



Natalie Wynn:  
How Personal Experience Can Win an Audience

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1. Known for deconstructing pop culture and weird trends, the video essay is a genre that has solidified its niche on YouTube in the past five years. Among the most popular creators within it, is Natalie Wynn, who makes videos around the intersection of internet culture and politics. In a dramatic show of colorful characters and metaphors, Wynn constructs arguments around how the internet facilitates various political agendas to an audience that is also affected by the internet as a means of social media. She finds purpose in educating netizens about their own environment so that the internet can be a little more self-aware. In her video “Cringe,” she smartly critiques the culture around what it means to be cringe and argues that it can be overcome. Her stylish delivery and nuanced opinions keep subscribers coming back, but her personal background serves to address the topics perfectly and empathetically.
2. A former philosophy student, Wynn is no stranger to academic format. She structures her arguments by tackling one subject at a time and using various sources to strengthen her point. In describing something as abstract as cringe, she proves her understanding by statistics, internet forums, and classical philosophy. These function to create a solid starting point before making claims around the word. Wynn first provides personal examples, and then consolidates them by introducing a more succinct definition by Melissa Dahl. Then, she describes a study in Dahl’s book that describes an anthropological experiment that provides a more academic description. The inclusion of these sources shows the audience that Wynn has done her research on

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the topic and serves to put her and the audience on the same page for when she starts building her argument.

3. Wynn cites credible definitions that don't require the audience to take her at her word, but much of her argument does require you trusting her logic. While logos is often described as data and statistics, Wynn's videos are appealing because she walks you through the arguments she makes. When Big Red, a particularly vocal and grating feminist, was taped and put online, the overwhelming response to her was brutal and jeering. Her eventual infamy, as a feminist specifically, gave the feminist movement a bad reputation. Misogyny prevailed, evident in her respective comments. Wynn argues that "...through mascotization, you declare that this memefied person represents an entire group or movement." (19:46-19:51). She follows by detailing how a cringeworthy individual is received by the audience. "When we see a mob of people...laughing at someone and ridiculing them, we register an emotional memory of it as a warning: don't act like that, or people will laugh at you." (21:35-21:45). The humiliation worked to further an anti-social justice agenda, enhancing the idea that feminism was unnecessary. She adds that similar attacks to reputation happen the same way in celebrities and political characters. She does not back this claim with further evidence, but her previous step-by-step explanation makes this a believable extrapolation. Her academic background is evident in the procedural way she presents these claims.
4. Focused on creating a solid, logical arguments, Wynn's pathos is not always obvious. Her videos don't harken the audience to take up arms against nasty internet trolls, but rather to keep a conscience around the weird stuff that inevitably occurs online. This is best seen in her lamentful description of Christine Chandler, otherwise known as Chris Chan, a long-time person of interest on the internet. After posting a super cringey comic, "Sonichu," in 2007, Chandler was harassed relentlessly. Her explosive reactions to internet trolls' inflammatory comments, often attributed to her autism, only made it worse. Where most Christorians (Chris Chan historians) simply regard Chris Chan as a far-away social experiment, Wynn plainly lists the atrocities that Chandler faced. Wynn has had her share of internet creepiness, so she approaches Chandler's case with sympathy. Particularly sinister internet trolls have gone as far as "creating pornographic parodies of Sonichu, posting candid photos of her... [They] tricked her into giving out passwords, they posted all her emails online. They showed up in person and photographed her house." (34:16-34:30). Worse by far, she remarks, "[T]hey groomed a child to deceive an autistic person into performing sex acts for their

entertainment.” (36:29-36:36). Wynn’s stark language and disapproving tone tells the audience that these actions are repulsive. There is nothing Chandler could have possibly done to deserve the absolute horror that befell her. Including the gory details, Wynn appeals to pathos by making a public humiliation of Christorians as she had just described earlier. In fact, Wynn doesn’t even make the argument that this torture was immoral. She simply lets the atrocities speak for themselves. Her disgust of these pervers affected me; when Chris Chan was arrested earlier this year, I found myself angry with anyone who was interested in reading about her life. Don’t you know that interacting with this criminally obtained information (morally) implicates you too?

5. Wynn herself is an avid internet user, and she uses this to display her credibility. The most titillating way she does this is her choice in language. While introducing cringe, she creates her own list of cringe characteristics: “Bronies, furries, otaku... incels, neckbeards... queer AFAB ukulele players...” (16:48-17:08) Not only are these terms accurate, but a few of them are in-group identifiers. “AFAB” is mostly used within queer spaces; “otaku” hasn’t been the popular identifier for overly obsessed anime fans in about a decade. The audience can assume that Wynn has either been a part of these spaces or interacted with them in a large way. Sometimes the ethos is so embedded in the performance, you miss it. She inserts quick jabs at her own argument that resemble a chaotic comments section. These similarly serve to clue the audience in that she is aware of the general opinion regarding whatever she is talking about. She describes how men dismissed girl gamers in the early 2010s, calling them “pleb-tier casual[s]” (20:30). She correctly identifies the main jokes used by those opposed to the transgender identity as “attack helicopter, two genders, 76 genders, special snowflakes.” (54:19-15:21). In her second costume, a “heckin striped sock nya nya catgirl,” she tells us she’s “giving fujoshi realness nya,” referring to her cat ears and body pillow (44:10-44:39). Correct use of these markers show that Wynn is proficient in the language of the internet. You listen to her argument because she obviously know what she is talking about.
6. Wynn is known for her colorful sets and costumes, which she changes multiple times each video. In this way, she invokes Kairos. In the video, Wynn first appears in a polite tea party setting to acknowledge her audience. Then, to introduce some cringey characters from a bird’s eye view, she appears as a ringmaster for a circus. Her timing here serves to reflect the way she talks about them. “[W]e’ve got schizos, fatties, and spergs! Come see sexual deviants on display!” (12:20-12:23). She calls these people pejorative terms in the callous way a ringmaster

would. She suspends disbelief; she invites the viewer to fully see her cast as freaks, on the same side of the pointed finger as she. After this, she inverts the perspective. In bright pinks and cat ears, Wynn leans in to her own embarrassing persona, inviting the audience to join her on this side of the mockery. The juxtaposition of the ultimate cringey cat girl next to the ring master serve to help reflect the tone shift from objective to personal.



Figure 1: Wynn dressed as a catgirl with a body pillow

6. After switching the focus of cringe to herself, Wynn tackles cringe and its presence in her own life. Within this long description about her own feelings on cringe, she harkens the audience to think critically about how we deal with embarrassment: “The humiliation and bullying we’ve experienced is internalized as shame. When we project that shame onto scapegoats and onto each other, it becomes cringing and contempt.” (76:00-76:07). Then, she asks, what should we do about our own fear of cringe? Which she answers with a quote by David Foster Wallace: “There is a lot of narcissism in self-hatred.” (79:38). The idea of cringe being selfish had not been mentioned before, and after a long spiel about feeling self-conscious and reminding the audience how it feels to be self-conscious, Wynn punches with the idea that something as personal as self-hate can make a narcissist. She then offers Dahl’s answer to self-cringe/self-hate: self-indifference. This argument works because of the timing. The whole video is dedicated to the intersection of viewing cringe and how it affects us personally, so it is effective to end on a note that snaps you out of that thinking. Perhaps too nihilistic, Wynn ends the video chanting “nothing matters.” (80:30-80:50). Though cliché, it serves to reinforce her point that realizing our insignificance

the world on a large scale is the best way to stop cringing at yourself.

7. YouTube videos serve as a unique rhetorical situation: an audience that can leave at any time. Wynn knows that humans get bored easily, so she uses direct language and creates flashy sets to grab their attention and talk about relevant topics. “Cringe” is emblematic of all of Natalie Wynn’s videos: it is smart, polished, and witty. With almost 1.5 million subscribers and within the top 10 most subscribed Patreon users, it is easy to see how effective her work is. Wynn’s communication style is both conversational and informative. Her ongoing experience as a creator only builds up her power in persuasion. She perfectly blends rhetorical devices by connecting her rich personal experience to logic and sympathy. In this way, Natalie Wynn is an incredible rhetorician.

### Works Cited

“Cringe | ContraPoints.” YouTube, uploaded by Natalie Wynn, 10 May 2020, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRBsaJPkt2Q&t=128s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRBsaJPkt2Q&t=128s).

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