Why do female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers go blond?

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Background. Appearance works as a medium to communicate individual self's identity (Hillestad, 1980; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Individuals are seeking to achieve a balance between the images that they imitate and the distinction they need to express about themselves (Simmel, 1904). It has noticed that more and more female Asian-Americans bleach their natural hair to blond – the trend of young female adults in the U.S., just as popular among celebrities as it is among beauty Youtubers. This study aims to examine how Asian-American women negotiate their beauty ideals from their hair transformation journey.

Sample. Female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers in this study were selected based on the most recent report from TeenVogue and Nylonpink. (Nylonpink, 2019; Corpuz, 2018). Among all of the selected YouTubers who posted the videos in relation to their hair (N=21), only five (N=5) of them talked about their decision of bleaching hair, and the rest of them only recorded the process of dyeing their hair as material into their weekly or monthly vlog. Five female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers were selected for the study (Figure 1). They are aged between 24 and 29 years old. Two of them are married and live with partners without raising children. All women were assigned females at birth.

1	Jenn (*Jenn Im*) Korean-American 2.59M subscribers
2	Karen Yeung (*IAMKARENO*) Korean-American 1.59 M subscribers
3 & 4	Cassie Masangkay and Ricci Pamintuan (*ToThe9s*) Filipino-American, 634K subscribers
5	Sandy Lin (*Sandy Lin*) Korean-American 59.9 K subscribers

Figure 1. The five selected female Asian-American fashion and beauty Youtubers

Method. According to Hillestad (1980) and Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992), the study of appearance contains both dress and the body. The dress includes "the article of clothing", and the body modification includes changes to hair. Clothing and hair belong to appearance. The theoretical framework employed in the study was developed by Guy and Banim (2000). The authors provided a conceptual framework to draw the connection between clothes and women's self-image. Women use clothing to create: (a) women wanted to be, (b) feared they might be, and (c) were most of the time. The researcher examined all of the selected videos and translated the videos into textual data. Data from all five selected videos were combined into a narrative used for content analysis and were coded using a priori codes based on the three themes of the theory from Guy and Bainm (2000).

Results. Based on the analysis, three themes were developed: the change I want to make; the change I worried about; the change I could never have made. The selected five female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers strongly expressed their aspirations pertains to blond hair and of attempts to use the blond hair to produce images which represent their beauty ideal. Following Guy and Bainmi's idea about

the woman I want to be, we can envision that having blond hair for female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers is to achieve a desired image that they are dreaming about. They think the image could be achieved, so they dyed their hair.

I've been wanting to go blond for a good six years.

(Jenn Im)

I feel good about this decision, I have no regrets I love this hair. It's so much fun already…. This is the change I wanted it.

(Sandy Lin)

The change I worried about. All of the selected female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers have mentioned their concerns about bleaching their hair which damages their hair, cause pain, and requires a lot of maintenance. The pain and permanence of the procedure cause their anxiety. They are also worried about whether or not the dying procedure will produce the same blond hair as they desired. Following the idea of *the women I fear I could be* from Guy and Banim's (2000) study to interpret here, the female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers have the current and future anxieties about their hair condition which leads them to feel out of control in the image that they want to produce or create.

I would dye my hair color still not quite sure what's gonna be most likely blonde and then I have nervous.

(ToThe9s – Cassie Masangkay)

Beyond the ideas from Guy and Banim's (2000) work, the female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers demonstrate another character: *the change I could never have made.* The female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers have strong aspirations in relating to getting blond hair. Majority of them search a lot of blond images as the reference to their hair stylist. But there is no guarantee to have the same level of blondness based on the individual's hair condition. Majority of the female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers mention they could not get the same level of blondness due to some leftover color in their hair. Implicit here is the assumption that the female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers have confidence about their decisions of being blond. But they do not know what it would look like in the end, for example, how the lightness level of blondness would be turned out at end. The hair stylists create a blond color that matches their skin tone which leads some unexpected effects eventually. The female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTubers were surprised with the final blondness they received and created a brand new image about themselves.

Discussion and Implications. The transformations of the hair belong to the change of body surface, which is sub-unit under Hillestad's appearance taxonomy model (Hillestad, 1980). The body surface modifications can make a statement about the individual's identity (Hillestad, 1980). The female Asian-Americans are considered as one of the marginalized people in the society (Atkinson, Lowe, & Matthews, 1995). Female Asian-American fashion and beauty YouTuber is one group of people under the marginalized population. Through the interpretation about how female Asian-American fashion and

beauty YouTubers navigating their beauty ideal, the researcher assume that they confidently create their image by their knowledge and fashion conscious, at the same time, they are learning from their experiences to produce their identity. They experience their agency both being Asian (East) and American (West). The interpretation of their relationship with appearance and identity is complex and ambivalence. The future study can emphasize on the motivation behind the practices of dying hair in blond for Asian-American young adults in the United States and continue to explore the symbolic meaning of practicing dying hair.

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