

Feminist Discourses and Videos by Youtubers: Limits and Horizons of I-centric Politicization

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Abstract

Within the current centrality of feminist movements in the Spanish public sphere and the transnational dynamics of feminist solidarity and calls to action made possible by social media, this article seeks to observe how a distinct group of well-known Youtubers has integrated discourses denouncing gender inequalities in their videos. YouTube videos are an audiovisual genre voiced in the first person that promote a connection between the authorial I (necessarily agentic) and the audience, which, cultivated by a commercial culture, goes on to constitute a personal brand that can be positioned as its own product. From within these “I-centric” spaces, Youtubers take on the challenge of articulating a feminist consciousness that is compatible with their public identity and is constantly in dialogue with other Youtubers and their audiences.

Keywords

Feminism, LGBTQ+, YouTube, pop-feminism, prosumer culture, social change

Resum

En l'actual centralitat dels moviments feministes en l'esfera pública espanyola i les dinàmiques de transnacionalització de l'agenda i la solidaritat feminista que han permès les xarxes socials, aquest article vol observar com un conjunt de reputades youtuberes ha integrat discursos de denúncia de les desigualtats de gènere als seus vídeos. Els vídeos de youtuberes són un gènere audiovisual basat en la primera persona i que promou una connexió entre el jo autoral (per necessitat agèntic) i l'audiència, que en el si d'una cultura comercial construeix una marca personal des de la qual posicionar-se com a producte. Des d'aquests espais “jo-cèntrics”, les youtuberes s'enfronten al repte d'articular una consciència feminista adient a la seva identitat pública i sempre en relació dialògica entre altres youtuberes i els seus públics.

Paraules clau

Feminisme, LGTBIQ+, YouTube, feminisme popular, cultura prosumer, canvi social

A political consciousness—and a political conscience—are not formed by learning to apply the abstract vocabularies of totalizing and experience-distance theories to particular situations, but by coming to the lived, embodied certainty that the personal is political.

Susan DiGiacomo

The March 8th demonstrations in 2018 and 2019, along with the massive protests against the judgement handed down in the case of La Manada have brought into sharp relief the importance that feminism has taken on in the Spanish public sphere within a the context of a transnational reinvigoration. Fourth-wave Feminism (Zimmerman 2017; Chamberlain 2017) is distinguished from the waves that proceeded it by its strategic use of social media and technology –also commonly used in

other contemporary social movements– and by its intersectional perspective. The strength that this movement has in Spain responds, among other factors, to the accumulation of wealth of older generations, to the influence of transnational media campaigns such as #MeToo #TimesUp or #Cuéntalo, to the anger generated by widespread misogyny and to the articulation of other demands originating in a series of demonstrations against austerity. The persistence of violence against women and the gender wage gap, despite the growing incorporation of women into the national labor market (Aguado 2018) have been two vectors of awareness of the specific precariousness of the position of women. As Gámez Fuentes (2015) points out, the anti-austerity 15-M Movement (*Movimiento 15M*) and feminist movements have been able to articulate an awareness of shared vulnerability and have set their sights on collective empowerment,

understanding sexist oppression as part of a patriarchal system of inequalities that operates in several axes. In this way, the inclusion of feminism in the 15M and political movements would have fostered the relevance that intersectionality has taken in the heart of this struggle and would also have allowed it to expand through activist networks. Likewise, the massive incorporation of young women into activism and the creation of networks that are capable of promoting a unified awareness of the marginalization of young women –while recognizing the specificities of each locality, racialized group, social class and religion– have promoted transnationality and the use of new technologies in the feminist movement (Hunt 2017). Apart from deliberate activism, feminist discourses have permeated entertainment, hybridizing the hegemonic values of neoliberalism and features of Third Wave Feminism such as the fragmentation of the female political subject and the celebration of popular culture (Wolwacz Heinz 2018). The achievement of legitimacy by feminism and its success in majority spaces is reflected in the production (and success) of popular musical styles such as the *reguetón feminista* (Araüna, Tortajada and Figueras 2019) or what some authors begin to problematize as the fact that “feminist” is becoming a label for a “television genre” (Cattien 2019). Nevertheless, the interaction between the meanings of popularized activism and the popular culture labelled “feminist” propose multiple readings and participate in the contemporary articulation of feminism.

This article investigates the forms that feminism has adopted in social networks and, particularly, in the audiovisuals of a selection of Youtubers that are part of the LGBTQ+ panorama: Dulceida, Yellow Mellow, Devermut and Andy Asadaf. They all, from a register created in the first person and the construction of a personal brand, in addition to a defense of sexual diversity, have expressed a certain commitment to feminist precepts, although hybridized with other discursive formulas centered on the “I” and supposedly devoid of ideologies. The analysis of their productions and discourse deepens the debate on the capacity of new media, first-person formats and the *produsage* (Bruns 2008) or *prosumerism* (Jenkins 2001) practices of young women to encourage diverse identities and positive messages in favor of human rights (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013) and sexual rights and responsibilities (DeRidder 2018).

Feminism and mediatization

The current centrality of feminism emerges not only as a necessary response to institutionalized misogyny (Núñez Puente and Gámez Fuentes 2017) but also as a result of the strategic dissemination by feminist movements, who have achieved a notable media presence, as well as expanding on the knowledge they have accumulated. Shortly after the Transition, Rague-Arias (1981) surmised that Spanish feminism, despite its late expansion in the European context due to the restrictions of the Franco dictatorship, was diverse and prolific, but had little

presence outside the cities. The institutionalization of certain demands of the movement carried out by social democratic governments and culminating in the approval of a comprehensive law against gender violence and one for equal rights (Gámez Fuentes 2015), as well as, later, the re-emergence of activism on the internet have contributed to extending the scope and repertoire of meanings and practices related to feminism to rural environments. As Banet-Weiser (2018) states, expressions of feminism can be found everywhere. This expansion of feminist demands, in more or less popularized forms, has overtaken the hegemony that post-feminism enjoyed in the media until recently (Lotz 2001; Gill 2007). Post-feminism has been one of the main areas of discussion in gender and media research in recent years (McRobbie 2004; Gill 2011). Essentially, post-feminism has been defined as a discursive framework which purports feminism, defined as collective social action, to be obsolete (McRobbie 2004; Gill 2016) and, instead, aims at legitimizing women’s capacity to empower themselves through consumption, cosmetics and professional success (Gill 2008). Post-feminism broadly entails the assumption of the neoliberal premise that women, effectively, already have the same rights as men and that their challenge is thus to participate in the meritocratic system on an individualized basis in order to take full advantage of them. Within this framework there coexists, on the one hand, a nod towards a present based on a market understood as a fully integrating mechanism with, on the other hand, a recognition of the traditional codes of femininity (fundamentally, beauty and the capacity to generate sexual attraction) and the implicit acceptance that these codes are enablers of women’s success. This post-feminist framework and the influence of *heterosex*y beauty superimposed and constructed on women’s bodies (Dobson 2011) has been present both in mainstream media productions and in the self-representations that young women have made of themselves on social media and, particularly, on video platforms such as YouTube (Caballero Gálvez, Tortajada and Willem 2017; Dobson 2015). This pressure to recreate the tiny boxes defining beauty as assigned to women by consumer culture explains many of the pressures that young women say they feel experience when becoming sexualized on social media, and also that they judge this sexualization according to patterns of success with a strong class component (Willem, Araüna, Tortajada and 2018). In addition, this post-feminist framework has tended to make power relations invisible and to hold individuals accountable for their subalternity, through a culture that promotes mechanisms to self-correct and control that impel them to think, judge and reproduce an “adequate femininity” (Araüna, Dhaenens and Van Bauwel 2018).

Previous studies show that Spanish Youtubers tend to reproduce gender stereotypes (Canales Segovia 2018), but on the other hand studies of fashion blogs note that young creators exhibit a certain ability to overcome traditional models of femininity (Roca-Salas and López-García 2017). Hence, it is important to observe whether the audiovisual material

produced and distributed through YouTube, made by young people who are demographically close to their audiences, also has transformative potential to contribute to overcoming the heteronormative and patriarchal models and references of mainstream fictional series that the majority of young people consume (Fedele, Masanet and Ventura 2019; Aran-Ramspott, Medina-Bravo and Rodrigo-Alsina 2015; Araüna, Tortajada and Capdevila 2013). In the changing media ecosystem, the platform YouTube has become the go-to place for young people to consume content (Poveda and Morgade 2018). Likewise, the free circulation of audiovisual material in multiple directions and geographies serves to question the traditional divisions and colonial frameworks that have defined LGBTQ+ identity in the media; meaning, the presumption that the media outlets most likely to construct feminist and LGBTQ+ collective identities are primarily produced in western urban contexts (a description that usually applies to Anglo-Saxon geographies) and that, radiating out from that point influence, “emancipate” audiences in the South, as well as in the East and rural areas (Sanz López 2017). The potential emancipatory role of Spanish Youtubers as creators of southern European audiovisual content minimally valued by prestigious institutions breaks these dichotomies.

Feminism’s New Luminosity on YouTube

In recent years, running parallel to the feminist movements in the streets, authors like Gill (2016) have noted feminism’s “new luminosity” in media discourse and popular culture. The effect of the popularization of feminism and its possible de-politization when its proclamations are filtered through mainstream spaces and agents is one of the themes on which gender activists and academics are reflecting (Banet-Weiser 2018). YouTube has been one of the platforms disseminating this corpus of messaging linked to a feminist framework and is of particular interest as, firstly, over the course of a few years it has become the priority object of consumption among young people and, secondly, because it comes out of the practices known as *produsage* (Bruns 2008) or *prosumerism* (Jenkins 2001); this means that it allows for a high volume of individuals to act both as consumers or users on the one hand as well as content producers, facilitating the emergence of peripheral identities and discourses in public discourse. As Szostak suggests, YouTube has feminist potential, given that it “operates as a support network for women dedicated to the general goal of acceptance and respect” (2013: 56). In this sense, movements such as #MeToo have demonstrated the capacity of network activism to interrogate rape culture (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller 2018), though it is also true that groups founded on popular misogyny are also taking advantage of the possibilities of online communication to spread their messages (Banet-Weiser 2018).

The genre of “videos by Youtubers” (so distinguished from other categories of audiovisual content that may be distributed through the platform) is an extension of the videoblog concept;

this is to say, they are voiced in the first person, uploaded regularly, and relate personal experiences and reflections. Youtuber videos can be classified into several subgenres spawned from imitation and virality. Through more or less professional means, they employ simple devices inspired by the webcam set up to face the speaker, evoking a confessional formula originally made popular by reality television, which allows addressing the audience directly. These communiqués are recorded within personal spaces (at first, the bedroom or dorm room, although the recordings vary over time) and include various intimate references to the personal thoughts and feelings of the Youtuber. In short, this genre is structured in such a way as to transmit authenticity and a feeling of closeness between the audience and the creator of the video. Authenticity, which is claimed as a central value in the productions in relation to other audiovisual genres, is in any case congruent with the personal brand aspect (Genz 2015), which is in turn converted into a strategy for achieving the aspirations of the Youtubers: to make a career out of the same audiovisual content or the marketing of products that are complementary and consistent with their personal brands. From there emerge contradictions between the search for authenticity and the strategically constructed dimension (Banet-Weiser 2012), often based on gender-based norms. Within this framework of successful authenticity, performing gender becomes particularly important and, in a precarious neoliberal economy, some research has already warned of the large investments of labor and auto-exploitation that many Youtubers make without compensation in order to create their personal brand (Duffy 2017). Likewise, this structurally precarious work of self-presentation often entails exclusions and the drawing of boundaries between adequate gender roles and failed gender roles according to racist and classist premises that interact with femininity (Moreno Segarra, Bernárdez Rodal 2017). However, the way that YouTube favors niche audiences is correlated to the possibilities that different expressions of diversity have, from different orientations toward feminism to products for LGBTQ+ audiences, and despite the risk that these products create ghettoized audiences and “identities without roots in the rest of society” (Ventura 2016:945).

In this sense, Youtubers videos are multisemantic spaces for the expression of frameworks and positioning around gender, sexuality and feminism. In a context in which feminism has achieved broad legitimacy, the proclamations they refer to have become frequent in videos of contemporary Youtubers and in the expressions on Twitter and Instagram of young influencers. Sometimes, they are even central elements of the online personal brand of media celebrities. In any case, we cannot ignore that the wide dissemination of YouTube videos among young people represents a challenge to the interpretation due to its potential to generate identities and intimate alliances. This activity plays an important role in the development of the collective consciousness and repertoire of young feminist activists (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons and Allaste 2018).

Methodology

From a critical feminist perspective (Van Zoonen 1994; Gill and Orgad 2017; Gill 2008), we have carried out an analysis or close reading of the discourse and staging of 31 videos, intentionally chosen from among Spanish LGBTQ+ Youtubers, employing two criteria: that their themes be related to feminism and that they have amassed a significant number of views through YouTube. All of them appear in the lists compiled in the media related to popular or outstanding Youtubers in the field of feminism and sexual diversity.

Dulceida, with more than 2 million subscribers, is a well-known Youtuber, with a traditional media-presence and embodying what Catherine Rottenberg (2014) calls the new neoliberal feminist subject, focused on one's own well-being and self-care. Yellow Mellow, with more than one million seven hundred thousand subscribers to one of her YouTube channels, was a pioneer in this area and stands out for her defense of feminism and, especially, of the freedom to be oneself. Andy Asadaf, with more than twenty-five thousand subscribers, exemplifies how minority online spaces are constructed and, although not one of the most followed, is considered a reference point for feminism on YouTube. She lays bare her deep reflections on feminism that she combines with stories from her own experience. Devermut, with more than three hundred thousand subscribers, allows us an interesting look into the evolution from a neoliberal feminism to a much more political feminism.

The analyzed pieces by Dulceida, Yellow Mellow, Andy Asadaf and Devermut deal with feminism, offer critical readings on expressions of femininity, and make the visibility of individual sexual orientation possible, allowing these Youtubers to go from observing the world to making us see it through their eyes (Halberstam 2018). The analysis developed ties together that which Youtubers create through exhibitions of authenticity, gender, sexuality and the political positioning of these, whether they reproduce traditional values and stereotypes or, on the contrary, are manifest counter-hegemony in ways that question these models (Kellner and Kim 2010).

Beyond the Male Gaze

By speaking for themselves and making use of a simple device that they have mastered, these five Youtubers take control over how they present themselves to others and to whom they address their message. What they offer is constructed in a space parallel to that of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975), which does not mean that they never opt for a *heterosex* aesthetic or emphasize a *mainstream femininity*, as in the cases of Dulceida or the couple Devermut.

Even so, from this potentially contradictory position, Dulceida publishes a piece, "Respeto" (*Respect*, 2018, 05:49, 3,163,846 views), where she gathers, through the participation of a group of friends (some also Youtubers), all the criticisms regarding

their physical appearances that they have received from other women. They all express the insecurities they feel about their bodies because of how they are perceived by other women and how they perceive themselves, and they show themselves in underwear, talking about complexes and telling each other what parts of their bodies they like. To show compliments instead of criticisms, to speak for themselves or with each other and to give visibility to non-normative bodies, while they smile and embrace each other, is a way of reflecting on the mechanism of the male gaze, which doesn't have a passive presence, and tries to shine a light on the scrutiny that women deal with and its consequences. In this alignment towards what has been called the trend toward body positivity or LYB/Love Your Body discourses (Roca-Sales and López-García 2017) however, there has never been at any time any discussion of structural or systemic issues or a fundamental debate about the reasons behind these pressures that women bear. Dulceida closes the video by encouraging us to love our insecurities while telling us that she hopes to have created something "beautiful" in us and affirms that she will always support "beautiful" causes like this one. She reiterates concepts such as "precious", "beautiful" and "love" to highlight her positive view of the world and encourage the public to change their individual perceptions. In Dulceida's way to "make us feel good", taking care of and trusting oneself becomes the formula for empowerment (Banet-Weiser 2018).

Yellow Mellow, in two of the videos analyzed, plays with makeup (an extensive practice on YouTube), and creates, through the act of putting on make-up (which, for her, is unusual), a perceptive shift concerning both make-up and femininity itself. She is much more comical than Dulceida and, using direct and fresh language, exaggerates to show them for the mask that they are, proving that they are indeed performances and constructions, as in the case of dressing up as a woman. Asadaf is more cutting but still departs an important lesson with her direct and simple question *¿Y si soy fea? (And so what if I'm ugly?)*, 2017, 08:34, 62.197 views) reflects on the scrutiny of the body in a misogynist society, citing authors and concepts that she situates within the history of feminism. She talks about diet as a sedative for women and the internalization of misogyny, questioning the beauty/ugliness dichotomy and demanding freedom for women. Both Yellow Mellow and Asadaf analyze traditional feminine tricks as potentially oppressive constructions, using humor and theory, respectively, and overcoming the body positivity framework in favor of questioning the importance of and fixation on the body in the construction of gender identities.

In *Cómo conseguir un cuerpo perfecto? (How to get a perfect body?)*, 2017, 09:34, 145,630 views), Devermut present themselves as an activist and feminist channel, which for them is not incompatible with admiring (or literally "drooling over") the bodies of Victoria's Secret models. They argue "that is evidence" that the bodies of these models are healthy (without providing any data or raising health issues related to the pressure of body worship and the narrowness of beauty standards). They propose their own (normative) bodies as parameters

and recommend doing sports instead of stopping eating, in a discursive framework that moves between promoting healthy living and good physical appearance as a result of the same. Later, Devermut's videos incorporate a more critical view, as in "Gordofobia en el cine" (*Fatphobia at the Movies*), where they make a timid defense of non-normative bodies, partially overcoming a neoliberal feminist discourse.

Unlike the productions of Yellow Mellow and Asadaf, which do not focus on their bodies and question the cultural practices of modifying bodies, or Dulceida, who, with her own (normative) body and by collaborating with other friends to show bodily diversity, also questions the scrutiny suffered by women, Devermut, in this case, produce a story based on some of the most recurrent post-feminist patterns of representation. The femininity promoted by post-feminism is centered on the body and attractiveness and celebrates objectified and *heterosex* (Dobson 2015) or *homosex* (Caballero, Tortajada and Willem 2017; Ventura 2018) representations of women, legitimizing the hypersexualisation or fetishism of these practices (Menéndez 2017) and transferring the pressure onto female subjects to reach these standards. Lesbianism, filtered by post-feminism, appears in this case to complement to the personal brand of these Youtubers, rather than as a sexual or political identity that can mobilize a response to heteronormative patterns. What is made public, in the case of Yellow Mellow and Asadaf, is a questioning of hegemonic beauty standards and a certain vindication of the condition of being ugly as a way of subverting established aesthetic norms. Dulceida, although not particularly original (some commercial brands had come out with this strategy years prior), questions the scrutiny of female bodies and shows us the solidarity between women as a vector to break with female competitiveness and encourage compliments. Thus, with different and perhaps even opposing strategies, these Youtuber establish a space to shake the extreme normalization of female bodies in media representation.

Authenticity and Sexuality

In terms of maintaining a successful personal brand on social networks, authenticity is a strategy for survival (Dare-Edwards 2014; Tolson 2010). In our research, we have detected that there are two aspects that the analyzed Youtuber videos link to the promotion of a presumed "natural self": the exposition of sexual orientation and the emphasis placed on imperfections. As for the display of weaknesses, Dulceida and Yellow Mellow insist on their condition as non-experts and non-professional people, on speaking from personal experience and on being imperfect, turning this weakness into something pedagogical from which other people can learn (Dobson 2015). Authenticity, as in other post-feminist contexts, is also linked to the women's sexual agency, which, in this case, and for most of these Youtubers, involves the public manifestation of their sexual orientation.

Yellow Mellow and Andy Asadaf do not exhibit a normative femininity and opt for more transgressive exhibitions of their body and gestures, while Dulceida or Devermut embody a hegemonic femininity, which is still presented as something authentic (Gill 2007). From this construction of the body and the diverse genre, Dulceida, Yellow Mellow and Devermut share their *coming out videos* (videos where they "come out of the closet"), a practice that is linked to the reaffirmation of identity, but which is also common among Youtubers who are already known and which serves to reinforce their brand (Wuest 2014). The coming out videos have become a subgenre on YouTube, a format with identifiable aesthetic conventions focused on intimacy, authenticity and emotional displays (Lovelock 2019). In this case, the revelation of sexual preferences that surpass heteronormativity and that, at the same time, can encourage collective identifications and counter negative stereotypes (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons and Allaste 2018).

In "Mi orientación sexual" (*My Sexual Orientation*, 2015, 06:15, 481,131 views), Dulceida states that she is a lesbian as much because she wants us to know as she wants to say it, essentializing what it means to date another girl, jokes about being able to dress her in her clothes, and expresses the will that her wide-ranging testimony can help others to accept the transgression of heteronormativity. She doesn't mind crying at certain moments of the story and hopes "*this video has affected you in some way*". Her video "Roast Yourself" (2016, 04:30, 7.186.786 views) gathers all the criticisms that accuse her of being a false lesbian, but the challenge does not lend itself to providing context for this contempt, and Dulceida, although she makes ironic statements such as "I married a woman because it's fashionable" or "there's nothing more overdone than being a fake lesbian", her central purpose is the preservation of her self-image. She parodies the criticisms she receives, saying ironically that her relationship with Alba is for financial gain, or that, in fact, she has not seen her since the day of the wedding (and the effect of denying it is immediate because Alba appears in many of her videos well-known to the public). In this same line of circumscribing the experience to an intimate space, but not a political one, would be the video of her wedding "Sí quiero" (*I do*), "Emocionada con el worldpride" (*Excited About Worldpride*) or "El tabú de la transexualidad" (*The Taboo of Transsexuality*), with the Youtuber Enzo. Dulceida often shows her emotions and insists that "I think this video will help a lot of people" or that "to feel good we have to think of our own needs". The discourse, however, remains in the individual and experiential analysis, without denunciations or references to structural inequalities or homophobia. Instead, physical and emotional reactions predominate the story itself, as well as the insistence on the idea that videos are meant "to help".

From a similar discursive and aesthetic construction, in "Cómo salimos del armario" (*How we came out of the closet*, 2016, 12:46, 308,158 views), Devermut, in a superficial way and without giving details, try to transmit that "every day of your life" you're coming out of the closet, that it is not easy, that each

situation is unique, and they explain that when it's explained to everyone, people tend to react in a positive way (although they admit that their families, at first, did not accept it). Their slogans are "don't appear weak" and "come off strong". Like Dulceida, they dedicate other pieces to talk about lesbianism, as in "Cómo ligarse a una lesbiana" (*How to Hit on a Lesbian*) or "Ventajas de ser lesbiana" (*Advantages of Being a Lesbian*), where they try to dismantle some clichés about lesbian sexual desire while reiterating a lesbianism linked to mainstream femininity and normative romantic relationships.

On the other hand, subverting the mainstream feminine aesthetic, in "No me siento mujer" (*I don't feel like a woman*, 2018, 07:37, 772,481 views), Yellow Mellow tells us that she doesn't feel like a woman, nor a man, that she doesn't feel anything. She wants to escape labels like lesbianism and bisexuality and interrogate what she really thinks and feels. She says she doesn't know if she's genderqueer or genderfluid, that she believes that her gender is neutral. She argues that human beings can think beyond binarism and, taking an anti-intellectual stance, concludes "if we think things are right, it's because they're right." She states that the responses to video scare him (explicitly referring to trans and homophobia) and, reinforcing the direct and fresh language of the whole piece, she tells us that she doesn't know how to end it and signs off with a simple "bye." This reinforces an idea that already appeared in "Mi orientación sexual" (*My sexual orientation*, 2016, 07:04, 1,416,792 views), in which she commented that it was not necessary to define oneself or know how to name what one is, while encouraging those watching to experiment and "hash things over". She also states "I hope this helped you" adding empathic and supportive messages, wishing luck to those seeking to express their sexuality, explaining, among other things, that you get over rejection.

Asadaf also presents us with a fluid identity, in continuous construction. The authenticity she exhibits is based on the self-critical distancing from the self and, thus, she speaks to us of her present self or contrasts her public and private selves. She eschews labels, arguing that in order to label oneself one has to have read a lot. However, in each one of her videos she explores several concepts related to activism and theory and, offers us a didactic discussion on how radical feminism and queer theory differ and what it means to be trans. In each of her lessons, she shows herself to be a knowledgeable person but one who is far from a sage, an expert, or a teacher. She presents herself as a non-binary person who, speaking from her own experience but also based on texts and active participation, seeks to share her concerns by taking advantage of the opportunities presented by audiovisual platforms online.

These subjective positionings take on a deeply reflective character, and displaying them in public becomes another potential transgression regarding normative sexual identities and gender norms that allows for the creation of a space that allows for gender and sexuality to exist in a transformational way, despite the risks that are entailed with exposing them (De Ridder

and Van Bauwel 2013). As such, all of these manifestations are not incompatible with a certain level of artifice: performing that the main purpose of the videos is to help others (Wuest 2014) or that they often cry, speed up their breathing or stammer due to the difficulty of putting their emotions into words (Lovelock 2019). As in the case of the videos analyzed, that which is personal and about sexuality can become public; the audience is invited to feel what the Youtubers are feeling within these larger ideological structures (Lovelock 2019). Besides, although their message, often, is limited to "be yourself" or "accept yourself as you are", the videos on YouTube make the collective task of producing and disseminating strategies to experience the diversity of sexuality possible (Lovelock 2019).

Feminism to Post-Feminism and Everything In Between

The coalescing of post-feminist tropes in popular culture has influenced the concepts of feminism that circulate on YouTube (Caballero, Tortajada and Willem 2017). While spaces are being created for the subversion of sexuality and gender, they are not always linked to feminist discourse and, when they are, the lack of theory and the personal aspect of feminist feelings does not necessarily generate a political space.

Devermut and Asadaf openly describe themselves as feminists and define their channels as spaces to promote this empowering ideology. Yellow Mellow, when asked directly, has defined herself as a feminist and alleges that "any person with any sense at all is a feminist and supports feminism" ("73 preguntas a YellowMellow", 73 Questions for YellowMellow, 2017, 07:49, 585.036 views). Dulceida, on the other hand, exhibits a cosmetic self (Lazar 2009), where the political becomes blurred by individualization and the centering of the "I", the thing against which everything else is measured. The world is seen from the point of view and for the self, and one's individual contribution has the most value. The authenticity she exhibits does not go beyond the limits framing this discourse. Her entire transformation is based on exposing her own flaws as discussed above, and the constant affirmation that thanks to her followers she has understood how to put herself in others' shoes and be self-critical. For Dulceida, empowerment is about being oneself and individual success (Caballero, Tortajada and Willem 2017) which, in her case, consists of, among other experiences, travel, summarized in "perfect days" and "Oh my god, I've made it" (positing the merits of pleasure). In addition to promoting other brands, she publicizes her own lines of lipsticks, perfumes, hamburgers, jewelry, and phone cases. All this merchandising is integrated in a problematic way within a discourse about personal experiences, romantic advice and slogans such as "don't get comfortable" or "give it your all" ("Lo que aprendí en 2018", *What I learned in 2018*, 2019, 17:13, 370.281). Many of Dulceida's productions also make use of the ability to laugh at oneself. Incorporating the criticism you receive into your own content is an empowering narrative strategy

for Youtubers. In Dulceida's videos there is an empowerment discourse that is verbalized in the idea of "I have made this video (a part of myself) in case it can help", and that focuses on the idea of "be who you want" and "you are brave for being who you want". The capacity and freedom to create oneself are the core of Dulceida's stories. There is reflection, but the whole discourse is centered on the self as a personal life experience and lifestyle. Youtubers exploit authenticity and naturalness to sustain that self-made self that she practices, but at no point does she reference oppression or structural inequalities. In this sense, speaking optimistically leaves the system out of it. In this case, authenticity appears to be congruent with commercial and self-reflexive dimensions (Genz 2015).

Yellow Mellow, if we imagined a cosmetic-political axis, would be situated in a space less devoid of political content than Dulceida. In terms of sexual identity, beyond expressing her feelings and eschewing labels, she develops a set of concepts to support her reflection, expresses her admiration for the courage of trans people and speaks of the construction of identity as a process that occurs throughout life and related to which you experience different stages and moments of uncertainty. She makes videos for people who feel alone or isolated (as opposed to the vague concept of "helping"). Coming off as natural, with fresh language and a fun affect, she supports, from her own experience, people feeling free to express their sexual identity. As such, Yellow Mellow reflexively appropriates the identity and authenticity she projects. Unlike Dulceida, who remains on the cosmetic plane, Yellow Mellow's open defense of equality and reflexivity is not based just on a particular construction of the I, but rather making visible certain collective rights and modes of structural oppression.

Devermut present themselves as novices with regard to feminism, but with the desire to reflect ("we try to have a feminist message but we aren't experts on the subject"). In the video "Feminazis", even though they don't offer arguments refuting criticisms of feminism, they introduce concepts such as "sexism" and "patriarchy" and talk about the importance of unlearning, condemning situations in which they've found themselves, like how men have reacted when they kiss in the street, cat-calling at women or increasing sexism. In "Si nos tocan a una nos tocan a todas" (*If They Touch One of Us They Touch All of Us*, 2018, 15:44, 170,042 views), they start with a feminist motto to give a voice to a group of women who, as a chorus, comment on the judgment in the Manada case, and among other reflections and testimonies, address the judge and the girl who was the victim of the crime, wearing shirts that read "sisters." It is an explicitly accusatory video where, with sororal solidarity, they explore the causes and consequences of the judgment for women and society, and discuss how women are socialized among fear, pornography or misinformation regarding false accusations. The video ends with the feminist conviction that things will change and an expression of support for those that have suffered not only at the hands of their abusers but also by the failure of society to support them; they affirm their belief

in the victim's story and send her their love. In this and other videos, Devermut demonstrate an evolution with respect to their first productions in relation to the collective consciousness. It also marks a change in the format of their videos, which no longer just center on the two of them but rather go beyond the first-person form to seek the participation of others.

Asadaf makes videos that are explicitly feminist and political. Her channel is niche and thematic, creating feminist pedagogy with didactic arguments. It touches on many issues, among them, the relationship between sexism and machismo and the causes and consequences of gender-based violence. She is also concerned with constructing a fair and positive image of feminism as a social movement, dismantling clichés about feminism, questioning the types of humor that are weaponized to discredit it, and reinforcing the fact that feminism is based on history and theory, "it is objective and is studied at universities." Asadaf wants to share feminist ideas, defends the movement, is an activist, and likes to clarify that "feminists do not hate men, they hate sexist society".

Hence a panorama of positions are displayed in which we find a fresh, explicit, feminist Youtuber discourse that draws on feminist theory and activism, practices which are feminist but that avoid being labeled as such, post-feminist versions that creep up to politicization, and post-feminist narratives and representations. These latter ones substitute the freedom of choice for politics, an ability to choose that creates a mirage of emancipation while reinforcing the normative (Gill 2007, Genz 2015, Menéndez 2017). By contrast, the rest of the positions outlined above sustain themselves on the construction of a reflexive identity based on solidarity that projects outward to the community (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2003) and that, in words of Devermut, show "the feminist growth we're trying to achieve." The videos are the tool they use for this purpose and exhibit the identities they put into practice, the result of uniting reflection, the desire to be free, commitment to others and "I-centrism" as a brand of its own. Certain feminist precepts form part of this project.

Conclusions

While true that the capital held by groups in the majority has managed to achieved a greater control over and involvement than ever before in the lives of people vis-a-vis social networking platforms (Guardiola 2018), it is also true that practices of resistance are capable of articulating language and calls to physical action through these same networks. This is to say, the way they are used can surpass, to a certain extent, the profit-driven and controlling objectives of the platforms and participate in the dissemination of ideas that can overthrow the hegemonic frameworks that interpret gender relations. As Castilho and Romancini (2017) observed, based on the sit-ins at Brazilian schools organized by adolescent demonstrators, the production and consumption of feminist discourses online

can incentivize dialogue and contribute to the politicization of young people and, through continued activism beyond the physical encounter, social change. In the case of videos made by Youtubers, moreover, their personal, intimate style contributes to the development of an intimate relationship with their audiences, who are invited to participate in the dialogue with content creators who are perceived as more accessible than conventional celebrities.

The Youtubers analyzed in this article offer a range of narratives and scenes that incorporate manifestly feminist elements. In this way, they contribute to transforming the negative associations, based on the stigma that the label “feminism” carried up until a few years prior, into positive associations; meaning, into collective pride and identification (Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons y Allaste 2018). All of the Youtubers share in the most agreed upon feminist issues, such as fighting against gender and sexual violence, the awareness and criticism of the fact that women are under enormous pressure when it comes to their physical appearance. From this perspective and going beyond the analytical limitations promulgated by the videos themselves, one can observe that they create a critical divide in regards to the oppressive values assigned to traditional femininity, such as the submission to the command to cultivate physical attractiveness. However, successful Youtubers do not break with normative codes of beauty, as young people, far from considering social networks as a space for disembodied communication, judge gender performances (and their adaptation to dominant standards) as factors of online reputation (Tortajada and Araüna 2014).

The same goes for LGBTQ+ identities. Although the intersectionality of the cultural movement leads to the sharing of a collection of positive action and portrays a positive attitude to “coming out” (as a feminist and as LGBTQ+), these individual identifications do not always construct images and discourses that go beyond binarism. This gives rise to a certain tension between the normative imaginaries and the LGBTQ+ aspect of the Youtubers analyzed. Lesbianism may be the sexual choice of a successful celebrity and icon of cosmetic femininity (with her own brand), but the forms in which she is most successful tend to have her embodying *heterosexy* and *homonormative* models (Ventura 2018). In fact, there is an overload of positivity in the encouraging messages of these Youtubers, pierced through with a neoliberal culture that imprints on these audiovisual productions the post-feminist stamp of making any solution up to the individual and her potential to adapt to the challenges in her environment. If, given the freedom of expression that makes these discourses possible means they can surpass the established frameworks for understanding gender inequalities, it is also true that the majority fall in line with a kind of celebrity feminism that dilutes the transformational potential from the privileged position occupied by the promotional figures (the Youtubers), who have a wider margin of choice than the majority of women: “The choice, blurred with political actions, is born from a banal understanding of empowerment based on

which, like the trap of positive thinking, where there’s a will there’s a way, free of any constriction or subjection,” (Gámez Fuentes, Gómez Nicolau y Maseda García 2016: 839). The Youtubers are, within this framework, examples of humanity and of success; close enough to touch and, at the same time, a fantasy of empowerment which suggests that, despite the structures and their intrinsic violence, there exists a margin of freedom.

Although devoid of politics, the reciprocal help and the possibility that an educational community seem to make the communicative strategies of the Youtubers possible, to a certain extent by nature of the platform, which is highly dependent on commentary from society, but which also serves as a commentary on society. As we see with Devermut, videos that start out quite banal and concerned with day-to-day, autobiographical topics, go on to acquire a more engaged tone and culminate with pieces that denounce “fatphobia”, conservative politics, and the Manada judgment. Despite the fact that Youtuberism is a practice resulting from the incisive individualism of the present moment and an incarnation of discourses centered on the self-articulated through the language of audiovisual content online, creators such as Andy Asadaf are capable of using this register to joining the large group of contemporary activists who use non-fiction audiovisual content to influence and provoke change. In addition, the platform’s accessibility and the simplicity of the format allow for the Youtubers to transcend gender biases and traditional positions of authority (Araüna y Quílez 2018) that are still dominant in other non-fiction genres with more prestige

Note

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