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Alice Bodge   April 9th, 2021

Digital Communities and the Cultivation and Normalization of Eating Disorders

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Abstract

Digital Communities and the Cultivation and Normalization of Eating Disorders

By Alice Bodge

The Internet is a public commodity that hosts online communities and digital media. These communities welcome users who share interests, lifestyles, and hobbies. Mirroring reality, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter allow for human beings to create online cultures. Humans have always desired to belong to a community, and digital ones are no different. The affordances of social media allow for online communities to have rapid communication and constant access.

This can be beneficial to society, as it allows for the user to create social bonds and find communities online. However, due to the social media affordances, online communities can transform into toxic spaces; these spaces can negatively impact the user's holistic health through the manifestation of digital media. The constant exposure to language, comments, and digital media (photographs, messages, videos) can influence the user to develop unhealthy tendencies.

This development occurs by prolonged exposure to social media and digital media; membership of an online dieting community, the viewing of edited photographs, and participation in pro-anorexia forums are all examples. Online communities can foster toxic environments and normalize eating disorders, putting the user at risk. Eating disorders are deadly mental illnesses that are often stigmatized or misunderstood. In the US, 10-15% of adults suffer from a serious eating disorder ("Eating Disorder Statistics"). This percent only acknowledges diagnosed eating disorders, failing to account for those with unrecognized disordered habits.

Four diagnosable eating disorders exist: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, and orthorexia.

I intend to explore these online communities and their relationship to cultivating and normalizing eating disorders. This research is extremely relevant to me, as I myself struggled with a debilitating eating disorder. Through my experience, I can attest that prolonged exposure to digital media and online communities exacerbated my mental illness. My research seeks to understand how communities were built online initially; then, why users join them and create culture. Throughout my research, I have not intended to judge whether digital media is good or bad. Rather, I analyzed interactions between users and digital media to understand how online communities come to be so toxic.

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INTRODUCTION

The birth of the Internet shifted the entire course of society. As individuals moved from letters and landlines to instant messaging and blogging, human beings experienced a drastic change in communication styles. Specifically, the Internet created a new platform for the consumption of digital media. Digital media is often referred to as photographs and videos but also takes form in websites, video games, social media posts, vlogs (video blogs), and forums (online discussion boards). Through this unprecedented online space, individuals can consume digital media at a rapid rate while forming connections to others.

Over the last three decades came a growing need for online connection that helped to drive the birth of social media. Focused on creating community and socialization, social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have taken over popular culture today. While social media innovators such as Facebook and Twitter were created in the early 2000s, they've grown exponentially, and have become a staple in individuals' lives today. The Pew Research Center found that in 2005, 7% of young adults used at least one social media platform. Yet in 2019, this number skyrocketed to a staggering 90% ("Social Media Fact Sheet."). Also relevant are older generations, as Pew Research Center found the following groups on at least one social media platform: 82% of Millennials (30-49 years old), 69% of Generation X (50-64 years old), and 40% of Baby Boomers (65+ years old). Social media has grown vastly over two decades, and to put it simply, it isn't going anywhere.

As digital media and social platforms innovate every day, so does our communication. Because social platforms welcome anyone and everyone, communities are formed by users online in order to host discussions about hobbies, lifestyles, and niche interests. These online communities create relationships, ideologies, and learned communication styles which are

strengthened through repeated interactions between peers. Online communities mirror those in reality, as they've created distinct cultures for thousands of years. The term "community" doesn't only apply to those who are explicitly joining clubs or groups based on hobbies; rather, community is an umbrella term for both those who join online clubs for hobbies and for those that may only interact with friends online. While fast-paced communication and the ability to virtually bond with peers are both astounding parts of society today, these are served with a price. With unprecedentedly fast virtual chatting, media consumption, and content creation, there comes a risk of overexposing one's self to harmful media and language use.

Historically, the media has held beauty standards over society through the vessels of magazines, television, print advertisements, and paintings. Imagery is powerful and can impact a population of users who may already struggle with insecurities. With both teenagers and adults reporting poor self-esteem today, online users are susceptible to digital media that may further exacerbate their insecurities ("Get the Facts").

They may be susceptible to digital media, language use, and interactions with peers that encourage eating disorders. Through popular culture trends today such as diet culture, excessive exercise, and unrealistic beauty standards, online users can learn unhealthy habits that are gateways to eating disorders. These habits can include food restriction, immoderate workouts, or purging in order to reach a goal weight. As researched in the field of sociology, longtime exposure to a community's repeated messages and digital media can normalize unhealthy habits and eating disorders.

The relationship between online communities and disordered eating isn't a simple one. Even those who pride themselves on not partaking in communities that revolve around influencers are still exposed to misinformation, unrealistic body standards, and

self-objectification. Over time, one's socialization into social media and prolonged exposure to digital media, a topic discussed in Chapter 2, can inflict serious damage to their self-esteem and mental health. It can even encourage the development of a deadly eating disorder. The topic of self-esteem and mental health has already been studied in different scholarly works, and is highly relevant to my research regarding participation in online communities and disordered eating.

I do not intend on repeating studies that have been already conducted. Instead, I am using these findings made by scholars to create a foundation for my argument. The normalization of eating disorders within online communities through the use of digital media and language is still a topic that is not widely discussed. If brought up, it seems that digital users can relate to this normalization; yet within the bounds of scholarly work, there is a severe lack of conversation regarding eating disorders and social media normalization. In addition to normalization, I'd argue that certain communities and usage of digital media actually encourage and foster eating disorders.

This phenomenon may not impact every single user. Throughout my argument, I am not making absolute statements that imply every single digital community can cause eating disorders. Rather, I wish to call out both the subtle messages in popular culture, and the blunt, dangerous media on forums and comment sections, in order to host a discussion on the cultivation of eating disorders online. These communities and harmful media exist on a spectrum, and so do the users; both mentally well users and those suffering from an eating disorder can suffer from this phenomenon. I wish to call out online communities and digital media to advance the discussion.

Further, I wish to ask more probing questions regarding this discussion. Why does heightened use of social media normalize eating disorders? How do online communities form,

and further, what gives them the power to cultivate mental illness? Is the only solution to log out of social platforms, and cease to consume digital media?

This topic is one that resonates deeply with me, as I suffered from an eating disorder for multiple years of my life. Before being diagnosed with one by professionals, I developed an overwhelming hatred for my body and an unhealthy relationship with eating. At its roots, this hatred came from my insecurities about gaining weight and being perceived as unattractive to others. I rapidly worsened as I spent more time on social media. From staring at my friends' Instagram posts to researching quick weight loss tips on pro-anorexia forums, I developed an absolutely toxic relationship with myself.

I quickly spiraled out of control, as I often punished myself when I didn't look like the perfect (and oftentimes, edited) women on my feed, or when I couldn't restrict my diet like how online peers could. I strongly believe that without my prolonged usage of social media, my eating disorder wouldn't have cultivated in the way that it did. Further, I wouldn't have normalized my habits and behaviors, had I not been exposed to certain online communities, memes, jokes, and social media influencers (famous social media users). I feel that it is important to note that no figure in my real life encouraged my eating disorder; I grew up with a supportive community of friends and family, those who all wanted me to seek help. The heartbreaking fact is that my story is not rare. Eating disorders are all-consuming mental illnesses that can break the individual down and ruin their life.

Even after this battle with an eating disorder and toxic online communities, I do not intend on calling social media "good" or "evil", as many pieces of commentary regarding social media do. Both the relationship between eating disorders and online communities as well as the entire concept of social media are not that simple. Rather, I intend on further exploring this

relationship and analyzing the interactions that lead so many users to develop negative body image and disordered eating. To do so, I have researched different digital studies and articles from scholars across disciplines, such as media studies, sociology, and statistics. While scholars have made the connection between social media use and body image issues, discussion regarding eating disorder normalization is lackluster. I intend to connect the findings of different digital media and sociological concepts in order to answer: how are eating disorders normalized through digital media? By understanding the different facets of social media in addition to the complexities of eating disorders, we can begin to answer this question.

CHAPTER 1

While so many users are logged in to social media today, our culture was only recently

indoctrinated into the world of online communication and media. Social media was born from

the ages of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, both revolutionary shifts on the Internet. The demand for

interactive online spaces and communications led to the social media platforms that we know

today. To understand how online communities come to be online, one must understand exactly

what social media is and how it originated. Further, social media has affordances that grant the

user autonomy to utilize each platform. The foundations of Web 2.0 and social media have

created the environment that users exist in today, whether that be a good or bad one.

Chapter 1A expands on these concepts, explaining how social media came to be, and its

functionality on different platforms. It explores the shift from participatory to interactive culture,

thus creating opportunities for online communities to be created. Chapter 1B then introduces

eating disorders by explaining each kind, delving into why they develop in individuals. These

two concepts must be discussed because they are interconnected; an interactive Internet with

affordances puts users who are susceptible to eating disorders at great risk. This chapter seeks to

fill in the gaps between media concepts and eating disorder studies in order to create a

relationship between the two. Through analyzing the foundations of both, we can understand

how online communities cultivate and normalize eating disorders.

Chapter 1A: The Foundations of Social Media

Social media is often perceived as a recent creation that came to be in the 2010s.

However, its origins are rooted in 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee birthed the World Wide Web

(WWW). Though the Internet was created in 1982, Berners-Lee's connection of the hypertext

technology to the Internet allowed for more public access (Aced). As the WWW became accessible through an interface navigable to users, it was seen by the public as both an "information universe and virtual community" (Stevenson, 2). Through this perspective, it served as an encyclopedic database that the world had never owned before; yet it also offered spaces for strangers and friends alike to connect online. While the WWW started as a way to offer information on a variety of topics, it soon became a digital media hub.

Digital social platforms such as the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (The WELL) were created in order to let digital users "leave their bodies behind" and discuss topics with peers, all taking place on an online forum (Stevenson, 5). It is important to note that the idea of "leaving their bodies behind" is relevant, as today's online climate differs greatly from this. Through anonymous or self-identifying usernames and profiles, users could enter an online world in order to interact with others around the world. These archaic digital spaces were created in response to the demand for online socialization, slowly paving the way for the classic social media platforms that society knows today. An example of this is *Wired*, a pop culture magazine that moved over to digital media, in order to provide fans with entertainment news as well as create a forum to host discussions. It proved that the modern world had an interest in both digital pop culture and socializing with others online.

Social platforms were able to thrive and flourish due to the 2004 creation of Web 2.0, a term used by scholars and technological savants alike that refers to the birth of the social digital age. Formally defined as "using the Internet to provide platforms through which network effects can emerge", Web 2.0 built on the WWW's social capabilities (van Djick, 2). Web 2.0 was seen as the turning point for the Internet, when it evolved into a digital social haven for the general population. This in itself is a debate between media scholars, as some state that the WWW was

always intended to be social. While that may be true in theory, social networks did not arrive in their full glory until Web 2.0, which served to link users to one another. Web 1.0 was a participatory culture; Web 2.0 took it a step further to make it a culture of connectivity (van Djick, 3).

To elaborate, Web 1.0 allowed for users to participate by "surfing the Internet", as they searched up new information or wrote their own blog posts. Web 2.0's culture of connectivity emphasizes interaction and bonding with peers instead, granting users the power to immerse themselves in online platforms. Participation allows for involvement; connectivity allows for interlinkage and contributing. Sites such as the aforementioned *Wired* allowed for participation as users could discuss topics online, but they didn't automatically connect users to each other. In comparison, social platforms created in the Web 2.0 era emphasize the feature of connectivity, often suggesting accounts, topics, and content to consume.

The term "Web 2.0" was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, it becoming a buzzword within both media studies and other disciplines (Aced). As this movement from participatory culture to immersive connected culture began, beloved social platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace gained popularity. Each of these platforms allowed users to create their own customized profiles and share their activities and innermost thoughts with the vast world online; this was a revolutionary feature compared to the limited forums of the 1990s.

Instead of merely hosting interactions between online users, Web 2.0 allowed for the shaping and creation of social networks. The *Time* magazine even joined the hype surrounding this new social age, announcing that the 2006 *Time Person of the Year* was "You". The cover of the magazine displayed a blank computer screen, "You" being in red letters. Underneath the graphic, it states, "Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world" ("Person

of the Year 2006"). Described as "a story about community and collaboration", Web 2.0's presence was influential, as the public joined the online world in order to create a digital identity.

With the demand for connected social platforms, rather than participatory, users adapted their lives to social media sites, as it allowed for profile customization and bonding with others. This profile customization is key to membership in digital communities, and will be analyzed under a sociological lens in Chapter 2. Through using Facebook or Twitter, users could both share intimate details about their own life and discover more about absolute strangers. The shift of Web 2.0 helped to mold the foundations of social media platforms that modern users know today.

In the past three decades, the WWW has created social media platforms that cater to the demand for more virtual communities. Defining it simply, social media includes any digital space that involves interaction between users (Seargeant, Tagg, 4). To be active on social media is to interconnect with others on the platform. There is no point in using Instagram, Twitter, YouTube or similar sites if one doesn't intend to consume any digital media or interact with others. While in real life, forming connections with human beings requires a direct effort to make conversation, engaging online is as simple as liking a post. Social platforms started as a way to connect with friends or strangers online, but have evolved into their own digital worlds. These worlds host multitudes of communities that are full of peers interested in similar hobbies, topics, celebrities, or lifestyles.

While MySpace has fallen from popular culture, the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube reign over users today. Much more accessible than their predecessors in the 1990s, these platforms are able to host digital interactions, content and communities; this ability comes through their affordances, and how much easier it is for the

public to utilize them. An affordance is a key term in digital media for understanding and analysing social media interfaces, and their relationship with users (Butcher et al.). These affordances are responsible for how users navigate social media; affordances enable comment sections, "like" buttons, and more. Social media platforms slightly differ in how they function, which we can attribute to their affordances. These affordances impact a user's engagement with others and how content is shared within communities.

James Gibson studied affordances in a broader perspective, simplifying the concept by comparing them to animals in an environment. An animal doesn't see the environment as a forest or desert, but rather through its possibilities for action and livelihood (Butcher et al.). Further, Gibson states that "affordances do not cause behavior but constrain and control it", thus creating paths for action (Butcher et al.). Affordances in an environment aren't the action itself, but rather different ways to interact with an environment. Applying this to digital media, the user is the animal and the social media platform is the environment. Affordances do not cause us to like a post or follow a famous user, but instead, give us the options to through its design.

The concept of affordances is highly relevant to my analysis of online communities and eating disorders, as it can help to explain how these phenomena are connected. Popular social media platforms today operate similarly to one another, yet their digital cultures differ due to their affordances. For example, Instagram, founded in 2010, has affordances that make it an image-based platform due to its physical setup. A user's feed is mostly photographs and videos, with captions and comments taking up a small amount of room. As a result, the culture of Instagram can prioritize physical looks and aesthetics, affecting how online communities interact. In Chapter 2, I'll be exploring this example further; Instagram serves as the perfect example for a platform that caters to eating disorder cultivation.

In comparison to Instagram, Twitter's affordances offer completely different paths to its users. Twitter, launched in 2006, prioritizes words and messages that stay under the 280 character limit (the character limit used to be 140, until 2017, when it was changed to 280). Rather than being image based, the platform operates to show all tweets, the term for posted content on Twitter, on one page which allows the user to like or "retweet" (share a tweet). Because of these user affordances, conversation and debate are popular as the platform allows for public, fast-paced discussion.

In the field of digital media studies, four affordances have been identified: visibility, permanence, editability, and association. These four coexist on a platform, and help to create digital culture for users. Visibility allows for users to make their otherwise private information public, from their political beliefs to their breakfast. Permanence, or persistence to some scholars, takes this public information a step further as it keeps the content online forever (Treem et al.). The affordance of permanence allows for online interactions to be repeatedly looked at or picked apart by a user; this concept is extremely relevant to the study of online communities and eating disorders, as digital media is readily available to view at all times. Social media platforms also have editability, which Treem et al. describe as "the fact the individuals can spend a good deal of time and effort crafting and re-crafting a communicative act before it is viewed by others". This implies that users are able to tweak and perfect digital media or messages before posting content; in addition, they often have the opportunity to edit their caption or words after others have seen it. Last is the affordance of association, which signals a user's social ties and can grant them social capital (Treem et al.). This affordance allows for established connections between individuals or individuals and content; these established connections can grant the user

popularity, as they gain a following and even an influencer status (Treem et al.). This status will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

Digital media affordances support Web 2.0 as a more social, accessible, connected Internet. Today, these features allow for customizable profiles and intimate conversations with strangers across platforms. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram visibile affordances operate so that "friending" or "following" another user grants access to all of their content. This content pertains to any posted content, shared posts from other users, and interactions on posts. In addition, the affordance of association makes it so that popular users are seen as powerful beings with high social capital. But Web 2.0 and digital affordances grant more power to each user, popular or not. With the ability to create original content, share messages, and host comment sections on their posts, each user has the power to be a digital socialite. This power creates an entirely new playing field for communities today, as opposed to the participatory culture of Web 1.0.

Chapter 1B: The Development and Dangers of Eating Disorders

With the positive growth in social media use as well as its relevance to users, digital media has become a dominant role in modern society. In this role, social media grants rapid communication and a sense of belonging to online communities; however, when these communities expose users to messages encouraging and normalizing eating disorders, it can become a lethal issue.

Eating disorders are deadly but stigmatized or misunderstood by society. Often, they're cast off as childish obsessions with becoming extremely skinny, or glamorized as ways to lose weight immediately. However, the reality is that eating disorders look different within each individual, and they can become deadly. Understanding this mental illness can be difficult

because an individual suffering with an eating disorder may look completely different from another. Each path is uniquely dangerous and consuming. Eating disorders take over an individual's life in how they dominate their health, relationships with others, and well-being.

There are currently four diagnosable eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and more recently, orthorexia. Anorexia nervosa concerns restricting calories or certain foods and a fear of weight gain; bulimia nervosa involves recurrent purging through vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise to lose weight; a binge eating disorder causes the individual to consume massive amounts of calories at once; orthorexia is an obsession with "clean eating" and perfect meals.

It is incredibly important to understand that each eating disorder isn't all-inclusive; while two people may suffer from bulimia nervosa, their experience with it differs greatly. The two individuals may have different fear foods, habits, or reasons for purging. In addition, an individual may suffer from anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder all simultaneously, suffering from multiple tendencies at once. These different experiences can cause general confusion about the mental illness, leading to further stereotyping or stigmatization.

In reality, by age 20, approximately 0.8% Americans suffer from anorexia nervosa, 2.6% from bulimia nervosa, 3% from binge eating disorder, and 11.5% from feeding or an eating disorder not elsewhere classified (Sidani). These percentages, found in 2016, don't account for any who are undiagnosed, a number that is likely rising due to negative digital media. The fact that these percentages only account for 20-year-old Americans is staggering, especially when we consider how many of these young adults are on social media.

Even if an individual doesn't have a diagnosed eating disorder, this doesn't mean that they don't suffer from disordered tendencies. Many social media users develop disordered eating habits from their online communities and I intend to include them in this discourse. While those struggling may never seek licensed help, they may learn to hate their bodies solely because it doesn't look like the perfectly posed users that they follow. During my experience, it took me almost a year to seek professional help for my eating disorder. My prolonged time spent on social media had led me to believe my thoughts and habits were normal. Gone untreated, 20% of individuals diagnosed with an eating disorder die, giving this mental illness a tragic mortality rate. ("Eating Disorder Statistics"). Anorexia nervosa is often cited as the mental illness with the highest mortality rate, which emphasizes just how dangerous these eating disorders are.

The cause of eating disorders is unique to each individual. A common stereotype is that of female models starving themselves to attain perfect bodies, but the actual causes are much more diverse. Many studies have been conducted to prove the negative long term effects that digital media has on the consumer's body image. Different forms of media historically have had negative effects on an individual's body image and self-esteem, which I'll be delving into in Chapter 2. Also in Chapter 2, I'll be exploring the qualities of modern social media that make it such a welcoming platform for eating disorder normalization. However, to understand how social media can cultivate and normalize mental illness, one must understand how eating disorders start.

Contrary to aforementioned stereotypes, eating disorders are rooted in mental health issues, repressment of past abuse, and escape-avoidance coping. A study conducted by Jacobi et al. analyzed a sample of ~12,000 adolescents, aged 12 to 15 years old. In this study, they identified that there were risk factors that could increase the likelihood of developing anorexia

nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder (Jacobi, et al.). It is relevant to note that because orthorexia is a more recent development in eating disorder research, there is less scholarly data on it. The study found that those with anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, or depression were more likely to develop an eating disorder. Further, individuals with sexual or physical abuse during childhood, or those who cope with trauma by avoiding and escaping it, were also more likely to develop an eating disorder (Jacobi, et al.).

Further, they revisited the study in 2015 in order to analyze long term risk factors. According to the samples analyzed, Jacobi et al. found that body dissatisfaction, weight and perception concerns, and body dysmorphia were the largest risk factors for developing an eating disorder, as they could predict future disorders. Body dysmorphia refers to a condition in which the individual becomes fixated on a part of their body; this fixation is often exaggerated and becomes debilitating to normal life. Also important was the finding of the individual's comparison to media; the study found that critiques made by others, as well as self-comparison to media, could greatly influence the development of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

These findings are key to understanding the encouragement and normalization of eating disorders on social media, as individuals can be predisposed to developing them. Oftentimes, an individual will already experience body dysmorphia, depression, or past unregulated trauma; instead of coping with these issues, consuming digital media may provide a healthy escape.

Personally, I found myself in this position. Prior to developing a diagnosed eating disorder, I dealt with extreme body dissatisfaction and experienced a newfound level of anxiety in all aspects of my life. During this, a highly emotional event pushed me to despise my body even more. Instead of dealing with these emotions or contacting a therapist, I used my eating disorder as an escape from my issues. I became obsessed with my weight and diet, constantly

concerned with how others may perceive me. By comparing myself to influencers on Instagram, joining fitness and weight loss groups online, and even micro analyzing friends' bodies on social media, I developed a debilitating eating disorder. Had I stayed offline, I feel that my disorder wouldn't have been exacerbated to the fullest extent.

That sentiment can be supported by studies that follow prolonged social media use. The 2018 study *Social Media Use and Adolescent Mental Health* analyzed 10,904 14-year-olds, all who used some form of social media. The purpose of the study was to find a relationship between depressive symptoms and prolonged social media usage; in particular, adolescents are vulnerable to the development of low self-esteem while online (Yvonne et al.). Out of 10,904 adolescents, 78.2% of girls and 68.3% of boys had body weight dissatisfaction after prolonged social media use (Yvonne et al.). In addition, 15.4% of girls and 11.8% of boys felt unhappy with their appearance after prolonged usage (Yvonne et al.). These findings are substantial because they give empirical support to claims often made by media scholars. In particular, the body weight dissatisfaction finding is jarring; well over half of the 10,904 adolescents feel that their body could be improved or changed. Yvonne et al. concluded that body dissatisfaction and depressive symptoms are linked directly. This finding further supports the concept that those with pre-existing mental illnesses are more susceptible to developing eating disorders while online.

Studies such as those from Jacobi and Yvonne et al. emphasize that eating disorders do not appear overnight, an argument I'll be supporting throughout this work. Looking at one single photograph on social media does not instantly impact the user. Whether it be learned habits or internalizing beauty standards, eating disorders develop overtime and can be used as coping

mechanisms. While social media is not the sole cause, it does host damaging messages and communities which encourage this behavior and normalize it.

This is seen through a number of vessels: language use on popular social media platforms, echo chambers and harmful messages, self comparison to popular users, and communities endorsing eating disorders. These vessels will be analyzed in Chapter 3, which conducts 4 case studies.

The cultivating of eating disorders, like those who suffer from them, is a spectrum. Through the presentation of self and the finding of online communities, the user can find themself in a harmful environment whether they intended to be there or not.

By discussing the creation of social media and Web 2.0, one can begin understanding how enveloping this environment is to users. Affordances welcome users in and create spaces for media exposure and rapid communication; however, put in the wrong hands, this can create toxic environments for both the diagnosed and undiagnosed user. Moreover, the introduction of interactive culture on the Internet paved the way for the communities that I'll be discussing in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. While Chapter 1 analyzed the foundations of both social media and eating disorders, Chapter 2 introduces both sociological and media studies concepts that attribute to aforementioned toxic environments.

CHAPTER 2

Scholars state that human beings have always been social creatures, seeking out peers for solace and survival. Citing the work of Charles Darwin, media scholar Hartley details the need for communicative sociality. To elaborate, humans have a need for social groups in order to share ideals, values, and an overall culture (Hartley, 4). This culture is referred to as a "survival vehicle", a group which a human "rides with" in order to thrive (Hartley, 4). With the development of social media in the last three decades, survival vehicles have become fluid between digital media and reality, as users have an online and offline life.

Chapter 2A sheds light on how these survival vehicles exist online; by analyzing sociological concepts from different scholars, we can understand why exactly online communities are created in the first place. In addition, I elaborate on profile creation and the judging of one's constructed "self". The explanation of socialization is key to comprehending why online communities become toxic, as it explains how users are indoctrinated into communities. Chapter 2B and 2C then take the analysis of social media and its membership, and link it to societal beauty standards, self-objectification, and influencer culture. Through my discussions on profile and community creation, light is shed on how each concept relates to one another. Moreover, I argue that membership on social media can expose the user to harmful beauty standards and messages from powerful influencers.

Chapter 2A: Online Community Creation

Communities are created when individuals seek out others with shared interests, hobbies, or lifestyles. Lave and Wenger's community of practice theory explains this creation: pursuing shared enterprises over time can lead to community building (Stommel). Humans within

communities experience the feeling of homophily, a term that Jonathan Bright defines as "an impulse to form social ties with others who are similar to oneself in some way". It is important to note again that communities aren't limited to hobbies or interests; they also are formed between friends and the average popular culture savant online. These social ties are then created through the use of language, as interaction defines online and offline social worlds (Hartley, "Chapter 1", 3). Social media platforms in the age of Web 2.0 are perfect vehicles for this language and interaction, as its affordances allow for fast-paced conversations.

Language use within communities also allows for the building of relationships between individuals. As one joins an online community that centers around anything from gaming to weight lifting, the user has to communicate their self and image to their peers in order to establish a relationship. This is not limited to digital platforms; in reality, humans do this with each and every relationship formed.

Two individuals meet. Maybe one compliments the other's shoes, maybe they meet in a grocery store, or through a dating app. Their image is immediately perceived and judged by the other. As the relationship builds, the two share details about their lives, from likes and dislikes, to career goals, to personal anecdotes about their families. This is how a platonic or romantic relationship forms in reality.

Online digital platforms see a similar pattern. To be in a relationship or community, one must present their "self". The term self originates from George Mead, a core sociological philosopher. This concept refers to one's set of perceptions of who one is in relation to oneself, peers, and the environment; to simplify, one's identity both in reality and online are formed through their interactions with others (Hegtvedt and Johnson, 102). Further, this formed self allows one to forge relationships with peers in communities. Throughout my discussion, I'll be

referring to one's constructed self frequently; one's self is sociological, and differs from the typical term "oneself" or "themselves".

Wyke Stommel calls the process of self construction the "participation and reification" within communities, as the two factors work to construct one's online self. Through participating online, the user creates a social experience through their community membership; the reification is the "product and process of what a community creates together" (Stommel).

Through the use of social media affordances, the user begins to create their self. The specifics of this process depend on which social platform is being used. For example, an Instagram profile page displays a photograph, a name, biography, and space for a website URL. The affordances of Instagram make it a digital media-focused platform; because of this, the user creates their self through the content they post, how they comment on other's content, and the media that they share with others. Creating a self is vital in order to join a digital community, as without one, peers won't reach out to build a relationship.

Once a user joins an online community, being able to fit in and belong is a core human desire. This desire for belonging is seen as the motive to connect with and be accepted by others; through achieving this, the user can feel welcomed and at home within a digital community or "survival vehicle" (Seidman). Achieving the status of belonging within a community requires being well-liked or holding similar ideologies. Because of our inherent desire to belong, the digital self often is idealized, as the user may feel pressure to create the perfect online persona (Feltman et al.).

To an extent, a user also has to view themselves objectively in order to understand how others will view their own profile page. I've often heard friends who are social media users say that they "stalk" themselves occasionally, implying that they spend time looking at their own

profile as if it's someone else's. This tactic forces the user to objectify themself in order to judge if their digital self is appropriate and flattering. This can also be described as the term self-objectification, a concept I will elaborate on in Chapter 2.

The creation of a digital self doesn't end there, as peer judgments also play a role in defining a user. Both the perception of a user as well as interactions with them can affect how the self is judged. Like reality, an individual has limited power over how they are seen. While the individual may choose their profile photograph or what digital content to post, they have no control over public perception. This creates an interesting issue as one can intentionally create a self that will receive a desired public perception. Inauthenticity is easily achieved online due to the ability to become anonymous or fabricate digital content. Whereas in reality, one's friends, family, and coworkers can sense inauthenticity in an individual, online strangers don't have the same ability. Whether a user's online self is authentic or fabricated with white lies, the constructed self allows them access to online communities. The topic of authenticity and digital media is discussed in detail in Chapter 2C, as I analyze influencers and their online fame.

Finding one's place in the digital universe has become streamlined, as social platforms utilize algorithms in order to customize each user's experience. The algorithm is a popular topic among media scholars due to its ability to frame the user's experience online. An algorithm on social media is used in order to rank content for each user by monitoring their activity, then showing appropriate and pertinent content. Their activity may consist of likes, comments, shares, and hashtag use, all affordances offered on digital platforms. Through profiling users based on their behavior, algorithms silently select, rank, and personalize content according to user data (Stefania). Silently is a keyword, as there is no permanent record of algorithmic work. As the

user's content becomes more personalized, it can create a narrow experience as they're only exposed to like-minded users.

As Beer states in his article *The Social Power of Algorithms*, algorithms "feed into people's lives, shaping what they know, who they know, what they discover, and what they experience". This shaping occurs due to the relationship between social platforms and algorithms; platforms not only provide content and digital communities, but also transform, distort and modify them due to algorithmic optimization (Stefania). For example, a user new to Twitter has a clean slate and can follow recommended users or create their own path. Through who they choose to follow and what hashtags they often interact with, their feed will begin to be customized. If the user mainly interacts with vegan content, for example, the Twitter algorithm will operate by ranking content deemed relevant. As a result, the user will be recommended to follow vegan accounts, or even will be shown vegan-related tweets by accounts they do not already follow.

Looking to other examples, digital media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, and YouTube provide pages that are direct results of one's algorithmic analysis. Instagram provides the "explore page", where recommended digital content is displayed based on the user's activity. Tiktok operates using the "for you page", which adjusts over time to show the user content they commonly interact with. Finally, YouTube recommends videos based on content creators that one interacts with most often. Interestingly, users have the power to create their own digital world through their choices; however, these choices may lead the user to toxic corners of social media.

As a result, algorithms silently contribute to community building within digital media. While social media algorithms do not directly create online communities, nor are they the same

thing, they are related as they bring like-minded users together. Through collecting and displaying pertinent content, the hypothetical vegan Twitter user is able to connect with others through recommended accounts and tweets. While this can be beneficial as it helps the user to navigate the digital universe of Web 2.0, media scholars argue that algorithms indirectly contribute to building toxic and closed spaces online. Scholar Milan Stefania states, "I found that the infrastructure", being algorithms, "dramatically configures people's options and ends up steering collective action in problematic ways" (Stefania). This thinking implies that algorithms can affect user's experiences online as they're encouraged to join homophilous communities; these communities can then become problematic if they're closed off to different thoughts or values.

While not intentional, algorithms can create echo chambers and enable confirmation bias, as the user is led to polarizing communities through media infrastructure. The term echo chamber is defined as a community that is completely like-minded, creating a closed off group that then repeats the same messages and beliefs (Bright, 16). Concerns about online echo chambers have been voiced since the early beginnings of the WWW, yet have become more relevant with each year that passes. In his study of online discourse and echo chambers, Bright states that "exposure to only like-minded voices may contribute towards polarization towards ideological extremes".

Echo chambers function hand-in-hand with confirmation bias, a term that describes an individual's gravitation towards like-minded voices and beliefs that align with their own. In order to validate their own beliefs, users may join communities that align with their ideologies; algorithms contribute to this as they can lead users to these communities. In addition, Bright argues that digital echo chambers can create collective action as the members of the community

develop groupthink. Groupthink refers to an entire community being in complete agreement, their language binding them together while alienating those whose opinions differ (Bright, 4). Confirmation bias and groupthink are connected as they can create polarizing echo chambers. Through constant communication with like-minded users, communities can create distance from others while cultivating a negative environment.

Users are accepted into communities, echo chambers or not, if their digital self fits the requirements of the community. Through presenting one's self, each user receives approval or disapproval from community peers; to use a casual term, one must "read the room" in order to fit in. Both in reality and on digital media spaces, an individual learns the behavior, language, and values of a community. While an algorithm may lead the vegan Twitter user to a community, the user must present a digital self that falls in line with the rest of the group. Or else, the user risks compromising the homophily of the online group. The presence of echo chambers once again raises the concern about authenticity on digital platforms, as users may create a fabricated self in order to belong to the community. The echo chamber may then press harmful values and language on said user.

Socialization is a key aspect in the process of joining communities and potential echo chambers. This is a concept defined by sociology scholars as "the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society" (Little). Through socializing with multiple agents, humans can learn a culture's norms, ideologies, and language use. We depend on socialization in order to obtain communication cues and successfully join communities, both online and offline. Relevant to this thesis are the agents of peers and mass media; through interacting with peers and consuming digital media, humans learn cultural norms needed to successfully fit into communities (Little). On social media platforms, this socialization can look

like learning about memes, language use, and the standards for a community. The user must be exposed repeatedly to these interactions in order to understand them and acclimate; however, this socialization could lead to the user being exposed to aforementioned harmful messages. Socialization relates to echo chambers as it can explain why these communities can become cultivators for eating disorders. In the process of learning about a community and interacting in order to fit in, the user may be exposing themself to dangerous ideologies and language use.

The concern surrounding algorithms and echo chambers isn't absolute, as algorithms serve solely to customize a user's page and offer relevant content. Oftentimes, they are harmless and offer interesting digital media to be consumed. However, algorithms can contribute to problematic communities through linking like-minded users to one another, then saturating a user's feed with polarizing media. The user's real life and wellness can be impacted as they manifest this media into reality, as digital platforms are increasingly becoming more relevant to user's lives. When a user strives to keep homophily within their communities, they may embody the community standards and messages that they are exposed to. This can do harm to their health, as they may hold themselves to unrealistic expectations and standards.

Chapter 2B: Self-Objectification and Media's Beauty Standards

A community's standards regarding their language use and messages aren't the only ones that exist in a user's life. Social platforms notoriously uphold societal beauty standards, but this form of media wasn't the first to do so. Beauty standards are embedded in cultures and run deep in humanity's history, as we can see when observing archived paintings and sculptures from past time periods. These pieces of art served as a form of early mass media, displaying the most ideal body and face, thus creating a standard for both men and women to aspire for. While the concept

of beauty is abstract and subjective, it is a sought after and important matter (Sarwer et al.). As a beauty standard is set, society members often can feel pressure to fulfill it in order to be physically attractive to society. To be attractive and in touch with society is to be liked, a feeling that humans strive for in the way that they desire belonging. While beauty standards have existed in different eras of society, they've consistently thrived on both print and digital media platforms.

Throughout the evolution of media, these standards have been enforced through visuals such as photographs, commercials and films. Further, the process of mediatization has affected how beauty standards are enforced. Media scholar Marwick defines mediatization as the process by which "media in the long run increasingly become relevant for the social construction of everyday life, society, and culture as a whole" (Marwick, 3). Mediatization explains how society interacts and communicates through media; this is subject to change as media transforms rather rapidly. Our communications and cultures have been shaped by the media and transformed throughout history as society moved from the newspaper to the Internet.

The discussion of mediatization doesn't indicate that social media is solely responsible for pushing beauty standards onto its users; however, it exposes users to these ideals in a way that prior media did not. Through the internalization of beauty standards which are often unrealistic or demanding (i.e. tiny waistline, 6-pack abs, plump lips), one may begin to self-objectify themself. Objectification of an individual occurs when the individual's body is regarded independently from that of the individual (Feltman et al.). In other words, any time that an individual's body or sexual functions are evaluated apart from the individual, and treated as symbols of the individual, they're being objectified.

Self-objectification builds on objectification, as the individual is objectifying their own self through internalizing a third-party perspective (Feltman et al.). Through this process, the

individual imagines themself in the eyes of another; instead of seeing themself as a normal human being, they scrutinize their body to analyze how it's perceived at every angle. Through repeated body-checking and comparison to others, self-objectification can quickly become a strong habit. In the context of eating disorders, body-checking involves obsessively monitoring, weighing, or measuring one's own body.

Scholars have linked self-objectification to different forms of media, both print and digital, as they were found to enforce beauty standards aggressively. While discourse in today's culture blames social media platforms for cultivating unrealistic beauty standards, print media such as magazines play a role as well. Scholars in the early 1990s found that magazines exposed readers to body and beauty standards, which then had a negative effect on their mental and physical wellbeing. Headlines from magazines published in 2000 include: "Get a better body (by tonight!)", "Gain Muscle Lose Pounds" and "Look Great Naked, A New Body in 9 Days" (Morry et al., 1). It's important to note that both men and women were accounted for in the study of magazines and beauty standards, as men often read fitness magazines. It was even found that the body weights of the *Playboy* centrefold models (within printed *Playboy* magazines) were 13-19% lower than that of normal women (Morry et al., 2). While the use of the word "normal" may appear problematic, as it implies that smaller women are abnormal, I'd argue that the larger problem is the lack of representation many women receive in the media.

Women in today's society often experience both objectification and self-objectification, as they're valued for their beauty and sexual appeal rather than their intelligence or contributions. This phenomenon is often reflected in digital media and its imagery. One example of many is the 2007 *Transformers* film series directed by Michael Bay. The series has been an integral part of pop culture, giving the audience large-budget explosions and giant fighting

robots. Yet throughout the series, the leading woman (Megan Fox) is often portrayed in a sexual and submissive manner. While the male protagonists are able to display strength and power, the female protagonists are limited to their attractiveness and sexuality. Fox's character, Mikaela Banes, is introduced through focusing on her breasts and curves instead of her strength. Banes's introductory shot follows her legs, moving upwards to her body clad in tiny denim shorts and a tight shirt. This objectification limits the audience to admiring women for their beauty and sexuality; it sets an unrealistic and unhealthy standard for both male and female consumers of media. Even worse, Fox recently spoke out in 2020 condemning the sexism in Hollywood. She states that when she asked the *Transformers* director Michael Bay for notes, he'd instruct her to "just be sexy" ("Megan Fox Has Spoken out about Sexism in Hollywood for Years").

Being exposed to objectifying and overtly sexual content can negatively impact the viewer. In 1994, Stice et al. found a direct link of magazine advertisements to eating disorder symptoms, gender-role endorsements, ideal body stereotype internalization, and body satisfaction or lack thereof (Morry et al., 2). The connection of the advertisements to these negative conditions can be linked by self-objectification, as modern culture socializes individuals to become preoccupied with their own appearance (Morry et al., 2). Through exposure to body and beauty expectations in media such as magazines, the readers began to view their own self as an object, rather than a human being.

Another study in 2001 was conducted to analyze the relationship between imagery in the media and self-objectification (Morry & Staska, Magazine Exposure, 4). The study used 150 Introductory Psychology students, the group being 61 men and 89 women (Morry et al., 4). The average age of men in the study was 19.8 years; the average of the women was 18.8 years (Morry et al., 4). The sample of students were mostly young adults just leaving their stage of

adolescence. To begin, both groups marked which magazines they read often, men choosing fitness while women chose both beauty and fitness. The group then completed tests that measured their eating attitudes, self-objectification, sociocultural attitudes and body shape.

As a result, the study found that the beauty standards enforced in the media negatively impacted the readers. It was found that the more women self-reported reading beauty magazines, the more they self-objectified themselves. In addition, they also reported more eating problems (Morry et al., 7). This study was correlational and not an experiment; meaning, women who participated in the study may have already experienced self-objectification, and were not given a treatment or condition. This could signal that some women are stuck in a cycle: they experience self-objectification and eating issues, they read beauty magazines, their issues are exacerbated.

The study's results parallel those from studies focusing on digital media. Researchers found that exposure to digital advertisements and television shows with slim models was associated with women's body dissatisfaction and symptoms of an eating disorder (Morry et al., 9). Studies such as these can suggest that the reader's frequent exposure to an ideal body shape, which often is unrealistic and edited, can cause the reader to internalize it. Misinformative and edited media will be discussed further in Case study 2, which delves into examples on multiple platforms.

In addition, the concept of socialization connects to this internalization, as readers are exposed overtime to messages encouraging the ideal body shape. Overall, these studies support the argument that cultural standards have been embedded in the media for a long time. The issue of self-objectification and unrepresentative photographs isn't a recent one, as we see it fostering in different forms of media. While it isn't Megan Fox's fault that her character was objectified, her image and sexual worth to men can negatively impact the audience and their body image.

The internalization of beauty standards may be deeper and more impactful from digital media rather than print, due to the affordances of social media. Social media plays a large role in particular as platforms encourage constant streams of digital media. Researchers Vandenbosch and Eggermont conducted a longitudinal study in 2016 that followed social media usage and self-objectification. They found that prolonged social media usage increases self-objectification and body surveillance among female adolescents (Vandenbosch & Eggermont). These results initially may not seem groundbreaking, as earlier studies concerning print media yielded similar results. However, these studies follow prolonged usage of social media instead of the occasional read of a monthly magazine. Social media's constant stream of digital media allows for prolonged usage, as there is always new content to consume.

Vandenbosch and Eggermont conducted another study concerning the platform Facebook, in order to see its relationship to self-objectification. They found that users who utilize Facebook self-objectify themselves; this linkage was brought by appearance comparisons and frequently being exposed to digital media (Vandenbosch & Eggermont). This frequent exposure occurs in higher degrees within social media, as other forms of media contain a lesser chance of repeated exposure. For example, a magazine may only arrive weekly or monthly to a home. A television commercial may air only a few times an hour. With over half of users visiting social media platforms multiple times a day, social media contrasts these rates of exposure (Perrin & Anderson).

The use of social media exposes users to a completely new frontier, as this accessibility is unprecedented. In addition, many popular social platforms are image-based due to their affordances, which can become negatively impactful on a user. Several studies have found that social media users experience increased self-objectification due to viewing sexually objectifying

media and anticipating the male gaze online (Feltman et al.). The male gaze is a similar concept to objectification, explaining how digital media is often depicted from the heterosexual male view. This view often perceives women only as objects of sex and beauty. The male gaze is commonly used in media, from promiscuous *Playboy* models to the *Transformers* series. Anticipating this male gaze and the experience of being sexualized can increase self-objectification, as an individual may value how they are perceived over their actual self-worth. Further, being repeatedly exposed to sexually objectifying media can then normalize the experience for a user, increasing their likelihood of internalizing the media and anticipating the male gaze.

In this section, I'll be analyzing Instagram and its contributions to self-objectification. While digital communities on all platforms are part of the issue, Instagram in particular is relevant to my thesis as it emphasizes visuals and imagery. Instagram contributes to internalization of body and beauty standards as the user's focus is on the digital media within their feed (Feltman et al.). We can attribute this latter focus to Instagram's affordances, creating a screen that prioritizes photographs and videos.

Typically, beautiful and trendy influencers garner a large following and platform on social media. Their community supports them, as their image and persona fit the standards for a conventional and attractive woman. As their imagery dominates a user's screen, the user may start to internalize both the influencer's beauty and popularity. This internalization is supported by Van Zalk and Monk's study, which details the neurological activity behind viewing and receiving "likes" on social media platforms. One like represents one user, liking a post to signal that they enjoyed the content. The subjects used in the study were all adolescents active on social media under the age of 18. The study found that when viewing highly liked digital posts, the

adolescents showed higher activity in neural regions associated with reward processing (Van Zalk & Monks, 148). In addition, these adolescents also had high activity in "social cognition, imitation and attention" (Van Zalk & Monks, 148).

High activity in social cognition implies that these adolescents were building thoughts and interpretations about themselves, as well as their peers. This relates to the process of constructing one's self, and judging another's self. High activity in imitation and attention indicates that adolescents in the study paid higher attention to popular digital media, because they felt it to be more successful, then seeking to imitate it themselves.

To apply these findings in an example, look at model @KendallJenner's bikini photograph in Figure 3 of the Appendix. She wears a small bikini, and is posing in front of a mirror. A user may note that her body and imagery receives positive, high engagement. Two outcomes can result from this scenario. First, the individual sees that sexualized media will provide high likes and engagement, and wishes to imitate it in order for online validation of their own. Second, the individual will see then themself as objects to be perceived, as they pose perfectly to achieve high likes and positive comments. Instagram encourages this internalization of body and beauty standards, as users may strive to fulfill standards in order to receive online validation. Understanding online communities and their structure is vital to understanding this internalization, as it explains why users can become so dependent on peer approval and harmony.

Instagram's affordances contribute to this internalization not just because of the focus on visuals, but the accessibility it offers. In print media, professional models dominate the covers and create entire careers out of being beautiful. However, on social platforms, anyone can post digital media of their body and face. It no longer requires an entire camera crew or modeling contract in order to post popular, sexualized content online; it only requires a smartphone. As a

result, an individual doesn't need to follow influencers or popular accounts in order to feel subjected to beauty standards and self-objectification. Average users can post bikini photographs, videos of them working out, or selfies, and acquire a high amount of likes and comments from their followers.

I personally experienced the phenomenon of internalization and self-objectification, as I severely self-objectified myself while dealing with an eating disorder. This objectification became so debilitating that I could no longer function normally each day. Because I saw myself as an object, and constantly imagined another pair of eyes viewing me, I couldn't focus while exercising, working at a coffee shop, or even sitting in my bed alone. During that time period, I constantly checked my body in the mirror at every angle and wondered how I looked doing any action. As a result, my daily life suffered, as I scrutinized myself for not looking like the beautiful women on my Instagram feed. Instead of fighting this self-objectification or removing the content from my social media feed, I let it consume me and continued to worry about how I was perceived.

My experience sheds light on how objectification and self-objectification can negatively impact one's reality. As users are being exposed to societal beauty standards that reinforce the valuable physical traits, it can create unrealistic expectations for the user's body or face. As discussed, objectification isn't new to digital media, the male gaze existing as a notorious example of this. But social media exacerbates these standards, as fulfilling them often brings likes, followers, and popularity to a user. Moreover, social media influencers embody these standards, becoming pinnacles of beauty and popularity to their community. By discussing and analyzing the impact that beauty standards have on users, we can understand the impact that these online celebrities may have as well.

Chapter 2C: Social Media Influencers

To become a celebrity means to become a famous and well-known figure, thrust into the mainstream spotlight. Through the process of celebrification, defined by Marwick as "the process by which individuals are transformed into celebrities", an individual gains a platform to share values and beliefs with fans. These platforms are not new to the 21st century. American film historian Richard Schickel stated that "there was no such thing as celebrity until the beginning of the 20th century", yet in reality, the celebrity has existed for centuries (Marwick, 2). Through early mass media such as portraits, plays, and statues, one can see the existence of fame and high social status. Mediatization, previously discussed regarding self-objectification, attributed to the growth of celebrities as media transformed quickly throughout the 20th century. The innovations of radio, film, television, and now social media, attributed to the role of celebrity and what that now entails.

From film stars to famous singers, each celebrity carries their own set of fans and culture. They rise to fame because of their talent or image and are idolized by fans for it. However, the rise of Internet stars and social media influencers call the concept of celebrity into question, given that their fame looks completely different. Marwick discusses these social media stars by using the term micro-celebrity, defined as "a self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others" (Marwick, 1). Further, Marwick states that a micro-celebrity "becomes something a person does, rather than something a person is".

This term was originally coined by Theresa M. Senft in 2008, another digital media scholar within the field. To elaborate on this concept, an individual who utilizes the technique of micro-celebrity relies on how they present themself and their image. While a celebrity in

Hollywood is known for their acting, an influencer practicing as a micro-celebrity is known for their branding, persona, or image. These figures, no matter the digital platform, must put a high amount of effort into maintaining their virtual self in order to keep their stardom (Marwick, 15).

This effort can often be exhausting for influencers. Gaining attention from users today is laborious, as more and more individuals are joining social media (Marwick, 15). As the Internet increasingly became vaster and more mainstream, a 1997 Michael Goldhaber argued that attention and fame became valuable resources. Thus, the "attention economy" formed, a term implying that in a digital world full of information and media, anything that attracts attention has value (Marwick, 15). This desire for attention online created celebrities exclusive to digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Myspace.

What exactly does an influencer practicing the micro-celebrity technique look like, in comparison to a mainstream celebrity? Influencers gain an audience due to their crafted self; they're often attractive or appear as likable people, building a platform around a lifestyle or hobby. For example, a fitness influencer on Instagram practices micro-celebrity when she presents her constructed self as a disciplined, strong and attractive woman. The constant self-branding and micro-celebrity place high emphasis on the construction of self, as this becomes consumable and loved by the audience (Marwick, 8). Like mainstream celebrities, the influencer requires constant monitoring and maintenance of their own profile; this earns the influencer attention in an overwhelming sea of information and media. Ruth Page calls the act of micro-celebrity one of labor, as digital users "must achieve the visibility and influence deemed necessary to achieve status or fame in the offline world".

Further, an influencer operates differently from a mainstream celebrity due to their perceived authenticity and accessibility online. Due to its affordances, social media operates

differently from other forms of digital media because it gives a public platform to any user. While a celebrity in film can't break through the theater screen to speak with fans, an Instagram user can reply to fans within her comment section immediately. In addition, she can like their posts, share content, and even opt to meet face-to-face. The mainstream celebrity's career exists without constant posting, self-branding, and interacting, whereas the art of micro-celebrity relies on it.

Because of this reliance, influencers need attention from digital users in order to have power. In return, influencers become inspiring and idols to their digital fanbase. Hence, Andrew Wernick's concept of "promotional culture" plays a large role in giving influencers power over users on social media; this culture encourages publicizing people, ideas, and organizations through marketing. As these fans give their attention and time to an influencer, they too give their trust and buy promoted products. This is highly relevant to the topic at hand, as influencers who are likable, attractive and enviable have power over the general public. Through their rigorous self-branding and promotion, they are able to sell both products and ideas that may be harmful to the user. In Chapter 3's Case Study 2, I'll be analyzing @medicalmedium, a popular user who sells his celery juice cleanses to almost 3,000,000 followers.

This aforementioned trust that digital users give influencers can grow more if the influencer is perceived to be authentic. The influencer's interactions with audiences can reveal the intimate details of their thoughts, food consumption, and sex lives; through this, the influencer presents a persona that appears to be less controlled than mainstream celebrities on film and television (Marwick, 17). Social media affordances allow for influencers to quickly, publicly, and candidly express their authenticity, whether it be a lie or not.

For example, Youtuber (a term for a content creator on YouTube) Emma Chamberlain, with 9,670,000 million subscribers as of December 2020, gained her fame through mundane videos following her everyday life. Known as "vlogs", video blogs, she shares everything from her daily coffee routine to her mental health struggles. Chamberlain often wears no makeup while she drives in her car and speaks to the camera as if it's an old friend. These videos became her claim to fame. She created a fanbase not because of her talents, but because of how she presented herself to the Internet. Through the use of multiple social media platforms, she created a candid and relaxed image of herself. She now has multiple company sponsorships, has been flown out to Paris fashion week, and is an icon to millions, all because of her micro-celebrity status. Oftentimes, her fans call her their "hero" or "best friend", relying heavily on her digital media for emotional support.

This authenticity of influencers is rewarded but can become an issue when their self presentation doesn't hold true in reality. If it is revealed that a micro-celebrity has been fabricating their brand and image, they can lose an entire audience. Further, Marwick states, "when internet celebrities turn out to be regular, fallible people, their fans may experience intense disappointment" (Marwick, 16). Authenticity is expected out of influencers, given that their entire brand is based around themselves; a failure to be truthful can negatively impact the influencer's reputation and their audience.

Pixie Turner, author of *The Insta-Food Diet*, details testimonies from these famous influencers who found that their respective digital communities were both toxic and encouraged an unhealthy way of living. As the influencer presents an image that the community deems favorable, they can gain power through higher likes, comments, and followers. But practicing the

technique of micro-celebrity is laborious and can pressure influencers into an unhealthy, unsustainable persona online.

In this position, an influencer can either feign authenticity by digitally faking a lifestyle to their audience, or continue their habits and lifestyle which may damage themself physically and mentally. Clearly, either option is not favorable. If the influencer feigns their branded self, they may be promoting unhealthy lifestyles or habits onto their audience while falsely preaching the success of it. Or, the influencer can't handle losing their stardom and they damage their own health to maintain their popularity. It is important to note that not all digital influencers are inauthentic; however, enough are inauthentic to where unhealthy habits and relationships have become normalized.

To contextualize this, Turner shares the experience of Tally Rye, a fitness blogger under the username @cleanfitlifestyle on Instagram. Rye used her account as a platform to digitally track her food intake and meal plans, and gained popularity within the community as her image aligned with its values. Originally, Rye seemed to have no intent on becoming an influencer, claiming that she began her social media journey only to track her health. Yet as she gained attention and followers, she adopted the habits of a micro-celebrity by closely maintaining her digital image. However, Rye stated that over time, she felt pressure as this image had to be presentable and look a certain way (Turner, 59). This pressure impacted Rye's physical and mental health due to her obsession with perfectly eating and exercising. In turn, this obsession was reflected on her social media platform, open for followers to see. Turner asks, "did Instagram enable and encourage this mindset?", to which Rye responds:

"100%. I had no exposure to nutrition information, my family never talked about diets at home, so all the information I initially got about nutrition was from social media – encouraging me to be gluten free and refined-sugar free and to eat clean. I used to follow all these people who were eating clean, tracking what they were eating, and posting the perfect breakfast every morning. I look back and I just think, wow, we were a bunch of very unwell people. Everyone stopped posting around 2016–17, and they must have stopped posting because it wasn't sustainable, or they had to seek treatment. Some of them, their last post was about how they're taking time away from Instagram for their mental health. Our disordered eating was really normalised and encouraged." (Turner, 60).

As mentioned previously, influencers hold high power over their followers. While Rye served as an icon to digital users, she concurrently was struggling with an eating disorder. This practice of micro-celebrity then hurts both parties: Rye and her followers. Rye felt such immense pressure to maintain her digital image to where she damaged her own wellbeing. The followers were hurt as well, as they looked to Rye's digital media presence for inspiration. Her promoted lifestyle was extremely unsustainable, as it was an eating disorder hidden behind fitness-related hashtags and comments. Rye chose to further hurt herself in order to keep her micro-celebrity status and negatively influenced her followers as well.

However, other influencers may choose to lead a double-life. Turner details the experience of Rawvana, or Yovana Mendoza, a well known health influencer on YouTube. YouTube, founded in 2005, hosts video digital content on its platform as well as comment sections under each public video. Rawvana became a popular influencer in the vegan community

due to her YouTube videos promoting vegan meals and raw food cleanses. The community idolized her, because they believe that veganism and cleanses were the optimal path to health and weight loss (Turner, 94). Her online stardom was so high that she began selling diet plans for cleanses, as well as electronic books to her fans and followers.

However, Rawvana's digital self crumbled in 2019 when she was labelled a fraud. Though she presented herself as a candid vegan, perfectly embodying the ideologies of the community, it was discovered that she didn't actually follow the vegan diet. Turner accounts that Rawvana was caught eating fish in a posted video, then promptly lost over 30,000 subscribers in just 48 hours (Turner, 95). She decided to take a break from social media, yet the damage was done, as across digital platforms she was forever seen as a fake. Ironically enough, her digital platform encouraged users to "reveal [their] authentic self" (Castrodale).

In an attempt to explain herself in a YouTube video, Rawvana explained that she "started to have hormonal problems and menstrual irregularities after doing a 25-day water fast"; she also stated, "I decided to put my health first" (Castrodale). Rawvana found that her image was no longer sustainable due to health concerns. In contrast to Rye, she didn't choose to stay vegan; rather, she violated her brand while maintaining her digital image. This inauthenticity not only jeopardized her digital presence, but also impacted fans that were following her vegan diet; by deciding to put her health first, it signals that her promoted digital content wasn't doing that in the first place. Unlike Rye, who actively suffered alongside her followers, Rawvana's inauthenticity only brought physical and mental risk to her digital audience.

Beauty standards and unrealistic expectations aren't newfound issues, as digital and print media have perpetuated them for years. However, through Chapter 2A, 2B, and 2C, we can see how social media is more susceptible to propagating standards and expectations. The concepts of

Chapter 2 can all be linked through how they create an environment that fosters disordered eating. From the steps of constructing a self, to being led through an algorithm, and falling in with inauthentic influencers and peers, an at-risk user can be led to an eating disorder. Through studies in Chapter 2B, we can see that users are already sensitive to body-image issues and self-objectification before and after using social media. Digital community membership and the idolization of influencers can further cultivate eating disorders, especially when the digital media sharing promotes self-objectification.

Chapter 3 applies the concepts and issues analyzed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 onto real examples online. Through conducting case studies on different platforms and forms of digital media, we can apply multiple concepts to each example in order to understand how they cultivate and normalize disordered eating. As this issue is multifaceted, it requires a diverse education of social media and eating disorders. With this education, we can draw connections between eating disorder propagation and digital communities.

CHAPTER 3

Each case study within Chapter 3 explores a different community or platform online. I intended to order them as if they exist on a spectrum; Case Study 1 being on the more subtle, toned down side of eating disorder normalization. Case Study 4 rests on the other side of the spectrum, as it explores forums that openly encourage the habits and dangers of eating disorders. These studies apply my conducted research in order to understand: how are online communities able to cultivate such harmful messages? In what ways can they affect a user?

Case Study 1: Tiktok, Memes, and Mukbangs: Toxic Language Use

Within popular communities on digital media lies language that encourages disordered eating. As discussed regarding the presentation of self, "reading the room" of a digital community is vital in order to fit in and become part of the group. The user must be socialized into the community through the learning of language, sense of humor, and culture. In his work discussing echo chambers, Jason Bright stated that "groups themselves can be defined through patterns of communication". How users decide to communicate through jokes, comments, and disposition creates a group culture (Bright, 3). But through socialization and exposure to communication, users may be impacted by this culture thus applying it to their real lives. If the group culture encourages or normalizes eating disorders, the impact will be extremely negative on each user.

We can look at the platform Tiktok, which recently came under fire for promoting unhealthy behaviors and eating disorders. Founded in 2016, the platform hosts videos that are 60 seconds or less. Similar to other platforms, it features a "for you page", a home page that utilizes algorithms in order to optimize the user's experience. It was recently found that on users' For

You Pages, TikToks (published videos on the platform) appeared that encourage anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or aggressive diet culture. Further, the comment section allowed for any user, regardless of age or account setting, to participate by giving their own problematic advice. These TikToks went absolutely unmonitored, somehow bypassing the platform's guidelines. While TikTok claims to have banned specific search terms and launched an investigation, there still exists toxic language that encourages disordered habits.

For example, a TikTok creator posted a video detailing her daily meals (Appendix, Figure 1). Documenting each meal, she showcased donuts, fast food, and calorie-rich meals to her followers; by looking at her account, one can see that she is societally attractive and thin. The comments are full of self-deprecating statements such as: "my slow metabolism could NEVER", "due to personal reasons i will not be eating anymore", and "i stare at ice and gain 10 lbs". Each of these comments received a high amount of likes. The first comment received 2,340 likes; the latter received 26,000 likes. Liking a comment signals one's agreement or appreciation of it, which implies that over 26,000 users agreed that they gain weight easily as well.

Not only is the popularity of these comments concerning, but it goes to show how quickly this language use is adopted and encouraged. The most classic example of a popular and seemingly light-hearted comment within popular digital communities is a joke about not eating for an entire day. Often seen on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, users often post comedic content about only consuming iced coffee all day. For example, Twitter user @hoemoticon tweeted in 2019, "my stomach when all i had for the day is iced coffee" with an attached video of a woman singing (Appendix, Figure 2). The tweet received over 204,000 likes, and 44,4000 retweets.

This joke is extremely popular in mainstream digital media and has spread across different digital platforms. The normalization of this media-born joke is what personally inspired

me to begin research on the issue of online communities and eating disorder normalization. As I began to suffer from an eating disorder, popularized jokes such as these enabled my behavior and belittled the fact that I was restricting myself. Because friends online and in reality laughed at jokes normalizing eating disorders, I felt that what I was doing was acceptable and not problematic. In actuality, I was absolutely starving while laughing at my own situation. As mentioned previously, my experience is not uncommon. Oftentimes, users interact with this joke by confessing that they often only drink coffee and lack actual, substantial meals. The entire situation is not comical; in reality, it can be lethal.

Discussing self objectification, Feltman et al. stated that "the more exposure he or she may have to commentary about one's physical traits", the more the individual will self-objectify and body surveil (Feltman et al.). This can be applied to the digital exposure to popular comments and jokes as well, as this language use pertains to an individual's physical body and appearance. Some of the most popular comments on model @KendallJenner's Instagram posts are self-deprecating and negative (Appendix, Figure 3). Comments such as "i hate my life", "i guess i won't eat", and "perfection" are all extremely common and thus normalized to an active social media user; this situation fulfills Feltman et al.'s argument that exposure to this language affects the user's mental health.

We can also observe the issue of language use within the mukbang community. Mukbang videos originated in Korean culture, translating as an "eating show" that anyone around the world could watch. Becoming widely popular in 2014, these videos are mostly posted on YouTube, showing the host cooking and consuming a large amount of food (Strand et al.). He or she speaks to the camera while eating, often commenting on the meal and showing high amounts of pleasure with each bite. These videos are extremely popular on YouTube and in popular

culture; both Korean and American creators can earn hundreds of millions of views on each video posted.

Oftentimes, this form of media is associated with the term "cheat meal", as content creators eat oversized portions of food that is typically unhealthy. For example, the more popular videos on YouTube feature tables full of the fast food chain McDonald's, trays of spicy noodles, or dozens of decadent desserts (Appendix, Figure 4). The term cheat meal itself has been associated with eating disorders already; scholars describe the term as "large meals that people that follow a strict diet and/or an intensive physical exercise regime occasionally 'allow' themselves as a reward or an incentive" (Strand et al.). Mukbang hosts often reinforce this term, typically using it when describing the meal they'll be eating in each video. Just by analyzing these videos alone, I feel that constant exposure to cheat meals, binge eating, and the host's language use are enough factors to cultivate an eating disorder. However, the community around mukbang exacerbates the situation.

While there exists blog posts and social commentary on the relationship that mukbang videos and eating disorders have, only very recently were studies conducted to research the correlation. In 2020, Strand et al. conducted an observational study to analyze the relationship between mukbang media and eating disorders, specifically the acts of purging, restriction, and binge eating. They analyzed the comment sections under mukbang videos on YouTube's platform; in addition, they also looked to online posts on the topic of mukbang and disordered eating on Reddit (Strand et al.). Founded in 2005, Reddit is a network of communities based on people's interests; it hosts forums and the ability to share digital media within posts.

As a result, they found that the language use of the mukbang community was significantly linked to disordered eating habits. A large amount of popular comments expressed

both amazement and evvy towards the mukbang content creator. These users were either impressed or jealous that mukbang content creators could eat such large quantities without gaining weight (Strand et al.). It is relevant to note that many popular mukbang figures are thin and appeal to the modern beauty standard. Content creators such as Stephanie Soo, Veronica Wang, and Zach Choi ASMR are all conventionally attractive and appear to be at a healthy weight.

Strand et al. also found community language use that directly implies disordered eating. Both restrictive eating and binge eating were relevant findings as they were present in YouTube comments and Reddit forums. Many online users described that watching mukbang videos helps them to limit their own eating. By "eating vicariously" through others, these users attest to losing their appetite or feeling satisfied just by viewing a video (Strand et al.). The study defines this habit as eating "by proxy" in order to successfully abstain from meals. On the other end of the spectrum, they found community language use encouraging binge eating disorder. Users that posted these comments appeared to have struggled with binge eating disorder in the past; through consuming this specific digital media, many claim that it encourages them to relapse and binge eat again (Strand et al.).

This study helps us to see that not only is the consumption of this media genre triggering eating disorders, but the language use within the community is becoming normalized as well. Comments such as "me watching this on a diet" or "who else is watching this on an empty stomach?" reign popular in comment sections on mukbang videos. Similar to the phenomenon within the media on Tiktok, or iced coffee memes, acclimation to this language use can be harmful. Through encouraging those who already struggle with disordered eating, and normalizing restricted or binge eating, the mukbang community contributes to the issue as well.

Persistence, one of the social media affordances, is relevant to this situation as it allows for comments and jokes to stay online permanently. The persistence of popular culture jokes such as "i stare at ice and gain 10 lbs" or "I've only consumed iced coffee today" are dangerous because the user can't easily escape this language; it is a popular culture meme that exists on every social platform. According to Bright's work regarding echo chambers, in order to belong or gain popularity within a community the user must utilize this language; if they don't, they won't be properly socialized and enjoy full time membership of the community. This leads to a process of prolonged exposure to negative language use; the user is stuck between utilizing the language in order to achieve social harmony, and harming their mental health or body image.

Case Study 2: Misinformation within Digital Media

The use of misinformation in digital media is connected to the discussion of authenticity and influencers. As analyzed in Chapter 2A, creating a self for the online world gives the user a plethora of freedom. This also brought up the aforementioned issue of authenticity, due to the power that users have to create any persona that they desire. Creating a self that fits into a community and gains an online audience can grant the user even more power if they receive high followers, likes, and attention. This leads to the issue of authenticity versus authenticity; further, it creates an issue of spreading information that may be misinformative to a large digital audience.

The Pew Research Center stated that in 2020, over 86% of U.S. adults often consume news on digital platforms. Social media is becoming more influential and prevalent in users' lives, so exposure to misinformation can be extremely dangerous to their physical and mental wellbeing. The Instagram account @medicalmedium embodies this issue. Anthony William is

the man behind the username, and with over 2,900,000 followers (March 2021) he reaches a

massive audience. On his profile, he claims to be the "Originator of Global Celery Juice

Movement" and has a large presence within the online wellness community. His dedicated digital

fans rave about his preachings, attributing celery juice to rapid weight loss, killing off strep

bacteria, and even stopping skin rashes (Appendix, Figure 5). On William's website, he states the

disclaimer that he has no license in the healthcare field and that his claims should not be

considered as healthcare advice ("Website Disclaimer"). However, 2,900,000 users on Instagram

take his revelations as fact.

Figure 6 is a photograph posted on Instagram by @medicalmedium, displaying one

follower holding a glass of juice and promoting William's liver cleanse. According to William,

this specific cleanse is intended to clean one's body of toxic heavy metals, petrochemicals,

pharmaceuticals, everyday household chemicals, viruses, and bacteria ("Meet Anthony

William"). Further, William states website that this cleanse will "turn around health problems",

including Lyme disease, gout, eczema, and depression. He claims that each individual may see

different results from this cleanse or possibly none at all.

The woman shown in Figure 6 states in the caption that she is on her fifth day of

William's liver cleanse, claiming that the "strep bacteria are dying off angrily" and that she has

lost significant weight while on the @medicalmedium's diet. The testimony states that she

struggled with autism spectrum disorder, autoimmune disease, and bipolar disorder throughout

her life. She thanks the @medicalmedium for helping to cleanse these "toxins and pathogens",

the aforementioned diseases and disorders. This post has almost 8,000 likes, and users in the

comment section both congratulate her and praise @themedicalmedium. This testimony isn't

accompanied by scientific or licensed proof, only a shared digital message that is believed as fact

by the community. One comment congratulating the fan states, "U inspire me to get stricter with myself". This language implies restrictive and disordered behavior, through both the self-comparison and use of the word "stricter".

Digital media such as Figure 6 exposes a multitude of users to misinformation that lacks evidential support by a licensed doctor. Misinformation is a highly discussed term in research today, as it often relates to the news cycle and politics. However, it can also apply to communities such as @medicalmedium's. Misinformation is properly defined as false or inaccurate information that is deliberately created and is intentionally or unintentionally propagated (Wu et al.). Because it is so often used in scholarly media discussion, Wu et al. took to defining distinct kinds of misinformation, believing it to be an "umbrella term to include all false or inaccurate information". It is important to note that I am bringing misinformation into this discussion, rather than Chapter 2C's analysis on influencers and inauthenticity, because it is a plague that affects every corner of digital media. Influencers play only a part in misinformation; it exists in online news, photographs, and conversations between users.

William propagates misinformation to his community of almost 3,000,000 followers on Instagram. He deliberately creates cleanses and diet plans for his audience, sharing the message that these may cure anything from depression to Lyme disease. This information qualifies as misinformation as these claims can't be verified with a doctor or licensed professional. His community then is exposed to this misinformation and they unintentionally share it to other communities and across platforms. Objectively, this is an issue because users are sharing digital content that is not supported by doctors. In the context of my research, these users are sharing potentially harmful messages. Juice cleanses, restricted meals and unlicensed diets can push a user to an eating disorder if left unchecked.

In addition, Wu et al. list "cyberbullying" as a term under the misinformation umbrella. Indeed, this occurred within the @medicalmedium's community, when users recently attacked a critic of the celery juice movement. In her book *The Insta-Food Diet*, registered nutritionist Pixie Turner details posting media on Instagram that questioned the validity of William's claims. She stated that this post caused her to lose "over 1,000 followers overnight and received so much abuse" that she turned both her comment section and direct messages off (Turner, 90). By turning these features off, Turner could prevent any user from interacting with her online. The backlash from William's digital community was so aggressive that Turner had to disconnect from the platform for a brief amount of time.

The existence of misinformation in a community is linked to echo chambers, according to the researchers who wrote *The Spreading of Misinformation Online*. They found that social homogeneity is the primary driver of content diffusion, which can result in the formation of homogeneous, polarized clusters (Del Vicario et al.). Because the community is composed of similarly constructed selfs and beliefs, the users share similar information and further polarize the community from digital outsiders. In addition, the researchers emphasized that users mostly tend to select and share content according to a specific narrative and to ignore opposing content (Del Vicario et al.). Online friends and community members passing misinformation to one another can do harm to their well being as well as the health of the group. Excessive misinformation links to cyberbullying as well as the creation of echo chambers. After all, at their core, echo chambers are environments where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own ("What is an echo chamber?").

We can see the harm of misinformation within @medicalmedium's community, as users may subject themselves to liquid diets and expect weight loss or changes. When unmonitored by

a doctor or licensed professional, these diets can be harmful and lead a user to a more dangerous lifestyle.

However, misinformation isn't limited to one agent, as aforementioned, and is spread across communities and platforms. One of the most common phenomena is the existence of Photoshop and body editing of digital photographs. The famous actress Blake Lively recently stated in an interview that "99.9% of the time, the images are Photoshopped" (Bruner). While she made this statement with no statistical background, she has been an actress in Hollywood for years, and can attest to the experience being edited and Photoshopped. The term Photoshop was made notable by Adobe, given that they have a program for photograph editing and image creation (Kastrenakes)

Photoshop qualifies as misformation due to the intentional manipulation that content creators utilize in order to change their body shape or coloring of their face. Users may share this media unintentionally, as identifying manipulated media can be difficult. Photoshop isn't exclusive to high-profile celebrities either; influencers and regular users online have been caught editing their bodies and faces as well. Phone applications such as Facetune (2013) are well known for their ability to edit body type and facial structure. The simplicity of these applications and their affordances make this manipulation accessible for any user. As a result, a user who follows both their friends and influencers may be consuming photoshopped media on their social media feed everyday.

The forum-based social platform Reddit calls out these misinformative photographs on a subreddit titled "Instagram Reality". The subreddit is intended to call out users online that use editing apps on their public media, their targets ranging from popular influencers and celebrities to the user's friends. In the Appendix, Figure 7 shows the capacity to which a user can change

their body through Photoshop. On the right is the woman before photoshop, and on the left portrays after. She has edited her face as well as significantly slimmed her entire body down. This inauthenticity is misinformation, as she intended to edit her body in a certain manner. Another example, Figure 8, shows a woman in a bikini on the grass. We can see that the grass underneath her is warped in efforts to edit her body in a more favorable light. Figure 9 shows a screenshot of a video: a girl uses a "lip plumping" filter which warps as she speaks, indicating that these aren't her real lips. These changes are relevant, showing the different ways that users seek to appeal to beauty standards. Through enlarging one lips or changing one's entire body shape, these users spread misinformative digital media.

As insignificant as these details may appear to be, they point to a larger issue at hand. These edited and manipulated details can set a user up for failure as they may compare themselves to models and friends who secretly utilize Photoshop. Yvonne et al.'s study stated that "manipulated images online are linked to individual perceptions of body image and self-esteem, which in turn are associated with poor mental health". Often, people may not think of Photoshopped images as examples of misinformation; as previously stated, news, messages or claims may be cited often as misinformative media. But the abundance of these edited photographs makes them just as much of a misinformation crisis as the other digital media. I have argued that eating disorders don't form overnight, but rather develop overtime due to prolonged social media use and exposure to messages. Misinformative photographs contribute to this development, as they're hard to spot and easily can impact the user.

As discussed in Chapter 2B, people are prone to comparing themselves to the media and may affect their own body image as a result. The 2016 study by Vandenbosch and Eggermont found that prolonged social media usage links to self-objectification; the inclusion of

manipulated digital media could only exacerbate this phenomenon. In addition, recall Yvonne et al.'s work, finding that the majority of girls and boys in the study felt body weight dissatisfaction after prolonged social media use.

Misinformative content from the unlicensed "Originator of Global Celery Juice Movement" or Photoshopped influencers can create unrealistic and harmful standards for users. Further, by looking to both the concept of socialization as well as findings from *The Language Case Study,* we know that constant exposure to body-centered language can impact the user. Exposure to fervent praising of weight loss, "juice cleansing", and unrealistic photographs can harm the active member online. With users already so susceptible to rates of self-objectification and body image dissatisfaction, they can't afford to be exposed to misinformative messages and photographs within a community.

Case Study 3: The YouTube Algorithm and Restriction Media

When debating the classic question of, "is social media good or bad?", YouTube is often cited as the "good". For almost two decades, it has hosted video content to teach users how to tie a tie, cook dinner for two, or recover from an eating disorder. In my eating disorder recovery, I have watched digital media from creators such as Rebecca Jane, a young woman who suffered with anorexia herself and now posts videos to help others. Videos such as these examples are extremely helpful, as they provide knowledge and support to the users seeking it.

However, on the other end of the spectrum exists problematic media that encourages and cultivates eating disorders. This media doesn't only encourage eating disorders; the media is encouraged to the user on YouTube. Through the use of algorithms, triggering media is suggested to users who watch videos centered around food restriction and purging. In this

context, the use of "triggering" refers to media that may enable a user to relapse or begin harmful habits. An individual with anorexia nervosa may be triggered to restrict again; a user with no mental illness may be triggered to feel overweight, and find ways to restrict meals. These videos share extremely low-calorie diets and host supportive comment sections, encouraging users to be inspired by peers and feel that disordered eating is acceptable.

As of February 2021, YouTube has over two billion users ("YouTube for Press"). Almost one third of all Internet users are on YouTube, and count for over 1,000,000,000 hours watched per day ("YouTube for Press"). It is a staple of social media: it's the most popular video-sharing platform, providing comment sections under each video, and grants the ability to like or dislike videos. Similar to the follow feature on other platforms, a user can subscribe to a content creator and receives their comments and activity within the "home page". Also on this home page are recommended videos that are based on the user's likes, subscriptions, and viewing activity. From Chapter 2, we know that these recommended videos operate due to YouTube's algorithm, functioning to optimize the user's experience and give them a customized list of videos to watch. In addition, we know that algorithms can lead users into unfavorable communities that push ideologies, language use, and media standards that are toxic.

YouTube's affordance of visibility allows for any user to post their content onto the platform; this is what allows for such a diverse offering of videos. This visibility is what allows harmful content to be posted by users with eating disorders, from anorexia nervosa to binge eating disorder. Videos titled "(TW) what i eat in a day of restricting #5" or "7,000 calorie binge // a full day of binge eating" are available to users of any age, with no intervening from YouTube itself. To clarify, YouTube has the autonomy to remove videos and YouTubers when they feel the community guidelines have been violated. Community guidelines include the restriction of

sensitive, violent, sexual, or fake content. However, there is a large and popular presence of eating disorder videos on YouTube; even the search "day of restricting" yields hundreds of videos for immediate consumption.

In a 24 hour time period, I found that 2 videos were posted under the keyword "day of restricting"; in the last week, I found 16 (as of February 2021). The difference between these kinds of videos and those created by Rebecca Jane is that the former promote disordered eating, while Rebecca Jane helps to heal it. While Rebecca Jane shares her painful experience and shows herself eating all kinds of meals, these restrictive videos work to share tips, tricks and habits of an anorexia, bulimic, or binge eating individual. This media could be permitted on YouTube if it slips through the algorithm's cracks. Because the content creators are including warnings in their video titles, or stating that they're "only documenting their disorder, not glamorizing it", the videos may not be flagged as breaking the community guidelines (Taylor). However, I find it surprising that platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest have all been held accountable for hosting eating disorder content; yet YouTube has stayed away from this criticism for years.

The content itself is extremely triggering to those already suffering with an eating disorder, or encourages disordered behavior and provides aid for those developing an eating disorder. For example, YouTuber @aha yikes posted a restrictive eating video that garnered 456,000 views. It's titled "what i eat in a week | tw ed | restriction"; "tw" meaning trigger warning, "ed" meaning eating disorder. The video has pleasant, calming music playing alongside clips of her preparing food and tea (Appendix, Figure 10). On a clip of her cutting lemons, a text box reads: "I had such a huge binge on the weekend so I'm doing a week of very low restriction". Tracking each consumption with a calorie counter, the YouTuber shows us her

lemon water, then green tea; as she drinks these beverages, she watches the Mukbang YouTuber Stephanie Soo eat a massive meal online. This relates to Case Study 1, as it exemplifies the use of Mukbang videos in order to further restrict oneself. At the end of her "day one", her calorie counter displays 0 calories. The video continues on to document the following days, where she ate 2 calories in a day, then 0, then 14. When she does consume food (pickled onions, falafel, vegetables), she's quick to add that she "burned it off" through exercise.

This digital media is of course problematic, but for multiple reasons. Firstly, it is extremely easy to locate, as typing keywords such as restriction, day of eating, or "tw ed" can yield these videos. As discussed multiple times throughout this work, prolonged exposure to media such as this can heavily impact the user. In this case, it can inspire restriction, normalize the extreme caloric deficit, or cause self-comparisons between the user and creator. In addition, it creates a space for community members to gather and encourage one another. This content also creates a charming, relaxing feeling associated with restrictive eating, as shown in the video.

In the comment section of @aha yikes's video, there are over one thousand comments praising her for her restriction, making jokes about eating disorders, and expressing envy for her self control. For example, one envious comment reads, "I can't even restrict myself for 1 minute..."(Appendix, Figure 11). Another comment states, "me: don't click you'll get triggered", then, "also me: checking to make sure im restricting myself as much as everyone else lol" (Appendix, Figure 12). These comments may use casual language, but as discussed in Case Study 1, this casual language normalizes eating disorders. Making jokes in a comment section instead of acknowledging the severity of eating disorders will numb the seriousness to which users take these illnesses. Both of these comments have hundreds of likes each, signaling the popularity of this content within the community.

In addition, the visuals of @aha yikes's video contribute to the normalization and glorification of eating disorders. Instead of serious music or outward shame towards the restrictive diet, the viewer is met with calming music and pleasing visuals of her preparing tiny meals and tea. This theme is common throughout eating disorders videos on YouTube; there often is a pastel filter, informal font, and clips of anime characters eating. To a viewer, @aha yikes's diet and daily life seems almost calming, her subtitles narrating each meal and calorie count. This visual aesthetic can glorify restrictive eating, as it eases the viewer into content that is harmful and triggering. Both @aha yike's comment section and video aesthetics glorify and normalize eating disorders, creating a casual and comfortable space for community members to share harmful messages.

The platform itself also is responsible for this normalization of eating disorders. Once a user's activity begins on YouTube, they begin to accumulate suggested videos based on likes, subscriptions, and interactions. For example, after viewing @aha yikes's video once, I was offered hundreds of suggestions to watch after.

Figure 13 in the Appendix displays the interface of YouTube. To the right of her video is a list of suggested videos, curated by the YouTube algorithm. Because I watched one restriction video, hundreds more just like it were suggested to me. It is important to note that not just anorexia nervosa videos were suggested; in addition, I also was recommended to watch videos detailing "a day of binge eating" as well as "purging and restriction". When I suffered from an eating disorder, these video suggestions did extreme harm to my chances of recovery.

YouTube does not provide content warnings for these videos or messages that alert the viewer to triggering content. On Pinterest, Instagram, and Tumblr, attempting to find digital media that encourages eating disorders will result in being led to a helpline; this occured due to

prior criticism by users. In contrast, not only does YouTube recommend similar videos with harmful messages and content, but also enables it in the search feature. By typing "day of restr-" or "day of bing-", I received suggestions in the search bar for content related to eating disorders. "Restr-" and "bing-" are spelled in this manner in order to show the amount of characters one must type before receiving suggestions that lead to this content. Social platforms have the autonomy to regulate this media, as it happens daily on Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, and most recently Tiktok. Yet YouTube won't take down videos that promote disordered eating or its normalization.

As a result, we see algorithms leading users to dangerous communities online. Algorithms have neither good or ill intent, because they serve merely as an online function, but they open the door to media fostering eating disorders and offering hundreds of videos for the user to watch. After being pulled into this community, it can be hard to extract oneself, as YouTube consistently recommends the user videos in order to keep them engaged. Even if content creators on YouTube are putting trigger warnings and disclaimers in their videos, it isn't enough to stop users from consuming the media. Similar to bikini photographs of Instagram influencers or jokes made on Tiktok about not eating, these videos can impact users in different ways. It can encourage those who already suffer from eating disorders; yet it also can normalize consuming 100 calories in one day to the general audience. As YouTube recommends these videos and takes no action to warn the viewer about the content, disordered eating may seem acceptable or a favorable way to lose weight.

Case Study 4: Pro-Ana and Pro-Mia Forums

At the extreme end of the digital media spectrum lies pro-anorexia (pro-ana) and pro-bulimia (pro-mia) forums. As previously defined, a forum is an online discussion board with multiple threads of conversation. One post is created, and multiple discussions can be held within that post. While there isn't an exact origin date for pro-ana/pro-mia forums, scholars can assume that they've existed since the age of Web 2.0 and its creation of participatory online spaces.

Pro-ana and pro-mia websites are digital platforms providing forums that are public to all users. These terms empower anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa; the use of "pro" in front of both disorders implies the support system provided. However, pro-ana/pro-mia content is not intended to recover individuals struggling with eating disorders, and doesn't act as a conventional support system. Rather, the pro-ana/pro-mia communities encourage users to motivate their harmful habits through giving tips on maintaining eating disorders. Research suggests that modest exposure to these forums can influence disordered eating habits and changes in meals, harmful changes that don't line up with a "support system" (Johnson).

Unlike mainstream social platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, pro-ana and pro-mia sites are unregulated because they're typically created by digital users and not professional entities. Due to this, they're accessible to any user, no matter how triggering or dangerous the media may be. Pro-ana and pro-mia forums thrive due to social media affordances, possibly more so than other case studies do.

To find a pro-ana/pro-mia website, one only has to type the correct keywords into the search bar. Using keywords such as "restriction diet", "pro ana blog", or "fast weight loss" can lead users to these sites. In addition, popular websites such as Quora host problematic conversations. While Quora serves as a public site intended for questions to be answered within

forums, they are guilty of facilitating pro-ana content as well. Posts such as "What typical foods do people with anorexia usually eat?" see high online traffic, featuring anorexic users that share their everyday diet (Appendix, Figure 14). However, most prominent is the website www.myproana.com (MPA), which is intended to host discussions about each eating disorder.

The description of MPA reads, "MPA is a site dedicated to the support or recovery of those suffering from eating disorders or body dysmorphic disorders" ("About MPA"). While this may appear to be a productive and healthy environment, the conversations held between users are not. MPA provides spaces for different communities: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, orthorexia, or other eating disorders unspecified. The site also provides pages such as "competition challenges", "thinspirations", "the rant room", and "accountability" ("MPA"). Within these pages, users compare body weights, criticize others' appearances, and share photographs of conventionally thin women and men. In addition, MPA provides pages to discuss exercising, diets, and handling illness. MPA allows any user to view discussions regarding all types of eating disorders, but in order to view more problematic media such as thinspirations or accountability, a user must make a profile and sign in. In this way, MPA does mirror mainstream social platforms that require profile creation; yet the unmonitored and outright dangerous messages is what sets it apart.

A pro-ana/pro-mia site contains digital media and messages that encourage then normalize eating disorders through discussion. In *I Will Not Eat*, a 2015 review, research was conducted to analyze the amount of pro-ana media within online platforms. It was found that 85% of pro-ana websites posted thinspiration material; this is typically defined by users as any media that inspires them to become thinner (Johnson). Thinspiration media can be skinny models, or a beautiful celebrity, or even a friend on someone's Instagram page. In addition, 65%

of websites contained tips and tricks for restriction; further, 96% of website visitors reported learning tips and tricks for an eating disorder (Johnson). That is substantial, as almost every single visitor to a pro-ana website left with a newfound tip for restriction. With 70% of pro-ana websites offering diet advice, a website visitor would have to be well-guarded in order not to be encouraged by these media messages (Johnson).

On a typical pro-ana or pro-mia discussion board, users may share photographs of their current body, daily meals, and celebrities that they are envious of. In addition to this media, online conversations are hosted that discuss tips on how to resist desserts, purge at school or work, and hiding a disorder from others. Figure 15 in the Appendix shows the array of forum posts in a single day on MPA; posts such as "Restriction advice" and "Do you count calories if you purge?" are there for any user to view.

One post by an MPA member @down.d.rabbithole is titled "school lunch ideas!", and underneath she requests suggestions from her pro-ana peers. Within the post, users with profile pictures of skinny models or rib cages share suggestions for low-calorie meals. To elaborate, members of these forums often share photographs of skinny rib cages (an example of thinspiration), as it portrays the thinness many members desire to have. One member shares a list of snacks, stating, "these are some of my favourite restrictive meal ideas". Another suggestion reads, "Skip lunch, hide in bathroom", then, "but [drink] some tea so mom still sees money coming out of your account".

The majority of the forum consists of members who suggest low-calorie salads, snacks, or only drinking black coffee during lunch. Even though MPA claims to be a website that supports and recovers members, this discussion thread is full of ideas for restrictive eating. One user suggests to bring chicken broth to lunch, as it only contains 30 calories per serving. This

post in particular resonated with me during my research, as this tip was the first one that I learned. As I began developing disordered tendencies, I sought out fast weight-loss tips online; I then discovered a pro-ana blog, where I learned to restrict by only consuming chicken broth.

It is important to note that while binge-eating disorders have a presence on MPA, the community surrounding them is surprisingly more supportive and helpful. On the first page of the binge-eating discussions there are supportive resources and motivations to stop binging. I've found that there are more online communities encouraging anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa rather than binge-eating disorder. Even MPA has "proana" in its domain name. While communities exist that support a pro-binge-eating disorder lifestyle, they are harder to locate online. In my opinion, this may be due to societal standards that emphasize weight loss and conventional slimness. Additionally, digital media that encourages eating disorders tends to contain more restrictive and purging content. The MPA's diet page lists extremely low-calorie diets for users to try, such as the "skinny girl diet", the "mono diet", and juice cleanses ("About MPA"). This media can be more encouraging to those with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, as they suffer with tendencies to restrict or purge any calories consumed.

Wyke Stommel analyzed discussions from a German pro-ana forum in order to understand the relationship between users in the community (Stommel, 2008). She found that throughout pro-ana forums there existed a set of rules concerning posting and language use, all managed by moderators. On these forums are newer members, seasoned ones, and moderators, who create and enforce the rules; when a member breaks a rule, the moderator either redacts parts of the member's post, or removes it altogether. For example, a new member posted both her current body weight as well as her methods to restrict. A moderator replied to the post, advising her to "read through the rules again" as she wasn't allowed to post that content (Stommel, 2008).

Having community leaders within pro-ana/pro-mia forums creates a standard of language use and behavior. In the future, this new member will follow the moderator's actions in order to stay within the group and hold conversation with other users. If not, they risk being removed from the community altogether for breaking the guidelines. This example may shed light on the more positive pro-ana forums; by banning any discussion of users' body weight, or how they harm themselves, it can actually protect users from harmful media. However, plenty of other forums lack this restriction (such as MPA, for example) but still host moderators that create language and discussion norms for the community.

Actual members within pro-ana/pro-mia communities attest to feeling a sense of support and welcoming. In the work *The Dark Side of Media and Technology*, members are interviewed and share that these online communities offer them sanctuary and protection, mostly from those in life who don't understand their eating disorder. These communities form due to online users' shared experiences with eating disorders, since they can relate to one another. However, the members themselves admit that the forums encourage eating disorders through weight loss tips, and teaching members how to maintain their eating disorder (Eli & Ulijaszek). Furthermore, these online spaces become toxic as a sense of competition exists within the community. Members compete with each other online to lose more weight, maintain their eating disorder, and avoid seeking help (Eli & Ulijaszek).

This competition leads to tension within the online community, as newcomers to the forums are often labeled as "wanna-rexics" (Johnson). Johnson defines the term as "individuals who are perceived to emulate eating disorders and visit pro-ana websites hoping to adopt the attitudes, behaviors, and weight loss results they promote". This exhibits the concept of socialization, as new members must present a self that is accepted by the community;

wanna-rexics are often challenged on their restrictions and disordered habits in order to fit in. One pro-ana post in Johnson's study discusses wanna-rexics, stating "…there is deffy one person on this site, who you can just tell has NOT got an ED" (ED referring to eating disorder). This phenomenon exemplifies the construction of self, as a newcomer to a pro-ana/pro-mia community must create an acceptable persona in order to join the group. If they aren't successful, they risk being outed and banned from interacting on forum discussions.

These online communities are toxic, as they claim to be support systems but keep certain users from joining the community. Though this may be for the best, labelled wanna-rexics can easily visit another website for tips and tricks. Pro-ana and pro-mia blogs often acknowledge this, giving users a warning to stay away from their content. The website palewintergirl.weebly.com details an individual's experience with anorexia; on the title page, she states "if you are wanting to be anorexic please leave now". She acknowledges that eating disorders are debilitating disorders and warns users to keep away and yet provides dozens of posts that encourage them. For example, the page shown in Figure 16 of the Appendix is titled "restaurant rules", and gives a comprehensive list on how to eat at restaurants without gaining weight or alarming others to one's disorder ("Restaurant rules"). Another page shows her recommended foods for low-calorie restrictive diets. Even if wanna-rexics and healthy users are warned on her home page, they can easily choose to continue and expose themselves to this media. Moreover, finding this website was not difficult; it took one search on Google with the keyword "pro ana foods".

The ease with which a user can consume this media is highly dangerous. A 2009 study of 711 adolescents showed that 12.6% of the girls and 5.9% of the boys had visited pro-anorexia websites (Johnson). While this study is over one decade old, it provides scholarly research and

gives us an idea of the environment today. As social media usage grows exponentially, we can make conjectures that adolescents continue to be exposed to pro-ana/pro-mia content. Through the permanence of these forums, users can access posts from even the 2000's. One post from 2008 discusses a developing case of anorexia, a user commenting that "fat = bad bad bad bad bad" (Johnson). The permanence as well as the visibility into other user's personal lives creates a large risk factor for both users just exploring communities, as well as pro-ana/pro-mia community members.

This risk factor was explored in an early 2007 study. They conducted a study with college undergraduate females (BMI of 18+, healthy weight range) who were given multiple conditions: exposure to pro-ana/pro-mia websites, exposure to health websites, and exposure to tourism websites. They found that 84% of those exposed to pro-ana/pro-mia websites had reduced their weekly caloric intake (Johnson). These findings support my overarching argument that exposure and membership into toxic communities can seriously harm the user's physical and mental health. The community's group bond is through their hidden struggles, their pain, their restriction; assimilating into this community can lead to disordered eating.

Pro-ana and pro-mia forums are not new to the world of digital media, as studies dating back to 2007 discuss their presence. They have persisted throughout the evolution of Web 2.0 and social media, opening the doors to plenty of users to develop an eating disorder. These forums hold users' hands and teach them skills such as hiding restriction from others, purging correctly, and staying under their calorie goal. These are the most dangerous of online communities in how members outright speak about disordered eating and encourage it; through constant discussion and communicating of goals, these communities are able to normalize their behavior and cultivate it through the use of digital media.

CONCLUSION

Due to my research and analysis, I can confidently conclude that online communities cultivate spaces for eating disorders. Each case study is supported by sociological and media concepts, and emphasizes the normalization of disordered eating that occurs daily through digital media. In addition, my own experience validates these claims, as I too fell victim to misinformative media, toxic language use, and pro-ana/pro-mia forums. My experience is not unique if anything, my research has confirmed that a staggering amount of online users can relate to my experience. At its core, the majority of social media users are already reporting negative body image (Yvonne et al.). From experiencing body image dissatisfaction to searching for ways to efficiently restrict, users are objectively cultivating eating disorders through their social media usage. Moreover, some users suffer in silence, as they don't seek help due to this normalization of disordered eating online.

Media scholars have discussed socialization, eating disorder normalization, and harmful digital media for over a decade, but they have failed to connect them all together. Through my work, I have taken these concepts and connected the dots between them in order to understand how online communities can cultivate and normalize eating disorders. Concepts such as social media foundations; the creation of a self; beauty standards and self-objectification; the affordances of social media: these are all factors of eating disorder cultivation online. This issue is multifaceted, and goes past the occasional Photoshopped model or restricted diet meme.

As discussed in the Introduction, I do not believe that social media is inherently bad There are positive communities online that encourage users to both love their bodies and combat misinformative media. Content creators such as Rebecca Jane and Tally Rye are shining examples: both of these young women experienced eating disorders and now use their platforms

to help others online. However, that is not to say that these positive communities make social media good, either. It is vital for users to be aware of toxic online communities that perpetuate eating disorders.

There is constant exposure to this digital media, making a user's prolonged social media use dangerous. A seemingly obvious solution may be to simply log off of social platforms and stop using them completely. However, with 90% of young adults in the U.S. using social media, this solution is not realistic (Shearer). The concept of logging onto social platforms and "leaving bodies behind" is no longer feasible due to the exponential growth in social media use. These platforms and media sharing capabilities are a part of modern society now, and for the average in-touch young adult, logging off isn't an option.

Users need to be aware that they are at risk for exposure to harmful digital media and online communities. This awareness entails the recognition that digital media may be misinformative, and memes that one's friends are sharing may be hiding disordered eating tendencies. When discussing my research with peers, they were quick to mention how relatable this issue is. People directly in my life have attested to feeling insecure about their own bodies after viewing an influencer's, or have found cleanses and restrictive diets online that were encouraged by communities. While users cannot easily log off of social platforms and cease any consumption of digital media, they can be vigilant and take care of their mental health.

This vigilance requires holding social platforms, content creators, and our own peers accountable for their messages and behavior. If users understand how socialization, community interaction, and frequent exposure to media may affect them, they may then recognize problematic behavior in other communities and users. In addition, users must hold platforms which still host toxic, normalized media accountable; YouTube's algorithm should not suggest

restrictive eating videos; the "MyProAna" website shouldn't exist with such open accessibility; influencers with millions of followers should not share edited photographs.

We have seen platforms take action to limit or ban disordered eating content, and progress shouldn't stop there. As users of social media, we have the power to call out platforms and its content creators in order to facilitate a more positive and healthy environment. It took months of therapy, as well as years of recovery, in order for me to understand how toxic digital media online is. I still struggle every single day, as these aforementioned examples are triggering and expose me to media that is harmful to my recovery. Being able to identify signs of toxic digital media and understanding when to protect one's self is vital in this digital environment.

If users begin to hold these platforms and digital communities accountable, we may see positive change in the environment. 20% of individuals with diagnosed eating disorders die, not even acknowledging those who never receive help or a diagnosis (Sidani). If the individual survives their battle with an eating disorder, they have a tumultuous road to recovery ahead of them. By managing one's mental and physical health, as well as acknowledging the toxicity of platforms and digital communities, users can protect themselves from eating disorder cultivation and normalization. In the future, we as a modern society must take steps to understand the dangers of prolonged social media use, and look out for one another. Eating disorders are all-encompassing battles that the individual must fight; digital communities should be used to uplift these individuals, not exacerbate their mental illness.

Appendix

Figure 1
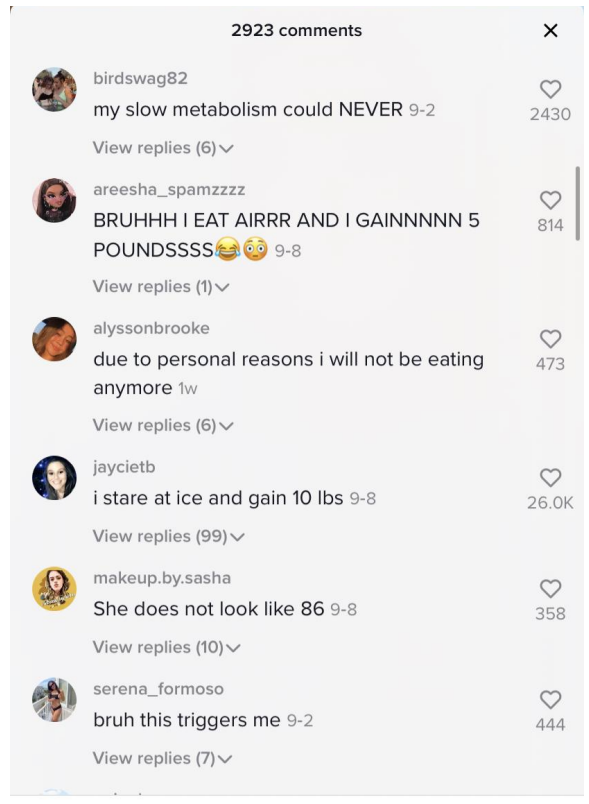
www.TikTok.com

Figure 2

@hoemoticon, "Tweet Message". 7/26/2019. "my stomach when all i had for the day is iced

coffee".

Figure 3

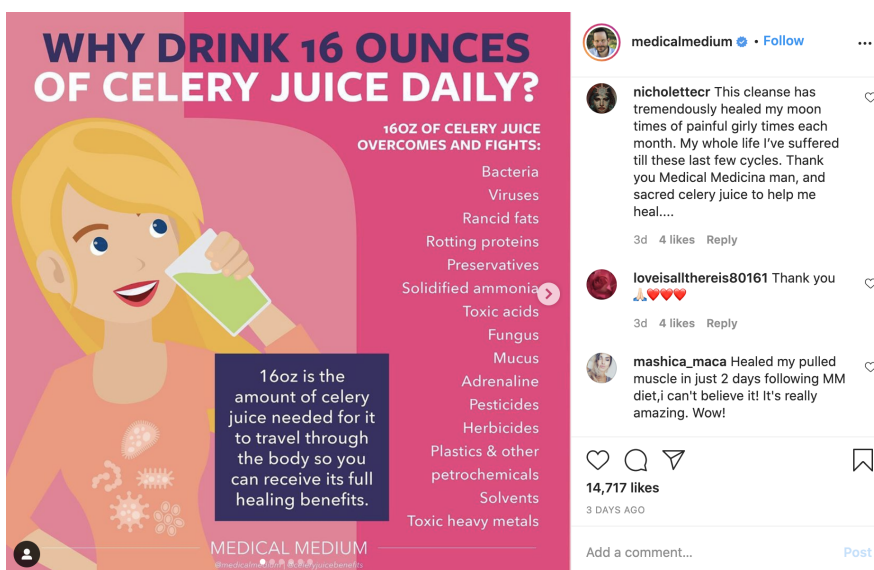@kendalljenner. "i [love] lakes" *Instagram*, 9/3/2020,

https://www.instagram.com/p/CEr8dfDDnSv/.

Figure 4

*Search results from "Mukbang" on www.YouTube.com on 2/25/2021.

Figure 5

@medicalmedium. "WHY DRINK 16 OUNCES OF CELERY JUICE DAILY?" *Instagram*,

9/7/2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CGBI986pc-x/.

Figure 6

@medicalmedium. "Repost from @cleansemysoul131" Instagram, 9/10/2020,

https://www.instagram.com/p/CGKr_U0JGHR/.

Figure 7

u/RubixMarvel. "Before and after photoshop..." Reddit, 2020,

https://www.reddit.com/r/Instagramreality/comments/bfqupk/before_and_after_photosho

p/.

Figure 8
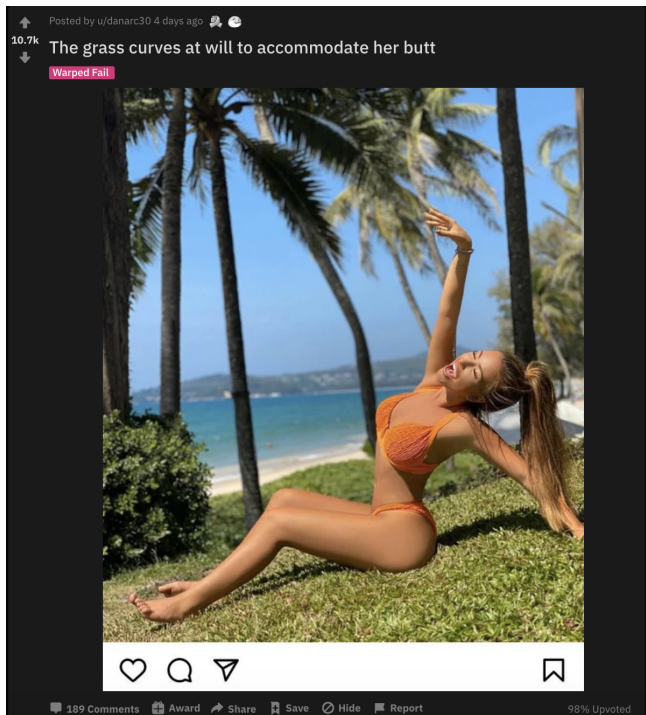
U/danarc30. "The grass curves at will to accommodate her butt." Reddit, 3/11/2021,

https://www.reddit.com/r/Instagramreality/comments/m2qjrz/the_grass_curves_at_will_t

o_accommodate_her_butt/

Figure 9
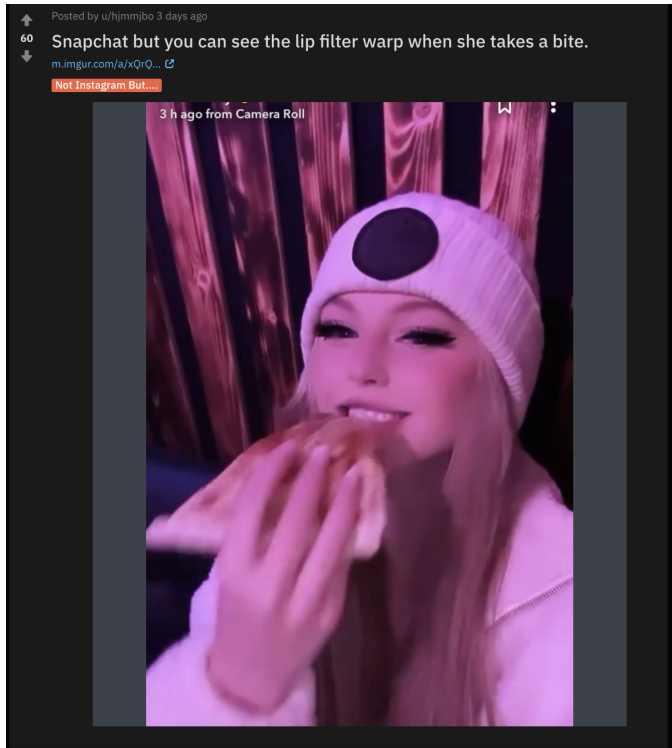
U/hjmmjbo. "Snapchat but you can see the lip filter warp when she takes a bite." Reddit,

3/12/2021,https://www.reddit.com/r/Instagramreality/comments/m3970b/snapchat_but_y

ou_can_see_the_lip_filter_warp_when/.

Figure 10

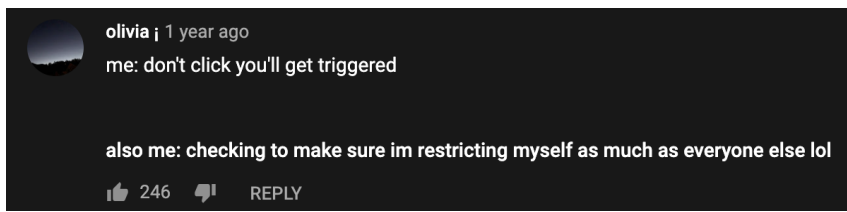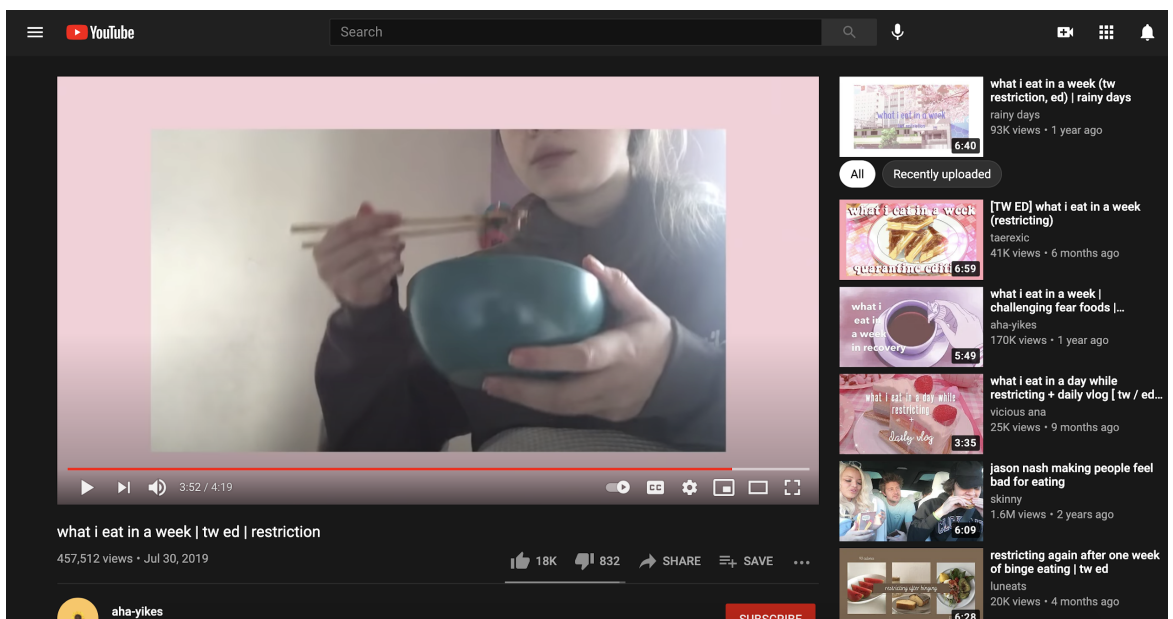"what i eat in a week | tw ed | restriction". www.YouTube.com, Uploaded by aha yikes,

7/30/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taVIk2DMihE.

Figure 11

"what i eat in a week | tw ed | restriction". www.YouTube.com, Uploaded by aha yikes,

7/30/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taVIk2DMihE.

Figure 12

"what i eat in a week | tw ed | restriction". www.YouTube.com, Uploaded by aha yikes,

7/30/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taVIk2DMihE.

Figure 13

"what i eat in a week | tw ed | restriction". www.YouTube.com, Uploaded by aha yikes,

7/30/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taVIk2DMihE.

Figure 14

Related Questions

On average, how many calories does a
person with anorexia eat in a day?

How do anorexics stop eating, don't they get
an urge to eat, or is food just out of their life...

What do other anorexics consume in a day?

How do I know if I'm showing signs of
anorexia? I think I'm healthy, I eat around...

Anorexia Nervosa: What causes people to
become anorexic?

Why does anorexia cause insomnia?

Can a person classify as anorexic if they eat a
1000 calories a day and don't exercise?

What is your Anorexia nervosa story?

What is a normal day like in the life of an
anorexic?

What typical foods do people with anorexia
usually eat?

Ask Question

https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.quora.com/What-typical-foods-do-people-with-anor

exia-usually-eat&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1615907853603000&usg=AOvVaw2Bfw-buOafC

h1OtXMqzXlb

Figure 15

Weirdest/saddest/most noteworthy places you've binged
Started by Bluey , Yesterday, 12:58 PM   1   2

How do you purge when your parents are at home
Started by nedim13 , Today, 12:41 PM

delivery HACKS ~free food~
Started by noturprincess , Yesterday, 10:50 PM

"The Binging Purging Alice in Wonderland"
Started by electrasheart , Today, 01:21 PM

Do you count calories if you purge?
Started by toxic.lax , Today, 10:39 AM

What Bulimic thoughts are you having right now?
Started by thesatellite , 01 May 2015   1   2   3   968 →

How do you purge when your parents are at home
Started by nedim13 , Today, 12:41 PM

How do you purge when your parents are at home
Started by nedim13 , Today, 12:40 PM

How long should I wait after taking a medication to purge?
Started by Ivegotwings , Today, 01:00 AM

Certain foods sticking to stomach
Started by PepsiCherry , Yesterday, 05:58 PM

Hand injury caused by purging: how to help it heal?
Started by Eloise_mCat , Today, 09:13 AM

Do you count calories if you purge?
Started by toxic.lax , Today, 10:39 AM

How much weight can I loose before April 24th?
Started by ArizonaDovii , Today, 02:39 PM

Anyone willing to share their diet/calorie numbers?
Started by ChunkyGurl , Today, 10:11 AM   1   2

CALORIES TOTAL TODAY - Just The Number
Started by Guest_NoNo557_* , 25 May 2014   1   2   3   2302 →

Post Pics of Your Grocery Haul!
Started by Tibbytheweirdo , 07 Aug 2016   1   2   3   183 →

WHEN do you eat
Started by skinniestbitchalive , 06 Mar 2021   1   2

Restriction advice
Started by katiegx , Today, 02:16 PM   🏷 anorexic, restrictions

Anyone else feel super fat from eating literally anything?
Started by Lemon boye , Today, 02:28 PM

Piggybacking off another thread - what stereotypical anorexic tendencies DO you have?
Started by Beautifulstrggl , Today, 09:23 AM

Did you have a different ed before anorexia?
Started by thisismyisle , Today, 01:31 PM

Birth control patch
Started by Whatwillthedemonsthink , Today, 02:25 PM

refusing meals
Started by anabutterfly04 , Today, 12:54 PM

Post pictures of your meals: part 11
Started by iwanttogohome , 02 Nov 2020   1   2   3   244 →

About MPA. https://www.myproana.com/.

Figure 16

RESTAURANT RULES
2/21/2014   0 Comments

1. Drink a glass of water before going.
2. If really hungry have some tea, or even veggies beforehand.
3. If at a restaurant drink at least a full glass of water before the food comes.
4. Take a sip in between each bite.
5. Eat slowly.
6. Sabotage food with too much salt, etc.
7. Try eating with opposite hand (if right handed use left hand and vise versa)
8. To avoid temptation, don't even look at the section of the menu with the fattening foods. Out of sight, out of mind, out of body.
9. Stick to ordering items including the words ' baked' 'broiled' and 'steamed'.
10. Always order sauces on the side
11. Dip the tines of your fork into the dressing then into meal, so you can still taste the sauce but with a fraction of the calories.
12. Eat half and pack it up
13. Start with soup or side salad to fill you.
14. Eat in the order of veggies first, protein next, carbs last.
15. Have salad with only negative calories vegetables.
16. Try not to be the first to start or last to finish.
17. Aim to drink at least 3 glasses of water during the meal.
18. Put your utensils down between each bite.
19. Talk a lot so you spend more time speaking than eating.
20. Look up the nutritional info online before going to the restaurant so you can decide before hand what you want.
21. Ask for lunch size portion or children's size.
22. Say 'No thank you' to dessert.

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