'LET ME LOCK IT UP': A RHETORICAL EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY AND AN
EMERGENT COUNTERPUBLIC WITHIN THE YOUTUBE BEAUTY COMMUNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

In light of calls to study digital composition outside of school-based domains (e.g. Yancey), this project specifically explores a counterpublic in the YouTube beauty community that has arisen in response to the encroachment of and attempts to institutionalize the space. Utilizing iconographic tracking and rhetorical analysis, this study illuminates a network of discourse geared toward a more responsible and educated consumption of makeup and participation within the beauty community. This study found that within the beauty community, a counterpublic has formed in response to a more commodified, product-centered public sphere that has dominated the space and is most associated with well-known YouTube channels. As a result, many in the "community" exhibit dialogue that hints at a fracturing between an "us" and "them" mentality and find difficulty identifying with the current state of the space. In response, the discourse of the counterpublic—which promotes utilizing products you already own, focusing on more creative and original content, and influencers being true to their identities—is shared and circulated through tags like "The Beauty Community Tag" or "The Truthful YouTuber Tag." This research space is of particular interest for the writing and rhetoric field because many young adults seek to enter this space as a career or creative outlet. As a result, it is crucial that we, as teachers and scholars, understand the rhetoric present within the community and the implications it has for composition practices and real-world bodies. This study illuminates one current discourse network aimed at an anti-consumerist participation in the community.

To My Husband and My Family

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Thank you to my committee for your advice and feedback over the last year and for being amazing and supportive mentors over the course of my master's career.

Thank you to my husband for the endless conversations you had to sit through about makeup and then the endless conversations you endured about my thesis, which is in a way also about makeup.

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Background

In recent years, technological advancements have given access for virtually anyone to communicate with others across the globe and contribute digital content to an ever-growing pool of texts. Now, more than ever, the world is turning to new forms of multimodal composition, like YouTube. A range of work in the composition and rhetoric field has taken note. For example, Kathleen Blake Yancey discusses this shift in "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key":

> These are *structural* changes—global, educational, technological. Like seismic tremors, these signal a re-formation in process, and because we exist on the borders of our own tectonic plates—rhetoric, composition and communication, process, activity, service and social justice—we are at the very center of those tremors (321).

Individuals are flocking to digital forms of composition not only as a creative outlet, but also as a career because of the appeal of working anywhere in the world. YouTube, in particular, is a hub for entrepreneurs entering the digital workforce. According to the site, the number of channels making a six-figure salary grew by 40% in the last year and garners almost one billion views daily ("Investing in Creators"). Many who visit the site do so in order to learn something as opposed to traditional genres of composition like company websites, manuals, or help files because of the accessibility and comprehensive nature of YouTube videos.

Within the last decade, the popularity of one particular form of composition on the site has skyrocketed—YouTube beauty. Because of the constantly shifting nature of digital content it is difficult to truly pinpoint when these kinds of videos started surfacing. We do know that from

2006-2018 there have been at least 4.6 billion views of YouTube beauty videos and roughly 45,000 channels dedicated to this kind of content (Sykes 9). The YouTube beauty community is generally defined as consisting of YouTube users who create or watch videos focused on makeup, hair products, or skincare. They usually range in length and topic: product hauls, product reviews, makeup tutorials, "get ready with me" videos. Some even publish video blogs (vlogs) of their life or videos dedicated to personal wellness. The purpose of product haul videos is usually to showcase a variety of products purchased (or received by) the YouTuber within a given time period and offer suggestions on where the product(s) can be purchased. Product reviews spotlight the YouTuber's opinion on how well a product or products work for them. Makeup tutorials take on a more pragmatic approach and consist of the YouTuber giving instruction on achieving a particular makeup application technique. "Get ready with me" videos are structured very similarly to makeup tutorials, but they lack an instructional discourse and take on a more laid-back tone. They are usually accompanied by the YouTuber offering life updates or personal narratives to their viewers while putting on their makeup. The potential of this space as a career and the complicated nuances involved in navigating participation in the community make YouTube beauty an interesting addition to the kinds of "work" scholars and teachers value in the field of rhetoric and composition.

The focus of this research project is largely the result of my own exigence and positionality as a longtime follower and what I would define as "lurker," or someone who watches videos without commenting on them, in the YouTube beauty community. Roughly between 2007-2008, I created a YouTube account for the sole purpose of learning more about putting on makeup. I was in middle school and my mom had just allowed me to start wearing

makeup, albeit very minimal makeup like mascara, neutral eyeshadow, and clear lip gloss. But, as she didn't wear much makeup herself, I really had no idea where to start. Curiosity drove me to the "interwebs" to see what I could find and there wasn't much. On a random Google search for neutral eye shadows, I stumbled across a tutorial video on YouTube called "Every day BASIC SMOKEY EYE look w/ brown/neutrals" posted by user panacea81. This was my first introduction into what would become one of my favorite and longest lasting hobbies. I have continued to watch videos about beauty topics as the community has grown at a very rapid pace over the last 10 years. Back then, I could probably count on two hands the number of channels dedicated to beauty on YouTube. Now, it would be virtually impossible to foray into every Beauty YouTuber's content and even more difficult to gain notoriety. I would like to clarify that while I do consider myself a participant and member in this community, I have never actually produced a beauty related video. As such, my positionality is limited to the observations and perceived effects of discourse and visuals as a viewer. But, as one, I have noticed a stark shift in the last couple of years in the community that I have grown to love. The videos have shifted in tone and focus to place more of an emphasis on the product itself and less on the creative expression and pragmatic feel of the YouTube beauty community of old. Recently, both content creators and viewers have professed to having a makeup addiction as a result of "FOMO," or "Fear of Missing Out," as a result of hype generated around products on social media. The discourse, particularly belonging to viewers, also points to a sense of distrust of content creators themselves. This could be due to the influences of the makeup industry as a whole. In exchange for monetary compensation or free products, content creators will review a brand's products on their channel. However, not all creators will disclose whether they purchased or received a

product as a gift. This makes the transparency of their discourse difficult to ascertain given the multitude of rhetorical constraints guiding the conversation. Product fetishism has, in some ways, turned a community into a commodity.

This area of research is in dire need for further exploration because of how rapidly the industry is growing and the sheer number of individuals who might retreat to YouTube for the latest advice on what products to buy and how to apply them. One study done by the website *Mint* found that the average woman spends around $15,000 on makeup within her life (Crooks). In a survey titled *Drawing the Future*, the Education and Employers charity, in partnership with University College London Institute found that "social media and gaming" was the fourth highest career aspiration for children from the ages of seven to eleven, which even beat out being a movie star ("Drawing the Future"). This survey shows that more and more students are seeking to enter this space. So, what does this mean for the composition classroom? What kinds of composition should we introduce? Should we teach forms of writing that are more "marketable"? How can we prepare students for the rhetorical implications involved with contributing to the YouTube beauty community and the impact monetization might have on their publications and livelihood? How can we gain a deeper understanding of the rhetoric actually utilized within this space? How might the discourse within the digital public sphere of YouTube impact real-world bodies? These are just some of the issues this study is interested in speaking to.

There have been few studies interested in the YouTube community (Sykes, Ma, Gnegy, Szostak, Ledbetter) and many are focused on marketing for brands. Given the field of rhetoric and composition's interest in writing in online spaces, it is crucial to observe the discourse and participation within this space through a more rhetorical lens. Scholars in the field of rhetoric and

composition have begun to acknowledge emergent voices in the digital world that were previously under acknowledged (Jones et al., Szostak, Zappen, Yancey, Habermas, Warner, Fraser). Other scholars are interested in further understanding how participating within digital communities might affect an individual (Boyd, Dadas, Gruwell, and Marwick & Boyd). But, as a field, we have yet to unite these interests in the YouTube beauty community as a research space.

The purpose of my study is to explore the shift in discourse and visuals related to a revival of the "old" YouTube before the influx of brand influence and understand the rhetorical implications for digital media content affected by commodification and monetization practices and to understand the role of the "beauty influencer" or "guru" and how brand influence might shape their rhetorical moves and their potential impact on the user. The project is interested in seeking an understanding of these research questions:

How might the YouTube beauty community establish itself as a "public"? How might counterpublics within the community form and make attempts to subvert *the* dominant public within the community? What rhetorical moves indicative of a more commodified exigence are present in beauty videos? How have rhetorical moves shifted with the introduction of a more commodified exigence? In examining these questions using iconographic tracking and rhetorical analysis, I have found that within the YouTube beauty community, a counterpublic has formed in response to a more commodified, product-centered public sphere that has dominated the space and is most associated with well-known YouTube beauty channels. As a result, many in the "community" express that it has been fractured between "us" and "them" and find difficulty identifying with the current state of the space. In response, the discourse of the counterpublic—which promotes utilizing products you already own, focusing on more creative and original

content, and influencers being true to their identities—is shared and circulated through tags like "The Beauty Community Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag."

Risk Management and Ethical Issues

Ethics in digital rhetorics research is a complicated issue that the field of digital rhetoric has continued to grapple with throughout its history. In digital research, the qualifications for what is considered "interaction" is subject to debate. McKee and Porter argue that the "boundaries between concepts such as public/private and researcher/participant are often blurred" (713). If a video is published on YouTube, it is technically public, but the content creator might have a different view on how "public" it really is. As a result, the study must take careful steps to understand this grey area for each of the participants that it interacts with and work to avoid "outing" them. Because my study does mention specific channels there might be concern with "outing" them to other unwanted viewers that they didn't expect. However, many of the channels that I focused on have anywhere from 1,000 followers-6 million followers, which establishes that a vast majority of "the public" have accessed their videos. The actual interaction between the content creators and I was kept at the minimum of only observing their videos and analyzing based on the content itself. The YouTubers were not contacted or interviewed over the course of this project because I wanted to focus on the language and discourse utilized in the videos themselves. "The Beauty Community Tag" gave me insight into the perceptions and attitudes of content creators and the comments on the videos gave me insight into the attitudes of the average viewer like me who utilize the space to purely watch videos and learn.

Project Overview

This chapter has worked toward introducing the YouTube beauty community and how the study of beauty influencers' rhetorical practices in relation to the commodification of the community may lead to a better view on how we might understand an understudied community and participate in an emerging and rapidly changing form of composition. The section also worked to situate the study within areas of research interested in the types of "work" we value in the field of rhetoric and composition, digital activism and harassment, and composition pedagogy.

The next chapter will offer a more in-depth discussion of these areas of research and a historical review of scholarship related to writing in public spaces and publics and counterpublics and start to draw comparisons with the concepts and how they appear within the YouTube beauty community.

Chapter 3 works towards introducing the kinds of rhetoric used in "the public" through a case study focused on one particular well-known channel, Jaclyn Hill. This chapter is meant to scaffold the issues at hand within the beauty community and illustrate the exigence for a counterpublic. The chapter will also detail the rhetorical analysis method used to explore "the public" and offer an analysis of some rhetorical strategies utilized by a more well-known channel.

Chapter 4 will introduce a counterpublic within the YouTube beauty community as discovered through iconographic tracking. It will focus on discussing reoccurring themes in the discourse and visuals tracked through this method.

The last chapter will offer a discussion of the limitations of the study and what its results might mean might mean for the field of rhetoric and composition before calling for future research and offering preliminary recommendations based on some of the study's findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on a review of the current expanse of literature related to research done on the YouTube beauty community, public sphere and counterpublics, identification, and digital composition as a space for activism and harrassment. Aside from the studies conducted on the YouTube community, the studies within these fields are all vast and well-researched topics of discussion within the field of rhetoric and composition. Many studies have amassed as a result of our interest in the kinds of composition we value as "work," which is, in part, an idea that drives the exigence for my project. In the YouTube space, people are creating content that conforms to standardized genres and are utilizing skills that might be found even in fields like technical communication, like using Photoshop to edit images. They make rhetorical choices as they decide how they will alter the visual to appeal to a certain audience. Further, people are making money off of these videos—and lots of it. So, should we be introducing this community in the classroom? Can others within our field participate in it as a creative outlet or even an additional source of income? There has not been near enough research on the rhetorical strategies and their effects on both content creators and their viewers for us to venture into this uncharted territory responsibly.

However, many scholars have researched the public sphere and the interactions between individuals within a digital realm, which can still speak to some of the discourse issued on YouTube. Following this interest, others have explored the emergence of counterpublics or subaltern in response to publics when there is a discontent with a dominant discourse. While the relationship between publics and counterpublics is by now well-rehearsed, more attention is needed in studying how such a relationship evolves because of encroaching commodification.

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As it has become more commodified, the YouTube beauty community is purported to take a physical toll on the real-world bodies of both content creators and viewers alike in the form of addiction and mental stress because of online harassment. There are many other scholars in the field, like Leigh Gruwell, that take an interest in the physical toll participating in discourse can have on real world bodies. Lastly, as a field we are highly interested in rhetoric and some like Kenneth Burke believe that any moment where an attempt at identification is made, rhetoric is present. But, what rhetorical happenings occur if there is a conflict in identification? This conflict seems to be present in the discourse between larger YouTube beauty gurus and their following when they exhibit rhetoric that indicates a consumerist influence. These larger concepts and threads of the discussion will be explored further in relation to the field of rhetoric and composition.

My project draws on previous scholarship through three different lenses: studies conducted on YouTube beauty community; public sphere and counterpublics; identification, composition, and technology; and digital composition as a space for activism and harrassment. Scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have begun to acknowledge emergent voices in the digital world that were previously under acknowledged. Jones et al. illuminates marginal narratives excluded from the dominant within technical communication research as a result of "cultural blinders." They do this in an effort to establish an antenarrative to the work and values within the technical communication field. In this way, Jones et al. speaks to their social justice efforts and the surfacing of marginal voices. This piece is crucial for this research as it shows a shift in attitude to a way to change the historical narrative within the field. The YouTube beauty community might fall under this umbrella as an example of subverting a dominant narrative (or

public). Although this lens is not the primary focus of this study, patterns present in the data that underrepresented voices is an issue currently faced within the beauty community and could be an area for future study.

Research on the YouTube Beauty Community

Before exploring previous scholarship related to counterpublics and composing in the public sphere, I'd like to contextualize the research that has already been done on the YouTube beauty community so as to see where this research project enters the conversation. The researcher that has come the closest in interest to the focus of this study is Lehua Ledbetter. In her 2018 study, "The Rhetorical Work of YouTube's Beauty Community: Relationship-and Identity-Building in User-Created Procedural Discourse," Ledbetter calls into question how we might define "usable" when it comes to instructional discourse in relation to a YouTube beauty video. She finds that the instructional content is successful when the content creators work toward building their identity and embody rhetorical strategies like storytelling and audience participation. This study will help to inform the analysis of the YouTube videos selected in my own study by offering potential strategies that may be used throughout. In my own study, I also found that many shared personal anecdotes, which correlates with Ledbetter's findings. However, most anecdotes were found to be used in an effort to invoke feelings of nostalgia for "old" YouTube or anger against a common enemy.

In a second study, "Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework," Ledbetter argues that some of the characteristics of the YouTube Community that she discovered in her previous study (like identity building) make this space useful for integration into the writing classroom and she offers how that might look. In the study,

her interviews with participants reveal that they often felt in conflict between their identity within the YouTube beauty community and their identity in the "real world," particularly if they had jobs outside of the space (40). This conflict could be of interest when establishing why content creators make certain rhetorical moves and even might answer why a counterpublic is forming in response to the more commercially guided digital space. This project is essential to informing my study on the potential for integrating YouTube as a form of composition in the classroom. Ledbetter gives an example of how it can be done. The findings of my study concerned with harassment indicate that more work needs to be done in understanding how teachers can prepare students for it in the classroom, which Gruwell also touches on in her study.

In her last study (*The Business of Feminism*), Ledbetter explores the construction of identity on YouTube beauty more in-depth by mapping the rhetorical moves used by two Asian-American content creators. In this piece, she acknowledges the complicated dichotomy between identity and consumerism: "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" (95). This conflict is very apparent in my own research, but I also found that some content creators also made efforts to distance their identity from that of the more well-known channels in an effort to disassociate. Some instances of this were even juxtaposed with nuances potentially meant to position the more well-known channels as a common enemy amongst the community as purveyors of commodification.

In "Beauty and the Brand: A Digital Ethnography of Social Capital and Authenticity of Digital Beauty Influencers Through Monetization Activities on Youtube," Hannah R. Gnegy explores the intersection of authenticity and social capital in YouTube beauty guru's

communication as influenced by monetary contribution by cosmetic companies and the YouTube site itself (50). She looks at how the YouTube beauty influencers navigate discourse affected by monetization practices and finds that certain monetized or sponsored videos will lower engagement. While this study is one of a very limited number that offer useful insight into the community itself and its approach is from more of a business or marketing lens. She acknowledges the importance of these beauty gurus to be "upfront" with their viewers and not try to hide paid sponsorships. My project revealed similar findings of the importance of authenticity within the space, but even more so related to the content creators own identity in relation to the community.

Public Sphere and Counterpublics

This research will primarily focus on the discourse and interaction between members of YouTube publics and counterpublics. So, it is crucial to acknowledge the long history of discussion about these concepts and others related to them (identification and consubstantiality) so that we may understand our current conceptions of them. Szostak explores the apparent gender divide within the YouTube space and whether the voices off the female population are silenced. In this study, the researcher found that women commonly made rhetorical moves to empower one another in blogging videos. She adds to the conversation on publics from a more gendered perspective and also critiques the relevance of Habermas' public sphere for today's world. My study actually found that some content creators feels that there is a lack of support due to the desire to earn more.

Habermas introduces the idea of the public sphere where everyone can come together and set aside their differences and approach one another from an equal level. This is one of the

original threads of conversation on the idea of the public. Much later, Gruwell's " Writing

Against Harassment: Writing Pedagogy and Online Hate," came in opposition to Habermas' idea

of the public sphere and is much more relevant to the current state of the digital world. For

Gruwell, it is virtually impossible to abandon all differences within a particular facet of the

internet especially when so much of our lives is searchable. But, Habermas' piece is still useful

in introducing how the idea of the public and counterpublic has advanced throughout history. For

the purpose of my study, "the public" within the YouTube beauty community is defined as

entities that perpetuate discourse related to topics like brand deals, sponsorships, ads, brand trips,

PR packages, purchasing products, etc. that hint to a more commodified influence (the makeup

industry). Within the community, more well-known channels are most associated with "the

public," although it is not limited to just those channels.

Fraser's idea of the "subaltern counterpublic" came much later after Habermas' work.

She describes these counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated

social groups invent and counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their

identities, interests, and needs" (123). In addition to offering another definition of publics,

Warner extends Fraser's understanding of the counterpublic as much more than just an

alternative to the public. He defines the public as created through its discourse. Those who

experience then feel belonging within the public. The audience is not always abundantly clear,

but what is important is that those within the public participate. He notes that when there is a

"blockage" in accessing the discourse, it can lead "people to feel powerless and frustrated,"

which perhaps might lead to an emergent counterpublic (53). He argues that a major facet of his

counterpublic that differs from Fraser's conception of the term is that the counterpublic is aware

of its "subordinate status" (86). This is very obvious on YouTube as those users who create the dominant public have millions of followers compared to the less successful (in terms of follower count) channels that makeup the counterpublic. The counterpublic on YouTube would be those that share discourse focused on a more economical and responsible of makeup consumption and participation in the beauty community. The topics of this discourse range from focusing on creativity to utilizing products you already own. Those within the counterpublic seem to be making efforts to move back to the "old" ways of YouTube where people just shared their love of makeup. Warner's idea of a "blockage" is relevant to my study because the makeup industry is functioning as that "blockage" through its attempts to infiltrate and institutionalize the space.

Warner explores the idea of the public and what exactly constitutes one. Once this is established he also delves deeper into how publics and both represented and addressed culturally. He then contrasts the idea of the public with that of the counterpublic. This text will serve primarily as the theoretical grounding for my research as I am attempting to make the argument that members of the beauty community are forming an emerging counterpublic in response to the participation and discourse affected by commodification. This is where this project lands within the conversation. There is not much research offering a critical examination of what happens when a group within a public rebels against it in a way. The closest a study has come is Choi and Behm-Morowitz's, which does focus on the YouTube beauty community. But, the conversation on identification and the possibility of an emergent counterpublic is still absent. This study mapped some of the common techniques made by beauty YouTubers that corresponded with educational goals and measured the video's effectiveness in transmitting information about digital literacy to viewers. They found that those who watched videos where the beauty YouTube

showed their filming technique were more likely to create content thus encouraging others to communicate when they otherwise would not.

Historically, we can see that counterpublics have traditionally consisted of marginalized groups seeking to rewrite the dominant narrative in their community. The race, gender, class, and ethnicity of every member that participates within the community and in both the public and counterpublic is not always apparent so it would be difficult to classify either group as marginalized. Those within what I am defining as the counterpublic do hint at issues of access related to technology and acquiring products. But, it would still be difficult to classify either "the public" or "the counterpublic" as marginalized as the main group we can actually see (the influencers) participating in this space seem to mainly constitute mid-twenties-early thirties, white females. Historically, scholars who have studied the concepts might have had difficulty associating YouTube beauty as a counterpublic because of its makeup, but the past has not had to account for the creation of a public where people across the world can communicate together. The shared network of discourse within the space and between individuals and the effects of the discourse is what keeps the community tied together and functioning as an educational outlet. This important characteristic of a public and counterpublic and the fact that it is so saturated within the community is what I think allows for the classification.

Identification

Identification in the establishment of a public or any sort of organization is crucial. Burke introduces the idea of identity with a kind of formula: "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to be so"

(20). In both cases, perception of the group is important because they may think they share common interests, but they "may not be joined." Finally, both groups might be persuaded to identify with the other. The idea of consubstantiality arises out of this idea that when A is identified with B he is essentially one with the other. But, he is also individual, separate from B, but at the same time joined. Although there is identity within the groups, there will always be division. The idea of identity and consubstantiality will provide theoretical grounding into my research on the rhetorical moves beauty content creators use on their social media to either isolate or identify with their viewers because the frameworks provide an explanation for how one identifies with another even if it is not conceived on both fronts. Within the community, the difficulties identifying between members might be a cause for the rise of a counterpublic.

The recent recognition of silenced or unacknowledged narratives in the field of writing and rhetoric could be because technological advances have brought more voices, not previously acknowledged to the forefront. Both Zappen and Yancey point to how technology has changed the way that scholars approach both the study of and participation in composition. Zappen introduces us to theories and concepts within the field of Digital Rhetoric that might apply to communities outside of the traditional workspace and offer specific insight into the rhetoric that plays a role in authority and control within the communication. This piece lends insight that can be applied to a community outside of the "traditional" workspace—YouTube.

Yancey argues that technology has afforded a new writing public that surpasses the reading public of the 1800s. Similarly, studies within the composition field have drifted outside of the field more so than ever in their subjects under study. She associates this group of people that come together in digital spaces to compose something as communities, which will be useful

both to relate to and problematize with the YouTube beauty community as there is some sense of "togetherness," but many are still excluded from participatory action or appear to feel dislocated because they can't relate to channels that perpetuate consumerism.

Digital Composition as a Space for Activism (and Harassment)

The last lens of scholarship this project explores is related to the participatory nature of digital composition and the physical or mental impact it can have on users. These aid in further understanding how participating within the YouTube beauty community might affect an individual. As a field, we must understand both the positive and negative effects of this kind of composition if we are to have future generations engage in it. The idea of underrepresented voices and "community" is taking more precedence than ever within composition and rhetoric research as technology has allowed people from all across the world communicate with one another at the touch of a button. But, what has been understudied so far are the emergent communities within these spaces and how the rhetoric within might work towards the acceptance or isolation of certain members and its resulting effects. We know that communication online has affects on the physical person as a result of research from Boyd, Dadas, Gruwell, and Marwick & Boyd.

Boyd argues that many people looking to spread an activist message turn to social networking sites because they bend both time and space. But, she cautions that just because content does spread quickly on these sites it doesn't mean that a particular user's will because of the attention economy. This is something that Dadas also mentions in her "Hashtag Activism" piece in reference to the public really only getting part of the issue related to in a tweet because audiences will be interested in one particular facet of information or the original creator might

push a particular piece of information to the foreground. Boyd argues that there has been a recent change in focus for these networked publics to being concentrated on more personal networks. She contends that these spaces are being used to just stay in touch with people a user is already familiar with rather than a stranger. This supports the recent influx of vlogging videos used in conjunction with tutorial and review style videos within the YouTube beauty community. As this style of video allows viewers to follow the YouTuber around in their daily life, they identify more with the YouTuber and feel closer to them because the videos allow them to be privy to activities that would normally be private.

Dadas uses her research in hashtag activism (using hashtags as a way to incite some sort of social change) to inform readers on how to make best use of Twitter as a vehicle for this kind of communication. She argues that while the site does allow for rapid spread of a user's message and bring it to the forefront, the hashtags will often not reveal the whole story, often omitting important facts related to the issue. She also argues that those who use hashtags as vehicles for activism should have "an awareness of how rhetorical velocity and remix might affect their tweets; and a willingness to include links to reputable news stories in their tweets, in addition to other factors" (18). Dadas also warns that users should be aware of the origins of the tweet and how others might remix their creation at a later point in order to anticipate the potential implications of their message. Dadas also makes a really good point important to keep in mind when researching within this realm: it is often very difficult to establish whether or not a hashtag has direct involvement in the actual change occurring. This should inform this project's methodology.

Gruwell explores several scenarios where the rhetorical communication an individual posts online causes a direct impact on their physical body. She finds that nearly 40% of those who use the internet have faced some sort of harassment both on and off screen. Her study tackles issues related to Habermas' idea of the public and offers alternative perspectives on the matter. She questions how we can prepare students for making their writing public. Gruwell argues that we should employ an ecological view within our pedagogy and help students understand the kinds of audience that might encounter their composition and its consequences. This emphasizes a more active rhetorical act in that it shapes the context of various situations.

Marwick and Boyd argue that social network sites, like Twitter, make it difficult for content creators to appeal to their audiences and to even contemplate their "imagined audiences" because the sites are often frequented by various groups regardless of how much they identify with the content. Unlike some of her other works, Boyd actually gives us the perspective of the users themselves as they navigate this hazy process.

Many of these texts and others within the field express interest within the participatory nature of composing within a technological space. Boyd argues that social network sites function as networked publics, which she defines as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies" and function as "the space constructed through networked technologies and…the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (1). She argues that these sites have changed the constructions of the public as Habermas once saw them because the digital world allows for content within these publics to be "persistent and replicable," "scaled," and "searcheable" (13).

CHAPTER THREE: THE RHETORIC OF THE YOUTUBE BEAUTY INFLUENCER AND THE PUBLIC

In this chapter, I offer a brief overview of how "the public" might be defined within the YouTube beauty community and offer examples of rhetorical strategies or moves used by members of "the public". For the purposes of this study, I understand well-known YouTube beauty channels as being representatives of the dominant public because they embody many of the characteristics of the YouTube space that the counterpublic seeks to rewrite. Their videos are also concerned with makeup, skin care, and hair care. But, the videos are more complicated in nature than they initially appear as the YouTubers must juggle their own identities, maintaining their fan base, and their careers (in terms of earning a profit from the space). These constraints might impact their rhetorical strategies and how they present themselves within their videos, which is an issue that this study is interested in exploring further as very little has been researched in the field. Insight into the rhetorical strategies that they employ will not only give us an idea of how they are able to build their following through identification, but also how commercialization and cosmetic brands have been slowly seeping into the discourse they utilize.

The rhetorical moves the analysis will focus on are efforts (both conscious and subconsciously) to increase identification between the YouTuber and their audience or between viewers and the beauty community (based on Burke's theory of identification) or moves that might lead to diassociation; navigation around more commercialized elements of the space like PR packages, brand deals/trips, sponsorships, or personal collaborations; moments of rhetorical teaching; references to production or creative aspects of the videos; and any other rhetorical moves of note. The analysis will focus on one particular content creator, Jaclyn Hill, in order to offer an in-depth observation of rhetorical moves more well-known channels might make.

Through the focus on Hill we might see how the discourse of the public might be characterized—one focused on the product itself rather than creativity or a more economical participation in the beauty community.

Defining the Public

Through the analysis, I have found that "the public," or the dominant discourse, is primarily associated with the more well-known channels on YouTube beauty that have followers and views in the millions. This insight became apparent during my tracking of the counterpublic when many of the channels I discovered constructed an "us vs. them" mentality by separating themselves from the larger channels and highlighting their lack of originality or their massive intake of PR packages and hint at a sense of distrust with larger influencers. It was through the observation of the counterpublic and supplemented by the analysis of Jaclyn Hill's channel that the characteristics of "the public" have come to light. "The public" within YouTube beauty are channels separated from others by their extreme level of access within the space—they get products sent to them for free regularly and have a large enough following (500,000+) to attract brand deals, sponsorships, brand trips, PR Packages, and collaborations with brands. This enables them to "be on top" of the makeup industry and prepared to produce timely content on new releases and to possess the technology to create quality content, which is not something that others in the space have access to. The infiltration of the industry into the more well-known channels has led to their content being more "product-centered," as in there are an increased number of videos focused on "hauling" new products and offering first impression reviews, neither of which lends to an informed participation in the community because they do not allow for the influencer to test the product for a large amount of time before they recommend it to their

following. In this way, "the public" of YouTube beauty is interchangeable with the makeup industry. The content revolves more around building your makeup collection and trying the newest products because that is the image represented by their channels. It's not that these videos blatantly come across as infomercials for products, but they might have the similar effect of inducing their audience to purchase the products recommended.

This commercialization of the YouTube space has been documented for years, but it effects on the beauty community specifically is understudied. In a 2012 panel consisting of content creators with viral videos, such as "The Evolution of Dance," they noted that

> The spirit and relative virtue of the internet is interactivity and the fact that we get to pick what content we consume. There's a fear in the room that professionalization and commercialization of channels like YouTube have eroded this spirit. It's becoming more like TV, and that's a loss (mstem).

The exaggerated fast-paced content focused on consistent and regular posting is also present in the beauty community as well. Michael Strangelove likens the space to a common trope tied to a business relationship: "they [influencers] are the tenants, YouTube is the landlord and village cop" (191). McGrane and Gunderson note that in this kind of relationship and with the growth of commercialization on YouTube the perfect viewer would be "those who never bring their participation in this practice into their conscious awareness" (21). This mindless consumption is what the counterpublic of YouTube beauty is seeking to rewrite. But, this process is complicated given that those who produce content in the space, whether public or counterpublic, still have the potential to make money from YouTube. As the structure of the site pushes influencers to gain as large a following as possible to make that money, the influencers have to use strategies to engage their audiences. Some associate this commercialized shift with the sites acquisition by Google. Jin Kim argues "If the pre-Google era of YouTube is characterized by amateur-produced videos

in an ad-free environment, the post-Google purchase stage is characterized by professionally generated videos in an ad-friendly environment" (56).

Rhetorical Analysis

In order to understand the nuances of "the public" and the common themes in their communication, (both visual and discourse), I utilized rhetorical analysis as a methodology to follow some of the more common patterns apparent in the videos and strategies or rhetorical moves used by influencers who focus on a more product-centered discourse. The analysis is informed by the historical roots of the concept "rhetorical situation", as particularly defined by Lloyd Bitzer and Keith Grant-Davie: "the context in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse" (Grant-Davies 488). In the analysis, Grant-Davies calls for close attention to the exigence (the purpose), rhetors (those who participate in the rhetorical communication), audience (those who receive and are affected by the rhetorical communication and can be both real or imagined), and the constraints of the situation (factors affecting the rhetoric and the rhetors' desired outcome).

Through this close analysis, I hope to decipher some of the more common moves by those considered "the public" and how they might promote a more product-centered space. As "influencers", they have the power to really affect their audience. The whole goal is to get their audience to "do" something. It's important to understand how they construct this dynamic and its impact on the audience because it might affect how others participate and identify within this space.

<center>"Let Me Lock It Up"</center>

Jaclyn Hill is a YouTube beauty influencer who got her start in the space back in 2011 when she published a tutorial on how to get a Kim Kardashian inspired look. Now, she has close to 6 million followers and 333 videos published on the site and several collaborations amongst makeup brands, like Becca Cosmetics and Morphe. Even as her channel has grown, she still continues to employ a lot of the same rhetorical strategies. But, there has been a noticeable shift in her content as she has introduced a new rhetorical move into her arsenal—for the purposes of this project, I'm dubbing it parodic identity. This new turn has most likely been the result of backlash she has received from her followers. Many of her followers have issued complaints that she flaunts her wealth too often or argue that all she does not is push specific brands (especially Morphe) for her viewers to purchase. Even one of her most recent videos contains these kinds of comments focused on distaste over product influence:
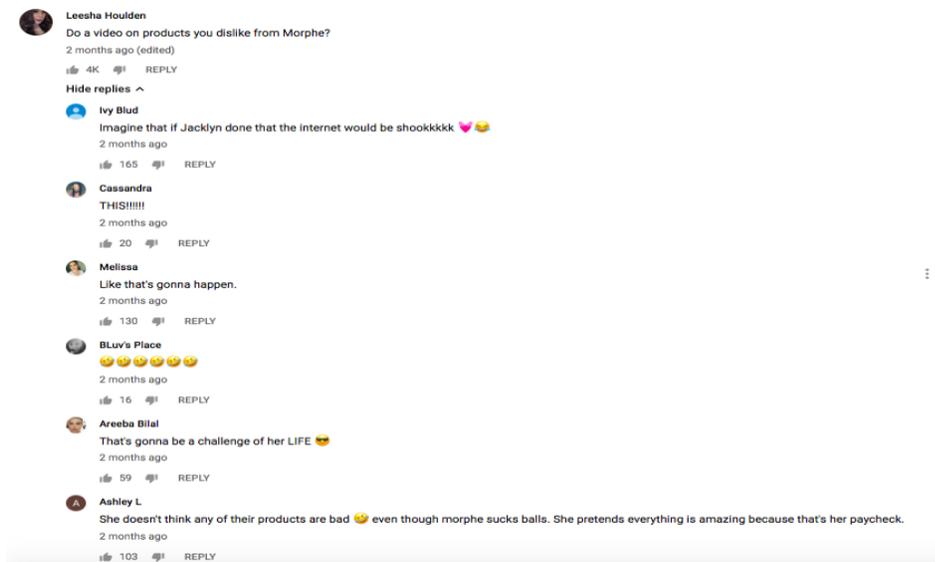

Figure 1: Comments left by followers on Jacyln Hill's "TRYING OUT DRUGSTORE PRODUCTS" video

<center>25</center>

The comments begin with "Do a video on products you dislike from Morphe?" which seems almost flippant in conjunction with the responses to the comments because Hill's followers express that she would never actually reveal how the products truthfully work because of her monetary ties with the brand. This is very apparent in the last comment in Figure 1 (although comments like this don't stop there on the video): "She doesn't think any of their products are bad even though morphe sucks balls. She pretends everything is amazing because that's her paycheck." Here you can see followers struggle with their conflicting identities and worldviews with the "picture" that Jaclyn has painted. Her rhetorical strategies have been successful in highlighting a specific brand that she enjoys, but because these directly contradict with her followers own experiences, that the products "sucks balls", they are losing touch with the new turn that her channel has taken. So much so that her followers could never see her saying a bad thing about Morphe just because that's one of the ways that she earns her livelihood. The conversation on the financial side of her content is another sensitive subject for her followers. Many of them feel like they want what she has or that she flaunts her wealth with expensive clothes and accessories. This lack of identification appears in the previous figure and can be seen in many of the comments on all of her videos.
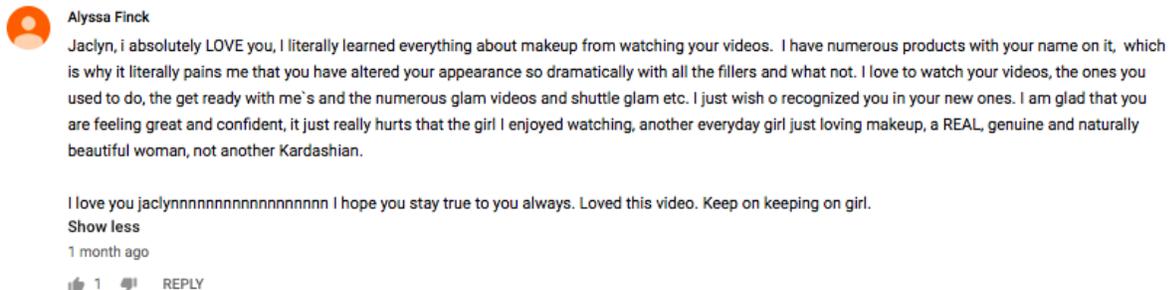
Alyssa Finck

Jaclyn, i absolutely LOVE you, I literally learned everything about makeup from watching your videos. I have numerous products with your name on it, which is why it literally pains me that you have altered your appearance so dramatically with all the fillers and what not. I love to watch your videos, the ones you used to do, the get ready with me`s and the numerous glam videos and shuttle glam etc. I just wish o recognized you in your new ones. I am glad that you are feeling great and confident, it just really hurts that the girl I enjoyed watching, another everyday girl just loving makeup, a REAL, genuine and naturally beautiful woman, not another Kardashian.

I love you jaclynnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn I hope you stay true to you always. Loved this video. Keep on keeping on girl.
Show less
1 month ago

👍 1 👎 REPLY

Figure 2: Comment left on Hill's video related to perceived shift in identity

Like the comment in the figure above, many of her followers feel like she has altered her role or identity within the space and as a result they cannot identify with "just another Kardashian. "As a result, Jaclyn employs rhetorical strategies and discourse that falls into a parodic version of the identity that her followers have thrust on her and attempts to squelch her own identity as she sees it—in her words, "lock it up". In this situation, it seems both parties may no longer identify with the space that Jaclyn operates in as Hill explained she need to "take like a little detox" in one of her most recent videos ("FULL FACE DRUGSTORE" 1:09-1:11) and that she "didn't give up on [herself] just on [her] career" (1:03-1:06). In her more recent videos, she seems to personify an exaggerated form of the "typical YouTuber": they live a life of luxury that followers lust after but can't have, spend money whenever they please, amass more makeup than they can use in a year, and focus more on the product than creativity. In other words, she seems to have become a simulacra or representative of "the makeup industry," which is a life that many of her followers can't identify with.

Figure 3: Screenshot of Jaclyn Hill's "Closet Tour" Video

Her closet tour video is an interesting example of how she has embodied a parodic identity of the influencer (figure above). In the beginning of the video, she is perched on her accessories table in a lush robe, surrounded by her expansive wardrobe, and served a fancy drink by an individual dressed as if he is her butler. This is a severe escalation in the image of being well off that she alludes to even in the earlier stages of her channel:

Figure 4: Jaclyn Hill's 2012 "Smokey Cat Eye Tutorial" Video

Published in 2012, nearly six years before, wine glass in hand and closet in the background, the focus seems less on the material items in the background and more on the girl playing with makeup on the forefront. In the more recent video, you can't help but look at everything else other than the girl on the table because it appears so exaggerated. We can see that her viewers feel the same in the comments on the 2018 video:
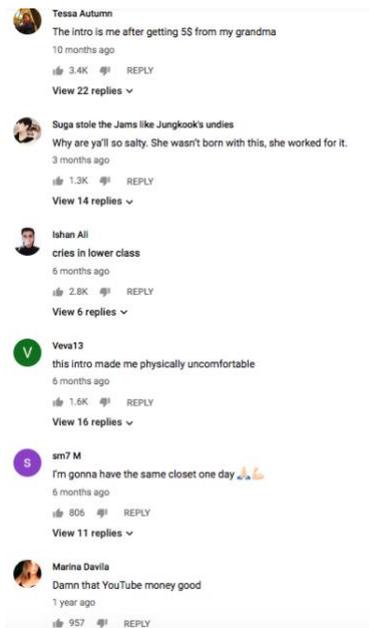
28

Figure 5: Comments Left By Viewers on Jaclyn Hill's 2018 "Closet Tour" Video

The close analysis of Hill's channel allows for a more in-depth observation of the rhetoric that larger youtubers, considered part of the beauty community public, utilize and is of issue within the community. The rhetorical analysis elucidates the large focus on consumerism and a less than minimalistic approach to participating in the beauty community. Even more so, this analysis shows how members, both followers and content creators alike, respond to this kind of rhetoric---members of the community are not content with the current commodified undertones in the discourse utilized by the dominant public. We can see how Hill's characterization of her own identity has a specific focus on some of the elements of the publics discourse that others express issue with: the monetary side of YouTube and levels of access in the space. Iconographic tracking, the focus of the next chapter, maps this discontent for us by following how members circulate discourse related more towards economical and responsible participation in the community and the importance of maintaining identity and originality of the content creator.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRACKING THE CIRCULATION OF BEAUTY VIDEOS AND THE COUNTERPUBLIC

This chapter will primarily focus on introducing the method used in the study—iconographic tracking—and how it was specifically adapted for usage related to tags rather than the creator's original intention for images. The chapter will also outline some of the affordances and constraints in implementing the method as part of this study. It will then culminate in an analysis of the genre of the "tag" video using the principles of iconographic tracking. Through the analysis, I found that the discourse of what I define as the counterpublic functions as a way to educate members of the community on concepts like the reality of the space and embodying a "less is more mentality." They also engaged in strategies that seemed to be an effort to unite the community together by creating common enemies.

In order to understand the budding discourse surrounding issues in the beauty community on YouTube related to brand influences and monetization, the study will utilize a method suitable for following the trajectory of the discourse as it is circulated by community members. This research seeks to explore the research questions: How might the YouTube beauty community establish itself as a "public"? How might counterpublics within the community form and make attempts to subvert *the* dominant public within the community? What are the consequences for underrepresented members and the rest of the YouTube beauty community? How have rhetorical moves shifted with the introduction of a more commodified exigence? To answer these questions, or at least offer support for them, my project requires a non-traditional research method. The research space itself is incredibly messy as there are billions of videos

30

posted on YouTube and the discourse from the same users and viewers extends into other social medias which are equally as vast. My project is also interested in accomplishing several things at once: establishing some of common rhetorical moves made by YouTube beauty influencers and in a way examine some of the discourse utilized that ties into the commercialized public, following the flow of counterpublic discourse within "The Beauty Community Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag," understanding how and why this conflict might be happening and related to the commercialized public, and understanding the impact this disconnection has on identities and physical bodies within the space so we might be better informed as a field when entering the community or instructing others to do so. I will use a method developed by Laurie Gries—iconographic tracking—to trace similar modes of communication across their lifecycle and the YouTube platform. This will also be in conjunction with a rhetorical analysis of emergent themes within the YouTube beauty community discourse. The trajectory of my data is blurred as algorithms and other computer infrastructure factors influence what I can actually see as a researcher. The tag itself also does not flow in a linear and neat fashion. Some of the content creators tag others and some don't or rather some might invite anyone who is interested to join in and create a video. Even if someone is "tagged" they might not follow through. Both the visuals and the discourse are critical in understanding the impact of rhetoric in this space because that is predominantly what viewers rely on and use in the process of identification. So, I needed something that could examine both in depth and also account for the complicated nature of digital composition and the public sphere. This is where iconographic tracking comes in—it involves several principles for looking at the rhetorical significance and circulation of a particular visual and following it over its various materializations. It allows the researcher to drift

back and forth between moments of data collection, organization, and analysis. The researcher is free to try new searches and explore other digitals spaces even after they have already performed an analysis. This method works to help the researcher reduce their data without leaving behind other critical pieces monumental to the study as a result of too linear a methodology.

In her original study, Gries uses a New Materialist approach to explore the circulation of an Obama image in its various forms from posters with different goals to its appearance on clothing items. In order to do this, she develops iconographic tracking as a method—one that directly contradicts our previous approach to studying images. Previously, we often treated any image, regardless of medium or format, similarly to print images in our analysis. Gries rejects this notion because it hinders our ability to follow an image and the discourse surrounding it through its various forms as it "circulates, transforms, and affects change through its material encounters" (333). As an alternative approach, she offers viewing an image as an event—one that is "a process of inexplicable becoming," "insuppresible," and unpredictable" (334). With this view, the meaning behind an image lacks stability because of the variety of forms and functions that it takes, which is where iconographic tracking comes into play. It allows us to follow an image and examine its "consequentiality" and play close attention to the different situations an image might encounter. According to Gries, the method is

> "specifically designed to elucidate how images become rhetorical and iconic in the sense that once actualized in multiple versions, they become not only visual actants capable of catalyzing change and producing space (and time) but also readily recognized and culturally and/or politically significant to a wide cultural group" (110).

Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics will serve as a guide for using iconographic tracking as a way to follow different facets of discourse in the beauty community in an attempt to create a counterpublic. This will not only provide insight in studying

the rhetorical power of an image, as this is the primary focus of the text, but will also provide the tools to adapt the method to studying the repeated use of tags in the form of video to convey a message.

The nature of iconographic tracking calls for the ongoing collection of data in a very messy process permeated with some analysis along the way before exploring the pieces of data in search of patterns. The method itself calls for four different stages in the data collection and analysis portion of the project: Data hoarding (R1), Data mining (R2), Recursive Search (R3), and a close study (R4).

The first phase of this method, data hoarding, involves using search engines and specialized terms to gather as much data as possible. Gries is careful to note the importance of a big data set in the beginning in order to gain a broader perspective of your research space and allow for ease in establishing patterns amongst your data. During this phase, you can use a variety of search engines and follow a variety of image paths. "Uncertainty" is an important approach that characterizes this stage of the process as the researcher should just follow the spirit of discovery and collect visuals that have some sort of appeal for them (111). For the purposes of my study, I had to find some way to limit this phase because of the seemingly never-ending pool of data. It was difficult to determine where to stop and when to end because mass amounts of videos were available. So, I narrowed it down to "hoarding" or collecting my data over a one month period. To find my data, I used various search terms, like the beauty community, on YouTube because I was interested in finding out more about how members identified or saw themselves within the community.

Following this phase, the researcher then begins the data mining phase where they parse through the data they have collected and separate everything into folders. These folders should be organized in a way that draws attention to the relationships between the images that they contain—whether that is common patterns or tags. Although this is the point you begin to search for patterns in the data, the researcher should not undergo an in-depth analysis at this point because the researcher may not have collected enough data to establish trends yet. This step was where I began to notice general concepts or ideas that continued to appear, like tag videos, and served as my entrance into using more search terms I had not thought of before, like beauty community and truth.

The proceeding steps in the research process are a little blurrier in terms of steps the researcher must take. In R3, the researcher utilizes new key terms and explores other search engines and websites to see if there might be other iterations of their collected images that they've missed. The researcher continues to organize the data into folders as they collect it. This phase of the project is meant to serve the function of helping the researcher decide on which specific "collective activities" they wish to focus on in their close study (113).

The fourth and final stage of the method (R4) is where the bulk of the data analysis takes place. According to Gries, during this stage "researchers conduct a close study of specific collectives to determine how an image intra-acts with humans and various technologies and other entities materialize, spark change, and produce collective space" (113). In order to study the visual closely, the researcher must observe it in light of seven different processes: composition, collectivity, production, transformation, circulation, consequentiality, and distribution (113). These seven principles will be explained further in later chapters as they relate to the YouTube

beauty community. This phase of iconographic tracking was the longest during the study as I continued to couple my analysis with a return to previous phases of the method in light of new realizations from the data or the publication of new videos. But, that is the beauty of iconographic tracking

Iconographic Tracking and the Beauty "Tag" Video

The specific tags that I will examine and trace are "The Beauty Community Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag" on YouTube. I chose to focus on these because they allow for a much broader view into the community itself in its generalized nature. Also, because the tags take on a much broader association, being focused on the "community" itself, they would allow me to explore further back in time to study the community at large rather than a more specific and kairotic tag like #itsjustmakeup. There is a large number of these videos which will provide the largest opportunity for an in-depth rhetorical analysis of the discourse because of their length and the open-ended questions that the content creators cover. For example, one video, titled "the beauty community in 1 minute," uses different videos of people getting scared in haunted houses to highlight many of the different issues and conflicts that have surfaced over the last year within the community.

The predominant focus of data will come from YouTube itself because the research is focused on learning more about the discourse within that space. Part of what this project is interested in is understanding how a member of the community's identity might conflict with the influx of consumerism and how that influx might affect a member's feelings of identification or isolation from the public sphere. Last year, a tag, similar to a Twitter hashtag, was created on YouTube in order to address some of these issues—it's called "The Beauty Community Tag."

Using iconographic tracking, I will be able to follow the creation of this tag through its present day to understand the participant's shifts in perception related to their community. But, a downfall of this selection of data is that it has only been published within the last year so it does not really reveal how attitudes and feelings of identification have changed compared to the origins of the community over a decade ago. However, one of the goals of this project was to illuminate this shift in meaning and values. So, in order to do so, I will supplement the iconographic tracking with a case study of one specific YouTube channel that has been around since the "start" of the makeup community and might be considered part of the dominant "public": Jaclyn Hill. Doing so will allow me to trace changes in rhetoric from the beginning of the channel until current day in an effort to see how the increased commodification might be seeping into how they construct their identity and their channel's identity.

First, in order to understand the circulatory power of the beauty "tag" video as a type of genre and why members of the beauty community might be utilizing this mode in order to convey their anti-commodification discourse to the public sphere, I will explore the genre through the lens of Gries' iconographic tracking principles. In a sense, I am attempting to understand how this particular genre of beauty related content is conducive to uptake. The next chapter will then offer a more discussion of the discourse in the "tag" videos, with Burke's theory of identification in mind, looking at two specific tags on YouTube: "The Beauty Community Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag."

Gries suggests that this principle of iconographic tracking is primarily concerned with understanding the reasons behind the creation of an image, or its exigence, and how all the different parts of that image work together as a whole. In the case of the YouTube beauty "tag"

video, regardless of the topic of the video, many of them share similar exigences. Tag videos begin with one member of the community, usually a YouTube beauty influencer, who creates a set of questions in an effort to get a general idea of other member's opinions and assumptions related to a topic. For example, the original creator of "The Beauty Community Tag," Lisa Stevens, says "…that's basically what all these questions are about is just the beauty community as a whole and how you personally fit into it as a content creator" (Lisa Stevens 02:20-02:30) and that she hopes the result of the "tag" is that will be "a good thing for the community as well" (Lisa Stevens 01:16-01:20). While the most outward purpose of the video might be to get other content creators to reveal how they feel they identify within the beauty community, another exigence might be getting other members of the community, like viewers, to think about how they might associate themselves with others in the community as well. In many of the "tag" videos observed for the project, many of the beauty youtubers drifted between addressing content creators, viewers, and the community as a whole as "you" and "we." For example, in Kaily Baute's "The Truthful YouTuber Tag," earlier in the video she says "…you don't have to have perfect lighting. You don't have to have a huge makeup collection. You don't have to have a different outfit every single day" (09:43-09:53) in reference to the perfectionism ideal that circulates throughout beauty channels that directly affects content creators. But, later, she uses "you" again, only to address the viewers in general: "Yeah, I mean anything, anything you want to know how to do you can learn on YouTube for free" (10:54-10:58).

The goal of the "tag" is to inspire as many content creators as possible to participate and join in on the conversation, which is accomplished through visually or orally tagging specific channel names to continue the thread and including a written list of the questions for them to

follow (see figure below). This might then assist viewers in understanding who they identify or

associate themselves with and thus lead to a larger following for content creators and more

members who associate themselves with the community as a whole. Some videos might even

seek to drives certain members out of the community, like those who inspire hate and

harassment. Many of the content creators in "The Truthful YouTuber Tag" said that they did

block words or actual viewers if they left comments on their videos that were not meant to be

constructive and were more negatively focused on appearance or the characteristics of the

content creator or even their viewers. This idea will be explored even further in the next chapter.

Tag Questions:
1. What are your favorite videos to watch?
2. What are your favorite videos to film?
3. What are your least favorite videos to watch?
4. What is your favorite part of the beauty community?
5. What is your least favorite part of the beauty community?
6. What motivated you to start your channel?
7. Who most inspires you on Youtube?
8. Number 1 thing you would change about the Youtube beauty community?
9. Number 1 advice for other creators/new people starting out a channel?
10. What do you love about Youtube as a whole?

Creators I tag:
Samantha March: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDnb...
LivLoveshermakeup: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx_z...
MrKongsMom: https://www.youtube.com/user/MrKongsMom
Flourishxo: https://www.youtube.com/user/flourishxo
Leah Janae: https://www.youtube.com/user/discotas...
Melsmakeup88: https://www.youtube.com/user/melsmake...
Lauren Mae Beauty: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk_p...
Jessica Braun: https://www.youtube.com/user/jambeauty89
Andrea Matillano: https://www.youtube.com/user/AndreaMa...
Jen Loves Reviews: https://www.youtube.com/user/jenluvsr...
Drea CN: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_HK...
Kaily Baute: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdON...
Niki Murphy: https://www.youtube.com/user/BabyGirl...
wannamakeup: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCROB...
Kelly Gooch: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtaV...
Nikkibeautybliss: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoJn...

Figure 6: Lisa Steven's Description Box Under "The Beauty Community Tag" Video

The text paired with the video itself where the creator goes through all the questions allows for

the content to be easily transferrable between creators. Anyone can reference the original and

formulate their own responses to the tag readily. Also, including the links to each creator's

channel allows viewers to travel instantaneously to the respective channel once the creator is

mentioned in the video. This formatting is crucial for the tag to actually reach the creator because

the formatting of YouTube does not allow creators to actually "tag" others in the same sense as with other social media sites like Facebook or Instagram. This brings in another exigence in the discourse of the tag video in that the creator must entice their viewers and fellow members of the makeup community enough to persuade them to reach out to the other creators that they tagged. The video links in the description box function as the first step for this. The actual videos themselves focus more on highlighting the individual creator's views related to the topic of the tag. Unlike many other YouTube beauty videos, colorful and outlandish thumbnails or designs are absent and actual makeup products rarely make an appearance in the videos. There is actually not much to the design and production of the video other than the discourse itself. You can see an example of this from Lisa Stevens "The Beauty Community Tag" Video.

Figure 7: Screenshot of Lisa Stevens "The Beauty Community Tag" Video

The video consists of Stevens just sitting down and talking to the camera. The camera blurs the background so the focus is solely on her, which these two elements together allow for the viewer to feel more closely connected to Steven's as the composition makes it seem as if the conversation is happening between friends. Focus on the beauty YouTubers words is important

in order to pick up on the subtle hints towards "a change coming on YouTube" (Stevens 9:07-9:10).

This theme of a change or transformation is apparent in all 15 "The Beauty Community Tag" videos—some cues being more obvious than others. Based on the overwhelming majority of these videos discussing some form of a shift, this must be the specific exigence for this type of tag video. Content creators use "The Beauty Community Tag" as a way to express how they identify with the beauty community and to offer some of their own personal observations on the content within the space and how others are utilizing their platform. Although the questions that the YouTubers follow seem surface level at first, they actually lead many into much larger conversations, which I think is the intention of using such open-ended questions for the tag:

1. What are your favorite videos to watch?
2. What are your favorite videos to film?
3. What are your least favorite videos to watch?
4. What is your favorite part of the beauty community?
5. What is your least favorite part of the beauty community?
6. What motivated you to start your channel?
7. Who most inspires you on YouTube?
8. #1 Thing you would change about the YouTube beauty community?
9. #1 advice for creators/new people starting out their channel?
10. What do you love most about YouTube as a whole?

The production and transformation of an image or video is concerned with the kinds of "labor" that go into the video and the entities that are informing it as well as how the image/video morphs as it is taken up by another individual. The tag videos appear to involve little labor compared to other videos published in YouTube beauty because they consist of the YouTubers sitting in front of the camera and talking. In fact, some content creators even mention not doing a ton of planning in advance, like wannamakeup who said "I have nothing written down. I'm not prepared. I just want to like answer them with whatever is on the top of my head"

(00:56-01:01). This seems to be a rhetorical move to enhance the connection between the YouTuber and their audience. The laid back and unscripted discourse coupled with the uncomplicated visual this creates makes it appear like the content creators are just sitting down and having a conversation as friends with their viewers. The visual also does work towards emphasizing the discourse as the highlight of the video and forces viewers to pay attention to it exclusively.

As different content creators uptake the tags, very little actually changes between the different videos when it comes to their form or medium because the community is primarily centralized on YouTube and the setting is the focus of "The Beauty Community Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag." All of the "tags" are strictly in video format and follow the same chronological order in their responses to the questions. The main elements that differ are the setting design or background of the video and the design of the videos themselves.

The background or setting of the content creator's videos consist of personal items and décor or just a plain backdrop. These might at first glance seem unimportant. But, I believe they do major work toward helping members of the community gain a better sense of the channel and the content creator and it reaffirms their identity, especially if the setting is consistent throughout the video. For example, one channel, wannamakeup, appears to be in a room within her home and has a little knick knacks and part of her makeup collection displayed in the background, whereas another channel, Bailey Sarian, has a vibrant backdrop filling most of the setting so that you cannot see any personal details (see figures below).

Figure 8:Screenshot of tag videos posted by Wannamakeup and Bailey Sarian

While this is a very subtle difference between videos, the visual does work toward characterizing the channel. For example, in wannamakeup's video (on the left), the viewer can see a poster in the background that says "Good Vibes Only," which displays the creator's desire for positivity on her channel through a short phrase that many others can relate to. This directly correlates with her discourse in the video, "My favorite part [about the beauty community] is…having such a huge support system that had never in a million years thought was out there making me feel normal making me feel loved making me feel important and I I just love it" (06:42-07:06).

The genre of the tag video on YouTube is unique in that content creators don't actually get any sort of notification that they have been tagged to do the video. So, in order to circulate it the originators must rely on their following to reach out to the other YouTuber. Many even call on their viewers to let those tagged know in their videos. This exposes followers to other channels considered part of the counterpublic network and expands it even further. In addition, some tag videos offered exigence to any member of the community by tagging "everyone" in their videos to participate.

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The previous chapter contained an analysis of the beauty "tag" video as it was tracked across YouTube utilizing Gries' iconographic tracking principles. While the method does offer particularly in-depth insight into the rhetorical power and life of a particular image as it resurfaces in different mediums and forms across a particular space—the "tag" video on YouTube constituting the image of interest of this study as it flows across the digital public sphere—the method does not offer enough in terms of a close examination of the power of the discourse within the tag videos and responses from commenters in furthering the counterpublic discourse. Discourse is the central entity that ties a public or counterpublic together. So, it is important that we follow how it is spread between members. This is what the following chapter will speak to. Using a rhetorical analysis of "The Beauty YouTuber Tag" and "The Truthful YouTuber Tag" videos, I will dissect key themes that appear in all 20 videos that were used as data and align with an ideology focused on a less commodified approach to creating YouTube beauty content (utilizing products you already own, focusing on more creative and original content, and influencers being true to their identities). The appearance of these same themes throughout the videos indicates that the work towards spreading an anti-commodified perspective is working (at least for now). But, as the nature of digital spaces is continually morphing there is no telling what might be of issue even tomorrow.

YouTube Beauty Content Creators as Educators

Positionality/Reality

One of the more common moves utilized by beauty content creators involved illuminating their positionality or a more realistic perspective on elements that define the community, such as appearance or performance of a product. For example, during their "The

Beauty Community Tag" video, one content creator used the zoom function of the camera to give viewers a closer look at her face. While doing so, she says, "I just wanted to show you guys my skin is not perfect. Don't ever think that" (Chizi Duru 01:58-02:04). As this sort of discourse continuously appears throughout the tag videos, it brings back the curtain for viewers in a way and reveals the filtered nature of what might be a filtered reality or a simulacra. Duru's rhetorical move of showing the flaws on her skin after the video had already started is critical in highlighting for the viewer that the image that a content creator personifies might not be the case in real life or that a product the creator uses in a video might not give them the perfect skin. Therefore, the spread of this form of discourse moves to get members of the community to participate more conscientiously.

Similarly, content creators work towards informing readers of their positionality in the world. By positionality, I am referring to the creator's location in the physical world and their position within the digital world. Essentially, creators reference the divide between the physical and the digital as a way to bring reality home once again. Although they do seek to grow their following through identifying and relating with their viewers, they also distance themselves by discussing that they are, in reality, just sitting alone talking to a camera in their room at home. While they do, to some extent, know who their audience is, there is no way that they can know whether the products or recommendations they offer will work for their viewers. Invoking this solitary visual may help some viewers realize that they should take videos that have recommendations for products with a grain of salt and avoid purchasing products that would not be beneficial for them.

<u>"Less is More Mentality"</u>

   The majority of the tag videos mentioned that their favorite videos to watch were

declutter or shop my stash videos. Both of these genres of video emphasize purposeful makeup

collections rather than buying every new thing on the market. Declutter videos involve getting

rid of all the makeup that an individual doesn't usually use and shop my stash videos focus on

the YouTuber using makeup that they already own in their collection to create a particular look

that may have utilized other products. An overwhelming majority of the videos also referenced

"first impressions" and haul videos as their least favorite videos. These are the least informative

genres of videos when it comes to knowing which products are essential for your collection

because both involve the YouTuber's opinions on the products after only having them for a short

amount of time. Haul videos are also particularly polarizing in the sense that many YouTubers

will post videos where they've purchased a large amount of makeup—20+ products—in a short

amount of time. These videos appear often and are still a popular genre so it makes it seem like

spending that much money on makeup is normal and achievable to members of the community.

These hauls also convey a mentality of needing to run out to the store and buy the latest releases

in makeup because that's what many YouTubers appear to do. But, in reality, many of these

same channels receive products for free from makeup companies and don't disclose that they

didn't actually purchase the products themselves. Many of "The Beauty Community Tag" videos

characterize these videos as "not realistic" and "not beneficial" for the community.

   Along these same lines, many of the creators disliked "First Impression" videos because

they do not allow for enough time for the creator to test a product enough to give an educated

review. This again works more toward getting members of the community to purchase the latest

product releases without really understanding if it would work for them. In relation to this, creator RawBeautyKristi said, "It's not even the beauty community anymore. Like calling it the beauty community is such a joke now. It's the makeup industry… It waters down the true beauty and passion behind makeup." (4:30-4:38). This sentiment mirrors many others across the videos that were analyzed over the course the study. Many members of the community feel like products have become the focus and have overtaken the original intention of the community—to practice your creativity with a support system of followers who identify with you. But, the discourse of the public continues to perpetuate consumerism, which RawBeautyKristi and many others call out against by directly addressing creators themselves, "We need to realize our influence" (RawBeauty Kristi 8:30-8:32).

Conflicting Identities

Rhetorical moves related to enhancing the feeling of identity between the YouTube beauty influencer and their viewers as well as between members of the community are some of the most common moves made in videos tied to "The Beauty Community" tag on YouTube. Burke's theory of identification is quintessential to understanding the current conflicts viewers feel in the idealized and commercialized space that their community has become. According to Burke, rhetoric occurs when any attempt at identification is made. He claims "The *Rhetoric* must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counter pressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the Wars of Nerves, the War" (23). For Burke, identification occurs when one identifies with another or is perceived to be a part of a group that another relates to, which thereby is also identification even if they might not share the mutual interest.

The process of identification is complicated in the YouTube beauty community as the perception of the viewers by the content creators can only largely be drawn from their comments, while the viewers do get to see and hear the content creator, this image is doctored based on what the creator would like to reveal. This alone has already impacted viewers' ability to identify. One beauty influencer, wannamakeup, expressed in her "The Beauty Community Tag" video that her least favorite part about the current space is,

> …people that don't remember their true friends it's people that constantly shout out the big youtubers when they don't care about you um so I hate the fakeness of YouTuber. I hate that it is now such a big deal to get fillers and lip injections and all this crap not that I am against a woman feeling good about themselves because this is 2018…We have lost our minds in 2017 all the people that look up to Jaclyn Hill and Amanda Ensingh and all these people that have morphed into perfection not my type of perfection (8:49-9:51).

We can see the difficult time members of the community have with associating with beauty influencers and their content in the earlier Jaclyn Hill example (Figure 2 & Figure 5). Hill attempts to display her closet parodically in her closet tour video, which adds a lighthearted, joking feel to the expansiveness of clothing and her wealth. This sort of strategy would normally work for getting viewers to relate to the YouTuber through humor. But, Hill's monetary value is so apparent in the video and so far from achievable for the average YouTube beauty lurker, that the only way viewers can find a likeness is through extremes. For example, in response to the video, one viewer said, "The intro is me after getting 5$ from my grandma."

A counterpublic has risen in response to videos like Hill's closet tour that represent an embodiment of monetary wealth or commodification associated with makeup. The YouTube beauty community might be considered a public, according to Warner, because it does operate within a shared discourse. However, he also mentions that "…a public can only produce a sense of belonging and activity if it is self-organized through discourse rather than through an external

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framework" and cautions that as a result "any distortion or blockage in access to a public can be so grave, leading people to feel powerless and frustrated" (pp. 52-53). The sense of belonging to the public is in jeopardy within the YouTube beauty community because of the influx of monetary influences over content like sponsorships, paid advertisements, brand trips, PR lists, and monetization practices on YouTube operating as external frameworks governing the previously untouched discourse within the space. A counterpublic rejecting the commodification of the space is fueled by the discourse in tag videos like "The Beauty YouTuber Tag" because of the nature and genre of the "tag" video. Videos that are "tags" are meant to hold similar characteristics and often involve the content creator answering the same set of questions that were created by the originator of the tag. The "tag" video operates similarly to how a hashtag might operate on Instagram in that a user can type in a generalized phrase or word and be transported to a massive compilation of content related to that term or phrase. In the specific sphere of YouTube, "tag" videos allow viewers insight into common and individual thought on specific topics (directed by the questions that are a part of a tag). The nature of the "tag" video allows for greater circulation of these thoughts and opinions at a much faster rate. The creators who participate in these "tag" videos will often tag other creators and challenge them to participate, shifting the content to an even wider audience and following. This is how the discourse of the counterpublic is circulated within the YouTube beauty community in addition to the more subtle rhetorical moves utilized in videos unrelated to tags.

YouTube Beauty Content Creators as Unifiers

<u>Uniting Against a Common Enemy</u>

Content creators also have built a network of discourse related to those who have either encroached upon the counterpublic, like "trolls" or users who post hateful comments across multiple videos targeting the creator or their following, or members of the consumerist public like makeup brands or "bigger channels." This pattern is important because through it, it seems that channels are attempting to unite their community through common enemies or others that oppose their revival back to a more creative and minimalist approach to the space.

Part of the mentality that channels are pushing for in order to bring back more creativity to the channels is being accepting of content and ideas even if they don't have top of the line technology. The desire for a positive and supportive environment is consistent throughout the creators and their channels. However, there are still users who jeopardize this initiative through posting negative comments that are not meant to be constructive and merely damaging. Chizi Duru points this out in her "The Truthful YouTuber Tag" video: "There is this thing called enemies of progress. Yes, they are very real. I've had situations where someone actually that I knew personally was going in like pretty much spamming my Instagram posts." (Chizi Duru 10:35-10:44). In fact, many of the creators that participated in "The Truthful YouTuber Tag" said that the only people they blocked were those that attempted to spread that kind of negativity.

Duru also calls out brands as another entity within the community that serve as obstacles to their goal of moving away from a product focused discourse: "Brands get away with a lot of things." (20:09-20:13) Many of the channels utilized personal narrative about bad experiences with brands in order to get their following to sympathize with them over it bringing them even

closer together. Duru specifically was referencing an experience she had with a brand where they sent her a product to review and in her review, she stated that it worked well, but only in certain circumstances, which led the brand to publicly attacking her channel on social media for not giving the product a 100% positive review. Sharing personal narratives like these reveals almost a behind the scenes look for the creator's following and helps to educate their following on how to conscientiously take in the content produced within the community. It might cause others to wonder how many positive reviews were only positive in order to maintain ties with a brand.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Implications

Through iconographic tracking, this study found several themes resonate with an anti-consumerist and educated counterpublic's networked discourse: 1) Reality vs. a filtered reality, 2) Maintaining Personal Identity 3) A "Less is More Mentality", 4) Creating a Common Enemy.

These findings are important to understand as the space of this study has become more and more popular for young adults to enter as a career. This calls into question whether or not this is a subfield within writing and rhetoric that we should be preparing students for entering. This study shows that those who do seek to join the community must move to educate themselves in the current discourse and rhetoric in order to participate responsibly. It seems that there is a delicate balance between maintaining identity and originality and also maintaining relationships with brands in order to earn a living. This space reaches a vast number of people across varying backgrounds and experiences, which one would need to acknowledge in order to positively impact their following. In his recent CCC's address, Asao B. Inoue calls on scholars to understand the power that language can have and that we need to undergo the process of: "…interrogating the paradox of judgement, how we see, hear, or feel, how we language the world into existence, how we are simultaneously right and wrong, and how that languaging makes and unmakes us simultaneously." My study reveals the importance of understanding how discourse might affect the foundation of the digital world within YouTube. It's become obvious there are many who feel unsettled and displaced within this commodified place and are

attempting to provoke change. But, further study is needed to see how changes are already being made or how more can actually cause a change in YouTube beauty.

Limitations & Need for Further Research

This study began because of a trend or shift I noticed in the beauty community that I felt no one had really touched on. But, as I conducted my research, I realized that there is a much bigger transformation occurring within this space and that the public sphere within the YouTube beauty community is much more complicated than I had anticipated. As a result, I think much more work needs to be done in observing the happenings within the YouTube beauty community.

A thread of conversation that is a bigger issue that is beyond the scope of my study is underrepresented voices within the beauty community on YouTube. This is a huge and blossoming market in the U.S. and other parts of the world that people have the opportunity to participate in and make a decent living. However, because many makeup video genres require that content creators to actually use and review products, some content creators might be limited by the cosmetic companies themselves because of their lack of representation for various skin tones in their product lines. While contemplating researching this idea, I realized I could not possibly do it any justice due to my positionality without talking to and gaining the perspective of those who are considered a minority within the community. As a whole, it would be beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of the actual impact the YouTube beauty community has on individuals by interviewing them or using a survey. This study was limited to what the content creators chose to reveal in their videos and what followers chose to include in their comments.

In the same vein, due to the mass amount of videos posted on YouTube daily, I had to choose a select representation of tag videos in an extremely large corpus. The themes that I discovered as a part of my study were very revealing in terms of current attitudes within the space, but there might be even more out there.

This project speaks specifically to the kinds of composition we "value" in the field and begs the question of whether or not we should be teaching composing on YouTube in the classroom. Many scholars have contributed to this important and growing conversation on online composition in the classroom. Much research has been done on the impact of rhetorical composing within an online classroom environment (Sherry, Gruwell, Blancato & Iwertz). Blancato and Iwertz explored the variety of roles that both students and professors took within this environment and found that the rhetorical composing these individuals took part in eased the transition between their multiple roles (56). Like Blancato and Irwitz's study, Sherry examines communication between students in online spaces—specifically within online discussion forums. He explores the impact of visual rhetoric on the communication practices of high school, college, and graduate students and how various multimedia can impact a student. He finds that using rhetorical strategies like alignment, repetition, and proximity lead to more effective conversations between the peers.

Other scholars have shifted our focus in the kinds of writing we should value to multimodal compositions and digital rhetoric (Clark, Yancey) and integrating them into the classroom (Sorapure, Lunsford, Duffelmeyer). Clark argues for composition instructors to move away from assigning the traditional academic essay in their classrooms to accommodate for the rapidly changing digital culture. She argues that a digital rhetoric pedagogy "emphasizes the

civic importance of education, the cultural and social imperative of "the now," and the "cultural software" that engages students in the interactivity, collaboration, ownership, authority, and malleability of texts" (28). In a similar light, Yancey argues for instructors to shift from "a pyramid-like, sequential model of literacy development" that was traditional associated with print texts because more and more students have become interested in composing in online spaces as a way to participate in various cultural enclaves (6). Yancey argues for a change in classrooms to accommodate for the need for more digital literacies. Sorapure argues for the integration of more information visualization projects to be integrated into classrooms in order to get students to think more critically about digital literacy and in order to offer other alternatives from the standard and traditional academic essay (69). Andrea Lunsford discusses writing as involving "epistemic, multivocal, multimodal, and multimediated practices in the computers and writing classroom" (169). She pinpoints multimodal composition and digital rhetoric as a way to challenge students and push them outside of their comfort zone. After analyzing several classroom assignments, Duffelmeyer was able to determine that composing within online spaces enabled deeper cultural awareness in students (370).

In a report to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 2009, Kathleen Blake Yancy calls for instructors to "help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future" (1). How we actually do this has been a longstanding debate within the discipline with the indecision likely stemming kinds of writing and "work" we have valued throughout our history. With rapidly advancing technology and more opportunity to broadcast our writing how do we teach "marketable" writing for our students? The research

space of this project might address these concerns if allowed in the classroom. However, more work needs to be done to discover how to actually implement this in the classroom. Ledbetter has contributed to this idea, but we need more on how to tie online composition pedagogy with a more commodified composition and how to balance the integrity of an individual's identity with their monetary opportunities. This project might be of interest for graduating Writing and Rhetoric majors who seek to teach the subjects to kids and young adults. Specifically, information literacy has become a prominent topic in the field. This study illustrates its importance in participating in the space with both production of videos and the consumption of them. How can we responsibly consume the content on YouTube beauty and acknowledge the constraints related to brand relations that guide the discourse? How can students seeking to enter this field navigate the balance between maintaining the creativity and artistry the community desires while also making a career from the composition? How can writing and rhetoric teachers prepare students for this? While this study does not answer all of these questions, it at least offers a start to the conversation by highlighting current discourses within the space.

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