



## **Confession and Branding of Anorexia and Bulimia in My Eating Disorder Story YouTube Videos**

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### **Abstract**

When Googled “My Eating Disorder Story YouTube”, over 4,000,000 million results come up, depicting the growing popularity of the videos. The My Eating Disorder Story genre on YouTube draws attention to the self and the act of confession by making the face the central focus of the screen, and uses scrolling text, photographs, editing, and music to dramatize and create suspense regarding the words of confession. The videos’ creators are engrossed in the essentialist ideology and culture of branding on YouTube. YouTube is a business that profits from the success of YouTube personalities and the more popular a personality the more revenue YouTube will earn from views and advertisements. Because YouTube is about the “You” of the video by showing the “You” through the actual appearance of the YouTuber in the video or the appearance of the YouTuber through the personality of the videos and channel, YouTube is then about creating a specific personality or brand where the self is what is branded and sold to the public. The brands or narratives on eating disorder are presented in identical ways, whether consciously or unconsciously by the YouTubers, which then presents disordered eating in an essentialist way and therefore brand. By presenting the stories in an essentialist way or brand the similar narratives of disordered eating suggest that there is one way to tell the story of one’s eating disorder, imposing a truth in what it means to be anorexic and how one chronicles that experience.

This paper will argue that through the aesthetics and content of the videos the My Eating Disorder Story videos are acts of confession that essentialize and brand disordered eating into a singular experience that then marks the uploader of the video themselves as subjects to disordered eating, branding, and YouTube.

### **Keywords**

YouTube, anorexia, branding, confession, shame

On January 22, 2016 Cassey Ho, fitness YouTube celebrity and creator of blogilates, posted a video on her YouTube channel called “Why I will NEVER DIET Again.” In the video Ho explains how from 2012-2013 she developed the eating disorder of orthorexia, a type of eating disorder where when one only eats healthy food. Ho claims that she wants to be honest with her self and her YouTube community in order to help others avoid experiences with disordered eating, but to also reject the harmful influences that made her develop orthorexia in the first place (blogilates).

The video represents the growing popularity of My Eating Disorder Story videos. The majority of the video is simply framed and features a stationary camera on Ho as she sits in her living room and talks directly into the camera. The rest of the video is composed of intercuts of photographs of Ho as she struggled with her weight, jumpcuts, text, zooms, advertisements for blogilates, and muted clips from an anti dieting Lean Cuisine commercial. All of these traits, except clips from diet commercials, are repeatedly found in the My Eating Disorder Story genre on YouTube. The aesthetic choices draw attention to the self and the act of confession by making the face the central focus of the screen and use scrolling text, photographs, editing, and music to dramatize and create suspense regarding the words of confession.

Ho’s video and other creators of My Eating Disorder Videos are engrossed in the essentialist ideology and culture of branding on YouTube. Because YouTube is a business that profits from the success of YouTube personalities, the more popular a personality the more revenue YouTube will earn from views and advertisements. And, because YouTube is about the “You” of the video by showing the “You” through the actual appearance of the YouTuber in the video or the appearance of the YouTuber through the personality of the videos and channel, YouTube is then about creating a specific personality or brand, where the self is what is branded and sold to the public. Once a certain YouTube brand is popular, others will often copy this brand. This is seen through gaming channels that have copied the flippant comedic style of YouTube millionaire PewDiePie, the similar structure, aesthetics, and length of exercise videos, as well as the almost identical videos in the genre of My Eating Disorder Story. The person and content of the YouTube channel becomes a brand, such as the brand of fitness instructor, gamer, or storyteller of eating disorders. The brands or narratives on personal topics such as eating disorders are presented in similar ways, whether consciously or unconsciously by the YouTubers, which presents disordered eating in an essentialist way and therefore brand. By presenting the stories in a hermeneutic way or brand, the repeated narratives of disordered eating suggest that there is one way to tell the story of

one's eating disorder, imposing a truth in what it means to be anorexic and how one chronicles that experience. To clarify, hermeneutics is the concept of an imposed truth and essence of self that requires self-decipherment and confession. The genre of disordered eating videos on YouTube then functions as a form of hermeneutic identification and interpretation.

This paper argues that through the aesthetics and content of the videos the My Eating Disorder Story series of videos are acts of confession that essentialize and brand disordered eating into a uniform experience that then marks the uploader of the video themselves as subjects to disordered eating, branding, and YouTube.

### **Aesthetics of My Eating Disorder Story Videos and Shame**

Disordered eating narratives are part of a larger genre on YouTube called "illness narratives" (Holmes 6). The genre consists of videos concerning teenage suffering and is focused on topics involving bullying, self-harm, and disordered eating (6). The videos all have similar aesthetics, star young girls or boys, and use written text and emotional music to convey the uploaders' suffering and grief. The majority of the videos are also represented by white young girls between the ages of 13 and 19 and are native English speakers (6), although I will also consider videos created by people who identify as male and who are older than the average age range. Due to the abundance of the videos on YouTube, as well as the website's inability to search from reverse upload date, it is difficult to locate a date when the videos first began to be uploaded onto YouTube. The oldest video found was posted on 7 February 2007 by Charlxttte, and is called "My Anorexic Story". The newest videos were posted as recent as an hour ago, suggesting that the videos have been popular since the early years of YouTube and will continue to be popular in the future.

The slideshow style of the videos features only selfies, title cards of text, music, and sometimes older videos of the uploader. The current day uploader is never seen and no cinematography occurs because the video usually consists only of photographs. Confessional style videos also consist of photographs, text, and music, but feature the uploader talking directly into the camera or webcam. In these videos filters are often used, jumpcuts occur, and the backgrounds of the uploaders' bedroom or other spaces can be seen. The videos can be professionally produced like Ho's video; these use a high quality camera and lighting, or, as is more common, the videos are produced by non-professional filmmakers and the uploaders use a webcam to make the videos.

Regardless of the style of My Eating Disorder Story video, the face, body, and words or confession of the subject are always the central focus of the video, calling attention to the act of confession. In the slideshow version of the videos the aesthetics are simple and non-professional and call attention to the self of the video. Because the video techniques lack complexities there are no distractions and the audience is forced to pay attention to the text, editing, and photographs because no other visuals occur. For example, in Charlttte's video "My Anorexic Story", the 3:15 minute long video features nothing but two selfies, colored texts on title cards, dissolves, a lullaby style song, and zooms into the photographs. Text from the title card includes "anorexia, the Dream Never dies [dissolve edit] and just because I can cope doesn't mean it's gone [dissolve] one day I saw the people around me suffer [dissolve] they knew... the farther I'd go, the harder to stop [dissolve] but I never thought it would nearly kill me" (Charlttte). The dissolves during beats of the song further emphasize the words and create a sense of fluidity between the texts by using a soothing style of editing instead of an abrupt or harsh hard cut. As each title card dissolves into the other certain words change colors highlighting them. In the last line of the quoted text, kill turns from yellow to red during the dissolve, once again simply calling attention to the serious tone of the video and the uploader's desire to address the painful and deadly consequences of disordered eating. Because the video lacks technical complexities the story of the disordered eating becomes the entire focus of the video.

In the confessional style videos the uploaders largely use webcams to film themselves as they discuss their eating disorder story directly to the viewer or camera, also making the face the central focus. This occurs in rocket girl's "MY ANOREXIA STORY TRIGGER WARNING". In the video rocket girl is in front of a plain white wall and the entire video consists of her talking to the camera. She is in the middle of the frame during the entire video and the viewers see her exclusively from her chest to the top of her hairline because the top of her head is cut off. The video is unprofessional in that she is talking to a camera and the only types of edits that occur are jumpcuts. The framing is also in contrast to traditional cinema in that she does not follow the rule of thirds or leave headroom. The frame cuts off the top of her head, and because she is in the center of a plain white wall, no depth of field can occur. Her face is the only visual interest in the frame and is the focal point of the video. rocket girl's face as the visual interest of the frame is reinforced by certain jumpcuts in the video that cut her off in mid sentence. These jumpcuts do not undermine rocket girl as a speaker, but the visuals and audio once again draw attention to the self on screen. Her words are not

always then the focus, but her face is. The use of multiple long takes in the video also further draw attention to her face because the camera remains uninterrupted on rocket girl for long periods of time.

Other videos such as NikkiPhillippi's "My Eating Disorder" use a webcam that draws attention to her self. In her video she uses jumpcuts and speaks directly into the camera, but she uses other technical features such as slow motion, voice filters, and sound effects. In the beginning of the video she starts by singing "Testing, testing, 1,2,3" through a high pitch voice modifier and a cinematic filter that makes the image appear as if it has wavy lines like a vintage television. In another moment she uses a slow motion effect to repeat the words "eating disorder" and when she compares herself to Olive from the Popeye cartoon, she edits her snapping fingers with a sound effect that is in time with a popup image of Olive. The use of slow motion and sound filters make her the center of attention by giving her a strange voice and slowing down time so her words and her corresponding facial movements are exaggerated and last longer. The video is edited to focus longer on her face. She is also always in the center of the frame and only jumpcuts, slow motions, and insertions of photographs on the side of the screen occur. She never leaves the frame. These visuals that call attention to the self setup the act of confession through an aesthetics that highlights the self and the words spoken by the uploader.

The verbal or written content of the videos are similar. Most of the confessional style videos start off with introductory remarks to the audience, explaining that the videos will be about the uploader's former use of disordered eating. Often the YouTuber's past use of disordered eating is presented as a reveal, even though the title usually makes the reveal obvious, and a truth that must be spoken if the YouTuber is going to remain honest with his or her YouTube community. Sometimes the YouTuber, such as Ho, will dramatize the reveal of her use of disordered eating and explain how it may come as a surprise to her viewers that she once had an eating disorder.

Today in this video I want to share with you something that I've been really ashamed of, and I didn't want to tell you for a really long time, in fact for like three years, because I didn't want to admit to myself that I had a problem, and this is going to be a very emotional, I think video, and I never talked about it publicly, and like I said, I refrained from doing that because I felt like it could

be controversial, or could be, a lot of people could judge me for it, but, you know what, I want to be super honest with you. (blogilates)

Ho then goes on to state that when she trained for a bikini contest she developed an eating disorder. The video then cuts to a title card that states “Time to get real.” (blogilates), before she chronicles what lead to her disordered eating. Stating that she never revealed her disordered eating past before suggests eating disorders are something that must be confessed. Ho must be honest or “get real” (blogilates).

In the slideshow style of the My Eating Disorder Story genre the videos also begin with a confession of disordered eating, but are usually more direct about it and state they had an eating disorder through text that occurs in the first frame or slide of the video. For example, the first two slides of indiefox187’s video state “My name is Claire” and then, “I’m 16 years old and recovering from anorexia” (indiefox187), and Elizabeth Mitchell’s video begins with the slide “This is My Anorexia Story” (Elizabeth Mitchell). Despite usually directly addressing their eating disorder instead of introducing the video and then confessing about their disordered eating past, the slideshow videos still use a language of confession and create suspense regarding the disordered eating. In Elizabeth Mitchell’s video after the first slide a series of title cards are used that express “I was healthy and I had a lot of friends/ I laughed, I smiled, & talked all the time/ I was happy, really happy/ But then things changed/ I was more self-conscious of my body/ I was slowly changing” (Elizabeth Mitchell). Between each title card Mitchell dissolves to photographs of herself with friends, and after she states “But then things changed/ I was more self-conscious of my body/ I was slowly changing” (Mitchell) the photographs now show her weight loss before dissolving to a picture of her in a hospital where one assumes she became hospitalized after losing too much weight. Similar to how Ho waits several minutes into the video to reveal her disordered eating, the way the slides are edited in Mitchell’s video make it seem like she is revealing her disordered eating in a dramatic and confessional way. Despite stating in the first slide that the video is about her disordered eating, she has to build up to the disclosure of the pictures of her disordered eating self and build up to the text that describes herself as “sick, physically, mentally, & emotionally” (Elizabeth Mitchell).

The idea that anorexia, bulimia, and other types of disordered eating habits are something that need to be confessed in order for one to move on, equates disordered eating with shame and something one should initially hide because it is too unpleasant or

controversial for one to discuss openly. Ho directly equates disordered eating with embarrassment and the sensational when she says that she was ashamed of her disordered eating and that discussing her disordered eating is controversial (blogilates). In her video NikkiPhillippi's comments "I never blatantly talked about or made a soul video about [my eating disorder]" (NikkiPhillippi) suggesting that similar to Ho's past secrecy of her orthorexia, NikkiPhillippi's disordered eating was something she previously hid before she became able to confess to her audience her obsessive thoughts concerning her weight and eating habits. The language of confession and declaration that she no longer has an eating disorder places disordered eating into a category of shame because it is something one must shed in order to get to the stage of confessing.

Psychologists have written about the presence of both shame and pride in anorexic women. In his article "Shame and Pride in Anorexia Nervosa: A Qualitative Descriptive Study" Finn Skarderud explores the presence of the contradictory emotions in anorexic patients. In his study female anorexic patients were interviewed by the author and asked various questions, some which concerned shame. In his results he found that a large portion of the anorexic women interviewed expressed shame and disgust regarding their bodies and eating habits (7-12). But others interviewed also explained their pride in being able to starve their bodies and be anorexic while others failed (12-13). The paper concludes by expressing the importance of patients openly discussing what they are ashamed of in order to end silence associated with shame that then prevents the patients from opening up and talking to their therapists about taboo or uncomfortable topics (15).

In the videos shame is associated with one's disgust over one's former emaciated body, but also one's disgust with his or her former pride over the emaciated body and the effect the eating disorder had on the uploader's family. In her video Ho asserts that she now feels like it was superficial to enjoy and be proud of her more slender body while she was training for the bikini contest (blogilates). Her former pride over her orthorexia, as well as the orthorexia itself, can then be inferred to be what she means when she proposes that she was ashamed of her disordered eating past.

It is notable that Ho says in in her video that she wants "to share with you something that I've been really ashamed of, and I didn't want to tell you for a really long time" (blogilates). Apparently she is no longer ashamed of the disordered eating, but just ashamed of her vain enjoyment of losing weight. The video then suggests that disordered eating is

something one should be ashamed of because it leads one to becoming superficial. But it is also something that one needs to confess in order to be honest. Once one confesses or is ready to confess then the shame disappears and is replaced with the cathartic experience of confessing. This idea relates to Skarderud's article that ends by stating the importance of patients' discussing what they are ashamed of in order for therapy to be successful and remove the stigma of shame (15). Like the uploaders, the patients needed to confess their shame.

The depiction of disgust and pride is more complicated in the slideshow style of videos. Through the use of photographs, editing, and music, the uploaders' intent seems to be to showcase their emaciated bodies as sites of pain and disgust. The shame is also present through the texts of the videos that highlight how the uploaders felt guilty for hurting their families by practicing disordered eating.

In ShezzVR's video he associates his disordered eating body with disgust by describing his body as gaunt and explaining that due to his diet he was "physically deprived of nutrients, essential for a healthy lifestyle" (ShezzVR) and that he began to suffer heart and cognitive problems after losing so much weight. Later in the video ShezzVR comments that he is not proud of the weight loss and now associates his slender body with sickness (ShezzVR).

Despite linking disorder eating to disgust and illness, in the beginning of the video ShezzVR explains that being overweight made him insecure and that he lacked confidence to go outside, take pictures of himself, and interact with people. As the video continues and ShezzVR chronicles his weight loss he shows more pictures of his changing body and writes how proud of the weight loss he was. In a later slide ShezzVR writes that he felt accomplished after not eating for four days (ShezzVR). This bodily pride and sense of accomplishment is in contrast to the first seconds of the video where ShezzVR uses text to tell his story and when his body is shown, the photographs are either out of focus or are close ups or medium shots of his torso that prevent his full body from being in frame. This declaration of pride and accomplishment is in opposition to the later lack of pride ShezzVR expresses he now feels regarding his disordered eating past. Despite claiming that he has no pride over his former body, his comments suggest that initially he was proud of his emaciated body.

This pride is also evident in the pictures of his weight loss. In the pictures he is shirtless and the video lingers longer on his ever decreasing body, in contrast to the out of focus photographs and quick cuts used to showcase his heavier body. In other photographs ShezzVR stretches out his clothes to show off the weight loss and uses post edit zooming and framing to exaggerate his emaciation. The majority of the pictures are also selfies, indicating that once he lost weight he felt comfortable taking his picture, even if he did not plan to share the pictures with others. Although ShezzVR's goal of the video seems to be to warn others about the dangers of disordered eating, the photographs represent his past pride over his body as well as his confidence regarding his body when he practiced disordered eating. The back and forth between feeling pride, disgust, and shame suggest that anorexia or other disordered eating habits can only be documented once the uploaders admit and confess their disordered eating habits and view their former disordered eating bodies as disgusting, and the desire to lose weight as something shameful.

The styles of the video are linked to confession and shame but because the videos exist on YouTube they are also linked to the ideology of YouTube and branding.

### **Branding of YouTube and My Eating Disorder Story Genre**

YouTube first began in 2005 as a site where individuals could easily upload videos, watch videos, store content, and comment and follow others' YouTube uploads (Banet-Weiser 278). The ideology of YouTube as a user friendly site available to everyone, as well as a site about communicating with others, is noted through YouTube's early use of the slogan "Broadcast Your Self" as well as the name YouTube, a play on words joining You with Tube, a slang for television.

In 2006 Google bought the site and soon advertisements began to appear before videos. After the buyout Google increased competition with platforms such as Hulu and videos containing music and films became more frequent on the site (Vonderau and Snickars 10-11). After the merger YouTube's goal of profits became more obvious to the public with the site's focus on increasing economic gains evident through the creation of content designed to generate more views so more advertisement deals with corporations would occur. At the same time amateur video uploads continued to be popular, but those videos also

usually featured advertisements before the video or embedded advertisements on the bottom of the video (10-11).

In order to make profits from “You”, the website became similar to a video store, where through meta information a viewer’s interest can be monitored and then targeted in order to get that viewer to watch more videos, which results in YouTube making more money from advertisements. As defined by Frank Kessler and Mirko Tobias Schafer in “Navigating YouTube: Constituting a Hybrid Information Management System”, meta-information are the key words, titles, and info boxes uploaders use to describe their videos, and the key words, titles, and phrases users type while searching for videos (281). Popular searches and keywords become saved by the system, so if one searches for “Cassey Ho diet” YouTube can suggest her video titled “Why I will NEVER DIET Again” based on others who used the phrase earlier to find the video (284). YouTube then uses this information to perform the viewer’s interest and offer him or her categories to choose from that matches the person’s previous videos and interests, which results in more views and money for YouTube if people watch the videos they are recommended. Because YouTubers also want more views, for money or just to have an interactive YouTube community, they also have to perform viewers’ interest or become a specific brand.

The uploaders can also use other social media platforms to promote and categorize their YouTube brand and videos. On other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram users can tag their posts themselves creating a personal categorizing system that functions as a form of data structuring (Cocq 275). By linking to their own YouTube videos on Twitter and other platforms, the YouTubers create categories and keywords to label and identify their YouTube content. In “Indigenous Voices on the Web: Folksonomies and Endangered Languages” Copp lie Cocq explains that hashtags on Twitter “function as keywords: they are a way to filter, categorize, share, and organize” (275). Although the uploaders do not control the metadata system YouTube uses to monitor and categorize viewers’ interests to then suggest other videos to watch, the use of keywords to describe their videos on other platforms results in user controlled keywords. Other people can also link to the videos through Twitter or other platforms and then create their own keywords and hashtags to mark the YouTube content. This style of a collaborate classification system is known as folksonomy. Cocq describes folksonomy as “a user-generated taxonomy” (275). Folksonomy was coined in 2004 by Van der Val and refers to any type of tag or label that indexes online content to make it easy for others to catalogue and find. Hashtags and other

styles of folksonomy grant the tagger the ability to organize content around specific interests and identities (Salazar 17). When YouTubers use hashtags on Twitter to link to their videos they are not just publicizing their videos and channels, but they are devising their own classification system. The taggers' use of the keywords sires a brand of various interests to associate the videos with. When other people re-tweet the video the previous tags are repeated and the re-tweeters can also add their own tags, creating a cycle of keywords that advertise the content of the video in certain ways and continues to brand the videos. Through the synergy of folksonomy the video creators and viewers control the brand of the YouTube videos and channels.

Branding can be used to just create a YouTube personality to attract others with similar interests of that YouTube personality. Sarah Banet-Weiser writes on branding in her article "Branding the Post-Feminist Self: Girls' Video Production and YouTube", and declares that due to the structure of YouTube and "the site's dynamic capacity for individual public performances and viewers' comments and feedback, it has become an ideal space to craft a self-brand" (278). Self-branding occurs through YouTube because the platform allows one to create a personality through the style and content of the videos, or brand, to then form and interact with a community.

The brand can be commerce based or amateur, so corporations and casual YouTubers can create a brand. For example Ho created the original pilates YouTube channel, blogilates, that uses pop songs in workouts. Her performance is her role as pilates instructor, use of pop songs in her workouts, unique pilates moves, and friendly, supportive, and bubbly personality. Through these performances Ho quickly developed the brand of blogilates into a YouTube channel where one could find original pilates workouts, contemporary music, and an encouraging and engaging instructor. Her unique personality/brand is also showcased through the design of her YouTube page that is decorated in pink texts, contains a pink heart and an image of her jumping from her icon, and videos that often begin with the blogilates' logo covered in colorful electronic glitter. The aesthetics of the videos and channel match the lively personality of Ho. Eventually blogilates became so popular that Ho was able to transform her loyal followers, called Popsters, into customers by selling her workout clothes, book, and real life meet ups through her channel. Her branding was successful and she now currently has 3.1 million subscribers (blogilates).

Not all brands on YouTube are used as a platform for a business, but the subjects of the videos are still subject to the effects of branding. For example, rocket girl has a YouTube channel that contains other videos about coming out, experimenting with hair color, and makeup routines. Although she has just under 90,000 subscribers, compared to the 3.1 million of Ho, she has a clear YouTube personality and brand that has attracted a community (rocket girl). Although rocket girl likely only makes a small profit from her videos, her YouTube personality is a brand that is selling her personality and videos as products to attract more views and build a community. rocket girl likely does not think of herself as a brand, and Ho may likely only think of her channel as a brand, but she and Ho still do become brands of YouTube because their faces and narratives are part of the experience of their channel. Although Ho and rocket girl just have single or few videos about their disordered eating history, because the videos follow the genre conventions of My Eating Disorder Stories they are part of the brand of eating disorder narratives on YouTube.

Brands of YouTube create an essentialist view of the YouTuber and put the YouTuber into a category of gamer, exercise instructor, eating disorder confessor, or another label. These brands and categories are how one finds these videos through the site's home page that recommends different types of videos, and through the meta information that tracks the interests of the person visiting YouTube. YouTube categorizes "You".

Because the My Eating Disorder Story videos are mostly identical, the uniformity of the videos not only creates an essentialist narrative of disordered eating, but also imposes a truth of disordered eating. The videos mostly resemble each other through the content and the aesthetics, but also how the videos depict disordered eating as an isolating experience. The isolating effect of disordered eating is shown through the use of selfies and photographs in the slideshow style videos. In indiefox187's video "My Anorexia Story", she uses photographs, edits, and title cards to draw attention to her once emaciated body and anorexia's alienating and fragmenting effect on her. The selfie that occurs at the 1:54 minute mark features indiefox187 in what appears to be a hallway. Due to the high angle of the camera, her full body, minus her left arm, is the only element that is actually discernable in the frame. The white wall that is on the left side of the screen as well as the right side of the frame that ends with indiefox187's body encloses her into the frame. At 1:23 indiefox187 includes a photograph that appears to be picture of the uploader with a group of friends on their way to a school dance. The picture is clearly cropped to edit out the friends that were on the right and left side of indiefox187. The result is a claustrophobic image where indiefox187

is again incased in the photograph, but also the black screen that fills the rest of the YouTube video player, and the frame of the television, phone, or computer the video is playing from. Her self is all that there is to look at and she is alone. The framing of the photographs can be argued to illustrate her obsessive thoughts concerning her body and how anorexia consumed her both physically and symbolically through the claustrophobic photographs, which lead to her isolation from her peers. This isolation from her peers is most notably seen in the photograph where indiefox187 cropped out the friends around her.

In other photographs she does not crop her friends out, but those moments occur when she is attempting to recover and is in the process of gaining weight, moments when her disordered eating did not alienate her. The only photograph that does not crop out others and is not during one of her phases of recovery is the photograph at 1:37. In that photograph she is sitting on a bench between several football players during a game. By not cropping out the much older and bigger men, her small disappearing frame is further called attention to, making her an outsider in the picture.

Charlxttte's video creates similar dark tones. Charlxttte's video starts with a title card that reads "i used to be like you" before cutting to a selfie and then a second title card that reads "anorexic", dividing herself from the viewers. The use of photographs are used similarly as indiefox187 uses them, and again isolates and highlights the emaciated body of the uploader. In contrast to indie187, Charlxttte uses a much more ominous sounding song and only a few photographs, which seem to be stock photographs found online, rather than actual photographs of her, further highlighting her distance and alienation from the world as anorexic by not showing her actual body. The song is called "My Silent Undoing" by Queen Adreana. The song is sung in a breathy voice that is hard to understand, over a haunting melody that resembles a lullaby through the use of xylophones and chimes. The song is also very slow paced and contains lyrics such as "protruding hips and skull, and spine/ ribcage cuts/a clear outline/ oh oh/ all roped up and pinching in/ distorted and disfiguring" (Queen Adreana). Because the song is about an emaciated body, the absence of selfies and photographs in the video does not change the effect of the video, because the song is effective in conveying the pain and isolation created by anorexia.

Although the camera angle creates intimacy between Ho and the viewer, she distances herself from the problematic she is discussing by referring to it as something she has overcome. We learned that Ho's disordered eating is something that she faced alone in the

past. This is true for the other confessional style videos that also refer to the eating disorders in the past. Like the association of disordered eating to alienation in the slideshow videos, the confessional style videos also depict disordered eating as alienating times of one's life.

Because the videos in the My Eating Disorder Genre are generally identical to each other, the videos essentialize the narrative of disordered eating and are actively constructing their videos to follow the genre conventions, and thus the brand of disordered eating. The YouTubers are constructing themselves as “brands” of YouTube through the language of YouTube then is about branding one's self into a specific category that is then easy to market, but a market that also is suggesting that these styles of videos are how one presents themselves as a former sufferer of disordered eating. Notably, due to the removal of videos and identical titles, it is impossible to search for the original My Eating Disorder Story video on YouTube that started the trend of using slideshows, the confessional camera, and other devices, suggesting that the language of the My Eating Disorder Story video already existed elsewhere and was earlier imposed onto subjects by a culture that presents disordered eating as a truth of essence that directs viewers to construct a sense of self.

## Conclusion

Although online social spaces such as blogs and chat rooms have existed since the beginning of the Internet, in the early 2000s YouTube provided a new and seemingly more personal method of connecting to others by bringing the “You” of YouTube into people's computer screens and thus lives. Through video making programs people were more easily able to visually document their lives through webcams, upload home movies and photographs, create YouTube channels to express their personalities, and to broadcast their stories through filmmaking techniques rather than just through writing. Branding through YouTube became not just a way to possibly make money, but also a way for uploaders to create a self by visualizing one's life, past, interests, and online friendships.

Despite YouTube's ability to allow people to easily tell or broadcast their stories to connect with others, YouTube's ideology of branding through metadata and channel design helped lead to the creation of video genre systems and the identical presentation of what it means to experience disordered eating. Along with one's channel and online personality, the use of certain genre conventions become one's brand. Although the genre conventions or

brand of The My Eating Disorder Story Videos cannot be traced to a single origin and seem to have always magically existed to inspire creation of the identical videos, the genre or brand exists because YouTubers copy the style of anorexic and bulimic storytelling they encounter when YouTube recommends disordered eating videos. The YouTube brand of disordered eating is characterized by secrecy, shame, disgust, and confession. By associating disordered eating with secrecy, shame, disgust, and eating habits that must be confessed, the videos create a contradictory rhetoric that tells audiences that they must be ashamed of disordered eating but also proudly confess disordered eating at the same time. This confusing rhetoric furthers stigmatizes anorexia and bulimia into controversial and taboo topics that are apparently very embarrassing, totalizing, and difficult to talk about. The stigmatization could lead to more people hiding disordered eating and not seeking help or treatment because of the shame associated with the eating habits. Through the uniform branding of the experience of disordered eating the videos also create an isolating depiction of disordered eating that silences others whose experiences differ from YouTube's brand of disordered eating. Although the videos express the desire to help others with disordered eating, because the videos present anorexia and bulimia in identical ways, people who have alternative narratives of disordered eating do not have a system or brand to tell their "unique" stories. Alternative narrations of disordered eating then are isolated, similar to indie187fox's isolation in her photographs. One can find narratives of disordered eating on YouTube that chronicle the experience in different ways than the My Eating Disorder Story genre, but because of YouTube's use of metadata to create their search system, these counter narratives are hard to find. Instead when one searches for eating disorder stories on YouTube one is presented with the ubiquitous My Eating Disorder Story videos that all have the same or very similar titles, and all tell stories of anorexia and bulimia in the same way. YouTube may allow anyone to broadcast themselves, but the "You" easily found and accessible on the site will always be a branded YouTube version of "You" – a manufactured "You" of disordered eating that through confession feels both stigmatized and proud.

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