

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Data Analysis**

Media has been playing a vital role in portraying images of both men and women in this information age and has widely affected the way in which people shape their own identity. In particular, the Internet has been a significant tool to communicate one's intention and voice to the public arena and YouTube is one of the websites where many users allow some of their personal matters to be published in the public sphere. A group of women, known as beauty gurus, have been producing videos sharing tutorials or their own methods of wearing make-up in varied occasions on YouTube.

YouTube beauty videos in this study can be categorized into two main types: make-up tutorials and beauty advice. The make-up tutorial videos aim to demonstrate how to wear make-up step-by-step on different occasions; these include seasonal make-up, everyday make-up, festive make-up, and fantasy make-up, and can include choosing outfits. The beauty advice videos focus on recommendations of beauty products and practices that are presented as the best and most practical for those beauty gurus. The beauty advice videos include skincare tips, basic beauty advice, and the beauty gurus' favorite beauty products. The videos selected in this study are created by the most subscribed channels of YouTube beauty videos, and include Zoella, Bethany Mota, Michelle Phan, CutiePie Marzia, and Meredith Foster. The total number of subscribers of these five channels is almost 40 million and the number of views of these 65 selected videos in this study exceeds 200 million. A great number of these participants imply that the beauty gurus or video producers are influential in the beauty online community and represent how women perceive beautifying process at the present time.

This study focuses on the role of various beauty gurus in the online society by examining whether their beauty videos promote female empowerment or female subjugation. Some beauty videos produced by the beauty gurus reflect a mode of expression that asserts their power and independence, whereas a small number of videos reproduces an idealized beauty dominated by patriarchal norms. In order to clarify the concepts of the beauty videos and the role of women in this popular community, an analysis of communicative messages and visuals is crucial.

#### **4.1 Girl empowerment**

Women have been negotiating their social status for over a century. This became a political movement when women fought for the right to vote to gain social equality with men. The succeeding feminist movement has challenged the oppression of women in domestic, professional, and sexual domains and has demanded full equality in these areas. Later, there is a discourse called “girl power” in the recent feminist movement, or third-wave feminism. The concept of girl power is used to describe women, especially young women, who embrace their feminine quality or beautifying practices to gain social, economic, and cultural power and to resist the patriarchal standard (Zaslow 158-159). Women in the girl power media culture are active agents who possess freedom in controlling their own bodies and in expressing their intentions and voices to the public community via social media, or in this case via YouTube. As a result of being independent subjects, these women have crafted their identities by expressing individualities and diversities through physical appearance. Physical appearance or beautifying practices provide an opportunity to a group of women called “beauty gurus” to become empowering subjects.

In the age of the Internet, people widely use information communication technologies to connect, exchange opinions, debate significant issues, and express their voices to other people worldwide. In addition, the Internet is beneficial for women in dispersing information, creating an empowered group, and communicating their voices and intentions without any control from men and the mass media (Tsatsou 520). These women have autonomy in their own selves, both internally and externally. They have freedom to choose what they believe in, from political regimes to cosmetic brands, and

to discuss them publicly. Externally, they provide themselves many options in decorating their bodies to express intentions and desires without being exploited by male-dominated norms. As a result, modern women have turned themselves from objects of desire or objects for the male gaze to empowering subjects or a choice-making agents by embracing their feminine side and using it as a tool to reinforce their social, economic, and cultural status (Zaslow 102).

#### **4.1.1 Freedom of choice**

The first characteristic of girl power culture shown in the selected YouTube beauty videos is related to the freedom that solely belongs to young women in choosing and controlling their physical appearance as a means of expressing their voices and intentions. This freedom has provided these beauty gurus the power in alternating their styles by presenting themselves in the desired looks and publishing them in their own broadcasting channels not dominated by the mass media. They have control over their external appearance, when to be girly and naïve, or when to be fierce and sultry, when to wear make-up for their private matters, or when to show cultural expression, when to be playful or when to be serious, and when to embrace their natural physical features or when to cover them up. As a result, these expressions of beauty styles empower them to fulfill their own desire and pleasure: they consider their self-improvement or self-decoration as gaining satisfaction and confidence in their own selves, without any concern whether their appearances would attract the male's gaze or attention.

Michelle Phan, one of the selected YouTube beauty gurus, is a good example of young woman who gains power in alternating and playing with her styles on her channel. The two following examples suggest that Michelle Phan wants to convey a message that one girl or woman can change her styles by only applying different colors which would set the tone of each make-up look, at her own pleasure. Her video called "5 Lipstick Looks & A Valentine's Day DIY!", published on 2015, is a suggestion on how to choose lipstick color on the Valentine's Day and how each lip color conveys the wearer's message. Lipstick can be a mark of women's freedom of choice and expression in the way that she can choose lipstick from a wide selection of colors and communicate her intention via the color of her lips. She claims that "nude" lipstick

illustrates “both a sultry and innocent” image, that “orange” lip color gives “fun and expected” vibes and “it says you like to try new things and that you are comfortable with your skin,” and that “plummy lip” or light reddish-purple lip color represents a “dreamy and romantic” quality. While the most common lip color, the hot red lips, introduces a “bold, audacious and sexy” style and a “dark berry” lipstick is “rebellious and romantic at the same time” and is suitable for dating on a special day or anytime when the wearer wants to reveal her “inner bad girl.” The implicit meaning of each lip color clearly shows that this beauty guru uses make-up as a tool to send a message to the viewers, including her partner, not necessarily to win their admiration but to satisfy herself.

Additionally, Michelle Phan can portray herself in a girly and sweet look with a pink shade on her face for Valentine’s Day in the video titled “Love Me For Me” as seen in figure 4.1. She appropriates her look for the special day by creating a romantic mood on her face. Moreover, external appearance is her option in expressing the way she wants to gain attention as she states, “Be flirty without having to say a single word.” Then, as shown in figure 4.2, she creates a contrasting video entitled “Grunge Beauty” as an image of a girl who admires grunge music. Even though there is no indication in the video if she likes grunge music, she chooses to wear dark lipstick to create this fierce and sultry look as an expression of her own pleasure. Both of these two looks present desirability, but in two different ways: the pink make-up look in the first look shows a feminine quality in a sweet and naïve sense while the darker tone of make-up in the second look produces a more provocative and bolder style. Her power in beautifying herself is not to be desirable for men, but to possess complete autonomy in alternating from one style to another style at her own will.



Figure 4.1 Michelle Phan in Valentine's Day look



Figure 4.2 Michelle Phan in Grunge Beauty look

Zoella, another beauty guru on YouTube, also insists that beautifying oneself can be a way of expressing and satisfying women's selves, regardless of how men perceive women. In her video called "Drugstore Valentines Makeup Tutorial," she mentions before starting the tutorial on wearing make-up on Valentine's Day, "But you don't need to doll yourself up for anyone. You only wanna do it for you because it makes you feel great and because you enjoy it."

Michelle Phan also encourages her audience to experiment with nontraditional styles and affirms that the autonomy in presenting and alternating one's style is in their hands by creating the video titled "Psychedelic Dreams," which is the make-up tutorial on her fantasy look. In this video, she shows two different looks distinguished by nude and blue lip colors, as show in figure 4.3. She stated firmly, "It doesn't matter what lip

or make-up you decide to go with, just make sure to wear it confidently. Because make-up is an expression of one of your many sides. Express confidently.”

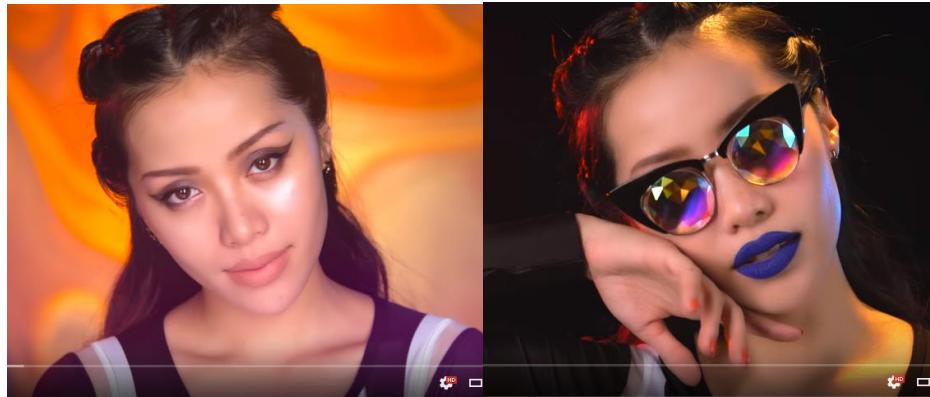


Figure 4.3 Michelle Phan in Psychedelic Dreams look

Similarly, Zoella produces a video in 2014 called, “Autumn/Fall Makeup | Gold Eyes & Berry Lips | Zoella,” she applies a coppery eye shadow, a golden blusher, and a dark berry lipstick, which are similar to the tone of autumn leaves. As shown in figure 4.4, she chooses an unconventional lip color as it is darker than usual lipstick shades. She claims,

So this is my finished look. It’s definitely not a subtle look and it’s definitely one for who’s feeling a little bit more brave . . . and want to rock a darker lip. But I honestly think you should just do it. I love wearing dark colors on my lips. I feel like they are so much fun to wear . . . I hope that you would enjoy it and that it has inspired you to rock a bit of the darker lip around this time of the year.

She feels comfortable to wear this dark lip color and that her ability to choose and create this adventurous look gives her the power to influence her audience to try something different.



Figure 4.4 Zoella in the 2014 autumn/fall make-up look

These two gurus affirm that freedom in stylistic changes empower them to fulfill their desire and to promote their self-confidence. This control allows them to feel comfortable to express themselves or to attract attention. More importantly, this autonomy in their physical appearance enables these beauty gurus to be an inspiration for their audiences to alternate their styles and to experiment with nontraditional styles.

Wearing make-up can also be an expression of creativity for these beauty gurus. Unlike the mainstream media, YouTube provides freedom for some young women to create a wide range of beauty styles and to become beauty experts, which they might not be able to achieve in the traditional media. The make-up tutorials suggest that decorating oneself not only represents beauty and femininity, but demonstrates their ability and expertise in applying make-up. In October 2014, Michelle Phan launched the Halloween make-up video with the title “Breakfast at Zombie’s” inspired by the movie “Breakfast at Tiffany’s.” She creates the first look for her audience who desire to go to a Halloween party in an elegant style and the second look for the viewers who admire a scarier and braver look, as shown in figure 4.5. She simplifies this complicated make-up look and explains its applying method to her viewers and lets them realize that they can achieve these looks as well.



Figure 4.5 Michelle Phan in the Breakfast at Zombie's look for Halloween

Apart from being talented, these beauty gurus are also active agents who use make-up as a tool of cultural expression. Michelle Phan produces a colorful make-up style entitled “Color Explosion: Party Makeup ”which is inspired by Holi, a festival celebrating the beginning of the spring season in India. She celebrates the festival by putting on a vivid pink eyes shadow with blue eyeliner and a bright pink lipstick, as shown in figure 4.6, and creating a scene with different shades of colored powder as in the actual festival in India . She states, “Don’t be scared to try bold color . . .Get ready, be fearless, and have fun!” to encourage her audience to be more confident in making up with daring colors and to be joyful with their choice of make-up . This emphasizes how women empower themselves with freedom of choice to create their own style for any occasion and moment.



Figure 4.6 Michelle Phan in the make-up look inspired by the Holi festival



Bethany Mota, another beauty guru and the most popular one on YouTube, emphasizes that women can be a part of festive celebrations in their own way and decorating oneself allows them to enjoy and fulfill their pleasure. She produces a video called “Fourth of July Outfit ideas, DIY Treats + Hair & Makeup!” as a celebration of the Fourth of July, the anniversary of the United States as a nation. She creates this video to give tutorials on how to wear make-up, outfits, hairstyles, and how to make a snack with the theme of the Fourth of July. She intentionally applies the three colors of the American flag on her face as shown in figure 4.7. She uses blue eyeliner, a pink-red lipstick, and white eyeliner to draw a little star on her face.

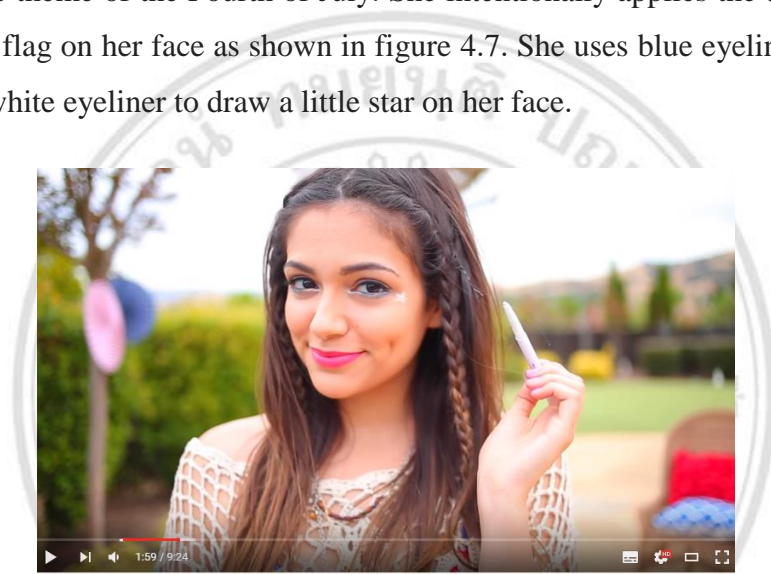


Figure 4.7 Bethany Mota in the Fourth of July look

Wearing make-up can also be a way of living their fantasies as these beauty gurus create some imaginative looks in their own channels on YouTube. Michelle Phan creates the 2015 Halloween make-up look in the video named “© Sailor Moon: Kōan ✧ Black Moon Clan Collab” using one of the characters in a Japanese comic book as a model. In figure 4.8, she wears purple eye shadow, dark purple lipstick, false lashes, and contact lenses as her own modification of this fantasy character. She picks this character because it is more related to her than other characters in this comic book as she says, “My look is inspired by Kōan, the youngest of the four sisters who is known to be obsessed with makeup and shopping. I know that’s so me, right?” With this look, she becomes what she has fantasized about.



Figure 4.8 Michelle Phan in the 2015 Halloween make-up look

According to Zaslow, women in girl power culture have freedom in expressing themselves and their desires (158). The feminine quality is a tool of empowerment as they apply beautifying practices to demonstrate that women are active choice-making subjects. These beauty videos in YouTube suggest that the beauty gurus can be whatever they desire to be and they have power through their choices in decorating themselves. They can alternate their styles from one to another and these stylistic changes empower them, boost their confidence, and make them feel good about themselves. Wearing make-up can also be a tool of expressing women's intentions: in order to gain attention, both from men and other people. They have autonomy to apply the desired colors or styles which convey their moods or motives. The bare face can be an empty canvas for the beauty gurus to show their ability, creativity, and fantasy, and there is no limitation by the mainstream media or society that is dominated by celebrities and supermodels. Above all, they apply this freedom of choice in decorating themselves to challenge their audience to explore various styles and to inspire them to express their individuality with confidence and grace.

#### 4.1.2 Individuality

The emphasis on individuality and diversity over collective beauty suggests how beauty gurus in YouTube mark their identities in the online community. Beauty gurus promote individuality with self-beautification as a tool to empower both themselves and their viewers. This quality allows young women to challenge the concept of ideal beauty portrayed by mass media and to discover their own selves by experimenting with

beauty practices and express their individuality and uniqueness. They encourage their audiences to embrace not only their own natural beauty but also their flaws and enhance them with make-up or a desired look.

To illustrate, Michelle Phan motivates her viewers to be themselves on important days as she states,

Just wanted to let you guys know how important it is to look like yourself when you're graduating . I know this make-up is really natural-looking and simple . But there's nothing better than timeless beauty and you want to look like yourself when you are graduating.

In the video called “Graduation Beauty Tips +My Speech”! Instead of guiding her audiences to wear full-coverage make-up and to look flawless on this important day, she insists that originality is the best way to celebrate their success as seen in figure 4.9. It can imply that embracing one's true self, with both perfection and imperfection, and enhancing one's natural beauty is a way to express one's identity and independence from the mainstream beauty . Another video produced by Michelle Phan titled, “Beauty Basic : Brows,” also suggests that imperfection in one's self can be embellished and that distinguishes one from others. She states,

If you're more like me and you prefer having that rugged brow look, you want something that's a little more natural and unruly . Skip the concealer .You don't really need it . Embrace the strays ...Celebrate how amazing your brows look by taking a bunch of selfies . There's nothing wrong with celebrating how beautiful you are.

This statement confirms that Michelle Phan realizes the significance of individual features and wants to inspire other young women to accept and celebrate them as one component of their identity in the same way she embraces her imperfect brows as shown in figure 4.10.

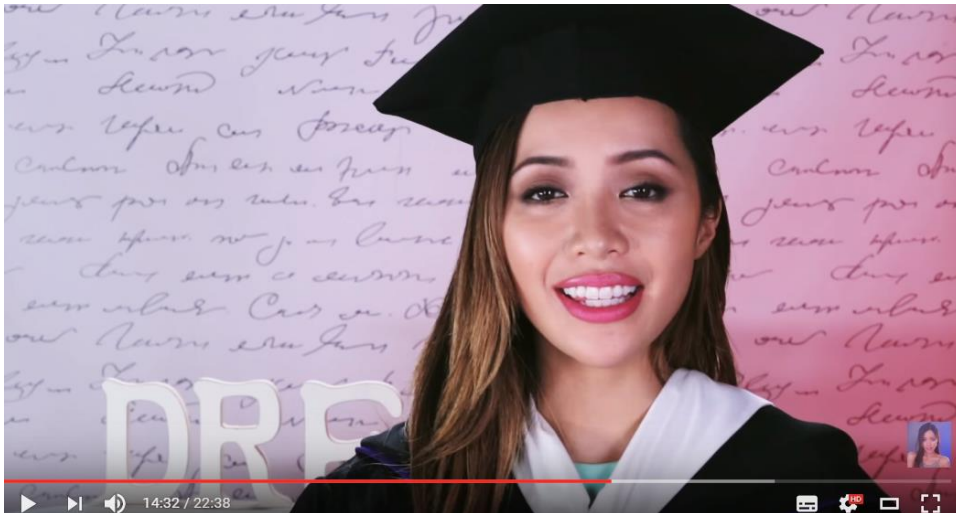


Figure 4.9 Michelle Phan in her graduation look

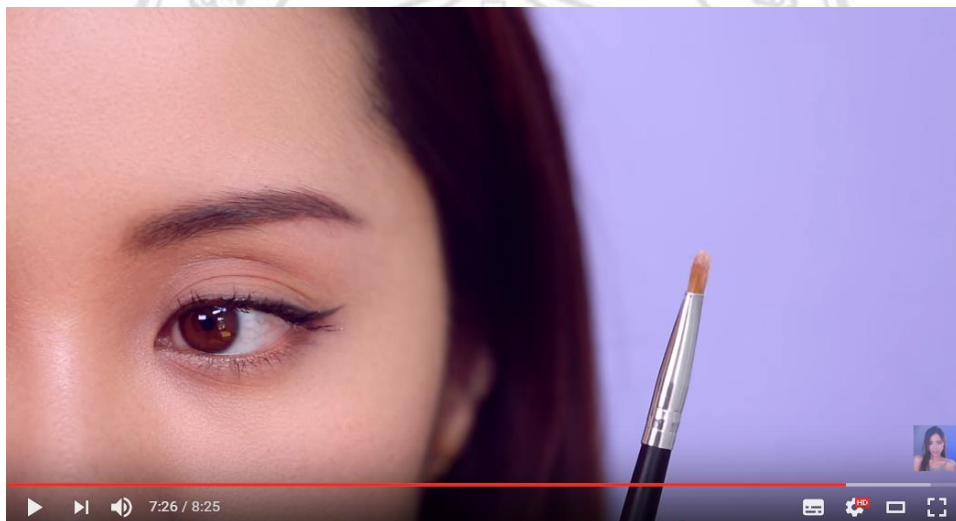


Figure 4.10 Michelle Phan with her imperfect brows

Individuality expressed through using make-up is also a form of resistance to objectification to male desire. These beauty gurus make a connection with their own selves by examining their physical features and experimenting with different styles and expressing their originality to the public world without approval from men. Zoella, the British beauty guru, asserts in her video named, “Drugstore Valentines Makeup Tutorial,” that women can decorate themselves and bear no responsibility to please anybody, except themselves as she says, ...“ you don’t need to doll yourself up for anyone. You only wanna do it for you because it makes you feel great and because you enjoy it.”

Cutie Pie Marzia, an Italian beauty guru, insists on making beauty videos to maintain her individuality. She often creates similar looks with color variations in her tutorial videos and states that she prefers the natural and routine make-up looks. Even when she gets many requests from her audience to create different looks, she describes and apologizes to them in the description of the video titled, “My Date Makeup,” that she would not do a tutorial on a look she would not feel comfortable wearing herself and she was sorry. This shows that she perceives her face as an expression of her individuality and that she is an independent agent, independent of any dominant beauty style.

The ability to express and maintain individuality through their faces and physical appearance empowers the beauty gurus to share their identities which are not dominated by an ideal beauty constructed by the patriarchal norms, with other young women in the online world. They embrace their individual features rather than conform to the collective beauty ideal by distorting or torturing themselves. YouTube beauty gurus are into girl power culture which is inclusive of women. They are not only examples of women who bring the individual self forward to inspire other women, but also support the concept of diversity among women in the online community.

#### **4.1.3 Diversity**

The YouTube beauty community is a combined group of women with diversity rather than a single group of women with similarities. This is a different group formation from historical feminist movements. The recent feminism, or sometimes referred to as third-wave feminism, has evolved from a group of women with a “unified” identity. Before this, the second wave feminism was a “coalitional” group of women with different identities (Snyder 186). In the past, women who fought against oppression by men and society and sought freedom and sexual equality were the group of “white, middle-class, and well-educated women” (Krolokke and Sorensen 3-4). The second wave movement was mainly concerned with personal problems of women who were dominated in domestic, career, and sexual aspects and those problems were publicized and became issues for most women, according to the slogan “the personal is political” (Hollows 4). Later, feminist groups became more diverse and flexible. Women have been more empowered and have had advantages in many sectors of the

world, including in the online world where women become more powerful in everything including YouTube. Beauty gurus embrace their feminine quality to achieve acceptance and admiration. The reason that causes these beauty gurus to become popular and approachable is that they are more realistic than flawless models presented in the mass media and that they are a combined group of women with diverse racial backgrounds and identities who most ordinary girls can emotionally connect with.

These top five YouTube beauty gurus have different characteristics and backgrounds. Zoella, who owns the most popular beauty channel with over 11 million subscribers, is English (“Zoella”). Bethany Mota, who has about 10.2 million subscribers, lives in California, USA but she is Mexican and Portuguese (“Bethany Mota”). Michelle Phan is Vietnamese and resides in Massachusetts, USA. Her channel is subscribed to by over 8.4 million users (“Michelle Phan”). CutiePieMarzia, who owns a channel with about 6.6 million subscribers, is an Italian guru and now lives in London, England (“CutiePieMarzia”). And Meredith Foster, who has over 4.6 millions subscribers, is American and lives in California, USA (Blogking). The total number of viewers of these five channels is approximately 3.6 billion (Blogking, “Bethany Mota,” “CutiePieMarzia,” “Michelle Phan,” and “Zoella”).

The diversity in race and characteristics among the beauty gurus allows young women to break through beauty stereotyping . Women often have their ideal beauty, which is usually dominated by both men’s desires and the mainstream media. The beauty portrayed by the mass media has created a stereotype of a beautiful woman and it has become an obligation that every woman should comply with. According to research, some universal standards define standard attractiveness, with such features such as “Symmetrical facial properties, large eyes, dilated pupils, prominent cheekbones, thin eyebrows and pleasant dispositions” are accepted as components of a beautiful face (Rahman 154). However, the beauty personalities in YouTube show that female beauty is not limited to a flawless beauty found on covers of magazines or television. They have their unique personality and external appearances which they not only embrace, but also encourage other women to embrace them . They apply make-up to suit their own features and characters. In addition, the beauty gurus prove Gaunlett’s statement true, they are “less glossy and stereotypical, and are, correspondingly more

real, varied, and imaginative” (73). Since most beauty gurus on YouTube are ordinary girls, they are representations of real girls who are not impeccably beautiful or do not possess exceptional features. With their different origins and races, the beauty gurus expand the scope of beauty to include every style. Each of these five beauty gurus, with their American, Asian, British, Italian, and Mexican-Portuguese origins, presents different skin colors, eye colors, eye shapes, and facial structures. The viewers can relate to the beauty gurus as they can choose the style that is suitable for themselves. Or they can even try different styles or looks to see if there are more options for them to beautify themselves. It can also be said that diverse characteristics and physical appearances of YouTube beauty personalities offer more alternatives to the viewers to access to unlimited and undominated beauty styles. It assures that beauty is not generalized and each woman has her own uniqueness.

Michelle Phan produces a video titled, “Fantasy Looks //The Magician +High Priestess, ” to display how women can be different in one make-up theme by collaborating with another YouTube beauty guru called JKissa, to create two different looks inspired by the art of Tarot cards. These two beauty gurus have different characteristics, Michelle Phan is Asian and JKissa is Caucasian, but they can portray a common artistic looks as seen in figure 4.11. Another video, published by Michelle Phan, demonstrates how young women who share common interests can work together and inspire other young women, called, “Music Festival Looks : Zodiac Sirens©.” Michelle Phan collaborates with other beauty video producers and a professional make-up artist to create the video portraying make-up styles inspired by the four elements of air, earth, fire, and water, of the zodiac signs. From these two video, Michelle Phan and other beauty gurus demonstrate that each beauty guru does not have to publish and communicate with audiences individually but they can coordinate with each other to provide a wider scope of beautiful looks. The beauty gurus create these beauty videos as guidelines for all women with different skin tones or facial structures so they can modify any beauty style by adjusting color or make-up technique to suit themselves. These YouTube beauty gurus, thus, expand the definition of beauty beyond the enduring portrayed beauty in the mass media to a variation of individual beauty based on women’s physical appearances and characteristics.



Figure 4.11 Michelle Phan and JKissa in fantasy looks inspired by Tarot cards

The diversity of women is reflected in an empowered group of YouTube beauty gurus who are claiming their status in the media world. The creators of these beauty videos indicate that there can be multiple external forms of women exhibited on the screen and they encourage other women or their audiences to broadened aspects of beauty. The examples of beauty videos co-created by a group of YouTube beauty gurus lead to the expansion of a notion of beauty as they demonstrate the authentic beauty of the majority of women, which is diverse, unique, inclusive, and democratic and not dominated by any ideal beauty. As beauty icons, these gurus influence their admirers, they realize that each woman possesses a unique beauty and she should not accept only her own authentic beauty, but also the diverse and inclusive beauty of all women. When women do not restrict themselves to only one form of female beauty and do not differentiate themselves from other groups of women, they appreciate the diversity of women and they can collaborate to negotiate their status and claim their authentic beauty in the media sphere. These YouTube beauty gurus are challenging the mainstream media by creating a group of women of different races and with authentic physical appearances and are becoming progressively significant in the beauty industry.

The beauty gurus have paved the way for more diverse and authentic role models and for marginal women who have been overlooked in the beauty business to drop the ideal beauty and to be acknowledged in the beauty and fashion community. The popularity of YouTube beauty channels proves that many women, or even men, approve of the diversity and realistic beauty and accept these beauty gurus as their role



models. However, these gurus started out with being normal girls who were eager to explore the online beauty world and, for some beauty gurus, to search for a channel to communicate their suffering to the outside world. All of these beauty gurus have experienced a process of transformation into inspiring pioneers and affirm that ordinary girls too can fulfill their desires and potential.

#### **4.1.4 Democratization of the underprivileged**

The process of transforming ordinary girls into influential beauty gurus in the online community signifies a democratization of beauty which allows normal cyber-girls, who had always been on the margin, to step into the sphere of social and economic attainment, which has always been preserved for models and actresses. These five beauty YouTubers are not categorized as universal beauties, or defined and controlled by patriarchal society, they have been through the journey of becoming acknowledged beauty YouTubers.

These beauty gurus started from being ordinary girls who had a passion for beautifying themselves and then adopting beautifying regimes, experimenting with different make-up looks and sharing them through their own channels on YouTube . Initially, some of them, like Michelle Phan and Zoella, started with an affection for make-up, while other, like Bethany Mota, only sought a channel for relieving her stressful experience of being a victim of bullying in school and, unexpectedly, becomes famous and successful in the online beauty community.

This stage of self-beautifying indicates that these beauty gurus are negotiating the beauty ideal constructed by the mainstream media. In the beginning, women responded to this control by abandoning their own selves and imitating an ideal beauty to obtain admiration from men or acceptance from others. Later, women, especially the second-wave feminists, became aware of their own sense of self and became more aware of the male-dominated power structure. They perceived femininity, as related to passivity, powerlessness, and subordination of women to men. Thus they rejected the ideal beauty standards and released themselves from any oppressive instruments, for example brassieres, high-heeled shoes, and corsets. Today, women are seeking a balance between these contrasting backlashes against male dominance by re-embracing

their feminine qualities while possessing the power to choose their outer appearance freely. They embody confidence and individuality in their physical expression and redefine female beauty.

These beauty gurus win admiration from the beauty community and become influential through crafting their external appearance and exploring their beauty regimes. These beauty gurus are creating equal and personal relationships with their supporters by evaluating their reactions and connecting with them emotionally or socially. This is a dualistic stage where the beauty gurus take their time during filming videos on decorating themselves and, at the same time, they also evaluate their audiences through the amount of receiving likes and comments on each video. Also, the decision to create a video occasionally depends on a reaction from their viewers as seen in the video titled “Fall Makeup.” CutiePieMarzia states, “Lots of you have been leaving nice comments on my pictures in Instagram or on my videos lately about my make-up. So, I thought I will recreate it for you on this video”. This beauty guru takes her followers’ comments into consideration when deciding to produce other videos for their audience. Positive reactions are a key factor that influences beauty gurus to continue filming and creating more videos to satisfy their viewers. For some beauty gurus, their audiences are an important part of their online lives and they take them as their friends whom they can count on and ask for opinions on intimate matters. Bethany Mota, for example, requests her viewers to help her make a decision on which dress she should wear to the prom by leaving answers in the comments on the video titled, “Getting Prom Ready: Makeup, Hair, + My dress!” When she creates the video called “Getting Ready: NYC Meetup + Vlog footage!,” she expresses her appreciation to her followers as she tells them about the meeting,

You guys seriously inspire me to keep going. And I want you guys to know that I will always be here for every single one of you, even the ones that I didn’t get to meet up. I still love all of you guys because you guys are amazing.

Apart from creating beauty videos to gratify her viewers and to induce their support, Bethany Mota also establishes intimate relationships with them. The relationship between beauty gurus and their audiences is not a hierarchical relationship

where the admirers look up to their favorite celebrities. The beauty gurus and their viewers are a group of women who share the same ages and the same passion for beauty. They are equal in the group where they can admire each other directly via Internet and they are compatible as the beauty gurus are more accessible and share common interests with their audiences. It is different with celebrities and fashion icons in the mainstream media where the fans always adore them from afar and the physical appearances of the mainstream celebrities are beyond ordinary girls' reach. Another aspect that induces these beauty gurus to become close with their audiences is that they can be producers or directors of their own shows. They have absolute power over how to put themselves on the screen and how to communicate themselves to their audiences. Most of the beauty videos created by these gurus show that they are the center of the show. The beauty gurus are at the eye-level shot on the screen, which demonstrates the equal relationship between the viewers and the beauty gurus (Mamer 9). They intend to communicate directly to their audiences and they do not distinguish themselves from them by using the high-angle or low-angle shots in order to be inferior or superior to their viewers. The ambience of the beauty videos also suggests sincerity and reality of how these beauty gurus want to communicate and express themselves to their audiences. They create a natural lighting and setting which show the reality of their lives and environment. The more approachable personalities and broadcasted videos are the key factors that make the beauty gurus gain a growing number of subscribers on YouTube.

The popularity of these beauty gurus confirms that they are socially and financially successful in the beauty community. With a combined total number of views of 3.5 billion, these beauty gurus alternate the way of perceiving beauty from the ideal beauty, which normal girls cannot achieve without dedicating themselves to dramatically changing their outer looks, or even their identities, into a more diverse and accessible beauty. This is what every woman possesses and they should embrace it without imitating the glossy and unreachable beauty portrayed in the mass media. The diverse and accessible beauty becomes more accepted and respected in the fashion and beauty businesses. These five beauty gurus gain golden opportunities to be a part of these businesses. Bethany Mota does not only earn 40,000 U.S. dollar a month from her

beauty videos, she also cooperates with some fashion companies, such as JC Penney, Forever 21, and Aeropostale, to co-design clothes, perfume, and fashion accessories (“Bethany Mota”). The other two beauty gurus, Zoella and Michelle Phan, have gained access to the beauty business. Zoella became an owner of a beauty brand called “Zoella Beauty” in September 2014 and this brand still exists in the online world today (“Zoella”). Because of her fame on YouTube, Michelle Phan has become one of the most popular cosmetic brand representatives. She had worked for Lancome as a make-up artist before she launched her own cosmetic brand, “EM Cosmetics” from cooperation with L’Oreal Company (“Michelle Phan”). CutiePie Marzia also launched her designed shoes supported by the Project Shoe brand and published a book titled “La Casa Dei Sogni (Dream House)” in 2015.

These famous and successful beauty gurus are examples of self-presentation in the online media where they have autonomy over their appearance and expression, to exhibit their individuality by embracing both their attractive features and imperfections. Moreover, they expand the definition of beauty into a more diverse and reachable one. They convince other ordinary girls to be more confident with their looks and empower themselves as they receive social and financial opportunities unlikely to be offered to average girls.

The following section shows some significant messages conveyed in beauty videos in which some women, like these beauty gurus, are still struggling to reach an ideal beauty standard.

#### **4.2 Female Subjugation**

Beauty gurus’ fame and power in the beauty community demonstrate how young women empower themselves through beauty regimes and establish relationship with other women. However, for some viewers, they deliver some messages indicating that female subjugation still exists among women in beauty community. Before, female subjugation had been concerned with ideal beauty as portrayed by men and the mass media. Women’s beautification had been based mainly on dominant beauty standards and for the pleasure of the male gaze. Today, women beautify themselves in order to reach ideal beauty standards and to gain acceptability from other people as seen in some

YouTube beauty videos. There is no explicit message in beauty videos on YouTube suggesting that these beauty gurus present themselves as an object for men. Nevertheless, some small portion of the videos studied shows conformation to an ideal beauty.

#### **4.2.1 Hiding the flaws**

These beauty gurus implicitly express that they are still controlled by an ideal standard of beauty by not embracing their natural flaws and, instead, covering them up with make-up. The mass media repeatedly projects images of flawless and unrealistic beauty icons and they become an underlying message that guides women to try to perfect themselves in order to gain approval as beautiful women. Consequently, some women believe that their imperfect physical features, such as obese bodies, blemishes, and dark under-eye circles are obstacles, which they need to hide or remove to achieve an ideal beauty standard. These beauty gurus also apply make-up products in order to conceal insecurities on their bare faces and they do not feel confident without wearing make-up. Zoella is afraid to show her unpolished face shown in figure 4.12 and complains about her skin in her video called “My Everyday Makeup Routine | Zoella,”

So, here I am. Finally naked on the Internet. Something that quite honestly terrifies me. Although, I know that not everyone has perfect skin, I'm quite unsecured about mine. As I inherited dark under eye circles. Yeah! Thanks, dad. And I also get scarring whenever I have a spot, which tends to leave me with a few blemishes and a little bit of redness.

Her insecurity about her skin indicates that even though it is normal for young women to have imperfect skin, she supposes that her face should be flawless in front of a camera like models or celebrities on screen.



Figure 4.12 Zoella's face without make-up

Michelle Phan also repeats that women should cover up their imperfect skin with make-up products. In her video titled, “Color Explosion: Party Makeup,” she gives her opinion about a concealer that it was like Photoshop in real life. She thinks that the flaws on the skin should be concealed with a skin-tone color cosmetic or should be erased with a real computer program. Moreover, she suggests to her viewers in another video called, “90’s Nostalgia – Beauty + Style Guide,” that they should have “a flawless complexion” after completing making up their faces. The beauty standard displayed on screen or in fashion magazines convinces many women to achieve those gorgeous faces and the messages sent from some YouTube beauty videos imply that their outer appearances are still based on an ideal beauty.

#### 4.2.2 Willingness to hurt oneself

The beauty norms are still dominating how young women decorate themselves not only in a way that they have to hide their natural flaws and put on a mask of make-up in order to feel more confident or to satisfy their viewers, but some beauty gurus are struggling and even troubling themselves to attain the desired and ideal looks. Investigating beauty videos in YouTube, it is found that these young women are willing to hurt themselves to achieve the ideal looks and they send a message suggesting that in order to be beautiful, it is acceptable to go through a painful regime. Michelle Phan produces the video titled, “5 Ways to PLUMP Your Lips!,” to give five tips to make their lips fuller as most women wish for the plump and full lips they see on some famous celebrities. She starts from the most natural way, which is applying cayenne

pepper and cinnamon powder on her lips for a moment to create swollen lips and she confesses that this method causes her lips to feel “a stinging sensation” but it is not that painful. However, she presents two more painful ways to plump out her lips. The first one is to use a small machine that looks like an electric toothbrush to scrub her lips and the other one as shown in figure 4.13, which seems to be harmful for her lips, is to use a derma roller. She explains that there are a lot of micro-needles on the device and says, “And what you are doing essentially is micro-needling your lips and it’s creating little microscopic tears and holes on the surface of your skin and lips.” This last method clearly shows that women occasionally seek a nontraditional way to beautify themselves and seek to attain an ideal image as shown in mass media. Phan also uses a small device, shown in figure 4.14, acting as a vacuum cup that will cause an increase in the blood circulation on her lips.

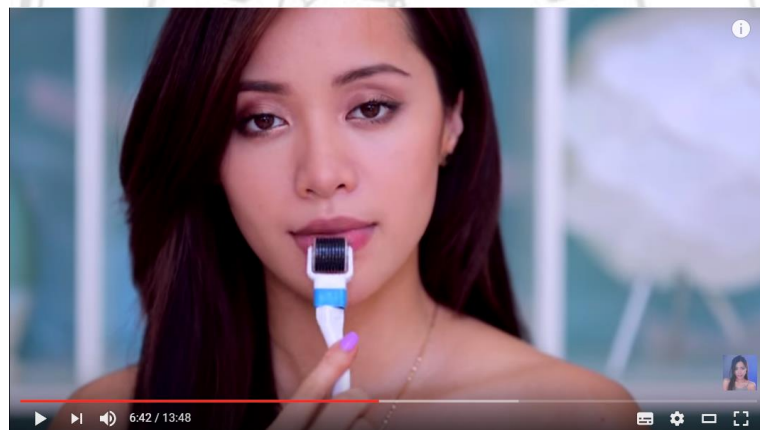


Figure 4.13 Michelle Phan using micro-needling device to plump her lips



Figure 4.14 Michelle Phan using a lip enhancing tool

Michelle Phan, in her video named, “Lunar New Year Beauty,” suggests to her audience who want to fill out a lash line to a line on an upper water line but this way might make cause a little uncomfortable feeling. Despite this, she informs her followers, “...but believe me it will look good. No pain no gain.” Her statement implies that for women to look desirable, they have to trade it with some painful or uncomfortable feelings.

#### **4.2.3 Putting others above oneself**

Despite the fact that beauty gurus publish some videos inspired by celebrities’ styles and make-up looks which indicate that these young women have autonomy in choosing and applying any style that they desire, there are a few beauty videos in which the beauty gurus are trying to replicate their beauty icon’s looks and they are sending an implicit message to their viewers that they should adopt those looks and that in order to attain their styles, they should own the same make-up products or clothes as the celebrities do. Bethany Mota has filmed a video titled, “Ariana Grande Hair, Makeup, & Outfit! (Celeb Style),” to demonstrate how to wear make-up and outfits like Ariana Grande, an American singer and actress. As seen in figure 4.15, Bethany shows her viewers that she uses the exact same lip color and wears the same outfits as the celebrity. She states “And the last outfit is actually an exact replica of something that Ariana has worn recently.” This shows that the perfect images of women exhibited on mass media are appropriated as the norm and affect how some young women express themselves since they are convinced that these images are real and they should try to achieve these looks. The act of replicating celebrities’ styles might also lead to diminishing self-satisfaction because they choose to struggle to reach the ideal looks which they think are acceptable and desirable for most people, instead of embracing and expressing their authentic selves in the beauty community.





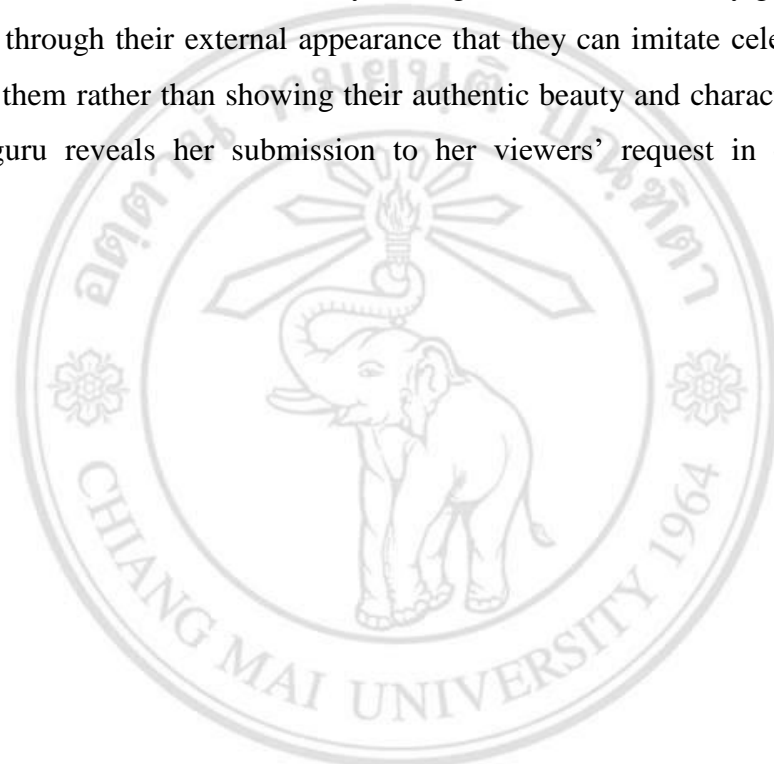
Figure 4.15 Bethany Mota replicating Ariana Grande’s make-up and outfit style

Female subjugation does not relate to only women’s attempt to win admiration from the male gaze, but it also is about how women objectify themselves to gain acceptance and popularity from other people and it is found in this study that some beauty gurus do not always produce videos of their will but they do it because of their followers’ requests. Zoella has created a video named, “Get Ready With Me – Festival Edition,” which is a requested look from her subscribers. However she clearly states that she does not like camping festivals and did not feel comfortable in doing this look. In this video, there is no voice-over explanation during applying make-up like in her other beauty videos, and she sets a different camera angle where she is applying make-up in the mirror, instead of looking directly into the camera, as shown in figure 4.16. Her apathetic feeling and statement shown in this video suggest that it is more important for her to satisfy her viewers than to create the beauty videos that she desires to do. The expectation from her followers causes this beauty guru to respond to their requests and to become a passive agent who has to fulfill others’ pleasure.



Figure 4.16 Zoella setting a different camera angle from other videos

Female subjugation appearing in this study is mainly based on self-subjugation in a way that these beauty gurus are no longer decorating themselves to attract or please men. In 5 out of 23 beauty videos, some of the beauty gurus demonstrate that the ideal beauty and gaining admiration from others affect how some women express themselves. They create a beauty tutorial in order to show how to hide their flaws due to an attempt to achieve ideal beauty. While another beauty guru conveys a message to her viewers that she is able to have a desirable look by hurting herself. Some beauty gurus choose to communicate through their external appearance that they can imitate celebrities' styles and look like them rather than showing their authentic beauty and characteristics. And one beauty guru reveals her submission to her viewers' request in order to gain acceptance.



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