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SITUATING GENRE ON YOUTUBE:
WE RANT, WE LAUGH, WE CONQUER?

BY
EMMA GABRIELE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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OF

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ABSTRACT

This body of research seeks to understand iterations of ranting manifest via YouTube video blogs through a rhetorical lens. I employ comparative theory to develop a description of the rant as a recurring typology, equipped with excremental metaphors inspired by Burke's concept of catharsis. I then differentiate YouTube vlog ranting from 'live' ranting by applying Carolyn Miller's theory of genre as social action. Using Miller's paradigm, I turn to contemporary research in media studies and humor communication, in order to develop a methodology equipped to analyze YouTube vlog rants as generic texts. I contend that the meaning constructed in YouTube vlogs must be interpreted beyond the oral performance of the rant, and explicate a methodological approach that accounts for editing, camera positioning (confessional-style format), scripting, setting, and any other superfluous additions that exists outside of the diegetic action of the vlog. In the culminating chapter of the exposition, I provide a preliminary application of the method. I also discuss the social implications of *comedic* vlog rants, and suggest that YouTube vlogging creates a unique subject position for the vlogger; a subject position that enables greater social influence and the potential for celebrity status. I conclude by questioning what role this subject positioning might play in reinforcing or subverting heteronormativity – based on a hypothesis that adherence to hegemonic ideals surrounding gender and sexuality is positively correlated with popularity (and participation in revenue sharing).

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CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Vrooman (2002), in his summary about ranting online, claimed that cyberspace, “is a performative space, a space created through programming and communicative interaction. This is a place where all sorts of performances occur [...] It is a kind of playground of identity where performance is the *modus operandi* (Plotz and Bell, 1996)” (p. 52). This study is concerned with a particular type of performance – the rant, on a particular online platform - YouTube. Ranting online occurs in a “performative space,” that is a kind of “playground of identity.” A faction of YouTube users utilize the platform’s available tools to create and disseminate videos of themselves, and some of these recordings are video blogs that feature users speaking directly into the camera in a ‘confessional-style’ whilst ‘ranting’ in a comedic way. In performing *comedic* vlog rants persistently on YouTube, vloggers create a persona. This means that ranters have the ability to make millions of people laugh while simultaneously developing an online identity through performance. Since laughter is both cathartic (Burke, 1959) and a unifying social principle (Burke, 1959; Meyer, 2000), it stands to reason that YouTube vloggers could potentially use the online identities they create to accomplish a variety of social actions (Ledbetter, 2014; Simonsen, 2012; Werner, 2012). That being said, this analysis simply aims to develop a working theory of the rant in order to examine how comedic ranting via vlog constructs a cathartic experience for the audience - one that depends upon how a performance is mediated and where this mediation emerges - as well

as to offer an approach to analyzing a cultural artifact (The YouTube vlog) that combines rhetorical theory and media studies.

This study proposes that locating rants in particular ‘rhetorical situations’ first requires a comprehensive description of ranting as a typology – after all, speech acts have been labeled ‘rants’ since the dawn of Western civilization. That the act of ranting is consistently and repeatedly performed in a variety of contexts is significant to this body of research for a number of reasons. Campbell and Jamieson (1978) explain:

A genre is a classification based on the fusion and interrelation of elements in such a way that a unique kind of rhetorical act is created. Approaching such acts generically gives the critic a unique opportunity to penetrate their internal workings and to appreciate the interacting forces that create them. (p. 21)

Delineating the rant as a rhetorical genre is an attempt to ‘penetrate’ the ‘internal workings’ of a rhetorical act that persists. However, examining iterations of the rant reinforces the disparity between recurring types of rhetoric on the one hand, and an identifiable rhetorical genre on the other. For example, the eulogy is often cited as one example of a rhetorical genre (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978; Miller, 1984; Lange, 2015), due to both its formal and substantive characteristics, as well as its emergence as an act in response to a particular, recurring situation; the act commemorates someone with whom one is close, while the situation might be that the person has retired, either from their job or in death. In some instances the eulogy may even celebrate a person’s birthday or an achievement of some distinction or excellence. At any rate, the occasion that brings the eulogy into existence is readily identifiable – the genre honors a person – as is the form

and, to a lesser extent, the substance of the act. Rants, however, are a response to a variety of situations for a multitude of different reasons, and while the form and substance of ranting online has been described in detail by recent researchers examining computer-mediated communication (Vrooman, 2002; Lange, 2015; Werner, 2012), the impetus to rant online must be determined with the same degree of certainty as the motivation to eulogize has been, in order to situate online ranting as a rhetorical genre.

Though there are similarities between the form and the substance of both the eulogy and the rant (they are both monologues [form] that express emotions [substance]), more significant are the differences, and not only in form and substance. The most notable divergence between these two rhetorical acts is their exigency; the eulogy emerges in the situation of commemorating someone known, yet rants emerge indiscriminately, in a multitude of different contexts that are not as readily identifiable as “the need to honor someone.” This examination draws distinctions that emphasize that while rhetorical genre is a recurring type, a recurring type is not necessarily a rhetorical genre, unless it accomplishes a social action (Miller, 1984).

The notion of genre is often a convoluted concept in academic research. Fusing rhetorical criticism with critical media studies simplifies the task that a number of researchers face when genre research and development occurs in multi-media environments. Yates and Orlikowski (1992) remark:

The notion of communication media is used variously and inconsistently by different researchers in different studies. In particular, the concept of medium has often been confused with that of genre. Confusion arises when researchers

compare genres of communication (e.g. memos or bulletins) with communication media (e.g. electronic mail or fax). Genres, however, may be physically created, transmitted, and stored in various media. Thus, comparing memos with electronic mail, for example, confounds the concept of communication medium with that of communication genre. [...] Although our notion of genre is clearly differentiated from that of medium, we recognize their interaction by positing that medium may play a role in both the recurrent situation and the form of the genre (p 310)

Examining rhetorical genre means addressing the form, substance, and action of a particular rhetorical phenomenon. What makes studying ranting via vlog difficult is that vlog rants represent a situation of hierarchically embedded rhetorical acts – the act of ranting (which has a form, substance, and exigence) is manifest within the act of making a YouTube video (which also has a form, substance, and exigence). For example, I argue that confessional-style recordings - a reiterative form of audio-visual production and the primary format of YouTube video blogs - are a recurrent *form* of video production, and one wherein the rant recurs online. More specifically, I explain how the rhetorical act of comedic ranting is “physically created” and “stored” in a confessional style format, and how the act of making a video of oneself and uploading it to YouTube takes precedent over the oral articulation of the rant in this particular rhetorical situation. This means that I approach confessional-style videos (a form that that is significant in particular contexts and that, according to Simonsen (2012) and Werner (2012), is indicative of identity construction) through a rhetorical lense, and employ a methodology equipped to examine both visual and aural aspects of rant performance via vlog. In short – I see vlogs as texts, and interpret their meaning as such.

Meaning is of course a product of interpretation, and sometimes – misinterpretation. A crucial issue that arises throughout the course of this examination lies in the various interpretations of the term “genre.” This study is centered around the development of a specific speech act, i.e., the rant, and involves situating that oral performance within a specific rhetorical situation in a particular form and with a specific substance. Ranting is an act that transforms as it manifests in various instantiations; face to face rants accomplish a different social action than confessional-style recordings of rants, and confessional-style rants are performed differently depending on where and how they are mediated; whether they are uploaded to the internet via YouTube, played during a news broadcast, viewed as part of a reality television program, or sent directly to a few friends, confessional style rant performance accomplishes different social actions depending on the where, why, how, when, and who of the recording. Since generic rants surface within various other media also categorized by genres, it is necessary to draw a distinction between genre study in the rhetorical sense and genre studies in the field of media studies.

Genre theory that accounts for specific speech acts is based on the social action that the speech act is used to accomplish (Miller, 1984), but media genre theory is typically conceptualized differently. For example, ‘drama,’ ‘comedy,’ ‘documentary,’ ‘horror,’ ‘action,’ and ‘romance’ are all familiar film genres, and while it could be argued that *some* genres, (‘horror’ for instance) are classified based upon the social action they might potentially achieve (insofar as horror films have struck fear into viewers en masse), it is not necessarily the case that film genres are named based upon what they hope to achieve in audience response. For example, not all films belonging to the horror genre are

designed to cause fear; similarly, ‘action’ films aren’t classified based on inciting their viewers to action. In the film studies tradition, Shary (2004) describes genre study specific to audio-visual media, explaining that such examination “considers patterns, motifs, and trends across a spectrum of films that share a commonality, usually subject matter and theme, and further explores how the elements of a genre are manifested and change over time” (p. 11). What is often the case, then, is that the notion of genre in media studies (based on the subject matter and theme of the film as a text) gets conflated with the conceptual theory of genre outlined by rhetoricians. For example, Werner (2012) has described four sub-genres of the YouTube vlog: “confession,” “reaction,” “witness,” and “rant,” each based on the substance and form of the language within a specific vlog or set of vlogs. The issue with this classification is his naming of the sub-genres. Applying rhetorical genre theory to video formats is not ill-informed, but labeling *genres* of video formats based solely on the verbal utterance is misleading, since there is much more to interpreting the vlog than a moniker derived from the partial substance of a vlog can describe.

Furthermore, Werner’s (2012) definition of the vlog assumes that all vlogs are filmed in confessional-style format, and although he claims that the vlog is not actually a genre (a point I disagree with), he advances ‘genres’ of the vlog all the same. One subgenre named is the ‘confession,’ which seems rather obvious considering that he assumes all vlogs are confessional style recordings – raising the question as to whether or not all vlogs might be seen as some mode of confession. Another example that illustrates the difficulty in naming genres of the vlog based solely on the verbal act lies in his differentiation between rant videos and reaction videos. Since ranting is also a reaction,

especially according to his description of what constitutes a rant, and since both rants and reactions share a propensity for heightened displays of emotion (albeit different emotions, based on his examples of these types), it seems as though these ‘sub-genres’ he identifies might see significant overlap. Of course, genre overlap or merging is common amongst popular digital media. Using cinema as an example again, ‘docu-dramas’ or ‘romantic comedies,’ are unions, or subgenres, of broader genres. In a similar fashion, musical genres are often fused and renamed as broader classifications that have evolved, transforming their original state into something new or different, yet still named appropriately. For example, the fusion of ‘metal’ and ‘emo’ becomes ‘screamo;’ since the lead singers of metal bands typically scream, and since emo is short for emotional (with a dramatic “life is pain” connotation attached), and this emotional expression is typically articulated in woeful, tinny song; the fusion then becomes life is still pain but rather than whine about it I’ll scream.

To be clear, I am not criticizing Werner (2012) for applying rhetorical genre theory to YouTube video blogs, as this is also my approach. The aforementioned discussion of genre is meant to highlight the importance of parsing the verbal/oral content of the vlog (itself a rhetorical act) from the actual recording, and attaching names accordingly; this implores that the researcher examine vlogs as a much richer and multifaceted object, and apply interpretive analysis as such. In other words, the oral act becomes part of the substance of the vlog, and must be analyzed as a partial product of the vlogging form, NOT as its chief organizing principle. In fact, that oral, recurring types are remediated in vlog form via performance enables a deeper understanding of

certain oral genres - particularly emotional ones - a point I elaborate on in subsequent chapters.

Confessional style recordings occur across a spectrum of media (i.e., documentary films, reality television, news broadcasts, YouTube video blogs, etc.) and so they cannot be said to be the sole format of a specific genre, but manifest rather as a common style of camera positioning across genres. Shary's description of film genre highlights "patterns, motifs, and trends" amongst a spectrum of films, and certain aspects of cinematography (camera positioning, for instance) are often repeated in a particular genre. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to confessional-style recordings as a predominant form of the YouTube video blog, distinct from the genre of the YouTube video blog insofar as A) not all video blogs utilize confessional style format exclusively in their execution, and B) other media utilize confessional style format. While differentiating between a media studies approach to genre and rhetorical genre development specific to speech acts is a necessary precursor to studying ranting via vlog, I do believe that Miller's (1984) paradigm has the ability to situate the vlog as a genre of the YouTube platform. In combining her model with media studies research, I suggest that her theory of genre as social action applies not only to oral discourse, but to video blogs as well. In other words, I expand her paradigm to include audiovisual recordings (though this expansion is limited to vlogs).

I operate under the assumption that ranting via YouTube vlog is a method of subject positioning that ensures (the ranter's) separateness from, and ontological and ideological opposition to, the (subject) which they critique, which is an adaptation of Vrooman (2002). In establishing that ranting is a recurrent form culminating in an

essential experience (catharsis), and suggesting that it is a form of pure persuasion (Burke, 1969), I avoid the arduous task of situating the act of ranting in itself at particular points in history – rather, I stake the claim that the rant as a recurring type is best understood as located within the rhetorical situation of the body. I then argue that humorous ranting also achieves catharsis, but that it manifests in a specific (ridiculous) approach; that the ranter exhibits pride by elevating themselves above the subject, and that the substance of the rant must reveal subject x as deserving of ridicule, in order for the ranter to position his/herself as superior to the subject. Finally, I differentiate comedic ranting via vlog from humorous ranting in itself, and suggest that comedic ranting via vlog allows users to engage in a process of constructing a unique and potentially powerful subject positioning. The ability to achieve this subject positioning is partially due to the idiosyncrasies of the textual form of the vlog combined with the form and substance of the oral performance of the rant - both of which are subject to the affordances of the YouTube platform.

In future research, I would like to use these findings as a foundation for pinpointing particular instances where the rhetorical situation of YouTube allows vloggers to utilize confessional-style vlog rants to affect social influence – both on and off line. In the discussion section of this exposition, I hint at whether or not ranting on YouTube could enable its users to either ascribe to, or engage in the subversion of, hegemonic ideals. That being said, drawing a direct correlation between vlog rant ‘x’ and any particular instance of social change (transcending ideologies surrounding gender and sexuality, for instance) is a different project entirely. The examination that ensues and any theories developed herein are intended to serve as a pre-cursor to subsequent studies

more adept at handling the complicated nature of audience effects research. The aim here is to construct a method to accomplish an in-depth rhetorical analysis of YouTube vlogs. In order to achieve this end, I synthesize rhetorical criticism to stipulate a methodology equipped to analyze video blogs wherein the performance of comedic ranting via vlog is the central focus.

This study takes video blogs as its object, and more specifically, video blogs with a particular format (confessional style) and on a particular platform (YouTube). To understand why the rant is a persistent reiterative form, it is pertinent to first describe the act of ranting as separate from the act of comedic vlog ranting. Then, some flexible guidelines will be offered to account for the humorous form of the rant as a verbal tool. Next, a detailed description of the video blog, confessional style format, and the affordances of YouTube as a social media platform will be offered, so that a more in-depth understanding of how ranting functions (in form, substance, and social action) within these various mediated situations can be articulated. Finally, I combine the theoretical findings of Miller's seminal article, "Genre as Social Action," with a media studies approach to textual analysis, in order to account for nonverbal and non-vocal aspects of the rant performance constructed via vlog. I rename the performance of humorous ranting via vlog as "comedic" in light of the performative and semi-professional approach to remediating the rant. So, humorous (live) ranting (HR.), when recorded in confessional-style and uploaded to YouTube, becomes comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV), and the object becomes a comedic rant vlog (CRV).

It comes down to this: iterations of rants have been cited in Western culture for centuries upon centuries (Lindblom & Dunn, 2006; Richlin, 1992; Vrooman, 2002) – but

how does comedic ranting in a particular situation (online via vlog) create a unique, and potentially powerful, subject position for the YouTube user? My theory is that those video bloggers who have established online personas and gained substantial popularity via *comedic ranting* easily situate themselves in positions of authority; by using invective to disapprove of various people, situations or topics, they elevate themselves above whichever object they choose to criticize while simultaneously uniting their followers, if not with each other (as that determination is beyond the scope of this study), at least with the vlogger. Meyer (2000) explains that:

Humor unites communicators through mutual identification and clarification of positions and values, while dividing them through enforcement of norms and differentiation of acceptable versus unacceptable behaviors or people. This paradox in the functions of humor in communication as, alternately, a unifier and divider, allows humor use to delineate social boundaries (p. 310)

Meyer (2000) also explains that humor emerges in three basic ways in human thought: through perceptions of 1) Relief 2) Incongruity and 3) Superiority. Since ranting positions the orator outside of the subject at which the rant is directed (what I refer to as subject x) in order to critique it, if a rant is comedic, we can understand this rhetorical act to meet the third criteria: superiority. This type of humor occurs when

people laugh outwardly or inwardly at others because they feel some sort of triumph over them or feel superior to them in some way [...] Laughing at “ignorant” actions on the part of others, as adults often laugh at the sayings or doings of children, illustrates this perspective (p. 314)

Since Burke (1959) elucidates that derisive laughter is cathartic insofar as it promotes social unity, I theorize that constructing a cathartic experience for the audience is the quintessential social action accomplished by humorous ranting. However, I also highlight the intention behind the act (whether or not it is meant to be humorous), as integral to the understanding of genre classification.

By performing catharsis, do YouTube vloggers develop a “superior” subject position, at least in relation to the people, objects or situations they ridicule via comedic vlog rants, or does this superiority not extend past online identity performance? Does their attempt to achieve superiority in their performance of identity grant them more social power?

I will pursue three research questions to this end:

RQ1: What criteria must a rhetorical act meet in order to be considered a rant?

How does the researcher distinguish “the rant” as a rhetorical genre?

RQ2: How might the ability to record and edit oneself within ‘confessional-style’ recordings (form) restructure the rant (in form and substance)? How might the affordances of YouTube contribute to restructuring the rant (form and substance) via vlog (form) as a social action?

RQ3: Considering the conclusions on media form and rhetorical substance from RQ2, how might the researcher go about applying the method? Might other social actions arise upon further investigation?

CHAPTER 2

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The significance of this study is multifaceted and interdisciplinary. As Matsuo (2010) points out,

Nowadays, rhetoric is just one among many approaches for analyzing and understanding communication: the traditional Speech Communication rhetorical and discourse analysis models are still influential, but they exist alongside an expanded range of research methods, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies from the social sciences, for example. Often knowledge domains intersect: in humanist orientations to communication, critical and cultural studies may have significant points of overlap with discourse studies and media studies and the knowledge bases of performance studies and public address scholarship p. 146.

This examination is an example of how certain “knowledge domains intersect” in qualitative research pursuits.

Since my methodology champions a critical approach to audiovisual social media by way of textual analysis, the method is designed to examine both language and performance as they construct online identities. A host of research has endeavored to examine identity construction online via social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace (Abiala & Hernwall, 2013; Aldridge & Harden, 2014; Carr, Schrock, & Dauterman, 2012; Flanigan, Hocevar, & Samahito, 2013; Leung, 2013; Morrison, 2014;

Subrahmen & Smahel, 2011; Turkle, 2011:2012; van Zoonen, 2013; Walther, Der Heidge, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), yet less attention has been directed toward identity creation on the YouTube platform (see Balance, 2012; Ledbetter, 2014; Simonsen, 2012; and Williams, Tyree & Lewis, 2015 for examinations of identity on YouTube). This analysis will expand on the discussion of identity formation via YouTube, as a social networking site, through the lense of rhetorical genre theory. Since speech and emotional display are identity-forming aspects of human behavior, and my analysis accounts for the aural as well as the visual, this paradigm might also be relevant to social scientific research that examines human behavior situated in audio-visual formats. Werner (2012) states that: “Though vlogging has been largely overlooked in rhetorical scholarship, it is highly relevant to broader scholarly conversations on interactivity and speed in new media, as well as conversations about emotion and remediation” (p. 11), and explains that vlogging is a remediation of “earlier genres of speech and emotional display” where “remediation endows those genres with new meanings and movements, and opens up new possibilities for social action” (iii).

Additionally, Lange (2015) asserts that rhetorical study of the rant has been largely ignored in scholarly pursuits. While identifying, examining, and critiquing particular rhetorical acts that may be organized into typologies, or even precise genres (for instance, “eulogy,” or for my purpose here, “the rant”) has been a concern in the field of rhetoric since its inception (Burke, 1971; Corbett & Connors, 1999; Engels, 2009; Foss, 1989; Miller, 1984), I add to the fields of rhetoric and media studies by examining how an ancient, Western oral tradition (the face to face rant) functions when remediated through an audio-visual recording, not only as an act within an act (as a person who vlogs

is both ranting (an act) and consciously recording their rant (another act)), but as an act within the rhetorical situations of A) a specific type of video format (confessional-style) on B) a specific platform (YouTube). In doing so, this study serves to support research in the fields of rhetoric and media studies that refutes the deterministic theory of rants.

Media determinists suggest that ranting (or invective, which Vrooman [2002] loosely defines as “verbal aggressiveness” [p. 52]) is a phenomenon that arose out of computer-mediated communication, but scholars that study iterations of the rant online are actively contesting the view that rants are a product of media determinism - a rebuttal I hope to fortify with this piece (Vrooman, 2002; Lange, 2015; Werner, 2012). Indeed, Vrooman (2002) specifically indicates invective’s function as a method of subject positioning and identity construction throughout the history of rhetorical study. He posits invective as a genre, and admits that genre theory differs depending on the discipline from which the theory is developed:

Both Campbell and Jamieson (1978: 19) in the communication studies rhetorical tradition, and Freedman and Medaway (1994: 2) in the rhetoric and composition tradition, describe genres as strategic, rhetorical responses to similar kinds of situations. Carolyn Miller goes further and argues that genres are used to mediate between the public and the private, our individual needs and social action (1984: 163) (pp. 53-54).

One of the places that invective functions as a genre mediating between the “public and the private,” and our “individual needs and social action” is via the online rant: “The internet, as a rhetorical situation, requires identity creation and performance and the creation and negotiation of a new social order. A common genre through which this is

done is invective” (Vrooman, 2002, p. 54). So “invective” is a powerful approach that allows the rhetor to create an identity (or position his/herself as a subject), as well as negotiate a new social order.

Interestingly, Vrooman (2002) does not provide a thorough description of the rant as genre; rather, he assumes that his audience has a working understanding of what a rant is, and uses it as a way to describe one of two different types of invective present in the object of his examination (The online newsgroup Alt.flame). According to Vrooman (2002), a rant is the manifestation of one type of invective; he differentiates ranting from other types of invective by stating that ranting is invective that takes the form of “messages of considerable length,” and separates rants into two different types: A) a long parody or satire, and “the adjective rant”(p. 59). Campbell and Jamieson (1978) point out that one of the recurring shortcomings attributed to previous genre theorists is that theorists assume that “a recognized genre already exists” (p. 15). To remedy this problem, my first endeavor is to describe in detail the quintessential nature of ranting as a recurrent, socially recognizable form. Using Burke (1959; 1961; 1969), I argue that humorous ranting in itself constructs a cathartic experience for the audience, but that the act of ranting as a recurrent, socially recognizable form does not make ranting a genre.

Carolyn Miller (1984) explains that rhetorical genres are a product of familiar social situations wherein a similar response is elicited; in other words, she claims that genres emerge due to the shared recognition, and subsequent common response, of rhetors to a given situation. This theory of genre as situational helps me to distinguish between the rant as a recurrent oral form in general, the rant as a recurrent *humorous* oral form, and the rhetorical genre of *comedic* ranting *online* via video blog. Utilizing Miller’s

theory to inform rant genre delineation means addressing the assertion that the context in which a rhetorical act occurs is integral to understanding the significance of the act itself. The context (or rhetorical situation) of the act is more significant for genre development than the form and substance of a given act, according to Miller (1984), because it indicates the social motive behind the act. However, her approach still necessitates a description of the form and substance of the rant that is specific to the situation in which it manifests.

As such, the study begins with a theory of the rant. Lange (2015) points out that a dearth of scholarly research exists pertaining to rants as a genre: a rhetorical act common enough to be recognizable by the general population, but elusive enough to necessitate further examination in the world of academia. In conceptualizing the rant as quintessentially cathartic, I reinforce the importance of rhetorical criticism, and emphasize the importance of rant analysis to the fields of cultural studies, philosophy, and psychology. By choosing to analyze rants in comedic form, I provide insight into the field of humor and communication and rhetorical philosophy; the former by employing current research on verbal aggressive humor, superiority theory and incongruity theory – the latter by describing the comic catharsis constructed by rant performance – a section that Williams (2001) points out is “still missing” from Burke’s *Motivorum Trilogy* (p. 22).

Studying the rant in the context of a particular rhetorical situation such as YouTube adds value to my study for more than one reason. Insofar as any good theory of rhetorical genre has to be responsible to the media environment in which it takes place (Brockriede, 1971), it is pertinent to study the rant within the context of the YouTube

vlog. Williams, Tyree, and Lewis (2015) explain that, “Perhaps the most popular form of blogging used on YouTube is video blogs (also known as vlogs)” (p. 102). Since the rhetorical act of ranting has become increasingly popular online (Vrooman, 2002; Lange, 2015), and particularly via video blogs uploaded on the YouTube platform, this examination adds a necessary layer to scholarly pursuits in cultural studies and new media studies, as it addresses the ongoing considerations regarding user generated content, identity construction and performance on social media, and the exploration of how participatory cultures function online (Ledbetter, 2014; Simonsen, 2012; Werner, 2012). Johnson (2014) explains that, “Social media is not a closed system dominated by gatekeepers or large corporations... Web 2.0 highlights the participatory culture of social media. Users have control over what they post, what goes viral, what gets shared and when” (p. 166). In a similar fashion, Simonsen (2012) claims that,

YouTube as a media platform is a catalyst of this visibility, by providing ordinary people with access as well as control of their own self-images. The most explicit type is the audiovisual one-to-one presentation of the self that is sometimes referred to as a Video Blog or, as I will refer to it, a *Vlog* (p. 2)

While I am not so quick to concede to the idea that users are in complete “control” of their online displays of identity, and while it is definitely not the case that vloggers have control over what goes viral, I do agree with Simonsen (2012) that the video blog is the most explicit display of online identity performance. Regardless, studying comedic ranting via vlog means studying identity performance: which has implications for identity formation both on and off line.

As a result, the discussion section of this exposition concludes by imploring that

future research takes a closer look at the object in order to examine how performance of aspects of identity via CRV might also grant the ranter social influence. The performance of comedic ranting via vlog can be examined from the standpoint of feminist criticism, as an identity performance that the ranter engages in that claims “I am x gender (or gender non-conforming)” in its proclamation that “I am not x;” it may even function as a point of resistance (Foucault, 1978) that relies on a proliferation of discourses to challenge existing power dynamics.

In developing a methodology that combines rhetorical genre study with media studies and textual analysis, I offer a comprehensive approach to analyzing instantiations of the rant intertextually – one that is more appropriate to the present media ecology – and one that reinforces how the situation from which a generic act emerges determines the significance of the social action that act accomplishes. That being said, future researchers might substitute other remediated genres in place of the rant, in order to explore how the social action that those genres accomplish (a filmed eulogy, for instance) takes on new meaning depending on the environmental factors that gave way to the act’s iteration. Furthermore, since emotional expression is foregrounded in rant performance, prospective inquiries in performance studies could utilize the rant criteria developed to study iterations of ranting, or perhaps even iterations of expressed emotions of or related to anger, in a variety of contexts, ranging from political campaigns to reality television.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE RANT, CATHARSIS, HUMOR AND COMEDY

The task at hand is to situate ranting via vlog as a genre, so I must first describe the typology of the rant in itself, since the act of ranting in itself precedes the act of comedic ranting online via vlog (Cohen, 2005; Lange, 2015; Lindblom & Dunn, 2006; Vrooman, 2002). In order to do this, I will start with definitions of the rant; these definitions will lead to a discussion of Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism and his concept of catharsis as they relate to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Integrating Burke allows for identification of the quintessential unifying principle of ranting in itself – the mode of action (Burke's terminology) that ranting accomplishes. From here, I will use Miller's (1984) theory, informed by Meyer (2000) and Vrooman (2002), to show how ranting via vlog is significantly different from ranting in other situations and to suggest that comedic vlog ranting can accomplish decidedly different social actions (Miller's terminology) – particularly, that it may grant the ranter a form of power. In other words, the ranter's ability to provide a cathartic experience for the audience is contingent upon the intricacies of comedic vlog ranting's construction, and performing the rant in this way sanctions a unique and potentially influential subject position for the vlogger.

Merriam-Webster Online simply defines the 'rant' in the following way: "to talk loudly and in a way that shows anger: to complain in a way that is unreasonable" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.). Lange (2015) defines rants as "emotional messages, often exhibiting anger or frustration, that identify a problem or criticize things"

and goes on to claim that “Ranting is an emotional genre, one which is arguably persuasive and empathy-arousing because it combines rather than separates passion and logic” (p. 2). While both of these definitions claim that ranting expresses anger or a similar emotion, the main difference between the first two definitions of the rant is that the former claims that ranting is irrational, where the latter asserts that ranting is actually logical. Vrooman (2002) argues that “rants share a number of characteristics, not the least of which is a goal akin to ‘turning hostility and disillusionment into high art’ (Epsy, 1983:13) and making “malice exalted... almost to the point of genius (McPhee, 1978: 10)” (p. 55), and gives us an idea of the form and substance in his assertions that “...‘rants’ refers to messages of considerable length” (p. 59), and are “monologues of insult” (p. 55). Waisenau (2011), in his discussion of the comedian Dennis Miller and his propensity to rant, points out that: “Rants have been described as “speak[ing] or shout[ing] at length in an angry, impassioned way” (p. 26). Both of these definitions claim that a rant must be lengthy, and Vrooman’s definition goes a step further in claiming that rants are forms of intelligible art. Lindblom and Dunn (2006) of the grammar and composition tradition describe rants as “heated complaints” (p. 71), whereas Cohen (2005), in the literature studies tradition, describes them as “the voice of our longings, our agitations” (p. 252). Commonalities amongst the various definitions point to ranting as an expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger (i.e. frustration, aggravation, irritation), and while this emotional demonstration is not necessarily irrational, it is surely “lengthy” to the point of excess. So what qualifies as excessive length, and why the disparity regarding rationality?

Exactly how long a rhetorical act of invective has to be in order to be considered a rant cannot be immediately determined based on these definitions. What criteria do one use to determine whether or not a particular oral performance is ‘too long’? This is a noteworthy problem in developing a typology of the rant, both in itself and in its various manifestations. However, if the action that a genre accomplishes is its primary developing factor, i.e., that the form and substance of the act are secondary to the action achieved as a result of the act, and furthermore, that the form and substance of a performance surely changes depending on the rhetorical situation, then explicitly defining the length of a vituperative speech act is an unimportant starting point in situating ranting as genre (Miller, 1984). Nevertheless, what can be said is that devoting excessive time to a subject distinguishes ranting from invective, insofar as invective can describe a single word or sentence said in anger (or frustration, etc.) against some person or thing, whereas there is undoubtedly more substance to a rant than manifestation in a single word or sentence allows. Moreover, the length of the rhetorical act itself is not the only time dependent factor involved in the production of the rant.

Werner (2012) argues that the elapsed time between experiencing an emotional impetus to rant and engaging in an act of ranting is very short:

Like all genres, the rant is associated with a specific composing speed or, to use a term from my taxonomy, a tempo. The rant’s composing tempo specifies a particular interval between the composing act and the emotion that inspired it – or, more precisely, the generative absence of such an interval (p 172).

So the interval between incitation to emotions of or related to anger and verbal articulation of such emotions is minimal. However, he further contends that this emotion

must go “unexpressed” for some period of time, “so that it intensifies,” and that rants are characterized by a “feverish pacing” (pp. 172-173). This means that an interval of time between experiencing an emotional impulse to rant and actually ranting does in fact exist, despite its marginality, and that the verbal articulation of the rant must be characterized by a quick, uninterrupted rate of speech.

In lieu of the aforementioned definitions of the rant, it would appear that timing (the length of the rant, the pace of the rant, and the perceived amount of time between experiencing an emotional impetus to rant and verbally expressing those emotions) could account for the “irrationality” cited in its various descriptions. Reformulating the definition to include Werner’s observations, ranting in itself is: an *impulsive* and *incessant* oral expression of emotions of or related to anger - an emotive oral tradition wherein the orator devotes a relentless amount of time to denigrating the subject due to their heightened feelings regarding the matter, but spends perhaps less time than is necessary accurately articulating their rage in a calm, methodical manner. I will argue that ranting in itself certainly fits this description, but that comedic ranting via vlog does not necessarily, for a variety of reasons. Before I go any further, however, I should clarify what I mean by “ranting in itself.”

Ranting in itself, or “live” ranting

Ranting in itself may be understood as “live” ranting, other-wise known as face-to-face ranting, or ranting as mediated only through the body and to other bodies in response to an impetus that caused the ranter to experience heightened emotions of or related to anger in any particular space. The main difference between comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV) and ranting in itself (R.)/ humorous ranting in itself (HR.), lies in the

situation from which the rant emerges. “Live” ranting as an impulsive oral expression of emotions is a reaction to a stimulus that occurs within a ‘relatively short period of time’: a stimulus which I refer to as subject x. While it is true that many situations may incite an orator to rant, rants arise out of a frustration with, or anger toward, the actions of a person or persons within a particular situation. Take driving for example: many people rant about driving (traffic, being cut off, absence of turn signals, stopping abruptly, etc.), yet driving cannot occur without the presence of a driver, and while the driver doesn’t have to be anyone specific, they must be *someone*; as such, rants are directed toward a particular person or class of people. So subject x incites the ranter to anger (or similarly frustrates, irritates, aggravates the ranter), causing the ranter to *impulsively* express those emotions verbally/ orally, and *incessantly*, to whomever shares a physical space with the ranter within that relatively short period of time. Furthermore, in the pages that follow I argue that through the act of ranting, the ranter engages in a fundamentally cathartic experience – the “live” ranter purges emotions of or related to anger by articulating their feelings aloud, and this mode of action is cathartic.

On the other hand, a comedic rant vlog (CRV) is a much more formulaic articulation of emotions directed toward subject x, bounded within stylistic approaches to humor, audio-visual recordings, and the affordances of YouTube. As such, the time elapsed between experiencing an emotional impulse to rant and uploading a comedic rant vlog on YouTube is prolonged, and the length and rate of the act cannot necessarily be characterized as impulsive or incessant (though I argue it must still appear to be both). Comedic ranting via vlog is mediated on multiple levels, complicating the notion that ranting, as a recurring type, is essentially a brash method of ‘getting something out of

your system'. It is my contention, however, that "live" ranting (R.) and humorous live ranting (HR.) as quintessentially cathartic rhetorical acts, must be understood prior to proceeding with a detailed description of comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV), particularly because comedic ranting via vlog imitates the form of humorous ranting in itself, and so it must *appear* that the comedic vlog ranter is motivated by releasing heightened emotions of or related to anger impulsively and incessantly, despite what their actual motivations might be for uploading the comedic rant vlog (CRV) to YouTube.

Catharsis

Catharsis is defined as:

1. the act or process of releasing a strong emotion (such as pity or fear) especially by expressing it in an art form.
- 2 *a* : purification or purgation of the emotions (as pity and fear) primarily through art. *b* : a purification or purgation that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension
- 3 : elimination of a complex by bringing it to consciousness and affording it expression. (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.)

For the purposes of this study, the catharsis achieved by ranting in itself can be understood as the process of releasing emotions of or related to anger (aggravation, frustration, irritation, etc.), purification or purgation of said emotions that brings about a release from tension, and the elimination of said emotions by affording them expression. Admittedly, I left out the aspects of the third leg of the definition that describe eradicated emotions as manifest in a 'complex' that must be brought to 'consciousness' - and this omission is absolutely deliberate. The third classification is rooted in psychoanalysis, and

since this study champions rhetorical analysis by integrating rhetorical philosophy, careful word choice is imperative, so as to avoid interdisciplinary confusion – especially since Burke’s theories surrounding catharsis employ a physicalist analogy. Indeed, it is clear that the Demonic Trinity (referenced below) is an explicit reference to Freudian psychoanalysis, but the excremental metaphor that I liken to ranting is just that – a metaphor. It is more important to position this discussion of the bodily purge as it relates to ranting within Burke’s theory of dramatism.

Dramatism relies on describing a rhetorical act by manner of a pentad, where the five points of the pentad reference dramatic liturgy; this philosophy must be elucidated in order to understand the motivation behind the act. Burke (1971) explains that,

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may insist upon totally different words in order to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (p. 76)

He goes on to declare this complete statement about motives as a methodology, explaining that, “The titular word for our own method is ‘dramatism,’ since it invites one

to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action” (p. 82). Marie Hochmuth Nichols (1971) elaborates further on Burke’s affinity for these particular terms, explaining that despite their reference to dramatic literature, “[Burke] nevertheless intends that his observations be considered pertinent to the social sphere in general” (p. 108). So what does this mean for a treatment of catharsis as the principal motivation behind R.? First, it should be noted that Burke’s (1959) article “On Catharsis, or Resolution” opens with an explicit tribute: “I assume that such a project should be developed with Aristotle’s *Poetics* in mind” (p. 337). While much of Burke’s terminology is born out of his analysis of dramatic literature, Williams (2001) explains that “The ‘Dramatistic’ step,’ he suggested in *Dramatism and Development* (1972) is ‘from specific literary analysis to the consideration of human motivation in general’” (p. 5).

Burke (1959) orients his discussion of catharsis around the body, proclaiming that dramatic poetry as cathartic can be described in terms of its likeness to bodily purging. In others words, just as the body must purge physically in order to be cleansed, so too must it purge emotionally; this emotional purge is the action that the performance of dramatic theater serves to accomplish, and this action can be described using bodily metaphors. He likens the experience of tragic theater to physical experience, describing pity as “a movement toward,” and fear as “a movement away from” (p. 342), where pity and fear comprise “an essential conflict” (p. 341) of tragedy in terms of their simultaneous existence, forcing the audience to reconcile “contradictory impulses” (p. 341). Put differently and continuing with the physical analogy, the audience is pulled in opposing

directions in their experience of tragedy, and this divergence occurs as they experience pity and fear concurrently. He argues that there is a third impulse that factors into the conflicting relationship of pity and fear innate in tragedy, and that this complication is pride, otherwise known as *Hamartia* or “the fatal flaw,”

Since misfortune moves us most to pity when it is undeserved and since we are most moved to fear when the sufferer is in some notable way like ourselves, the tragic hamartia is a remarkably efficient way of engaging an audience. By giving an otherwise admirable person a mere flaw in character, the playwright avoids the extremes of making him either too bad (for our pity) or too good (for our ability to identify ourselves with him); but at the same time he endows the character with a motive whereby the disaster would to some degree be the logical result of the character’s own decisions. (pp. 348-349)

It is this third attribute that allows the audience to accept what happens within the tragedy and experience catharsis; in other words, the audience accepts the tragedy that befalls the central character, because the protagonist is inherently flawed; the audience can feel relieved because they were able to identify pride as the source of the protagonist’s eventual demise, and they find comfort in the knowledge that possessing too much pride is a mistake, one that they themselves would not make. The idea that a person’s behavior is a direct result of their internal personality, rather than a response to external environmental factors, is known in the field of psychology as Fundamental Attribution Error (Amabile, Ross, & Steinmetz, 1977); also known as correspondence bias, this theory is often adopted in interpersonal communication to explain human interactive behavior.

Since the aforementioned descriptions of the rant in itself characterize it as an impulsive and incessant oral expression of emotions of or related to anger, and since the pages that follow employ Burke's use of bodily metaphors to describe the experience of catharsis achieved by R., it is pertinent here to clarify how the purge that results from an experience of dramatic theater (i.e., catharsis experienced on behalf of the audience) can likewise be attributed to manifestations of the rant within bodies throughout history (i.e., catharsis experienced on behalf of the ranter through the act of ranting in itself). Burke (1959) remarks that:

Perhaps purgation of this sort is best grounded in Croce's calculus, which equates catharsis with 'expression.' And unquestionably the symbol-using animal experiences a certain kind of 'relief' in the mere act of converting any inarticulate muddle into the orderly terms of a symbol system. (p. 364)

If the ranter is the symbol-using animal (since all human beings are, at least according to Burke), then ranting is one way to achieve catharsis, as it articulates (hastily, poorly, irrationally even, but nonetheless) negative feelings, and therefore culminates in relief by default. Yet this seems too easy, since any verbal expression of an "inarticulate muddle," would necessarily be cathartic by this measure. A return to Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), describes the situation of the rant a bit better, by way of his notion of pure persuasion:

Pure persuasion involves the saying of something, not for an extra-verbal advantage to be got by the saying, but because of a satisfaction intrinsic to the saying. It summons because it likes the feel of a summons. It would be non-

plussed if the summons were answered. It attacks because it revels in the sheer syllables of vituperation (p. 269)

If Burke's dramatism can describe R., one would have to provide a description of the act (rant), the agent (ranter), the scene (subject x does something that angers, frustrates, irritates, etc. the ranter which incites ranter to rant), the agency (impulsive and incessant expression of emotions of or related to anger via verbal/oral articulation), and the purpose (to purge emotions of or related to anger). This is obviously achievable. However, in subsequent explanations of CRvV, I will explain how the dramatist pentad doesn't accurately account for iterations of the rant on the YouTube platform, since the motivation behind ranting is much more elusive in iterations of CRVs (Werner, 2012) due to their performative nature. In other words, although CRVs appear to be motivated by catharsis, they are not necessarily. Before I get there, I will further describe the motivation behind R., not only as cathartic, but as a purge that can be metaphorically analogous to bodily refuse.

In terms of bodily purging and in homage to the Demonic Trinity, Burke (1959) specifically, likens "pity, fear, and pride" to the experiences of bodily functions specific to orgasm, diureses, and excrement, respectively (p. 356). It is this third analogy, the idea that pride can be likened somehow to excrement, that informs my development of ranting in itself as a typology. According to Burke (1959), "pride in its simplicity would be excremental" as pride involves problems of power, and "incites to anger and vengeance (also excremental)" (p. 356); he elaborates on this further by explicating that, "Aristotle also remarks that anger drives out fear" (p. 360). If "live" ranting is an expression of "bottled up" anger at a particular person, object, or situation, then it stands to reason that

the ranter does not fear the object of his anger – does not move away – or, if she feels fear, feeling of fear is overwhelmed by feelings of anger. In fact, the ranter’s experience of the object of his/her rage is quite the opposite; rather than retreating, the ranter is confident in her assurance, and moves toward the object of anger, rather than away from it. If pride incites to anger and vengeance, and rants are characterized by anger, then it stands to reason that one who rants must be categorized as proud.

With these ideas in mind it is possible that the rant as an *impulsive, incessant* oral tradition (characterized by anger) could be described as an excessive sort of verbal excrement: one that is aggressive, lengthy, and difficult to contain or interrupt. One might even express ranting as “verbal diarrhea,” insofar as rants can seem wild, uncontrollable, violent and explosive – a build up of emotion that effectively spews out of the orator’s mouth (I trust the metaphor is clear enough that we may avoid a description of its counterpart). So essentially, the ranter assumes the position of proud pooper, (Prince/ Princess of the purge?) and we’re left with a question: how can facing up to frantic unfettered feces provide a cathartic experience for the audience?

To be fair, the metaphor that pride/ anger is excremental aligns with the definition of the “live” ranting (R.), but does not account for Lange’s assertion that ranting combines passion and logic, and fails to reconcile Vrooman’s claim that ranting is a “high art” marked by some stroke of “genius.” This disparity in describing the rant can be attributed to the rhetorical situation (see chapter IV for explanation) from which the rant emerges; where a common definition might describe the rant in itself, both Vrooman (2002) and Lange (2015) develop explanations of the rant that are specific to its instantiations online. This contextual difference is significant in developing rant genre,

because where the rant is situated changes the composition of the rant. And if expression of anger via the rant is akin to purging bodily excrement (since the ranter exhibits both pride and anger and expression of pride/anger = feces), how might the catharsis inherent in the act of ranting become a construction that shifts the purgation of emotions from the ranter to the audience in comedic rant performance, and how is this catharsis constructed in comedic rant vlogs (CRVs)? To continue with the bodily metaphor, what situations have to be present in order for ‘explosive excrement’ to culminate in comic catharsis?

Humor and Comedy

The answer here lies in the continuity between tragedy and comedy. In a follow-up article entitled, “Catharsis – Second View,” Burke (1961) goes on to say that, “So far as the body participates directly in the production of catharsis by the organizing of symbol systems, its two principle expressions are laughter and tears” (p. 107). So crying and laughing are identified as the two *most* cathartic human actions, and we can understand these actions as being positioned on opposite ends of the expressed emotional spectrum. He is also sure to point out that human beings are the only species that laugh (a point which has been challenged and arguably disproven over the 50+ years since the article’s publication), and that often times, hysterical laughter results in tears – an observation which intimates an innate connection between cathartic experience of the tragic and the comic alike.

Golden (1984) was particularly interested in Aristotle’s discussion of catharsis as it related to comedy, and claimed that, “Since comedy has been placed in polar opposition to tragedy in terms of the object it imitates [...] we should expect that it must be placed in polar opposition to tragedy also in terms of the emotion that it evokes” (p.

287). He extrapolates on this further by offering an explanation for the emotion that would stand in for the polar opposite of pity, citing Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to postulate *indignation* as pity's emotional opposite:

Events which evoke our 'indignation' (*nemesan*) in a comic context must meet two specific criteria: (1) they must manifest some dimension of unjustified good fortune or of inappropriate and incongruous behavior; and (2) such incidents (which can be described as examples of error or ugliness) must be presented in such a way that they do not generate any painful feelings on the part of the audience but are clearly recognized as forms of the ridiculous (p 288).

So, pity is to tragedy as indignation is to comedy, and indignation is most definitely an emotion of or related to anger; indeed, sometimes the terms anger and indignation are used interchangeably. Burke (1959) also quips that the Demonic Trinity can be treated as a parody of the Holy Trinity (Power, Love, and Wisdom), where Pride (feces) is the parody of Power. He explains pride as "the dropping of dung on an inferior, or an inferior's fighting back with dung" (p. 356), and let's face it: there's nothing more ridiculous (arguably ridiculously hilarious) than witnessing someone or something being defecated on, as long as, as Golden (1984) explained: 1) the subject deserves it and 2) the witness does not experience injurious emotions as a result.

I have now positioned the ranter as a ridiculous (yet respected) waste wielder - a person motivated by the expression of anger or indignation or some such other similar emotion - who, regardless of their position as either inferior or superior to the subject that he/she derides, isn't afraid to fling feces at the subject of his/her scorn. And, if R. can be understood as an oral shit-storm targeted at subject x, then the humorous rant in itself

(HR.) can likewise be described as an act whereby the process of relentlessly shitting on x, assuming shitting on x is justifiable in some way *and* ridiculous enough to not cause the audience pain, is humorous; the ranter's incessant derision of x is acceptable due to a mutual recognition that x warrants ridicule, and when this mutual recognition culminates in laughter, we have comic catharsis achieved at the expense of the shat upon. Burke states that (1959):

But, just as pity may lead to moral indignation, (which I would think but a "fragment" of tragic catharsis), so laughter may be not only friendly but derisive. And I would not consider derision as wholly cathartic, except insofar as we need our partisan alignments, too, and are socially united by the particular butt of humor at whose expense we jointly laugh. (p. 362)

The idea that derisive laughter is cathartic due to its unifying nature is not isolated to Burke. In a similar fashion, Meyer (2000) claims that "Laughing at faulty behavior can also reinforce unity among group members, as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed can coexist with a feeling of belonging (Duncan, 1982);" but he also explains an applicable theory of humor origin known as superiority theory: "From a superiority theory perspective, humor results, not just from something irrational or unexpected, but from seeing oneself as superior, right, or triumphant in contrast to one who is inferior, wrong, or defeated" (pp. 314-315). Based on this description, it would seem that the act of justifiably denigrating x in a ridiculous manner positions the ranter as superior to whichever subject x they choose to deride. In other words, in hurling dung at x, the ranter transforms the function of Pride. Allow me to demonstrate how.

I have yet to explicitly state how Pride functions in comic performance, juxtaposed to its characterization as the fatal flaw in tragic performance. Since I have reasoned that a ranter must exhibit pride, it is necessary to treat pride as a significant emotion in the development of rant genre, alongside emotions of or related to anger. And, since Pride is a terminal defect in tragic performance, it must be something else entirely in comedic performance – perhaps an immortal strength? The symmetry does not quite add up. If Pride allows the audience to accept whatever befalls the protagonist in tragedy, since the audience can attribute the protagonist’s shortcomings to a terminal character flaw (Hamartia), one that they themselves do not possess, and (HR.) elevates the ranter above whichever subject they choose to deride, then the humorous ranter’s pride must be a redeeming factor. In other words, if the audience identifies with the ranter’s denigration of x (since the derision of x is justifiable, and since the method of derision is ridiculous), since the ranter exhibits pride in that vituperation, then the audience must identify that pride as an emotion they share with the ranter, in order to feel superior to subject x. But the ranter can exhibit pride in a non-humorous rant performance as well, since not all rants are humorous. So how does pride function in R., regardless of whether or not the performance is comedic, tragic, or something else entirely?

Pride is a complicated human emotion, and one that carries both negative and positive connotations. The first thing that comes to mind when I think of pride, for instance, is its Christian affiliation. Okay, fine – *truthfully*, the first thing that comes to mind is Morgan Freeman’s voice in the film *Se7en*. I can hear that calming intonation as he, assuming the role of detective Somerset, recounts the seven deadly sins in the squad room: “Gluttony. Greed. Sloth, Wrath, Pride, Lust, and Envy.” Of course, deeming pride

as sinful advances the idea that pride is a negative attribute, a connotation that falls in line with Aristotle's *Hamartia* in tragic performance. But it is a more constructive configuration of pride, one that situates pride as a necessary precursor to the derisive, incessant verbal articulations of the rant, that is pertinent. The type of pride that 'incites to anger and vengeance,' in rant performance is the type of pride that claims, "I vehemently disapprove." If the ranter expresses heightened anger, frustration, indignation, etc. toward subject x, i.e. if the ranter scorns x, then the ranter renounces x, and the act of rejecting x necessarily defines the ranter as separate from x. Put differently, the ranter's differentiation from x is a method of subject positioning; insofar as the ranter denies x, they describe their own condition as not-x in effect, so the proclamation "I vehemently disapprove of x" becomes a declaration of "I am not x." For example, "I vehemently disapprove of erratic drivers" becomes "I am not an erratic driver." In this way, ranters exhibit pride in their ability to drive "better than" other more unpredictable drivers, and differentiates themselves from these types of drivers.

In his review of rants, Vrooman (2002) argues that "This style of invective seems to have corresponded to a specific kind of identity-forming situation: the need to maintain continual distance from society and the need to defend that isolated position by denigrating the society" (p. 56). This claim gives me pause, as it assumes that the ranter's anger is directed toward society as a whole, positing x = society in every possible instance. It is interesting (and perhaps intuitive) to assume that the ranter experiences emotions of or related to anger as a result of being a member of society. While I am sure it is the case that certain practitioners of 'monologues of insult' may have intended to isolate themselves from society, this distinction does not apply to all rhetors wherein

ranting is manifest, since not all ranters direct their attention toward subjects that demean society at large. Besides, denigrating factions of people within a society does not preclude the ranter's membership in the larger social order; surely, if subject x is socially incongruous to begin with, then the ranter is actually reasserting his/her citizenship by shitting in a socially acceptable place. So while I agree with Vrooman (2002) that ranting dissociates the ranter from the subject of said rant, I do not agree that the substance of every rant disparages society as a whole.

What is more interesting about Vrooman's (2002) assertion that ranting guarantees the ranter's "separateness from the society which they critique," is that he immediately follows this claim by citing an "extreme kind of sexual humor," historically characteristic of ranting, one whose "focus on things sexual, especially things that might be considered taboo breaking or obscene [...] might also be explained as a way of signifying a certain type of political self-expression" afforded to people in some type of "powerless" situation (pp. 55-57). He points out that sexual humor sees significant crossover with scatological humor throughout history, and since I have a vested interest in gender and sexuality studies (my propensity for toilet humor now firmly established) but have yet to offer additional criteria for the substance of the rant (a category that must be accounted for in order to operationalize Miller's theory of genre as social action), I will narrow my focus in this exposition to consider CRVs containing subject matter that is explicitly sexual.

Live ranting (R.)

The substance of the rant determined, it is now time to revisit the formulation of the rant pre-catharsis, in order to incorporate both catharsis and humor into the re-

articulation. Here we go now: ranting in itself (R.) is an *impulsive, incessant* oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger - an emotive oral tradition wherein the orator devotes a relentless amount of time to denigrating subject x due to his/her heightened feelings regarding x, but spends perhaps less time than is necessary accurately articulating their rage in a calm, methodical manner, *due to the ranter's fervent need to purge the emotions evoked by x AND distance themselves from x in so doing. In this way, ranting toward subject x declares: "I vehemently disapprove of x," (which effectively declares: "I am not x")*. This is the definition of ranting in itself. Metaphorically speaking then, ranting in itself might be described as an inflammatory bodily reaction to a physical irritation - an explosive corporeal regimen that excessively defiles due to uncontrollable expulsion of explosive excrement experienced abruptly; *violently overwhelmed by biological necessity the body is cleansed, purified of the perfunctory prickliness which previously plagued them*

Humorous live ranting (HR.)

The definition of humorous ranting in itself HR. would include the aforementioned descriptions:

Ranting in itself is an *impulsive, incessant* oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger - an emotive oral tradition wherein the orator devotes a relentless amount of time to deriding subject x due to his/her heightened feelings regarding x, but spends perhaps less time than is necessary accurately articulating their rage in a calm, methodical manner, *due to the ranter's fervent need to purge the emotions evoked by x AND distance themselves from x in so doing. In this way, ranting toward subject x declares: "I*

vehemently disapprove of x,” (which effectively declares: “I am not x”), and would add to this description the notion that:

If the ranter is both justifiable and ridiculous in declaring: “I vehemently disapprove of x,” (which effectively declares: “I am not x”), then the ranter uses humor to construct a cathartic experience for the audience. Insofar as the audience identifies with the ranter, the catharsis constructed culminates in laughter, and catharsis has been achieved.

Metaphorically speaking, ranting in itself might be described as an inflammatory bodily reaction to a physical irritation - an explosive corporeal regimen that excessively defiles due to uncontrollable expulsion of explosive excrement experienced abruptly; *violently overwhelmed by biological necessity the body is cleansed, purified of the perfunctory prickliness which previously plagued them.*

And also:

If the body happens to defile something (subject x) that deserves directed defecation, but is not normally a refuse receptacle, and the manner in which it does so is out of the ordinary (one can assume it probably would be) then this purging process is humorous. Insofar as the audience identifies with the ranter (if the audience both understands the experience of dire diarrhea and believes subject x deserves to be defiled), the catharsis constructed culminates in laughter, and catharsis has been achieved.

I have purposefully decided to leave out discussions of intentionality in my descriptions of HR. This is because I believe there is a difference between humorous ranting in itself (HR.) as a mode of pure persuasion that culminates in catharsis, and comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV.) on YouTube. Recall that another limitation of studying

the rant through a rhetorical lens is the inability to prove whether or not an act of ranting actually made people laugh, since audience reception is beyond the scope of the analysis. Meyer (2000) suggests that, “[The] receiver-centered nature of humor, focusing on the intended effect of a message on hearers, suggests that a rhetorical perspective on humor will lead to insights into how humor influences audiences” (p. 311). Since this project hopes to add value to humor communication research, the intentionality behind the justifiable yet incessant denigration of x achieved by CRV performance must also be considered. In performing the rant with the intention of making others laugh, the ranter performs catharsis, regardless of whether or not that catharsis is achieved by every person who experiences the rant. On the other hand, if a ranter rants as a form of pure persuasion in order to achieve catharsis for themselves, and witnesses happen to find it funny despite the fact that the ranter did not intend for it to be funny, then this act also performs catharsis, albeit with a different motivation, and its form and substance are still deserving of rhetorical scrutiny. But since my description of the comedic vlog rant genre relies on intentional humor in the form of superiority theory, my description of comedic rant vlogs (CRVs) must include their construction as inherently comedic, not accidentally or fortuitously comedic.

I have demonstrated how ranting (verbal diarrhea, if you like) is motivated by catharsis (insofar as the act of ranting can be likened to purging bodily excrement) in lieu of Burke’s notion of pure persuasion I theorized that the derision characteristic of humorous ranting can be described in terms of defecating on subject x (metaphorically); I located pride as an emotion just as significant to comedy (Burke, Aristotle, and Golden’s verbiage) as it is to tragedy in the performance of catharsis, and elucidated that the comic

catharsis achieved by ranting unifies an audience; by situating them as members of a community superior to and separate from subject x, the ranter positions his/herself as not-x, and achievement of comic catharsis is contingent upon the audience's ability to identify with the ranter.

I imagine it isn't immediately clear why I have devoted so much time to describing R. both plainly and metaphorically, since the overall task is to develop a methodology equipped to examine CRVs. Rhetorical genre theory demands an in-depth understanding of the rhetorical situation from which a given act emerges, and since ranting is a recurrent oral performance evidenced since Grecian antiquity that has been "largely ignored in scholarly pursuits" (Lange, 2015), It is necessary to describe strictly oral/verbal iterations of the rant before I describe comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV). Moreover, since rant performance is a product of our exposure to rants pre-vlog, and since rants pre-vlog have emerged in a variety of different contexts, one has to understand, to whatever extent one can, the situations present that lead to this recurring rhetorical act, and the typology that has emerged as a result. And since it is impossible to understand the intricacies of so many different environments, cultures, and languages, it seems that the only approach to gaining an understanding of the rant pre-vlog is to situate the rant within the human body. After all, the rant always occurs in the rhetorical situation of the body first and foremost. The body is the first point of mediation. My hope is that establishing the rant in the rhetorical situation of the body and positing it as an impulsive and incessant expression of emotion that can be described using bodily metaphors might offer some over-arching insight into why rants have endured, despite their emergence from a multitude of diverse and dynamic social contexts. If ranting is

identifiable by the expression of apparent and underlying human emotions (apparent = anger/ underlying = pride) manifest in the familiar landscape of the body, then it stands to reason that the shared understanding of the rant as a recurring type (despite obvious differences in the description of the thing) must somehow be related to the species, to humanity's "generic nature" as "animal[s]" (Burke, 1959, p. 342).

So, I differentiate (R.) from (HR.) by positing the derision of subject x as justifiable *and* ridiculous in the latter. The task is now parsing HR from (CRvV) (which involves more than a simple discussion of intentionality). In the chapters that follow, I offer a description of comedic rant vlogs (CRVs) based on, but notably different from, the description of R. that I outline above. These differences are largely due to the performative nature of CRVs, as well as the unique situation from which the CRV emerges. Informed by Miller (1984), I argue that CRvV is not actually impulsive or incessant, so much as it *appears* to be, and that while the ranting vlogger still devotes an incessant amount of time to denigrating x, the process of recording and uploading a video to YouTube requires that they spend more time articulating their rage, which not only changes the form and the substance of the rant, but shifts the motive behind ranting, displacing the ranter's "fervent need" to purge emotions with other, much more complicated reasons to create CRV's. However, the comedic vlog ranter must still maintain the facade of expressing heightened emotions that justifiably and ridiculously assert: "I vehemently disapprove of x," and situating their rant within confessional-style recordings on the YouTube platform allows them to construct a cathartic experience for the audience that is more deliberate and rational than HR., opening up a range of possibilities for the social actions that comedic ranting via vlog may accomplish.

CHAPTER 4

RHETORIC AND GENRE

Aristotle

In order to continue to differentiate the R. and HR. from the CRV, I will begin with a broad examination of how Aristotle categorized rhetoric; this discussion will transition from Aristotle's rhetorical classifications into a more specific examination of rhetorical genre theory's contemporary history, and end with an in depth description of Carolyn Miller's seminal article *Genre as Social Action* (1984). Using Miller's archetype, I articulate a theory of the comedic vlog rant based on the preceding chapter's return to Aristotle via Burke; finally, I will outline a rant paradigm specific to video blogging, in order to adequately describe the rhetorical situation of comedic vlog rants that emerge via YouTube.

Ultimately, the configuration considered herein is the video blog – a product that came about thousands of years after Aristotle first attempted to explain the practicality of rhetoric, so far removed from the range of possibilities during his era that it might even seem odd, at least at first, to apply this classical theory to such a modern object. However, as Werner (2012) points out, vlogging is a remediation of “earlier genres of speech and emotional display [and] remediation endows those genres with new meanings and movements, and opens up new possibilities for social action” (p. iii). Nonetheless, considering Aristotle's taxonomy provides a useful starting point for an examination of rhetorical genre theory, for more than one reason. First off, identifying, examining, and

critiquing particular rhetorical acts that may be organized into typologies, or even precise genres (for instance, “eulogy,” or for my purpose here, “the rant”) has been a concern in the field of rhetoric since its inception (Burke, 1971; Corbett & Connors, 1999; Engels, 2009; Foss, 1989; Miller, 1984; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Since the rant itself is an impulsive and incessant oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger, examining how emotions are articulated is paramount. At the beginning of Book 2 *On Rheotric*, Aristotle provides a detailed description of anger that includes an experience of catharsis upon release of that anger:

1. Let anger be [defined as] desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for apparent retaliation because of an apparent slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one. 2. If this is what anger is, necessarily the angry person always becomes angry at some particular individual (for example, at Cleon but not at an [unidentified] human being) and because he has done or is going to do something to him or to those near him; and a kind of pleasure follows all experience of anger [...] 3. Belittling [*oligoria*] is an actualization of opinion about what seems worthless... and there are three species of belittling: contempt [*kataphronesis*], spite [*epereasmos*], and insult [*hybris*] (Kennedy, 2007, p. 116)

It is the third species of belittling – insult – that is most closely aligned with rant typology, as it is an act that expresses emotions of or related to anger directed at a particular other (subject x) due to something that subject x has done. Or, to use previously established bodily metaphors, it is inflammation of the bowel resulting in excrement that one chooses to sling toward subject x because maybe x gave them a

laxative, or offered them spoiled food, or scared the shit out of them, etc. Richlin (1992) claims that the earliest documented instances of ranting (instead of “rant” she uses the term “invective,” a distinction I reconcile elsewhere) in Roman writings surfaced by way of Roman humor. However, Lindblom and Dunn (2006) trace ranting “back as far as ancient Greece,” (p. 71), and Vrooman (2002) provides evidence for this claim when he explains that, “Rosen notes a ‘predilection for scatological and sexual obscenity’ in Grecian invective (1988:73),” reminding researchers that Roman humor emulates their pre-existing Greek counterpart (as cited in Vrooman, 2002, p. 55). The bottom line is this: Aristotle developed classifications of rhetoric while immersed in a time period in which comedic ranting was already occurring in a recognizable form, and while considering Burke’s treatment of his *Poetics* informs a description of the motivation behind the rant, the categorizations Aristotle outlines in *On Rhetoric* fail to position the rant as a member of one of his three over-arching genera.

It has been argued that Aristotle was one of the first to attempt to formulate a theory of rhetorical genre, due to his characterization of particular instances of rhetoric by species (Jamieson, 1973; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Kennedy (2007) explains that the distinction between species is:

based on whether or not the audience is or is not a judge, in the sense of being able to take specific action as a result of being persuaded to do so, and the *time* with which each species is concerned:

- a. If a judge of past actions, the species is judicial
- b. If a judge of future action, the species is deliberative

- c. If an observer of the speech, not called on to take action, the species is
epideictic

Built on this distinction, the struggle would be to determine where the comedic rant falls on this spectrum. Is it judicial, deliberative, or epideictic? Surely, it depends on certain features of the monologue. However, there are limitations in application with the aforementioned categorizations; namely, in terms of identifying patterns or motifs, Aristotle's speciation falls short. Allow me to demonstrate how.

The question is: how might one characterize the rant according to Aristotle's speciation? It appears that the first task at hand would be to determine where this impulsive, incessant oral aggressiveness occurred, and to what audience. The key here is that there must be an audience, and that this audience must be either a judge of past or future actions, *or* they must simply be an observer, unmoved by the words of the orator. Now suppose that an act of ranting in itself has occurred and been witnessed, and that the subject of said rant is bad tippers in restaurants. If a person is moved to rant to their coworkers about a tip they have already received, then their coworkers become judges of the past actions of the ranter's customer(s), and the rant is judicial. However, if a person rants to their coworkers about how all foreigners are bad tippers, and their coworkers have a non-English speaking table that is dining at the same time that the ranter vituperates, perhaps they are judging the future actions of the people at their table based on the ranter's assertions. Here, the ranter has made the audience (their coworkers), a judge of future actions (the future actions of their guests upon paying their bill), and therefore the rant would be deliberative. So, we can see how a rant to the same people about the same subject can be typified as two different species by Aristotle's

categorizations, depending on the rhetorical situation. Jamieson (1973) describes the Aristotelian taxonomy as one that “fractures” when “confronted by the data with which the contemporary critic must deal,” and specifically mentions the “verbal tantrum,” as one example of such ill-fitted contemporary data (p. 162). The verbal tantrum is essentially another way to describe the rant. Yet despite the shortcomings of his aforementioned classifications, his characterization of the quintessential nature of rhetoric itself seems to fall in line with Carolyn Miller’s theory, which she expounds in “Genre as Social Action.”

According to Kennedy (2007) “Modern scholars have tended to attribute to Aristotle the view that rhetoric is a productive art” (p. 16); the problem with this accreditation is that it is misguided. Kennedy explains how Aristotle defined rhetoric as “an ability of ‘seeing’ the available means of persuasion,” but also characterized rhetoric both as a tool at the rhetor’s disposal, and as one of three legs of intellectual activity: namely, a *practical* art, (which is different from a productive art) (p. 16). What is interesting about this brainpower tripartite is that each leg is characterized by its ability to achieve a particular objective. According to Kennedy (2007), a productive art (ie: poetics) is concerned with “making,” whereas a second leg, “intellectual sciences,” aims to acquire “knowledge for knowledge’s sake,” and is concerned with knowing (think hard sciences); finally the third involves “doing” something and is named “practical arts,” where some examples are “politics and ethics” (p.16). Aristotle’s distinctions among the three legs of intellectual activity appear to be mutually exclusive; if this is in fact the case, then modern scholars would (incorrectly) claim that rhetoric allows the rhetor to *make* something, as a productive art, but not to *do* something, as a practical art. This

seems odd considering the examples that Aristotle himself provides of practical arts – surely both politics and ethics are accomplished using rhetoric. This is the delicate nature of rhetoric itself, at least as Kennedy (2007) elucidates: to Aristotle, rhetoric is both an instrument and an art, an art that allows us (as rhetors) to do something, to practice, but *not*, as modern scholars suggest, to make something. This is evidenced in Book 2 of *On Rhetoric*, when, a bit later in the section on anger, Aristotle claims that “The cause of pleasure to those who give insult is that they think they themselves become more superior by ill-treating others” (Kennedy, 2007, p. 117). So rhetoric motivated by anger, and in the form of insult, causes the rhetor to feel pleasure in their belief that they have elevated themselves above subject x – a practical accomplishment. Metaphorically speaking, shitting on someone makes us feel and believe that we are superior. But does this necessarily prohibit the rhetor from making something, i.e.: can a practical art not also be a productive art? Can the impulsive and incessant expression of emotions of or related to anger, characterized by derisive language, be poetic? Is there an artful way to fling feces? I argue the answer is yes, and one of the ways that a practical art functions as a productive art is by way of the comedic vlog rant.

Kenneth Burke

According to Burke (1959), Aristotle’s *Poetics* provides insight into what dramatic liturgy and performance can do for an audience, but since “problems of “catharsis” are situated precisely at that point where analysis of language in terms of Poetics both sums up the field of Poetics proper and through sheer superabundance inclines to “spill over” into other areas of linguistic action” (p. 340), it stands to reason that discussions of catharsis cannot be limited to any one leg of intellectual activity. And

since Burke's theory of Dramatism relies on the notion that 'language and thought' are 'modes of action,' we can distinguish Burke from Aristotle by clarifying that Burke's view of rhetoric is much more all-encompassing than Aristotle's, insofar as it includes not only poetics, but all verbal and oral symbols, and could even account for some nonverbal symbols (Johannesen, 1971). That being said, both Johannesen (1971) and Nichols (1971) underscore Burke's proclivity for Aristotelian principles; in fact, Nichols (1971) explains that Burke's Dramatism was the result of "a clue from Aristotle's consideration of the 'circumstances' of an action" (p. 109).

This then begs the question: If Dramatism is to be understood ontologically (i.e.: dramatic liturgy and performance *is* the ranter's world, or whatever situation from which the rant emerges (the scene), and the theater's audience *is* the ranter (agent), and impulsively and incessantly expressing emotions of or related to anger with derisive language orally or verbally (act) is cathartic and elevating (purpose), then how do the instruments at the ranter's disposal (agency) change the act? The purpose? The scene? Can Dramatism account for generic groupings in ways that Aristotle does not, or was Burke, so "strongly allied with the classicists" (Nichols, 1971, p. 109) that his contemporary theory 'fractures' (in Jamieson's words) in its attempts to "account for the wide range of rhetorical acts" (Brockriede, 1971) in contemporary Western Civilization? Aristotle's aforementioned categories of intelligence delineate poetics as a productive art, rhetoric as a practical art, and imply that these types of intelligences are mutually exclusive, and the rant can be attributed to both. His speciation of particular kinds of rhetoric not only does not account for the rant, but relies on audience response to the act, whereas Burke's rhetorical paradigm, aimed at naming the motive behind an act, focuses

on the rhetorical act itself, rather than the audience. And while I use Burke to describe the motivation behind the recurrent act of ranting in itself and humorous ranting in itself (sans intentionality), I must turn to rhetorical genre theory more explicitly focused on the social order, in order to continue with a description of the rant. Since agency is a point of contention in the field of media students, particularly as it regards user-generated content, differentiating between Burke's agency and the situation of comedic ranting via vlog as a genre does not permit me to apply Dramatism, as Burke's paradigm is confounded, particularly at the points of scene, agency and purpose, when applied to comedic ranting via vlog.

The choice to describe the act of live ranting with the metaphor of excrement is an homage to Burke; he claims that *motive* is partially animalistic in nature, since it is affected by *emotion*, so observing isolated acts of human emotional expression doesn't provide a complete understanding of the nature of verbal/oral expression or of human interaction. Burke (1959; 1961) claims that catharsis purifies the self as a symbol-using animal, offering the researcher an opportunity to situate catharsis as the principal motivation behind ranting in itself. So, symbolic actions (ideas, thoughts, language) are analogues for bodily actions. Burke (2001) tries to create a more comprehensive and complete view of man as the symbol-using animal, because in his view Behaviorism is "a misshapen *fragment* of Dramatism in disguise" (p. 41). He selects dramatism because it is an act, it's what we *do*; my argument is that ranting in itself/ humorous ranting in itself is something we do to purge emotions of or related to anger for the sake of purifying, but that comedic ranting via vlog is something different entirely, in motivation as well as action. And situating ranting within an audio-visual recording on a particular platform in

a particular style means considering a complex rhetorical situation – one that reflects an act embedded within another act – as the act of ranting occurs within the act of recording and uploading a video. The dramatist’s relationship status on Facebook might read: “It’s complicated” with “YouTube videos.”

Genre Theory

According to Miller (1984) genres are “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (p. 159), and since an action is simply a thing done, it appears that Aristotle would likely agree with Miller that in categorizing rhetoric, it makes sense to delineate genres based on the actions they’re used to accomplish. In developing a working theory of rhetorical genre, Miller (1984) claims that, “if genre represents action, it must involve situation and motive, because human action, whether symbolic or otherwise, is interpretable only against a context of situation and through the attributing of motives” (p. 152). While I am not so quick to claim that all human action must be interpreted based on these criteria, I do agree with Miller’s assertion that genre is a *social* action. As such, it is necessary to position the context of the situation as paramount in understanding the genre of a given act, since it is the combination of situation and motive that must be examined in order to determine what social action a recurring form accomplishes. Such an exhaustive description of the motivation behind the rant must now give way to a discussion of position, in order to locate the comedic vlog rant within a particular rhetorical situation.

Campbell and Jamieson (1978) recount that it wasn’t until 1965 with Edwin Black’s publication of *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, that the neo-Aristotelian

model was challenged in the wake of a new framework for understanding rhetoric: a generic approach:

Black's work was noteworthy on several accounts. It argued for an organic critical method, one which emphasized form but was not formulary; it located clusters of discourses based on recurrent strategies, situations and effects; and it revealed the weaknesses of the neo-Aristotelian perspective as a basis for writing a developmental history of rhetoric. p. 10.

In short, although Black's theory neglected to offer a concrete taxonomy of genre, he did identify "modes of discourse characterized by certain strategies that seemed more likely to occur in certain kinds of situations," and his work was a breath of fresh air in the field of rhetorical theory at the time, one that served as the impetus for "the explosion of unconventional critical essays" that appeared in its wake (Campbell and Jamieson, 1978, p. 10). So Burke emphasized the significance of the interplay between the 'scene' where an 'agent' 'acts' with 'agency' in its ability to expose the motivations ('purpose') behind the act, and Black stressed the importance of understanding 'certain kinds of situations' from which the act emerges in order to locate it in history. Rather than equating Burke's 'scene' with Black's 'situation,' it is important to differentiate between the two in developing a genre of the CRvV; separating the notion of scene from situation is important in genre development, and particularly in the confines of this exposition, due to complicated function of *time* in examining CRvVs. Time will be discussed in detail in discerning ranting in itself/humorous ranting in itself as a typology from the genre of the comedic rant via vlog.

Lloyd Bitzer's thorough explanation of the (rhetorical) situation was a significant contribution to the field of rhetorical theory, and paved the way to the predominantly accepted view of genre that it is implemented herein. Bitzer (1971) contends that the situation from which an act emerges is quintessential in understanding an act of rhetoric, because

a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action (p. 384)

He then provides a detailed definition of what exactly is meant by the phrase 'rhetorical situation:'

Let us regard rhetorical situation as a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invited utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains meaning and its rhetorical character [...] The situation dictates the sorts of observations to be made; it dictates the significant physical and verbal responses; and, we must admit, it constrains the words which are uttered... (p. 385).

This description of rhetorical situation allows us to view rhetorical acts as responses to an *exigence*, or *exigencies*, which is a central component of the 'genre as social action' paradigm, and markedly different from Burke's focus on motive.

The most notable essay on rhetorical genre theory occurs some 20 years after Bitzer's explanation of rhetorical situation, with Carolyn Miller's seminal piece "Genre as a Social Action." Miller (1984) explains exigence as a, "crucial difference" in the relationship between Bitzer's rhetorical situation and Burke's 'scene,' and notes that: "Burke's focus is on human action, whereas Bitzer's appears to be on reaction" (p. 155), but she reformulates Bitzer's notion of exigence considerably in her assertion that, "Exigence is a form of social knowledge, a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but makes them what they are: an objectified social need" (p. 157), and reasons that this social need is based on the human propensity to classify types of situations:

What recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type. The typified situation, including typifications of participants, underlies typification in rhetoric. Successful communication would require that the participants share common types; this is possible insofar as types are socially created (or biologically innate) (p. 157)

So the assertion here is that rhetorical acts that are recurrent can be classified by genre, only if they occur in a 'typified' situation with 'typified' participants, and that these rhetorical types are socially recognizable because either these types of situations that lead to rhetorical types recur in society, *or because* these rhetorical types are in some way inherently related to the physical nature of the human body. She then rejects Burke and Bitzer in the same breath when she claims further that "Exigence must be seen neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as social motive" (p. 158). If genre is identifiable based on the social action it achieves, and this includes types of

participants in types of situations that lead to types of rhetorical acts, then it follows that in classifying ranting as a genre, determining *what the rant accomplishes in the social realm* is initially more important than describing in detail what the rant actually is: what form it takes and the substance of the thing. But this leaves us at an impasse; due to my previous assertion that ranting in itself/ humorous ranting in itself (unintentionally humorous, to be clear) is fundamentally motivated by catharsis (and purging is biologically innate), how do we get from the physical realm to the social realm? How does (humorous) ranting relate to comedic ranting via vlog?

In order to understand the association between “live ranting” (see p. 23 for definition) and vlog ranting, I will revisit the description of ranting in itself: (R.) is an *impulsive, incessant* oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger - an emotive oral tradition wherein the orator devotes a relentless amount of time to denigrating subject x due to his/her heightened feelings regarding x, but spends perhaps less time than is necessary accurately articulating their rage in a calm, methodical manner, *due to the ranter’s fervent need to purge the emotions evoked by x AND distance themselves from x in so doing. In this way, ranting toward subject x declares: “I vehemently disapprove of x,” (which effectively declares: “I am not x”).* Also recall that humorous ranting in itself (HR.) would include the above definition, but add to it the notion that: *If the ranter is both justifiable and ridiculous in declaring: “I vehemently disapprove of x,” (which effectively declares: “I am not x”), then the ranter’s use of humor constructs a cathartic experience for the audience. Insofar as the audience identifies with the ranter, the catharsis constructed culminates in laughter, and catharsis has been achieved.* These explanations purport that R. is motivated by catharsis, and also

stake a claim as to what (unintended) HR. can “do” for an audience (construct a cathartic experience). So what does comedic ranting via vlog do? How is CRvV different from HR.? And what is the difference between humor and comedy? Deconstructing Miller’s paradigm and positioning rant performance within the audiovisual recording will offer insight into these questions. While it is true that Miller’s theory is based on the delineation that what an act does is more important than the form and substance of the act, a discussion of form and substance is still necessary in developing rant genre in accordance with her paradigm. To this end, 1) the form and substance of the rant as it occurs within the recording, and the 2) form and substance of the recording as it exists on the YouTube platform, must be described and situated within the rhetorical situation of YouTube. Before I transition into the methodology section, I’ll give you a hint as to what I mean by this.

Since comedic ranting via vlog is a *performance* of the humorous rant, and is mediated not only through the body, but through an audiovisual recording, CRVs actually present us with an act *within* an act – performance of the rant within the audio-visual recording. This means there are multiple rhetorical situations at work in CRV’s, since audio-visual recordings (film, television, news broadcasts and even video blogs) are discursive in nature, and when situated within a particular rhetorical situation (YouTube) embrace a recurring form (confessional-style format), which, when combined with a particular substance (in this case – rant performance), confounds the ideas of motivation (in Burke’s capitulation) and exigence (in Bitzer’s capitulation). That being said, CRV’s actually give us much more insight into Miller’s idea of exigence, which she describes as social motive. In HR., the humor may be unintended, so there is no certainty in

pinpointing the social motive present. On the other hand, since the act of making a video of oneself and uploading it to the YouTube platform is absolutely intentional, if the verbal/oral expression included within the rant vlog takes the form of humorous ranting in itself, we can understand the humor constructed as intentional, regardless of whether or not the people on the receiving end (the viewers), find it funny (Meyer, 2000).

Since intentionally humorous ranting occurs on YouTube *via video blog* - a form that disrupts the “assumed divisions between amateur and professional, market and non-market practices and motivations,” on YouTube - and since certain YouTube users (vloggers) have utilized this form on YouTube in “an entrepreneurial way,” I have chosen to distinguish between (humorous) ranting (HR.) and *comedic* ranting via vlog (CRvV), using the term “comedic” to distinguish the professional nature (Burgess & Green, 2009, pp. 93-96) of comedic vlog ranting *performance* as separate from the more natural considerations of humorous ranting outlined previously. In other words, labeling the acts of ranting via vlog considered herein as *comedic* as opposed to *humorous* functions as a way to connote not only their performative nature, but to highlight their (somewhat) professional production on the YouTube platform. Table 1, entitled “Rants as Symbolic Action” highlights the differences among the aforementioned rant descriptions, while simultaneously displaying how Dramatism struggles to account for the act of comedic ranting via vlog.

Rhetorical Act (Act)	Situational Demand (Scene)	Ranter's Distinction (Agent)	Live or performed? (Agency)	Motivation (Purpose)	Social Action (Exigence)
Ranting (R.)	Subject x incites ranter to anger	Speaker	Live –mediated through the body	Purge/ Identification	N/A
Humorous Ranting (HR.)	Subject x incites ranter to anger	Speaker if humor is unintended/ Amateur-Speaker if humor is intended	Live <i>and</i> potentially performative – mediated through the body	Purge/ Identification; potential for ulterior if humor is <i>intended</i>	Constructs cathartic experience for audience
Comedic Ranting via Vlog (CRvV) or comedic rant vlog (CRV) on YouTube.	Accessibility of participatory culture (i.e.: ability to produce user-generated content on YouTube with relative ease) <i>combined with (?)</i> - other more elusive demands to record and upload. Creates a public persona.	Professional Vlogger (agent speaks, records and uploads a vlog to YouTube).	Performative <i>and</i> remediated using audiovisual tools - bodily mediation of the verbal act is only a portion of the substance of the YouTube vlog as text, and does not account for cinematography, editing, planning/scripting, imitation/mimesis, recurrent settings and artifacts, etc. – all of which are audio-visual textual cues that transform the performative act of ranting.	Identification, definitely. Catharsis – maybe. And (?) - Many potential others: to “Broadcast Yourself,” or to <i>be heard</i> ; Validated self-expression; negotiating identity, performing identity; commodifying identity, making money through adshare, brand-building...	Constructs cathartic experience for audience and opens up possibility for additional social actions (affecting social change, etc.).

Table 1. Rants as Symbolic Action

As this table shows, determining the scene, agency, and purpose of CRVs is much more complex than determining the scene, agency and purpose of live ranting. The first

five columns can be understood to relate specifically to Burke's pentad (see parentheses for analogies), while the sixth column is an explicit reference to Miller's genre paradigm. What is the scene (the where and when) that demands YouTube vlogging, and specifically comedic rant vlogging, and how can the purpose be understood? Pentadic analysis cannot accurately account for CRVs, as the act of ranting is embedded within the act of making a video of oneself, which involves a time delay. Burke's rhetorical philosophy is based on the assumption that a particular act occurs in time and space – i.e.: that there must be a where and when - and this approach requires immediacy. Because the 'where' and 'when' of the rant vlog is ruptured – because the action that occurs in a particular location is a performance that is taped and altered and uploaded - the time-space continuum is disturbed, and the object of analysis is altogether different. As such, another rhetorical paradigm must be employed. The above characterization of CRVs' 'scene' and 'purpose' are suggestions reached by combining media studies research with Miller's (1984) hierarchical paradigm of genre as social action. Since Miller contends that classifying a recurring rhetorical act as a genre relies on identifying the social motive that calls the persistent act into being, the description of her hierarchy that follows must necessarily focus on the YouTube video blog as the object of analysis. This rhetorical approach more accurately accounts for the tiered elements of comedic ranting via vlog (CRvV), and highlights the importance of time in the production process.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

In order to ascertain the exigence or ‘objectified social need’ that calls comedic vlog rants on YouTube into being, I combine an understanding of Miller’s hierarchical theory of rhetorical genre with contemporary research in the field of communication and media studies (DiCioccio, 2012; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984; Lange, 2015; Merriam, 2002; Molyneaux, O’Donnell, Gibson, & Singer, 2008; Ng & Kidder, 2010; O’Hallaran, 2011; Shary, 2004; Simonsen (2012); Tyree, Williams, & Lewis, 2015; Werner, 2012), suggesting that rhetorical criticism can situate CRVs as a genre; it is my contention that textual analysis can pinpoint, or at the very least strongly suggest, the social motives involved in creating comedic vlog rants. Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000) define rhetorical criticism as a “systematic method for describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the persuasive force of messages embedded within texts” and point out that in genre criticism, “standards vary according to the particular type, or genre, of text being studied” (pp. 229-233). Since my chief concern is to analyze video blogs as texts that contain rant performance, I employ a qualitative approach to the object of my analysis, adopting both interpretive and critical perspectives. Merriam (2002) summarizes the qualitative approach in general:

qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective. The researcher can approach the phenomenon from an interpretive, critical, or postmodern stance. All qualitative research is

characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigation strategy, and a richly descriptive end product (p. 6)

And while the interpretive approach is geared toward grasping the semantic value of human interaction and experience, the critical approach “investigates how the social and political aspects of the situation shape the reality” (p. 4), which is particularly important in locating genre. This methodology is both interpretive and critical.

Built on comparative theory, I have utilized rhetorical criticism to demonstrate “how theories apply to the practice of persuasive discourse” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p. 230). I accomplished this by applying Dramatistic criticism to different iterations of ranting, which showed that pentadic analysis does not account for acts within acts (such as comedic ranting via vlog), but that it can shed light on live ranting as a recurring type. I offered an account of the rant as a recognizable and recurring type by examining Burke’s concept of catharsis and combining this knowledge with an application of Burke’s theory of Dramatism, settling on catharsis as the chief motivation (purpose) behind live ranting. I have also reasoned that humorous ranting “does” two things: it declares “I am not x,” and it constructs a cathartic experience for the audience. Since the actor within the video blog (the vlogger) engages in rant performance, they imitate live ranting; in other words, the form and substance of the verbal act within the vlog mimics live ranting. However, the purpose or motivation behind creating CRVs differs considerably from live ranting.

Transitioning from Burke to Miller makes possible a ‘richly descriptive’

articulation of the comedic rant vlog, and highlights the shortcomings of settling on one particular theory over another. Miller's (1984) theory (outlined below) facilitates a description of how the affordances of YouTube enable users to utilize the platform's available tools to record and upload videos of themselves engaged in the *performance* of *comedic* ranting – a performance which mirrors 'live' humorous ranting, but is decidedly different. I contend that the difference between humorous ranting and comedic ranting via vlog is that in the case of the latter (CRvV), the vlogger is utilizing humor intentionally, and thus I label their performance as comedic (as opposed to humorous), due to both the intention behind the act and the 'professional' subject positioning that the vlogger assumes by way of recording their rant performance. However, this same theory would not have been able to convincingly suggest the purpose behind live ranting (the act that comedic rant vlogs imitate), while Burke's Dramatistic pentad can and does. Since understanding the motivation behind live ranting is a necessary precursor to describing the form and substance of the performed rant, they go together like [insert cultural cliché here].

This inquiry aims to describe the exigence of ranting via YouTube vlog, making the object of rhetorical analysis (the rhetorical act) the video blog uploaded on YouTube. Simonsen (2012) has described video blogs as "an audiovisual one-to-one presentation of the self," and characterizes them as the most information-rich artifact for studying constructions of the self on the internet (p. 2), yet other academic research on YouTube has chosen to focus on how video blogs invite interaction (Burgess and Green, 2009; Werner, 2012), and build community (Balance, 2012; Burgess and Green, 2009; Ledbetter, 2014; Tyree, Williams, & Lewis, 2015; Werner, 2012) through the

‘confessional-style’ format they adopt. All theorists seem to agree, however, that this ‘audiovisual one to one presentation of the self’ creates a feeling of immediacy or intimacy for the viewer, and this idea of ‘closeness’ or ‘nearness’ challenges the strictly physical denotation of proximity typically associated with intimacy. That proximity, immediacy and intimacy are notions complicated by the digital era is not a novel idea, though it is significant. Since I approach YouTube vlogs through a rhetorical lens, the confessional format has meaning. Miller (1984) asserts that, “Form is perceived as the ways in which substance is symbolized” (p. 159), so the form of the video blog as a rhetorical act serves also as an organizing principle - not only to categorize the milieu of videos on the YouTube platform, but to ascribe meaning to them.

Burgess and Green (2009), note this “recognizable mode of production and [a] particular aesthetic style associated with the culture of user-created content on YouTube” (p. 90) as an artistic association that can often befuddle the ‘professional-amateur divide’ characteristic of the platform. According to them, the vlog’s form is “often associated with ‘amateur’ video production” (p. 93), though they are sure to point out that not all vlogs are amateur. They explain that

Videoblogging, or ‘vlogging,’ is a dominant form of user-created content, and it is fundamental to YouTube’s sense of community. Typically structured primarily around a monologue delivered directly to the camera, vlogs are characteristically produced with little more than a webcam and some witty editing. The subject matter ranges from reasoned political debate to the mundane details of every day life and impassioned rants about YouTube itself. Vlogging itself is not necessarily new or unique to YouTube, but it is an emblematic form of YouTube

participation. The form has antecedents in webcam culture, personal blogging, and the more widespread ‘confessional culture’ that characterizes television talk shows and reality television focused on the observation of everyday life (p. 94).

Since vlogging occurs in a particular and ‘emblematic’ form (confessional-style) in a particular rhetorical situation (YouTube) with a wide range of subject matter, or substance (a popular one being the impassioned rant), and has been described as an act that facilitates interaction and builds communities, we can understand the Vlog as a genre of the YouTube platform, by combining media research with Miller’s theory of genre as social action (1984).

Miller (1984) explicates the relationship between substance, form, context and social motive in her assertion that: “The combination of form and substance at one level becomes an action (has meaning) at a higher level when that combination itself acquires form. Each action is interpretable against the context provided by actions at higher levels” (p. 160). She provides this pictorial description of the hierarchy (Figure 1). It begins at the very basic level of language and experience, denoting the first form of language and experience as grammar (language governed by rules and structures) and the first substance as lexicon (the words available in a given language) which when combined with grammar become a sentence or “action” that has meaning.

Fig. 1. Miller's (1984) hierarchical theory of genre as social action

Miller (1984) provides a more comprehensive description of this hierarchy below:

But since context itself is hierarchical, as Toulmin emphasizes, we can think of form, substance, and context as relative, not absolute; they occur at many levels on a hierarchy of meaning. When form and substance are fused at one level, they acquire semantic value which is then subject to formalizing at a higher level. At one level, for example, the semantic values of a string of words and their syntactic relationships in a sentence acquire meaning (pragmatic value as action) when together they serve as substance for the higher-level form of the speech act. In turn, this combination of substance and form acquires meaning when it serves as substance for the still higher-level form imposed by, say, a language-game. *Thus, form at one level becomes an aspect of substance at a higher level (this is what*

makes form "significant"), although it is still analyzable as form at the lower level
[...] It is through this hierarchical combination of form and substance that symbolic structures take on pragmatic force and become interpretable actions; when fused, the substantive and formal components can acquire meaning in context. A complex hierarchy of such relationships is necessary for constructing meaning (pp. 159-160, my *emphasis*).

Since I am using this paradigm to develop a genre of the CRV as a rhetorical act, and the CRV is a unique combination of form and substance that exists on the upper level of a hierarchy of discourses, I think it is pertinent to describe this hierarchy from the bottom up – and this is what I have done thus far. This logic is based on the overwhelming agreement (cited previously) that ranting as a rhetorical act preceded the act of ranting via vlog. As Drake (2013) famously echoes: “started from the bottom now we’re here” (on *Nothing Was the Same*).

In situating the rant within the human body and describing what R. and HR. “do,” I have suggested that rants about a particular subject claim, “I vehemently disapprove of x,” which results in differentiation from x (since this statement of disapproval claims, by default, “I am not x”). While rants directed toward x merely differentiate the ranter from x, humorous rants about x differentiate the ranter from x AND construct a cathartic experience for the audience (by framing derision of x as both justifiable and ridiculous). I have reasoned that the motive of R. and HR. is catharsis, and have provided some conditions for the form and substance of R. and HR., though I have not delineated either in detail. Describing the form and substance of ranting is the next step in the process, since adhering to Miller’s (1984) hierarchy means being able to describe the form and

substance of each level of action, from the lower levels “(words, sentences, speech acts, text, etc.)” upward (p. 163). My description of the humorous rant (a speech act positioned on a lower level of Miller’s hierarchy as it relates to the comedic rant vlog), was developed on the premise of the rant in general as an action, and does not provide explicit criteria that may be used to determine both the form of the rant (stylistic elements of the recurring type that indicate the nature of the act itself as a purge), or the substance of the rant (derisive words, phrases, etc. that refer to sexual subject matter in a ridiculous manner, and are justified).

Since I have chosen to examine *comedic* ranting via vlog, the form and substance of the language utilized within the video will be most closely aligned with my previous description of humorous ranting. Since humorous ranting is a justifiable and ridiculous reaction to x, and since the oral derision directed toward ignoble x is an *impulsive*, *incessant* oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger, we can extrapolate from these adjectives a list of criteria that the form and substance of the rant should meet. In considering humorous rants, the words impulsive, incessant, and explosive (I take explosive to be synonymous with the ‘oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger, including frustration, irritation, etc.’ – an homage to the pride/anger = feces analogy from chapter II) must be operationalized, in order to explicate the relationship that their conceptual definitions have to the *form* of the speech act. Similarly, derisive, justifiable, and, ridiculous must be operationalized in terms of the *substance* of the speech act. Moreover, since I will be analyzing rants focused on sexual subject matter, I must also provide some indication of what constitutes sexual subject matter.

Form of HR

In order to operationalize the aforementioned conceptual definitions to provide guidelines for the *form* of the rant, I start by restating the obvious: rants are monologues. Miller (1984) pinpoints monologue specifically as a stylistic approach that must be understood in its relation to common usage within the socio-cultural discourse from which it emerges. In other words, the intention behind the rant (a monologue) has to be understood, not in terms of the intention behind the *individual* act, but in terms of the “conventionalized social purpose” (Miller, 1984, p. 162) of ranting generically. The rant as a particular recurring type is called into being by the shared recognition that certain situations elicit rants as a typical social response.

In monologue, personal intentions must be accommodated to public exigencies—because the audience is larger, the opportunity for complex statement is greater, and constraints are less easily managed; more elaborate rule structures at the upper end of the hierarchy, at the level of whole discourses, are therefore necessary for both formulation and interpretation” (Miller, 1984, p. 162).

Since the humorous rant is a monologue, and Miller contends that monologues are subject to a different set of rules due to their enhanced ‘opportunity for complex statement,’ monologues like ranting must be highly structured – more so even than dialogue.

In order to further describe the structure or stylistic qualities of rants, the next task is to operationalize the adjectival description of the thing. The form of the rant is impulsive – meaning impetuous or, thinking back to Werner’s (2012) description, marked

by a ‘feverish pacing,’ which denotes an abnormally quick rate of composition (one that implies little time between provocation and the oral articulation of the emotion provoked); incessant – meaning the verbal act must continue uninterrupted for an excessive or disproportionate amount of time; and finally, explosive – meaning the oral expression is intense, loud, uncontrollable and sudden. I have adopted Werner’s (2012) criteria for operationalizing the impulsive nature of ranting in the verbal sense, but what determines whether or not something is ‘excessive’ or spoken about for a ‘disproportionate amount of time,’” and how can the oral expression of anger as ‘explosive?’ be understood? Furthermore, since my approach defines the rant as mediated through the body, it is not enough to account for the form and substance of the verbal articulation alone; nonverbal codes sent by the body during the rant must also be considered.

Truly, it is much easier to operationalize explosive than it is incessant, since the definition of the word ‘explosive’ carries with it physical qualifications that can stylistically describe speech acts in much the same way that disasters or explosions are described. What does it mean for a speech act to be articulated in an explosive manner? Well, explosions are intense, loud, sudden and uncontrollable – adjectives that can also accurately describe both verbal and nonverbal qualities of the rant. But what qualities of a speech act enable its description as incessant?

Well, incessant definitely means without stopping, which can be described as uninterrupted. Operationalizing uninterrupted is relatively easy, as it simply means ceaseless, and we can understand uninterruptable as unable to “get a word in edgewise,” as my mother has often said, which implies minimal pausing between one sentence and

the next. But what are some other conceptualizations of incessant? One synonym is *continual*, which means uninterrupted, but also means repetitive – and since ranting is a vehement disapproval of x, some of that fervor and zealousness may manifest in repetition. Since a ranter is overly enthusiastic and intense, we can also understand the rant as an “in your face” speech act – one that must occur in close proximity to the witness of the act. Table 2 below, entitled “Humorous Rant (HR.) Form” provides conditions for both verbal and nonverbal operationalization of the form of the rant, based on qualified interpretation of the words “impulsive,” “incessant,” and “explosive.”

According to Frey et al. (2000) “Communication scholars also often function as qualified interpreters of texts” due to their training within the Communication field (p. 227).

However, since Miller’s theory also includes a disclaimer (i.e.: that an identifiable taxonomy with strict criteria for form and substance cannot ever be reached, due to the transformative nature of speech), I make no claims as to whether or not the description is exhaustive.

	Conceptual Definition	Verbal Operationalization	Nonverbal Operationalization
Impulsive	Impetuous; implies little time between provocation and oral articulation of emotions evoked; marked by a 'feverish pacing' (Werner, 2012).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sudden declaration of disapproval toward subject x * Absence of segues from one topic to another * Justification is secondary to emotional expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Rate of speech must be quick * Fluency of language must be great * Increasing or consistently high vocal pitch * Eye behavior is exaggerated. * Jerky movements
Incessant	Oral articulation continues uninterrupted for a disproportionate or excessive amount of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emotions are articulated more than once, or repeated verbally; * Ranter explains point with multiple examples and repeats/ rephrases derision directed toward subject x throughout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Very little pausing between sentences. * Person close in physical space (proximity) to the people listening * Repeats mannerisms and facial expressions throughout the course of the act
Explosive	Expression is intense, loud, sudden and uncontrollable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sudden declaration of disapproval toward subject x is vehement. * Vehement disapproval toward subject x might involve the metaphor "I shit on x" or "x = shit," or some variation of excreting on x. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Higher pitches signify heightened emotions (of or related to anger) * Volume is high/increases when subject x is mentioned or denigrated * Tone marked by emotions of or related to anger. * Mannerisms are erratic/ exaggerated (arm flailing, rapid eye and head movements, etc.)

Table 2. Humorous Rant (HR.) Form

Substance of HR

To operationalize the substance of the rant for the purposes of this study, I must describe the manner in which the act of ranting can both justifiably and ridiculously deride subject x, and must also provide some insight into what the ranter identifies as taboo breaking or obscene sexual behavior. Admittedly, the substance of humorous ranting in itself (HR.) is conceivably indiscriminate in terms of subject matter, as it is possible that any particular subject may be the object of a ranter's scorn. While I have previously confessed that my choice to focus on rants with sexual content is partially a result of my own academic interest in gender studies and sexuality, I would like to also reiterate that Vrooman (2002) noted that the subject matter of rants traditionally centers around, "...things sexual, especially things that might be considered taboo-breaking or obscene" (p. 57). Since Miller (1984) defines the substance of a generic text as the meaning created by the discourse utilized pertaining to a particular topic, or the "semantic value of discourse [that] constitutes the aspects of common experience that are being symbolized," and since sexual acts constitute 'common experience' for the vast majority of the population, I chose to focus on rant vlogs rife with sexual subject matter.

But what does it mean to be justifiable, ridiculous, and derisive, and how can these conceptual definitions be operationalized? While I was careful to describe the form of the rant both verbally and nonverbally, the substance of the rant is much more limiting, insofar as the justification and derision present should be understood primarily in terms of the meaning derived from the verbal articulation. In other words, the justification characteristic of ranting does not rely on nonverbal expression to signify meaning, and the derision enacted via ranting relies heavily on verbal articulation, though kinetic

features (specifically nonverbal emblems, which are arguably verbal) have been sited in a list of verbally aggressive messages (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984). What makes a rant ridiculous, however, is articulated both verbally and nonverbally, and should be interpreted as such. As a result, I will start with a description of what it means for a rant to be justifiable and derisive, and discuss the ridiculous nature of ranting substance last.

Although there are many different senses wherein a live speech act can be viewed as justifiable, in the case of ranting, justifiable merely means that the ranter provides reasons for why subject x has become the topic of their scorn, or explains the conditions that lead to denigrating subject x. In other words, the ranter provides insight into this fill-in-the-blank: “I vehemently disapprove of x *because* _____.” The reasoning doesn’t have to be compelling – indeed, in the case of ranting, it might be viewed as irrational according to some – but it does have to be present. Also present in the substance of the rant is derision, or denigration. This qualification of the rant was derived from previous definitions that cited ‘invective’ or ‘verbal aggressiveness’ as a defining characteristic of the act (Vrooman, 2002), and from Aristotle’s own conception of belittling as a form of anger expression (Kennedy, 2007). DiCioccio (2012) contends that

Although researchers have identified different types of aggressive verbal messages, they all share the same purpose: to harm or damage the target. Infante et al. (1984) labeled 10 communication behaviors as possible messages of verbal aggression: (a) character attacks, (b) competence attacks, (c) background attacks, (d) physical appearance attacks, (e) ridicule, (f) teasing, (g) threats, (h) swearing, (i) nonverbal emblems, and (j) maledictions (p. 100).

For the purposes of this exposition, the derision characteristic of ranting can be understood as any attack on subject x (be it in character, competence, background or physical appearance), or any verbal denigration of subject x that takes the form of ridicule, teasing, threatening, swearing or cursing (ah, the double entendre), as well as indirect denigration of subject x, such as with sarcasm. DiCioccio (2012) explains that “ironic messages, such as sarcasm” have been associated with “trait verbal aggressiveness” and “are potentially more hurtful than direct attacks” (p. 99). It is also worth noting that Infante et al. (1984) group nonverbal emblems directed at subject x into the verbal aggressiveness category; this grouping is due to their explicit reference to a verbal meaning. For example, the meaning behind sticking your middle finger up at someone in this culture is translated as, “fuck you” – so the act, while nonvocal in nature, is still viewed as verbal, insofar as there is a specific verbal meaning associated with the nonverbal emblem.

The conceptual definition of ridiculous I take to mean extremely silly or absurd, and contend that the “ridiculousness” characteristic of the rant should be interpreted both nonverbally, in terms of the ranter’s facial expressions, body movements, appearance and artifacts, use of space, use of touch, vocalizations and voice qualities (Alberts, Martin, & Nakayama, 2011), as well as in relation to both the verbal justification that the ranter provides and the derision that the ranter directs toward subject x. Admittedly, it is a much trickier endeavor to operationalize this qualification of the rant, for two reasons. First, unlike the other characteristics of substance, this qualification references, at least partially, the form of the rant; the extent to which a rant is ridiculous is partially due to its incessant, impulsive and explosive form. Keeping this in mind, the researcher is again

confronted with the problem of operationalizing an opinion-based term. The extent to which one denotes anything as “ridiculous” is largely dependent on their personal bias – just as the extent to which someone devotes “too much time” to something is also arguably subjective. As a result, it is best to think of the ridiculous in terms of its negative relationship with social propriety; i.e.: what are some *common* expectations associated with acceptable vs. non-acceptable expressions of emotions of or related to anger? In a similar vein, what makes some justifications and some derisive language absurd or at the very least, outside of the ordinary? Furthermore, is denigration every really justifiable? The answer to all of these questions is yes – when it is ridiculous and doesn’t cause harm to the audience – i.e.: when it is humorous. This may seem like circular reasoning, but answering yes to these questions is supported by the incongruity theory of humor (Berlyne, 1960), which Meyer (2000) sites alongside superiority theory as one of three different approaches to humor in communication.

Frymier & Houser (2012) explain that,

According to incongruity theory, humorous reactions result from exposure to stimuli that are unexpected, shocking, or surprising (Berger, 1976; Berlyne, 1960; McGhee, 1979). A basic premise behind this theory is that people enter communication situations with a specific set of expectations and when something happens unexpectedly, it is often perceived as funny (p. 217)

To get at the meaning behind the ridiculous or the absurd by viewing it as outside the dominant conception of ordinary or acceptable behaviors (both verbal and nonverbal) assumes that the interpreter understands what is expected in given communication situations, and thus what would be perceived as the opposite - as the ‘unexpected,

shocking, or surprising.’ In other words, the interpreter recognizes social propriety, and understands appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors in particular situations. If you’ll concede to the notion that I’m not a sociopath, I’d say that makes me qualified to interpret the ridiculous. Furthermore, ridiculousness can also be deciphered by juxtaposing the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the ranter. For example, if the ranter is ranting about “sluts” but their fly is down and their underwear is unknowingly on display, that qualifies as ridiculous, too. Table 3, Entitled “Humorous Rant (HR.) Substance” provides conditions for both the verbal and nonverbal operationalization of the substance of the rant, based on qualified interpretation of the words “justifiable”, “derisive”, and “ridiculous.”

	Conceptual Definition	Verbal Operationalization	Nonverbal Operationalization
Justifiable	The ranter provides reasons for why subject x deserves their vehement disapproval, or explains the conditions that lead to denigrating subject x	An argument against x, one that provides justification for denigration of x; a declaration of impropriety; “I vehemently disapprove of x because _____”	
Derisive	Verbal aggressiveness in the form of invective	Any verbal attack directed toward subject x, or verbal denigration in the form of ridicule, teasing, threatening, swearing or cursing; and/or indirect derision in the form of sarcasm; and nonverbal emblems directed at x (Infante et al., 1984; DiCioccio, 2012)	Any nonverbal approach that aids in the verbal expression of derision of subject x (including but not limited to kinetic features, eye behavior, vocalizations/voice qualities, posture, appearance/artifacts (Alberts, Martin, & Nakayama, 2011))
Ridiculous	Extremely silly or absurd; marked by subject matter that is unexpected, surprising or shocking; behavior that be described as out of the ordinary; incongruity theory (Berlyne, 1960; Meyer, 2000; Frymier & Houser, 2012)	The form of the rant (impulsive, incessant explosive); over-the-top justifications and derisions; any denigration or justification that is acceptable to the viewer yet unexpected; derision and justification atypical in nature as it relates to social expectations	Over-emphasizing the aforementioned nonverbal qualities associated with derision; imitating the object of scorn; adorning oneself with incongruous attire/ artifacts that contradicts the subject matter being discussed, or is unexpected. Ex: ranting about sluts while doing naked yoga; wearing a winter hat inside or during a non-winter season, etc.

Table 3. Humorous Rant (HR.) Substance

Thinking of the ‘ordinary,’ ‘acceptable,’ or ‘expected,’ in terms of typical or ‘day-to-day’ interactions with people also involves differentiating between personal relationships and professional or role relationships, since expected communication behaviors differ based on the relationship that the ranter has with a person. Personal relationships include ones developed with family, friends and in many cases coworkers, while professional relationships pertain to people you may see daily, but whom you exchange money or goods with for a particular service - interactions with the grocery attendant or the postal worker or the restaurant server can be grouped into this category. What is interesting about parsing personal relationships from professional ones is that instances of live ranting would then only be acceptable in personal communicative situations – especially since the subject matter of the rants considered herein focuses on taboo-breaking or obscene sexual behavior. Again, ranting is conceived here as directed toward a particular person or class of people who are ignoble in their conceptualization of sex, or in their proceedings of sexual acts, according to the ranter.

Since I have differentiated ranting from humorous ranting by denoting that the humorous rant is “ridiculous,” it seems that humorous ranting exists safely only when the witness has a personal relationship to the ranter, since the person ranting must manage not to offend the witness. Indeed, it is cringe-worthy to imagine a scenario where an orator is justifiable in their derision of x yet offends the witness in the process due to their inability to determine in advance whether or not their derision will offend the witness. However, it is a much easier endeavor to offer up denigration of x that may be offensive to some in a digital space as opposed to a physical one. The description of the form and

substance of the comedic rant vlog (CRV) offered below highlights this difference, and many others, between HRs and CRVs.

According to Burgess & Green (2009), the vlogger (in this instance a YouTuber who rants via vlog) bridges the professional amateur divide with their recorded comedic rant vlogs. As a result, uploading a video blog on YouTube must also be seen as a rhetorical act, with its own motivations and exigencies; in fact, the exigencies and social action of making the video take precedent over the choice to rant within the video. YouTube is also a content aggregator; while it is true that many vlogs uploaded are ‘user-generated content,’ a large percentage of the content on YouTube is professional, and available for access due to YouTube’s functioning as a search engine for popular video content (Stiegler, 2009). Since I have chosen to focus on the video blog, and more specifically, the comedic rant vlog (CRV), it is necessary to point out an additional function of the YouTube platform; that is, that YouTube users utilize the platforms available tools also as a social networking site, or SNS.

According to Ellison and boyd (2013), YouTube can be characterized as a SNS. These researchers define a Social Networking Site (SNS) as:

a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site
(p. 158)

Since uploading a video blog to YouTube requires that the vlogger has an uniquely

identifiable profile (in the form of a YouTube channel), and allows the vlogger to both publicly articulate connections that can be viewed or traversed by others *and* interact with streams of user-generated content, vloggers who choose to connect and interact in this manner are treating YouTube as a social networking site. What is interesting and unique about the YouTube channel as a profile is that Ellison and boyd (2013), in discussing the “public or semi-public profile” characteristic of SNS(s), explain that “Lacking visible bodies, self-presentation in online spaces offers participants many possibilities to actively construct a representation of how they would like to be identified” (p. 153); and yet, in the case of YouTube video blogging, there is no lack of ‘visible body.’ Instead, the YouTube vlogger showcases their body, their ‘live’ self, through an audiovisual recording. That being said, vloggers still choose how they will look, where they will film, what they will say, and how to edit their rants into a (semi) coherent narrative – one that may even be scripted - though with ranting, the oral expression must at least appear not to be. Since serial vloggers use YouTube as an SNS, the act of ranting, filming and editing the rant vlog, and subsequently posting a vlog on YouTube, can be understood as a genre of the YouTube platform – one that arises out of the ‘objectified social need’ to develop a public profile, or an online persona. Admittedly, this restricts the sample of video blogs considerably, as only comedic rant vlogs uploaded by serial vloggers will be considered (where ‘serial’ means occurring in regular installments, such as with a television series or newspaper periodical).

Any generic rhetorical act is a combination of form and substance that arises due to social motive (Miller, 1984), so the rhetorical act of recording a vlog of oneself should be understood as being comprised of a particular form – in this case a video in

confessional style format – and a particular substance. The substance of CRvV includes both the form and substance of the oral expression of the rant(er) outlined above, as well as the setting of the video, and any other additions that occur outside the oral expression of rant narrative that the vlogger might incorporate. These additions take many different forms; I have described some possible add-ons under the heading “Substance of the CRV” below. Based on the understanding of the vlog as an ‘emblematic form’ of the YouTube platform (Burgess & Green, 2009), the next task is to operationalize the form and substance of the CRV.

Form of the CRV

Since comedic rant vlogs are recorded, and thus easily duplicated, the easiest way to illustrate the aspects of the object that constitute the form (aside from describing the thing) is to show you some representative examples of vlogs in confessional-style format. Figures 2, 3, and 4 are all screen shots of serial vloggers engaged in CRvV. Figure 2 showcases the most popular vlogger of the three, Jenna Marbles, with over 15 million subscribers. The still was taken from a rant video entitled “People that I Hate” just over a year ago. Figure 3 is a still from the first vlogger I was ever exposed to – Kingsley – and is taken from one of his very first vlogs. Figure 4 is a screen shot of a less popular vlogger – one that never quite reached celebrity status, but still managed to go viral with one video. Her name is Krissychula, and she generally utilizes a slightly different approach to vlogging than the former two vloggers, in that she positions herself closer to the camera and often forgoes the editing process.

Fig. 2. Jenna Marbles, “People That I Hate.”

From this image of JennaMarbles, we get a visual representation of confessional-style format on YouTube, or the ‘audio-visual one-to-one presentation of the self’ described by Simonsen (2012). This camera shot is known as the medium close-up; half way between the close-up and the medium shot, it generally encompasses a person’s head, shoulders, and the top portion of their chest (Barker, 2000). Recall that Burgess and Green (2009) described vlogs as produced, for the most part, with nothing more than a ‘webcam and some witty editing,’ and claim that the emblematic form has antecedents in the confessional culture of reality television. It is this aspect of the form, the ‘confessional culture,’ that is significant as an organizing principle; the format of the video creates in

the audience a feeling of immediacy. The audience feels close in proximity to the vlogger – it is as though the viewer has a “first-hand” experience of the vlogger’s personal emotions (despite whether or not these emotions are ‘authentic’ or ‘performed’ – a point of contention in reality television also – and significant in developing a persona, either online or via reality television).

Werner (2012) claims that vlogging “can transform personal emotion into public spectacle, and even into powerful public statements” (p. 65). The still below is an example of the rant as a public spectacle, and showcases a second popular vlogger: Kingsley. Admittedly, this video does not come directly from Kingsley’s channel, but is uploaded by another YouTuber. In one of Kingsley’s many vlogs, he explains that someone hacked his channel, deleting many of his previous posts; this probably accounts for its absence on his own channel. Regardless, you can see here that the medium close-up characteristic of confessional style format is again present in this vlog:

Fig. 3. Kingsley, “Things I Hate”

Another interesting aspect regarding the naming of ‘confessional-style’ format is that it intimates catharsis in the moniker. A “confession” in the Catholic sense purges the symbol-using animal of their sins, and here we have the dominant format of the vlog being described in form as a type of confession. The closeness in proximity of the vlogger to the camera actually creates a feeling of intimacy, or nearness – one that mirrors the physical distance that would typically be characteristic of live ranting – and thus also mirrors the (assumed) relationship between the ranter and the witness. Werner (2012) cites an interview with anthropologist Patricia Lange and a YouTube vlogger named Michelle, explaining that the “power and popularity of vlogging” is a result of

confessional style format's ability to emphasize emotional performance, and "particularly emotion displayed on 'somebody's face'" (p. 70).

Another aspect of the form of the CRV that must be discussed is the salience of editing characteristic of many serial vloggers. Both of the videos referenced above contain multiple edits, which are evidenced by a quick frame change (better-known as the "jump-cut" in film studies) that is designed to be somewhat seamless. Many serial vloggers utilize editing as a tool to create a coherent or semi-coherent narrative. In terms of CRvV, by editing their rant together piece by piece, vloggers are able to give the appearance of a 'feverish pacing' that Werner (2012) discusses in his characterization of the rant, and thus the monologue appears to be both impulsive and incessant, despite it being highly formulaic. So in the case of comedic rant vlogs that have been edited, utilizing this tool actually also contributes to the manner in which the performance of the rant mirrors the criteria of the oral expression of the rant outlined above. However, not all CRVs are edited. One example of a vlogger who doesn't edit all of her rant vlogs is Krissychula. Figure 4 is a screen shot of one of her vlogs entitled "Double Standards," that contains no presence of edits.

Fig. 4. Krissychula, “Double Standards”

Here, the camera positioning is slightly different. This shot can be characterized more as a close-up; the shot only includes the face and the top of her shoulders, and the bottom of the frame rests on her shoulders as opposed to her bust line. This shot is slightly different from the medium close-up referenced in the previous two videos. Interestingly, Krissychula has the fewest followers of the three vloggers featured here. Her channel also has substantially fewer videos, and those videos have substantially fewer edits (with some, such as “Double Standards,” subject to none at all). These observations might inform future studies that examine whether or not number of edits per vlog is positively correlated with popularity – though I am off-track for the purpose of this exposition.

Either way, I wanted to include an example of a less popular vlogger as well, since I have only limited the corpus of vlogs thus far by contending that they must include rant performance and be a result of a serial vlogger. Table 4, entitled “Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Form,” provides criteria for the form of the CRV.

	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Required?
Confessional – style format recording	Creates a feeling of immediacy, closeness, or nearness with the audience; highlights emotional expression; showcases persona/personality by focusing on facial expressions.	Generally comprised of a medium close-up shot taken at the bust line - the vlogger’s face and partial torso included in the frame. Can also be a close-up (Barker, 2000), though this type of shot is less common to the form.	Yes
Video Editing	Arguably the most important element in constructing narrative understanding in edited vlogs – especially important in ensuring that the oral performance of the rant is uninterrupted; comprehension of recorded rant vlogs that are edited is dependent upon piecing together both the aural and visual information in a cohesive and rational manner.	Involves piecing together audio-visual recordings to promote narrative cohesion; the process of reworking recordings by subtracting from, adding to, or combining frames into an audio-visual narrative. Splicing.	No

Table 4. Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Form

Substance of the CRV

Miller (1984) would argue that the substance of the comedic rant vlog must include the form and substance of the humorous (live) ranting outlined above. This insistence falls in line with O'Hallaran (2011), a researcher who developed a way to treat television shows as a semiotic resource by adapting Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to televisual texts, a methodology she termed Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis (MDA). O'Hallaran (2011) identified three points of inquiry that comprised the overall "discourse" present in the program: "spoken language, kinetic features (including gaze, body posture, and gesture) and cinematography effects (including camera angle and frame size)" (p. 127). My approach also includes these points of inquiry, though cinematography effects are hierarchical to spoken language and kinetic features based on Miller's paradigm. This all makes sense, since the form of the vlog mirrors traditional approaches to television (recall that Burgess & Green (2009), referenced reality television and talk shows specifically), but what else constitutes the substance of the CRV? What are some additions to the CRV that occur outside of the form and substance of rant performance?

Possible supplements to the oral performance of the rant might include an oral preface, delivered by the vlogger, as to why they've chosen to rant about a particular topic – this is especially the case when the choice to rant was based on viewer demand. The vlogger will often precede the rant performance with a declaration that they are ranting about a particular topic due to their followers' insistence that they do so. Other added visual information might include pictorial images, perhaps even with added foley. One such type of these audiovisual add-ons serves as the vlogger's signature; introducing

each video in the corpus of texts uploaded by the vlogger, the supplemental image (either accompanied by sound or devoid of sound) is the first phenomena that a viewer encounters upon clicking on a particular video, and indicates that *this* particular video belongs to a particular vlogger. Figure 5 is a still of the signature that occurs at the beginning of Jenna Marbles' vlogs:

Fig. 5. Jenna Marbles - Signature

It is not always the case that serial vloggers have a signature, though it seems to be common, again, amongst popular serial vloggers. Continuing on with additional types of substance characteristic of the CRV, it could be the case that a vlogger has added typed text to a vlog in post-production, or that they utilize a portion of the screen (while

engaged in rant performance) to simultaneously show pictures of the thing they are deriding; these images serve as a type of visual aid to the denigration offered via rant performance. Furthermore, since the oral expression of the rant occurs in a particular space that is evidenced within the frame, the setting, or background, where rant performance occurs must also be included as an interpretable aspect of the substance of the CRV. Peters and Seier (2009) in discussing identity construction on YouTube via home dance videos, argue that,

While the focus is solely on the performance of the actors, the framing of the images reveals much more: the room décor thus supplements the video. This supplementary aspect of the image in turn forms the aesthetic surplus of the YouTube video. (p. 193)

As a result, it would be ill-informed to omit this aspect of the video, as the setting in which the vlogger films is also a deliberate choice, and should be interpreted as such. Table 5 below, entitled “Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Substance,” provides criteria for the substance of the CRV.

	Conceptual definition	Operational Definition	Required?
Oral Expression of the Humorous Rant	An impulsive, excessive, and explosive denigration of subject x – one that is both justifiable and ridiculous.	Combine verbal and nonverbal operationalization from Tbl. 2, HR Form, and Tbl. 3, HR. Substance.	Yes
Post-production add-ons	Any aural or visual addition to the video that occurs either before, during, or after rant performance	Might include: a verbal preface; a visual or audiovisual signature; foley; typed text; pictures that comprise a portion of the screen, etc.	No
Setting of the video	The place where the ranter performed the rant	The background of the video – the visual information that we can gather from the frame that doesn't include the ranter's body; room décor (Peters & Seier, 2009).	Yes

Table 5. Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Substance.

What is interesting about vlogs (since video blogs are partially comprised in substance of monologues as opposed to dialogues) as a stylistic device is that vlogs may either take the form of actions *or* reactions; in other words, monologues might be a response to a particular person or persons (when a politician responds to a question in a political debate, for example), but they may also be preplanned, as with a lecture or a sermon or some such other action that is not dialogic in nature. Since comedic ranting via

vlog is a prolific and recurring act on YouTube, and may be viewed by some as both an action and a reaction in the same package (due to a major portion of its substance being rant performance), interpreting CRVs requires “more elaborate rule structures.” My contention is that CRVs are a deliberate act – I do not view them as reactive, at least not in the sense that I view live ranting. But just because CRVs aren’t strictly *emotional* reactions to subject x, it doesn’t mean they aren’t dialogical reactions. They’re just not dialogical reactions in the sense that a dialogue is created within the object of analysis.

The dialogue that emerges occurs in the rhetorical situation in which the vlog is manifest (in this case, YouTube). Many popular vloggers post rant vlogs at the behest of their audience. For example, Jenna Marbles’ vlog posts entitled, “Reading Mean Comments” and “People that I Hate,” posted on January 15th 2015 and December 10th 2015 respectively, are videos that she made due to an overwhelming demand from her fans. In the latter video (a rant), she prefaces the diatribe by explaining, “You guys are always asking me, like, “Hey Jennahh, make a rant,” like you’re essentially saying, “Jennaaahhh, we want you to shit on people!” (Mourey, 2015). While the act’s substance still involves the vlogger shitting on x, this vlog rant was made based on viewer/ follower insistence; though the substance of the vlog is still a monologue, it is a dialogical reaction (based not on a need to purge, but on a need to please). Throughout the rant, JennaMarbles rants about a range of different people that she hates for different reasons, and does so in a ridiculous manner. This is an intentionally humorous rant performance: she indicates that she has made a rant to entertain the demand of her followers, and since she has close to 16 million subscribers on YouTube, this makes her a professional comedian – hence the naming of the object of analysis as comedic rant vlogs as opposed

to humorous rant vlogs.

As discussed previously, in order to intentionally rant in a humorous manner (one that does not offend the witness), the vlogger most likely has developed a personal relationship with the witness; they know the witness well enough to understand what may be offensive to them, and what may not be. In the case of YouTube vlogging, however, the situation is different – the vlogger must rely on comments, vlog views, and other feedback to determine whether or not their CRV will offend people, and even taking as much information into account as they can, the vlogs they upload don't please everyone. This idea and others will be discussed in the culminating chapter of this exposition.

For serial vloggers, the mediated rant is a way to build a public persona, or online identity. Through the act of making a vlog and uploading it to the YouTube platform, vloggers build a loyal following and celebrity status. This is the main difference between 'live' ranting, inspired by bottled up anger, and 'performative' ranting, inspired by the drive to gather followers. The amount of planning, production, and delay between CRvV and viewer reception makes asynchronously mediated rants a mere imitation of live humorous ranting. I would also argue that those rants subject to edits mirror most closely the act of live ranting; since edited CRVs emphasize the 'feverish pacing' of the rant by suggesting that the ranter is persistent in their vehement expression of emotions of or related to anger, the viewer is challenged to keep up with the verbal incessancy, and perhaps doesn't notice the fluid replacement of medium close-up shots succeeding one another that imitate the experience of live ranting. At any rate, the exigence of CRVs on YouTube must be understood as a way to build a public profile or online persona; truly, the vlogger intentionally constructs a cathartic experience for their viewers. However, the

authenticity of the emotions expressed is suspect, and so too is the idea that those who rant do so in order to purge – at least in the instance of CRVs, there is reasonable doubt in suggesting that recorded rant performance is indeed cathartic.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

“Every now and then I have been accused of being crude and vulgar because I have used analogies of sex or the toilet. I do not do this because I want to shock, particularly, but because there are certain experiences that are common to all, and sex and toilet are two of them. Furthermore, every one is interested in those two - which can’t be said of every common experience” (Saul Alinsky, 1971, pp. 83-84).

I began this body of work by posing a series of questions regarding the rant, in order to develop a richer understanding of the rant as a typology, and to situate ranting as a rhetorical genre that can be studied by examining its iterations on the YouTube platform. RQ1 asked: What criteria must a rhetorical act meet in order to be considered a rant? How does the researcher distinguish “the rant” from other rhetorical genres? My attempts to understand ranting as a rhetorical act (preceded by an authentic emotional response to a given situation), have lead me to the conclusion that live ranting may not actually be a genre, at least not by Miller’s (1984) conceptualization. Despite its recurrence as a trans-historical act, the situations in which ranting occur don’t have to share many commonalities; ranting doesn’t recur due to ‘an objectified social need,’ so much as it arises out of a universal human need to *purge*. The reiterative form of the rant is based on an understanding of how people have previously purged emotions of or related to anger in monologue form, sure, but the urgent need to release these emotions can be viewed in the same light as the urgent need to expel waste. Indeed – explosive diarrhea is less of a social response to a recurrent social situation, and more of an action engaged in due to the absence of an alternative. However, the manner in which one

should purge (and where to do it), and the manner in which one should not (and where not to do it), are also understood. In other words, just as one can't "drop trou" anywhere if they feel an excremental urge, as that would be inappropriate, it is not proper to rant in every situation. Differentiating rant typology from rant genre addresses the ongoing difficulties with developing and delineating rhetorical genres – particularly those based in ever-evolving oral traditions that are not subject to any legal formalities or stipulations

Nevertheless, I developed a typology of ranting (R.) and humorous ranting (HR.), not only to describe ranting conceptually, but in order to operationalize the act as an interpretable text mediated by the body. The description of HR. (again, humorous ranting is significant, since comedic rants vlogs imitate this type of rant) that outlines both what HR. *is*, and what it *does*, is as follows: HR. (humorous ranting) is an *impulsive, incessant* oral expression of heightened emotions of or related to anger - an emotive oral tradition wherein the orator devotes a relentless amount of time to denigrating subject x due to their heightened feelings regarding x, but spends perhaps less time than is necessary accurately articulating their rage in a calm, methodical manner. *The ranter is both justifiable and ridiculous in declaring: "I vehemently disapprove of x," (which effectively declares: "I am not x"), so the ranter's use of humor constructs a cathartic experience for the audience. Insofar as the audience identifies with the ranter, the catharsis constructed culminates in laughter, and catharsis has been achieved.*

I developed this description as a necessary first step in analyzing iterations of ranting via the YouTube vlog; since comedic rant vlogs contain humorous rant *performance*, imitating an act that occurs 'authentically' means the researcher must first be able to describe that act in its original form. I did this by combining Burke's

dramatistic pentad with his concept of catharsis, ultimately considering live ranting as a form of pure persuasion. That being said, the argument that humorous (live) ranting constructs a cathartic experience for the audience functions regardless of this consideration, since constructing a cathartic experience for the audience relies not on pure persuasion, but on the justifiable and ridiculous manner in which the rant is articulated.

My second research question was designed to highlight the differences in form, substance, and social action that exist between HR. and CRvV. RQ2 asked: How might the ability to record and edit oneself within ‘confessional-style’ recordings (form) restructure the rant (in form and substance)? How might the affordances of YouTube contribute to restructuring the rant (in form and substance) via vlog (form) as a social action? Perhaps the most significant distinction between these two objects is that while CRVs can be considered a genre of the YouTube platform, as their exigence is easily identifiable, yet it is much more difficult to identify the social action behind HR. In fact, what makes this iteration of ranting a genre is its repeated and remediated performance – the planning and execution of something that is purportedly impulsive, incessant and explosive makes CRVs an imitation of HR. *remediated* via vlog.

Miller would say that the social motive for posting YouTube vlogs is analogous for all serial YouTube vloggers. I have previously reasoned (based on Ellison & boyd’s [2013] definition of a SNS) that this similar social motive is to develop a public persona, or online identity. Despite a host of identifiable differences amongst the vloggers (race, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, etc.), and the oral substance of the vlog (subject matter, i.e. the vlog rant vs. instructional vlogs;

emotional vs. rational performances, intentionally humorous vs. intentionally serious approaches), consistently vlogging accomplishes a social action, and that (is at the very least) creating a public profile.

This methodology proposes studying serial vloggers that upload comedic rant vlogs, which means that a portion of the substance of the object of analysis (the CRV) is an oral articulation that effectively declares, “I am not x;” it also means this oral expression must be justifiable and ridiculous in approach. Since serial vlogging is a deliberate process of uploading videos to the YouTube platform (designed to build a following), and making people laugh is one way to get recognition, the vlogger intentionally constructs a cathartic experience for the audience. Aristotle (Kennedy, 2007), Infante et al. (1984), DiCioccio (2012), Meyer (2000) and Vrooman (2002), claim that directing insult at subject x makes one feel superior to x, and since YouTubers that engage in comedic vlog rant performance bridge the professional-amateur divide, I reason that CRvV grants the vlogger a powerful subject position; insofar as the ranter gains popularity through vlogging and vlog rant performance, their recognizability grants them celebrity status.

Consider a quote from a serial vlogger mentioned previously: “I’m silly and fun because that’s just how I choose to see the world,” declares Jenna Marbles in her 200th video (Mourey, 2014). Interestingly, this video cannot be categorized as a vlog, as it includes no spoken language – the only sound the viewer hears is a song. The meaning of the video is created through a combination of the song, a montage of previous vlog clips and moments in Jenna’s life, and scrolling text at the bottom of the screen. At the end of the video, Jenna mouths “I love you” to the camera, right after the scrolling text reads,

‘but I give all the fucks about my life [break] and yours’ (Mourey, 2014). Here, Jenna Marbles identifies with her audience; by creating a public profile comprised of serial vlogs that not only declares (in the case of comedic vlog rants) who she is not – but also says, explicitly, who she *is* – or at least who she wants to be perceived as. Here, Jenna Marbles presents herself as a self-made comedian (‘I’m silly and fun’) who cares about her own life and the lives of her followers, and who shows her followers gratitude by creating a special video just for them. This is an atypical object in the corpus of texts uploaded to JennaMarbles’ page, but it is worth mentioning. In conducting a rhetorical analysis of rant vlogs as a genre, researchers have the opportunity to obtain a much better understanding of the vlogger’s varied motivations; since serial vloggers develop a persona over time through recordings, the process of vlogging consistently results in a library of texts. Therefore, videos that the vlogger produces that are not vlogs, and even vlogs that are not considered rants, can be utilized to fill in the blanks about a particular vlogger’s personal intention, *or* social motive. In other words, non-CRVs uploaded by a particular vlogger can be used for supplementary information, though the methodology previously outlined should only be applied to CRVs.

Being able to readily and easily access facts about the speaker that come directly from them, but are not provoked by any researcher, preserves the internal validity of the textual analysis while increasing the likelihood of a richly descriptive end product. It also provides further commentary on the notion mentioned earlier, that the ‘confessional-style’ form of the vlog seems to be special in its ability to showcase emotions, providing the audience with a window into the true personality of the vlogger. This idea that the confessional form gives us a glimpse of authentic human emotions (due to the viewer’s

ability to get “up-close and personal” to the vlogger via camera positioning) is significant in considering the alternative social actions that CRvV may accomplish. The confessional format gives the audience a sense of “now-ness,” but since rant performance is recorded, altered (in many cases), and uploaded, the comedic rant vlogger is actually at an advantage, as they can “get emotional” about a topic, but present those emotions in a much more rational narrative than a live ranter. Likewise, the ability to edit a vlog grants the ranter more power in constructing a coherent message, and enables more succinct justification, seeing that the rant is planned. Live ranters lack tools, such as editing, the ability to script a rant, and the ability to review a rant before presenting it - all of which work to ensure that the message delivered via CRV is lucid.

RQ3 asks: Considering the conclusions on media form and rhetorical substance from RQ2, how might the researcher go about applying the method? Might other social actions arise upon further investigation? Well, in terms of applying the method, the researcher must begin by identifying the object as a vlog. Since form is the way in which substance is articulated (Miller, 1984), the researcher, in considering whether or not the object meets the criteria, must first ask: does the object meet the conditions outlined in Table 4: Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Form? This essentially means first determining whether or not the recording is an ‘audio-visual one-to-one presentation of the self’ (Simonsen, 2012); as long as the camera positioning is a medium close-up or close-up that focuses attention on the vlogger’s face, and the vlogger is the only person speaking into the camera, then the object is a vlog. The vlog may also be edited, though edits do not have to be present. The next question to ask is: does the vlog meet the criteria outlined in Table 5: Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Substance? Here, the researcher should

start by ensuring that the oral performance indeed meets the criteria for HR., which involves looking to the verbal and nonverbal operationalization of both the form and substance of HR.

Just as the researcher begins by ensuring that the case aligns with vlog form, so too must the researcher begin addressing this portion of the substance of the vlog by ensuring that the oral performance in the CRV aligns with the verbal and nonverbal operationalization of humorous (live) ranting. Since HR. is an act within the CRV that foregrounds the substance of the CRV, HR. is subject to its own form and substance. When addressing the ‘lower level’ of the ‘hierarchy,’ form is the chief organizing principle (Miller, 1984). The researcher must first ask of the case – given that this is a vlog, does the oral performance within the vlog meet the criteria outlined in Table 2: Humorous Rant (HR.) Form? If the answer is yes, the next question becomes: does the oral performance meet the criteria outlined in Table 3: Humorous Rant (HR.) Substance? Providing that it does, the researcher can ensure that the remaining required aspect of CRV (setting) is present, in order to settle on a particular case as the object of analysis. This is what a preliminary application of method to object might look like. I have chosen another vlog from JennaMarbles for this task, entitled: “Things I Don’t Understand About Girls Part 2 Slut Edition” (Mourey, 2013). Though she has removed this vlog from her personal channel, I archived it before she did – as did Maria Caliente (a YouTube user). You can still access the video on YouTube; typing the title into the YouTube search bar still grants access to the video - it just happens to be uploaded by someone else.

Either way, I start by determining that this object (or act), meets the criteria

outlined in Table 4, Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Form; this simply entails determining whether or not the camera positioning is comprised of a medium close-up shot taken at the bust line - the vlogger's face and partial torso included in the frame. While this shot can also be a close-up (Barker, 2000), close-up shots are less common to the form, and Jenna Marbles tends to utilize the medium close-up. Figure 6, entitled: "Things I Don't Understand About Girls Part 2 Slut Edition" is a still from that video:

Fig. 6 Jenna Marbles - "Things I Don't Understand About Girls Part 2 Slut Edition"

The researcher can at this point determine the presence or absence of editing as well, though editing does not necessarily have to be present in a CRV. This particular video contains many edits, which aid in message construction, particularly since the substance of the CRV is foregrounded by an oral performance of the rant.

In order to determine that the act contains an oral performance of humorous ranting, I turn to Table 5, Comedic Rant Vlog (CRV) Substance, which directs me to Tables 2 and 3 – HR. Form and HR. Substance, respectively. She begins the narrative within the vlog with a greeting: “Hey friends!” and a description of where she is speaking from – her dining room – where she is certain to point out the Spiderman cut-out behind her. She asks, “Do you have one of these in your dining room? Because I dooo – hashtag ‘adult’” (Mourey, 2013). This greeting serves to establish Jenna as “silly and fun,” the way that she describes herself in her 200th video, referenced previously. It is 12 seconds long, and includes five visible edits. Since this “episode” is a part 2, she also prefaces the rant performance by explaining that the video is, “kinda gonna be more, like, some questions that I have for sluts,” since the last video was questions that she had about herself. In order to determine that the oral performance meets the criteria for HR. form, I first check to ensure the manner of speaking is impulsive, incessant and explosive. This involves assessing whether or not the verbal and nonverbal operationalization of these terms is present.

Looking to Table 2, I determine that the oral performance *appears* to be impulsive, since 30 seconds into the beginning of the video she introduces the topic of her scorn: sluts. This is a sudden declaration of disapproval toward sluts, who she defines as “Someone who has A LOOOTTT of casual sex” (Mourey, 2013). She is also speaking quickly (aided by many edits that piece the narrative together), which gives the appearance of a ‘feverish pacing’ (Werner, 2012), and she widens her eyes in a show of disbelief when talking about ‘slutty’ behavior. Impulsive – check. The oral performance is also incessant – she repeatedly uses the word slut and provides multiple examples of

slutty behavior, appears to be “in-your-face” (a function of the confessional style recording), and repeats gestures of disbelief (throwing her hands up in the air, widened eyes) throughout the rant. The oral performance contains many “explosive” aspects as well. For example, at 4:03 (the video is over nine minutes long), she takes one particular slut as an example, explaining that the person in question (subject x) reasoned that her particular behavior was not in fact slutty because she engaged primarily in anal sex, or, as Jenna phrased it, “only did it in the butt.” Jenna Marbles’ reaction: “WHAT?! That is some stupid. fucking. logic, honey, like I can’t even, I-I have no response for that, that’s so stupid. I’m just completely baffled and dumb-founded by your slut logic that I-I-I got nothin’! You win!” Accompanying this vehement verbal disapproval is a heightened pitch (the “what” is exaggerated, as is “I got nothin’, you win”), her tone exhibits frustration, and she utilizes exaggerated hand gestures, such as throwing her hands out in front of her with palms facing upward, a gesture culturally understood as the “why?” gesture. She also repeatedly looks briefly to her right and then back at the camera, engaging in jerky and at times rapid or abrupt head/ eye movement. Now that the oral performance in the CRV has been classified as fitting HR. form, the researcher turns to Table 3, Humorous Rant (HR.) Substance, to ensure that the rant is justifiable, ridiculous, and derisive.

Since meeting the first criteria for HR. substance simply requires that the ranter provide reasons for their vehement disapproval of subject x, I’d say the performance within this video qualifies. Immediately after Jenna Marbles deems having anal sex with multiple men “slutty” behavior, she mentions another type of “slutty” behavior that doesn’t involve anal intercourse. Explaining how other “sluts” say, “Oh no, you know I

would never sleep with him, I just like, sucked his DICK like a bunch of times. That doesn't make me a slut because it didn't go, you know..." Her reply: "I got news for you, if it goes in any hole in your BODY – your mouth, your butt, your vajay – you're getting fucked! Mouth-fucked is a thing. It doesn't matter that you didn't sleep with any of them. Think about it" (Mourey, 2013). Here she provides justification for deeming this behavior "slutty," clarifying that any girl that allows a "dick" to repeatedly penetrate an orifice is indeed a slut, regardless of where that orifice is located on the body. She points to her own pelvic region (off-screen) when explaining that just because "it didn't go, you know..." it doesn't mean that a person isn't a slut. This mode of justification is also a form of indirect derision, since she sarcastically ridicules the "slut" who claims that engaging in fellatio "doesn't count" on the gamut of slutty behavior, illustrating her point by gesturing toward her own, non-slutty vaginal orifice. Her sarcastic ridicule of subject x also involves swearing, and this combination of strong language, sarcasm, and illustrative nonverbal behavior makes the oral performance derisive. This particular instance of rant performance can also be characterized as ridiculous, since she employs over-the-top justifications – "if it goes in any hole in you're BODY...then you're getting fucked," and is atypical in nature; she labels the vagina a "vajay," repeatedly imitates the confessions of "sluts" from her past, and the combination of her language and behavior can be interpreted as ridiculous, insofar as this behavior can be described as unexpected or surprising. It is also out of the ordinary, since all the while the image of Spiderman in the background remains constant; this also qualifies as ridiculous, since there is an incongruity in subject matter and imagery.

After determining that the oral performance of the rant meets some (or all) verbal

and nonverbal qualifications of HR., the researcher must return to Table 5, CRV Substance, in order to identify the presence of any post-production add-ons (which may be included but are not required), as well as to describe the setting of the video. The video begins with Jenna Marbles' signature (see Fig. 5), as do all of her vlogs. This aspect of the rant substance is classified as a post-production add-on, since it occurs before she engages in rant performance, and also exists outside of the narrative. Her signature includes foley; the sound of a squeaky toy or clown prop or some other such silly artifact, repeated twice, accompanies the image. Likewise, I have already mentioned the setting of the video, or room décor - which is her dining room - and where almost the entire left side of the frame behind her (save some red wall space) is a giant cardboard cutout of Spiderman (featured in Fig. 6). Remember, a description of the setting must be present in interpreting CRVs, since this is part of the substance of the object, in addition to the oral performance of HR.

If CRVs are edited, and this changes the form of the rant, does it also change the substance of the rant – i.e., do the emotions expressed become more rational – and thus more powerful? Well, I have already established that humorous rants directed toward subject x effectively declare: I am above x, according to the superiority theory of humor (Meyer, 2000; Infante et al., 1984). However, I believe there are *two additional levels of elevation* in CRVs. Andrejevic (2004) writes: “If the limelight that revealed the most personal and intimate details of celebrities’ lives demystified them, if it brought them “down” to the level of ordinary people, the corollary was that ordinary people could, through mass mediated self-disclosure, attain a degree of celebrity” (p. 67). Attaining a degree of celebrity is one possible social action that CRvV may accomplish; vloggers

may elevate themselves from the “ordinary” to the “celebrated” in attaining celebrity status, but in doing so they also elevate themselves from consumer to producer (Bazerman, 2012, p. 27). This elevation, designed to combat the “top-down” consumerist model with user-generated content, is itself insidious. Before I get to consumerism, however, I want to spend a little bit of time talking about celebrity as a subject position.

I contend that vlogging creates a unique, and potentially powerful, subject positioning for the YouTube vlogger. What I mean by this is that, in serial vlogging, vloggers situate themselves in a position to attain celebrity status, which grants them more power in terms of social influence. If a video has 10 million views, I think it's safe to say that close to 10 million people have seen it (although a single person might view the video multiple times, it is also the case that one “view” could have reached a number of people, if the video was played to a group, so this number can be said to be inexact but an accurate estimate nonetheless). In studying vlogs as meaningful texts, the researcher must consider the vlogger's draw; if millions of people choose to watch a particular vlogger, then the vlogger reaches millions, and if the vlogger reaches millions then the vlogger has the potential to influence millions. This makes the messages they relay about particular topics, and the way that they present themselves through vlogs, important for a number of reasons. While any subject *x* can be the focus of a rant, considering rants rife with sexual subject matter places the researcher in a position to interpret the vlogger's attitudes toward gender and sexuality (or at least to interpret the persona's attitude, since we can't necessarily equate the vlogger's personal views with those of the ‘persona’ that delivers rant performance). This also carries implications for interpreting the hegemonic ideals associated with sex in a particular culture. Jenna Marbles' next example of slutty

behavior in the aforementioned video quips, “Another thing I don’t understand about sluts is when a particularly promiscuous girl finally gets knocked u by some dude, she’s like, ‘Hey, isn’t everyone so excited for me isn’t this great I’m having a baby!’” And we’re all kinda like, ‘I’m-I’m-I’m not excited, I don’t, do you-do you know who the dad is? Because I remember that time in college when like, the hockey team was running a train on you, so I feel weird – I bought you a bunch of baby stuff – heard you’re having a girl so I got you some pink shit but, uh, its not gonna stop me from feeling *very* strange about the whole thing’” (Mourey, 2013). This video had over 10 million views when I archived it in 2015.

Foucault (1978) remarked that,

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1978, p. 101).

In order to understand how discourses might function as both “an instrument of power” and as “a point of resistance,” it is first pertinent to understand Foucault’s conceptualization of power, especially as it stands in opposition to the Marxist theory – since a discussion of how a vlogger elevates themselves from producer to consumer will follow.

For Michel Foucault, languages are complex and dynamic organizing principles wherein the relationship between knowledge and power form a union; it is through language that the citizens of a society come to understand the existing power dynamic.

Put differently, discourse denotes and delineates “force relations” so that members of society can position themselves within society and understand their position within these force relations (p. 92). Since vloggers are members of society that have the ability to reach millions of people, and since they are also providing a cathartic experience for the audience by justifiably and ridiculously directing impulsive, incessant, and explosive insult at subject x, AND since their rant performance also attracts followers who ‘subscribe’ to the vlogger’s public persona, we can understand the vlogger’s subscribers as *ascribing*, at least partially, to the viewpoints offered by the vlogger’s persona via vlog. The fact that knowledge and power are unified in, and articulated through, discourse, and that texts are produced (and reproduced) through particular speakers, situated within a specific time period and embedded in a particular rhetorical situation within a particular culture, paired with the fact that serial rant vloggers are actually reaching people (it is known – at least by advertisers), should be a concern for researchers in media studies and rhetorical studies alike. The term “follower” is often used to describe YouTube subscribers, as it used to describe Instagram connections, and Facebook has a function that allows users to choose who they will follow (i.e., what stories will show up in their newsfeed), and who not to. Perhaps this isn’t just a way to indicate connections, but also implies social influence.

Corbett and Connors (1999) remind us that “Writers lack the advantage a speaker enjoys because of their face-to-face contact with audience and because of their vocal delivery; the only way in which writers can make up for this advantage is by brilliance of style” (p. 23). Studying the rant in not only an aural, but a visual context characterized by “immediacy” (confessional-style format makes nonverbal scrutiny of facial expression

unavoidable) offers more opportunity for the researcher to explore how vocal inflection, kinetics, setting, and editing contribute to the construction of heightened displays of emotion present in comedic rant vlog performance, and highlights the importance of considering a ‘proliferation of discourses’ by examining recordings as texts - texts that provide much more information than mere language. Foucault’s (1978) initial objective in *History of Sexuality: Volume I* was to “to analyze a certain form of knowledge regarding sex,” and it is my contention that CRVs can be interpreted as describing some such forms.

Future research might utilize the typology of the rant developed herein to examine how ranting online explicitly relates to A) more serious or dramatic performances of the rant, as well as B) performances of particular aspects of identity such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or any combination of the aforementioned categories. Johnson (2014) explains that,

Social media exploration brings new complexity and possibility to what Erving Goffman (1959) coins “the presentation of self in everyday life. [...] Because our identities fluctuate in a milieu of negotiation, conceptual change, and mediated representations, it is important to study how social media challenge the way we perform, authenticate, appropriate, and exploit intersectional identities. (p. 155)

One such intersectional identity is race and sexuality. According to Williams, Tyree, and Lewis (2015), “Queering and transgendered practices were visible across the Internet since the emergence of multiuser domains (MUDs) and have permitted those with access to the technology to make choices in how they present themselves to the mass public” (p. 106), and they go on to explain that YouTube is a platform where “the

potential to mediate a sort of performative play” (p. 107) is realized. This all seems great for counter-acting dominant ideologies regarding gender performance and attitudes toward sexuality – but there is a catch. Williams, Tyree and Lewis (2015) studied one particular vlogger, Quentin Latham, commodified his online persona by placing a wig on his head and becoming an alter ego: “Funky Dineva” (p. 108). Funky Dineva is a comedic vlogger who identifies as a black, homosexual man –one who uses incongruity theory to create ridiculous yet justifiable videos, though they are not necessarily rants.

This case study emphasizes another social action that serial vlogging can accomplish: commodifying the online identity created through serial vlogging. While it is true that Funky Dineva, and many other serial vloggers, often appear in other media in order to further their celebrity status (they are featured on talk shows, attend award shows, and make guest appearances on other vlog channels, etc.), the fact remains that vloggers who go viral or obtain celebrity status, and even less well-known vloggers that may not be characterized as internet “celebrities,” get paid to vlog on YouTube. Burgess and Green (2009) explain that this is possible through “the company’s revenue-sharing program, which extends a cut of the revenue from page views to prominent producers who create their own content” (p. 97), but there are other opportunities to commodify a persona. Vloggers may post links to YouTube videos on other SNSs (Facebook, Instagram, Vine, etc.) in order to increase notoriety; they might be paid by certain companies independently as well, if the vlogger agrees to advertise their product. Although his work focuses on reality television, Andrejevic (2004) explains that participatory cultures don’t necessarily combat top-down consumerism:

The celebrity status attained by participants on the show highlights the promise

that authentication via surveillance has its tangible rewards... This is a promise that needs to be handled very carefully. On the one hand, it invokes a familiar critique of a society in which authentic individuality has been subordinated to the dictates of mass production and the mass media [...] As labor power before it, personal information can be extracted from consumers only to be sold back to them in a congealed commodity form. This ambivalence in the promise of mass customization recapitulates an oft-noted ambivalence in the political potential of new information technologies in general. (p. 111)

My theory is that vloggers who are granted access to YouTube's revenue-sharing program have gained celebrity status by reinforcing or celebrating hegemony.

Considering Butler's (1986;1988) theory of performativity, I hypothesize that: those vloggers who challenge heteronormativity have a difficult time attaining celebrity status, while those vloggers who adhere to hegemonic ideals are more likely to attain celebrity status. Put differently: In the case of serial vloggers, attaining celebrity status is positively correlated with adherence to heteronormativity. Jenna Marbles is a prime example – in the application outlined above, she effectively claims that only heterosexual “girls” engage in slutty behavior, defines slutty behavior as allowing a “dick” to penetrate an orifice, and suggests that promiscuous women should not be excited about having children. Nowhere in this nine minute rant does she acknowledge homosexuality, reinforcing Butler's assertion that gender performativity is organized around explicitly heteronormative ideals (Butler, 1993). But at least she's still being supportive, right? You're having a girl? I bought you some pink shit. Thanks Jenna, for reminding us that female babies should be restrictively adorned with pink shit.

The question as to whether or not vlogging may be an opportunity for vloggers to reinforce or subvert traditional notions of heteronormativity then becomes a question of – does attaining celebrity status mean that a vlogger has commodified their persona, and how have they done this, and in the process of doing this, did they challenge heteronormativity or reinforce it? These questions and others will inform my future research.

Vloggers choose how they will look, where they will film, what they will say, and how to edit their rants into a (semi) coherent narrative. Might the progress achieved by the marriage equality movement in Western North America be evidence of a proliferation of discourses surrounding this “unnatural” (Foucault’s terminology) marginalized population? How does YouTube, as a social networking site, proliferate discourses that originate from the standpoint of “the resistance”? How do they assimilate them? Since vlogs are texts as well, should we be concerned about this presentation of the self that relies on emotive performance? When do the lines between “authentic” and “performed” emotions start to become blurry? Ng and Kidder (2010) explain that, "Cultural meaning is implicated in one’s performance of emotion. The emotive self is on display in the course of social interactions...Seldom does a person resort to meaningless rants... at the height of a so-called emotional outburst" (p. 197). Since we understand emotional expression in a cultural context, what can we learn from rant performance exported in other media?

The choice to discuss sexuality as a topic of social significance specific to rant genre is a merger of my academic and personal interest in the field of gender and

sexuality studies on the one hand, and the assertion that the subject matter of rants often reflects a “focus on things sexual, especially things that might be considered taboo breaking or obscene” (Vrooman, 2002, p. 57). Additionally, expressing sexuality and performing gender identity are pertinent topics of discussion in the cultural context of contemporary U.S. proceedings, particularly in the wake of two significant and highly publicized occurrences: Caitlyn Jenner’s cover story on *Vanity Fair*, published online in its entirety on June 25th, 2015 and the Supreme Court ruling on June 26th, 2015 that legalized marriage for same sex couples in the United States. And since Campbell and Jamieson (1978) explain, as so many other rhetoricians have, that, “Because rhetoric is of the public life, because rhetorical acts are concerned with ideas and processes rooted in the here and now of social and political life, rhetoric develops in time and through time” (p. 22), it is important to examine the common themes that have arisen over the past 40 or so years since Foucault wrote his *History of Sexuality: Volume I*, if only to examine how a proliferation of discourses, in various texts, may have functioned to create positive social change (admittedly, this is an idea that Foucault himself would probably reject).

My light-hearted and at times, intentionally humorous, approach to the subject matter outlined herein is inspired by Kenneth Burke. If what Crusius (1999) says of Burke’s philosophy is true, if the approach to saving ourselves is to adopt a “comic attitude,” if “In part, the point of Burkean Comedy is to transcend of transmute our irritation, frustration, and anger with ourselves, other people, and social institutions by becoming interested in them” (p.199), then if nothing else, I hope I have fueled your interest in comedic ranting via vlog.

CHAPTER 7

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