

## 7.2 SOCIAL MEDIATED LATINAS IN THE ONLINE BEAUTY COMMUNITY: CREATING AND CRITIQUING LATINA BEAUTY GURUS THROUGH YOUTUBE

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In the late 2000s and throughout the 2010s, regular girls and women began recording videos from their bedrooms about the cosmetics, clothing, and body products they bought, were gifted, or aspired to own. These girls and women are not traditional celebrities who are recognizable to the public in the twenty-first century by the public persona, marketed “look,” and/or technical skills they perform in legacy media and further display through social media presence. Instead, they are people whose experiences, talents, physical appearance, and name are exclusively recognized in localized, interpersonal situations until their use of social media facilitates significant visibility for them on a national or global scale. In their videos, girls and women apply products to their face and body, try on clothes, or style their hair as they speak into the camera about the positive impact these items have on their creative expression, self-care, and personal confidence at work or school. Some videos are structured to appear casual and even spontaneous, such as video diaries of “a day in the life” called “vlogs,” or shopping “hauls” of seasonal or go-to products purchased from big box retailers in large quantities. Others are more formal “sit-down” videos, such as makeup tutorials that feature guided instructions via recorded voiceover or synchronous explanation for recreating the look. To share their work to the public, regular girls and women work independently or with collaborators during and after the filming process to edit their footage into a final video that is then uploaded with a relevant title and description to a personal YouTube channel associated with their public-facing persona.

As this multi-step content creation process illustrates, girls under the age of seventeen and women of eighteen and older take on numerous roles before and behind the camera when they post video content to the internet. To name a few, they supply the personality and skillset(s) that videos are based around, evolve their

content to remain relevant with contemporary popular culture trends, engage their viewers on and beyond YouTube, and produce the descriptive information necessary for the YouTube algorithm to properly categorize and display videos to potential viewers. Taken together, their varied content creation on YouTube has gradually been recognized by internet users across the globe, writers for the popular press, and mainstream beauty brands as the basis of the online beauty community populated by professional experts and amateur hobbyists who post tips, tricks, and trending topics related to beauty culture.

As an offshoot of traditional celebrity culture, the beauty community’s popularity with its audience of predominantly girls and women is mediated through the figure of the **beauty guru**. Florencia García-Rapp (2017) usefully describes beauty gurus on YouTube as “users who advise on cosmetics, makeup, and hair-styling, demonstrating and teaching practical matters through regular video posts in the form of video tutorials as step-by-step How-to guides” (229). As a social media influencer, the beauty guru engages an online audience comprised of long-term channel subscribers who are often active in the guru’s comment sections on YouTube; casual viewers who watch videos sporadically and may or may not utilize user interface tools to share their thoughts; and dedicated followers whose connection with the beauty guru motivates them to engage with the guru’s social media activity across more than one platform (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter). To maintain the interest of this complex audience, the beauty guru endorses a beauty routine that includes recommendations for purchasing choices, makeup techniques, and personal style refinement. Their contributions to the cultural milieu have largely been measured by the economic value placed on this relationship with their followers, which enables them to compel their following towards trying the products

and steps of the beauty regimen they advertise (Tait 2019; Krause 2020; Cosmetify 2021). At the same time, as a public figure, the beauty guru functions as a proxy for regular girls and women who aspire towards a look that is less average and more “star-like.” When following the self-adornment practices that the beauty guru invests significant time, money, and labor in—such as makeup application and styling outfits—viewers emulate a beauty regimen they hope will facilitate their own transformation from ordinary to extraordinary. Moreover, beauty gurus model for their viewers how pursuing various beauty techniques and technologies can not only elevate their look but can yield increased public visibility and recognition that are prerequisites to “cross-over” from social media content creation to legacy media opportunities in film, television, and radio.

Popular and scholarly approaches to the online beauty community have well addressed how digital content creators like beauty gurus effectively utilize the affordances of social media sites like YouTube to form connections with their viewers and strategically perform personas to maintain this relationship.<sup>3</sup> Much of the discourse fixates on the nuances of white beauty gurus’ presence in the online beauty community, while the complex contributions made by beauty gurus who self-identify as women of color, mixed-race, or brown are often minimally recognized or entirely disregarded in these conversations. In addition to this, few studies have focused exclusively on beauty gurus who self-identify as Latina. Even fewer have examined those whose conscious foregrounding of their **ethnoracial identity**—an identity or subject position based on a person’s ethnicity and race—in their beauty content informs the kinds of connections they create with their viewers. Here, I draw upon sociologist Ariana J. Valle’s recent work on Los Angeles-based Central Americans’ processes of self-identification. I recognize ethnoracial identity to mean the complex emphasis placed on ethnicity (ancestry, cultural

customs, and familial history) and race (socially constructed meanings projected onto phenotype and cultural characteristics) as simultaneously impacting lived experiences—a term that is productive to use for heterogenous groups whose identities are sorted into homogenized umbrella categories in the United States, such as Latinxs/Latines.<sup>4</sup>

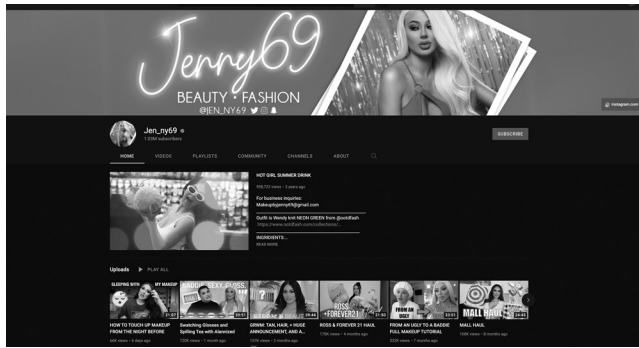
I attempt to address this gap by offering a framework in this chapter for understanding the varied content creation strategies, on- and offscreen roles, and viewer interactions that Latina beauty gurus produce through their YouTube channels. I propose that popular Latina beauty gurus typify a larger umbrella of content creators that I conceptualize to be Social Mediated Latinas. Social Mediated Latinas are content creators who utilize digital tools such as hashtags, comments, photo filters, customized posting features, and video editing applications to produce “social media self-display” on sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.<sup>5</sup> When presenting a version of themselves online, these creators make subtle or explicit mention of how self-identifying as a Latina influences the type of content they want to make, see, and interact with on social media. Further, Social Mediated Latinas retool sites’ social networking capabilities, such as comment sections and direct messaging, for cultural commentary purposes related to creating and viewing Latina representations on portable, smart devices. They participate in **intracultural discourse**, or conversations between people whose respective identity configurations (e.g., gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity) overlaps in significant ways that may generate a complex sense of shared experience and connection between them. In doing so, they collectively reimagine what is considered an on-screen depiction of Latinas beyond legacy media portrayals in industries such as film, television, radio, and advertising.

To explore how this term can be applied to YouTube, I offer a case study of Jenny “Jen\_ny69” Ruiz, who is one of the most popular US-based beauty gurus in the

<sup>3</sup>Required reading on beauty YouTube includes Sophie Bishop, “Beauty Vlogging: Practices, Labours, Inequality,” PhD thesis, University of East London, 2018, <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.768461>; Florencia García-Rapp, “The Digital Media Phenomenon of Youtube Beauty Gurus: The Case of Buz-zbeauty,” PhD thesis, Universitat Pompeu, 2019, <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/463002#page=1>; *Microcelebrity Around the Globe: Approaches to Cultures of Internet Fame*, ed. Crystal Abidin and Megan Lindsay Brown (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>See Ariana J. Valle, “Second-generation Central Americans and the Formation of an Ethnoracial Identity in Los Angeles,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 27 (2): 133–52.

<sup>5</sup>My use of “social media self-display” throughout this chapter is influenced by how Jillian Hernandez applies the term in *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham: Duke UP, 2020).



**Figure 7.7**  
Screenshot of the Jen\_ny69 YouTube channel—an example of social mediated Latina beauty guru.  
Courtesy of Jen\_ny69

online beauty community. She rose to prominence on YouTube in the 2010s and subsequently leveraged her social media following to cross over into legacy media with the creation of her beauty brand, Baddie B Beauty, and her music career as an artist signed with Lumbre Music Group. I contend that the contours of Jen\_ny69’s rise to “internet celebrity” status should be analyzed in the context of the consistent, strategic references she makes to her Latina identity throughout her video content, public persona, and engagement with her channel subscribers. Through brief textual analysis of her videos, I identify and examine aspects of these references that exemplify her overall **self-mediation methodologies**: the strategies she uses to present a version of herself online that can appeal to social media algorithms while also garnering attention from the public in “measurable” forms, such as likes, views, comments, and shares of her social media posts.

I close read the self-mediation methodologies Jen\_ny69 displays in these videos for two purposes. First, to demonstrate how her emphasis on being Latina throughout her social media presence (such as on sites like Instagram and TikTok) is foundational to the success she experiences and the kinds of viewer reactions she receives as a beauty guru who got her start on YouTube. The topics covered in her beauty vlogs and formal videos, the personas she performs before the camera, and the tailoring of her content to a Latina audience—even when deemed fake, offensive, or stereotypical—all exemplify this to be true. Second, I analyze these strategies to show how both Jen\_ny69 and her viewers post varied forms of social media self-display to her YouTube channel. I contend that it is through their mutual use of digital tools provided by

YouTube’s user interface, such as comment sections, that Jen\_ny69 and her viewers perform digital, creative labor around their ethnoracial identity that signals their status as Social Mediated Latinas. Ultimately, I present this case study analysis of Jen\_ny69’s videos to make the argument that Latina beauty gurus create content on YouTube that is generative of intracultural discourse about Latina representation and exemplifies the critical interventions that Social Mediated Latinas can make from their personal social media accounts.

## How to Be Visible: Internet Celebrity and Engaged Audiences on YouTube

Since its launch in 2005 and acquisition by Google two years later, YouTube has functioned as a principal site of self-mediation for regular people. Its significance to the career formation and professional branding of Latina beauty gurus like Jen\_ny69 cannot be overstated. YouTube is not only a digital location where creators post their original content. Like other social media platforms, its site design elements, especially the algorithm and user interface, also actively shape creators’ decisions about what, how, and when to post to maximize the visibility of and viewer interactions on these posts.<sup>6</sup>

The popularity and visibility of these videos on and beyond the internet has solidified YouTube’s economic value and cultural relevance as a global entertainment platform well suited for the contemporaneous advancements in smart phones and personal computers happening in the twenty-first century. Stuart Cunningham and David Craig (2019) characterize twenty-first century media industries as a continuum, with “professionally generated content (PGC)” offered by digital streaming platforms like Hulu and Netflix on one side, and “pure social media platforms” like Facebook and Instagram that specialize in “user-generated content (UGC)” on the other (23). They propose that YouTube is neither a PGC nor UGC space, but

<sup>6</sup>For further reading, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYUP, 2006); Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2008); Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016); André Brock Jr., *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures* (New York: NYUP, 2020); Catherine Knight Steele, *Digital Black Feminism* (New York: NYUP, 2021), and Trevor Boffone, *Renegades: Digital Dance Cultures from Dubsplash to TikTok* (New York: Oxford UP, 2021).

instead a hybrid site that exists in the middle of this continuum by drawing content creation tools from either side. They attribute YouTube's success in part to the dynamic combination of it being "open access (to users who can afford to access broadband and mobile systems with enough speed)" and its offering of a "convergent video content player" that features social networking capabilities, specifically "comment sections and likes, emoticons and shares, friends and followers" (10). With the site's user-friendly "Creator Studio" tools for uploading videos and its interactive features for audience engagement and retention, the demarcation between the viewer and the viewed is effectively blurred in more ways than one.

Bearing this in mind, the ways that beauty gurus practice self-mediation methodologies on YouTube are multifaceted in their contributions and references to mainstream media culture in the United States. To achieve visibility, they utilize three core strategies in their self-mediation: performing one or more personas that the public responds to, creating content that appeals to the site's algorithmic design, and utilizing the affordances of the platform's user interface to engage viewers. These approaches are simultaneously reflective of the star marketing strategies used to promote the traditional celebrities these creators first emulate when starting out online and indicative of the original, platform-specific trends that vitalized YouTube into a digital entertainment competitor of legacy media industries. Like the Hollywood star persona mediated through scripted roles, interviews, and celebrity gossip, the self-mediated image of the beauty guru depends on strategies of cultural production and public engagement to peak viewers' interest enough to follow the creator's life (Marshall 2010). As I have written elsewhere, beauty gurus on social media are often referenced by celebrity studies and internet culture scholars as key examples of micro-celebrity practitioners (Sweeney-Romero 2022). Micro-celebrity is a curated practice of self-mediation whereby regular people use social media tools to craft a public, digital version of themselves that emulates some aspects of how traditional celebrities are presented to the public in magazines, on the big screen, and on social media. Whereas traditional celebrities who achieve their fame through legacy media can use social media as a supplemental visibility tool, a micro-celebrity practitioner's visibility is wholly contingent on garnering real-time

engagement from their viewers through the user interface (i.e., likes, comments, shares). Said differently, micro-celebrity practitioners are visible to the public exclusively through their social media presence, while traditional celebrities have an existing persona and/or body of work in legacy media that has already familiarized them to the public.

The possibility of public visibility incentivizes digital content creators to invest their free time and creative labor towards practicing micro-celebrity on their social media account(s). A variety of factors—such as proficiency with social media tools and access to financial capital—can determine the type of visibility a content creator may achieve with their social media self-display. For some, presenting an "online self" that is visible to existing, real-world social networks comprised of friends, family, and co-workers is suitable. For others, they strive to achieve a visibility that extends beyond their local, regional, or even professional environment. In either case, micro-celebrity usefully characterizes the actions the content creator *does* when pursuing visibility online, rather than what the content creator *is* on social media. In her work on twenty-first century celebrity culture, Alice E. Marwick (2016) observes micro-celebrity as a digital pathway for nonfamous people to occupy a celebrity subject position. They do so by displaying certain self-mediation strategies in their content creation that require individuals to "view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans" (333–4). The size of their social media following (e.g., a list of Facebook friends or Instagram followers) matters less to a creator's characterization as a micro-celebrity practitioner than this following being actively engaged with their social media self-display.

However, savvy use of micro-celebrity practices in a content creator's self-mediation can in fact elevate their social and economic status towards that of an **internet celebrity**. Crystal Abidin (2018) conceptualizes an internet celebrity to be created through either an individual's conscious performance, or an audience's perception of an individual as celebrity-like, with these figures "given attention and celebrated for their exclusivity, exoticism, exceptionalism, or everydayness" (19). According to Abidin, internet celebrities achieve fame based on their access to capital and how it is performed for or perceived by the audience. She

proposes that based on the types of capital commonly associated with these creators, there are four primary qualities that are constitutive of an internet celebrity. First, there is “exclusive” internet celebrity based on exceptionally “high economic” displays of material wealth by the creator for an audience who does not occupy a similar class status and will admire their lifestyle (20). Second, there is “exotic” internet celebrity in which the creator’s self-mediation is interpreted by viewers in an inter- or intracultural context as interesting to watch based on the cultural differences that exist between viewer and viewed (22). Third, there is “exceptional” internet celebrity that is derived from viewers watching a creator’s performed expertise in a particular skillset, such as playing an instrument (29). And fourth, there is “everyday” internet celebrity, which is based on the relational, “social” dynamic that emerges from the audience experiencing a heightened sense of connection, community, and “trust” with the creator they are watching (33). Popular beauty gurus who rise to the most optimized levels of internet celebrity—social media influencer—often display a combination of exclusivity, exoticism, exceptionalism, and everydayness when performing personas, appealing to the algorithm, and engaging viewers. However, Latina beauty gurus deviate from this norm by also making references to their Latina identity that both advance their career and subject their social media self-display to intracultural commentary and evaluation.

### **“You really woke the Latina in me!”: A Brief Case Study of Jen\_ny69’s YouTube Presence**

Foundational to the success of Jen\_ny69 and her Latina beauty guru contemporaries like Desi Perkins, Dulce Candy Tejada Ruiz, Karen Sarahi “iluvsarahi” Gonzalez, and Louie “The Baddest Perra” Castro is how they draw upon ethnoracial self-identification as a core self-mediation strategy for garnering visibility on YouTube. Their references to being Latina throughout their content creation helps to facilitate a kind of “digital Latina space” that is by and for Social Mediated Latinas who are actively producing, viewing, and

<sup>7</sup>For another case study of digital Latina space on beauty YouTube, see Rachel Valentina González, *Quinceañera Style: Social Belonging and Latinx Consumer Identities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019), pp. 86–119.

commenting on Latina representations on YouTube.<sup>7</sup> The strategic emphasis that Jen\_ny69 and others place on being Latina is evident in the types of videos they create and how they address other Social Mediated Latinas on the platform with their videos. Rather than downplay their identity or refrain from mentioning it at all, Latina beauty gurus strategically foreground their “Latinaness” throughout their performed personas, algorithmic appeals, and viewer engagement. When doing so, they mediate a version of themselves online that is meant to be relatable, authentic, and vulnerable for Latina viewers who can identify with aspects of their interests and experiences. These explicit references to identity are generative of Social Mediated Latina viewer engagement, which is expressed through likes and most notably through comments. Whether these comments are encouraging, critical, or ambivalent, they help the Latina beauty to remain relevant and visible.

When received positively, strategic references to Latina identity can facilitate a distinctive, para-social relationship between Latina viewers and Latina beauty gurus. The term para-social relationship is often used to describe the heightened feelings of attachment many viewers experience towards public figures whose cultural production they engage with regularly (such as traditional celebrities cast in programs on network television, or internet celebrities who post short- and long-form videos on social media).<sup>8</sup> This dynamic consists of a one-sided relationship that the viewer forms with the public figure when watching them through a screen. It culminates in the individual perceiving of this figure as an extension of themselves, as someone whose experiences they intimately understand, and as an “authentic” person they can place trust in. By contrast, strategic references that are read as negative or stereotypical by Social Mediated Latina viewers may create tension that threatens the longevity of this relationship. For a beauty guru like Jen\_ny69, taking a combined approach when striving for visibility on YouTube is beneficial, even when these interactions are overwhelmingly critical or harsh. She alternates between mediated displays of her Latina identity that encourage her viewers to take pride in their shared cultural background and performances of one-dimensional Latina personas that frustrate

<sup>8</sup>See Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” *Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 19.3 (1956): 215–29.

and at times offend her viewers. Both reference types are generative of viewer engagement from her Latina audience. Although the tone of this engagement varies depending on the reference, Jen\_ny69's success on the platform strategically uses ethnoracial self-identification as a reliable way to increase the traffic and interaction she gets on her videos, which in turn increases the likelihood that her videos will be recommended to new viewers by YouTube's algorithm.

Consistent with trends in the online beauty community, Jen\_ny69's videos are a mix of commercially driven, "content and market-oriented videos," such as step-by-step tutorials and reviews, as well as community-driven "relational and motivational videos," such as casual vlogs and personal life updates (García-Rapp 2017). Jen\_ny69's commercial content has primarily consisted of makeup tutorials tailored to Latina aesthetics,<sup>9</sup> shopping hauls from chain retailers, and product reviews of affordable but effective makeup products for Latina complexions.<sup>10</sup> Her community content is comprised of chisme ("gossip") storytimes and educational before-and-after vlogs detailing the surgical procedures she has gotten done. Whether trying on a lipstick shade or showing off her new body, Jen\_ny69's popularity largely stems from her multifaceted approach to curating what she terms a "Latina Approved" beauty regimen that her viewers can use to elevate their self-confidence and look while also factoring in their daily responsibilities as a Latina woman.

The strategic references that overwhelmingly invite positive identification from Jen\_ny69's audience are videos in which she speaks fondly of the "señora life" she leads as a Latina woman and whose priorities of being a wife and mother factor into her beauty regimen. In these videos, Jenny\_69 comes across as genuine and meaningfully connected to her audience by encouraging a para-social relationship through shared identification as Latina señoras who want to elevate their look on a budget and without sacrificing family time. The 2017 makeup tutorial titled "Realistic

<sup>9</sup>See "Jenny from The Block Makeup Tutorial" (2014), "I didn't like the MAC Selena collection" (2016), "Latina Approved Lipsticks" (2017), "IS KKW BEAUTY LATINA APPROVED??" (2018), "Noche To Putear Makeup Tutorial" (2018), "Teresa Makeup tutorial" (2018), and "QUINCEAÑERA MAKEUP TUTORIAL" (2019).

<sup>10</sup>See "Mac Haul" (2014), "Bath and Body works HAUL!!" (2015), "LUSH 'Dont look at me' Mask first impressions" (2016), "Fashion Nova Honest Review Haul" (2017), "Fashion Nova Haul: Affordable Pieces" (2018), "HIGH HAUL | WHAT I GOT AT THE MALL" (2018), and "Sally's Haul while lit" (2018).

makeup: Señora Vibes" exemplifies how this reference produces Social Mediated Latina discourse that is initiated by Jen\_ny69 in the video and extended by her Latina viewers in the comment section. The 23-minute video, which has been viewed over 636,000 times and liked over 21,000 times, features Jen\_ny69 guiding her viewers through a simple makeup look intended for other Latina mothers who find they have little time to do their makeup. The first two minutes are structured as a friendly advice segment in which Jen\_ny69 empathizes with her viewer how difficult but important it is to "find time to put yourself together" when you have familial responsibilities. She underscores how the products she has selected, and her application methods, are beginner friendly, cost-effective, and quick to replicate. She also pauses to express gratitude for her viewers who "use the comment section to really talk about what they are going through or products that you want me to review," and notes that she keeps comment sections active on most of her videos to encourage this discourse.

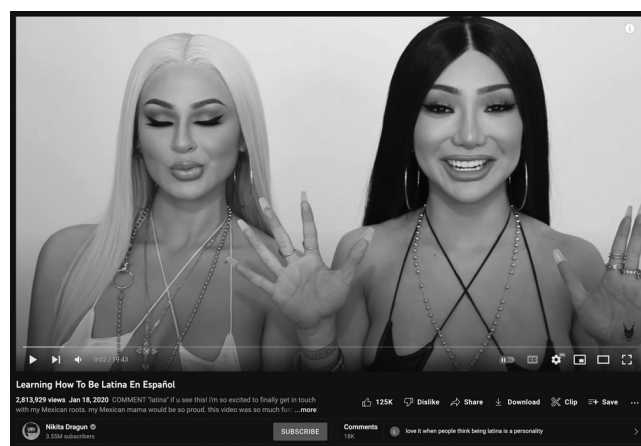
By verbally encouraging other Latinas to share their stories, struggles, and reactions to tutorials in the comment section of her videos, Jenny creates a communal, digital Latina space where viewers can share their own personal narratives without having to build their own large subscriber base first. In the comment section, viewers celebrate having a beauty guru who not only clearly teaches them the steps of doing quick makeup that looks good on various Latina complexions, but who intimately understands the struggles of being a señora and not having a lot of time to devote to themselves. Many of the 1917 comments posted under this video feature reflections from viewers on how long they have been watching Jen\_ny69, how the clarity of her explanations encourages them to try the look, and how her relatability as a Latina makes them feel confident. Similar comments are posted to other instructional videos on her channel, particularly vlogs and Q&A videos centered on plastic surgery and temporary cosmetic procedures. In these videos, she is forthcoming about her breast augmentations, facial reconstructions, veneers, and lip fillers and demystifies these processes for her viewers.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>See "Laser Hair Removal Q&A" (2015), "Lip Injection Q&A" (2015), "Breast Surgery Vlog" (2016), "Plastic Surgery Q&A" (2018), "I GOT VENEERS (WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU)" (2019), "ALL ABOUT MY FACE INJECTIONS!" (2020), "HOW I GAINED WEIGHT FOR A BBL!!! I have Emetophobia ..." (2020), and "BOOB JOB Q&A" (2021).

When answering viewer questions, she expresses wanting to demystify these procedures as a way to “look out” for her viewers who she thinks of as her “little sisters.” In response, the comment sections are full of viewers expressing gratitude for learning about these procedures through her videos and commend her for not concealing the work she has done like many traditional celebrities do.

The authentic “big sister” or sincere “señora friend” role that Jen\_ny69 is celebrated for by her viewers across her content is sharply contrasted by the dramatized persona she routinely performs for comedic effect and entertainment when collaborating with other Latina beauty gurus on the platform. Many Latina viewers express their frustration with this persona for being the inverse of the positive portrayals for Latinas that she displays elsewhere on her channel. However, these collaboration videos are among the most watched YouTube videos of any Latina beauty gurus on YouTube, which incentivizes Jen\_ny69 and her collaborators to continue producing them despite the backlash. Three videos in particular exemplify this persona: “HOW TO BE jen\_ny69 WITH \$69 | Gabriel Zamora” (2019), is uploaded to Gabriel’s channel, has more than 518,000 views, and 1865 comments; “Learning How To Be Latina En Español” (2020) is uploaded to Nikita’s channel, has over 2.8 million views and 18,483 comments; “GRWM FT GABRIEL ZAMORA | WHO’S MORE LATINA?” (2019) is uploaded to Jen\_ny69’s channel, has 1 million views, and over 3169 comments. All of these videos are among the most watched videos on each creator’s channel. While not all of them are uploaded to Jen\_ny69’s channel, they have become synonymous with her brand and have influenced how she has chosen to self-mediate in later years of her career for continued visibility.

In each of these videos, Jen\_ny69 makes reference to her own Latinanness more often than when she films alone or with white content creators. More specifically, in these videos, she and her collaborators make a joke out of being Latina and perform exaggerated versions of their ethnoracial identity by putting on accented voices, eating Hot Cheetos, constantly saying “Latina” in their sentences, and mocking identifiable cholo and chola aesthetics. Self-adornment practices associated with cholo and chola culture include drawing heavy, sharp wings onto eyelids with black liquid eyeliner, wearing dark lipstick outlined with lipliner, donning



**Figure 7.8**  
Screenshot of Nikita Dragun’s YouTube channel featuring the episode “Learning How To Be Latina En Español.”  
Courtesy of Nikita Dragun

accessories such as hoops, sunglasses, and bandanas, and wearing clothing such as white tank tops and flannels, among others.<sup>12</sup> When mocking these aesthetics, Jen\_ny69 and her collaborators imply that Latina identity can be taken on and off with makeup, hair, and clothes. In each of these videos, Jen\_ny69 performs the role of beauty expert that is consistent with her overall brand as a beauty guru, except her area of expertise that she is instructing collaborators Nikita and Gabriel on are how to “properly act like a Latina.” These performances are exaggerated and full of mediated stereotypes for the purposes of being comedic to their audience, but ultimately, these representations are negatively received by Latina viewers as harmful and offensive.

Case in point, the premise of “Learning How To Be Latina En Español” is that Nikita needs to learn from Jen\_ny69 how to “become” a Latina since her lack of Spanish proficiency and her appearance as a mixed-race, Vietnamese-Mexican American woman, does not register as legibly Latina to her audience. In the video, Nikita jokes that her following Jen\_ny69’s beauty regimen rules really “wakes the Latina in me” as she learns from her how to walk, exaggerate her mannerisms, select a foundation shade, accent her voice, use “Latina lingo,” and do her makeup to perform “real” Latinanness. However, Nikita and Jen\_ny69’s jokes and

<sup>12</sup>For further reading on cholo and chola aesthetics, see Norma Mendoza-Denton, *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) and Elvira Carrizal-Dukes, “Towards A New Cholo Consciousness: The Visual Rhetorics of Cholo Artists as a Method for Social Justice Movements,” Dissertation, University of Texas at El Paso, 2020, [https://scholarworks.utep.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4084&context=open\\_etd](https://scholarworks.utep.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4084&context=open_etd).

stereotypical performances of what it means to give off “a Latina vibe and attitude” in persona and appearance creates tension with Latina viewers who use the comment section to engage in intracultural discourse about the harmfulness of these images. On the video, comments range from anger to frustration to disbelief by people self-identifying as “actual” and “real” Latinas.

A YouTube viewer with the screenname RosaOrthey34 writes, “This is offensive. Being a Latina is not an action ... you can’t just wake up and say I’m gonna ACT latina.”

Janna T writes, “She sounds like she is embarrassed to be Asian and trying to hard to be “Latino” that’s just really sad.” Jessimiel Orega writes, “Everyone wants to look and act like ‘latinas’ but no one wants to be a real Latina and take racism and everything that comes with it.”

And April Tschim writes,

I am a Latina, This is offensive and rude. It’s not a personality trait and the way they portray it is so disrespectful and rude, it’s not a mood and it’s not a personality trait once again. Not all of us are like this, showing off our figure and acting disgustingly. There are not rules to being a Latina. Nikita I am Highly Confident that you are not a Latina, But’s it’s not my place to determine someone’s culture. But I do think if you were a Latina you would not be so disrespectful to a culture. And I’m am here, they are saying we are definitely Latina because we got our moles removed at the same time??? No, That is just Stupid!?

The tone of these comments are much different from those posted to Jen\_ny69’s makeup tutorials and surgery vlogs, but a through line of these responses is how intracultural discourse between Social Mediated Latinas on YouTube can use beauty gurus’ social media self-display as a primary text to analyze and discuss the kinds of Latina representation they would like to see, produce, and do away with online. Ultimately, beauty gurus like Jen\_ny69 are Social Mediated Latinas based on their strategic references to Latinaness, but they mediate their identity in ways that prioritize the self-mediation methodologies that supply the viewer engagement and platform visibility their channel depends on. At times, this means causing enough

controversy to offend existing viewers and interest new ones. Despite the negative images of Latinas that these controversies can create, Jen\_ny69’s multifaceted YouTube presence demonstrates how her references to being a Latina in her video concepts, personas performed for the camera, and interactions with viewers facilitates a complex, digital Latina space within the larger beauty community—one where Social Mediated Latina viewers can utilize the affordances of the convergent video player on YouTube to create and converse on what it means to mediate a Latina identity for public visibility.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the way Jen\_ny 69 and other Latina gurus express their Latinx identity?
2. What other forms of Latinx identity have you found in social media?
3. What other expressions of social mediated beauty related to race and/or ethnicity can you identify in social media platforms?