community are entrepreneurs, and seek profit from this work. From my analytical perspective, given the data from this study and the stories of the participants, this is a complex community marked by a rhetoric in tension with itself that can contribute to and complicate our understandings of cyberfeminism and feminist rhetorical practices.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BUSINESS OF FEMINISM

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have established the ways in which this project draws

on post-positivist realist theories of identity to complicate what is often referred in

mainstream culture as "second-wave" (e.g., Kristeva, Irigaray, Butler, Haraway) and

subsequent movements in feminism that don't account for the kinds of identity and

entrepreneurial work that women do in the beauty community. I also discussed my own

anxieties as an academic and feminist participating in paid work for the community that

engaged consumer discourses that are often critiqued in my own field of study. In

Chapter Four, I presented data from my coding and interviews with Lisa and Esther, two

members of the community, and explained implications of their data for building on and

also complicating cyberfeminism, a branch of feminism that attempts to theorize

women's online feminist groups. Specifically, I discuss the tensions between the identity-

building and commercial rhetorical work that occur in Lisa and Esther's videos. As it

turns out, these discourses reside in constant tension with each other in the community;

they are not mutually exclusive. Participants report spillage between identity-building

and entrepreneurial work—they do not make a distinction between the two. In this

chapter, I examine this spillage in greater depth and present data from several other

popular channels in the beauty community that illustrate this spillage, with implications

for professional and technical writing. I also investigate the women's entrepreneurial

work that takes the form of instructional content, which I refer to as "technical

communication in the vernacular." Finally, I provide examples of and discuss the concept

of the channel itself as a rhetorical entity and how this phenomenon has let to the growth and migration of entrepreneurial work beyond the community; these women often work as interlocuters between organizations and consumers. I investigate examples of how the rhetorical moves that I identified in Chapter Three are used for brand growth as well as identity-building. This growth has enabled participants to draw on their YouTube user bases to start their own businesses. I explore the ramifications of these activities as they build on what we know about women in professional and workplace settings and examine parallels between what we call "professional writing" and the writing that beauty community members do as they produce and publish content for their channels.

Building a Brand, Building an Identity

In the final interviews that I conducted with my participants, I developed findings about the nature of commercial, entrepreneurial, and identity work in the community that I found at first to be conflicting and at odds with my own beliefs and values as a feminist and academic. My participants reported making videos for the community because it was a way to belong, and Lisa reported that it was a way for her to reveal her "authentic" self; at the same time, both reported profit as the bottom line when it came to their motivations. When I asked Lisa to define success in the community, she told me: "I think everyone has a number and I think it keeps going up. *I would say number of subscribers.* At first I was like, oh, I just want one thousand, and then it was five thousand, ten thousand, now I want a hundred thousand" (Lisa, Personal Interview, November 2012). Esther told me that while she had a small channel and for her success meant "Being able to get a few viewers to watch my videos," channels that she felt were most successful "have a very big audience and I feel like a lot of them reached that point where they get

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paid for what they do" (Esther, Personal Interview, March 2013). Subscribers—what Lisa refers to as a "core" audience—translate to advertising impressions via advertisements that appear in the videos, generate profit through YouTube's Partner program. YouTube users who are invited to join the Partner program receive a portion of the income generated by the advertisements. YouTube Partners have access to detailed analytics that provide information on the performance of ads on their videos. Power, according to Lisa, is both about shaping the community through content, and "the number of views" one receives on their videos, which ultimately translates to profit.

Analytics for my own channel, comprised of data that Google provides on all monetized YouTube channels, show cost-per-mile, or "estimated average gross revenue per thousand playbacks on which an ad was shown," as well as gross revenue for the channel and number of estimated monetized playbacks for the past month. This data is made easily accessible to users, and users are also able to retrieve detailed information on content performance, including absolute and relative audience retention, which is measured against a frame-by-frame timeline of video content. Users can use this data to determine which videos are most effective at retaining audiences, and which instances in their videos are most effective at retaining audiences for future content. Both participants reported that they use their analytics data as tools to improve video and channel performance. The wealth of data available to users through YouTube's analytics feature supports the entrepreneurial work that community members do. The data also suggests that YouTube's interface is already designed with functions that support entrepreneurship and further supports my finding that my research participants are businesswomen who are concerned with audience engagement and use the tools available to them to build their

brands *and* their identities. Many of the strategies that Lisa shared with me in her final

interview are what she considers her "trade secrets" for brand growth; they are carefully

developed strategies that over time increase subscribers and audience retention.

In my coding and analysis of Lisa's videos, I found a high frequency of the

rhetorical move that I coded as storytelling, or the audience move that draws on narrative

accounts of experience as a means of identity-and relationship-building. Storytelling

accounts for 19% of Lisa's video content, in videos (such as "haul" videos) that appear to

be otherwise commercial in nature. Storytelling in Esther's videos accounts for 33% of

video content in videos that appear to be similarly commercial in nature. This data led me

to believe that storytelling functions in the community as a mechanism of identity

building, audience retention, and, as Lisa later shared with me in one of her interviews, as

part of her successful marketing and branding strategy. This strategy is not unique to Lisa

and Esther's channels. As I discuss in next section of this chapter, one of the most well-

known members of the community, Michelle Phan--whose subscriber base exceeds

millions--has talked about storytelling in her interviews with mainstream news media as

one of the strategies that she uses in her videos to attract and engage with her audience, as

well as to share her experiences. Yet, these women craft identities in their videos that are

complex, even as they engage in commercial activity. They hint at (and sometimes

explicitly describe) their experiences embodying raced and gendered identities that are

marked in particular ways and use their videos as a platform to respond to and share their

experiences with their audience. I understand from the data that spillage, rather than

separation, occurs between women's identities, and the work that they do, as

businesswomen, entrepreneurs, and women of color.

Risky Businesses

Participation in the beauty community is risky, and riskier for some members than others. The notion of riskiness in constructing a particular kind of identity is reminiscent of Moraga's argument in *Learning From Experience* that we do not all experience or respond to oppression in the same way. Minority women, in addition to bearing the riskiness of their gendered identities, also do not have the privileges of whiteness that can grant them invisibility within in a dominant culture—the kind of invisibility upon which some feminist movements (see Chapter Two) were predicated, and which did no favors for many marginalized women who did have the same invisibility. YouTube is all about visibility; according to Lisa, participating in the community successfully is "all about being seen" (Personal Interview, June 2013). For Lisa, the riskiness of her videos was great enough that she did not publicly reveal her participation in the community until she had quit her corporate job. She stills feels uncomfortable and reports having to leave the room when in the company of another person who wants to view her videos in her presence. Yet, interestingly, Lisa has also identified riskiness as a factor in attracting an audience: her audiences want to see her do risky things. "I think definitely being risky and being successful have something to do with each other [on YouTube]," she told me. Building a brand that is intertwined with one's identity is in itself a risky activity for minority women whose identities are shaped by their experiences, especially when these experiences include marginalization and discrimination. This was an activity that Lisa did not feel comfortable with in her first participation in the community, and I also experienced this discomfort when I made videos for the community. Yet, Lisa also recognized that audiences seemed to respond to risky content, and made the decision to

quit her job and go full-time with her YouTube channel, developing what she believes are

risky videos that reveal much about her personal feelings and experiences as an Asian

American woman who suffers from skin problems. In her interview with me, she reported

that

> On my Google Analytics, all my most viewed videos are really like kind of gross
>
> beauty videos. Like how to get rid of clogged pores or how to get ride of acne.
>
> And I never, I wasn't even going to put that up. It was so embarrassing. And I put
>
> it up and it went viral. (Lisa, Personal Interview, June 2013)

The viral video to which Lisa is referring, titled "Get rid of blackheads and clogged pores

WARNING GRAPHIC," is one of Lisa's most-watched videos, with well over four

million views at the time of this publication. It is interesting that the title of this video

warns viewers of "graphic" content, which consists of up-close footage of Lisa's face,

and no more. In the video, Lisa appears sans makeup in front of her bathroom mirror and

shares step-by-step instructions on blackhead removal. She shows the audience how she

opens pores by steaming her face with a clothing steamer that is intended to remove

wrinkles from garments, then advises her audience to purchase a "comedone pusher" (a

blemish extracting instrument) and explains how to sterilize the tool. In front of a

magnification mirror, she demonstrates the process of extracting blemishes for her
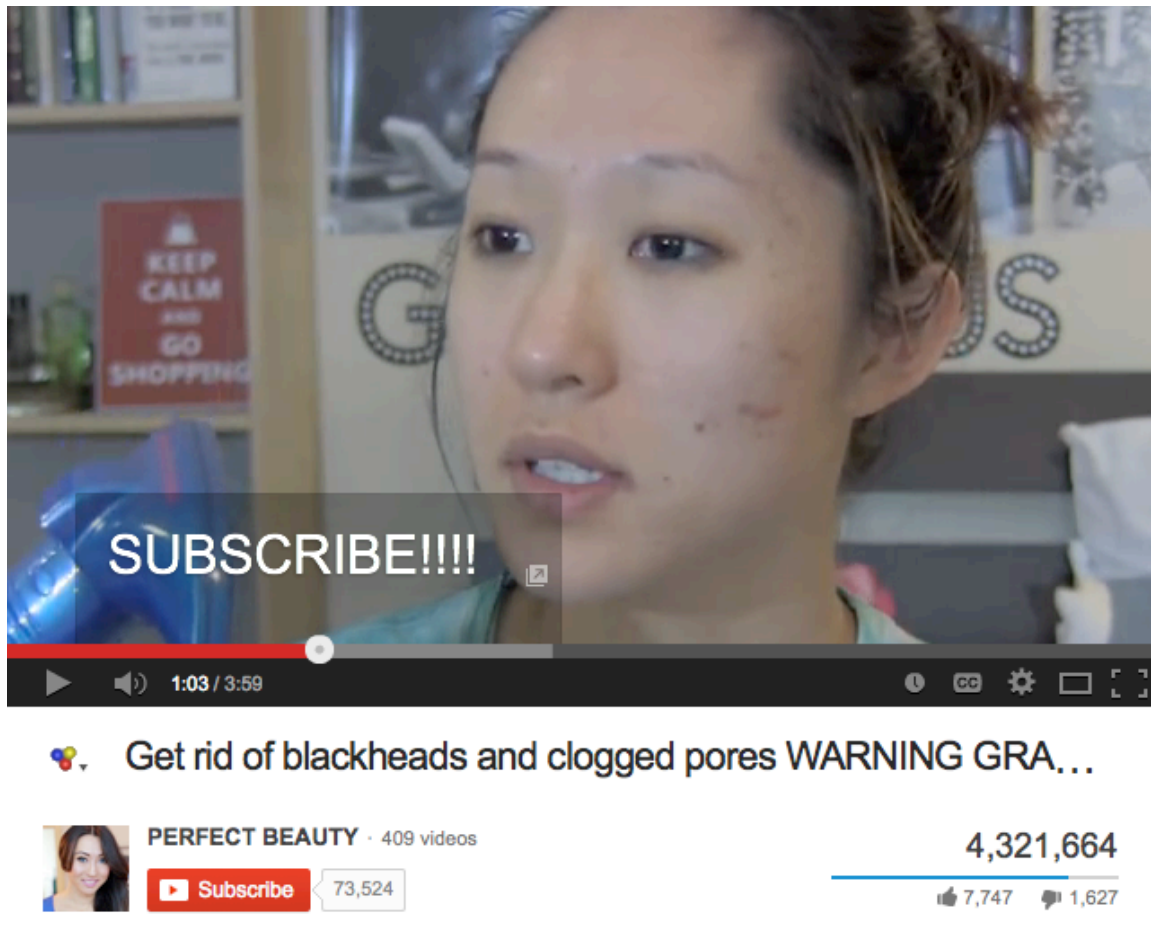
audience (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Screenshot from Lisa's viral blackhead removal video on her YouTube channel. The above screenshot reads, "SUBSCRIBE!!!!;" Get rid of blackheads and clogged pores WARNING GRA…; PERFECT BEAUTY; 409 videos; 4,321,664 views; 7,747 likes; 1,627 dislikes

Lisa said that publishing this kind of content is "how you stand out now" and that "I can't compete with doing a smoky eye look, but I can do embarrassing beauty stuff. Because nobody else wants to do it" (Personal Interview, June 2013). When I asked her what was so risky about producing this type of content, she said that "just showing my skin" was a risky activity for her. Why does Lisa warn her viewers that her content in this video is "graphic"? And why does Lisa feel that showing her skin is a risky activity? Does her "social location" (Alcoff) play a role in her experience of riskiness and vulnerability, given her identity? I found myself wondering whether others who are afforded the

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privileges of invisibility would experience the same anxieties. Despite these feelings,

Lisa reveals vulnerable information in her videos for her audiences. It seems that for Lisa,

risk increases with the visibility that is necessary for success.

Even in this online this platform, Lisa does not escape the politics of her offline

identity, or the anxieties that stem from her offline experiences as a woman of color who

does not fit the Western (white) beauty norm. Yet, Lisa has found that using this riskiness

to her advantage as a business tactic seems to promote channel growth: "I can't be you

know that really pretty girl on YouTube so that's not the angle I take. And also people

want this information, so they're obviously going to search for it" (Personal Interview,

June 2013). Lisa reported to me in her first interview that her subscribers would respond

strongly to these videos, writing letters about their own similar experiences and anxieties,

and how she helped them feel comfortable in their own skin (Personal Interview,

November 2012). Lisa's strategy of providing information that users want and request

from her, and delivering this information in a platform, YouTube, that she believes

involves high levels of risk given her identity as a woman of color who does not fit with

dominant beauty norms, is at the core of her brand. She refers to herself as the "Oprah of

beauty," and uses this strategy in the business that she developed from her YouTube

channel, yourperfectbeauty.com. She has identified the profitability of this activity, and

successfully leverages the riskiness of her identity for visibility in the community,

especially amongst audiences who share her social locations as women of color.

<div align="center">The Channel as a Rhetorical Phenomenon</div>

Entrepreneurial women in the community (successful entrepreneurs with popular

channels earn the title of "beauty guru") who seek profit from their videos have identified

an opportunity to generate income from their knowledge and ability to deliver information effectively to a broad and diverse audience. The explosion in popularity of several "beauty gurus" in mainstream media, some of whom are now celebrities, is testament to the profitability of this business. Michelle Phan, whose YouTube channel has reached about 5.5 million subscribers at the time of this publishing, reached commercial success when she signed a contract with Lancôme and agreed to produce "sponsored" videos for the cosmetic corporation, featuring their makeup products in her videos. Phan recently launched her own makeup line, em (which translates as "you" in Vietnamese) backed by L'Oreal USA, featuring her own (professionally produced) tutorials that users can reference to learn how to use the products. In her em michelle launch video, Phan tells her fans: "After a few years of collecting thousands of beauty questions, I had an idea to create a makeup line for you, my community . . . all of your makeup related comments, and feedback, inspired us to create and formulate the products and colors. If you've ever left a comment for me, you've helped co-create this makeup line" (Phan). Phan launched the makeup line with a video that she released on her YouTube channel (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Screenshot from Michelle Phan's makeup line launch video on YouTube. The above screenshot reads: finally! my makeup brand: em michelle phan; Michelle Phan; 317 videos; 6,508,803 subscribers; 2,538,532 views; 105,699 likes; 2,474 dislikes

In the video, Phan describes her makeup line as "a brand of life stories & tutorials" including "stories of emotion," "stories of empowerment," and "stories of self esteem." "Em is the reflection of me," she says—describing the difficult as well as gratifying experiences she has had as a Vietnamese-American woman. What is most interesting about Phan's marketing strategy, which a Mashable.com article calls the "not-so-secret sauce" of success—storytelling—is that it is a strategy that ensures users are interactive in the construction of the brand in a way that seems to incorporate some of the persistent characteristics of the community that I found in my study. Identity-building in the form of storytelling makes up a large percentage of the rhetorical moves in the videos that I

analyzed. L'Oreal, the maker of Phan's product line, co-opts this strategy, and with Phan as the face of the makeup line, draws on users' stories as a successful marketing strategy across various platforms, including YouTube, Instragram, and Facebook. Users can post video reviews of the em michelle phan products on the company's website. It seems that these consumers are what Nayar refers to as "prosumers": users whose "feedback or repeated use informs further development or the interface or the technology" (74). Nayar points out that in these spaces,

> what we must recognize is the *co-construction* of technology (even though, admittedly, overall power and profit remain in the hands of the capitalist, monopolist manufacturer). What we see in such a techno-consumer society is the recursive nature of all new media cultures where the interface or technology is linked to the material user and the practice of usage. (74)

The practice of usage of commercially-produced content in the beauty community is part of the co-construction of the makeup brands and the platforms with which they are advertised, in that users shape the way the platforms are experienced and used, and contribute to their commercial nature. While some strategies, such as storytelling, are co-opted by larger corporate entities, the "overall power and profit" that emerges from creation of videos in the community does not remain entirely in the "hands of the capitalist, monopolist manufacturer." This distinction becomes blurry when beauty gurus like Phan themselves become manufacturers. The relationship between *corporate* and *marginalized* is indeed blurred when Phan, whose family arrived in the United States as refugees from the Vietnam War (Mashable) and who reported experiencing extreme hardship and poverty because of her socio-economic status, achieves the marketing

prowess to build a brand, *Em*, on those stories and experiences. This blurring between the user (Phan, for example) and the corporate power that is often assumed to operate as an invisible, oppressive force is a large-scale illustration of the interweaving of discourses of commercialism and identity. As visibility of videos in the community increases, corporations—makeup companies, for example--increasingly attempt to mimic and co-opt the strategies and content that women have developed in the community, but are often unsuccessful at replicating these strategies.

A unique characteristic of the beauty community is the understanding amongst some video producing members, like Lisa and Esther, that audiences will seek a consistent user experience of quality content on the channel. Both Lisa and Esther told me that they have developed, over time and by observing other YouTube videos, techniques for producing quality content. Because Lisa's channel is also her full-time job, she has also learned to produce quality content quickly and regularly. She has a dedicated schedule of filming and editing. In her video "How to get more subscribers, views, make it to youtube partner!" Lisa explains to viewers that producing quality content for YouTube involves labor, capital, and a big time commitment:

> To grow your YouTube channel . . . you need to have passion to really
> consistently build content, to want to improve your content, respond to people's
> questions and comments, to brand yourself on YouTube . . . It takes a long time to
> build up a channel, to build a brand, and build quality, consistent content.
> (PERFECT BEAUTY)

Lisa's awareness of the need for consistent, quality content is evident on her YouTube channel, for which she has created a banner that promises subscribers "videos 3x a

week." Lisa' channel provides viewers with links to other channels of interest, including

a separate channel that Lisa has created, girlentrepreneur, devoted entirely to providing

women with information and advice on building their own businesses.

Members who choose to participate by creating entire channels devoted to their activity,

like Lisa and Esther, also often create blogs and other related media that are designed to

enhance their audience's experiences of their content and also increase their brand

exposure. Lisa's new business, Banish Acne Scars (Lisa, "Banish") uses branding

strategies developed from her YouTube experience (e.g., storytelling) to connect with
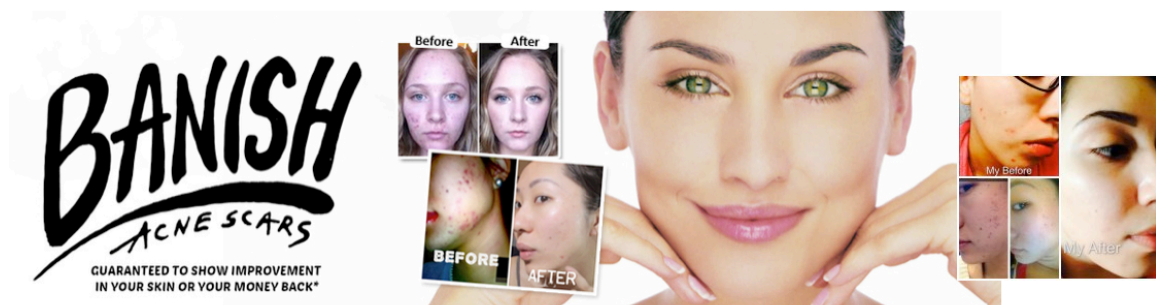
users (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Screenshot from Lisa's new website, banishacnescars.com. The above
screenshot reads: BANISH ACNE SCARS; Guaranteed to show improvement in your
skin or your money back; BEFORE/AFTER

Lisa maintains her brand identity as the "Oprah of Beauty," offering videos and photos in

an interactive user platform, all in a community model that encourages relationship-

building amongst consumers. Users can blog, post videos, and view others' content while

they shop and discuss products that they purchased. Information on her website is

seamlessly linked with her YouTube channel. By participating in the community, women

create channels as part of an extended ethos that can be considered rhetorical phenomena

in itself. Users like Lisa demonstrate an awareness of the ethos of the channel in its

entirety as well as the need for other social media outlets to supplement the channel. Like professional writers—including technical communicators—many of the participants in the community understand that organizations cultivate a "collective identity;" they adopt organizational techniques in developing a brand identity to their own channels. Such an identity is often constructed using multiple graphic elements intended to enhance audience interactivity and experience, including elements like "logo, website design, [and] . . . product branding" (Selfe 136). This is evident in the branding that women such as Lisa develop to market their businesses and their attention to the many customizable elements of the channel that create a consistent user experience that extends across platforms and technologies. While the focus of this study has been primarily the videos that community members produce, the videos should be understood as an important piece within the larger rhetorical context of the channel. Members of the community attract subscribers by producing consistent content for their audiences, and their channels function as part of a carefully cultivated personal *and* professional ethos.

Technical Communication in the Vernacular

The Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) center at Michigan State University, a research entity that operates within the MATRIX Center for Digital Humanities and Social Sciences and is committed to understanding the uses of writing in electronic contexts, released a statement for its focus in 2013-2014. This statement is compelling and relevant to this study because it takes up the question of what can be considered "professional writing." According to WIDE, the center's current research focus is "unprofessional writing." The WIDE center includes in its statement its belief that "the present moment and the near future are marked by the "unprofessional": makers,

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hackers, groups, communities, and robots. The asymmetrical is more relevant than the symmetrical, the informal more than the formal" (WIDE). The inclusion of groups and entities that are often partitioned from the activities that are sanctioned as truly "professional" writing creates a disciplinary space for understanding the professional writing activities that happen in spaces like the beauty community. As I explain in the following sections, much of the work that participants do for the community can be understood as a kind of professional writing—and as professional writers, community members are adept at communicating with diverse, and often global, audiences. For the purposes of this project, I refer to the professional work that these women do not as unprofessional writing but as professional writing and/or technical communication in the vernacular.

Women of color, including many Asian and Asian American women like myself, seek out information in the beauty community about beauty products that are better suited for their skin types and features. Entrepreneurs like Lisa and Esther know that audiences search for this information and produce content to meet this need in their videos. Much of this information is delivered in the review video genre, and sometimes also in the "haul" video (I define review and haul videos in Chapter Four). Many American made makeup products, especially those that are known as "drugstore" products that are accessible and affordable to most consumers, are overwhelmingly available in shades that suit Caucasian skin, but few options are available for women of color with different skin tones. Moreover, many makeup companies don't provide information on how to make some makeup products (e.g., eyeliner) work for the Asian eye shape (often referred to in the community as the "monolid" eye). Women in the beauty community recognize a need for

information on how to find alternative products as well as education in how to make the

Western-made products work for women who don't fit the (white) beauty standard. These

women make step-by-step tutorials, some of which become popular and are co-opted by

makeup companies that recognize the potential to expand their consumer base. Some

women with large audiences are solicited by companies to become brand ambassadors

and are paid to create tutorials demonstrating how to use their products. Videos such as

the tutorial, created to demonstrate and instruct audiences on how to use beauty products,

are instances of what I call "technical communication in the vernacular." They often

provide detailed instructions for users interested in makeup techniques and products, with

attention to usability and, unlike many corporate producers of makeup products in the

United States, respond to the socio-cultural context and needs of the audience, an issue

that Ceraso identifies as a key component of the work of technical communicators

(249).The women who create instructional videos—many of whom are also employees of

multiple entities and produce content across several different platforms—are professional

writers who coordinate between organization and consumer, although they may not be

recognized as such in an official capacity. They demonstrate attention to usability of

products and seek feedback from their audiences; they strategically compose their videos

using rhetorical tools that engage audiences; they recognize the need for effective

learning tools (recall Esther's techniques for effectively delivering information in Chapter

Four) and deliver instructional content intended to help audiences use a product.

Corporations often solicit these users, who sometimes become employees of

multiple entities in this way, recognizing their potential for growth and profit in the

channels and the large audiences to which they have access. Such corporations also

recognize that these women can potentially do the technical work that Ceraso refers to as "planning for audiences" (250) by serving as the go-between for the organization and consumer base and providing opportunities for interaction and feedback. This work includes understanding the diverse needs of an audience, including variables that are "demographic and psychographic" (qtd. in Schriver), as well as "ways of thinking about and using technology," "cultural factors," "experience with similar technologies," and "previous and current problems encountered by users" (250). While Ceraso refers to technology that technical communicators engage with in a more traditional sense, extending this framework to the technologies that consumers use on a daily basis— makeup and beauty products—reveals many parallels between the technical work that Ceraso describes and the work that women do in the community, both for their own businesses and those that seek to employ the women in an official capacity as ambassadors. This work is interwoven with the identity work that women also do as members of the community, and these activities are often inseparable. These women's understanding of the demographics of their audiences, access to information about audience retention and feedback, and their social locations and experiences inform their work as professional writers and give them leverage as businesswomen in a diverse community.

The Business of Feminism

The beauty community is a diverse, global, commercially-mediated online space in which women do both entrepreneurial and identity-building work using rhetorical moves such as storytelling, instruction, and evaluation (see Chapter Three for complete descriptions of rhetorical moves). I argue that some of these rhetorical moves are feminist

in nature; women in the community, like Lisa and Esther, construct identities from their experiences that they leverage for power and influence. They create for themselves and other women positions of (sometimes corporate) power, situating themselves as experts with valuable knowledge about products, skincare routines, and regimens that meet the needs of specific audiences. They often work as interlocutors between organizations and consumers, engaging with users across multiple platforms. In my analysis in Chapter Four, I presented data indicating that my study participants also use rhetorical moves in their videos to reveal and respond to their complex "social locations" (Alcoff) as minority women of color who have experienced marginalization and isolation in their offline lives. They provide this information, however, alongside content that is commercial in nature, and sometimes intended to sell or endorse products and build their own YouTube brands. In fact, their brands and their identities are inseparable. They also report that power in the community ultimately corresponds to numbers: how many subscribers one has, and how many clicks one receives on advertisements that appear in videos. Participants report that they gain a sense of belonging by creating content for the beauty community, but they also report being motivated by profit. While I expected in the initial phases of this study to present findings that would be easily situated within a given disciplinary and ideological framework, I conclude with the understanding that this is not the case. The data intersected at points that were unexpected, but seemed to indicate relationships between, for example, *business* and *feminism*—between *corporate* and *marginal*--and while my first inclination was to believe I had reached a dead end, I began to see that these entities were not just related. In the context of this community, they are interwoven.

The research questions that prompted this study—*What is the nature of the beauty community? Who participates? Do participants feel a sense of belonging?*—can only be answered with information that seems conflicting and contradictory at first. The nature of the beauty community is at once commercial, corporate, global, but not free from the local and contextual, personal, at times feminist, professional, entrepreneurial, and an entity that shapes and is shaped by discourses of race and gender. It is fluid in that it is frequently changing and adapting to its members, but it is also knowable in the post-positivist realist sense—we can, within the limits of our own social locations and biases, reasonably argue that it is real, that the meanings attached to it are not arbitrary, and neither are the experiences that women share about their lives. Moya argues that we can learn much about the nature of oppression through empirical work that assumes that there is, in fact, a real about which we can gather data. I have taken this approach to this project, and found that I have learned that understanding oppression necessitates also understanding why we value resistance and how this shapes our interpretations of the phenomena we choose to study, and that listening to my research participants' stories has indicated that in this context, oppression and resistance do not occur in isolation from each other. Community members often reify normative discourses of female gender performance, but this does not mean that they 1) can't engage in feminist rhetorical acts and 2) can't simultaneously engage in meaningful identity- and community- building activities that provides marginalized women with a sense of belonging. I have gathered from this study that women use rhetorical tools in online environments to do work (some of which I refer to as "professional writing") about which we still understand very little, and that lives at intersections that we have not yet explored or even knew existed. My

hope is that in listening to and learning from the women in the beauty community, I have at last provided new insights for understanding writing and rhetoric as it is used by a very large group of people and that until very recently we have situated at the periphery of our disciplinary vision.

APPENDIX

YOUTUBE BEAUTY COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW I

Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to complete this interview! Your responses will be used as data in a research study of the YouTube beauty community. This study is part of my doctoral dissertation research, which I hope will shed light on the beauty community as an important resource for a diverse population of women. The interview questions below are part of the initial phase of this research project.

Questions

1. How did you first hear about or discover the beauty community?

2. Describe your first interactions with the community. What were your initial reasons for wanting to participate?

3. Why did you decide to start making videos for the community?

4. How would you describe your role in the community?

5. Has your role changed at all over time?

6. Who is the main audience for your videos, and what are your strategies for reaching this audience?

7. What do you most hope to achieve when making your videos?

8. In what other ways do you participate in the beauty community (e.g., commenting on other videos, interacting with other participants)?

9. What are your favorite things about the beauty community? What are your least favorite things?

10. Tell me a story about how you developed the concept, or theme, for your channel. How do you incorporate this theme into your content?

11. Tell me a little more about your day to day participation with YouTube. On average, how much of your daily time is spent:

    a. Working on videos (preparing, filming, and editing content)

    b. Managing uploaded content

    c. Responding to comments and questions

    d. Managing other social media channels that help to grow your audience

    e. Interacting with other participants on YouTube

12. In what ways do you benefit from your participation in the community?

13. Does your personal identity influence your choice to create different types of content?

14. How did you learn how to participate in the community? How did you learn "the ropes" of participation?

Thank you for your time in completing this interview! Your responses are extremely valuable to this study. If you indicated interest in a follow up interview, I will contact you with more information.

YOUTUBE BEAUTY COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW II

Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to complete this interview! Your responses will be used as data in

a research study of the YouTube beauty community. This study is part of my doctoral

dissertation research, which I hope will shed light on the beauty community as an

important resource for a diverse population of women. The interview questions below are

part of the initial phase of this research project.

Questions

1. How do you experience the beauty community?

2. What does its existence mean to you?

3. Where does the name "beauty community" come from?

4. What is the language of the beauty community?

5. What are the words that you associate with the beauty community and what do those words mean?

6. Why do you choose to tell stories about yourself or your experiences in your videos?

7. Do you talk about personal and life experiences on your beauty channel? If so, why?

8. What do you believe this will do for your audience?

9. What is the purpose of a "haul" video?

10. Why do you make references to the production quality of the video?

11. I'm going to ask you some questions I have about a specific video that you made. Let's take a look at [title of video]. Can you tell me...

a. How and why you chose the location for this video?

b. How and why you chose the backdrop of the video--what the audience sees?

12. At this point I plan to use the Lindquist/Halbritter method and point to specific scenes that are unique to the videos and ask the participant to tell me more about specific composing choices they make in the clips.

13. I'd like to show you some of the data that I've collected about your videos and what I've made with the data. These are the "codes" (think of them as containers or categories) that I came up with after watching and studying the videos that you and several other members posted. These codes help me understand the nature of these videos.

14. At this point I will show the coding scheme to the participant, explain it briefly, and show how it was used to analyze their video. I will ask the participant if they think anything is missing, is inaccurate, or if I should add or change these codes. I will also ask what they think of my interpretation of the coded data.

YOUTUBE BEAUTY COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, INTERVIEW III

Interview Script

Thank you for agreeing to complete this interview! Your responses will be used as data in a research study of the YouTube beauty community. This study is part of my doctoral dissertation research, which I hope will shed light on the beauty community as an important resource for a diverse population of women. The interview questions below are part of the initial phase of this research project.

Questions

1. How do you define success in the beauty community? Where do these ideas about success come from?

2. How do you define success for your own beauty community participation (what does it mean to you to be successful?)

3. Who can be successful in the beauty community? Who has access to the means of success?

4. Is there a commonly held belief in the beauty community, amongst participants, about what it means to be successful? If so, what is it?

5. What do the YouTube/Google analytics mean to you and your performance in the community?

6. What does it mean to take risks as a beauty guru in the community? What makes a video risky?

7. What are some of the ways that you take risks in your participation in the community?

8. Does risk play a role in being successful in the community? If so, how?

9. What role does risk play when it comes to attracting an audience?

10. What's at stake when you take risks?

11. What does it mean to have power in the beauty community?

12. Who can have power in the beauty community?

13. Are you aware of the fact that you help to construct the community? I.e., boundaries you draw between yourself, your network, and the whole community?

14. At this point I will show participants the focal points that have emerged from the study so far: risk, participants, storytelling, success, identity, emotion, belonging, audience, access and ask briefly share how these focal points emerged. I want to ask/confirm whether they believe these are indeed significant themes in the community.

15. At this point I will show participants my sketches of how these themes fit together and ask them about the accuracy of these sketches: do these themes actually fit together? What's missing from the pictures?

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