YouTube Beauty Boys as Expert Subversive Technical Communicators

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Abstract

This study considers the "beauty boys"—cisgendered, gay men who post makeup tutorials on YouTube as experts in Kimball's (2016) tactical technical communication method. I also employ Butler's (1990) theories of gender performance and subversion to show how the beauty boys are simultaneously subverting hegemonic notions of masculinity and the gender binary, while they're instructing viewers in the complex processes of makeup application. In this way, I endeavor to show that the beauty boys are a good example of where the field of technical communication is headed, or at least should be headed—ethical and effective tactical technical communication that privileges diversity, inclusion, and self-expression.

YouTube Beauty Boys as Expert Subversive Technical Communicators

Technical communication has historically been seen as occurring primarily within the business workplace, and thus excluding the work of women and minorities who don't have regular or easy access to such spaces (Allen, 1990; Connors, 1982; Durack, 1997; Haas, 2012; Johnson, Pimentel, & Pimentel, 2008; Moeller & Frost, 2016; Pimentel & Balzhiser, 2012; Tebeaux, 1993; Williams, 2013). Not surprisingly, this also means technical communication has always been and still is deeply embedded in industry and capitalist structures (Connors, 1982; Durack, 1997; Haas, 2012; Jones, 2016; Kimball, 2016). Naturally, this has led many scholars to only study the technical communication that occurs within or is a product of professional or governmental institutions, organizations, businesses, or corporations. Though this type of scholarship is often enlightening and necessary, I, like Kimball (2016), am interested in considering what happens when we push technical communication scholarship to look outside industry and business, especially outside the spheres of predominantly straight, white men, for examples of technical communication, even examples of expert technical communication. This is why I propose viewing the "beauty boys"—cisgendered, gay men who post makeup tutorials to YouTube—as expert technical communicators who epitomize Kimball's (2016) *tactical technical communication* strategy and also use their tutorials as platforms to advance messages of self-expression, love, courage, and inclusion. Thereby, this study attempts to answer Jones' (2016) call to integrate social justice approaches into technical communication research and pedagogy.

Employing said social justice framework, I will use Butler's (1990) theories of *gender performance* and *subversion* to explore how the beauty boys' tutorials force viewers to reconsider hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity, ultimately calling into question the

validity and necessity of the gender binary itself. I hope this study induces other technical

communication scholars to look beyond the conventional workplace and into new mediums, like

YouTube, and underrepresented populations, like the beauty boys, for future research.

An Introduction to the Beauty Boys

The "beauty boys," a moniker bestowed by *Marie Claire* magazine, are a culture of men

who have YouTube channels and other social media accounts dedicated specifically to makeup

(Beck, 2016). They talk about everything from favorite makeup products to application tips and

tricks. And, of course, they all have a different take on makeup, but I will be considering the

YouTube makeup "gurus" who focus primarily on beauty or glamour (glam) makeup tutorials.

Some of these YouTubers include Jeffree Star, Manny Mua, PatrickStarrr, and James Charles,

who is actually the first-ever male ambassador for the CoverGirl brand; they're aptly calling him

the "Cover Boy" (Safronova, 2016).

The beauty boys make it a point to underscore that they are *men*—meaning they are not

transgender, drag queens, or non-binary individuals (Safronova, 2016). [1] Some viewers and

scholars have a difficult time understanding how the beauty boys differ from drag queens

because both are men who wear feminine makeup. However, drag is a theatrical performance,

and drag queens are performers. The beauty boys are not performers in that way—they are not

putting on a theatrical performance like drag queens. In short, drag makeup takes place at a

certain time, on a stage, with lights. The beauty boys wear makeup as part of their daily gender

expression. The makeup they do in their tutorials is the makeup they wear to the grocery store;

whereas a drag queen would likely have a more traditionally masculine gender expression (sans

makeup) at the grocery store. Additionally, many, but not all, of the beauty boys are gay and

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[1] A non-binary individual is a person who identifies as neither a man nor a woman.

open about it. Some of the most popular beauty boys, Manny Mua and PatrickStarrr for example, are men of color. The beauty boys are a diverse bunch, but they are united in that they are all men who share a passion for makeup and technical communication, as I will argue.

Makeup as Technology

Many would argue that a prerequisite of technical writing or technical communication is that it treat an area or piece of technology:

> While it is true that we have yet to agree upon what constitutes modern technical writing, popular definitions often exhibit either or both of two key characteristics: first, a close relationship (in subject matter or function) to *technology*; and second, an understanding that technical writing is associated with *work* and the *workplace*. (Durack, 1997, p. 36)

This line of thinking derives from the history of the technical communication field itself in that "technical communication started *as a profession* by explaining weapons to American soldiers during the 1940s and 1950s" (Kimball, 2016, p. 6). Therefore, it is not surprising that technical communication has always had and likely will always have a close association with technology; this is not inherently negative but rather a reality of the field. However, this reality becomes problematic when the definition of technology becomes too rigid or closes itself off to new potentialities and other aspects of society. This is what took place with the rift between the engineering and English departments in many universities. The rift began in the early days of technical writing as a discipline and persisted many decades after that (some would argue it persists even today)—each discipline thought the other was teaching students in an ill-advised manner and working toward fundamentally flawed ideals (Connors, 1982). Technical communication, particularly as an academic discipline, has a history of being exclusionary—and in more ways than one.

Not only has technical communication been averse to the humanities in the past, but it has also traditionally been the domain of straight white men, systemically ignoring or discrediting the work of women and minorities (Allen, 1990; Durack, 1997; Haas, 2012; Johnson et al., 2008; Jones, 2016; Moeller & Frost, 2016; Pimentel & Balzhiser, 2012; Tebeaux, 1993; Williams, 2012). Because makeup and cosmetics have long been associated almost strictly with women, femininity, and the private sphere, this is a major reason why makeup is not popularly thought of as a form of technology, and why very little, if any, technical communication scholarship exists on makeup instruction:

> The cultural link between science, technology, and masculinity combined with a bias that fails to find significance in productive activities that occur within the household and lack associated cash value has…resulted in an interpretation of 'technical writing' that works to exclude the significant contributions of women. (Durack, 1997, p. 42)

Thus, the exclusion of makeup and makeup application from technical communication scholarship is not because makeup fundamentally lacks technological merit, but because the field has historically excluded technologies that are used primarily by women (this is rapidly changing however) in the domestic sphere.

Makeup, after all, is highly technical. Similar to pharmaceuticals, each product is created in a lab for a specific purpose and must undergo tests and trials before being released for public consumption. Makeup is also a highly lucrative and influential industry. Therefore, my study of makeup as technology and the beauty boys as technical communicators is crucial. Not only does it open the field to critically viewing a technology that has long been ignored, but it also pushes the field to recognize technical communicators from unjustly marginalized groups—gay men and

people of color—and in unlikely places—YouTube. It also fosters openness and fluidity within the definition of technology, and encourages the field of technical communication to become more inclusive, creative, and humanistic.

The Beauty Boys as Tactical Technical Communicators

As mentioned in my discussion of makeup as technology, technical communication and technical communicators are often limited to the realms of business and industry (Connors, 1982). Technical communication has historically been seen as legitimate only when it occurs within a conventional workplace and endeavors to turn a profit (Allen, 1990; Durack, 1997; Moeller & Frost, 2016; Tebeaux, 1993). However, if this historically dominant view is perpetuated, it will forestall the possibility that we can learn how to communicate complex processes efficiently and effectively from those in areas outside the typical business workplace. Furthermore, it is necessary and refreshing to see technical communication as applicable to something other than a capitalist business venture—this is one of the major reasons why viewing the beauty boys as tactical technical communicators is essential.

Kimball (2016) claims that we are in the *Golden Age* of technical communication, meaning that "while the profession of technical communication might have shrunk somewhat, the performance of technical communication has exploded" (p. 11). Kimball (2016) even goes so far as to assert that "at no time in human history have more people, or a greater proportion of living people, been involved in helping to accommodate each other to technology and to accommodate technology to their own ends" (p. 12). I argue this explosion of technical communication is clearly evident on the relatively new medium of YouTube, where do-it-yourself (DIY) videos and tutorials abound: "Typically the most common Do-It-Yourself video category on YouTube is how to apply makeup or do arts and crafts" (Kimball, 2016, p. 12). This

being the case, a crucial component of my argument is that the beauty boys are at the forefront of

the Golden Age of technical communication, and surely support Kimball's (2016) bold and

necessary statement that "we are all technical communicators" (p. 12). Since our society is

enmeshed in often unjust capitalist structures where major corporations hold so much cultural

sway, it is imperative to recognize the expertise of everyday folks, who, through the advent of

the internet and social media platforms like YouTube, finally have the ability to share their

expertise with a vast, sometimes global, audience.

Kimball (2016) delineates between *tactical* and *strategic technical communication,* where

strategic technical communication is performed by professional technical writers in industry and

for a specific, professional institution, organization, or business corporation (p. 13). Tactical

technical communication, however, is "conducted for reasons other than traditional institutional

or *strategic* motivations" (p. 13). It is "a voluntary contribution to public discourse…[that] puts

itself out there and hopes to be heard—perhaps even to entertain, as well as instruct" (Kimball,

2016, p. 14). Tactical technical communication is often "user-created" versus "user-centered,"

"visible" versus "invisible," "signed" versus "anonymous," and "personal" versus "controlled"

(Kimball, 2016, p. 16). I argue the beauty boys' makeup tutorials are a prominent form of tactical

technical communication. As I will demonstrate in the following analysis, the tutorials are

signature user-created pieces that absolutely call attention to themselves and espouse personal

values, all while instructing viewers in the complex process of makeup application. Tactical

technical communication and its study matters because "user-producers often trust and value the

work of other amateur technical communicators over the work produced by a professional tech

writer hired by a corporation" (Kimball, 2016, p. 13). With my study of the beauty boys as

subversive tactical technical communicators, I attempt to answer Kimball's (2016) call to enlarge

the scope of what we consider technical communication to "include the vast, unrecognized bulk of technical communication performed every day…[because] technical communication as an activity has so obviously outstripped the profession" (p. 17-18). I assert the beauty boys' tutorials are not only a portion of this "unrecognized bulk," but also an extremely prominent section that can teach even professional technical writers a great deal when it comes to creating instructional, entertaining, and influential technical communication. It is crucial to start recognizing the beauty boys as highly influential technical communicators because they are working not only to accommodate makeup technologies to users, but they're also working toward a more socially just society by forcing viewers to be critical of the gender binary and realize the humanity and expertise of others very different from themselves.

The Beauty Boys and Butler's (1990) Theory of Gender Subversion

When considering the beauty boys as tactical technical communicators, it's imperative to also consider Butler's (1990) theory of gender performance and "subversion of identity" (p. 199). First of all, it's important to understand Butler (1990) believes the subject, or "I," does not and cannot exist outside of the process of signification: "To understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (p. 198). With this statement, Butler (1990) is effectively saying that everyone, as knowable subjects, exists only within discourse, or language, which strictly and constantly regulates how we are able to talk about and know others and ourselves. Therefore, Butler (1990) is suggesting that identity and the subject inhabiting a certain identity(s) cannot exist or be thought of outside of language and discourse because they constitute identity and thereby subject—language does not reflect some objective identity or truth that is already present outside

of it. Rather, language creates the identity, the subject, the *truth.* Butler's idea is similar to Stuart Hall's (in Jhally, 1997) idea that "representation is constitutive of the event." Hall (in Jhally, 1997) reminds us that representation "enters into the constitution of the object…It is part of the object itself." The object as we know it cannot exist without representation just as the identity-subject as we know it can't exist without the signifying process of language. Both Hall (in Jhally, 1997) and Butler (1990) suggest our language, our representations, and our culture define who we are as individuals, particularly who we are as gendered and sexed individuals.

Butler's (1990) theory of signification becomes relevant to my exploration of the beauty boys when we consider how the English language and Western culture have a very rigid set of rules that govern how we are to describe and enact masculinity. Often, masculinity is diametrically opposed to femininity. Therefore, something strictly associated with or encompassed by the sphere of femininity, like makeup, immediately becomes incompatible with masculinity—with the very act of being a man. Yet, the men in makeup, like Manny Mua, PatrickStarrr, and James Charles, insist they're simply that: men in makeup (Beck, 2016). So then how can we understand the men in makeup phenomenon when we don't have a space in our language and mainstream cultural tradition for a masculine individual who performs feminine actions? Butler's (1990) theory states that the subject is generated through the signification process, but if no sign exists to generate the subject(s) we are considering (the beauty boys in this case), then how can they exist at all? Fortunately, Butler's (1990) theory on signification, specifically gender signification, has a second part, which deals with the concepts of agency and subversion and can shed some light on the existence of the beauty boys.

Butler (1990) believes agency is only afforded to subjects through the very act of signification in a "rule-bound discourse": "signification harbors within itself what the

epistemological discourse refers to as 'agency'" (p. 198). She goes on to state that "rules that govern intelligible identity…rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through repetition" (p. 198). So the societal rules and norms that give us the strict gender hierarchy and binary we know all too well are so powerful and hegemonic because they're constantly being reified and reinforced through personal acts of repetition. In short, when we play by society's established rules governing how we perform femininity and masculinity (like women wearing makeup and men playing sports), we only further cement the presence and power of the rules in our society. However, signified subjects aren't strictly bound or fated to follow the established rules governing gender performance:

> The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. (Butler, 1990, p. 198)

As we know from the beauty boys, there is always the option to subvert the established gender rules through varied repetition. This falls in accordance with Butler's (1990) claim that "agency…is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition…it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible" (p. 198). Consequently, I argue the beauty boys of YouTube are using subversive variations on the repetition of gender norms to destabilize the hegemonic notion that gender is natural, inflexible, and exists only within the man-woman binary.

"The Power of Makeup"

I have chosen to rhetorically analyze PatrickStarrr's (2015) makeup tutorial "The Power of Makeup." It was originally posted on August 31, 2015, and has over eight million views. I've

chosen PatrickStarrr to study because he's one of the most popular beauty boys—his channel has over 2.7 million subscribers—and he's fairly representative of the beauty boys on the whole. He's twenty-seven years old, making him a millennial like most of the beauty boys. His channel primarily centers on makeup tutorials, but he also has videos on fashion and travel. Like the other beauty boys, Patrick is a cis-gendered gay man. However, he's Filipino-American, so he's a person of color, and he's plus-sized. Both identity factors set him apart from the majority thin, white beauty boy population.

I have chosen to analyze "The Power of Makeup" (2015) because, as of this writing, it is still his most popular tutorial with over eight million views. Though it is about two years old at this point, which is a long time speaking in YouTube terms, it is an apt cultural artifact to analyze for this study because it demonstrates several hallmark characteristics of beauty boy tutorials: 1) It is all about the makeup. The entire video is a dedicated makeup tutorial. However, this particular tutorial is unique because Patrick only applies makeup to half his face for comparison purposes. Thus, like the title suggests, this tutorial is all about the power of makeup to transform a person visually, but also socially. As soon as Patrick applies the makeup to his face, he is rewriting what it means to perform masculinity in our culture. I will speak more on this in the analysis of the video. 2) Patrick's diction and delivery is also in line with that of other beauty boys. Most use similar phrases and expressions, and speak in an animated, dramatic manner that is entertaining and engaging, as well as informative. This manner of speaking is synonymous with gay culture, yet I argue it can also be viewed as a form of cultural appropriation (Mannie, 2014). 3) Patrick emphasizes the importance of self-expression and self-love throughout his tutorial. Both topics are major components of the beauty boys community, as they often use their tutorials as platforms to speak on the importance of embracing diversity and

difference, and not being afraid to blaze new trails and go against, or subvert, gender norms. Self-expression and self-love feature prominently in the introduction and conclusion of Patrick's (2015) tutorial.

PatrickStarrr as Tactical Technical Communicator

PatrickStarrr's (2015) tutorial "The Power of Makeup" features the four hallmarks of tactical technical communication—it is visible, user-created, authentic, and personal. Therefore, it contrasts strategic technical communication's invisibility, user-centeredness, anonymity, and controlled nature. Patrick also highly considers his audience, or subscribers, and their needs when making his tutorials. This leads him to employ some typical conventions of the YouTube makeup tutorial genre that allow viewers to better follow and replicate the techniques the YouTuber uses. Thus, I argue Patrick's (2015) tutorial is a highly successful piece of tactical technical communication that effectively caters to a specific audience while avoiding some of the pitfalls of classic strategic technical communication.

Visible and User-Created

It's clear Patrick's (2015) tutorial is not an anonymous or invisible piece of technical communication. Just by virtue of the fact that it's a YouTube video, it is a highly visible piece of communication. What's more, Patrick stars in his own tutorial, in effect "signing" his technical document. If one had any serious questions about authorship, one need look no further than the first five seconds of the video to see "PatrickStarrr" in giant lettering flash across the screen, a clear and self-conscious signature. Patrick obviously wants the viewer to realize that this is his tutorial and his expertise: "It's pleasant to be recognized as an authority" (Kimball, 2016, p. 15).

As far as user-creation is concerned, that's rather self-evident as well. The YouTube video itself is a unique, user-generated genre. Because Patrick is a user of YouTube, his tutorials are all user-created content. This is, in part, what's so fascinating and unique about the Golden Age of technical communication: expertise is conferred not by an educational degree or institutional title as it once was, but by community support (Kimball, 2016). Patrick has become as popular as he is and risen to the level of makeup "guru" because his subscribers, the YouTube makeup community, have granted him this high level of expertise by watching his videos and emulating his makeup looks. In this way, any person with a computer and internet access can potentially rise to the level of global expert with the support of fellow users. Therefore, YouTube viewers truly determine who's in their YouTube community and what kind of content is produced.

Authentic and Personal

Authenticity and personality is really what sets Patrick apart from other technical communicators, particularly professional or strategic technical communicators. His tutorials are undeniably entertaining and engaging. They're colloquial. "The Power of Makeup" includes a phone going off (0:59), people talking in the background (1:06), and Patrick getting tongue-tied (5:52). All this footage would surely get edited out in a formal, professional piece of technical communication. However, all of these "mishaps" make the tutorial more accessible and relatable, even charming. They underscore that Patrick is just a regular human like the rest of us. He isn't perfect and neither is his tutorial. He consciously lets viewers see this by only putting makeup on half his face and including bloopers in his tutorial; he's being vulnerable with his viewers in a way that technical communication often isn't. This truly makes Patrick's (2015) tutorial feel more authentic and relatable than traditional pieces of technical communication.

Patrick's (2015) tutorial is also highly personal. He shares his values and his passion for makeup with viewers throughout the tutorial and in the tutorial's description box:

> I love makeup SO much. I wanted to share my personal makeup transformation on half my face! YES—I am a boy. I am no different than the next person. I believe that it is ok for men to wear lashes and lipstick too! Makeup is art…Don't be afraid to share yourself with the world. Have courage and be kind. (description box)

Clearly Patrick is imparting some deeply held beliefs along with his guide to makeup application. These beliefs and values support a message of self-love and acceptance, of embracing difference and being inclusive to all, and even of courage: "It's okay to be yourself. Don't ever be afraid to share yourself with the world" (7:55). Patrick's message supports a social justice framework as it communicates a desire to accept and embrace people of all gender identities and expressions. Consequently, Patrick's (2015) tutorial is an influential form of tactical technical communication that's working toward a more just and equitable society for himself and others, and its authenticity and personal nature make it all the more effective as such.

Audience

Like any successful technical communicator, Patrick caters to his audience. At the end of "The Power of Makeup" and nearly every one of his tutorials, Patrick says, "Let me know what you guys want to see in my next video" (8:05). He takes his subscribers' comments to heart, often making videos that were requested in the comment section below previous videos. He also often does collaborations with other YouTubers or major players in the cosmetics industry—he recently collaborated with Eva from MyLifeAsEva, another highly popular YouTuber (PatrickStarrr 2017). Thus, he's working directly with those who view his videos and members

of the YouTube community to create content. This recalls and adheres to Johnson's (1997) *audience involved* method of technical communication, where technical communicators bring users in at the design phase rather than just the usability-testing phase.

Patrick also employs popular makeup tutorial conventions—like naming and displaying all products and brushes or applicators before using them, so the viewers can easily follow along and replicate the makeup look exactly if they wish. He also lists all the products he uses in the description box below the tutorial screen. Though these techniques may seem odd or even gauche, they are conventions of the genre. Viewers demand to know exactly what products are being used, and Patrick has adjusted his tutorials to fit that viewer demand. Patrick's (2015) tutorial is also high definition, sharply focused, and well-lit, necessary attributes of a successful makeup tutorial as the viewers need to be able to clearly see all the small, intricate techniques and detail Patrick is using to make over his face. Overall, Patrick's (2015) tutorial expertly caters to his viewers and their needs, and his viewers have responded by making him one of the most popular beauty boys on YouTube. That definitely is the mark of expert technical communication.

PatrickStarrr Subverting the Gender Binary

Patrick is parodying[2] gender rules through the act of applying makeup to subvert gender norms and demonstrate the artificiality and construction of gender and its binary system while at the same time still managing to entertain and "accommodate each other to technology…technology to their own ends" (Kimball, 2016, p. 12). Butler (1990) reminds us,

There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains 'integrity' prior to its

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[2] I'm referring to Butler's (1990) definition of parody in this essay, which is less about making a humorous piece or statement, and more about using an exaggeration or caricature of a specific aspect of society to call attention to its social construction or artificiality.

entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where

they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there. (p. 199)

Patrick and the beauty boys are certainly "taking up" the cultural tools—YouTube, makeup,

technical communication, discourse and language—and using them to subvert and denaturalize

our heavily entrenched conceptions of gender and what it means to perform masculinity and to

be a man, and in so doing, push for a more socially conscientious and just society.

In analyzing this tutorial, I'd like to focus on two major areas (though there are many)

where Patrick subverts gender norms by adopting and even parodying a feminine identity while

maintaining his status as a cisgendered, gay man. Firstly, I'd like to explore how Patrick's voice

and the language he uses parodies that of a female and in doing so, demonstrates how gender is a

fluid, malleable construction. Secondly, I will focus on the makeup style itself and how its

exaggerated form is reminiscent of the makeup style used by drag queens, which suggests its

parodic nature as a form of gender subversion. Both aspects of Patrick's (2015) video are

essentially performing a similar action by parodying gender conventions, but it's important to

talk about each as a separate and unique aspect because doing so will emphasize how nearly

every aspect of this tutorial is working to subvert gender rules through parody.

Voice

When considering how Patrick's voice and language undermine the gender binary, it

should first be noted that Patrick takes on a high, feminine voice in his tutorials. A savvy viewer

can tell this isn't his natural voice because he sometimes, perhaps unwittingly, dips into his deep,

traditionally masculine voice at certain points in the video. An example of this occurs seven

minutes and twenty seconds (7:20) into the video when he comments on how he's almost done

with the tutorial in a low, gravelly voice. Though Patrick's choice to take on a high, feminine

voice certainly makes the viewer aware of his tutorial as a performance and not strictly an informational or instructional guide to doing makeup, it's Patrick's diction and delivery, which are theatrical and highly parodic, that self-consciously reveal the constructed nature of gender.

Throughout the video, Patrick spouts off clichés and platitudes, like "the eyes are the window to our soul" (1:12) or "remember that life opens up when you do" (8:01) in an earnest yet playful tone, like he realizes how disingenuous the clichés could sound, especially in the context of a makeup tutorial, but there's a sincerity there as well—a message of self-love and acceptance. This relates back to Patrick's (2015) tutorial being valued for its authenticity, vulnerability, and personal nature. It's clear Patrick truly believes in the phrases he's using, even if they are clichés—it's all a part of what makes his tutorial so entertaining and engaging. Patrick goes on to use other phrases and idioms that used to be synonymous with gay male culture and the beauty boys, but have now become culturally ubiquitous: "you just wanna keep on blending until your arm falls off" (3:24), "sketch out a fierce, fleek liner" (3:41), "Lord Jesus give me strength for this liner to turn out fleek" (3:48), "curl my lashes all the way up to Jesus" (4:01), and "next I'm going to snatch my nose" (6:19). These once unusual, ambiguous, and highly specific adjectives—"fierce," "fleek"—and verbs—"snatch"—have now been appropriated by the beauty world and beyond from the drag world and before that from Black female culture[3] to parody, in a sense, what's seen as the high-stakes drama and glamour of the beauty world and generally undervalued feminine culture: "The parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance" (Butler, 1990, p. 200). Though the racial implications and uneven power dynamics suggested by this cultural "stealing"

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[3] See Mannie's (2014) article for her thought-provoking take on how white gay men "steal" Black women's culture.

are unjust and deserve to be looked at more closely in a different essay, this "stealing" also highlights how gender parody calls out gender as an illusory social construct and explores the interconnectedness between seemingly disparate populations of society.

For example, makeup and beauty can often seem like a natural, indispensable part of feminine life. I often privilege fashion and aesthetic over function when choosing and applying makeup.[4] But makeup is not an inherently crucial part of a woman's identity or life. From a pragmatic standpoint, makeup could be considered merely an unnecessary drain on a woman's time and resources. It seems Patrick highlights this when he says,

> I just want to let all of you know that makeup is no different than what you wear, the food that you eat. It is a form of expression. It is your personality. And makeup does come off at the end of the day. (0:37)

Though Patrick seems to place a premium on makeup as a form of self-expression, he also understands that it is fleeting as it "comes off at the end of the day." Because it's so changeable and fleeting, it's not a foundational part of the individual and doesn't define the individual. Gender is also fluid and not an inherent aspect of a human being, but merely another aspect of a contextualized and socially situated person's identity. However, as we know from Butler's (1990) theory on signification and from a Western socialization, gender feels like a foundational part of who one is, and not a fluid conception of gender but a rigid conception, one that is either male or female. What is so brilliant about the language Patrick uses in his tutorial is that he seems to grasp this concept—that gender, like makeup, is a socially constructed form of self-expression. Though it cannot necessarily be taken off as easily as makeup, it is, nevertheless, a

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[4] False eyelashes are a great example of this. Yes, they make one's lashes look gorgeous, but they also involve taking the time to *glue* a large, fluttery accouterment onto one's lash line that often impedes one's vision and irritates the skin.

performance and a way of expressing an interior artistry or sensibility to the world. Patrick's

voice and the language he uses to speak about makeup make the viewer see gender for what it

really is—a social construct that is subject to change like all other social constructs.

Makeup Style and Application

The most obvious way Patrick subverts gender rules in his tutorial is by applying makeup

to his face. Makeup, especially the kind of glamorous makeup Patrick applies, is typically

thought of as isolated to the feminine sphere. But Patrick insists that he's "a boy that loves to

wear makeup" (0:34). Therefore, his gender performance involves combining a masculine

identity with a feminine expression—an act that's still considered highly controversial and

subversive in our society. As soon as Patrick sprays that foundation on his face, he's

undermining gender norms and the notion that dualistic gender is an inherent, immutable part of

one's identity and Western society: "Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these

surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the

performative status of the natural itself" (Butler, 1990, p. 200). It's important to realize that

Patrick's style of makeup is also a form of parody. It's much closer to drag makeup than to the

makeup an average woman might put on to go to school or work. That is to say Patrick's makeup

is an exaggeration of typical feminine makeup. Patrick applies heavy makeup in a very dramatic

fashion. He even claims, "We wanna trick people today," as he applies layers of concealer

(1:47). This undoubtedly underscores the sheer parody of his tutorial and his gender expression.

A salient example of the amount of makeup Patrick applies throughout his tutorial is that

he applies three strips of false eyelashes (per eye) on top of mascara. Now a single set of false

eyelashes intimates a pretty dramatic makeup look. Most women don't wear false eyelashes on a

daily basis. Many women, even women who wear some amount of makeup every day, will only

wear false eyelashes on very specific, special occasions—prom, a wedding, maybe a birthday. And even during these special occasions, most women will only wear one strip of false eyelashes per eye. So the fact that Patrick uses three separate strips per eye is a sure sign of parody. He's specifically exaggerating the popular conventions of feminine makeup to call attention to them and point out their artificiality and arbitrariness. In this way, Patrick's wearing of multiple sets of false lashes calls out the ridiculousness of wearing lashes in the first place. Taking that further, Patrick's total subversive gender performance successfully calls out the ridiculousness of a strict gender binary in the first place.

Points for Further Study

As with any study that deals with complex concepts like gender and an unsettled, burgeoning academic discipline like technical communication, there will be complications or, more optimistically, points for further study. I will suggest a handful here with the understanding that there are many avenues an extension of this study could go down. The first complication involves Kimball's (2016) assertion that "user-producers often trust and value the work of other amateur technical communicators over the work produced by a professional tech writer hired by a corporation" (p. 13). This claim about a user-producer's authenticity is complicated by the fact that many popular YouTubers, PatrickStarrr included, produce content that is sponsored by major businesses and corporations—those who employ strategic technical communication. For example, Patrick has many videos on his channel that are sponsored by or in collaboration with major cosmetic companies—Benefit Cosmetics, GLAMGLOWMUD LLC, and NYX Cosmetics—or owners of up and coming cosmetics companies—Jeffree Star (Jeffree Star Cosmetics) and Kim Kardashian West (KKW Beauty). Patrick has also appeared in advertisements for Benefit Cosmetics (Benefit Cosmetics, 2017). Naturally, this throws Patrick's

credibility when it comes to using and reviewing certain cosmetic products into question.

YouTube and other social media platforms don't have hard and fast rules for declaring

sponsorships or advertising partnerships, so it can at times be difficult to tell if certain product

review videos are sponsored or a part of a public relations campaign as opposed to an authentic,

non-coerced reaction on the part of the YouTuber. This ultimately makes one wonder if the

tactical technical communication on YouTube is becoming an extension of the classic strategic

technical communication practiced by familiar businesses and corporations, just in a new media

and with a new type of professional technical communicators.

As mentioned elsewhere in this article, it is also crucial to consider the relationships of

power, privilege, knowledge, and access at work within the beauty boys community and the

larger YouTube sphere. Further studies of these relationships could include looking at how and

to what extent white male gay culture appropriates Black female culture and to what ends, or

how traditionally feminine products and activities—like makeup and its application—are

historically devalued in society, until they are taken over or *appropriated* by men. This is to say

that there are plenty of women on YouTube doing makeup tutorials of the same style and caliber

as Patrick's tutorials, yet their tutorials are not half as popular, and they are not being asked to

enter into partnerships or advertising engagements with major cosmetics companies. I believe

that can easily be viewed as a form of sexism and merits further consideration.

Conclusion

With this study, I hope to have shown the importance of looking beyond the conventional

workplace to find examples of expert technical communicators on different media platforms and

within marginalized and underrepresented groups. I believe that by stretching the field of

technical communication to search for new and unique groups of technical communicators to study and learn from, we will stay relevant and embrace social justice frameworks at a time when it is absolutely necessary to do so. I also hope my study has highlighted just how prevalent technical communication is in our society, and the importance of seeing expertise, passion, and the potential for subversion in the average human, who has also become an expert technical communicator.

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