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Subverting stereotypes and surpassing disregard: a case study of Asian Americans' self and group representation on YouTube



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Abstract:

This dissertation explores the development of Asian American YouTube channels. Since the mainstream media are not offering any characters which are a fair representation of Asians, YouTube has become an outlet for Asian Americans to represent themselves. In order to break the general stereotype of a person of Asian descent, these YouTube channels post videos to empower Asians globally. Their success includes billions of views, job opportunities, collaborations, sponsorships and creating a community online which takes their relationship offline. However, this “phenomena” has not evolved without any difficulties. There are ignorant and racist responses since registered users can post comments. The methodological approach is case studies of Wong Fu Productions, NigaHiga, KevJumba and Michelle Phan amongst other North American YouTube channels. Their videos and the movement were perused in order to map out the “phenomena”. These “YouTubers” have gained success yet there is mainstream success to achieve. The dissertation also examines the defect of YouTube; the hater comments and racism online. In conclusion, YouTube has created a space where Asian Americans can themselves represent and break stereotypes. Although they have not gained mainstream success they are created a community online and gained mainstream sponsorship.

Preface

YouTube is a medium which has developed from amateur videos of cats and babies to making it possible for people to work full time as “YouTubers”. The global forum has created an outlet for people to showcase their passion and share audiovisual content. When it comes to cultural and ethical representations in mainstream media there is a defective and misleading portrayal of Asians. Since there is lack of Asians in Western mainstream media, YouTube has offered a space for them to represent. This dissertation will be focusing on rise of Asian Americans on YouTube and the negative sides of this development; unfortunate aspects like racism and hater comments. Racism exists in different forms. The starting point for the moral discussion is when the harm suffered by an individual or the harm that could reasonably be foreseen to be suffered by an individual (Elliot 1996:4). This paper is not criticizing the behavior and beliefs of all Caucasians or an implication that it is each individual's responsibility for all racism in this world. This is not intended as a personal attack, but an argument which draws attention to and constructively criticizes the society in which we live.

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Introduction

Asians are underrepresented in the mainstream media. Those portrayed are often ridiculous stereotypes with funny accents, socially awkward nerds, non-veridical martial artists, or seductive and submissive women in kimonos. These absurd stereotypes that exist in Western countries, chiefly in the United States¹, are not only damaging and hurtful - they also create a form of racism against Asians. They actualize the belief that all Asians fit into these narrow molds. Excluding or misrepresenting a minority in the public eye may be a result of ignorance. Since mainstream media is dominated by companies with their own interests, YouTube offers the opportunity for anyone who is a registered user to upload a video, provided the compliance to the terms and conditions of the website. The audience is anyone with access to the Internet and YouTube.

Asian American YouTube users have gained popularity online because the website offers a platform where they can represent; they are not required to fit into the stereotype that mainstream media has prescribed. Instead, they have made names for themselves with billions of views, gained mainstream acknowledgment with sponsorship and collaborations, and created an online community that steps out from “URL” to “IRL.”

However, the results are not all positive; due to the participatory culture that YouTube provides, there are problematic areas such as the users’ racist comments on the videos. Any registered user can comment on the videos. There are rules and regulations that are to be followed, but the punishment is a bit ambiguous. People are protected by the screen and can write any obscene comment without taking on responsibility for their acts.

¹ Hollywood, the Swedish film industry has not yet portrayed East Asians as lead or supporting characters.

Aims and Objectives

To explore how YouTube is used by Asian Americans in order to compensate for the lack of representation and the misrepresentation of Asians in mainstream media. Additionally investigate how has this “phenomena” of Asian Americans on YouTube has evolved.

Methodological Approach

Case Study

The method used for this dissertation is case study due to the nature of it; used to particularistic and systematically study a phenomena of current time (Merriam 1994:21, 23, 27). The aim is to heuristically create understanding and insight for the reader. The research that has been made is exploratory, inductive and focuses more on the process and evolvement of the phenomena rather than the goal or end result² (Ibid. 1994:31). Case studies are used when the aim is to pedagogically showcase cultural differences (Ibid. 1994:43). However, it can also simplify or amplify situations that make the reader draw defective conclusions. Another problem with case studies is the researcher's own limitations when it comes to sensibility and integrity. Since the researcher is the one who collects data and information and there are no clear guidelines of how to execute the finishing product, the researcher self is omitted to his or her instinct and ability. There is also a question whether he or she is bias and objective (Ibid. 1993:47).

Standpoint theory

As pointed out, whether the researcher is objective can be discussed. Standpoint theory’s starting point is that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality or other political shapes, the structure and activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on performers’ understanding of the self and the world around them. The activities from those at the bottom of the social hierarchy can provide a starting point. Experiences of marginalized people provide significant problems to be explained and these experiences and lives have

² This dissertation does not aim to solve the problems of racism both on and offline, but instead focus on the movement of Asian Americans on YouTube.

been devalued or ignored as a source of objectivity-maximizing questions. The answers are to be found in the beliefs and activities of people who make policies and engage in the social practices which shape the lives of those marginalized. One's social situation enables and sets limits on one's knowledge. Standpoint theory claims that all attempts of knowledge are socially situated and that some objective social locations are better than others as a starting point for knowledge. The theory intends to maximize the objectivity of the results of research and to produce knowledge of use for marginalized people, rather than for the use of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people (Harding 1993:49-51).

YouTube Channels Selection

This dissertation will focus on Asian Americans due to their visibility as one of the larger minority groups in the United States as well as the popularity of Asian American YouTube personalities. There is also a YouTube community formed by Asian American YouTube profiles and their collaborations and therefore the main focus will be on Asian born Americans. There are several YouTube channels which support the Asian American community however, this selection has been made in order to highlight certain individuals who have YouTube as their main focus and began their careers through YouTube. The sampling is based by the purpose and expedience, which is used for case studies (Merriam 1993:61).

The video clips that will be analyzed are from the YouTube profiles: WongFuProductions, NigaHiga, KevJumba and MichellePhan. NigaHiga, Kevjumba and MichellePhan represent the most subscribed Asian Americans channels and they are on YouTube's top twenty list of most subscribed channels (Considine 2011). Wong Fu Productions is not as highly ranked with "only" 1.4 million subscribers and 230 million video views³. However, they remain the basis for the research because of their content and their collaboration with other popular YouTube channels. Additionally, they helped develop a community of Asian American YouTube artists and fostered connections with mainstream Americans. The male YouTube personalities mainly produce short films, skits and "vlogs", which are video blogs or logs. All of them are all a part of the same Asian American YouTube community, know each other

³ 2013.06.01

personally and collaborate. Wong Fu Productions have created a second channel, ISA TV, together with KevJumba and they have done a series of projects, such as the web series *Funemployed* (2010). Ryan Higa, also known as NigaHiga has also been in productions with Wong Fu. They made the several films including the popular *Agents of Secret Stuff* (2010). Higa also worked on several occasions with KevJumba and they are currently working together with Hollywood director Justin Lin and YouTube musician Chester See on the YouTube channel YOMYOMF.

Ryan Higa (NigaHiga) was most subscribed in 2011 (Wei 2011). He made 138 videos for his own channel but has collaborated with other YouTube channels, both Asian and non-Asian Americans. Higa began his YouTube career posting videos with his friends due to boredom and now has over 6,5 million subscribers and 1.4 billion video views⁴.

Wong Fu Productions (WFP) was created by Wesley Chan, Ted Fu and Philip Wang. They met while attending University of California, San Diego, where they took classes in Visual Arts. Together, they began to make short films and after graduating, they move to Los Angeles to pursue their passion in making videos (WongFuProductions).

KevJumba, or Kevin Wu, began making vlogs and because of his popularity, he now collaborates with other YouTube profiles to make videos and films. Wu has over 2.6 million subscribers and almost 319 million video views. He made 101 videos⁵ since 2006 and, along with Higa, is a member of the YouTube collaboration YTF, *Yesterday Tomorrow Forever*. Wu also has a “private” channel called JumbaFund where he donates all earnings to a school in Kenya (JumbaFond).

Michelle Phan also know as Rice Bunny on her “private” charity channel, is the first acknowledged beauty guru on YouTube and is now a Lancôme spokesperson thanks to her channel (The Independent 2010). Phan has almost 3 million subscribers and 728 million video views on her main channel MichellePhan⁶.

⁴ 2013.06.01

⁵ 2013.06.01

⁶ 2013.04.02

Other YouTube personalities, including Andrew Gunadie, Christine Gambito and Natalie Tran⁷, will be mentioned, but the focus will mainly be on the four profiles listed above.

Key Terms and Concepts

“What we know about ourselves, we know through and from the media” (Peters & Seier 2009:187). YouTube offers a platform for media based self-preferentiality and is the most prominent example of a media practice that allows the individual to record details of their life and then distribute it worldwide (Peters & Seier 2009:187). These concepts form a base of understanding for the analysis and also work as theories to assess the dissertation.

The Magic of YouTube

Like television, YouTube plays a key role in helping to construct meaning, communities of interest and frameworks of evaluation that are important to the cultural experience (Uricchio 2009:35). The television industry is stuck in a small conceptual space and YouTube provides a set of radical alternatives (Ibid. 2009:36). The rise of YouTube and the Internet has changed distribution options from small scale home viewing to a global sharing and exchange (Lange 2009:74). The Internet has opened a new world of possibilities when it comes to active mass participation and production of audiovisual material. The main reason for YouTube’s huge success lies in the fact that it operates as an open channel for producers who can exchange meanings and experiences throughout the moving image media (Sørensen 2009:143-144). Making videos or vlogs establishes communicative connections to people (Lange 2009:71). Vlogs make up almost half of the thirty most subscribed channels on YouTube. Two of those most subscribed are KevJumba and NigaHiga (Burgess & Green 2009:96). However, YouTube is both industry and user driven, since both music videos and amateur videos compete for the most popular categories (Snickars & Vonderau 2009:11). It has been debated whether or not YouTube is a medium; but because it archives and distributes audiovisual media, allowing the individual to reach far from their own homes and countries YouTube can be considered a medium (Gruisin 2009: 61-62).

⁷ Andrew Gunadie is from Canada and Natalie Tran is Australian.

Yellow Identity

There are over eighteen million Americans of Asian descent (CHAMPS 2011). From East, Southeast and South Asia, there are at least sixty separate Asian American groups including native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Until the past few decades, the literature on Asian American culture was scarce and they were generally an invisible minority. The history of the United States has been defined by minorities from all continents and ethnic backgrounds beginning at the bottom of the economic and social ladder and facing intense racial prejudice and oppressive forms of social, political and economic discrimination (Lott 2010:35). Since the 1980s, Asian immigrants and refugees have come to America with imagination and energy looking for a brand new start, enhancing their ability to survive in American society and easing their adjustment to it (Wei 1993:170). Asian Americans are labeled as Asian Americans instead of Korean American or Chinese American. They form a unit as they are both US- born Asian Americans and immigrants (Feng 2002:12-13). “...*Having tried to assimilate into mainstream culture, only to be rejected as ‘unassailable sojourners’⁸, they sought alternatives*” (Wei 1993:45). Asian immigrants raised the ethnic consciousness of the entire Asian community and found a collective identity as Asian Americans (Ibid.1993:63-64).

Stereotypes in mainstream media

Stereotypes convert real people into artificial ideas; the individual is treated as a proxy for the whole group that has been prejudicially represented. Prejudice and discrimination magnify the dangers of stereotyping because of tenuous generalization (Enteman 1996:10).

The stereotype occupies the middle ground between fantasy and reality, and is inscribed into the perceptual apparatus of the beholder. They are invisible and ordinary, insinuating themselves into everyday life and constitute the social screens that make encounters with other people possible. The stereotype circulates and is most effective when it remains unseen, unconscious and waiting to be confirmed by a fresh perception. Although people know that stereotypes are false images that prevents them from truly seeing the individual it seems to may be a necessary evil to make sense of the world that surrounds them. The moral scope filters the perceptions depending on the person’s sensitivity. One person’s injury may easily

⁸ ”sojournes”, a label which expressed the desire which they return “home” when their services were no longer needed (Feng 2002:1).

be another's joke. Sometimes there is no one to blame or the harm that was caused may be justified, but the victim serves as the obvious starting place for a dialogue (Elliot 1996:4-5).

The Asian Stereotype

Historically, the racial stereotype reflected the country's antagonism toward Asian immigrants and Asian countries. Anti-Asian hostility mirrored an unwarranted fear of the economic competition of Asian workers and the threat of "racial mongrelization" through miscegenation; Asians were unassailable aliens; racial stereotypes have portrayed Asians as a "special" species, not human. The stereotype states that Asians have a low regard for human life, committing suicide to atone for some egregious human mistakes, lacking compassion and seeking to control the world. Another variation is the insidious "model minority" stereotype, with the power to adapt more than other people of color and to succeed in mainstream society (Wei 1993:47-49).

The Asian stereotype which exists in mainstream media consists of martial artists and ninjas (Feng 2002:8). Asian American men have been excluded from the white-based notion of the masculine. They have been characterized as asexual, effeminate, passive, ugly and lacking of muscles and physical strength (Lott 2010:57). Hollywood has represented the Asian female as either a blushing Lotus Blossom or a domineering Dragon Lady. Asian women on the screen are invariable, passive and paired with older white male anchors (Feng 2002:9-10). They are hypersexual, exotic, sensuous and promiscuous but also untrustworthy or treacherous. Other stereotypes are war brides, China dolls and prostitutes - unworthy and subservient to men (Lott 2010: 57). Asian women are "exotic" sex objects with a penchant for European American men (Wei 1993:50).

Race, Ethnicity and Racism

The concept of race can be important because it informs people's actions. Race exists as a cultural construct whether or not it is a biological reality. Racism, builds on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ vastly between races. In this way race assumes sociological importance even if it has no objective existence.

There have been arguments on whether or not to separate race and ethnicity. Some say that race refers to the categorization of people while ethnicity has to do with group identification; ethnicity is more the identification of “us” while racism is more oriented to the categorization of “them” (Eriksen 1993:4-5). There are times when attempt to give voice to the person is made, there is often an accusation of playing the “race” card (hooks 1995 & 2009).

Moreover, the ubiquitous stereotype of Asians as foreigners reflects the hegemonic ideas of the Orient and white supremacy, reducing all Asians to a homogenous “other” not worthy of assimilation or white privilege (King & Leonard 2005:138). As more people of color raise our consciousness and refuse to be pitted against one another, the forces of neo-colonial white supremacist domination must work harder to divide and conquer (hooks 1995 & 2009). The study of Asian American popular culture representation is crucial in a culture that conceives race in black-and-white terms. Asian Americans have been elevated to “honorary white” status, contributing to everything from economic successes and failures to cultural factors; they have been become targets for resentment from both white “haves” and non-white “have-nots”. Asian Americans are alternately claimed as both black and white, and so the study of Asian American representation is ultimately a study of the construction of blackness and whiteness in racial discourse (Feng 2002:2).

Approaching the Asian Stereotype on YouTube

Cinema provides a pedagogical role in many lives. Movies supply a narrative for specific discourses on race, sex, class but also provide a shared experience and a common starting point where the audience can begin a dialogue about charged issues (hooks 1996:2-3). The Asian stereotypes that mainstream media provides is not representative of the Asian American population and due to the lack of counter stereotypes or auto stereotypes, there is no balance (Feng 2002:8).

Normalizing

Wong Fu Productions approaches the mainstream Asian stereotype by normalizing Asian Americans as “normal people”, not bound to any race or ethnicity. Their cast is usually Asian

American and they portray the characters as average, everyday Americans. For instance, in their short film, *Just A Nice Guy* (2007), they take on the saying that “nice guys finish last,” telling the story of a college kid with a crush on his friend but without the courage to tell her. It does not state that Asian Americans specifically have this problem but instead it can be applied to any heterosexual male, no matter the ethnicity or nationality. It is simply the nice guy syndrome. The male actors who portray the characters are not martial artists or do they have strong Asian accents. They are neither asexual, since the protagonist has a female love interest, nor weak, tiny Asian men. The existing stereotype that Asian men are passive could be applied since Nick, the main character, does not have the courage to confess his feelings for his friend, Amy. This could confirm that Asian men are too nice and always get placed in the friend zone. However, another character, Joe, is also presented in the short; he is not a nice guy, and in fact described as “*wasn't the prime example of a good guy*” (*Just a nice Guy* 2007). Wong Fu Productions' short films show a vast supply of different types of Asians.

Similar to other films in mainstream media, the cast consists only of one ethnicity; the difference is that it is not Caucasian. In a vast selection of their videos on their YouTube channel they tell stories about love, friends, relationships and family - concepts that are bound to *people* not race or ethnicity. By using an all Asian American cast and a subject that could apply to any person, despite ethnicity, and even nationality, they normalize Asians and create a counter stereotype.

Direct approach with humor and taking control

Wong Fu Productions approaches the Asian stereotype in two ways: by making Asian Americans “normal” people and by a direct approach, broaching the subject in a humorous yet underlying serious way. They also introduce the subject in their short *Kung Fooled*, where they worked with YouTube profiles: Freddie Wong, Brandon Laatch, Ryan Higa, Nathan More and DeStorm. The short film begins with two Asian American men sitting and watching a movie. In the movie, there is an Asian man and one of the characters, played by Freddie Wong, states, “...*hey look there is an Asian guy in this movie. I wonder if he's going to be doing some Kung...yep, doing Kung Fu...I bet that every single person in America thinks that Asian people are good at, what? Math, piano, martial arts...I can do like literally none of those things, such a stereotype. I hate it.*” (*Kung Fooled* 2011). The plot continues to mock

the stereotype that all Asians know martial arts and when Freddie Wong's character is about to be mugged, he is mistaken for a martial artist. He uses this in order to escape and when he meets Ryan Higa, he also successfully continues the same lie. In the end, Freddie meets Destorm, an African American YouTube profile, and tries to take his car with his new "Kung Fu" talent. However it backfires as Destorm demonstrates the male African American stereotype, the raging African American man.

Another YouTube profile that takes a direct approach on the Asian stereotype is KevJumba, or Kevin Wu. One of his early videos, *Stereotypical Names with Ben* (2007), focuses on stereotypical names, and racist views of them. Further, he posted a video about how he has been treated differently because of the stereotype of the Asian man, *I have to Deal with Stereotypes* (2007). By using a direct approach, bringing up the subject and asking people not to believe in the stereotypes, he affects people's manners toward them (Hinton 2003:24). Kevin Wu uses his YouTube videos to discuss this topic in a humorous way, especially when he also confirms these stereotypes for humor. The stereotypes he deals with are: people think that he is cheap, a nerd and that he has no social life. He responds by asserting that he is a bad kid; he does not get good grades, he got a B+ on a test. He is interrupted by "his mom" (voice over by himself), who yells at him for not getting an A and that he is dishonoring his family. Using this tactic he pokes fun at the existing stereotype by confirming it. Instead of just talking into the camera about a serious topic, he is acting and trying to make an entertaining video to reach a greater audience. In the next part of the video, he says that he does not want to talk about himself and instead wants to discuss certain individuals who are so closed minded that they assume that a person only eats a certain type of food because of their race; for example, that Chinese people only eat fried rice, egg rolls and dumplings or that Mexicans only eat burritos, tacos and enchiladas. He finishes by stating that he thinks that it is ridiculous to make these generalizations about food and that he has to deal with this stereotype constantly. Then, he reenacts a situation where a "friend" (played by himself) asks him what he is having for dinner, but guesses before Kevin can reply "rice and egg rolls" (*I have to Deal with Stereotypes* 2007).

Ryan Higa also uses a humorous approach when he exaggerates the stereotype in his videos. In his videos *Asian Boy – Yank Dat Cameltoe* (2008), *I'm a Chingstah* (2009) and *How To Be Ninja* (2007), he plays the part of a stereotypical Asian man but by confirming the stereotype and amplifying it to the extent of absurdity, he takes the stereotype into his own hands,

creating a power shift. If the producer had been of another race, making fun of an ethnic stereotype could be interpreted as racist. However, because he, himself is Asian, it is “safe” for him to mock other Asians. Another tactic employed by Asian Americans on YouTube is the use of humor to overdo the stereotype until it is completely absurd. Kevin Wu and Christine Gambito employ this tactic in the video *Put it in Purse* (2007). Gambito plays the role of Wu’s mother with a heavy Asian accent and bad driving skills. She is trying to say “put it in reverse” but due to her pronunciation it sounds like “put it in purse” In the information box of the video Wu clarifies “*this video is not meant to enforce the stereotype that Asians can't drive*” (Put it in Purse 2007).

KevJumba also made several videos starring his father, Michael Wu, where both poke fun of the stereotype of Asian parents or older Asian men. In *My dad is Asian Ep. 1* (2010), Michael performs Tai Chi in front of the neighborhood, explodes over Kevin’s grades because they are not A+’s and sings karaoke. Wu’s characterization of his father has not only gained popularity because of the humorous approach, but because Asian Americans can relate to the stereotype.

By taking the stereotype into their own hands and making it a product of their own minds, they take back control and power. Since they are “mocking” their own kind, it is not interpreted as racist by others, instead it lightens the subject.

YouTube’s Role

There is a need for images that heal and, the victims of stereotypes need to do what they can by calling stereotypes to task and supporting efforts to do this. The power is in the hands of the image makers and those who finance them (Lester 1996:220), “...*they have the responsibility of producing media that recognizes the diversity and complexity of human experience*” (Lester 1996:220). YouTube seems to have taken the broader space where social meaning and cultural value take form (Uricchio 2009:35). YouTube provides a new venue for ordinary people and amateur videographers to have a voice, share their message and have an audience with the main purpose to be seen - to draw an audience (Strangelove 2010:127). The Internet has opened a new channel for active mass participation and audiovisual production to exchange meanings, experiences and ways of expression through moving image media (Sørenssen 2009: 143-144). YouTube is open for people to create videos, upload them to the

site and gain the attention of viewers. Asian Americans have created a space for them where they reach an audience and can convey their message. With their videos they reach a global audience and can show an alternative to mainstream media and break the stereotype. The notion of visibility is also a factor. YouTube can be accessed by people in Western countries, where the damaging stereotype exists, and by making Asians visible people will become more aware of them. Ignorance and racism are linked with the assumption that there is a difference between the races (Eriksen 1993:4-5). By making Asians visible on a global platform like YouTube, in videos that contradicts stereotypes and “normalizes” them to “regular people” will show that there is no difference between the races.

Breaking the female Asian stereotype?

Michelle Phan began her YouTube career by posting makeup tutorials in 2007 and became the number one YouTube “Beauty Guru”. She has directed, produced and starred in over 220 videos and has been hired as a spokesperson for Lancôme Paris. Phan has appeared in *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Nylon*, *Forbes* and *Seventeen Magazine*. She launched FAWN, a collaborative YouTube channel, has her own jewelry line, Ever Eden by Michelle Phan, and is the co-founder of the beauty social networking site *ipsy.com* (*MichellePhan.com*). These achievements show that she is far from the existing stereotype of the Asian female who is invariable and submissive. Phan is an entrepreneur and an independent woman. She has also produced, written and directed short films, such as *Underneath Your Love* (2012) and *Rouge In Love* (2012) that she published on her YouTube channel. She also made shorts with a storyline, including makeup tutorials such as *Midnight Kiss* (2011) and *Catch my Heart* (2011). As the titles suggest, they are all romances in which Phan plays the protagonist. In all of these short films, her character meets a man and their love story begins. The first two short films mentioned are both deeply influenced by Cinderella.

In *Underneath Your Love* (2012), the story begins as Phan receives a letter from a fan asking her for help. The fan is in love but she thinks that the man is out of her league because she is poor and has had to take a part time job at the supermarket to help her support her family. Whenever she sees him with his family going grocery shopping, she hides until they leave. Phan begins to tell her own story; when she was a college student, she worked as a manicurist to help support her mother. At the spa, she met Leon, her Prince Charming, who always took

his grandmother for a manicure on Fridays. One day, Phan's mother insists that Leon should get a manicure from Phan who hides her mouth and nose with a mask during these scenes because she is shy. Every Friday after, they have their weekly manicures and get to know each other, even though Leon has never seen Phan's face without the mask. One Friday, Leon asks her to come to his annual fraternity party and, as Cinderella, Phan dresses up, goes to the party and meets Leon. However, she never reveals her identity and when they meet at the party, he does not recognize her. She does not tell him her identity because they come from different worlds; he is a prince and she is a peasant. At midnight she runs away and leaves him at the party. Back home, her mother encourages her, stating that she should love herself and that she has to allow herself to open her heart and experience love. The next day, Leon comes to the spa and Phan tells him that the girl at the party was her. However, Leon interrupts and says that he knew; he does not have to see her face to know who she is.

Even though Phan's success shows that she is an independent entrepreneur, her videos portray an Asian American woman, waiting for her Prince Charming to rescue her from her peasant life at the nail salon and take her to a world of Fraternity boys and parties. Leon is played by a Caucasian, American man, Miles Fisher. The color of the male lead should not make a difference, however, since the stereotype for Asian women states that they have a fondness for Caucasian men (Wei 1993:50), it matters and confirms the image of the Asian female. In another of Phan's short films, *Rouge In Love* (2012), she cast a Caucasian male lead, but in two other videos, *Catch my Heart* (2011) and *Midnight Kiss* (2011), there was an Asian American male lead. This could be Phan's way to show diversity and interracial relationships, yet it is open for speculation.

Another useful perspective is the feminist critique. Phan's Cinderella inspired videos confirm the general female convention that a woman needs a man to rescue her and live happily ever after. However, it breaks the Asian female stereotype in the same way that Wong Fu Productions normalizes Asian Americans. Phan's character could be any girl; race or ethnicity does not matter because it is a story about a girl who finds her prince. The moral of the story is that looks do not matter; it is the person inside that is important.

This shows the complexity of stereotypes. Breaking one does not mean that you break all of them, instead you may confirm another. People do not fit solely into one category; they are not defined by just one stereotype (Hinton 2003:28).

Reaching out to Asian Americans

As a result of these stereotypes, social scientists ask whether these stereotypes have a deleterious effect on people. Among Asian Americans it is generally believed that they have had a profound psychological impact on them. Asian Americans have long known that stereotypes are detrimental: demeaning their dignity by denying them individuality, undermining their identity by limiting their self expression and self development, and engendering ambivalent feelings by instilling self-hatred. Asian Americans have argued that stereotypes constitute a form of “psychological violence” that leads to physical violence against them, especially during periods of tension between the United States and Asian nations (Wei 1993:50). Asian Americans who tried to become Caucasian American were conditioned to accept and live in a state of self-contempt, accepting the Caucasian standards of objectivity, beauty, behavior and achievement as morally absolute, never able to fully measure up to the white standards (Ibid.1993:50-51).

YouTube creates a space where Asian Americans can find role models and take part in creative productions. With the help of YouTube, a vast majority of first generation Asian Americans now have access to an alternative to mainstream media. “*Many Asian Americans felt confused (and inferior) about who they were because of society had forced the dominant culture on them and prevented them to form an identity they could call their own*” (Wei 1993:46). Therefore they consciously set out to develop a new identity by integrating their past experience with their present conditions to raise group esteem and pride. Asian Americans felt estranged from all things Asian because they had seen Asian life through the prism of a Eurocentric culture (Ibid. 1993:46).

Asian immigrants had dual cultures, the Asian and the American, thus developing dual personalities with Asian and American components (Wei 1993:47). Wong Fu Productions has made several videos targeted at an Asian American audience. Wesley Chan made *The One Day: HK*, a series of shorts filmed in one day in Hong Kong. The cast speaks English as well as Cantonese and the scenery is shot with the city of Hong Kong representing an additional character. The production company also made a parody of a Korean drama, *Forever Endless Valentine of my Winter Heart* (2011). The plot is an exaggerated version of a typical Korean drama with fake diseases, overly dramatic facial expressions and outbursts. They also created a “mockumentary”, *POSER! - The history and evolution of the “Peace Sign”* (2009), where

they explore the different signs that Asians are known to use when posing for pictures. These videos are a contemporary cultural representation of Asian Americans, who has interests in their heritage.

Wong Fu has stated that they never set out to be role models to Asians or Asian Americans. However, as three Asian American men, most of their work is predominantly Asian. They often cast Asian Americans in their videos because many of them are their friends. Even though they never intended to become role models for Asian Americans or Asians in general, it is something that they will not avoid or toss aside; they are glad that people can look to them as inspiration or “pioneers”. However, they recognize that it is a complicated business and they ask the viewers to be patient and trust that they will do everything they can to bring equality to mainstream media (Wang 2011, Ding 2011). Their videos show that they are reaching out to Asian Americans by using Asian American cast and bringing up subjects connected to Americans with Asian descent.

Yellow Identity 2.0

Asian immigrants created a place for themselves in America’s ethnically pluralistic society through the development of a brand new ethnic identity, Asian American (Wei 1993:45). Their search for identity forced them to challenge the distorted images that have diminished them as individuals and degraded them as a group, replacing them with more accurate ones based on a historical knowledge of them. This created a pan-Asian counterculture that reflects their values and experiences and instills them pride and self-esteem in their generation. This process in turn awakened ethnic sensibilities and led to a sense of cultural freedom, giving birth to their own forms of expression and enriching the multicultural mosaic that is America (Ibid. 1993:70). Asian immigrants of the 1980s created an identity for themselves through movements, and now it is their children, first and second generation Asian Americans, who continue the identity movement in order to find a place for themselves. With the help of YouTube they can reach a larger audience since the space that is used is online, thus a global and nationwide audience can be reached with a few clicks. As mentioned before, the Internet has opened new possibilities to make your voice heard and be able to show alternatives to mainstream media.

Popularity

Ryan Higa has been the most subscribed YouTube channel in 2011 (Wei 2011). He now has over 6 million subscribers and more than 1.3 billion video views (NigaHiga, YouTube 2012). He began posting videos five years ago and has worked with Wong Fu Productions on several occasions. The most significant collaboration is probably the 35 minute feature film specifically made for YouTube, *Agents of Secret Stuff* (2010). The video has more than 19 million views and stars other YouTube channels, such as Kassem and HiImRawn.

KevJumba has gained popularity since he started in 2007, most notably when Jessica Alba (*Sin City*, *Fantastic Four*) responded to his “Stare Contest” in 2008. Since then, he has worked with famous sports profiles, such as the Harlem Globetrotters and Jeremy Lin (New York Knicks, Houston Rockets) as well as musical artist, Iyaz. Kevin Wu and his father, also participated in the *Amazing Race* (2010), an Emmy Award-winning reality television series (CBS) where he was the youngest ever participant in the show (*Amazing Race* 2010). Wu also made a feature film, *Hang Loose* (2012), together with actors Dante Basco (*Hook*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*) and Justin Chon (*The Twilight Saga*). In one of his videos (*AWKWARD* 2011), he says that he noticed that on the search engine, Google, when you type in “Is KevJumba...”, the first word that is suggested is “Gay”. He says that he is not offended yet asks his viewers to search Google for “Is KevJumba a heterosexual bear wrestler“ in order to make that the first search topic suggested. He succeeded (Humphrey 2011).

Sponsorships

Wong Fu Productions is sponsored by YesStyle and JC Penny, two clothing companies. KevJumba is also sponsored by JC Penny. In the past, Wong Fu Productions has been sponsored by or collaborated with different companies, such as AT&T, a telecommunication service company, which produced two different stories and was used for product placement.

Their short *Too Fast* (2010), Wong Fu Productions was asked by Subaru, the automobile manufacturer to produce a short film. They worked together with Randall Park (*Dinner for Schmucks*, *Supah Ninjas*) and the short marked the first of many collaborations with the

Korean American actor. Later, they made another web series with Park and Ellen Wong (Scott Pilgrim vs. the World, Combat Hospital), *Home is where the Hans are* (2011).

Collaborating with mainstream media

Wong Fu Productions has become so popular on YouTube that the mainstream media has covered their story on multiple occasions (CNN). Together with the musical group Far East Movement, they created ISA, or International Secret Agents. It began as a showcase to support the Asian American community but has now grown into several concerts nationwide as well as on their own YouTube Channel. Kevin Wu joined the team and it has become an entertainment portal for pop culture news and different types of web series, featuring art, dancing, video games and fictional shows (ISA TV). Mainstream artists B.o.B and Sean Kingston performed at the concert amongst YouTube artists such as David Choi, Timothy Delaghetto and Clara C (ISATV).

WFP are not just sponsored by companies, but mainstream actors are teaming up with them. Harry Shum Jr. (Glee, Step Up 2) also starred in several of Wong Fu's short films. Kevin Wu, as mentioned before, has also worked with several mainstream actors, the common factor being that they are all Asian Americans.

Ryan Higa, Kevin Wu and Chester See (an Asian American YouTube music artist) began working with Asian American, Justin Lin, director of *The Fast and The Furious* franchise and *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002). In 2012 they launched the YOMYOMF YouTube channel, a network based on Lin's popular culture blog, "You Offend Me, You Offend My Family". The YouTube channel gained over 30 million views in one year and includes both scripted and reality series (YOMYOMF). The YouTube channel has different content, consisting of web series and short films with the goal of being a family (YOMYOMF).

Even though they are gaining acknowledgment from mainstream media and collaborate with Hollywood actors, they have not become a part of mainstream media.

Alternative New Media?

YouTube is not only a platform where the YouTube personalities reach an audience. The site began as an alternative to the advertising-driven industry of content production, like television (Strangelove 2010:174). However, as of late people can now become YouTube partners, make a career and earn money through Google ads. YouTube began as, and remains, an amateur video medium, however it evolves quickly and with the addition of High Definition quality, the ability to earn advertising revenue and mainstream professionals on the web site, there is much greater pressure to meet a higher standard in order to gain an audience. YouTube's management promotes the site as "community driven" and as having "community values", but the Internet providers track user patterns to create new marketing strategies for media consumption targeted to the new, younger generation. From this perspective, YouTube seems like a combination of strategic video content and numerical data (Snickars & Vonderau 2009:16). By gaining attention from viewers and reaching an audience, to survive and make a living, these YouTube channels may have begun as aspiring young artists with a passion for making online videos, but they now have "sold out", creating content with the help of sponsors who only want view counts. They have become just like any other mainstream media.

Creating a new Community

As previously discussed, Asian American YouTube personalities frequently work together and many began friendships through YouTube. They have created collaborative channels and founded a community on the website that also reaches beyond the online world. ISA TV promotes the Asian American community, artists and lifestyle; it is not only a YouTube channel, but it began as an initiative to gather Asian American artists to showcase their talent. The latest ISA concert was a day long festival in Long Beach, California (2011). Sponsored by Verizon, SkullCandy, EA Sports, Mocospace and 4C the Power, they had fifteen acts, special guests and an audience that consisted of people from all over North America. The first ISA concert took place in Los Angeles in 2008 with the goal that they would be held annually. With the success Wong Fu, they instead held the concerts twice a year in different parts of the US. So far, ISA concerts have taken place in New York, Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area. Wong Fu Productions goes on tour every year to meet their fans and showcase their

latest work. Their first tour was in 2006 to promote their first film, *A Moment with You* (2006), and they visited over 25 schools all over the continent. In 2012 they went on their first South East Asia and Australia tour to show their newest projects and tell their story (Wong Fu Productions South East Asia and Australia Tour!).

Ryan Higa and Kevin Wu are not only part of the YOMYOMF network, they are also part of the YTF legacy with fellow “YouTubers” Victor Kim (*American’s Best Dance Crew* Season 3, *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel*), Chester See, Andrew Garcia (*American Idol* Season 9), JR Aquino and Dominic “d-trix” Sandoval (*So You Think You Can Dance*, *American’s Best Dance Crew*). YTF’s goal is to create an online community where fans can enjoy and share exclusive content while also mentoring up-and-coming “YouTubers” (YTF Legacy). However, YTF also went on tour in the fall of 2012 to Toronto, Montreal, Chicago, Atlanta, New York and Minneapolis (YTF Legacy Fall Tour Announcement 2012).

The community that has been created on YouTube with Asian Americans and other ethnicities differs from traditional media. They are all gathered on one platform, YouTube and work together in order to gain an audience. Within traditional media outlets, like television there is competition between the channels. YouTube have even made a video with “YouTubers to star in a mash-up of culturally defining moments of 2012” (Rewind YouTube Style 2012).

Closed Community?

Wong Fu Productions has stated that they are strong supporters of diversity and never intended to target only Asian Americans; they make videos to capture anyone and everyone’s interest. However in looking at a list of their friend’s channels, published on their own YouTube channel's main site, there are only Asian Americans. This is a diverse group as there are many different ethnicities represented by the term Asian,⁹ but there is a lack of other ethnicities⁹. It could be suggested that this Asian community is excluding others in the same way that mainstream media does to Asian Americans. However, in several of these short films, they use a diverse cast, not only Asian Americans. For example, their web series, *Company Car* (2012), *Home is where the Hans are* (2012) and *Technology Ruins Romance* (2010-2011), feature actors of different ethnicities. Other examples include: *Hugger* (2012),

⁹ See Appendix 1

The Wan Percent (2012) and *Linappropriate* (2012). In fact, *The Wan Percent* (2012) and *Recess Court* (2011) consisted of a majority of Caucasian actors. KevJumba, NigaHiga and MichellePhan are not known for collaborating solely with Asian American YouTube channels or actors. In the film *Agents of Secret Stuff* (2011), created by Higa and produced by Wong Fu, several YouTube channels with different ethnic backgrounds are featured. Research has shown¹⁰ that outsiders see Asian Americans as foreigners who all look alike and choose to live in quaint communities in the midst of a large city (Wei 1993:49). It is also a stereotype that all Asians keep to themselves and only “hang out” with Asian people; they do not want to mix with others.

When it comes to these YouTube profiles and their audience, it is hard to assess the kind of people that follow them from behind their anonymous usernames. Based on videos from their tours and main events, the audience predominantly consists of Asian Americans in their early twenties. Wong Fu Productions also stated in one of their videos (*One Million Subscribers* 2011), that their fans are usually female and Asian. Their fan base is Asian by heritage, leading to questions of whether or not this creates a further segmentation and fragmentation of the audience. It is clear that Asian Americans watch Asian Americans.

Hater Comments

The YouTube community has been created with users as its members. However, not everyone is polite and on their best behavior. For example, there are many “haters,” users who post rude and often racist, sexist, homophobic, and obscene messages. The word “hater” appears over 111,000 times on YouTube (Strangelove 2010). The problem is not restricted only to comments and there are often videos posted on the platform that are littered with racist, sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, and anti-Semitic hate speech. In addition there are also videos containing extensive or blatant violence (Ibid. 2010). People commenting on the videos can cause problems as the instant feedback is not all positive. There is a Safety Center on YouTube where you can report and block users¹¹. In many videos, they discuss the racism that they have had to suffer and some YouTube personalities take a more humorous approach to this problem. Wong Fu Productions mentions it in one of their short films, *The End of Wong*

¹⁰ Asian American Children’s book Project 1945-1975 (Wei 1993:49).

¹¹ See Appendix 2.

Fu: A Christmas Story (2011), as one of the creators, Philip Wang, expresses his anger toward the racist comments, "...if I see one more racist comment, I...I swear, I swear, I am just going to shut down our entire channel," (Wang 2011). KevJumba also takes a comical approach. In his video, "Kevjumba Responds to Haters" (2007), he explains that he gets racist comments every day, many containing the word "chink", "...you ugly chink, go pick rice in the rice paddy - get out of my country, we don't want you here" (KevJumba Responds to Haters 2007). This is the most common way of dealing with hateful comments. Several YouTube channels make videos about the comments to address the problem, making it visible in a light way but with a serious undertone. Gunnarolla, or Andrew Gunadie, has made several videos about the racist comments that he has received throughout the years, including "*He'll never be a real Canadian*" (2009) and "*Yo you Chinese f*** go back to your country*" (2009). This will be investigated further in the next passage.

Different Types of Racism

Andrew Gunadie made a YouTube video with his friend Julia called, *Canadian, Please* 🎵 (2009), to celebrate what they like about their country (Canada). The video went viral and now has 3.6 million views¹². However, the comments were not only positive or constructive feedback: "*who's the chink? Slid eye f***ing rice eater*" and "*I just shit in my pants, it is the same color as your skin*" (Hollet 2010). Bigotry is amplified online because users can hide behind their screens. Gunadie believes that ignorance can be handled through education and that the best way to educate people is to entertain them. He saves the comments, posting them on his Facebook page and making videos about the subject matter (Hollet 2010).

Other types of racism shown on YouTube are not necessarily foul language and white supremacist ideas. hooks¹³ introduces the subject of Caucasian filmmakers choices and the focus of the meaning of skin color (1996). Wong Fu Productions consists of Asian American men, therefore it can be assumed that they will do videos consisting of Asian American issues. However, it has been assumed that black filmmakers would make black films (i.e., black experience). Ergo it is essential that filmmakers of color are not locked into that assumption

¹² 2013-01-28

¹³ "*But the Chicago Manual says it is not all right to capitalize the name of the writer bell hooks because she insists that it be lower case.*" (http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/28/books/28chic.html?_r=0)

and that they always have to focus on that. When filmmakers of color are able to treat a range of subject matter, not just which highlights race, then there is a more freedom to resist the racial burden of representation (hooks 1996:89-90). Most filmmakers are forced to deal with issues of race. When a white male make films with all white subjects or with people of color, their “right” to do so is not questioned. No one asks a Caucasian filmmaker in the United States or Britain who makes a film with only Caucasian characters if he or she is a white supremacist. The assumption is that the art they create reflects the world as they know it. However, when a non-Caucasian makes a work that focuses solely on subjects that deal exclusively with their race or Caucasians, they are asked to justify their choice and to assume political accountability for the quality of their representations. It is a racist assumption that the integrity of artistic vision matters more to filmmakers who are Caucasian (Ibid. 1996:86). Caucasian men are able to make films without being subjected to a constant demand that their work not perpetuate systems of dominations based on race, class and gender (hooks 1996:87).

For example, Philip Wang (Wong Fu Productions) made a guest appearance on Angry Asian Man’s blog, writing about racism on YouTube. He mentions that they get comments daily that include words like “chink” or “slanty eyes”. However, what he considers to be the worst are the comments that say, “Why is everyone Asian”, “Why is it all Asian” and “Look at these Asians”. Wang states that this kind of racism is the worst because it is racist without people even realizing it. Growing up, he watched *Friends* and never thought of the color of the actors’ skin; he just thought that it was a good TV-show. He also mentions that people do not care when Jay-Z has an all black cast in his music videos. Further, Wang also brings up the topic of an Asian lead in a movie, who is not a martial artist. His hope is that, perhaps even through the community’s own work and efforts, someday people will not make headlines just because an Asian person is cast as a lead in a feature film. For instance, Will Smith plays the lead in *Hitch*, and nobody commented on why a black man was the lead character. If it had been an Asian American man, it would have been a different story (Wang 2010).

Wang points out that the racism online is not always the most obvious form. There are other levels and types of racism. Ignorant comments hurt as much as hateful comments. This shows how marginalized and underrepresented Asians are in media. The absence of people of Asian descent makes them unfamiliar to people of other ethnicities and this result in ignorant comments. YouTube has created a space for minorities to represent themselves and be visible.

Wang also brings up the subject of mainstream movies, the lack of Asians in Hollywood. There are few movies from the US which portrays a character without the subject of race. For instance the Harold and Kumar franchise portrays two Asian men, East Asian and Indian Asian, yet their ethnicity plays a part in the story. They both are tired of the stereotypes that come with their ethnicity. Wong Fu Productions videos are therefore not only breaking Asian stereotypes by normalizing Asian Americans but also aiming to showcase them in order to stop racism.

The U.S motion picture industry's institutionalized racism manifests itself through role segregation and stratification. Role segregation is shown as Caucasian actors can portray non-whites but non-whites can never portray whites and role stratification is shown, as the main character will likely be white and those few Asians cast will be in the limited stereotypical dimensions of Asian characters (Feng 2002:8). KevJumba broached the subject in one of his videos as he discusses how Hollywood cast a white man in the film adaptation of the Japanese cartoon Dragon Ball (Asians Just Aren't Cool Enough? 2009). This is not a new phenomena; historically, European American actors were cast in Asian roles and used tape (or some prosthetic device applied to the temples and cheekbones) and "yellowface" make up. By casting only Caucasians, even as Asian characters, Asian American actors are denied meaningful roles (Wei 1993:52). In another vlog, KevJumba discusses the under representation of Asians in films. He tells the audience that he grew up loving cartoons because there were Asian superheroes; he had Goku of the Japanese anime cartoon DragonBall Z as an idol and hero. However, Hollywood made a movie inspired by the cartoon and starred Justin Chatwin as Goku. Wu objects, stating that Goku should not be played by a white actor. He compares this with making a Fat Albert movie starring Keanu Reeves or having an episode of Full House featuring his own father as Bob Saget's character. KevJumba wonders why a white actor can play an Asian superhero. He answers that Asians are just not cool enough and shows images of nerdy and unfortunate looking Asian men.

Compared to other media outlets, YouTube works like a discussion forum. Several of these YouTube personalities have mentioned subjects in their videos as a response to a current or ongoing discussion. For example, in 2009, a photo circulated on the internet showing actress Miley Cyrus ("Hannah Montana") posing for a picture and pulling the corners of her eyes to

make them slanted in order to mock Asians¹⁴. Cyrus did not apologize for the gesture, instead stating that it was taken “out of context” and that she was simply doing a “goofy” face (Kaufman 2009 & the inquisitr 2009). Kevin Wu commented on the event in one of his videos, *Asians Just Aren't Cool Enough?* (2009), stating, “even Miley Cyrus doesn’t think Asians are cool.” He continues, explaining that Asians are represented in the media as “uncool” (*Asians Just Aren't Cool Enough?* 2009). Ryan Higa teamed up with Michael Buckley, another famous one-person media enterprise (Vonderau in Snickars & Vonderau 2009:110), and Natalie Tran, Australia’s most subscribed YouTube Channel (Moses 2009), to do a response to Cyrus’s photo. In the scripted comedic video, Buckley asks Tran and Higa how Cyrus offended them. They respond that they were not offended at all and instead praise Cyrus as a great singer, actress, and role model, and state how beautiful, talented and “hot” she is. Both Tran and Higa stress that they are not offended by Cyrus’ photo and instead praise her in a very redundant way due to editing. Buckley then does “chinky” eyes, same as Cyrus did in the photo and sings the children’s rhyme “*chinese japanese dirty knees look at these*” (*Asians Hate You Miley Cyrus! - with Nigahiga & Community Channel (and SMOSH?!) 2009*). Buckley excuses the act by saying that he was just being “goofy” and Tran and Higa show by facial expressions that they both got offended by it.

These different levels of racism are not only shown on YouTube by Caucasians. Racism extends to everyone and it is not only in “black and white” terms or “Asian and white” terms. It has become “cool” for Caucasians to associate with African Americans and express pleasure in “black” culture; most Caucasians do not feel that this pleasure should be linked to unlearning racism (hooks 1995:157). For example, in KevJumba’s video, *Ghetto Music Makes Me Crazy* (2012), he states that listening to “ghetto music” makes him feel “really black” and a “thousand times cooler” when he does ordinary things like chores. Kevin Wu takes out the trash and suddenly starts to dance outside of his house and two girls, one of whom is African American, walk by. They both look at him like he is “weird”. The same African American girl is a part of the next segment where Wu dances around in the kitchen, doing the dishes while listening to playlist titled “Really Black Music” (*Ghetto Music Makes Me Crazy 2012*) wearing sunglasses, a cap and fake tattoos on his arms. In his enthusiasm he makes the kitchen to a mess and in the end of the video he screams, in frustration, “Ghetto music makes me crazy!” (*Ghetto Music Makes Me Crazy 2012*). Wu has also made a video

¹⁴ See Appendix 3.

AWKWARD (2011), where in one of the segments he talks about how “awkward” his father Michael is around his “black friends”. The reenactment shows the reality, and later Michael’s version when Kevin’s African American friends aim and shoot with their guns towards Michael’s feet. These two videos can be interpreted as racist and confirming stereotypes of African American people, which show that are different types and forms of racism. The labeling of racism in “black and white“ terms is just one perspective. There is racism in “yellow and white” terms, “yellow and black” and so on.

Conclusion

YouTube can be a new media tool helps people to find alternatives when it comes to entertainment and even role models. This forum has created a space where Asian Americans can represent themselves in their way. The stereotypes created in mainstream media generalizes gender, ethnicity, nationality and is not only false, it is also racist. The Asian American community on YouTube has been working on approaching the problem by showcasing different representations of Asian Americans. By normalizing, humorizing and taking control; they create an alternative to the ones found in mainstream media. Through their videos in which they confront the Asian stereotype through humor, Asian American YouTube producers empower and communicate to Asian American viewers how to deal with stereotypes or Asian prejudice that they have to deal with in their daily lives. It is much more relaxed approach, instead of dealing with it with aggression it has opened up a lighter way of dealing with it. As a result by presenting “Asianness” (stereotypical Asian stuff) is also making people comfortable to be a bit stereotypical Asian, because the humor of it, by presenting “Asianness” (i.e. wearing YesStyle, driving a Subaru) in their videos, Asian American YouTube producers communicate to viewers that they do not have to actively deny their "Asianness" or fear falling into the stereotypically Asian category.

However, there is a complexity when it comes to representations. A video can refute a stereotype yet confirm another one.

Since YouTube is a global¹⁵ platform, it reaches an audience and YouTube channels gain

¹⁵ : YouTube as a part of Google is restricted in China however, it is the author’s belief that there is not a lack of representation or racist stereotypes of Asians in China

success because of view counts. More and more Asian Americans are teaming up and collaborate with each other and mainstream Asian American celebrities; as a result of their popularity they are getting sponsorships and new career opportunities.

However, despite all of this; the mainstream Asian Stereotype and racism towards Asians is not yet gone. YouTube has created a space, Asian Americans have formed a new community on and offline but since the fan base is predominantly Asian and not diverse there are still issues like hater comments and online racism. YouTube made Asians *visible*, which is a start, a beginning of more diverse representation of people.

Further more...

This dissertation had the goal of answering how YouTube was used by Asian Americans to compensate the lack of representation and the misrepresentation of Asians in mainstream media. The next question was how this “phenomena” of Asian Americans on YouTube as evolved. But it also opened up new questions like: how about the future, will YouTube still be user driven and industry driven? Or will this be the beginning of a new media industry with more commercial goals than artistic creativity? Will these YouTube channels gain mainstream success and will things change so we can see Asians resented as something else than a martial artist or submissive woman as lead character and not supporting?

Also, this is North America, with the main focus on the US. What about Sweden? There are not even Asian supporting characters in mainstream films and television shows. Since there is not a large Asian immigration in Sweden, there is also not an Asian Swedish identity or community. In fact, it is still acceptable to make fun of Asians. If we take a look at Patrik Lundberg’s “Kinapuffs” event. Lundberg has criticized several entertainers how they mock asians without anyone reacting to it as racism (SVT Kultur 2013). There is a bigger motivation in the US to break the ethnic stereotypes due to the racism that follows since the US has a diverse population (Hinter 2000:24). Since there is, in all senses, minority of Asians in Sweden and it is predominantly Caucasian, the issue does not get enough attention. Astrid Trotzig said in her speech that there have not been any changes for the past ten years when it comes to racism (UR Samtiden 2012).

Videos

Wong Fu Productions

- A Message from Wong Fu Productions (2006.13.09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GfGwAKacyw>
- Forever Endless Valentine of my Winter Heart (2011.24.03).
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlfchQIqUjI>
- Just A Nice Guy
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrnK-qPARYI> (Part 1 2007.31.05)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMGeWGvDHTA> (Part 2 2007.08.06)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5IJL2peXik> (Part 3 2007.13.06)
- Kung Fooled (2011.04.05)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN8E8L5c9WI>
- POSER! - The history and evolution of the "Peace Sign" (2009.10.09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GLJRzuodKo>
- One Million Subscribers! (2011.25.10)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5A1jU5UNo0Y>
- The End of Wong FU: A Christmas Story (2011.18.12)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TC6VwJx9odo&feature=plcp>
- Wong Fu Weekends: Episode 1.
<http://vimeo.com/9397887>

Kevin Wu (KevJumba)

- Amazing Race (2010.07.09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TCKNnKSJQw>
- Asians not being cool enough? (2009.10.04).
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAbJgXUM4o4>
- AWKWARD (2011.20.01)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgV89H4jevI>

- I have to Deal with Stereotypes (2007.08.03)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbZ9zJ22WfQ>
- Ghetto Music Makes Me Crazy (2012.16.11)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2prGFclOz7o>
- Hang Loose – Official Trailer (2012.27.11)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhABMnRIhmI>
- I Challenge Baron Davis (2008.08.04)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dvk-wEiBdg>
- I'm not cool (2011.26.08)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EB7LWOWsPOs>
- KevJumba vs. IYAZ (2010.27.07)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPxl3sfPzzk>
- Kev Jumba VS Globetrotters (2010.02.12)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lwVIvcOb_A
- Put it in Purse (2007.17.09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywWmGbpUKXM>
- The Stare: Jessica Alba Responds!!! (Link in Description) (2008.06.04)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CguCyEX51Gc>
- Stereotypical Names with Ben (2007.24.02)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocRSf9mgdT8>

Ryan Higa

- "Agents of Secret Stuff" (2010.23.11)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMy-6RtoOVU>
- Asian Boy - Yank Dat Cameltoe (2008.02.01)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh6xpck4OSQ>
- I'm a Chingstah (2009.05.09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5FN3hj5t7k>
- How To Be Ninja (2007.25.07)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdLCEwEFCMU>

Michelle Phan

- Catch my Heart (2011.25.08)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzi4nDZldNk>
- Midnight Kiss (2011.21.12)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=88Fvc4fhAoM&feature=endscreen>
- Rouge In Love (2012.14.02)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=undN03IK2Qg>
- Underneath Your Love (2012.11.01)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDtcs0Jq40>

Andrew Gunadie

- 🎵 Andrew Sings Hater Comments: Where the f*** is your actual content, mm?
(2011.27.02)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CULX7rFC2C8>
- Canadian, Please 🎵 (2009.24.06)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWQf13B8epw>
- "He'll never be a real Canadian" (2009.21.10)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCXqOFjsiZs>
- "Yo you Chinese f*** go back to ur country" (2009.21.01)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9NxT8Smfts>

Others

- Asians Hate You Miley Cyrus! - with Nigahiga & Community Channel (and SMOSH?!) (2009.13.02)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9KGd7ga8B0>
- IT HAS BEGUN: BABANAPOCALYPSE (2012.03.06)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92z1C-lurE4>

- Jessica Alba The Stare Response on ibeatyou (2008.14.05)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmzcKXsllWs>
- Rewind YouTube Style 2012 (2012.17.12)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCkYw3cRwLo>

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Appendix

1.

The screenshot displays a YouTube channel page with a grid of 12 video thumbnails and a sidebar titled "Friends' Channels!".

Video Grid:

- WFW 90 - Our Dancing, Gaming, A...** (13:34): 239,990 views | 1 month ago
- WFW 89 - Basketball Redeems Us...** (8:46): 222,011 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Ep 4 - FINALE** (13:17): 956,244 views | 1 month ago
- WFW 88 - Hula Hoop Champ! Play...** (8:55): 265,807 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Vlog 3 - Are the...** (4:16): 219,812 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Ep 3** (6:06): 971,760 views | 1 month ago
- WFW 87 - Gingerbread Houses!** (11:48): 338,923 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Vlog 2 - Saying ...** (3:34): 239,145 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Ep 2** (8:06): 1,205,793 views | 1 month ago
- WFW 86 - Epic Balloons Animals!** (14:25): 264,010 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Vlog 1 - Nice Gir...** (3:50): 367,213 views | 1 month ago
- When it Counts - Ep 1** (7:55): 1,244,746 views | 2 months ago

Friends' Channels!:

- David Choi**: 934,569 subscribers
- Kevin's Channel**: 2,658,776 subscribers
- ISAtv**: 70,089 subscribers
- nigahiga**: 6,776,696 subscribers
- if you lived in sydney, you'd ...**: 1,212,897 subscribers
- cathy nguyen**: 300,086 subscribers
- D-trix**: 1,170,082 subscribers
- Jeremy Lin's Official Channel**: 204,029 subscribers
- AJ RAFAEL**: 418,774 subscribers
- Kina Grannis**: 566,967 subscribers

2.

The screenshot shows the YouTube Safety Center page. At the top is the YouTube logo and a navigation arrow pointing left to "YouTube".

Help home

Safety Center

What is your issue?

- Community Guidelines Violations
- Cyber Citizenship
- Privacy
- Teen Safety
- Hateful Content
- Sexual Abuse of Minors
- Harassment and Cyberbullying
- Suicide and Self-Injury
- Impersonation
- Spam and Phishing
- Harmful and Dangerous Conduct

[Continue](#)

IMPORTANT

If you sense that you or someone on the site may be in imminent danger, call the police.

QUICK TIPS

- Flag videos that violate our [Community Guidelines](#).
- Keep personal videos [private](#).
- [Block users](#) whose comments or messages are bothering you.
- Keep comments clean and [respectful](#).
- Learn more about [online safety](#).

Are you a parent or educator?

Go [here](#) for parent resources or [here](#) for educator resources.

3.

