

**SHARED EXPERIENCES AND COLLECTIVE PRODUCTION: NOTE CARD**

**CONFESSIONS ON YOUTUBE**

A Thesis

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

New media are continuously changing the way in which youth communicate. Social media and online production, especially, are rapidly evolving. This research analyzes note card confession videos found on the popular video site, YouTube. It looks at the many aspects of digital storytelling, networked publics, and social support that make this genre of videos so unique. These videos have many visual and narrative components that tie them together as a unique form of communication. Writing style, narrative cues, and physical gestures were all used as part of the digital storytelling process. It was found that there is a common discussion of intimate topics such as depression, abuse, bullying, self-harm, and suicide. Furthermore, the comments section of each of the videos seems to serve as a potential space for online social support. In response to these videos, a series of parody videos have also been created as an apparent critical response to these note card confessions. These findings potentially open up new paths of research regarding new media communication, prevention studies, and youth health.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Importance of Youth Confessions .....	3
Social Media Use among Youth .....	4
Identity Formation in Social Media .....	5
Individual identity .....	6
Collective identity .....	7
Importance of identity formation .....	9
Relationships and Personal Expression.....	10
Support and Self-verification .....	12
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
The Role of Social Media.....	14
Networked publics.....	16
YouTube and the Role of Social Support .....	18
Digital Storytelling.....	20
Note Card Confessions as a Genre .....	22
Representations of Signboards in Media.....	25
Bob Dylan’s <i>Don’t Look Back</i> .....	26
PostSecret .....	27
“I am Obamacare” .....	28
Who needs feminism? .....	29
Project Unbreakable .....	31
Additional adaptations.....	32
Gendered Uses of Social Media .....	33
Space for Confession.....	37
METHOD .....	38
Searching for Videos .....	38
Initial Sample of Videos .....	39
Classifying videos .....	40
Additional classifications .....	42
Creating a Sample for Analysis.....	42
Disparities in sex of storyteller.....	43
Selecting the videos.....	43
Textual Analysis of the Note Card Videos .....	45
Transcriptions .....	45
Video analysis .....	45

	Page
Comments.....	45
Rationale for Analytical Categories .....	46
<b>FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Notable Videos .....	48
Amanda Todd .....	48
Jonah Mowry.....	50
Ben Breedlove .....	51
Significance of Todd, Mowry, and Breedlove.....	52
Confessional Stories.....	53
Gender Findings .....	53
Authenticity of the Videos.....	56
Commonalities in Production.....	57
Actions by the storyteller .....	57
Writing style .....	60
Relationships .....	67
Health and Life Challenges .....	70
External challenges .....	70
Internal struggles .....	73
Related outcomes .....	75
Differences between Female and Male “Authentic” Confessions .....	78
Parody Videos.....	79
Comments.....	81
Positive responses .....	81
Personal stories.....	83
Support .....	84
Negative responses .....	87
Religion .....	88
Parody comments .....	89
<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>118</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

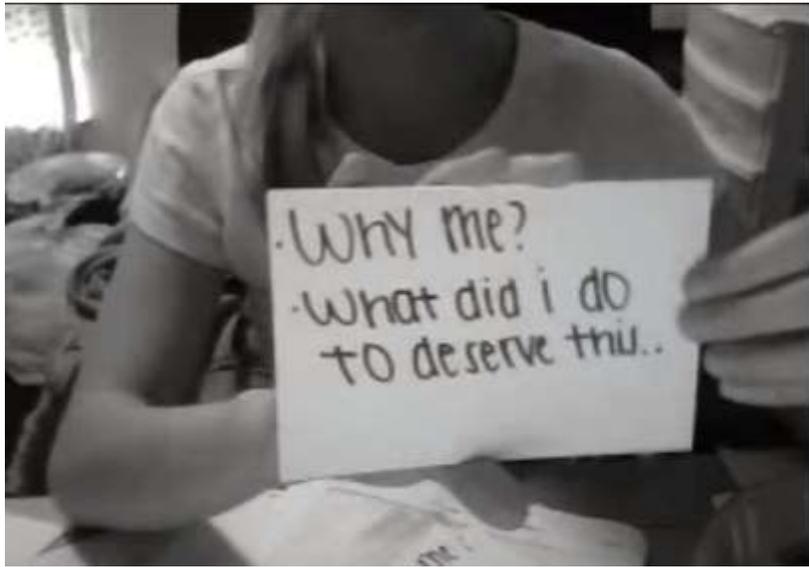
FIGURE	Page
1. Note card confession .....	2
2. Dylan .....	26
3. PostSecret .....	27
4. “I am Obamacare” .....	29
5. “Who needs Feminism” .....	30
6. “Who needs feminism” 2 .....	30
7. “Project Unbreakable” 1 .....	31
8. “Project Unbreakable” 2 .....	31
9. “Dog Shaming” 1 .....	32
10. “Dog Shaming” 2 .....	32
11. Shrug 1 .....	58
12. Shrug 2 .....	58
13. Waving .....	58
14. Pointing .....	58
15. Emotional response .....	59
16. Providing emphasis .....	61
17. Slut .....	61
18. Nasty .....	61
19. Fat .....	61
20. Color use 1 .....	62

FIGURE	Page
21. Color use 2 .....	62

## INTRODUCTION

Year after year the world is moving increasingly faster into a digital era. The computer especially has opened up a new space for society (Mirzoeff, 2009), and digital technologies have altered the ways in which we communicate, connect, and express ourselves. These processes can be important individually, but they can also have a profound influence on one another.

This research will analyze confessional YouTube videos in which producers use note cards in order to disclose personal information about themselves to the public. These videos vary in topic, but often contain many similarities that constitute them as their own genre. The standard note card confession video contains a single person in front of a camera, generally with a medium to close-up camera framing (*Figure 1*). The person on screen plays a song and then proceeds to confess something personal about her or his life by flipping through a stack of note cards. Topics include bullying, problems with family members, and even suicidal thoughts or actions. Each note card displays writing that tells a piece of the story. These videos normally last between two and ten minutes, and the person in the video remains silent the entire time.



*Figure 1. Note card confession. Example of a note card confession video.*

This category of videos goes by many different names, the most common being “Note Card Confessions,” “Index Card Confessions,” “Flash Card Confessions,” and “Secrets and Confessions.”

In addition to the original stories, another trend of note card confessions developed which can best be considered as “note card parodies.” Parody videos follow the same production format as authentic note card confessions. However, the content of the stories is different, taking a mocking or comedic tone. These videos are primarily used to criticize authentic note card confessions or evoke humor.

The research goals for this project are to perform an analysis of note card confessions on YouTube, any parody videos imitating and/or mocking traditional confessional videos, and the comments posted to the videos by other users. Overall themes of the stories and similarities in production that constitute these videos as a

distinct genre will be important. In order to better comprehend note card confessions, this research will ask the following questions:

**RQ1:** What are the similarities in production and story themes that note card confessions share?

**RQ2:** What are the primary responses and discussions being formed through online comments in reaction to these videos?

Connection and shared experiences are key aspects of the note card confession community that has developed, and social media have been optimal vehicle for these features.

### **Importance of Youth Confessions**

It is important to study note card videos because of their relation to youth culture. Adolescents are the primary age group involved in the creation of note card confessions, usually ranging from 12-21 years old. The use of social networks is a common form of self-representation for adolescents, and among this note card videos are another reflection of how youth are performing their identity for the public. A large majority of the confessions contains information about troubling and potentially harmful aspects about these youths' lives. Depression, self-harm, and suicide are all major topics among these videos. Minimally, these stories are an expression of these youths' online identities; in other circumstances they are also potentially an indirect form of reaching out for help or solace from members in this same community that have faced similar experiences.

Moreover, these youth have created a space and practice that allows for this type of intimate communication in a setting that is normally less personal in expression. Why these adolescents feel comfortable openly discussing these serious topics is an

interesting question needing further research. One possible reason is due to the feeling of comfort obtained from posting a confession among a group of peers with similar identities. Forming a group of individuals with similar experiences ultimately creates a culture that supports the communication of intimate moments in a storyteller's life.

Understanding these trends among youth will help further research in multiple fields. The note card culture of expression is a phenomenon that opens up new ideas regarding communication using new media. Furthermore, the study of note card confessions also provides deeper insight into understanding performances of the online-self and new outlets for identifying adolescents who might need help coping with depression, bullying, abuse, and suicidal thoughts.

### **Social Media Use among Youth**

Society has been transformed by the advent of new media. The way in which we communicate, seek out entertainment, create content, and even perform our everyday work has changed with new technological advances. No group is more adjusted to these new innovations than our youth. Today's youth culture thrives in the new media world. One particular area where this group flourishes is in social media. Social networking sites (SNSs) have evolved into diverse, interactive realms of communication and personal expression over the last decade. Sites such as YouTube also host note card confession videos. In order to better understand the culture surrounding these videos, however, it is important to understand motivations behind current youths' use of social media and how it affects their lives in areas such as self-expression, identity formation, and relationship building.

An online Pew research report discusses teens' use of social media. According to the report, teens continue to use specific forms of social media because they believe that it is highly significant to the socializing process (Madden et al., 2013). Additionally, in the original 2007 study it was found that the use of SNSs is vital to the overall lives of these youth (Besley, 2011). YouTube, especially, can be a vehicle for this process. Besley (2011) asserts that the home life and local relationships are becoming less of an influence in how younger generations construct their own self-perceptions:

For the youth of today whose lives are being shaped by the rapidly changing digital world that includes mobile phones, iPods, MP3 players, social media, social network sites (SNS), on-line games, and video-sharing sites, their identities will be profoundly different from youth of last century or earlier, different from that of youth who are not engaged with the digital world for whatever reason – be it poverty, prohibition or choice (p. 9).

As Besley (2011) mentions, video-sharing is one aspect of identity formation. Though not all of today's culture is expressed or represented on YouTube, its videos are always changing in order to represent current events, including news, sports, music, movies, and homemade videos expressing new trends in popular culture. Moreover, in this world of decreasing privacy, users are putting more of themselves on the web for the public to see every day, and this is especially true for today's youth. Videos made by adolescents have become a commonplace method for connecting with peers who often serve as the primary audience (Weber & Mitchell, 2008) and as a means for forming one's own identity.

### **Identity Formation in Social Media**

Creating content and relationship building in new media and social networks are important components to the creation of an online identity. Identity formation and

maintenance can be one of the key motivations behind the use of social media. Besley (2011) defines digital identity as:

...a set of characteristics asserted by one digital subject about itself or by another digital subject (human or otherwise) in a digital realm i.e. it is what you publish about yourself, and what others say about you and includes any electronic exchange with both human and with non-human digital agents (p. 10).

This essentially means that a vast proportion of what teens do online – specifically regarding posting to SNSs, updating blogs, uploading videos to their YouTube channels, and other forms of personal updates contributes to the maintenance of their digital identities. For some youth, a digital identity can be just as important as a personal identity in everyday “reality.”

**Individual identity.** One aspect of identity formation comes through the process of producing confessional videos on YouTube. Storytellers who upload these confessions are balancing their private and public identities. Online videos, such as those recorded of the self over long periods of time, demonstrate the extreme emotional commitment and will that users put into creating YouTube productions of themselves (Kavoori, 2011). The Internet allows users to carefully select what they communicate to others (boyd, 2008), offering a balance between the communication of the personal and private self to others through social networking. Ultimately, when producing a digital story “the task of making a video requires participants to make particular decisions about what to include, how to represent it, and what level of importance or priority to assign to different elements” (Lundby, 2008, p. 256). Thus, the process of storytelling on YouTube becomes a well-thought out production that is created in very specific ways to represent and prioritize certain events.

Note card videos emulate this process of choosing and prioritizing information. Each video is comprised of the sharing of experiences and feelings in the form of a confession. The producer has a limited amount of time to tell her or his story and must therefore make critical decisions about which information to include and how much emphasis particular details receive. The process of selecting the most important information is especially intricate for note card videos because the stories must be written out, making space and aesthetics factors of consideration as well. Through all of these choices, the storyteller ultimately creates an online representation of themselves based on varying priorities and decisions about how she or he wants to appear to the public. For example, a storyteller might take on the role of the victim, the survivor, someone whose mistakes have changed them, or even someone continuing to suffer from a particular circumstance; each one of these personas is a choice by the storyteller. Moreover, by choosing to adapt the note card confession format, the storyteller has also chosen to engage in a larger group identity.

**Collective identity.** The development of this self “is an emergent process that comes with sustained participation in existing community structures and discourses” (Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008, p. 202). Engagement in a network of similar storytellers is therefore important to not only the management of the self, but also the maintenance of a collective identity. Polletta and Jasper (2001) provide a cultural definition of this phrase:

To avoid overextension of the concept, we have defined collective identity as an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is

distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity (p. 285).

Similar norms of behavior help to characterize groups as a single collective identity (Ackland & O'Neil, 2011). Moreover, it was found that “the tendency for actors to prefer to form ties with those who are similar in socially significant ways” is also a large indicator of collective identity formation; this process of finding individuals with similar identities is important to youth development (Lüders, 2009). In the case of note card confessions, collective identity is largely created through the process of sharing experiences. This means watching other note card videos, sharing your own, using recognizable titles, telling similar stories, and maintaining a standard style of production.

The importance of social media in general stems a lot from its creation of a new space for expression. Rather than just self-indulgence, the process of writing on SNSs includes a process of understanding the self and your relation to other individuals (Sauter, 2013). This form of expression is largely valued through its sharing between other users. In her study of collective behavioral responses to a popular YouTube video, Chu (2009) found that “YouTube allows users to see, hear and feel each other (mutual availability) in a virtual space where they can respond to and focus on the same issue” (p. 348). The same concept applies for note card confessions. This mutual space has created a specific location for YouTube users to share their experiences and develop a new reality based on the experiences of similar storytellers (Chu, 2009). In essence, YouTube is an important vehicle for cultivating a location in which the individual members of this specific reality can form a collective identity. This mutual identity is

developed through genre-specific methods of production, the intimate expression of similar digital stories, and shared distribution within the same media.

**Importance of identity formation.** Identity formation appears to be significant to the process of producing and sharing note card videos. Social media use in itself is a practice of identity construction, and it is becoming increasingly influential in the lives of youth. In the case of note card video creations by adolescents, the content of the stories is cause for attention. Collectively, note card video producers are a group of individuals who potentially identify themselves as depressed, suicidal, abused, or in another state that could possibly be damaging to their physical or mental health. Understanding how and where youth who face these troubles spend their time and communicate their problems could be important for the future of prevention research.

Additionally, the propensity of individuals to form ties with similar people also means that a unique process of communication has developed among these storytellers. Youth (and social media users in general) facing troubling experiences that are not easily discussed have found a space within YouTube to open up about certain events in their lives and their feelings regarding those situations. This space for confession balances both the idea that every individual has her or his own story to tell and the notion that no one is alone in their experience. In this aspect, the relationships that take place through this sense of collective identity are also a potentially key motivation for the production and sharing of note card videos. These ideas hold value for new media studies regarding youth, social networks, and new media practices.

## **Relationships and Personal Expression**

What is interesting about note card confessions is that they seem to serve as a paradox to other fields of research on social media. Previous studies indicate that users of social media are more likely to present the best versions of themselves in their online profiles in order to make themselves look better and to please viewers of their social networks (Besley, 2011; Bortree, 2005; Willem, Araüna, Crescenzi, & Tortajada, 2011). However, the large majority of authentic note card confessions are used to tell stories about terrible and depressing moments in the subjects' lives, possibly indicating the worst or most embarrassing part about who they are. Although this seems to contradict the idea that users choose to make their online identities as positive as possible, the logic behind note card videos might not be that irrational.

Social networking sites have become a place of research for better understanding social support networks and preferences between weak-tie and strong-tie connections (Wright, 2012). Strong-tie connections consist of close friends and family members (Wright & Miller, 2010), while weak-tie relationships are generally made up of acquaintances and individuals who are not particularly close to you (Wright, 2012; Wright & Miller, 2010). Less formal relationships are a unique factor of SNSs and theoretically make up a new realm of support networks for individuals. Significantly, individuals who use new media may prefer the support of people to whom they are not as close (Wright, 2012; Wright & Miller, 2010); due to the fact that online users are less attached to the subject, these weak-tie connections are often more open to discussing sensitive information (Wright & Miller, 2010).

Among the millions of viewers who visit YouTube there is an endless pool of possible weak-tie connections. Users who have fans or acquaintances as subscribers to their YouTube channels (i.e. people who are usually geographically distant or are not formally acquainted with the user) already have an established set of these weak-tie relationships. Social networks increase the opportunity for users to extend their social support networks, because geographic distance is no longer an inhibiting factor (Wright, 2012). Furthermore, note card storytellers have the ability to develop weak-tie relationships through the sharing of videos, comments, and general communication among the note card confession community.

Social networks, where less formal relationships are frequent, can be a desirable place of communication for individuals experiencing problematic situations in their lives. Wright (2012) explains the potential attraction of weak ties through several factors: “(a) access to different viewpoints, (b) reduced risk, (c) access to objective feedback from others, and (d) reduced role obligations” (p. 392). Less formal relationships can be a desirable source of communication if an individual is seeking feedback on a sensitive topic.

The decreased emotional attachment of a weak-tie relationship can reduce the risk of judgment because the two individuals do not share an intimate history (Wright, 2012). In essence, social media has become an ideal tool for forming distant relationships that can be used for information-seeking in a more comfortable setting than asking close friends and family in an individual’s everyday life. Wright (2012) found these results in his study on network convergence and emotional support:

In other words, individuals in one's Facebook network who were perceived as less similar and less available to provide emotional support were seen as being less risky to disclose information to, less judgmental, and more objective than individuals who were perceived as more similar and capable of providing emotional support. (p. 399)

Overall, his research provides significant insight into the uses of social media in terms of seeking out social support. Creating a note card confession may actually feel more comfortable than discussing a difficult situation with friends or family members.

Because members of the confessional community and general YouTube viewers serve as weak-tie relationships, they are likely less judgmental and the risk of negative consequences from revealing sensitive information is significantly reduced.

### **Support and Self-verification**

The levels of support received through social networks affect both the mental and physical health of new media users (Wright, King, & Rosenberg, 2014). Yet, another possible motivation for creating a note card confession may also influence the producers: self-verification. Swann (2005) defines self-verification as a process of identity negotiation in which "people form self-views as a means of making sense of the world, predicting the response of others, and guiding behavior" (p. 70). This theory believes that in order to self-verify, people will seek out environments and individuals that confirm their own self-conceptions (Swann, 2005; Wright et al., 2014). This poses potential complications to the process of social support, because individuals with negative self-conceptions may reject reassurances of self-worth, and positive support may only increase their level of stress (Wright et al., 2014).

Youth who post confessional videos to YouTube at times express feelings of loneliness, depression, and issues with self-esteem. Social support and self-verification processes may potentially take place through feedback generated by comments. If this is the case, comments produced by audience members could have an effect on verifying a video creator's self-conception and/or creating friction by expressing alternate views. Wright et al. (2014) believe that an important relationship might exist between stress, loneliness, depression, and self-verification, especially since relationships that fail to self-verify can cause loneliness.

This is another process that should draw attention to the individual production and collective identity of note card videos. If an adolescent is suffering from self-esteem issues or having other critical troubles in her or his life, than (s)he may turn to the note card community for self-verification of this perceived identity. The individual could proliferate her or his difficulties with self-esteem in the case that (s)he receives positive support from these weak-tie members; however, the note card community could also provide a space of solace if this individual is able to verify these negative self-conceptions. In either case, this new media space is worthy of attention from scholars interested in youth health.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As YouTube has grown throughout the years, so has the research surrounding it. However, this research becomes increasingly difficult as more of everyday life continues to move to an online format. The constantly changing content of YouTube provides a challenging barrier to researching the popular website (Burgess & Green, 2009). Yet, this phenomenon makes it more important for the continual study of YouTube because the site is constantly transforming to fit our current culture, especially today's youth culture. The relationship between YouTube and contemporary youth culture makes the study of the site's content all the more important.

### **The Role of Social Media**

Chu (2009) believes that YouTube is one of the best new media examples for studying newer capabilities regarding interactivity and new spaces for cultural productions because of both its popularity and the multitude of ways in which it has been used. The site is extremely popular; it is home to millions of users who have uploaded and viewed billions of different videos (Chu, 2009). Furthermore, its features that characterize the idea of "user-generated content" make YouTube a cultural and political force in society because it has changed the way we produce and consume video content (Chu, 2009). YouTube is the primary platform for note card confessions; Tumblr is another popular social media site for them as well, with many of the storytellers' YouTube confessions being embedded into their respective Tumblr accounts. The specific features of SNSs that allow for expression, connection, and convergence permit confessional videos to thrive.

YouTube was a late development in social media history. According to their respective web pages, MySpace was founded in 2003, Facebook was founded in 2004, and YouTube was founded in 2005 (“About Facebook,” 2014, “About YouTube,” 2014, “Press Room,” 2014), making YouTube the youngest of some of the most popular earlier social networks. MySpace is by no means the first of social networking sites either.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) provide a definition of social networks in their research on the history of these websites:

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

Many features of social networks existed individually within different websites (boyd & Ellison, 2007) beginning with the earliest stages of the internet. However, using this previous definition boyd & Ellison (2007) believe that the first social networking site was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997.

Social networks have transformed the way that we communicate and form personal identity. According to Sauter (2013), “SNSs such as Facebook provide one modern technological tool for self-revelation, confession, self-management and self-improvement that demonstrates continuities and discontinuities with older forms of self-writing” (p. 8). These websites provide a space that often substitutes for face-to-face communication and also intertwines expression of the private and public self (Phillips, 2008). Rather than employing face-to-face communication, users rely on the written word and use of visuals. Status updates, videos, profile descriptions, uploaded photos, comments, and shared links are all aspects that make up a user’s online identity.

YouTube takes this idea a step further. The site was founded in the later stages of social networking popularity, and it was unique in its role as an archive of shared videos. Its website combines aspects of video production, television viewing, and social networking all into one format. What makes it so significant compared to other social networking sites is that YouTube “allows users to move seamlessly between traditional mass communication activity of watching mediated content, and interpersonal social connection activity of sharing it with others” (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009, p. 318). Google purchased YouTube in 2006 for \$1.65 billion (The Associated Press, 2006). Since then, YouTube has been integrated with the Google+ format. According to Google’s web page, users are now able to share YouTube videos with friends who are in their “circle”; videos can be watched live with friends; users can connect their Google+ and YouTube profiles; and automatic posting to both formats is available (“YouTube,” n.d.).

**Networked publics.** Combining social media platforms further increases this idea of online self-expression and connection, in that networked friends are connected to all different types of activity. This networked activity coincides with previous research on convergence culture. Jenkins (2006) says that the world of media convergence is a space where stories, commercial products, and even our lives spread across different media platforms. In his view, rather than just technological products and services, “relationships, memories, fantasies, [and] desires also flow across media channels” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 17). Furthermore, Parks and Floyd (1996) believe that network convergence occurs as members of online networks introduce each other to other

network connections, and thus create a shared social circle. The many features of social media continuously enable these processes. Boyd (2008) distinguishes social networking sites from other media such as broadcast television in terms of their relation to the public. She defines social media as a conglomeration of networked publics, maintaining the idea that rather than there being one “public” for all situations there is actually a collective of “publics” based on different circumstances (boyd, 2008). Comments, rating systems, and the ability to share media express the networked publics’ opinions and views about various social media content (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009). These different features fuel this new media space and help build online relationships.

The idea that the subject of the note card video is telling a secret is very interesting considering the fact that this information is potentially being made known to the entire world. New media allows for connection in a way that “blurs the boundary between mass and interpersonal communication” (Baym, 2010, p. 4). One of the characteristics that makes networked publics different from other mediated publics, such as those that use television, is the difference in invisible audiences (boyd, 2008). Unlike with the use of television, virtually anyone can access content on social networking sites at any point in time, and this makes it practically impossible to know who all comprises a certain audience and in what context they are viewing the content (boyd, 2008). However, the messages themselves – especially in confessional videos – can be interpersonal, as they are directed to individuals within the mass audience (Baym, 2010). Thus, deep personal experiences in these confessional videos are being shared with select individuals, but they are also deliberately and simultaneously being published to a

mass public. The intimate communication and personal expression within a wider public sphere is in part what makes this communication process so unique.

YouTube is still changing how we make sense of videos and television; cultural shifts and technological innovation have changed the future of the television platform (Uricchio, 2009). The site is also altering concepts of social networking and media convergence. Arguably, YouTube is comprised of many different networked publics, and each of these audiences forms its own connections through sharing and commenting on videos. Note card confessions are one genre among the mass of videos within this social networking site. Furthermore, these confessional videos are just one form of communication among other forms of expression that use note cards or another visual; similarly YouTube is one location out of many SNSs for youth to disclose personal stories online.

### **YouTube and the Role of Social Support**

YouTube as a social media platform is different in its social networking features compared to sites like Facebook in terms of aspects such as profile display and motivations for use. However, it still contains characteristics that potentially coincide with these ideas of weak-tie relationships and social support. As previously stated, YouTube allows the option for users to “subscribe” to an individual’s channel. This would be similar to “friending” somebody on Facebook or “following” them on Twitter. Since many subscribers to YouTube channels (especially the more popular ones) are simply fans or individuals who enjoy a particular set of videos, these subscriptions would constitute a network of weak-tie relationships. This is not to say that close friends

and family members do not subscribe to an individual's YouTube channel as well, but subscriptions allow for more informal connections to take place that would not necessarily occur in a face-to-face setting.

Additionally, the integration of Google+ into YouTube means that users can share videos with other members of their circle. This is another space that would allow for informal connections to be made based on the discussion of a certain video. Comments that are made on these shared videos also show up in the comments section below the actual video that has been shared. This means that other users can view the discussion among members of a circle, which could hypothetically generate further discussion from YouTube users outside of a Google+ network.

Finally, the comment section below each video also provides a space for social support. Though these are not always necessarily members of an individual's network, these users make up the networked public surrounding YouTube videos, and, in particular, confessional videos on YouTube. The responses generated in a video's comment section could serve as feedback that contains less risk, more objectivity, and diversity in viewpoints – the essential characteristics of weak-tie relationships. Prensky (2010) reinforces the idea of this communication process:

Perhaps the thing about You Tube that is least understood by people who do not use it regularly is that it is not just one way, or one-to-many, communication; it is designed to be, and very much is, two-way. There are easy-to-use communication and feedback channels built in, including view counts, ratings, text posts to any clip, and in the ability to make and post “response” video clips, which often happens. Many users post ideas and opinions, looking for feedback, and many get large numbers of responses to their clips (p. 125).

Users who do not know the creator of a video are less emotionally attached to both the creator and their content. Moreover, geographic and cultural separation between the different users of YouTube means that there is space for a wide array of diverse opinions about the video's content. Overall, the opinions expressed by social media users can have a profound effect on content creators.

### **Digital Storytelling**

“Storytelling” involves traditional practices of both shaping and sharing a story, and the expansion of digital media – such as the Internet – has provided a new space for these stories to take place (Lundby, 2008). For example, the Internet can offer a new platform for “self-reflection, releasing pent-up feelings, and witnessing personal growth” (Stern, 2008, p. 101), such as through the use of blogs, online videos, and social media sites. Additionally, digital storytelling exemplifies new ways in which people relate to each other and their settings, and the digital aspect of storytelling matters because it changes the methods for producing and consuming these stories (Lundby, 2008). Thus, new technological platforms are not only important for how the stories are told, but also who they are communicated to.

Confessional videos, especially, have the potential for a significantly different audience than if a confession were to take place face-to-face, both geographically and demographically. There are several other features that also make the digital-aspect of storytelling significant. As indicated by the title of many of these note card confessions, the primary purpose of their creation is to disclose some sort of story – usually surrounding a personal topic. However, articulating a confession through digital media

differs from how we would communicate that same story in person (boyd, 2008).

Though the image of a person might be seen, nonverbal cues may not be communicated in the same way. Many of the rules of communication and storytelling change based on this different format – such as how language and nonverbal communication are performed. The communication is mediatized through a piece of technology (computer, smart phone, etc.), and this can affect the encoding and decoding of the story itself, because the audience is unable to immediately provide verbal and/or non-verbal feedback. Additionally, YouTube videos blur the boundaries between text and face-to-face communication. Though a user might receive a message by watching a video of a person talking, their feedback is often through text (e.g. comments left on the video's site).

As with many other types of videos, confessional stories told through YouTube also represent a new age of expression and set of norms for personal disclosure. The balance between anonymity and identity is challenged in this digital format. For example, users show their faces (most of the time), but you don't necessarily know their name or location. Moreover, it is not only the individual story that is important. The aggregation of these individual videos serves a whole new purpose, telling their own story about society, disclosure, and the utilization of technology. Together, the videos make statements about how rules of communication are changed, such as norms for format, acceptable content, and how the use of media is being changed to serve a purpose (such as hosting an archive of personal confessions).

An online site like YouTube is one of many areas among new media where users can come together. These sites provide “a space where we are a part of the cultural flow of using different narratives and where we talk about ourselves” (Erstad & Wertsch, 2008, p. 32). Within YouTube, a specific platform has been developed by note card videos within the last few years. Additionally, there is a shared practice in not only exchanging stories but also the norms that determine *how* the confessional videos are made. Cultural technologies “structure participation in standard ways that are consistent in form, but not necessarily in content” (Goldman et al., 2008, p. 185).

Though each individual story is different, these videos, like many other Internet stories and trends, are uniform in format (using note cards, not talking, playing music, etc.). Over time, these specific characteristics have become a norm for making a confessional note card video. Resources, support, and relationships can also be established through online comments and response videos. Research into commentary and responses generated by this movement of videos is necessary to better understand this. Lastly, the shared identities of these video makers help link them together as a genre of videos, though the relative strength of this identity can only be identified through further research.

### **Note Card Confessions as a Genre**

It is important to study genres on the web because the internet contains the capacity for the creation and development of new genres of communication (Crowston & Williams, 2000). Note card confessions have become their own genre as a specific form of communication and video production. Crowston and Williams (2000) define

communicative genre as “an accepted type of communication sharing common form, content, or purpose...” (p. 202). Similar styles of production and content give these videos a distinct appearance different from other forms of online self-expression. The features that establish the genre characteristics of these videos include the use of a note card, inclusion of music, the use of video as opposed to still pictures or the written word exclusively (though there are exceptions), and the incorporation of a digital storytelling process that contains similar tones, styles, and themes.

The elements of storytelling and confession are also unique factors to this culture of note card videos. As different versions of their name suggests, these productions balance the line between narrative and confession. Note card videos contain characteristics that resemble a new media form of writing in a diary: written word, a recounting of past events, and even the creation of a space for the intimate expression of thoughts. However, confessions can be thought to go beyond this form of storytelling. In their study of reality television, Aslama and Pantti (2006) make a distinction between video diaries and confessions; video diaries primarily focus on developing a narrative whereas confessions resemble therapeutic discussion featuring “a self-induced examination of one’s prior actions and, even more importantly, of one’s thoughts, feelings and relationships with others” (Aslama & Pantti, 2006, p. 176). Presentation of a narrative and reflection upon feelings or relationships are both important to the production of a note card video. What has happened to a storyteller, how these events have been affected by other figures, and how the storyteller feels about herself/himself or the events that took place are all key elements to the basic style of note card videos.

Furthermore, a single-person style of speech contributes to this confessional diary form of expression. Aslama and Pantti (2006) relate reality television confessions to a monologue. Being alone with the camera empowers the storytellers, for they are able to control a scripted presentation of the self in which they are both intimate with the audience and also in control of their own identity construction. In a theatrical play, or even in a reality television show, when a character talks alone the audience gets access to information that other members of the story may not know. The same is true for note card confessions. The storytellers are essentially disclosing information to audience members about themselves of which other people in their lives may be unaware. Therefore the camera serves as a private space between the storytellers and their audience in which they can form their own versions of themselves through writing and performing “private” information about their lives.

Note card confessions are a unique genre in themselves because they go beyond the characteristics of a standard video diary. The process is both a planned-out telling of events and also a reflection on the self, relationships, and feelings associated with the narrative. These videos are also easily recognizable aesthetically, further maintaining their own genre-specific method of production. It is important that these videos are classified as their own genre for multiple reasons. First, there are many different types of confessional videos on YouTube, each containing a different style or purpose. Among these productions, note card videos have their own specific style of confessional storytelling in both visual representation and the content within the stories. Note card videos have developed their own unique culture compared to other YouTube videos and

thus should be studied as their own entity. On the other hand, the utilization of a note card in these videos is also an apparent reproduction of other similar uses of written visuals in today's media. Note card videos are one rendition of written confessions found in new media, and it is important to study how this adaption affects the confessional storytelling process.

### **Representations of Signboards in Media**

The use of a note card to tell a story is not only a process used in the making of note card videos; it is also part of a larger phenomenon in today's media. There are many examples of this form of digital storytelling in other forms of online and television media. The use of the note card – or in other cases flash cards, poster boards, dry erase boards, or even paper – have been used by many different social groups for different purposes. Similar visuals can be traced to a wider popular culture trend whose roots can possibly be found all the way back in the 1960s. For the purposes of categorizing note cards, posters, paper, and dry erase boards under one collective term, these will be called “signboards.”

Hariman and Lucaites (2008) theorized that visual rhetorics maintain deliberative “voices” and constitute a public identity. In fact, iconic images themselves are given meaning through cultural, political, and religious contextualization (Mueller, Oezcan, & Seizov, 2009). Though not every signboard statement is political, there are still many unique characteristics about their production and circulation that constitutes a single cultural movement. These signs are often used to capture the mores and deep-set problems of public culture (Hariman & Lucaites, 2008). Furthermore, the widespread

use of social media has enabled the quick and frequent sharing of these images. Note card confessions are just one example of this wider genre. Other mediatized usages of signboards vary in their purpose, and not all of them are videos.

**Bob Dylan's *Don't Look Back*.** Dylan's *Don't look back* is a documentary film that was made in 1967 about his tour of England during 1965. The opening scene of the film consists of Bob Dylan standing at a medium distance away from the camera by himself holding a set of cue cards (*Figure 2*). The scene is shot in black and white and lasts for just over two minutes. During that time, Dylan flips through the stack of cards while his song "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is played (Bernard, 2012). Each signboard contains one or two words that coincide with key words from the actual song.



*Figure 2.* Dylan. Screen shot from *Don't Look Back*.

Though it is not known for sure, Bernard (2012) believes that this film was the first signboard production, and that it inspired other similar trends (such as the note card confessional videos on YouTube). The visual language in this film was “appealing, easy to reproduce, and highly adaptable” (Bernard, 2012, para. 7).

**PostSecret.** According to its website, PostSecret is “the largest advertisement-free Blog in the world” (“PostSecret,” 2013). Every Sunday, submissions are posted to the blog that detail people’s confessions. Each submission is anonymous and states some sort of secret that the poster has about his or her own life (*Figure 3*). Originally, submissions to the blog were confessions that were written on an actual post card. Now however, secrets can be written on a piece of paper, photograph, or other piece of material.

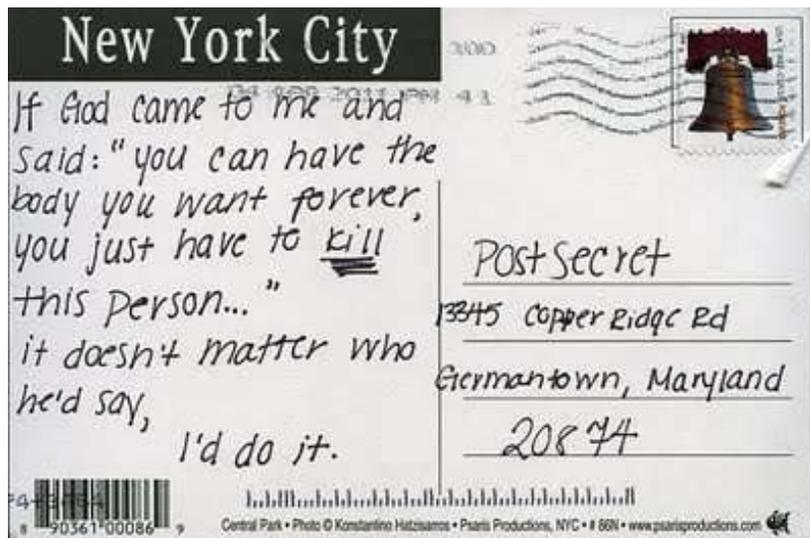
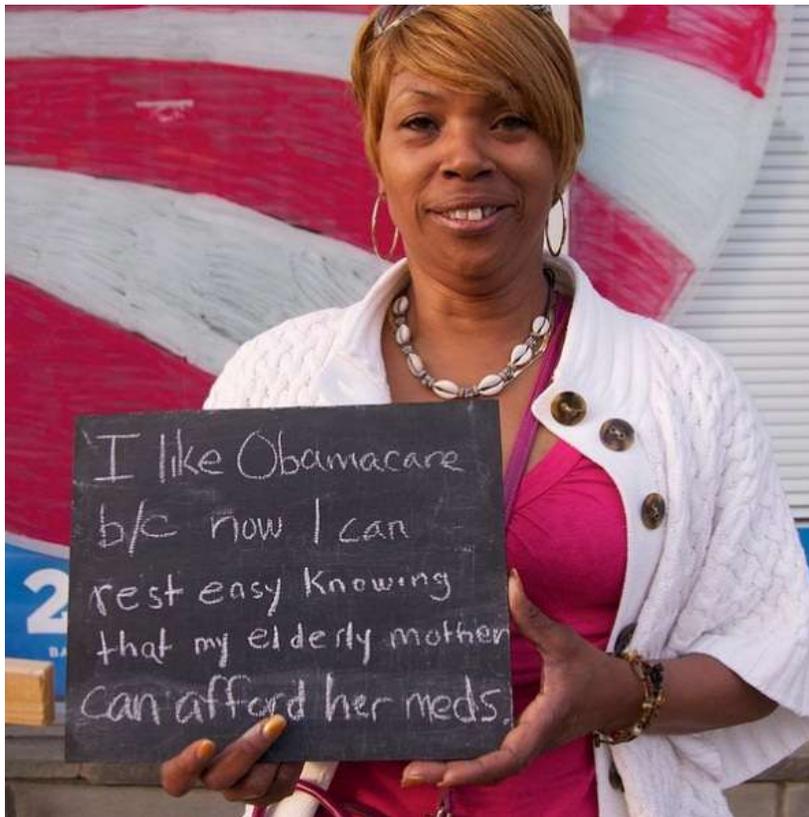


Figure 3. PostSecret. Example of a post card.

The secrets that are posted vary both in topic and level of seriousness. For instance, one submission talks about how the user forgot to put sugar in a Thanksgiving pie (“PostSecret,” 2013). However, other submissions are significantly more serious. For example, another secret reads “When I get bored at parties I stand alone in a corner and think of ways I could kill myself with only the objects in the room” (“PostSecret,” 2013). Other topics discuss divorce or relationship issues, depression, personal fears or insecurities, and embarrassing actions.

Though PostSecret does not entirely fit the standard signboard method of production, it is still important to note because of its structure. PostSecret not only contains similarities to note card videos in its style of confession, it also appears to be the inspiration for the creation of confessional phone applications. Before it had to be shut down for reasons of abuse, PostSecret was the top-selling app in the Apple store and contained over 2 million shared secrets (Meyers, 2012). Now there are new versions of confessional apps such as Confessiondolls and the more famous Whisper, which have become extremely popular worldwide.

**“I am Obamacare.”** The “I am Obamacare” movement was started on a blog by Miss M. Turner (Davis, 2013). It began when she posted a photograph of herself holding a signboard stating how Obamacare could help her, detailing how she could now afford tumor surgery that insurance companies would not cover in the past (Davis, 2013). Since then, multiple users have posted similar pictures about why they support Obamacare (*Figure 4*).



*Figure 4. "I am Obamacare." Example of an "I am Obamacare" signboard.*

Most of these have to do with being uninsured, unable to afford an insurance plan, or having to get the most expensive plan due to having conditions that companies deemed "pre-existing."

**Who needs feminism?** The "Who needs feminism" campaign was started by 16 women at Duke University seeking to counteract many of the stereotypes and misconceptions about people who label themselves as feminists (Clendenin, 2012; "Who needs feminism?," 2013). The "who we are" section of the official website outlines a lot of the problems associated with stereotyping feminism:

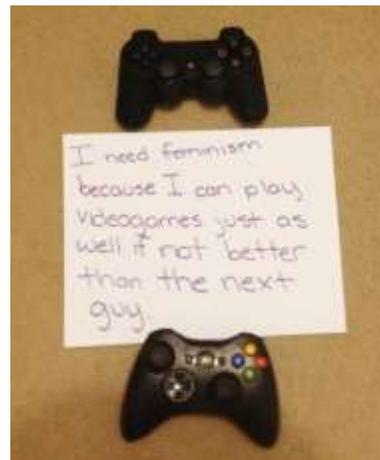
Identify yourself as a feminist today and many people will immediately assume you are [a] man-hating, bra-burning, whiny liberal. Perhaps a certain charming

radio talk show host will label you as a “Feminazi” or “slut.” Even among more moderate crowds, feminism is still seen as too radical, too uncomfortable, or simply unnecessary. Feminism is both misunderstood and denigrated regularly on a broad societal scale (“Who needs feminism?,” 2013, para. 1).

The idea is to involve all different kinds of people in the campaign, especially those who would not normally be thought of as a voice for feminism (Clendenin, 2012). With a large focus on white women, women of color, queer identified people, people who identify as transgender, and men, the project seeks voices that have often been potentially excluded from previous movements (Clendenin, 2012). Thus, people of all different races, genders, sexual identities, religions, nationalities, and other cultural backgrounds have posted pictures – usually with a dry erase board – stating why they need feminism (*Figures 5 and 6*). Some signboards are written in languages other than English as well.



**Figure 5. "Who needs feminism."**  
Example of this signboard movement.



**Figure 6. "Who needs feminism" 2. Another example.**

Topics for the signboards range widely. Some involve sexual assault; others refer to misogyny, stereotypical gender roles (conformity for both men and women), man-hating, inequalities in career and pay opportunities, and general fears of mistreatment or lack of safety.

**Project Unbreakable.** Project unbreakable is a signboard campaign that focuses on sexual assault. Its purpose is to increase awareness about the issue of sexual abuse and aid in the healing process through these signboards (“Project Unbreakable,” 2013). The website features thousands of pictures that have been submitted (*Figures 7 and 8*). The idea behind the project is that the person posting the image holds a signboard containing a quote from his or her attacker (“Project Unbreakable,” 2013).



*Figure 7.* "Project Unbreakable" 1. Example.



*Figure 8.* "Project Unbreakable" 2. Example.

Like the “Who needs feminism?” campaign, Project Unbreakable attempts to defy preconceived stereotypes about sexual assault. There are many signboard pictures posted by men along with those posted by women. Additionally, the attackers mentioned

on the signboards are made up of both sexes as well. Moreover, signboards are posted in all different languages and by people of all ages.

**Additional adaptations.** There are many other versions of signboard movements appearing every day in new media. Several of these have adapted this process of using signboards; rather than making a social statement, however, they take a comedic approach to the well-known genre. For example, the Dog Shaming website is a more humorous spin on the signboard movement (*Figures 9 and 10*). The purpose of the site is to show dogs who have disobeyed their owners or have done something bad that they need to be “shamed” for.



*Figure 9. "Dog Shaming" 1. Example.*



*Figure 10. "Dog Shaming" 2. Example.*

In each picture, owners write their dogs’ misbehavior on a sign and take a picture with it near or on their pet. Sometimes the pictures catch the dogs in the specified act, and other times the picture is taken in a new setting after the “crime.”

Note card confessions are just one of many ways that signboards have been used. Though some examples show adaptations to comedy and consumer culture, others are clear illustrations of how visualizing stories, events, thoughts, and confessions can be used to make powerful statements about societal issues. Note card videos perform a similar method of storytelling; the genre-specific method of production is used to help communicate intimate experiences and potentially severe health or relationship problems that exist within individual storytellers' lives. This specific type of production is a large part of what makes up the collective identity of the note card confession networked public, and that identity provides the space for weak-tie connections to form and social support to take place.

### **Gendered Uses of Social Media**

There are a wide variety of activities that youth engage in online. Yet a study performed by Mascheroni and Olafsson (2013) focusing on European youth, found that the primary reason adolescents (both female and male) use the internet is for social networking purposes. This fits research regarding youth online identity formation and self-expression. However, it has also been found that YouTube is primarily a male-dominated social platform (Besley, 2011; Mascheroni & Olafsson, 2013; Tucker-McLaughlin, 2013). Despite this fact, the research for this study found that the note card confession videos were overwhelmingly dominated by female producers. If YouTube is chiefly used by males, this poses questions as to why there are so many more females that make note card videos. The answer potentially lies in previous research regarding gendered use of social media.

Colás, González, and de Pablos (2013) concluded that males primarily use social media for psychological reasons, such as reinforcing self-esteem. Females have been found to use social media for socializing and relationship building (Colás et al., 2013; Kearney, 2006). This means that the types of social and new media used by females vary from males as well. Female youth are more likely to be found using chat rooms, message boards, and writing in web blogs (Bortree, 2005; Kearney, 2006; Willem et al., 2011). This alludes to the idea that females are more likely to use the internet for community formation which is very similar to the atmosphere provided by note card confession among YouTube. Though YouTube itself might be a male-dominated platform, the rationale and method of production involved in the creation of a note card confession is essentially social and relational in nature. Therefore, these videos may ultimately be an extension of other forms of blogging and relationship building previously found in other areas of new media and social networks. In this respect, it would make sense that note card confessions are more commonly produced by females than males.

The presentation style of note card confessions is also very similar to the female-dominated style of blogging. The digital stories maintain a continuous balance between the public and private in terms of choosing which information to share, and the style of writing focuses more on emotional expression (e.g. through bolding, use of color, incorporation of emoticons, etc.) rather than providing perfect spelling and grammar. In Bortree's (2005) study of teenage girls' weblog use, writing strategies by females were adapted based on whether or not they chose to write to a more public or private

audience; abbreviated language and restricted punctuation also created a more “intimate” atmosphere within the weblogs.

Furthermore, the topic of discussion is something that could also be a gendered component. In their study of online risk and harm among youth, Livingstone and Görzig (2014) found that although males are more frequent recipients of sexual messages on the internet, in reality females experience more negative psychological effects from these same type of messages. Therefore, female adolescents actually suffer more harm even though the risk for exposure is higher for males. Creating social spaces for discussion is just as important a motivation for creating media as many other factors (such as producing identity) (Willett, Burn, & Buckingham, 2005). Considering that sexual abuse and relationship issues are two of the larger themes within these videos, the space provided by note card confessions potentially serves as an ideal platform for the discussion of issues that are specifically sensitive to women.

Previous research supports the feedback and support aspects involved in the collective identity of note card videos that could be applied to gender use. Responses to other’s confessions could in itself be an inherently gendered concept. In their research of girl’s Fotologs and their relation to identity formation, Willem et al. (2011) found an example of this type of feedback:

Girlfriends tend to be the ones who comment on each other’s Fotolog entries: they are the main agents of online interaction, at least on an explicit (written) level. Boyfriends or other male friends occasionally post comments, while parents, teachers or other adults may be reading and following the blog but never post comments. When a girl expresses sadness or negative emotions, she usually receives immediate encouraging or advisory comments by girlfriends... (p. 236).

This feedback loop of original posts and responding comments can be very important to the relationship-building process. Note card confessions typically express very personal and occasionally traumatic moments of a storyteller's life. This can make communication and attempts at support very difficult. Therefore, telling these stories through social media can be seen as a way to get to know about the lives of others and build intimacy without having to struggle with face-to-face communication (Bortree, 2005). This can be among friends in real life who read each other's posts or with less formal relationships built through the collective identity of the note card confession genre.

Identification can also play into other gendered aspects of note card confessions that make for a very female-centered audience. In the case of audience discussion programs for example, "women are more likely to consider that the genre offers a sphere in which they can participate, feeling involved and that the issues are relevant to their own lives" (Livingstone, 1994, p. 435). By watching other women discuss issues that female audiences identify with, they are essentially connecting and engaging in a socially-relevant discussion. Furthermore, whereas older television shows restrict the capability for engagement by the audience, YouTube and new media technology provide the opportunity for these audience members to actually engage in the conversation, through posting comments, sharing the story, or even creating their own videos. Through this discussion of socially-relevant issues, the connection women create with each other possibly helps formulate a sense of self (Livingstone, 1994).

## **Space for Confession**

As new media evolves, so does our understanding of how it's used. Baym (2010) believes that new technologies "affect how we see the world, our communities, our relationships, and our selves" (p. 2). The continuous evolution and adaptation of the internet means that new spaces are constantly opening up new forms of communication and self-expression. Social media, specifically, have invented a new and unique platform for storytelling among youth culture. Note card confessions provide a specific genre of communication and an easily accessible means for almost anyone to tell her or his story. The title "confession" in itself indicates that these stories contain personal aspects about an individual's life that are sensitive in nature. How other social media users react to these stories may also tell a communicative story on its own.

Space has become a unique concept, because with the internet and new media, it no longer applies solely to geographical location. Instead users have now been brought to a shared space through mutual use of YouTube, the sharing of videos through social media, or other forms of online connection. Rather than a specific time or location, similar production methods and creation of stories is what brings this networked public together. As YouTube and other social networking sites grow and transform, so will this space of stories and self-expression.

## METHOD

The following chapter provides a detailed description of the data collection and sampling measures that were used in order to gather data for this study.

### **Searching for Videos**

Scholars studying YouTube have often used specific search terms as a way of obtaining a sample of videos for analysis (Chu, 2009; Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013; Sumiala & Tikka, 2013; Thorson et al., 2013; Yoo & Kim, 2012). Frequently, whenever a set of terms is searched, thousands to several million search results are found. However, Yoo and Kim (2012) note in their study of YouTube videos that there is a limit on the amount of results that can be retrieved. They indicate a limit of 1,000 videos (Yoo & Kim, 2012). In an initial search of a few terms performed in July 2013, it appears that the maximum number of page results that can currently be accessed on YouTube is around 30 pages, or approximately 600 results.

Unless advanced software is available to assist in searching for videos (Cheng, Liu, & Dale, 2013; Thorson et al., 2013), sampling from keywords and categories appears to be one of the most valid and productive methods for analyzing YouTube videos (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013; Weaver, Zelenkauskaitė, & Samson, 2012; Yoo & Kim, 2012). Note card videos have many different variations in their name. The cards themselves are referred to as note cards, index cards, and flash cards. Furthermore, the videos have also been known purely as confessional videos or personal stories.

It is unknown exactly how many different search terms these videos are located under, but in order to analyze as wide a sample as possible, the major titles and

variations were compiled into a list of 11 key phrases. This list was used as the basis for generating an initial sample of videos for analysis. The key phrases that were searched were as follows:

- note card confessions
- note card video
- note card story
- index card confessions
- index card video
- index card story
- flash card confessions
- flash card video
- flash card story
- secrets and confessions
- my \* story

The term “my \* story” is intended to find note card videos that might be titled with a phrase that includes words other than “note card” or “confession,” such as “my suicide story,” “my sad story,” or even just “my story.” Based on a preliminary search, variations in titles of many similar videos appear under searches for these terms. Therefore, alterations in title such as using “My” at the beginning or titling a video “(Name)’s Card Story” does not instantly exclude the video from the results list just because it does not fit the exact search term.

### **Initial Sample of Videos**

In order to obtain an initial sample for textual analysis, a YouTube search was performed during February and March of 2014 of each of the key phrases listed above. No additional filters were used to search the videos other than the key phrases. Therefore, the search results were automatically listed by relevance.

Out of each key phrase search, the first page of results was used for the first step of sampling. Each YouTube page automatically provides a list of 20 results. All 20 videos for each search phrase were collected and marked in a Microsoft Excel spread

sheet. In total, 220 videos were input into the Excel database. The videos were categorized by each search term, and every video that was added to the spread sheet was given a code. The codes were created by key phrase abbreviations and search result numbers. For example, the first video that was listed as a result for the key phrase “note card confessions” was coded as “NCC1.” The following is a list of the abbreviations that were used for coding:

- note card confessions = NCC
- note card video = NCV
- note card story = NCS
- index card confessions = ICC
- index card video = ICV
- index card story = ICS
- flash card confessions = FCC
- flash card video = FCV
- flash card story = FCS
- secrets and confessions = SAC
- my \* story = MAS

Along with specific categorizations and listing each video under the appropriate code, other characteristics for each of these videos were noted in the Excel database as well. The title of the video, the username of the person who uploaded the video (which is *usually* the same person who made the video), the hyperlink to the video’s specific YouTube page, and the number of views were instantly written next to the respective code.

**Classifying videos.** In addition to this, each of the videos was marked as either “authentic,” “parody,” or “non-confessional.” Authentic videos were classified as those meeting the basic requirements of a note card video and appeared to have full intent to tell a real story about the video creator’s life. Whether or not the video contained serious and/or personal topics, the authentic video was not intended to have a mocking effect.

On the other hand, parody videos were designated as those videos that met the criteria of a confessional video but used the format to criticize and/or make fun of the mainstream videos of this genre. Even if the story was real, it was apparent that it was being used to make a comedic statement not intended with the original format of confessional videos. Rather than remove these videos from the final sample, they were included in the textual analysis for two primary reasons:

1. The videos are still made in the same format as other confessional stories, and are therefore still note card videos.
2. The videos potentially offer significant insight into responses, support/discouragement, and/or commentary on these videos as a group.

Removing these videos from the research would mean potentially excluding data that displays an important component of criticism or general commentary about these types of videos. Therefore, by including parody videos in the overall sample, the data will better represent a range of sentiments toward the confessional community. Overall, attitudes toward this transition in digital storytelling could have significant impact on the future of digital technology in personal expression and self-disclosure.

Finally, non-confessional videos consisted of videos that showed up in the initial search results but did not fit the criteria of analysis. Overall, these videos had nothing to do with confessional stories. For example, some of the listed results included videos about using flash cards to as a tutoring method for elementary school children. Other videos consisted of tutorials about using flash cards to make greeting cards.

**Additional classifications.** Three other characteristics of the videos were marked in the Excel database. First, some of the videos showed up in multiple searchers. Therefore, if a video had already been marked in the spread sheet, it was noted again and marked as a copy. Two famous video stories, those of Ben Breedlove and Amanda Todd, were also reposted by multiple viewers. These video copies were classified as reposts. Finally, one video was created by a user based off the user's first note card story. The video was described as "updated" and "more organized." This video was classified as a remake and was excluded from the final analysis since the original video was a part of the final sample.

Secondly, the sex of the card holder was noted. There were a few videos that only showed the note cards, and they at no point showed the face or any distinguishing characteristics of the person who was holding them. These videos were classified as "hidden" in this category. Third, the topic(s) of each of the videos were noted. The texts of the stories selected for the final analysis were coded in more detail later on, but the basic subject(s) of each video in the original search results was listed.

### **Creating a Sample for Analysis**

Once the 220 videos that were originally searched for were compiled into the Excel database, a new spread sheet was created to create a viable sample of videos for textual analysis. Videos that were copies of other listed videos, reposted videos of the same story, or were non-confessional were instantly excluded from the list. Furthermore, any videos that were inaccessible were also excluded. This includes videos that had broken links, had been taken down, blocked for any reason, or videos that were made

private and not accessible to the public. From here, maximum variation sampling was incorporated based on two classifications: sex of the storyteller and whether the video was authentic or a parody. Maximum variation sampling is often used to obtain “wide variations of the phenomena” and ensure that underrepresented groups are a part of the data set (Tracy, 2013, pp. 135–136). Sampling from each of these classifications was used in order to obtain a diverse data set from the sampling of videos and guarantee that both male and parody videos would be represented.

**Disparities in sex of storyteller.** Among the final sample of videos that met the criteria for textual analysis, there was an overwhelming difference between the number of males and the number of females that posted stories. Of the available confessional videos classified as “authentic,” 72 of those were female, 12 were male, and 6 were “hidden.” Of the available confessional videos classified as “parody,” 7 were told by females, 12 were males, and one could not be classified.

It is evident that women were the primary posters, especially of “authentic” confessional videos, and this seemed critical to account for in the analysis. Therefore, of the available videos that met the inclusion criteria, the sample was categorized into five main categories: authentic-female, authentic-male, authentic-hidden, parody-female, and parody-male. This categorization was a part of the maximum variation sampling processes.

**Selecting the videos.** The final set of confessional videos used for analysis was randomly sampled from these five categories. Three videos were automatically excluded because their proper classification could not be determined with certainty. Additionally,

three videos were instantly chosen for coding outside of the main sampling process. These confessional stories were taken from the primary data list because the researcher felt that these videos are in essence the “poster stories” for this genre of confessional videos, thus making them critical for the discussion of this type of digital storytelling. They were selected automatically for coding because their stories are widely referenced by commenters inside this community of videos, and these three videos also have a large news value outside of YouTube. The popularity of their stories will be discussed in the results section.

After all exclusions were made, 104 videos were left in the final data set to be sampled from. There were 86 “authentic” videos. Of those, 71 storytellers were female, 10 were male, and 5 were hidden. There were also 18 “parody” videos. Of the parody videos, 7 were female storytellers and 11 were male. Every other video from each category was selected for textual analysis, resulting in half of the videos from each category being selected. Including the three “poster stories,” 54 videos in total were selected for coding. However, one video that was originally available to the public was made private by the time full textual analysis was attempted. Therefore, the final total of confessional stories that were analyzed was 53 videos. In the “authentic-female” category, 34 videos were coded. In total, 5 videos were coded in the authentic-male category, and 3 were coded in the authentic-hidden classification. For the parody videos, 3 were coded for females, 5 videos received textual analysis for the male classification, and there were no hidden identity videos in the parody category.

## **Textual Analysis of the Note Card Videos**

**Transcriptions.** A textual analysis was performed on the final sample of 53 confessional note card videos. For each video, a typed transcription of the note card story was created. Each video's transcription contained a copy of the video's description, a transcript of the written note card story, denotations of any unique gestures or actions that were made by the storyteller, a written transcription of anything the storyteller said with his/her voice rather than using a note card, and screen shots of the top 40 comments to the video, including any replies to those comments. When creating transcripts of the written stories, unique production features were noted to the best of the transcriber's ability, including use of emoticons, underlining, bolding, etc. Each individual transcription was titled with its respective code. Title of the video and username of the uploader were excluded from the transcriptions.

**Video analysis.** The transcriptions for each video were coded for two primary characteristics: themes of the story and characteristics of the genre (including production characteristics). The coded terms were used to find similar themes among the stories and the genre itself. These themes will be discussed in the results section: commonalities in production, health and life challenges, gendered differences, and parody characteristics.

**Comments.** YouTube changed its comment section as of Fall 2013. The new display can either show the "top comments" or "newest first" for a video. Each page initially displays 20 comments and their replies before providing the option to display more comments. Primarily, the top comments of YouTube videos are the most recent and/or those marked as the most popular (decided through a series of "thumbs ups")

ratings for each comment). While some videos did not have any comments, others had hundreds of responses. In order to maintain a relatively consistent number of replies for each video while still seeking to gain a satisfactory understanding of the primary conversations for each video, screen shots were taken of up to the top 40 comments for each and any replies.

With the new Google+ integration, shared videos through Google+ are occasionally discussed by members of a circle within the Google platform, but these conversations still appear under the comments section of each video. Any replies to an original comment through this process were not counted as a “comment,” but instead as a “reply.” Therefore, these replies did not count towards the total count of comments. After gathering screen shots of the comments for each video, these responses were coded for similar themes and reactions. An analysis of these themes will be discussed in the results: positive responses, personal stories, support, negative responses, religion, and parody comments.

### **Rationale for Analytical Categories**

The rationale for the analytical categories was based on the key features of note card videos that were being analyzed for this study’s research questions: how they are produced, what they are saying, the types of responses, and who is involved. With continued research into these videos, it increasingly became apparent just how similar the note card videos were in these particular categories, and this made understanding these features as an aspect of genre/collective identity more important. There were also many smaller components that made up each of these broad categories. Therefore, it was

also necessary to categorize the significant themes within each of the wider classifications, including the different types of topics, what different aspects of positive support or negative responses were provided, and who were they key people that featured a role in the digital stories. Knowing this information contributes to the understanding of how note card videos tie into theories of social support and expression of identity.

## FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to analyze note card confession videos on YouTube to gain an understanding of the common themes within the videos and the types of responses that they received from viewers. Overall, these findings showed unique themes within and across the different groups of note card videos that were analyzed. The biggest differences were between the “authentic” confessions and the parody videos. The primary confessional videos revealed many similarities both in style of production and in the themes discussed.

### **Notable Videos**

Before common themes are reviewed, however, three particular note card confessions must be discussed to help better situate the genre of videos themselves. These specific videos were not only among the most watched, they were also frequently referenced in the comments sections of other videos. These three confessions are those of Amanda Todd, Jonah Mowry, and Ben Breedlove. These videos have also been written about and/or referenced in other media. Thus, the confessions of Todd, Mowry, and Breedlove are essentially the poster videos for the note card confession genre.

**Amanda Todd.** Amanda Todd’s video is probably the most famous note card confession. Todd’s story discusses a long-standing struggle with bullying and cyberbullying. After flashing for a man on the internet, Todd received a Facebook message from him a year later threatening to share the picture if she did not “put on a show.” He also had access to the contact information for many of her friends and family. The man from the internet not only shared the image, but he also made it his Facebook

profile picture. The event ultimately led to a wave of bullying from her peers. Todd also states in her confession that the situation led to anxiety and depression in which she ultimately started cutting herself and getting involved with drugs and alcohol.

After moving schools, Todd got involved with a boy who already had a girlfriend. This caused even more bullying to start. She states that a group of students ganged up on her and physically beat her to the point that she hid in a ditch until her father arrived. Todd discusses attempting to commit suicide by drinking bleach and then states that students would post pictures of bleach and ditches on Facebook with comments saying “I hope she sees this and kills herself.” Her video concludes by her stating that she is “constantly crying,” “constantly cutting,” and reaching out for help. Her last two note cards read “I have nobody... I need someone,” and “My name is Amanda Todd...” before ending on a picture of a bloody arm with several cuts and a picture of another arm with a “stay strong” tattoo (TheSomebodytoknow, 2012).

Todd’s story grew in infamy because she committed suicide less than a month after posting her confessional video to YouTube (Grenoble, 2012). There was a wave of news articles written about her video and her situation with bullying after her death. There is a website dedicated to her called “Amanda Todd Legacy.” According to the website, the Legacy seeks to raise awareness about cyberbullying and mental health, largely through raising donations and giving grants to different organizations and school districts (“What the legacy does,” 2014). Furthermore, her story has become a part of the social media world. There are several Twitter and Facebook pages created in her honor,

and her name is a popular hash tag used throughout different social media outlets (e.g. #AmandaTodd).

**Jonah Mowry.** A second well-known note card confession is that of Jonah Mowry. Mowry's video is also referenced in Bernard's (2012) article about confessional videos. During his confession, Mowry talks about being depressed, cutting himself, being bullied, and debating suicide. He states that he is scared to go to school, especially since most of his friends are already in high school. At the end though, Mowry ends with a positive declaration of having strength and knowing that there "a million reasons to be here." The emotions that he displays while changing the note cards are especially gripping. At a certain point through the story, Mowry begins to start crying and has to take a moment several times to collect himself (Mowry, 2011).

Mowry's story, while already popular, grew even larger when stories began to circulate that the video was fake. According to Bernard (2012) and a wave of YouTube response videos, Mowry supposedly uploaded a second video – which was quickly removed from his channel – in which he displays a happy, carefree atmosphere. This change in emotion caused many to call into question the authenticity of his first video. Since then, Mowry has uploaded a thorough statement about his first confession to his original video's description in which he explains what was going on in his life the night he posted the video, reasserting his video's authenticity. Mowry's video has created a wide online discussion about bullying, and his story has received a mass of both support and criticism. Celebrities have even taken to supporting Mowry and his story (Donaldson James, 2011).

**Ben Breedlove.** Ben Breedlove’s confessional video centers around a significantly different theme than the other previously discussed videos. At the time of making his video, Breedlove was already well-established to YouTube. He had two other channels where he posted videos, OurAdvice4You and BreedloveTV, where he offered viewers advice on relationships. However, he created a separate channel, “Ben Breedlove,” for his two confessional videos (a first and second half to his story).

Breedlove’s story discusses his lifelong struggle with a heart condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM). Over the course of his two videos, Breedlove recounts different moments in his life when he “cheated death.” He discusses his experiences of having a seizure, implanting a pacemaker, going into cardiac arrest, and passing out at school. Through all these events, Breedlove emphasizes his experiences while unconscious or in the hospital. The thematic descriptions in his story are highly religious – containing rhetoric about white lights, miracles, and angels - and the tone is more uplifting than many other confessionals. Breedlove tends to smile throughout different moments and describes these occurrences as “peaceful.”

Similar to Amanda Todd, Breedlove passed away shortly after making his video. His video was posted on December 18, 2011, and Breedlove died the following week on December 25, Christmas day (NG, 2011). Furthermore, like Todd and Mowry, his story became an internet sensation. His memorial service was streamed online, making the total attendance over 1,500 people (NG, 2011). His sister has also written a book about Breedlove called *When Will Heaven Begin?: This is Ben Breedlove’s Story*. Celebrities have even come into contact with Breedlove’s story. In his video, Breedlove talks about

seeing Kid Cudi, his favorite rapper, in a dream/vision. After his death, the famous hip-hop artist released a statement detailing how much the video touched him (Duncan-Mao, 2011). He also wrote to the Breedlove family that they ““raised a real hero”” (Duncan-Mao, 2011).

**Significance of Todd, Mowry, and Breedlove.** These three videos serve as examples for how note card confessions can have a wider impact outside of YouTube. Each of these videos has over 8 million views, and their stories have become part of continuing conversations regarding youth health, bullying, teen suicide, and more. Furthermore, these representative stories contain many of the key themes expressed in other note card confessions. Examples of these similarities will be provided with the coded findings of the videos.

Finally, being some of the most well-known videos, these three examples also occasionally served as inspirations for other YouTube users to create their own videos and/or as points of comparison or reference in the discussions of other note card confessions. One user in particular had a detailed story about her relation to Amanda Todd:

I got a text from my mom about a week ago saying “you and Amanda share stories.” I looked more into this Amanda Todd she was talking about and sure enough, we went through almost the exact same thing. Amanda inspired me to post this to show people that bullying can’t take over your life... it simply can’t. No matter what you’re going through, you’re never alone... it may feel like it, but you aren’t (Savanna Roby, 2012).

Her confession proceeds to detail her experiences with a boy she liked, the decision to send him personal pictures, and discussing the bullying that stemmed from it. Similar to

Todd, she recounts attempting suicide, but the user ends her confession by stressing the importance of pulling through the hard times:

The other day I heard about Amanda Todd. Her story is very similar to mine, the only difference is... She didn't make it. I couldn't believe it when I heard that. So I decided to share my story and show girls that you can get thru this (Savanna Roby, 2012).

The stories of Todd, Mowry, and Breedlove also appeared as references in the comments sections of other videos. The comments tend to use these videos as comparisons for the stories that they are discussing. This includes both “real” confessions and parody videos.

### **Confessional Stories**

The purpose of this research was to better understand confessional note card videos on YouTube and how they are being used to tell stories. The first research question of this study asked the following:

**RQ1:** What are the similarities in production and story themes that note card confessions share?

Overall, there were many common themes throughout the groups of videos that were analyzed. The “authentic” confessional videos – female and male – were very similar in their thematic patterns, and they closely followed the representative examples of Todd, Mowry, and Breedlove. Predictably, the parody note card videos – while containing some similarities – followed a unique set of rules that largely separated these stories from the rest of the videos.

### **Gender Findings**

As discussed in the methodology, there was a large discrepancy between the number of females and the number of males who created note card videos. There were

significantly more females than males (34:5), creating an undeniable gender component to these videos. It would be difficult to try to explain all of the reasons why female videos outnumbered male videos so considerably. However, the groups were coded separately in order to identify any significant differences in their stories. Particularly, it was unknown if male videos had any stylistic or content differences. Overall, the male videos were not significantly different from those created by females. Both contained many stylistic consistencies, and the major themes of the confessions included discussion of health issues, life challenges, and relationships. For example, both female and male videos discussed bullying, depression, emotional abuse, and suicidal thoughts. The production style of male videos also mirrored those of the female videos (e.g., the use of underlining and bolding, gesturing to the camera, etc.).

Videos authored by males differed more from each other than they did as a category from videos authored by females. Each video was entirely different than the others when it came to content. Whereas the female group contained many stories that were very similar in terms of life experiences, the five male videos were all different in their creation. This is possibly due to the low number of videos that were available. The female videos likely experienced more saturation in story themes due to the higher volume of confessions. It is unknown whether or not there would have been more similarities between male videos had there been a larger sample size.

Additionally, as with the other authentic videos, the videos that were created by storytellers who remained hidden contained the same types of themes in their stories as the female and male groups. To reiterate, the hidden videos were created in a way that

only showed the note card in the frame of view. The person telling the story is nowhere to be seen in the video. However, this does not mean that the sex of the storyteller was always unknown. Profile information or details of that person's story occasionally revealed the sex of the storyteller. Yet, each "hidden" person maintained some purpose for not showing themselves and several of the videos explained their reasons. One storyteller gave this reason:

I apologize. I'm not saying my name... orrr showing my face... If people from my school saw this... and knew it was me, I'd be ruined (WereHereForYou, 2011).

Another hidden video creator followed a completely different line of thought when making the decision to stay off camera:

You don't need to know my name... It's not important... What IS important... and what I think you should know... are my STORIES. This is 1 of them... (MyDeepestSecrets, 2013).

By prioritizing the stories over the individual, the storyteller has deemphasized his individuality. This could possibly reinforce the notion that every person has a story, and these stories are stronger under a common method of production and distribution. One story by itself may easily go unnoticed, especially within billions of other YouTube videos. However, a mass collective of videos telling similar stories has the power to make a much larger statement. Additionally, by deprioritizing himself and focusing on the story, the storyteller is bringing more awareness to the act. In this instance, what is happening in his life is not necessarily the focus; instead, what's important is that bullying, self-esteem problems, and similar activities are a major problem globally.

## **Authenticity of the Videos**

Despite the importance of understanding these stories, one process that was difficult during the coding of these videos was the categorization of the authentic and the parody confessions. Something that must always be kept in mind when performing research on the internet or other media content is that the information cannot always be verified. Although the note card videos were categorized to the best extent possible, it is impossible to tell for sure whether or not a video was truly authentic or parody. A confession that might seem like it is trying to make a joke (e.g. having issues with diarrhea) may actually be a serious confession. Furthermore, even a video made with the intention of being “authentic” cannot always be verified as truthful. As with overall intent, it is also impossible to know for sure if all of the stories told in the authentic confessions were true. False confessions could have a large effect on the type of value these stories have to research. A true community of youth with these types of problems might be significant for teen health and prevention studies. However, false stories would indicate a unique trend of communication that could be significant for new media and communication studies.

Regardless of this factor, all of the videos were coded at face value to the best of the researcher’s ability and the significant themes were noted based on what was in the videos, even though there is no way to prove whether or not all of them are true. Though the limited number of male and hidden note card confessions made saturation within these groups difficult, both groups of videos showed consistent themes with the larger

number of female confessional videos. The key themes found within the “authentic” note card confessions will now be discussed.

### **Commonalities in Production**

To start off, it is important to discuss what ties note card confessions together as a genre other than the common use of a note card by a single person in front of a camera. Coding the videos revealed that consistencies in production and method of storytelling were in many ways as significant as the stories themselves. An individual in front of a camera with note cards was not the only similarity in production for these stories. Key phrases and story topics in the videos also contributed to production similarities. Moreover, there were many visual commonalities in production that were not previously known.

**Actions by the storyteller.** One engaging component of the note card confessions was witnessing the actions of the storytellers throughout their videos. Overall, most of them were highly engaged with their story as it was being told. Different series of gestures and displays of emotion reinforced this notion. Visual gestures by the storyteller had the effect of showing her or his emotion, whether intentional or not. Some of the most common movements by the storytellers were shrugging, waving, and crying. Often the storyteller featured in the video would shrug during moments of dissatisfaction with a certain outcome (*Figures 11 and 12*).



**Figure 11.** Shrug 1. Example of a "shrugging" gesture by the storyteller.



**Figure 12.** Shrug 2. Another example of a shrug gesture.

The sense of dissatisfaction was commonly an outcome of knowing things differently in hindsight. In retrospect, what happened to the storytellers was either a mistake or unexpected result. However, shrugs could also be used at sad moments in the story or at negative comments in general.

Waving was another popular gesture. A wave was prominently used to say hello or goodbye to the audience of the video (*Figure 13*). Storytellers might also give a "thumbs up," or other form of gesture that fit with certain moments of their confessions. *Figure 14* below shows one youth pointing to her heart. She uses this gesture as a display of personal strength, drawing emotion to that particular piece of her story.



**Figure 13.** Waving. Storyteller waves hello.



**Figure 14.** Pointing. She makes a reference to her heart.

Similarly, several storytellers cried at various points in their stories. The duration and severity of crying varied. Some of the storytellers simply seemed to be holding back tears or taking a moment to collect themselves. Others candidly cried (Figure 15), often having to stop their stories to wipe tears from their faces.



*Figure 15. Emotional response. One storyteller cries during her video.*

As previously mentioned, part of the appeal to Mowry's video is the deep display of emotions, including crying. The emotions displayed compound the emotional atmosphere generated by the words on the cards. With several of the note card videos – especially some of those in which the storyteller pauses for an action like crying – you

can see the clear process of emotions that transpire over the course of the storytelling process.

**Writing style.** Another aspect in addition to common gestures was the way in which note cards were written. Spelling and grammar appeared to be relatively unimportant when sharing a story. Often times words were misspelled and common abbreviations used in texting, instant messages, and overall online communication were employed. However, other aspects of presentation seemed to be intentional for many of the storytellers.

The way in which the cards were written or used together helped express emotions and certain stylistic effects. For example, the use of emoticons was a prominent trend among both female and male authors. Smiley faces, hearts, and arrows were frequently used to convey emotion and tie thoughts together, and underlining was utilized by some of the storytellers to emphasize particular words (*Figure 16*). Along with a specific phrase, emoticons and underlining could show shifts in the story. If a confession started on a positive note, a “frowny” face might aid in displaying the change of emotion when the story becomes more serious.



**Figure 16.** Providing emphasis. Underlining might be used to highlight a particular idea.

Moreover, the story itself often appeared to be written onto the note cards with an intentional organization. Individual elements of the confession might be written on separate note cards, and to place emphasis on one concept – such as the type of names that bullies have called the subject of the video – single words were also commonly written by themselves in a series of note cards. The figures below (*Figures 17-19*) show the type of sequencing that was found in several of the confessional stories.



**Figure 17.** Slut.



**Figure 18.** Nasty.



**Figure 19.** Fat.

These images reference the type of names that this particular storyteller was called by bullies. Rather than writing all of them on one note card, displaying the names individual

gives each word its own sense of importance and dramatizes the tone at that particular point in the story.

However, emphasis could also be created through the use of color. Color seemed to have stylistic importance among many of the confessions. Certain words were written in a different color from the rest of the story to help give them more significance (*Figure 20*). The colors might also be used in conjunction with capitalization and bolding in order to provide emphasis to a key component of a user's confession. Furthermore, some storytellers would also utilize different colored note cards (*Figure 21*).



*Figure 20. Color use 1.*



*Figure 21. Color use 2.*

These could be used for creative purposes, to emphasize key ideas, or even as a mocking imitation – such as in the parody videos.

Aside from visual elements, there were also several components to many of the confessions that resulted in similar writing patterns between storytellers. For example, one of these uniformities in production from the authentic female confessional videos

was that many of the storytellers provided reasons for why they were posting their stories. Most often this was provided in the video description on each of the individual YouTube pages, but some storytellers mentioned their reasons in the videos themselves. The purpose for posting the videos varied (e.g. following the trend, creating awareness, feeling the need to express oneself), but there were some common themes throughout.

One of the reasons mentioned for posting a confessional video is founded in the idea of communal storytelling. Among the regular female confessions, there was a recurring notion that “we all have a story.” In this sense, the user’s video is just one piece of a larger conglomeration of experiences. Therefore, the point of posting the confession is to express what one individual is going through, knowing that others have shared experiences. Whether this is to help others or not is not always defined. Sometimes the statement “we all have a story, this is mine,” or a variant of this idea, is expressed in the description section of the video. Other times it is found as one of the last statements of the note card confession itself.

Furthermore, several of the storytellers sought to negate the idea that the making of their videos was a means of getting attention. Rather, a common reason for posting a confession was described as intending to be a source of inspiration rather than a narcissistic behavior. Amanda Todd’s video contained a similar explanation. The first part of her description reads:

I’m struggling to stay in this world, because everything just touches me so deeply. I’m not doing this for attention. I’m doing this to be an inspiration and to show that I can be strong.. (TheSomebodytoknow, 2012).

Another girl who made a video posted a similar explanation:

I have seen these videos all over the internet and decided to make my own. I thought it would be nice to share my story with others and maybe it might touch or inspire them in some way. If any of you are struggling through a difficult time, remember, things will get better (Zoe Royer, 2013).

These explanations tie into a larger overall idea of “togetherness” conveyed by a large number of the confessional videos.

One of the interesting aspects of these confessional videos was that the stories almost always followed the format of a typical narrative. Generally, the stories would have a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning tends to introduce who the person is – including name and age – and place the viewers in the setting of that storyteller's life. Most of the stories are written by high school students. Next to this age group, middle school-aged youth and a few college-aged students make up the majority of the rest of the videos. Only two of the authentic confessions were written by adults who were in their 30's - one female and one male. The middle typically explains the major crisis that the user is facing, including health issues, relationship problems, etc. Lastly, the end will tell where the storyteller now is in her or his situation, personal thoughts about who they are or how they are moving forward, and final messages to the audience.

Different shifts also occurred within the stories, including both positive and negative changes. Negative changes in the lives of the storytellers could provide a key hook to their stories, as this is where they began to describe the issues in their lives. One female confession uses one of these shifts:

I'm sixteen years old. I look like a normal teenage girl right? (And I certainly play the part.) I like poetry, parties, coffee... and music. I'm in colorguard, I play the flute, and I'm in student council. I have a 4.0 GPA & a job at a supermarket. Most of the time, I seem HAPPY ...but I'm not. I've struggled with BULIMIA NERVOSA for 3 years. It's a constant battle. Sometimes months go by where I

purge almost everything I eat. I can't look at my body for more than 10 seconds without crying... (MyDeepestSecrets, 2013).

The positive aspects at the beginning of the confession are used to preface the main content of the story. It also presents the idea that these issues can be faced by anybody.

In a few of the note card videos though, positive changes within the confessions also existed. In one confession, the female storyteller was able to change her life in the midst of her struggles:

I was on a very dark path, with no hope that I'll find a light. But then something happened to me... and to this day, I'm not quite sure where it came from. But I woke up one day wanting to be different... to CHANGE! I have always been exposed to God, having a Christian family & all. And there was even a time where I pretended to be one, to get my parents off my back... But I had the urge that morning to pull out my dusty Bible & so I did. I flipped it to a random page & just started to read... After about 20 minutes of reading, I was bawling my eyes out, On my knees, begging for God's forgiveness... I rededicated my Life to Him & an amazing feeling of peace washed over me. My attitude, my thoughts, my life completely changed. People at school see that I'm different, that I'm not who I used to be... (RememberMoe, 2014).

In these types of scenarios, positive shifts in the storytellers' life helped them to resolve many of their issues, even if things were still not completely perfect.

The conclusions of each confession varied in whether they were positive or negative. Though having faced many challenges, some storytellers chose to end their videos with a sense of optimism. For example, after discussing troubles with peers and the death of close friends, one girl closes her confession by saying, "My life has definitely had some ups and downs, but I know the sun will always shine." However, other storytellers' difficulties were still apparently an aspect of their lives at the time of posting their videos, and this affected the conclusion of their stories. One example of a negative end to a confession came from a girl who discussed her struggles with bulimia

nervosa. She struggles with her self-esteem and her body has suffered many side effects of her eating disorder. The final words of her confession appear to convey negative emotions still being felt at the time of the video's production:

My parents don't get it, and don't try. They tell me to act happy even when I'm not... so I do. I feel so alone. All of my "friends" have either left or don't care too much. But honestly, I'm drowning and I don't know if I can keep my head above water (ofniceandmaggie, 2012).

Another female storyteller confessed her struggles with bullying. She talks about her life in school growing steadily worse, and the final thoughts of her story are left with a grim feeling:

I'm scared now I can't control it any longer. I had thoughts. Bad thoughts. I had dreams & those dreams are bad. I gave up I cry every day even in school. Every inch of the way I go I do something wrong. I got blamed by my teachers too. So now I'm the girl who can't be herself now. I'm broken... (Malorie Harvey, 2012).

After this last sentence, the storyteller ends the video by dropping the note card and wiping a tear from her face. The combined effect creates a grim atmosphere surrounding the confession similar to Todd's video, and the viewers are left without any sense of closure to the story.

Finally, along the lines of repeating statements throughout the note card videos, another stylistic recurrence was the notion of a message to the audience. In the video descriptions and/or the confessions themselves, many of the storytellers would speak directly to the audience. Often times this would be in an attempt to reach out to those in similar situations, such as a user who has attempted suicide deciding to tell others that life gets better and not to give up. As an example of this, one female concludes her story with the following message:

I hope everyone will listen to my advice and get HELP! And remember... Don't ever be one to judge! You have NO clue what someone may be going through! A smile can hide so much! Just because there isn't tears doesn't mean there isn't pain! Smile, it could make someone's day! And remember... Always choose... LIFE! Thanks for watching (Marsha Wilson, 2012)!

One of the male videos also contained a proactive message:

We only get one life... but... we get second chances. Or 50 chances (like me). So I challenge you to... Become a better version of you! Will you take this challenge? Let's all work together to make tomorrow an even better you (Douglas Lancaster, 2013)!

Additionally, many phrases of a confession would be audience-centered as well. This includes expressions like "I love you," "thank you for watching," and "you are beautiful." These audience-focused statements were often found surrounding positive shifts in story, messages to the audience, and in final thoughts of stories in general.

These messages are one example of two-way communication that can happen within the networked public of confessional videos. Rather than viewers just offering support to the storyteller, the producer of the note card confession can also provide support to audience members potentially in need of support.

### **Relationships**

One of the other major thematic aspects of the note card videos is the relationships that the storytellers discuss. This typically includes friends and family members. Among the family, parents are frequently mentioned. Parents featured in the stories acted both as outlets of support and as the source of distress felt by the storyteller. When a storyteller faced depression, bullying, or some other major issue in her or his life, some parents became a strong support system. For example, one father was able to step in after hearing about his daughter's intent to commit suicide:

I couldn't handle the pain... I went upstairs to my room & I was about to do it... when my parents came home, & my dad came in my room to stop me. The guy had called him & told him what I said... My dad held me for the next hour while I just cried in his arms (Kirstin Cole, 2013).

The girl had told her ex-boyfriend of her plans, who then called her father. While this parent was able to help save his daughter's life, though, there were also a number of parents who served as a major source of anguish and misery for many of the other video creators.

Pain caused by the parents is often due to divorce, abuse, or even looking away and ignoring abuse that the storyteller receives from someone else. Trouble in the family additionally sometimes started at a young age. One female discussed her struggles with such a case:

I have no father. I don't even know his name... I trust very few, & push people away because... The man that raised me, left when I was around 11... have not seen or talked to him since... I have a mom, but... we do NOT get along, at all. I wish we did. I'm a lesbian and she doesn't accept me... (Sarah2244able, 2011).

Conflicts with parents took various shapes and forms. Sometimes it was an emotional conflict, other times it was physical. Even if the parent was not the direct source of a storyteller's problem, looking away from abuse (such as from another parent) or denying the presence of an issue in the storyteller's life (e.g. having an eating disorder) can be just as damaging. In those cases, storytellers might seek out strong-tie support from somewhere else.

Friendship is a commonly mentioned relationship within confessions in addition to parents. In a few cases there is a friend or group of friends that ends up being a source of help for the subject of the video. One female tells this type of story:

My true friends have always been there... Whether or not I knew it... They stopped rumors... They stuck up for me... They listened when I just needed to vent... Held me as I cried... Confronted those who hurt me... Pushed me to do things that were hard... Reassured me I was beautiful... Sat silently next to me when I needed company.... (AltearaHavenwic, 2011).

Similarly, friends played a major role in the confession of one of the male storytellers:

But even when I'm hiding it I have thoughts like... "Would the world be better without me..." "Do I have a reason to even be living." But each time I plan my death out I start to think... How would this IMPACT others... How would my mama and sisters feel coming home to my dead body... Would they think it's their fault... How would my friends feel when they get the news... Would they feel like they could have.. no... should have done more... I think, and think, and think, and think.. Until finally I DECIDED... That there's too much to live for... I honestly believe my friends and family saved my life (Arthur Thompson, 2013).

However, in many cases former friends turn into the source of conflict for the storyteller.

This is common in situations of bullying and cyberbullying. In one of the note card videos where the person is hidden from view, the entire confession is dedicated to the problems that came about from being friends with one person:

He would pick on me in the most subtle ways... He would encourage my friends to ditch me... I would be all ALONE. I would try to go back to them... But they would continue to AVOID... Me. He would put me into situations where I would EMBARRAS myself: telling girls I liked them, spreading rumors... about my GENITAL LENGTH. Something I couldn't defend much @ 12 years old... (MyDeepestSecrets, 2013).

Struggles with close relationships are strongly tied to the major thematic problems that were faced by many of creators of note card confessions. Issues with friend or acquaintances often led to depression and self-harming habits such as using drugs, cutting, or attempting suicide.

## Health and Life Challenges

Along with the features of note card videos that help define them as a uniform genre, one of the other major themes found in the confessional stories were discussions of many similar issues that the storytellers face and the common struggles affecting their health. There were many different factors leading to a multitude of problems for each of the storytellers, and it is clear that the different struggles discussed in the confessions are likely related or influenced by one another in many situations. The issues faced by storytellers were caused by both external and internal factors.

**External challenges.** Two of the most commonly discussed topics that served as the subject for many of the confessions were bullying and abuse. Bullying could take place in many forms throughout these videos, including verbal, physical, and digital. Name calling and ostracizing were two common acts mentioned in the note card videos. One of the hidden storytellers presents an example of this:

This all started in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I lost some friends and still don't know why... this one... "friend" made everyone turn against me... lunch was hard. No one to sit with. Also... I posted videos on youtube... of me singing... worst. Idea. Ever. People saw... I was made fun of... (WereHereForYou, 2011).

However, as in the Todd video, bullying could also be physical. One female describes a specific situation:

I've been used, physically attacked, bullied, cyber bullied, excluded, and lied to. I've been suicidal, depressed, and scared because of bullying. I've gone into panic attacks many times because I'm afraid of being attacked. This summer a girl I didn't even know punched me in the face because her friends told her to. One time a girl followed me out of a concert, pulled my hair from behind and punched me. I never fought back (Isabel Snyders, 2011).

There are numerous videos involving girls being called names like “slut,” “whore,” and “ugly.” Life in school has proved difficult for these storytellers.

Additionally, cyber bullying was also one of the forms of bullying faced by a few of the storytellers. Rather than just in-person name calling at school, social media could also serve as a place of verbal attack. For example, in her confession one female wrote:

She turned everyone against me. She started joining in, harassed me through facebook/text messages/etc... called me a slut, a bitch, & ugly. All her friends started joining in, mostly on facebook. Girls would post statuses, calling me a “hoe,” ugly, making fun of how I look... Everyone would comment on the statuses, agreeing... The girls say they wanted to fight me. NO ONE stood up for me (Kirstin Cole, 2013).

Cyberbullying was significantly less common than general discussions regarding bullying. However, it did appear in a few of the confessions.

As previously mentioned, a common theme within the confessions was facing abuse. Physical, mental, and sexual abuse were all discussed. Sometimes a storyteller faced multiple different types of abuse all in one story. This could be from the same person or from a collection of people. Parents and family-figures were a major source of this type of abuse. Family figures could also include step-parents or relatives of friends.

First, physical violence is one of the forms of abuse that was mentioned in several note card videos. One of the female storytellers described her experience with vivid detail:

I can't remember my first beating to[o] well but I know I was 8 & it was more than just a little smack... The second time was the beginning of the worst to come... Because I got tired & forgot to study for my history test in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade even though I had the weekend he got mad. He said, “That’s okay. I got you later. Your butt is mine.” I knew exactly what that meant... So when I got home he didn’t seem so mad anymore. I thought he forgot. But in about half an hour he came in the room where I was watching tv... He said “Take off your pants. I’ll be waiting

in your room.” I instantly began to cry & begged him to forgive me. He turned around & said in the scariest voice I’ve ever heard & said, “Take off your pants now!” And walked out of the room. Failing to fight back tears I silently prayed while I began to take my pants off. And like the first beating he beat me with his belt until I had what looked like slash marks all over... Only 2 times worse on my legs than ever :\. By then my mom stopped drinking & was getting better... but she didn’t do much to defend me... One night not only did I have to take my pants off but my dad had a thicker belt... And my mom left the house before she could hear me scream in pain. The marks hurt so bad I could barely move... But I never showed it... especially in school (dayrenee08, 2011).

As with the example here, it was not uncommon for the abuse mentioned by the storytellers to start at a young age. Secondly, mental abuse was featured in more forms than name calling from peers at school. Parents and family could also be a primary source for this issue. For example, one male storyteller wrote:

I’ve been physically & mentally abuse[d] since I can remember. Physically: punched, slapped, spit on, not giv[en] food for days, beat with different objects, jumped, kicked. Mentally: been wished death upon by my family, told I was never going to amount to nothing, called names (fag, gay ass, bitch, hoe, etc... etc...). I never told anyone... not even my closest friends... just been [too] scared to ... even making this video is HARD (Arthur Thompson, 2013).

Bullying from peers, however, still remained the largest source of mental abuse

discussed among the videos. Finally, sexual abuse was the last major form of abuse featured within the note card confessions. As with physical abuse, this could often start at a young age. One female storyteller had a detailed account of her experience:

My stepdad abused me. Emotionally, physically, & sexually. I was only 9 the first time he touched me. And the first time he raped me I was 10. It would happen almost every school day. Sometimes it would happen before and after school. I tried to tell my mom but she didn’t believe me. When I was 13 I got a restraining order. He was forced to move out & my mom filed for divorce. I thought the nightmare was finally over... I was wrong... A few weeks later he came back to the house when I was alone. He beat me. He raped me. He threatened me. I was too scared to tell anyone. I just let it happen. He continued to come over when I was alone. I didn’t tell anyone until one month ago. It took me almost nine years to finally tell the police. Now he’s in jail with 5 million dollars bail (Pheonix Fontaine, 2013)!!!

Although accounts of sexual abuse were primarily seen in the authentic female videos, there was at least one confession regarding sexual abuse in the authentic male and hidden videos as well. Overall, bullying and abuse were two major problems that not only created external challenges for the storytellers, but they also in some circumstances influenced internal struggles as well.

**Internal struggles.** Whether due to bullying, abuse, or something else entirely, there were also a number of internal difficulties mentioned within the note card confessions. The two most common topics mentioned were depression and issues with self-esteem.

Depression was one of the most common themes throughout all of the authentic note card videos. There were numerous confessions of being depressed and that discuss events that led to depression. Depression was also tied to other harmful experiences, as one female detailed:

They told me to just ignore the people that were putting me down and calling me names. Problem was... EVERYONE was calling me names. I cried myself to sleep every night... Then depression settled in. Every morning was a constant struggle just to convince myself to get out of bed. My life had gone to SHI\*. I started getting into drugs... They only worsened my depression. Till one night, I had finally had Enough! I swallowed a bottle of advil... I ended up getting really sick and passed out. Somehow, I woke up the next morning (Savanna Roby, 2012).

Many video creators discussed their struggles with depression in addition to other problems in their lives. Storytellers often cried as well. Some video creators confessed that they would cry every day. For example, “I cry myself to sleep most nights” and “I’m

crying all the time” are two quotations from an authentic female and hidden note card video.

Moreover, one phenomenon that seemed to occur throughout these stories was the portrayal of “fake happiness.” This is the idea that the storyteller seems happy or pretends to be so although she or he is actually feeling completely different on the inside.

A male storyteller expressed one of these scenarios:

I envy some of the people who [make] these videos... Cause even today (2-24-13) I still have thought[s] of ending my life... I may seem HAPPY in the Hallway or in class. But even at school with friends I still feel ALONE... It may be hard to notice I’m DEPRESSED. Maybe because I’ve gotten good a[t] hiding it over time... But even when I’m hiding it I have thoughts like... “Would the world be better without me...” “Do I have a reason to even be living” (Arthur Thompson, 2013).

The process of faking being okay and pretending to be happy is a repetitive theme throughout these videos. Often times the storyteller will begin this line of thought and follow it with a confession of what is really going on inside of them. As previously stated though, in many cases the problems do not stop at depression alone. There are many other life and health issues that these youths face.

Not surprisingly, one of the other internal difficulties that many of the storytellers appeared to suffer from was issues with their self-esteem. This could be due to relationship troubles, bullying, trouble at home, or some other underlying cause. One female provides an example of her struggles with self-esteem:

People tell me how “beautiful” I am... and how “perfect” I am... I’m not. I have issues with my self-esteem. I feel ugly and fat. I can’t leave the house without makeup on. I want so much to be like the other girls. I get jealous too easily. I get clingy and attached. I’m afraid to meet new people... Because I’m shy. And I’m afraid I’ll be JUDGED. I smile a lot... but only I know it’s just an act. I’m

terrified of being alone... I'm in a relationship. But I'm still deathly afraid of getting hurt (Fearlesslyfalling, 2011).

What was most troubling about discussions regarding the storytellers' self-esteem was its relation to themes like crying, feelings of loneliness, depression, self-harm, eating disorders, drug and alcohol use, and suicide attempts.

**Related outcomes.** Throughout many different confessions discussing external and internal struggles there appeared to be three primary coping mechanisms associated with these stories: use of drugs and alcohol, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts and/or attempts. Each of these actions was frequently linked to other struggles previously mentioned, and all three major challenges (external, internal, and associated outcomes) were commonly mentioned together in a number of confessions as well. However, different storytellers struggled with challenges to varying extents, and the confessions often put different emphases on actions.

First of all, some of the storytellers confessed in their videos that they started using drugs and alcohol. Frequently this is linked with other issues in their lives. One female provides her reasoning for choosing to engage in drugs:

I used to cut. Well... I still do sometimes... I have been doing it since 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I have been to 3 different places... to get help. I drink. & I do drugs. ... NOT to be cool. They make me stop thinking... about the past. It makes me happy (Sarah2244able, 2011).

The storytellers are not the only ones featured in the confessions who are involved in drugs and alcohol though. Family members can also be a source.

Self-harm was another very frequent experience within the authentic female videos. There are many women who discussed cutting themselves and their experiences

with self-harm. As with many of the other issues discussed, self-harm appears to be closely linked with other conflicts in the storytellers' lives. One female discusses this type of connection:

They've ruined my happiest times by bullying me... I've had to change schools because of my "friends"... They've picked apart my life, style, and personality... Till I had no self-confidence left... This led me to drugs & drinking... I felt that I had to cut to feel better (AltearaHavenwic, 2011).

In this instance, bullying, drugs and alcohol, and self-harm are all closely related. The latter two experiences served as an attempt to help with issues of self-esteem brought on by bullying.

Furthermore, along with bullying, suicide was the most commonly discussed issue in the note card confessions. This included both suicidal thoughts and actual suicide attempts. There were numerous examples of different attempts from storytellers on their own lives. Two of the authentic male videos also discuss suicide attempts. One storyteller stated that he tried to commit suicide in high school. The other male discussed his battle with suicidal thoughts among other issues he'd faced in his life, including rape, anxiety, and several other health issues. In his confession he says that he had attempted suicide three times. Accounts of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts were very prominent among the authentic female videos. Whether or not the thoughts turned into physical action varied. One female discussed her thought process during her confession:

And with everything that was happening, it multiplied... Soon, I began to feel... Alone. Angry. Depressed. I cried myself to sleep for months. I cut to relieve some of the pain... But it wasn't enough... I started researching... The quickest, & quietest, & "best" ways to die. I spent hours looking up different ways to kill myself. And read story after story about failed ones too. It was at that point that I decided I either had to make no mistakes, or not go through with it at all. Obviously, I chose the latter... (RememberMoe, 2014).

As with a few other note card videos, thoughts of her family are what saved her from attempting to take her own life.

Some of the female storytellers only confessed to having suicidal thoughts but never attempting the action. This could be caused by other problems in their lives, as one female writes:

In the morning I pretended nothing happened... But I really wanted to die. When I got home, I cried for days. Now at this point, it's only getting worse. He made me feel like shit... worthless. I started to notice all my flaws... I'm fat. Ugly. Tall. Stupid... [nobody] would ever like me. I started to hurt myself. Eating disorders. [Suicide] thoughts. Went on for about 6 months (staystrong41, 2011).

Based on her confession, the girl did not physically attempt suicide but was still struggling with her self-confidence at the time she uploaded the video.

On the other hand, several of the storytellers had actually attempted suicide. A few had even attempted it multiple times. The largest number of suicide attempts by a single person was twelve. This statement came from a girl who confessed struggles she had faced due to her bipolar disorder. Additionally, one of the girls who dealt with sexual abuse also discussed her struggles with her mental health and suicide:

I struggle with PTSD, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and anorexia. I have been hospitalized 13 times. I've attempted suicide 4 times... Some days I want to try again. But... I know this is not the end! I know one day I'll get better! One day I'll be healthy and happy (Pheonix Fontaine, 2013).

These examples clearly show how actions such as self-harm and suicide attempts are closely related and often mentioned together in note card confessions. Moreover, these processes are also readily linked with topics like depression, self-esteem, and bullying.

## **Differences between Female and Male “Authentic” Confessions**

As previously mentioned, the three groups of authentic confessions (female, male, and hidden), were largely similar in their common themes. Though there were not as many confessions, the male and hidden videos still discussed the same types of issues that could be found in the much larger group of female confessions. Among the health issue themes previously mentioned, cyberbullying and self-harm were the only two that were female-specific. Each of the other themes had at least one example story in either of the five male or three hidden videos.

However, there did seem to be one major difference between the authentic male and female confessions. The male videos tended to have a specific focus on relationships that the female videos did not. Relationship issues were a common story among the female videos, but they were largely told in terms of how a relationship and/or interaction with someone that the female liked caused problems in their life.

On the other hand, three of the five male videos were chiefly focused on the idea of finding love. Two of the videos contained storylines about their struggles in obtaining love. One of the videos contained the following confession:

I am for the most part a happy kid. But... some people take that for granted... And when I mean people, I mean... ..Girls. My heart has been broken many times... I'm pretty sure you know who you are... Just because other guys treat you like crap doesn't mean that I will. You may think all I want to do is use you... But you are sadly mistaken. [Whether] or not you choose to see that is up to you (Ian Renaud, 2012).

The second video that focuses on relationships contained a theme of “When will I find love?” Part of the confession discussed this desire:

I am on a new journey once again. To find a person to love me FOR me. Flaws & all. It's difficult in the gay community... because you have to be "this" or "that" but... I AM ME! I am full of love and hope! I want a partner and best friend. I want to be loved, accepted, kissed, and held... Despite my disabilities... I AM NOT PERFECT. (nor is anyone, right?). I have so much to give, would you like to receive? I'm very misunderstood. I am romantic. Walks on the beach... hand in hand... candle light dinner in park... I'm the guy you've been looking for... BUT WHERE ARE YOU? I want to experience true love. Am I just unloveable? Am I cursed? I'm trying to love myself so you can love me (Douglas Lancaster, 2013)!

This video also contains several principle themes that were discussed regarding all of the videos. Yet, it still has a relationship-focus not found in the other groups of note card stories.

The third video told the story of how the storyteller met his girlfriend and ends with him asking the girlfriend to be his valentine. Though this is not the same as the other two videos, it still portrays the same relationship-focus to the confession that the other two male videos do.

### **Parody Videos**

In total there were eight videos that were coded as "parodies," three female and five male. These videos primarily contained the same style of production, but the content of their confessions differed from the main group of note card videos. Rather than talk about truthful and/or difficult moments of their lives, the storytellers in the parody videos tended to dramatize either fake information or events of minor importance. One of the female uses the stylistic tendencies of the authentic note card videos to dramatize her confession:

I'm just an average teenage girl. Well, okay maybe I'm a bit smarter than average. And I'm definitely more attractive. But I'm still a person, just like YOU. Sometimes I feel like everything in my life is FAKE. Sometimes I feel like

everything is a LIE. Especially the CAKE. The cake is definitely a LIE. I often wonder... Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy (Natalie Redmond, 2012)?

Similarly, one of the male parody videos uses the dramatic effect often found in the authentic videos until the very end of his confession:

I look happy... But I have a secret... How do I say this?... Don't judge me... Soo... I had sex... with... Ya mom bitch! Ha Ha (Icon Ayoung, 2011).

The dramatic tension in the video is largely due to the storyteller's presentation of the video and his actions during the confession. The video itself is titled, "My Deepest Secrets - Saddest Index Card Sad Video (Don't Judge)." Additionally the video's description tells the audience not to judge him because everyone has secrets. During the video, the storyteller changes the cards very slowly, making it appear as though changing to the next card – and thus advancing the story – is very difficult for him. At the very end of the video when he reveals the final card, the storyteller breaks out in audible laughter.

Each of these videos is seemingly using the style of authentic note card confessions as a way of creating a form of comedy. Whether or not all of the parody videos are using this style to mock or criticize the authentic note card videos themselves is unclear. However, it is clear that the tone and intent of the videos are different from those of the authentic confessions.

In terms of content, the confessions of the parody videos did not contain any similar themes. Each of the videos – male and female alike – was significantly different from each other. All eight of the parody videos had their own unique twists in their stories. Therefore, what tied them together as a group was their style of production

(mimicking the authentic note card method of video production) and the overall intent behind the confession (comedy/criticism).

## **Comments**

In addition to the confessions, the comments to each video were also coded for common themes. The second research question study asked the following:

**RQ2:** What are the primary responses and discussions being formed through online comments in reaction to these videos?

The comments for the videos followed many similar patterns. As with the coded themes for the videos themselves, the largest differences were between the authentic and the parody videos. The primary themes of the comments for the authentic confessions were each found in multiple groups (i.e. poster videos, female, and male). Additionally, each group of videos shared the majority of themes that were coded.

**Positive responses.** Overall, there was a wide array of positive comments left by viewers of the different confessional videos. These included sentiments of adoration, inspiration, and general notions of praise. Small expressions of adoration for the storyteller were also frequently posted to the comments sections. The primary words used in these comments were “amazing” and “beautiful.” One viewer wrote an uplifting message to a male storyteller using this sense of adoration:

You are a beautiful soul, and your essence will inspire someone one day. You serve a greater purpose in this world that we live and you will positively impact someone’s life, the way that you have impacted mine.  
Fierce song (Shonde, 2014)!

While this compliment was directed towards the storyteller for who he is, other viewers also use the same type of comment to contradict some of the content in note card

confessions that discussed self-esteem issues and/or problems with bullying. For example, one viewer wrote to a female:

oh my god you are so pretty! i can't believe that someone ever called you ugly!!! I LOVE your hair! AND there is SO MANY reasons to keep going and stay strong than giving up! I support you (H, 2013)

Similarly, another commenter for the same video addressed the frequency of this type of issue:

sooo beautiful... everybody on these note card videos usually says that theyve been called ugly or they think they are ugly but their really all gorgeous.. (JBade, 2013)

These types of statements were only one form of positive comments. There were several other encouraging and optimistic forms of comments articulated by audience members as well. Yet, expressions of adoration seemed to create an uplifting, opposing atmosphere to some of the negative content in the note card confessions themselves.

Coinciding with other positive comments, many viewers also saw these confessional videos as sources of inspiration. Audience members often expressed appreciation for these storytellers' acts of confessing the difficult situations that they have been through. Viewers might be inspired to think about a cause or situation differently, or they might feel the inspiration to do better in their own lives. A viewer for one of the hidden videos shared these feelings in her comment:

Tayla you inspire me so much to not just ignore things in life to fight to and for it I have depression anxiety and PTSD to so does my mom but we are getting Better each day... (Williams, 2013).

Mowry's video also received several comments of inspiration. In his comment section one viewer wrote:

Please know that you shouldn't hurt yourself. You don't deserve the pain and you shouldn't hate yourself. You do have a reason to be here. And you just gave a whole lot of people the inspiration. Jonah, you are not any of those hurtful names. You're an inspiration, a strong person, you're also a soldier of your generation. You're going to be okay, believe me (Calleidin, 2014).

As in these examples, comments of inspiration came from people who simply admired the storyteller and from those who related strongly to the content of the confession.

**Personal stories.** With so many audience members relating to and feeling inspired by these videos, it was very common to see commenters telling personal stories about their own lives. This often seemed to be done as a form of expressing empathy or as a way to create a sense of connection between the storyteller and the viewer.

As with the note card videos themselves, the types of personal stories that were told varied significantly. For example, one of the male videos that focused on the storyteller's relationship issued evoked this response from a viewer:

I've gotten my heart broken a bunch of times. The thing that sucks the most is I'm just in the friend zone with the only boy in my area who's sweet sensitive and has been a great boyfriend to all the other girls... just not me. KEEP SPREADING THE LOVE <3 (lollipop171717, 2012).

On the other hand, while some comments discussed problems with relationships, a large number of others contained content more serious to the viewer's well-being. In one of the female videos the storyteller discussed her problems with family members, struggles with sexual and emotional abuse, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, use of drugs and alcohol, and bullying among other topics. In response to her video, one viewer commented:

hey im 14 i self harm every day and i am bullied i might have to go to hospital soon if i don't stop SH. i was bullied really badly at camp and i almost jumped off a cliff im still really sad and i cut really deep every day its just getting worse can u plz help me? do you have kik facebook or skype? i would really appreciate

<3 ps: u are really strong and you are beautiful and my inspiration <3 i have an eating disorder too (Simpson, 2012).

As with this example, there were several commenters who appeared to be in very severe moments of their lives. In the comments section of Todd's video, one audience member wrote:

ik how u feel! ive been bullied b4! ive been bullied starting in the 3rd grade. people would call me freak, weird, ect. i didnt no y. years past, then in the 5th grade a new kid came to my school. he was on my bus. he made fun of me, for being middle eastern! it wasnt fun! i just cant say the whole story! its just to sad! im crying cuz of the memories now! im [thinking] of killing myself soon if they dont stop! i.....just don't.....want to b an outsider anymore!!!!!!!!!! I have no friends! i get out of class now just to cry!!!!!! i just hope 1 day i have the guts to face up to the bullies, if not im done w/ the world (Youssef, 2013).

A lot of the audience members who watch these note card videos are apparently facing highly difficult problems in their lives, and they seem to relate closely to the storytellers. Something about the confessions have made these viewers feel comfortable enough to post these deep, personal thoughts about their own lives. This sense of comfort and/or connection is something that could be explored further in the future.

**Support.** Emotion and connection appear so far to be a major theme throughout the responses to the videos. Similar to the positive responses, there were a large number of viewers who posted messages of support to the storytellers. Support was offered in many ways. These messages could include reassuring statements, comments hoping for positive change in the future, and even pieces of advice.

The largest example of reassuring statements was a phrase found continuously throughout the comments sections of the note card videos: stay strong. A large number of viewers who commented merely wrote this statement by itself. Others included the

phrase within their comments or used it as a way of ending their messages. In one of the hidden videos, a comment was left with the latter option:

You are beautiful. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Anyone who is mean to you is just a bully and is not worth thinking about. I'm so sorry to hear that people are bullying you. Stay strong <3 (dreamerforever79, 2012).

Telling a storyteller to “stay strong” was one of the most frequent statements made in the comments sections of videos. However, some audience members took different approaches to offering support.

Beyond positive statements by themselves, some audience members actually offered ways to get in touch with them in their attempts to show connect to the storytellers. There were a frequent number of commenters who provided their contact information, including ways to access them through social media. For example, one commenter wrote to one of the female video makers:

OMG :( Hang in there the world is harsh. I have an instagram if you ever need to talk. The user is that\_one\_girl\_maddy. I hope it gets better and I have so much respect for you (McManigal, 2013).

Viewers provided usernames for all different types of social media websites, including Facebook, Instagram, and Kik. Additionally, email addresses and website links were also some of the other forms of contact information that were given by commenters.

Furthermore, hope was another common theme among the note card confessions. The primary basis behind these comments was that viewers would send messages to the storytellers wishing for a positive turn of events in their lives. In the comments section of one of the male videos, a viewer wrote:

Very well done video Douglas. Each day I try my best to practice random acts of kindness. Our thoughts, our words and our deeds are energy. Best way to put out

good into the world is to practice good behavior. Wishing you great success on your journey. Allow your past not to define you. You have a new beginning right now. what is that you really want? Begin with that in mind. All is well (McLain, 2013).

Like many of the other major themes throughout the authentic comments, these expressions of hope appear to tie into the larger themes of support and connection built by the audience members.

With all the other similar positive expressions, it was typical to see audience members offer advice to the storytellers as well. In one of the hidden video's comments, hope and words of advice coincided with each other to provide an overall message of support:

Hope is my favorite part of your message kiddo, I'll tell you why that person did that, because they're immature & have a lot of growing up to do. You made it thru that, you do what you need to do to set up a good future. Show respect to those who deserve it, to hell with those who don't & gradually things will fall in to place. If you prepare for the future, & hold on to that attitude, the world will be opened up to you & you can do anything & go anywhere you want. You will succeed, Good luck (fromtheArura, 2012).

On a limited number of occasions, however, there would be advice that was negative in sentiment. One audience member wrote a comment that might have been written with honest intent but also could have just been sarcasm. Either way, the statement was received very negatively by the storyteller. The comment itself was directed towards the section of the video's confession that discussed self-harm:

Well done! By learning to ease your mental suffering through the infliction of physical pain, you've taken the first step down the road to unparalleled pleasure. Now, you must learn to reinterpret the pain from your flesh into masochistic rapture. Cut, as I cut! Suffer, as I suffer! And it enjoy it as I enjoy it (Slanoje, 2013)!

Most of the negative advice or comments in general were viewers telling the storytellers to stop complaining about their problems. Aside from these types of messages, the largest form of negative responses came from audience members who questioned the legitimacy of some of the confessions.

**Negative responses.** With all of the support that these storytellers received, there was still a set of audience members who provided negative feedback for the videos. Sometimes viewers did not believe the content of the videos was true, other times they remarked on the purpose of making the videos, and some comments merely involved rude statements.

As a previous example has shown, a popular sentiment among a group of commenters was to call into question the validity of some of the note card videos. One of the most debated videos was a female confession. The storyteller of them told a confession about sexual abuse that she received from her friend's uncle at a sleepover party when she was 13 years old. This video, among others, had comments by audience members denying that the stories were true. In response to the first video, one viewer commented:

ummmm, this looks unbelievable fake. i found this video really offensive. if this would have happened less than a year ago you would be balling your eyes out on this camera. you wouldnt have a plane expression on your face. it takes yrs of counseling and help to not be able to cry even thinking about it. this is bullshit. and i wouldn't even tell the whole entire world that i was molested. its not the worlds business. smh. if your ganna at least try. make it look real next time (Bowen, 2013).

Furthermore, several audience members offered complaints about the videos in general, or made references to the process of note card videos themselves. In one of the hidden videos, a commenter wrote:

Dammit, yet another of them overly-cliché depressing note card rants. Even sadder, the illiteracy of your channel name. \*we're (TheChihuahuaStorm, 2012).

Yet, while many audience members called into question the authenticity of the videos or chose to make insulting comments, others leaped to the defense of the storytellers. This occasionally caused arguments to form within the comments sections of some of the videos.

There were many arguments between a few individual commenters that were usually generated from a negative comment made by one viewer. The comment primarily would be faced with backlash from other audience members, and the language of the responses was typically obscene. The use of profanity was very common.

Additionally, some viewers chose to simply make a broad statement to all of a video's commenters based on statements that had been made. One such person wrote:

All these hateful comments. What the hell people!? You don't know what these people go through why don't you try to deal with something like they have. After Amanda Todd and people dying because of people like you...I just cant handle anymore. This would is fucking judgemental and full of assholes (Johnston, 2014).

It was not always other audience members that responded to negative comments, though. Many of the storytellers could also be found responding to comments made about their videos.

**Religion.** The last major theme that was prominent within the comments of the authentic confessional videos was religion. Most often the religious expressions

appeared to be Christian-based, but occasionally other religions were also discussed.

Some audience members sought to use religion to guide the storytellers to peace. In one of the male videos, a viewer made the following comment:

jesus loves you sweetie. for who you are! no matter what everyone thinks of you. he hears your prayers. when you feel like he is not there for you and not listening. HE IS THERE. JUST WORKING IN YOU. and jesus Christ SAVED YOU from ending your life. don't ever give the devil what he wants. if you haven't gave your heart to god. GIVE IT TO HIM!!!! HE IS THE LIFHT N THE WAY. HE is the only one that can give you internal life. he is worth it. GOD BLESS YOU n I hope you read this (mae, 2013).

However, other commenters used religion simply as a way of encouragement. For example, a viewer wrote to a female:

Just remember “with hardship comes ease” – a verse from the Quran. All of this will stop one day. Just remember that its not just you going through things like this, everyone goes through things like this at one point in life. It’s better that its happening to you when you’re younger than when you’re older. It means you have more time to be happy after all this is over. For now, focus on not letting the sadness take over you and as hard as it is, try making new friends again (Sirname, 2013).

Both types of references were frequently featured throughout the comments sections for the authentic videos. Other religious-based comments included phrases such as “I’m praying for you” and “God wanted you to be here.”

**Parody comments.** As with the parody videos themselves, the comments sections of these videos were difficult to code. This was largely due to the limited number of these videos and because the content of the confessions were so varied. Additionally, due to the nature of the parody videos, most of the responses merely reflected how the video was received. One positive response for a female parody confession came from a viewer’s apparent distaste for authentic note card videos:

i looked at your username, read the title, heard the song and got ready to rip on this vid. but i was actually pleasantly entertained :) cool vid (chocolatemuffin47, 2012).

While some audience members enjoyed the comedy, others found the parodies very offensive. There were several viewers who did not like the fact that the videos were used to make fun of authentic note card confessions. One audience member goes into detail about this line of thought in the comments section of one of the male parodies:

I get your whole idea of just having fun. Cracking jokes and everything is fine, but honestly there are some things that shouldn't be treated as a joke. There is a line, and people can cross it. It really isn't funny to mock something as serious as some of the problems that some people face. Teenagers commit suicide all over the world everyday because they have problems and are mistreated. I don't know if you realize what that really means. People, human beings, just like me are taking their own life away. They can't take the punches that life hits them with. This video is mocking that. This video is mocking the fact that people have problems. There is nothing funny about someone taking their own life because they feel there is no hope for them. I find it horrifying that people are laughing at this... (Domingos, 2014).

Overall, positive and negative responses were about equally intermixed between the parodies. Moreover, there were no significant differences between the responses for the male and female videos. Lastly, the only major theme within the comments for the parody confessions was the distinction between positive and negative responses. Any other comments were limited to one video and/or were infrequent overall.

## DISCUSSION

These findings contribute to our understanding of youth culture and communication practices that engage new media. The act of representing oneself online has evolved with each new type of social medium. In the case of note card confessions, we are witnessing a phenomenon in which the balance between the private and public self is no longer necessarily focused on portraying the best version of yourself. Rather, there is a whole community of youth who are potentially revealing the worst moments of their lives to a networked public. Many of these youth faced mild to severe problems with peers, such as bullying, that often resulted in negative consequences for their health. These consequences include self-esteem issues, use of drugs and/or alcohol, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts or attempts. Furthermore, many of the storytellers also faced significant problems at home. Parents, step-parents, and parental figures were often the source for these issues. This type of conflict namely consisted of abuse, including physical, mental/emotional, and sexual abuse. Abuse in these forms also seemed to be linked to the health issues faced by these youth.

Within the authentic note card confessions the primary themes discussed were commonalities of the storytelling process that tie these videos together as a genre, significant relationships, and life challenges that had been or were being faced. Accordingly, parody videos dramatized the production style of note card confessions with an apparent critical or satirical purpose. Overall, the coded themes for the authentic and parody note card confession helped develop insight into how these videos are used for the purpose of storytelling. The notion that the intent behind creating an authentic

note card video was to share a story about difficult moments in someone's life was reinforced by the themes presented within the digital stories. The phrase “we all have a story” serves as a key theme behind the production of note card videos. The primary idea is to both share your own experiences and share in the experiences of others.

This form of communication connects theories of networked publics, social support, and youth communication together. Note card confessions are one example of how a networked public can be used to create a system of weak ties that potentially offer social support to youth. The comments sections of these videos show how viewers of the confessions seek to connect with the storytellers. Producing a note card video, commenting on other videos, and responding to your own video are all basic forms in which the members of this particular group communicate with each other. Many viewers even attempt to connect with the storytellers beyond their videos by offering their contact information for other forms of social media, but it is unclear whether or not these methods were ever utilized. Sympathy and support were prime motivations throughout the positive comments. Viewers sought to boost the storytellers’ self-esteem, give them someone to talk to, commend their efforts, and occasionally to share a personal story in order to empathize with the confession. Moreover, many storytellers reciprocally sought to offer the same kind of support. Often the storytellers would include their social media contact information in the description section of their videos and provide contact information to support hotlines. Additionally, messages to the audience letting viewers know that they are not alone and to never give up were prominent among the authentic confessions.

This research additionally expands information regarding theories of self-presentation and identity construction in social media. While it has often been thought that new media users choose to portray their best or ideal selves in their public profiles, note card confessions show that this is not always the case. The content discussed is often very personal in nature and does not usually reflect positive experiences. The storytellers admit to such things as hating their body image, being beaten, being raped, and cutting themselves. Though not every storyteller has undergone these experiences, the topics themselves are in the norm for the note card public as a whole. These subjects are therefore central to what makes up the identity of each of these storytellers as we know them in this setting.

In addition to topic, there are other aspects of note card confessions that construct identity. Theories regarding digital storytelling support the idea that the storytelling process requires deep thought about what information to convey and how (Lundby, 2008). The note card confessions are prime examples of this concept. Each producer of a note card video must make deliberate decisions about what information to include in the story, how much emphasis to place on that information, and how to include it within the story overall, both visually and in terms of content. Visually, the storyteller must decide which and how much information goes in each card. Use of gestures, color, emoticons, underlining, and how the camera frames the shot (i.e. how much of the presenter's face is shown) are all aesthetic choices that must be made. The content of the story is also another major decision.

For example, if a troubled teen decides to make a confessional video about her experiences with bullying, then she would need to make a series of important choices about her story. Should she talk about what led to the bullying? Should she mention who it is that's bullying her? Should she talk more about how she's been bullied, or should she spend most of her time talking about how it has affected her and how she feels about it? These questions not only create a story about someone who has been bullied, but they also represent the storyteller as a reflection of her actions and feelings toward the situation. She has the power to present herself as a victim. She could describe herself as having used her experiences to become a better person, someone who simply made it out of hard times, or even someone still in need of help. The information that these youth choose to convey in their confessions ultimately creates their digital identity within the networked public of note card videos.

As a whole, the combined expression of these experiences creates a collective identity among this networked public of note card confession producers and viewers. The assemblage of similar stories indicates that these youth view themselves as a collective public who all share a story and, more specifically, share certain struggles in life. Having this collective identity gives these youth a place to gravitate to (YouTube) in order to communicate their experiences each other. This could be a significant component to the development of the weak-tie connections that allow for the process of social support to develop.

In addition to the topics involved in note card confessions being socially important, they are also gendered in nature. Sexual abuse, including rape, relationship

issues, and eating disorders are all primarily thought as issues more relevant to women. This space that has been created by note card confessions is potentially very important for female youth seeking a more comfortable space to discuss these issues. While men might seek more structured, problem-solving type debates, women tend to prioritize the ability for a diverse set of voices to be heard, and this space allows for all women to speak on these issues that are relative to their lives (Livingstone, 1994).

Having this sense of space allows these female youths to balance their personal and collective identity. Buckingham (2008) believes that it is just as important for a public to recognize an individual's identity as it is for that individual to claim her or his identity in the first place. Within the space of note card videos, female youth are both able to assert their individual voices regarding these social issues and have their voice verified by others (through other women creating videos, socially supporting comments, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

For the last few years, note card confession videos have been one of the many popular trends of videos on YouTube. This genre has gained such distinction that a large number of parody videos have also been made as a satire to the original format. The use of a note card is used as an iconic signboard for revealing secrets and telling stories about the lives of the video producers – primarily today’s youth. In general, SNSs have become an important tool in the lives of youth for expressing themselves and forming their identity, namely their public identity. YouTube and the production of note card confessions have become another piece of this process. However, rather than expressing daily, positive, or ideal moments, this genre of video production appears to focus on revealing struggles with issues like depression, bullying, abuse, and suicide.

Aside with individual self-expression, discussion of these topics seems to utilize a networked public of producers and viewers who share a collective identity surrounding these life challenges. This networked public potentially creates a space for these youth (and storytellers in general) to develop weak-tie connections with other members of the public that could serve as a form of social support. This support stems from comments, messages by the storytellers, and the mutual sharing of experiences through the creation of videos. YouTube has the ability to serve as a form of two-way communication (Prensky, 2010). Understanding this process offers a lot of potential for the future of new media and youth research.

This research potentially opens a lot of doors for new studies. In the future, more research will be needed to grasp a better understanding of why youth choose to use

social media like YouTube and the format of the note card video to tell these stories. This research alone does not reveal whether or not weak-tie social support and collective identity formation are the exact reasons behind this form of self-expression. Interviews will need to be conducted with producers of note card videos to gather deeper insight behind their specific motivations for making a video and what kind of effects participating in the creation process/note card confession public had. For example, the use of a note card is in itself an aspect of performance. What is it about the use of a note card that makes it so important to the story? As some of the storytellers have indicated, this is potentially because it makes it easier to tell a difficult story, as you don't have to worry about actions that might interrupt the story:

...I've been seeing lots of... umm... index card stories. And I think they're a good way to tell a story because you don't have to – well some people still cry– but, you don't have to say it out loud, so you don't like break down and cry and you're sniffing and stuff like that when you're trying to tell the story so I think that they're a good way to tell a story. And I want to share my own story. Um, whether this becomes Tumblr famous or not like a lot of the other ones I don't know. But, I just want to get my story out there so people will know also what I think and that you're not alone, and that you're strong enough to get through anything. Even though what I've been through isn't the worst, it is a little, scarring, mentally. And, uh, I'd like to share it" (dayrenee08, 2011).

However, are there other aspects to these confessional videos that could make the use of note cards significant? For instance, the use of note cards makes these videos easily recognizable as their own collective of videos compared to other confessional stories on YouTube (e.g. "my hijab story"). This could add to the importance of establishing these videos as their own genre.

The producers of these stories might be intentionally trying to stand out as their own community. This is possibly due to the nature of the stories themselves. These

confessions are primarily revolved around highly sensitive and serious topics.

Cyberbullying, depression, and suicide are just a few of the subjects discussed. The note card is in essence allowing these youths to discuss these social issues in a very public setting without actually having to “talk” about their experiences. Whether its use is intended to ease the comfort of the storytelling, create a unique icon surrounding a larger social discussion, or some other reason can only be answered through further research.

Additionally, new media – and YouTube specifically – have become a popular platform of communication for youth. This would be an ideal place to start building more research into how to connect to high-risk youth in a new media format.

With this thought in mind, one of the biggest questions that stems from this research is: “What can we do to help?” Even if note card confessions themselves decrease in popularity among youth, it is clear that the communication of these sensitive issues has moved to (at least in part) an online format. Youth are undoubtedly showing that they are comfortable telling different mass publics about these types of intimate experiences. Therefore, how can this new media format of expression be used to benefit these struggling adolescents? Rather than just trying to reach out to this group via school and community outreach, new media has a strong opportunity to be another means of connection, and there is not yet enough research in this area. Can researchers, counselors, etc. use this form of weak tie support to connect with youth in need of help in ways that is not possible through more standard methods? Would youth feel more comfortable opening up about their problems in this type of new media setting as opposed to in a school office? How can researchers and professionals use this knowledge

to aid this public of struggling youth without interfering with what makes this group thrive (e.g. lack of adults, presence of strangers over current acquaintances, “cool factor,” etc.)? All of these questions require additional research.

Building on theories of networked publics, weak-tie support, and digital storytelling might be the first step. How can we look at cultural phenomena such as “Project Unbreakable” and note card confessions both as similar and highly distinct social movements, and how can we use this knowledge of digital storytelling to further our research about public space and gendered discussion? Is it just female youth that need help since they are likely more negatively affected by certain online messages (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014)? The answer is likely no. Therefore, how can we create networked publics or open up spaces for digital storytelling that allow males to find support as well? Can this be done by academics and professionals, or must these spaces be created by youth themselves?

This research had several limitations beyond not being able to uncover more information about motivations and effects behind creating a note card confession. First, sampling proved to be a difficult process. It is unknown just how many different names note card confessions go by. Therefore, not knowing certain titles potentially excluded some videos from analysis. Secondly, only analyzing the top 40 comments means that some conversations from videos with more than 40 comments also did not make it into the analysis, possibly preventing information-rich commentary from being coded. Finally, the sampling of the videos resulted in some of the more popular (highest viewed) videos not being transcribed and coded. In an effort to equally represent all

forms of confession, some of the stories that most attract audiences may not be fully understood still.

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## APPENDIX A: DATABASE OF SAMPLED VIDEOS

Genre	Video ID	Video Title	Channel	URL	Duration		
Atheistic - Female	NC25	My note card confessions	Personal Writing	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=880710pC210">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=880710pC210</a>	2:18:00 F		
	NC28	My note card confessions	frag1383	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=113524">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=113524</a>	2:11 F		
	NC21	Read Note Card Confessions	Larissa McCowan	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=629V78IM4d">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=629V78IM4d</a>	1:58:16 F		
	NC24	Note card confessions, We all have a story	Molly Hawkins	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03H9LWV7Y">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03H9LWV7Y</a>	1:37:15 F		
	NC20	Note Card Confessions	Insoulings	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14kL4qL10s0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14kL4qL10s0</a>	5:56:19 F		
	NC25	My Note Card Story	Senab2244444	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2edwzab0d4s0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2edwzab0d4s0</a>	2:2:02 F		
	NC23	Note card story about:	mezzoz	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd17453_48">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd17453_48</a>	8:55 F		
	NC27	1 year ago, My Note Card Video	Bella Bear	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388047204H">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388047204H</a>	5:55 F		
	NC24	My note card story	frag1383	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=484404">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=484404</a>	1:4:20 F		
	NC28	My note card story on note cards	Melanie Harvey	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1501585244">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1501585244</a>	2:42:22 F		
	NC23	The note card challenge (My story)	Melissa Wilson	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16V780">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16V780</a>	4:03 F		
	NC25	My Note Card Story	Label Scribes	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16V780">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16V780</a>	8:03 F		
	NC25	My Note Card Story	Chloe Taylor	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5611201416">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5611201416</a>	5:14 F		
	NC28	My Note Card Confessions	Brooksburn	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW5012p0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW5012p0</a>	2:7:36 F		
	NC28	My Note Card Confessions	AllycatPawPrints	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9694444">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9694444</a>	3:54 F		
NC28	Fun Story, Note card confessions	ohhcaat091818	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9694444">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9694444</a>	3:50 F			
NC20	My "note card" story	dayvaredd	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20XkXh189YA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20XkXh189YA</a>	3:01 F			
NC25	Note card video 1	parthenos	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11V0250538e">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11V0250538e</a>	2:58:35 F			
NC20	hey, another note card video	Shanel	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=607602320">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=607602320</a>	9:11 F			
NC29	My story (note card)	Remembrance	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1402484">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1402484</a>	1:1 F			
EC27	Note Card Confession	SydneyRising	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4</a>	6:4 F			
EC28	Note card confession Audio	Holly Semina	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4</a>	5:24 F			
EC28	DISCOVER! Women Call Comments Sudden: Flashcard Story	Holly Semina	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4</a>	5:24 F			
EC28	My Flashcard Story	Holly Semina	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10500N4407_4</a>	5:24 F			
EC25	My Flashcard Story	Stephony41	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161V7204">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161V7204</a>	24:57 F			
EC23	2 Heart Worth Saying - Jennifer Johnson, 30 year-old (Flashcard story)	Hectora Matic	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq9H7H78A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq9H7H78A</a>	13:57 F			
EC26	My Building story on cards	Yvett Terrell	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K4V4A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5K4V4A</a>	19:39 F			
EC28	Audio - Set fire to the Rain - My Flash card story for my missing boyfriend.	Theosarah	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1688M413E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1688M413E</a>	4:06:0 F			
EC27	My secrets and confessions 1	Chanel Bucio	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4252672954">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4252672954</a>	2:07 F			
EC25	My secrets and confessions	Cheraine Barnes	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52930404b">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52930404b</a>	15 F			
EC25	My secrets and confessions 1	deniseh0222	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52930404b">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52930404b</a>	13:1 F			
EC28	My adult story, secrets, and confessions part 1	caroladefunkname	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J10U_854">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J10U_854</a>	1:33 F			
EC21	My Story - Zoe Boyer	Zoe Boyer	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=527270701B">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=527270701B</a>	3:44:21 F			
EC26	My Story: Building Self Esteem, Heartbreak, Suicide	Kevin Salt	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27107055A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27107055A</a>	1:3:58 F			
EC24	My Story: Abuse, Rape, Mental Issues, & Hope	Projecta Redline	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09271040e">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09271040e</a>	55:15:36 F			
EC21	My story, inspired by America today.	Sherrisse Kelly	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	5:41:31 F			
Atheistic - Hidden	NC23	Note Card Confessions	WendersonTV104	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11027046404">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11027046404</a>	11:77:1 Hidden		
	NC24	My Story (Note Card Project)	Terly Wojcik	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6pW655300">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6pW655300</a>	3:07 Hidden		
	NC25	My note card Building Story	MyOupsideDowns	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	4:21 Hidden		
	NC29	My Note Card Story (Johannesburg)	Jan Inwood	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	2:52:16 M		
	NC25	My confessions: The note card video	Douglas Lunsdale	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0000000000">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0000000000</a>	4:29 M		
	NC21	My story in note cards	Emmy mikes	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	1:18 M		
	EC21	2 Love Story - Note Cards	Projecta Redline	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	1:12 M		
	EC21	My Flash Card Video ...	Ashley Thompson	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	5:74 M		
	Parody - Male	NC27	Jared's Note Card Confession	inspiration	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21E146846">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21E146846</a>	2:45:2 M	
		NC24	My Dearest Secret - Saddest Note Card Sad Video (Don't Judge)	Icon Agency	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	87:56:2 M	
		NC20	INDEX CARD CONFESSIONS	DV4vidsinger	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=520xv0n_47Y">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=520xv0n_47Y</a>	1:11 M	
		EC23	Flashcard confessions - NBA Western Conference Finals Spurs	remotestudio116	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Mc5_g1h6wZ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Mc5_g1h6wZ</a>	89 M	
		EC26	The Saddest Flash Card Story Ever!!!	MANOTD02	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	7:31:4 M	
		Parody - Female	EC26	Note Card Confession (Parody)	Madella Redmond	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	2:33 F
			EC24	My note card story	remotestudio116	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	3:11 F
EC21			Flashcard confessions	Holly Virgin	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	6:27 F	
NC23			This is my story... Dan Brewster - A new angel entering an	stephankatv104	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	54:38:0 M	
NC12			My story: Struggling, Surviving, Suicide, self harm	TheScreamofaFistnow	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	8:29:4:0:05 F	
EC27			Irish Memory "Whitsun" on...	Irish Memory	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=161026254U</a>	10:17:9:38:0 M	

**APPENDIX B: LIST OF SAMPLED VIDEOS**

<b>Username</b>	<b>Video Title</b>	<b>URL</b>
Ohmai	Hey, another index card video	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNw8TePQ310">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNw8TePQ310</a>
AltearaHavenwic	I'm Sorry, index card confession.	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qih29XpM4rk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qih29XpM4rk</a>
angelwarriorsss	This is my story , Ben Breedlove , a new angel among us	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBgI8W5xf4A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBgI8W5xf4A</a>
Arthur Thompson	My Flash Card Video . . .	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRjc5sA_4TY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRjc5sA_4TY</a>
Bella Berr	I Love You ; My Note Card Video	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZB8Mr2YNHU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZB8Mr2YNHU</a>
brookiekabaam	Tumblr Confession Video.	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcmtsUJgmlo">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcmtsUJgmlo</a>
Chaise Taylor	My Story - Notecard Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W18TWdRyEw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W18TWdRyEw</a>
Chanell Rocco	My secrets and confessions :)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ep2He7zRHx8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ep2He7zRHx8</a>
Cheyenne Bankes	My secrets and confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWZE10yhRHs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWZE10yhRHs</a>
cupcakeisdahnickname	My bully story, secrets, and confessions part 1	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-kRDU_xg54">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-kRDU_xg54</a>
Danny morales	My story in index cards	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvd6tPswsuY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvd6tPswsuY</a>
dayrenee08	My "index card" Story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NXMhuSe8YA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NXMhuSe8YA</a>
desiraeRose222	My secrets and confessions. :)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CV2ksWrfqI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CV2ksWrfqI</a>
Douglas Lancaster	My Confessionals: The Index Cards Video	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrO00B7gkD8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrO00B7gkD8</a>
DrVandanger	INDEX CARD CONFESSIONS	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52mXvBm_iFY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52mXvBm_iFY</a>

<b>Username</b>	<b>Video Title</b>	<b>URL</b>
elsephen	Jayce's Note Card Confession	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71t7Lq0BcYE">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71t7Lq0BcYE</a>
fearlesslyfalling	my note card confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6D7UqtCzUo">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6D7UqtCzUo</a>
heyashleyp	Note Card Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KK-wRrIDKco">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KK-wRrIDKco</a>
Holly Semma	Note Card Confession - Autism	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoP6cY6Hi60">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoP6cY6Hi60</a>
Holly Vugrin	Flashcard Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owCn5gZzmtk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owCn5gZzmtk</a>
Hottest Music	A Heart Worth Saving - Jennifer Johnson, 30 years-ols (Flashcard story)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epqhhdmcac">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epqhhdmcac</a>
Ian Renaud	My Note Card Story (pinappleexpresspass)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge6pBCJLwal">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge6pBCJLwal</a>
Icon Ayoung	My Deepest Secrets - Saddest Index Card Sad Video (Don't Judge)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiM27yw4my8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiM27yw4my8</a>
Isabel Snyders	My Notecard Story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLC1ZV_GaEY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLC1ZV_GaEY</a>
jazminnnx3	Index Card Video :)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhVGD9xE4bw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhVGD9xE4bw</a>
JeromeInRealLife	Flashcard Confessions - NBA Western Conference Finals-Spurs	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoC_GnRcwZI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoC_GnRcwZI</a>
Jonah Mowry	Jonah Mowry: 'Whats goin on..'	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdkNn3Ei-Lg">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdkNn3Ei-Lg</a>
KAYOTIC07	The Saddest Flash Card Story Ever!!!	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjfk1f4A-O4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjfk1f4A-O4</a>
Kirsin cole	My Story: Bullying, Self Harm, Heartbreak, Suicide	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYFPjVqjFSA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYFPjVqjFSA</a>
Larissa McGowan	Rissa Note Card Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0y9y7HJMv0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0y9y7HJMv0</a>

<b>Username</b>	<b>Video Title</b>	<b>URL</b>
Malorie Harvey	my bullying story on note cards	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSb15f6xS4k">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSb15f6xS4k</a>
Marsha Wilson	The note card challenge. (My story)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha67LWPbxjI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha67LWPbxjI</a>
meme trash	My Index Card Story.	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IltfzCVLFmc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IltfzCVLFmc</a>
mezzyo1	Note card story video(:	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ7z7u43_J8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ7z7u43_J8</a>
Molly Hawkins	Note card confessions, We all have a story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03HNJoVJp2Y">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03HNJoVJp2Y</a>
muggle94	my notecard story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC18_43abYE">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC18_43abYE</a>
mvgirl363	My Index card Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPS2-ThESrs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPS2-ThESrs</a>
MyDeepestSecrets	My Index Card Bullying Story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXVQjCO1ib4">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXVQjCO1ib4</a>
Natalie Redmond	Index Card Confession (Parody)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS51oNIbqYI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS51oNIbqYI</a>
nikki tremblay	My bullying story on cards	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-iS4IvsYAk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-iS4IvsYAk</a>
ofmiceandmaggie	My name is Maggie (index card confessions)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S2Po1h6VDk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9S2Po1h6VDk</a>
Phoenix Fontaine	My Story: Abuse, Rape, Mental Illness, & Hope	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U927hPdAmvI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U927hPdAmvI</a>
Protege2014	A Love Story - Index Cards	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWoO5e0my_8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWoO5e0my_8</a>
RememberMoe	My Story (Index Card)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hyJYjvp6kc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hyJYjvp6kc</a>
Sarah2244able	My Note Card Story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owcAvddAmw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owcAvddAmw</a>
Savanna Roby	My story, Inspired by Amanda Todd.	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmRo2cS2scU">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmRo2cS2scU</a>
staystrong41	My Flashcard Story	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLFpLV7z0AI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLFpLV7z0AI</a>

<b>Username</b>	<b>Video Title</b>	<b>URL</b>
SydneyBreining	Note Card Confession	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXSQNgAWO_k">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXSQNgAWO_k</a>
tayla wojnar	My Story (Notecard Project)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YvzCwoSRM0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YvzCwoSRM0</a>
thesexduh	Adele - Set Fire to the Rain ~ My flash card story for my missing bestfriend..	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5-M8kMuTSE">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5-M8kMuTSE</a>
TheSomebodytoknow	My story: Struggling, bullying, suicide, self harm	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOHXGNxE7E">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOHXGNxE7E</a>
WereHereForYou	Note Card Confessions	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1i8ZOka-mPM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1i8ZOka-mPM</a>
Zoe Royer	My Story- Zoe Royer	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V7ZgrXYU3I">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V7ZgrXYU3I</a>

## APPENDIX C: FIGURE URLS

### Figure

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSb15f6xS4k>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VY4HtQ-XJQE>
3. <http://mybandita.blogspot.com/2011/04/disturbing-postsecret-postcards.html>
4. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/05/i-am-obamacare-\\_n\\_4046470.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/05/i-am-obamacare-_n_4046470.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular)
5. <http://whoneedsfeminism.com>
6. <http://whoneedsfeminism.tumblr.com/page/2>
7. <http://projectunbreakable.tumblr.com/>
8. <http://projectunbreakable.tumblr.com/>
9. <http://www.dogshaming.com/>
10. <http://www.dogshaming.com/>
11. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-kRDU\\_xg54](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-kRDU_xg54)
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmRo2cS2scU>
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvd6tPswsuY>
14. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLC1ZV\\_GaEY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLC1ZV_GaEY)
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-iS4IvsYAk>
16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W18TWdRyEw>
17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owcAvddAmw>
18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owcAvddAmw>
19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6owcAvddAmw>

Figure

20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXVQjCO1ib4>

21. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owCn5gZzmtk>