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On being *bimbo*

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Abstract

Der Begriff »Bimbo« ist im englischsprachigen Raum ein bekanntes Pejorativ für dümmlich naive, aber attraktive Frauen. Ein Internetphänomen auf der Social-Media-Plattform TikTok, das *bimbo-movement*, schreibt diesem Begriff jedoch eine neue Bedeutung zu. Durch Persiflage und eine spezifische Ästhetik übernimmt diese Bewegung den Begriff »Bimbo«, befreit ihn von seinen negativen Konnotationen und deutet ihn feministisch um. Mit einer multimodalen Inhaltsanalyse untersuche ich die komplexen semiotischen Mittel, durch die eine Bimbo-Persona auf TikTok konstruiert wird. Die Analyse zeigt damit sowohl die Wirkmächtigkeit als auch deren Grenzen auf, die ein strategischer Einsatz von Satire und die Verknüpfung von Weiblichkeit mit linken politischen Idealen innerhalb eines feministischen Diskurses entfalten können.

Schlagwörter: Identity construction, multimodal content analysis, TikTok, bimbo, feminist discourse, social media, gender stereotypes

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1 Introduction

“[...] nothing matters in the end, babe; we’re all gonna die, fuck it...so die a slut!”

These words echo a sentiment reflective of a pop-cultural shift emerging from an online movement that currently challenges societal norms and perceptions, the so-called bimbo feminism.

Digitally mediated spaces provide a unique arena for exploring identity practices without risking repercussions, redefining and reclaiming old phenomena. One such phenomenon, the *bimbo movement*, has emerged on TikTok, reappropriating and subverting the stereotypical *bimbo*¹ image. It stands as a pop-cultural rebellion, celebrating traditionally feminine traits while rejecting historical negative connotations. At its core, the bimbo movement challenges societal norms and perceptions by celebrating femininity, self-expression, and body positivity. Followers of this movement often advocate for self-confidence, embracing sexuality on one’s own terms, and rejecting societal judgments based on appearance or behavior.

The bimbo movement represents a deliberate and conscious effort to subvert societal expectations and challenge sexist stereotypes. Members embrace the label of bimbo, leveraging social media platforms like TikTok to perform and embody aspects of the stereotypical bimbo persona. Yet, as it challenges norms and advocates self-expression, questions arise. What even counts as bimbo content? How is a bimbo persona constructed? Exploring these questions helps to unravel the nuanced emergence of this phenomenon amidst digital spaces. While the bimbo movement actively endorses certain values and cultural references, its intentional defiance against sexist ideals amplifies the need to delve deeper into the construction of bimboism.

The bimbo is very local to TikTok and its performance is characterized by its vocal endorsement of the LGBTQAI+ community, mental health advocacy, promotion of sexual liberty, and an unwavering

¹ The term “bimbo” is also a known racial slur in German speaking regions. This contribution, however, focuses on its use in the US American discourse.

commitment to feminist ideals. Additionally, it often incorporates nostalgic nods to early 2000s fashion trends, adding a layer of cultural reference to its expression. However, these performances are intentionally designed to defy and contradict the entrenched sexist ideals associated with the bimbo archetype.

An intriguing facet of bimboism lies in its fusion of explicit, hypersexualized white femininity with ostensibly 'radical' leftist political views, as noted by Harvey (2021). It is essential to emphasize the racial dimension within this movement. Despite its progressive stances on various social issues, the bimbo movement can be criticized for predominantly representing and being tied to a form of feminism that caters strongly to white experiences and perspectives. This racial component raises important questions about the inclusivity and intersectionality of the movement's feminist ideals and whether its representations adequately address the diverse experiences by non-white individuals within feminist discourse. While the bimbo movement intersects with important discussions in feminism and gender politics, aiming to reshape societal narratives encompassing femininity and beauty standards, it simultaneously displays boundaries within which this feminist expression is framed. An integral aspect is the question of whether the bimbo movement inadvertently confines its feminist discourse to certain experiences and perspectives, predominantly those aligned with white femininity. This critical observation raises concerns about the movement's effectiveness in encompassing the diverse spectrum of identities and struggles encountered within feminist discourse.

In this article, a detailed investigation unfolds along two separate yet interconnected dimensions. Firstly, this study is based on a thorough analysis of the construction of a bimbo persona. Drawing from one TikTok content creator, named Chrissy, this article dissects the process and the dimensions used to construct the bimbo archetype, which Chrissy is known for. For this, a digital content analysis of the content created by Chrissy is carried out. By dissecting her content, the analysis delves into the strategic use of satirical elements and the dimensions utilized to defy feminine stereotypes and misogyny.

In tandem with this approach, this investigation also enters into the socio-political sphere by asking: how effectively does this so-called *bimbo feminism* challenge established gender stereotypes and really empower individuals in the face of societal expectations regarding femininity? This question allows for an exploration of the effectiveness of the bimbo movement regarding its intended goal of subverting stereotypes and empowering individuals. Analyzing Chrissy's bimbo portrayal opens up avenues for exploring the dimensions of the bimbo, its construction, the satirical elements employed, and its resonance within feminist discourse.

By harmonizing these dual perspectives – one centered on the construction of the bimbo persona and the other questioning its efficacy within feminist discourse – this article endeavors to illuminate both the intricacies of social media persona construction and the broader implications of such movements within the socio-political landscape.

Moreover, this study highlights the utility of digital content analysis and the challenges that arise from handling large quantities of social media data. The data reduction process utilized in this study showcases an effective approach to managing data in digital content analysis. By employing a rating system which focuses on the dimensions crucial to bimbo construction, this study demonstrates how a structured approach facilitates manageability and reproducibility in analyzing data from social media platforms.

This contribution is structured as follows. A general overview of relevant literature as well as key concepts that guide this paper is given in Section 1.1. The app TikTok and the bimbo phenomenon located there is outlined in more detail in Section 1.2 and 1.3. Section 2 provides a description of the data and the data collection process. A detailed account of the methods applied in this study is presented in Section 3. These include data annotation, the data reduction process, and classification techniques. In Section 4, the analysis and results are presented, after which Section 5 discusses the results of this paper and Section 6 concludes this article.

1.1 Theoretical framework

Sociolinguistic literature and studies regarding TikTok-specific phenomena are scarce at this point. This contribution can, however, draw on a scholastic body of work on identity construction in general (e.g., Blommaert & Varis 2013, 2015; Buchholtz & Hall 2005; Butler 1990; Gumperz 1982) as well as in digital spaces (e.g., Androutsopoulos 2007; Leppänen et al. 2014; Maly & Varis 2016; Procházka 2018; Varis 2021; Varis, Wand & Du 2011, but see Al Zidjaly 2019 for a general discussion, Barton & Lee 2013, or Page 2012 for an overview).

In contrast to identity, which refers to a bundle of social practices and processes shared by more than one person, a social persona is the identity *performance* of a single person. It is not only part of the identity performance of an individual but part of their identity *repertoire*. Considering that there is no single identity by which individuals define themselves, a whole repertoire for identity is presupposed and the term is therefore used in its pluralized form as *identities*. Different identity practices are encountered in different life segments, meaning that the individual draws from their identity repertoire in order to change or modify their social persona depending on the context (Varis et al. 2011). This change, or shifting, is later described in the context of *micro-hegemonies*. Blommaert & Varis (2013) characterize identity practices as discursive orientations towards an emblematic set of features. The authors demonstrated the creation of “authentic” identities through external emblems in the constructions of the British *chav* subculture and *Irishness* in Belgian Irish pubs. Grounded in Agha’s notion of the emblem (2006), the study expanded on this with Blommaert & Varis’ ideas of *enoughness* and *dosing* (2013).

An emblem, in Agha’s terms, is “a thing to which a social persona is attached” (Agha 2006: 233). It involves three elements: (1) a perceivable thing or diacritic, (2) a social persona, and (3) someone for whom it is an emblem. That means: features which occur in a specific context become with their repetition widely recognized as a marking of the same social persona, and hence an enregistered emblem of it (Agha 2006: 233). Emblematic sources can be drawn, for instance, from specific fashion

styles, forms of language, or habits and preferences in general. Through their representation and enregisterment within the context of an identity discourse, such features become *emblematic* of social identities.

Enoughness, per Blommaert & Varis (2013: 148), sets the standards defining recognition within a given social identity, encapsulating essential features for inclusion. It is the benchmark for meeting criteria within an identity group, applied here to understand and define the essential attributes for acceptance within the constructed bimbo persona.

The introduction of small features into an identity discourse that, in sum, can lead to such a benchmark of an identity category, is described as *dosing* (Blommaert & Varis 2013: 148). In their study, the authors illustrated with these concepts how external features or configurations of features become active substances in identity practices. It was shown that in order to be admitted to the identity category of the *chav*, one single sign (the Burberry tartan) was *enough* to trigger an identity discourse.

Even though the present study does not aim to argue for authentic bimboism in Chrissy's profile, the concepts of enoughness and dosing are adopted for the purpose of illustrating the identity construction process. Transposed to the purpose of this article, the combination of the three concepts *emblem*, *enoughness*, and *dosing* provides a frame for the interpretation of bimbo semiotics and its function in the construction of the bimbo.

This investigation is situated within the framework of digital content analysis. By employing a naturalistic and qualitative data collection, it examines the complexities of identity construction within the TikTok bimbo community.

In the discourse surrounding the bimbo, conflicting themes often arise simultaneously. To make sense of this behavior, the concept of micro-hegemonies (Blommaert & Varis 2013) becomes essential. Micro-hegemonies offer a practical solution within various aspects of life by accommodating conflicting ideologies or practices specific to different parts of an individual's life (Blommaert & Varis 2013). These micro-hegemonies replace a singular "robust hegemony," allowing for

the simultaneous propagation a wide range of content and ideas, such as vocal critiques of capitalism alongside sponsored commodities. This fluidity enables individuals to navigate between different hegemonies, adapting views and behavior according to the context and demands of their social spheres within their life projects.

These clusters of micro-hegemonies collectively form a repertoire that serves as the foundation of the individual's identities (Blommaert & Varis 2013: 145).

1.2 TikTok

In the digital sphere, TikTok emerges as a multifaceted platform, embodying a unique blend of versatility and ephemerality that defies easy categorization. As aptly stated by Cervi (2021), TikTok encapsulates an essence of randomness and evanescence, making it a challenge to encapsulate the platform's essence (Cervi 2021: 199 – 200). Launched in 2018 by ByteDance Inc., TikTok initially targeted young teenagers with a focus on lip-syncing. However, during the 2020 lockdown, its user base expanded beyond demographics, evolving into a versatile platform for creating memes, vlogs, and more. By March 2022, TikTok boasted 1 billion monthly users (Omnicores 2023). To access content and upload, users need a profile. The app's "for you page" displays a personalized feed influenced by user interactions, preferences, and activity history, constantly adjusting through an AI algorithm (TikTok 2020). As a starting point for all functions, a video, which is limited to the length of one minute,² must be created or uploaded within the app. After uploading, users on TikTok can select sharing, saving, reacting, or commenting options for their videos, akin to features on platforms like Facebook. Alongside likes, shares, and comments, the view count serves as a crucial engagement metric, especially for creators earning from their content. The choice of sound in TikTok videos significantly impacts visibility, often leveraging popular songs or sonic memes to

² Developments lead to an expansion of this format. Now, TikTok allows up to ten minutes long videos.

reach a wider audience. Further, songs can be used to search for content like hashtags and contribute to the “for you page” algorithm. The algorithm fosters connections among similar users, forming exclusive online communities on the platform. In that way, discourse communities are built and maintained, and through established norms constantly negotiated.

1.3 Bimbo

The term “bimbo” finds its roots in the Italian language, initially referring to a foolish young male during the 1910s (Merriam-Webster 2023b). While retaining its “foolish” connotation, its gender association shifted. From the 1950s onward, it increasingly characterized the stereotype of the “blonde bombshell” epitomized by actresses like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe – portraying attractive women perceived as lacking intelligence. This led to the creation of a mainstream media archetype stemmed from stereotyped, air-headed performances and specific physical attributes like blonde hair or curvy figures depicted by these actresses’ on-screen characters, perpetuating a distinct image.

In contemporary usage, the term “bimbo” predominantly characterizes attractive women perceived as unintelligent. While actresses like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe were only playing the bimbo on-screen, the bimbos of the 1990s and early 2000s embodied a specific lifestyle and behavior, publicly showcasing these traits in their private lives. Personalities such as Paris Hilton, Nicole Richie, or Anna Nicole Smith exemplified this archetype through their public personas.

These public figures not only embraced the appearance associated with the bimbo stereotype but also curated a lifestyle that aligned with the perceived characteristics of a bimbo: a focus on materialism, an emphasis on appearance over intellect, and a party-centric public image. Their media presence and reality TV appearances further solidified the societal perception of bimboism, cementing it as a cultural phenomenon extending beyond scripted roles in movies or television shows.

However, in 2019, there was a notable shift toward destigmatizing the term “bimbo” when pornographic film actress and glamour model Alicia Amira actively embraced and labeled herself as a bimbo (This Morning 2019, Truly 2019). Her intent in reclaiming this label was to reclaim control over the negative connotations associated with the term, aiming to demonstrate that being a bimbo does not equate to lacking intelligence. Amira’s goal was to empower women to confidently own their sexuality, stating, “show people you don’t have to be stupid to be a bimbo [...] and encourage women everywhere to be confident enough to take ownership of their own sexuality” (This Morning 2019). This act initiated a new discourse around the concept of bimboism, signaling an evident shift in its meaning, observable even in entries within the Urban Dictionary.³ On April 9th 2004, the meaning of the bimbo was described as a

“Woman who is not attractive enough to be a model, not intelligent enough to be an actress, and not nice enough to be a poisonous snake.” (Urban Dictionary 2023a)

On November 6th 2020, however, a new entry was added:

“Hyperfeminine woman who does not judge others for body modifications, naively kind, and carries a lot of confidence in herself and her sexuality.” (Urban Dictionary 2023b)

This illustrates a noticeable shift where the negative connotations associated with the term “bimbo” are entirely replaced by a more positive portrayal. The contemporary bimbo phenomenon, prevalent on TikTok, encompasses a diverse community that includes individuals beyond those presenting as female. Shortly after the reimagining of the bimbo on Tiktok, users swiftly crafted a diverse range of bimbo

³ A crowdsourced online dictionary which features definitions of pop cultural phenomena.

variations. These include “male bimbos,” coined as *himbos*⁴ (a portmanteau of him and bimbo), or *gimbos*, referring to goth-bimbos. These iterations share similarities with Chrissy’s bimbo persona, exhibiting apparent superficiality and a strong emphasis on their physical appearance.

2 Corpus

In the following, the data used for the analysis of Chrissy’s bimbo is presented. Section 2.1 focuses on the primary data corpus, which includes videos made by Chrissy for her TikTok profile. The subsequent Section 2.2 addresses the complimentary corpus that was collected for this study, which includes meta data of the video corpus.

2.1 Chrissy

In this paper, the content of one creator is analyzed: Chrissy, a woman in her early twenties living in Chicago, USA.⁵ Chrissy represents an anchor of the bimbo community on TikTok, where she has 5.2 million followers (as of November 2023), making her the biggest bimbo creator on the platform. Her influence on bimboism and her role as a representative is acknowledged outside of TikTok as well, as Rolling Stone and Vice published featured articles about her and the bimbo movement (Dickson 2020, Richards 2022).

She plays with outdated perceptions of the bimbo by willingly embodying stereotypical, air-headed behavior and presenting herself in a sexualized manner. However, the body of thought she propagates is strongly aligned with feminism, anti-racism, women’s rights, and LGBTQAI+ rights, injecting an unexpected depth into her bimbo

⁴ The term “himbo” first was used in 1988 (Merriam-Webster 2023a). It gained popularity after 2020, however, after its use on social media platforms, especially on TikTok.

⁵ Chrissy moved to Los Angeles in 2023, the analyzed content, however, was created during her residence in Chicago in 2021.

portrayal. In a multimodal way and through rich semiotic activities, she intricately constructs a multifaceted and hyperfeminine bimbo persona, serving as a blueprint to create a regulatory discourse about bimboism. Between April 2021 and June 2021 data was collected from the TikTok account described above. Video clips that were released on the profile prior to April 2021 were also collected for the corpus. The oldest video in the corpus was uploaded by Chrissy in January and the newest video in June of 2021. In order to keep the number of clips manageable, not all uploads (231 videos) were collected for the corpus. A random sample was drawn by collecting the videos from the first and third week of the months January 2021 to June 2021. In total, 105 clips were collected from the Chrissy's profile which were then labeled with a corpus item identification "IDn." Since she enabled the option to download her videos clips directly from TikTok, the corpus for this study was created by saving the clips onto a cellphone and transferring them to a hard drive. The length of all videos combined amounted to 28 minutes and 7 seconds and the average length is 35 seconds.

Two extraordinary circumstances have to be noted for the data collection. Firstly, the profile was banned in the first week of May of 2021 and at an unknown time prior to that (this was revealed in a statement by Chrissy). Secondly, during June, Chrissy celebrated Pride and her content shifted towards a focus of LGBTQAI+ themes more than it already was. For the May incident, this week was skipped in the time frame for the data collection and Pride month was noted in the respective clips.

2.2 Meta data

In order to gain insights into how discourse-regulating videos are framed in the context of Chrissy's TikTok, meta data has to be taken into account as well. The meta data that was collected for this study were hashtags, view counts (to count as a view the video must be watched for at least 3 seconds (Cucu 2022)) and likes of the core corpus. This is important in two ways: Firstly, meta data shows how the content itself

is being judged by those creating and viewing it. Secondly, as this study is embedded in a digital ethnographic approach, it is important to include materials found within TikTok's infrastructure to gain insights into how the videos are embedded in the space of TikTok and how the video is going to feed into the algorithm according to the creator, Chrissy. The meta data collected is to be seen as complementary, as this paper primarily focuses on the analysis of the presentation within the videos.

3 Methods

The following subsections offer an insight into the methodological apparatus of this study. Subsection 3.1 shows how the data reduction process was carried out and how the vastness of ethnographic data can be scaled down and made manageable. In Subsection 3.2 summarizes the classification and labelling procedure for the production effort and content type of the videos in the corpus. Whereas in Subsection 3.3 the annotation process is described, Subsection 3.4 deals with the immersion and participation of the author in the bimbo community.

3.1 Data reduction

This section outlines the process of data reduction employed within this study, providing a structured insight into how the corpus of 105 videos was scaled down and assessed based on specific dimensions. However, it is essential to critically examine the approach taken, particularly in the context of feminist analysis. The method utilized a five-dimensional rating system, applied subjectively by the author to evaluate the relevance of constructing the bimbo persona within each video. Dimensions such as *apparel*, *make-up* and *hair*, *speech*, *background music*, and *main topic* were subjected to a rating system. While this approach helped structure the data and simplify the analysis, it is important to consider the implications of "rating" or assessing women's content based on predefined criteria. Assigning points based on how videos

align with a particular persona or concept, in this case, the bimbo archetype, might inadvertently reinforce or impose certain stereotypical notions of femininity. This process may limit the nuanced understanding of the creators' intentions or expressions within their content, reducing multifaceted narratives into a quantifiable scale. Additionally, the emphasis on categorizing content into specific dimensions for the sake of reduction and analysis might risk overlooking the complexities inherent in online personas. The reductionist approach, while facilitating the study's management, might overlook the intricate interplay between various elements present in these videos and their implications within feminist discourse. Overall, while the reduction process aids in organizing and managing the dataset, its limitations and potential impact on interpreting and categorizing women's content should be critically considered within the context of feminist research.

In order to scale down the amount of the data appropriately, data reduction on the corpus of 105 videos was carried out as followed. First, every video that was tagged as an advertisement or included another person in the frame was removed. Then, each of the remaining videos was rated in a five-dimensional rating system by the author regarding the relevance of the construction of the bimbo. The dimensions were chosen by the author either in relation to the importance ascribed to them by Chrissy or their apparent significance in the bimbo cosmos. They include apparel, make-up and hair, speech, background music, and main topic. Each dimension could reach up 2 points and in sum these dimensions could yield up to 10 points. This scale can be seen as a gradual sequence with two poles, where 0 states "mundanity" as in everyday actions such as walking the streets and talking about topics that are irrelevant to the bimbo microcosm and 10 states the outwardly exhibited construction of the bimbo persona.

Essentially, the dimensions were rated regarding their feature BIMBO which describes the *bimboness* of the dimension. This feature is ternary where [+bimbo] yields 2 points and states a fully realized "bimbo act," [±bimbo] which yields 1 point, and [-bimbo] 0 points. Some clips showed both [+bimbo] and [-bimbo] acts in certain dimensions. In these

cases, the feature which was more prominently represented was then chosen as the winner.

The introduction of the feature BIMBO is necessary in three ways. Firstly, it is a measure that can be applied to a large corpus, allowing the data reduction process to be efficient, quantifiable, and reproducible. Secondly, even though this study has ethnographic elements, adding structure to the corpus makes it easier to manage, which ensures the feasibility of future work. And lastly, this feature can also be applied to other creators of the bimbo community, hence making it possible to perform a comparative analysis in the future.

In order to operationalize this rating system, two videos serve as an aid for reference, which were later excluded from the analysis. The first video, ID21, is a clip where Chrissy clarifies “how to be a bimbo.” In this regulatory discourse fragment, specific elements are pointed out that characterize the bimbo persona, and hence every dimension is taken to be a [+bimbo] performance. For example, in this clip it is clarified that “the bimbo doesn’t think” and is “hot”.

ID95, the second reference clip, performs poorly in regards to its *bimboness* as it has a [- bimbo] performance in four out of five dimensions.

The dimensions include the following:

- Apparel: Clothing items that fit the bimbo aesthetic that Chrissy has established in explicit bimbo performances were rated [\pm bimbo] and [+bimbo] when Chrissy explicitly pointed out her appearance in a verbal (e.g., “look at me”) or non-verbal way (e.g., finger point towards her clothing). [-bimbo] was given when there was no clothing visible or when she was in pajamas.
- Make-up and hair: Chrissy attaches great importance to make-up and hair when she gives a bimbo performance. For her, great weight lies on the eyeliner, as she repeatedly emphasizes. Videos where she only wears striking eyeliner were rated [\pm bimbo], in combination with styled hair [+bimbo]. Videos where Chrissy was not wearing make-up or styled her hair were rated [- bimbo].

- Speech: Bimbo catch phrases introduced in ID21, or found in other regulatory bimbo discourse fragments, such as “men are dogs,” “gay rights,” or “fuck capitalism” were the basis for a [+bimbo] rating. A [-bimbo] speech act was the narration of everyday or very personal topics.
- Background music: The usage of recurring songs which are used in bimbo videos, paired with Chrissy’s own voice, were the basis for a [+bimbo] act. Original audio without background music was counted as a [±bimbo] act, and sounds used for current TikTok trends or memes were counted as a [-bimbo] act.
- Main topic of the clip: Topics relating to societal issues were counted as a [+bimbo] act. This included “how to,” relationship issues, LGBTQAI+, or self-care topics. [-bimbo] topics were related to everyday-life or to Chrissy’s personal life.

It has to be noted that these dimensions, above all, come to aid the data reduction process and are only indirectly used to interpret the bimbo persona.

To summarize, videos that solely deal with the construction of the bimbo were rated with 10 points, since each of the five dimensions described above were a [+bimbo] act, which is rewarded with 2 points. Videos which were personal to Chrissy were rated naturally lower as they were more concerned with everyday life in form of a vlog.

All videos which were tagged as advertisements involved another person in the frame, and replies to comments were excluded from the close analysis.

The average rating for the videos was 6 points. For this paper, videos with the ratings 8 and higher were considered for the close analysis. This leads to a reduction from 105 to 23 videos (total of 10 minutes 20 seconds) for the core corpus.

To reinforce the validity of the data reduction approach while acknowledging its complexities within feminist analysis, it is crucial to adopt a more nuanced perspective. The methodology employed a structured rating system to distill and organize a large corpus of TikTok videos, offering a manageable framework for analysis. By categorizing

content based on predetermined dimensions like appearance, speech, and themes, the process facilitated a systematic examination of the bimbo persona, offering insights into its construction. While this approach simplified the analysis, it is essential to recognize its limitations. It may inadvertently limit the depth of understanding creators' diverse expressions and intentions. However, by utilizing this reductionist lens as a starting point, research can initiate exploration into complex online personas. This methodology, if used judiciously and complemented with qualitative insights, can serve as a stepping stone for deeper examinations of multifaceted narratives on platforms like TikTok, contributing to a richer understanding of feminist discourse and digital identity construction.

3.2 Classification/Labeling

All 105 videos were annotated regarding their production effort and type of content in order to see if correlations or patterns emerge with the topics of or the ratings of the video. In the transcriptions showed later in the excerpts, regular text represents a regular voice tone, capitalized text denotes a loud to screaming voice, and italics indicate a breathy, calm manner of speaking.

3.2.1 Production effort

The production effort was labelled as either *low*, *medium* or *high*, depending under what conditions the video clip was created. Videos with low production effort were recorded in only one shot and in the selfie-perspective. To be a high effort video, on the other hand, the clip must have included either different scenes and angles, wardrobe changes, or filmed by another person or with a tripod and subtitles.⁶ 69 % of the collected data were labelled as *low* effort, 17 % as *medium* and 12 % as *high* effort. In the core corpus there are 50 % low, 25 % medium and 25 % low effort videos.

⁶ This assessment results from the personal experience of the author.

3.2.2 Content type

A randomly drawn subset (N = 20) of the whole corpus was examined in order to find patterns or content types, that can be applied to the rest of the data. Five major categories emerged from this subset: *Affirmation*, *meme*, *everyday*, *feminine expression*, and *other*. These types result from different (and not yet quantified) degrees of intensity of the above-described dimensions and their co-occurrence. The whole corpus was then categorized according to these five content types. Some clips exhibited more than one content type, i.e., *feminine expression* and *meme*, in these cases, a decision was made in favor for the prevalent type in the clip. A description of the different content types is given below.

Affirmation

In these videos Chrissy gives affirmations, and motivational talks. The focus lies on the viewer or her target audience. Example (i) shows a sequence of a motivational talk, taken from ID41.

- (i) “[...] now put some sparkles on your face and stomp on anyone who gets in your way.”

Meme

On TikTok, specific sounds, such as pop songs or the original audio from other creators’ posts, become popular and develop a meme-like character, known as a ‘TikTok meme.’ Some of these sounds become trendy⁷ and users participate in those trends to reach a broader audience.

Everyday

The content of these videos includes everyday acts without a focus on aesthetics, conveyed messages or the like. These videos are short personal statements Chrissy makes mostly about herself. There are no explicit references to being bimbo. It has to be noted, that the content

⁷ A ‘trend’ refers to a recurring theme that gains popularity and is widely imitated by users. In contrast, a ‘viral’ video refers to a specific video that spreads rapidly across the platform, gaining a large number of views, likes, shares, and comments in a short period.

type *everyday* does not exclude bimbo performances as Chrissy affirms her bimboness through clothing and appearance. Example (ii), taken from ID99, shows an instance of such an everyday clip.

- (ii) [Chrissy facing the camera on the floor]
 “Listen, I don’t give a fuck if you like my outfit, ok? I don’t wear my outfit for you. I’m wearing it for myself [...] get away from me, *I’m gonna be a slut in peace.*”

Feminine expression

In this type of videos, Chrissy often acts explicitly acts as a bimbo. This category includes tutorials on how to behave, how to look, or how to put make up on in order to be bimbo. These videos are characterized by hyperfeminine appearance, explicit endorsement of sexual promiscuity, and feminist themes. Videos which address issues relevant to society such as sexism, anti-racist, or LGBTQAI+ related topics are also covered under feminine expression clips.

Other

All clips that did not meet the criteria for affirmation, meme, everyday, or feminine expression were labelled as other. These videos include karaoke performances for the most part, stitches in order to promote other creators, but also more serious topics such as depression or political stances. Figure 1 illustrates the relative distribution of content type in the whole corpus.⁸

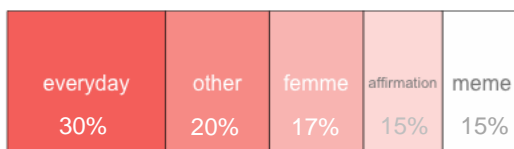


Fig. 1: Relative distribution of content type in the whole corpus (N = 105), percentages are rounded.

⁸ Data visualization was carried out with R Studio (RStudio Team) and the packages *inspectdf* (Rushworth 2021) and *ggplot2* (Wickham 2016).

All videos were coded for above-described types. The majority states everyday videos (30.8 %), whereas the rest of the collected clips are similarly distributed in regard to their content type: 15.4 % affirmation, 18.3 % feminine expression, 15.4 % meme, and 20.1 % other.

3.3 Annotation

Annotation was carried out using the video annotation tool ELAN – linguistic annotator (Brugman & Russell 2004) which allows for annotating both, visual and audio data at the same time. All videos from the corpus were annotated on a basic level, which included the partitioning into different scenes, with information about the production effort, speech (orthographic transcription) and general topic(s) of the clip. The other dimensions, make-up and hair, apparel, and background music were annotated in an Excel sheet, where the ELAN information was also summarized. These two sources combined provide the basis for the analysis.

3.4 Immersion and participation

Immersion took place in the months of March to September 2021. The author spend time on a daily basis using the TikTok app in form of consuming content of their “for you page” as well as seeking out bimbo-specific profiles. They immersed themselves with liking and commenting not only on Chrissy’s posts but also on other bimbo-related content on TikTok. An interview, which would have provided valuable insights and perspective to the interpretation of the data, was not carried out. Despite communicating efforts, the author’s request was not replied to.

4 Analysis and results

In the following subsection 4.1, an overview is provided, reviewing all 23 videos within the core corpus. Following this, Section 4.2 delves into

Chrissy's development of the bimbo persona. Section 4.3 then scrutinizes the collected metadata.

4.1 Overview

Chrissy's own experiences contribute to a great extent to the construction of her bimbo persona. When surveying her videos, it becomes evident that, for Chrissy, becoming a bimbo was connected to a string of personal and emotional turmoil. The bimbo is the result of the emancipation from an emotionally challenging time, blurring the lines between Chrissy and Chrissy's bimbo. Identities have proven here once again not to be of a discrete nature.

In general, Chrissy's performance is characterized by a great amount of self-confidence, evident both in her body language as well as in her manner of speaking, marked by a high-pitched or assertive tone. Her appearance is characterized by the color pink, striking eyeliner, clothes that accentuate her physique, and embellishments like glitter. She directly addresses two specific groups – cisgender heterosexual (further referred to as *cishet*) women and members of the LGBTQAI+ community – using endearing terms, establishing a sense of closeness and intimacy, highlighting them as her primary audience. Cishet men are mostly only talked about rather than directly addressed, thus creating distance between her and men. If directly addressed, it is often in a satirical way as she pretends to talk to (fictional) characters with a stereotypical and negatively evaluated first name, such as Kyle. Cishet men are also never directly shown in the corpus. Critics are addressed on occasion but not on a regular basis (see example (ii)). Another characteristic is the 'performative spontaneity' inherent in most of the clips which gives the videos a notion of everydayness. By performative spontaneity, I refer to actions or behaviors that seem unplanned or unscripted but are actually part of a deliberate performance. It is a way of appearing spontaneous or impromptu while actually being part of a planned or staged act. In the context of content creation like in Chrissy's case, it refers to moments in her videos that appear spontaneous but are

likely planned or rehearsed. Figure 3a and 3b show still frames taken from ID29 and ID11. These show two typical instances for Chrissy’s videos, appearing to be performed spontaneously in the middle of the street while Chrissy proclaims bimbo-related messages.



Fig. 3a-b: Still frames showing typical instances of Chrissy’s videos.

Clips with a high degree of performative spontaneity include the type *affirmation* and appear to be not planned out performances, with short statements such as example (iii), taken from the clip ID11, shows.

- (iii) [Chrissy from the selfie perspective, talking directly to the camera]
 “[...] nothing matters in the end, babe; we’re all gonna die, fuck it...so die a slut!”

Frequently used in Chrissy’s clips, the term “slut” may initially appear as an inappropriate slur, referred to as “[...] a person who is known to have had meals many times with different individuals” (Urban Dictionary 2023c). However, when contextualized within the bimbo diacritic behavior, its negative connotations dissolve. Chrissy’s embrace of sexual

liberation encompasses aspects like promiscuity, redefining the term “slut” without intent to offend, instead becoming a facet of her sexually liberated social persona. Similarly, akin to the term “bimbo,” this designation has recently gained a new interpretation in the Urban Dictionary. In June 2021, “slut” was also redefined as “[...] an awesome woman, of a sexually liberated type” (Urban Dictionary 2023d). In example (ii), Chrissy asserts, “Listen, I don’t give a fuck if you like my outfit, ok? [...] get away from me, *I’m gonna be a slut in peace.*” This declaration reinforces her stance on independence, emphasizing her choice to embrace the term “slut” within her own definition, free from external judgments. This declaration underscores Chrissy’s assertive independence, highlighting that her choices in appearance are not for external validation but rather for her personal satisfaction and comfort, embracing her self-defined identity without external influence.

She employs both, an aggressive and calm manner of speaking when discussing topics, regardless of their nature. Volume modulations as well as voice quality modulations are used for stylistic purposes and are seemingly random. Example (iv), taken from clip ID29, illustrates this.

- (iv) [Chrissy facing the camera on the floor]
 “HONEY. WEAR WHATEVER YOU WANT. YOU ARE GOING TO DIE ONE DAY and it could be today. *And you want to look hot while doing it, bitch.*”
 [Chrissy turns around]
 “Gay rights.”

In this sequence, Chrissy begins with an assertive tone to emphasize the importance of individual choice, urging people to embrace their preferences despite life’s uncertainties. The forceful delivery adds intensity, highlighting the significance of personal freedom and expression. What follows is a stark contrast as Chrissy switches to a breathy, intimate voice, emphasizing the phrase “*And you want to look hot while doing it, bitch.*” This shift in tone signifies a more personal connection, addressing the viewer directly while introducing an aesthetic aspect. The emphasis on looking “hot” while embracing individual choices suggests the fusion of empowerment with a

distinctive visual presentation, intertwining the idea of personal agency with a specific aesthetic ideal. The final transition to a casual tone with “Gay rights” encapsulates Chrissy’s ability to seamlessly incorporate different themes and messages within a short discourse. Here, she effortlessly shifts from emphasizing personal choices and aesthetics to advocating for LGBTQAI+ rights in a nonchalant manner. This dual narrative underscores her ability to intertwine diverse themes within her content, promoting self-expression, empowerment, and social advocacy in a succinct and engaging manner.

Being *hot* is used beyond its conventional meaning of being attractive. Throughout her videos, Chrissy portrays “being hot” as a fundamental component of embodying the bimbo persona. However, her definition of *hotness* extends beyond mere physical appearance; it encompasses a set of attitudes and behaviors. This version of hotness encompasses an internal disposition, emphasizing a mindset rather than a superficial appearance. In example (v), Chrissy states, “Being ugly is a choice. Being hot, that’s easy. It’s all a mindset.” Here, she challenges the conventional notions of beauty by asserting that attractiveness is primarily a product of one’s mindset and attitude. This declaration implies that one’s perceived attractiveness is contingent upon their mindset, their confidence, and their self-love rather than solely reliant on external appearance.

- (v) [Chrissy on roller-skates from a high angle selfie-perspective]
“Being ugly is a choice. Being hot, that’s easy. It’s all a mindset.”

By stating that “being hot” is easy and a matter of mindset, Chrissy underscores the significance of self-perception and confidence over societal standards of physical beauty. This aligns with her broader themes of empowerment and self-assurance, suggesting that the key to being hot lies within one’s self-perception, self-confidence, and embracing individuality rather than conforming to external ideals of beauty.

In most clips, a humorous twist can be expected. These jokes are marked by satirical and dark humor such as example (vi), taken from the clip ID7, shows. This shows an entertaining intention while satirizing once again, the objectification of women.

- (vi) [Chrissy from the selfie perspective, directly talking to the camera]
 “[...] if anyone makes fun of you ...spit on them. But charge them first!

In this instance, Chrissy adopts a direct, conversational tone while addressing the camera. The seemingly comical advice she offers, “[...] if anyone makes fun of you ... spit on them. But charge them first!” carries a layer of satire that subtly critiques societal dynamics and power structures. This phrase, on the surface, seems absurd and humorous, but beneath lies a deeper commentary on empowerment and standing up against mockery or disrespect. From a feminist viewpoint, Chrissy’s statement can be interpreted as a subversion of the traditional power dynamic that often belittles or objectifies individuals, while aligning with feminist ideals of empowerment and autonomy.

4.2 Chrissy’s bimbo

Chrissy effectively crafts emblems for bimboness through her normative discourse fragments, consolidating her version of a bimbo persona. Her self-referencing and repetitive display of bimbo-associated behaviors solidify her interpretation, which spreads widely and becomes enregistered within the TikTok community. Chrissy’s bimbo persona essentially acts as a blueprint, inspiring other content creators to adopt their own rendition of the bimbo archetype. In normative clips like ID85 *bimbo girlfriend* or ID98 *bimbo at the beach*, Chrissy embodies the stereotypical portrayal of a seemingly unintelligent woman. She deliberately speaks slowly, often makes statements implying a lack of intelligence, and portrays herself as an object, hinting at the objectification of women. However, in these same videos, she intertwines political messages. For instance, in a segment from clip ID98, illustrated in

example (vii), she adopts a feminine presentation, mimicking Pamela Anderson's iconic slow-motion run from *Baywatch*. This juxtaposition of stereotypical bimbo traits with moments referencing empowered female figures underscores Chrissy's nuanced approach to challenging and subverting traditional stereotypes.

- (vii) [Chrissy at the beach, walking and being filmed by another person]
 “[...] all you have to do is step on homophobes and republicans [...] so join me on my bimbo adventure and stop caring what ugly people think.”
 [next frame, Chrissy is running in slow motion towards the camera]
 [only as lettering]
 “Gay rights!”

By “ugly” people, Chrissy refers to people who are homophobic, sexist, racist, and are politically right oriented, ascribing this attribute a new or another meaning as she often states, that “being ugly is a choice.” By this she refers once again to *beauty on the inside*.

In bimbo-specific clips, Chrissy always presents herself as hyper-feminine. This is achieved through suggestive body language and her overall appearance including clothes that accentuate her physique and make-up. A reoccurring feature in all of Chrissy's videos is striking eyeliner and colorful eyeshadow. In ID1 *get ready with me – bimbo edition*, a regulatory discourse fragment, Chrissy ascribes great importance to her eye make-up, as example (viii) shows.

- (viii) [Closeup of Chrissy putting on colorful eyeliner]
 “[...] add a little color, make your eyes pop, make sure the men who are staring deep into your soul while you're yelling at them about being misogynistic know how beautiful you are.”

In Figure 4 a-c a series of pictures is shown, taken from Chrissy's Instagram profile, which are characteristic for her as well as for the bimbo persona. These pictures show the typical colorful eye make-up

(Figure 4a-c) as well as suggestive body language (4c) which is featured in videos included in the bimbo discourse.

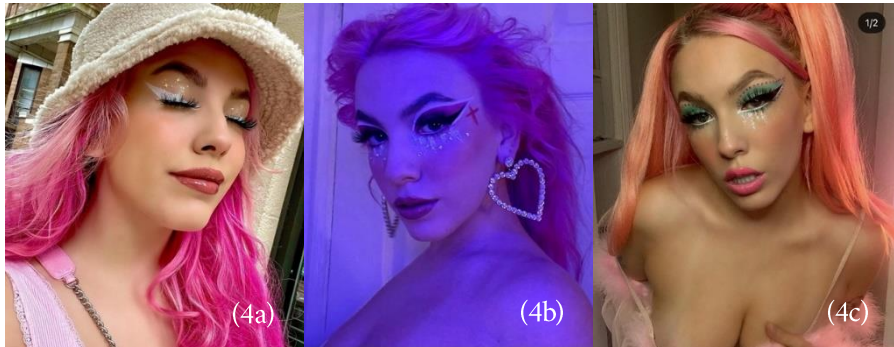


Fig. 4a-c: Pictures from Chrissy’s Instagram profile showing her eye make-up.

In another instance that touches upon the makeup aspect, a feminist interpretation can be applied. In example (i), Chrissy’s instruction to “put some sparkles on your face and stomp on anyone who gets in your way” holds feminist implications worth examining. The reference to a specific materialistic aesthetic, like applying sparkles, could be seen as a nod to the societal expectations of femininity, suggesting a visually pleasing or glamorous appearance. However, Chrissy’s subsequent assertion to “stomp on anyone who gets in your way” juxtaposes this aesthetic expectation with a strong message of empowerment and individuality. Here, Chrissy appears to challenge the conventional notion of femininity tied to “sparkly” appearance by advocating for self-expression and assertiveness. It echoes a feminist idea centered on autonomy and defiance against societal pressures. The call to “stomp on anyone” could be interpreted as a metaphorical rejection of societal constraints, encouraging assertiveness and resilience in the face of opposition. The juxtaposition of these seemingly contradictory directives – embracing an aesthetic choice while advocating for fierce independence – highlights the complexity and depth of Chrissy’s bimbo portrayal. It suggests a reclamation of “traditional” or stereotyped feminine traits or aesthetics as tools for empowerment rather than

conformity, aligning with feminist ideals of self-expression, autonomy, and resilience.

Moreover, Chrissy juxtaposes stereotypical bimbo traits with moments of political assertion and feminist subversion. By embodying elements associated with perceived lack of intelligence or objectification, she intertwines these with messages of empowerment and political activism. This interplay challenges and redefines traditional stereotypes, showcasing a complex and layered approach to her bimboness. Chrissy's use of humor and satire, coupled with her deliberate manipulation of societal perceptions, underscores her intention to challenge norms and champion feminist ideals of autonomy and resilience.

Additionally, Chrissy's focus on appearance extends beyond superficiality; it involves an emphasis on inner beauty, self-expression, and individual assertion. The utilization of makeup and aesthetic choices becomes a canvas for feminist interpretation, exemplified in her directive to "put some sparkles on your face and stomp on anyone who gets in your way." This seemingly contradictory directive encapsulates a feminist narrative of challenging conventional expectations, advocating for self-expression, and fostering resilience in the face of societal pressures.

4.3 Meta data

Chrissy embeds her videos within a feminist, self-love-oriented context by using 26 different hashtags. The most used hashtags were bimbo-related such as #bimbo or #bimbotok. Hashtags that were related to self-confidence such as #imhot were the second most used. One hashtag that was often used but seemingly had no explicit connection to the contents was #ihatecapitalism.

On average, a video received 505.933 views (min = 120 k, max = 1 mil.) whereas four videos with a notably high number of views (mean = 6.57 mil.) had to be excluded from this calculation as they are to be treated as viral and not regular videos. When it comes to likes, a video

from the core corpus received on average 433.625 likes (min = 92 k, max = 3.1 mil.). The view-to-like ratio on TikTok is usually at 4 % (4 likes to 100 views (BeProfit 2021)). In Chrissy's videos this ratio is at almost 44 %, which makes her profile and her content more successful than the average TikTok account.

5 Discussion

The short-lived nature of internet trends and TikTok affordances can lead to the accumulation of a vast amount of data that is difficult to navigate. The age of the information changed to the age of the curation. Effective data reduction processes are crucial for digital content analyses, allowing for better management of digital datasets. Despite being inherently complex, data can be filtered without unknowingly discarding relevant data for specific research questions. Thus, for the data reduction process in this contribution, the feature BIMBO was introduced, and five dimensions were examined regarding their degree of bimboness. These dimensions included clothes, speech, hair and make-up, background music, and topic of the clip.

The analysis revealed a distinct structure in bimbo-specific videos. These videos typically start with an introductory segment that sets up a misleading content framework, seemingly aligning with the objectification of women. However, they culminate in a message that challenges this perspective, serving as a disruption to the viewers' expectations and confronting them with ideas aligned with feminist thought. The slow-motion sequence taken from example (vi) illustrates this, as the running in a bikini acts as bait to hold the viewer while the actual message appears: "Gay rights!"

The analysis of emblematic features in the videos revealed specific elements that serve as key indices for bimboness. Within these identified parameters, two crucial elements stood out in the construction of Chrissy's bimbo persona. Firstly, the content category labeled as "feminine expression," where Chrissy engages with societal issues, emerged as the most significant aspect in the analyzed clips. In

regulatory bimbo discourse videos, Chrissy addresses feminist, anti-racist, or LGBTQAI+ topics while maintaining a hyperfeminine presentation. The deliberate emphasis on her womanhood alongside the concurrent exploration of bimbo themes indicates a strong connection between these intertwined identities.

Make-up also seems to be a key element, making it the second most important dimension in the core corpus. The striking eye make-up is ascribed great importance throughout Chrissy's content by Chrissy herself. Generally, the eyeliner is an integral part in all her videos and has a strong recognition factor, so that an emblematic function is attributed to it. The make-up and expression of (explicitly indicated by her as) radical leftist views act as active substances that contribute to the set of emblematic features that are *enough* (Blommaert & Varis 2013) to represent Chrissy's bimbo persona. When discussing the construction of identity, particularly within the context of Chrissy's content, her radical leftist views go beyond being a political stance. They become an element in shaping Chrissy's bimbo identity. In this context, radical leftist views are not merely about adhering to a particular political ideology. Instead, they contribute to Chrissy's self-presentation and how she constructs her bimbo persona within the digital space.

Chrissy's bimbo content aims to challenge the stereotype of a "dumb woman" by showcasing her comprehension of fundamental human rights and various degrees of misogyny. While her content features self-sexualization, it diverges from internalized misogynistic perceptions that typically conform to conventional feminine norms and cater to the cishet male gaze. Instead, her self-sexualization serves a different purpose – to reclaim bodily autonomy, promote empowerment, and advocate for sexual liberation. Postmodern sensibilities see self-sexualization for empowerment as regressive to feminist advancement in society. Chrissy, however, rejects this view and affirms her feminist beliefs through such forms of self-expression and femininity. Being *hot*, in Chrissy's terms, can be interpreted as a behavioral diacritic or an emblem of bimboness.

The evaluation of the meta data revealed that Chrissy is prolific at being a bimbo creator on TikTok. Video views and likes are above

average for her uploads on the social media platform. The hashtags she uses show that Chrissy judges her own content as feminist (e.g., #feminityispower), but also as ironic and comical, which reflects how she sees herself as a bimbo.

Chrissy's personal journey significantly shapes her bimbo persona. Her videos hint that becoming a bimbo emerged as a response to personal struggles, blurring the lines between Chrissy and her bimbo identity, showcasing how identities intertwine beyond discrete boundaries. In other words, Chrissy's bimbo is a polysemic manifestation of her feminist beliefs through which she also creates and offers an online community space for self-expression.

Chrissy's construction of the bimbo persona transcends mere aesthetic choices, embodying a feminist reclamation of femininity as a vehicle for empowerment and self-expression. The complexity and depth within her portrayal invite nuanced interpretations, contributing to a broader discourse on identity, empowerment, and the redefinition of societal norms within digital spaces.

However, does bimbo feminism effectively achieve the redefinition of the stereotypical 'dumb blonde' as a symbol of female empowerment? It appears that this concept struggles to find its footing, wavering between satire and reclamation without fully embodying either. In this case, satire would only succeed with an undercurrent of irony. The bimbo would have to acknowledge her intelligence behind its materialistic facade while knowingly playing into the patriarchy. The issue arises when bimboism takes itself too seriously to be truly satirical. The hyperfeminine presentation might aim to wield power within the patriarchal structure, but it comes across at face value, reinforcing stereotypes rather than challenging them – projecting an image of "I'm a hot bimbo who can't do math." While Chrissy's content held a lot of political elements in 2021, the execution fell short in dismantling these standards convincingly. For instance, while supporting sex work, Chrissy's stance aligns more with standard liberal feminist perspectives, overlooking how sex work commodifies the female body (also evident in example (vi) "spit on them but charge them first"). Moreover, her promotion of anti-capitalist ideals paradoxically intertwines with a

hyper-materialistic aesthetic that remains inaccessible to most women. This contradiction fails to deliver the intended satirical edge, instead presenting itself as a serious empowerment narrative.

6 Conclusion

From the detailed examination of Chrissy's content on TikTok, several insightful conclusions emerge. Firstly, the analysis underscored the necessity of refined data reduction methods in handling the vast and transient nature of internet trends. The introduced feature BIMBO and its associated dimensions provided a structured approach to understanding bimbo performances, aiding in the identification of emblematic features associated with bimboness. This structured method blends qualitative and quantitative analysis, allowing for a nuanced examination. However, it sparks reflection within feminist analysis due to its subjective nature, potentially reinforcing stereotypes. Categorizing content against fixed criteria risks oversimplification, limiting the understanding of creators' intentions. While aiding organization, this approach demands caution, ensuring sensitivity without imposing rigid frameworks. It is vital to assess how these methods shape interpretations in feminist discourse. Further, engaging in dialogue or interviews with creators could provide an invaluable qualitative dimension to this analysis. This would offer a deeper understanding of their perspectives, motivations, and the contextual nuances shaping their content. However, it is imperative to also acknowledge potential limitations inherent in this approach. Accessibility to creators, their willingness to participate, and the potential introduction of subjective bias are key considerations. Incorporating creator input should supplement, not replace, the established quantitative methodology, aiming for a balanced integration of qualitative and quantitative data for a comprehensive analysis.

The analysis showed that Chrissy's bimbo performance is characterized by a distinct structure, employing an enticing introduction that later subverted conventional expectations with a disruptive feminist

message. While humorous elements permeate her content, they serve as vehicles for ironic and satirical expressions within her portrayal, presenting the bimbo as a digitally-mediated social persona standing for gender inclusivity, self-expression, and bodily autonomy in opposition to the norms of a patriarchal society.

When critically reflecting on the limitations of this feminist construction, however, it encourages consideration about the movement's impact and the narratives it embraces. It invites introspection into whether bimbo feminism inadvertently reinforces certain societal norms, albeit unintentionally, by not fully encompassing the diverse experiences and perspectives inherent in feminist discourse.

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