

Melissa M. Boronkas
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You Are Not Alone: Stigmatized Identity and Confessions of Dyslexia on YouTube

In 2014 Google launched a marketing campaign highlighting some of the top creative content producers on the company's video sharing site, YouTube (Patterson). As seen in figure one, the campaign's television, print and subway advertisements ran with an altered YouTube logo that retained the word "You" but omitted the word "Tube." In place of the word "tube," the ads featured various tag lines including, "You fight bullies with style" and "You help us make up who we want to be."



Fig. 1 2014: YouTube subway ad campaign from AdAge.com

The ads portrayed YouTube as personal, as part of the self. Without the individual, without "You," there is no YouTube. Users of the site play the most critical and central role; they are both the audience and content creators. They generate videos, watch other user's videos, and interact via comments. They develop personal relationships with other users and feel a sense of ownership over the YouTube community. YouTube users have helped to create a new form of intimacy which collectively celebrates the intricacies of the individual by championing positivity

in order to safeguard against isolation, criticism, harassment and discrimination. Lauren Berlant argues that face-to-face intimacy is “a serious, emotionally-laden, accretion of mutual experience” one where you may need to hide “inattention, disagreement, disparity, (or) aversion.” Whereas face-to-face intimacy and disclosure is challenging, YouTube has omitted the in-person audience and made it easier for more intimate self-disclosure to take place. Intimacy on YouTube allows people to “inhabit the social as a place . . . of being ordinary, of being acknowledged” where “you are not an isolate” (Berlant).

Haleigh Birdie, Joey Graceffa, and JayTeaXOXO are YouTube vloggers or video bloggers in their early twenties who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Each has chosen to disclose this hidden disability via a YouTube confessional video. YouTube has given these vloggers the ability to share their “profoundly introspective, self-reflexive personal narratives” to provide an “experience of human connection” with their viewers (Wesch 26).¹ Through the videos of Birdie, Graceffa and Tea, this paper will examine how young adults with a hidden disability process and reflect on their own experience with dyslexia, build a supportive peer network, address the stigma surrounding their dyslexia and seek to educate others. Additionally, this paper will show how these young adults are using YouTube to build an allied culture where sharing about personal differences is encouraged and harassing users for disclosure is discouraged.

¹ This concept is also discussed in Nicola Certo’s paper, *Isn’t it too private for Youtube?*, found in this anthology.

Dyslexia, Shame and Stigmatization on the Outside of Literacy

Definition of Dyslexia

In order to gain a better perspective on our YouTube vloggers, it is important to create an understanding of dyslexia. Dyslexia is not easily defined. As Tønnessen states, “researchers have been working on dyslexia . . . for about a hundred years now, and we still have not reached a strong consensus as to how to define ‘dyslexia’” (89). In response to the backlash to his book *The Dyslexia Debate (2014)*, Julian Elliot lays out a chart of 13 examples of the various understandings of those who are considered to have dyslexia. These examples include “anyone who struggles with accurate single word decoding, those who demonstrate a discrepancy between reading and listening comprehension, and those who fail to make meaningful progress in reading even when provided with high quality evidence-based forms of intervention” (9). Siegel lists definitional issues with defining dyslexia that include the lack of medical means to test for dyslexia (blood tests, brain imaging) and definitive test score to determine dyslexics from non-dyslexics. Shaywitz et al, states, “Our findings indicate that dyslexia is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, but like hypertension and obesity, occurs in varying degrees of severity” (qtd in Siegel). Miles argues that it may be best to focus on differing descriptions of dyslexia versus coming to a consensus on one definition (44). This research points toward an understanding of dyslexia that is multifaceted and dependant on context and shifting variables for understanding. Those who have been diagnosed with dyslexia must then come to their own conclusions regarding the definition based on their personal experience.

Shame and Stigmatization

The term dyslexia was created to identify those members of society who could not live up to the lexic standards in education. As Collinson states, “there is no evolutionary norm of literacy: it is only when it becomes a difficulty socially that we can talk of dyslexics or others with literacy difficulties” (64). If society did not place value on literacy, dyslexia would not exist. Riddick asserts that it is not the term dyslexia that causes stigma but the act of having trouble reading in a society that upholds those who are literate (664). It is this constructed idea of “normal,” i.e. “literate,” that sets up an “other,” a “deviant,” a “dyslexic” (Davis 13). As Davis states, “the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person” (9). Linton takes this idea further and argues that by medicalizing disability, disability is framed “as an individual burden and personal tragedy” (11.) Placing disability outside of normal society and as the responsibility of the individual isolates the individual from relationships and support. As we will see in the accounts below, the stigma around dyslexia isolates young adults from support and connection with peers.

Disclosure of Dyslexia

The literature asserts that stigmatization and shame prevents those who have dyslexia from disclosing their dyslexia. As Riddick frames it, “among both children and adults their concern about publically using the term dyslexia was that others would ridicule them and think less of them” (659). Additionally, in Evans’s study of dyslexic identity among students in nurse education, he found that 9 of the 12 students were afraid of being labeled stupid if they disclosed their identity (367). In addition, students were afraid that those without dyslexia view

dyslexia as being “illiterate” or “reading backwards.” While these students were interested in gaining accommodations and educating the public, avoiding being seen as different prevented students from disclosing their dyslexia. As Evans states, “disclosure is complex and problematic because, on one hand, students appear keen to advance a human and moral-rights debate, which focuses on accessing individual accommodations . . . while, on the other hand, sameness and avoidance of difference is a strong deterrent to disclosure” (367).

Alternately, Nalavany, Carawan, and Rennick, in a concept mapping study of 15 adults, found that while adults were still hesitant to share their dyslexia, it was also found that many adults with dyslexia want to have their “experiences validated and known” (74). Their desire for non-dyslexics to understand the way they process was rated higher than their fear of disclosure (73). In another study, Barden uses Facebook to support high school students as they work toward a group research project on dyslexia. Barden states, “Before starting I warned the students that people might post hostile comments on their Facebook page. They were unanimous in wanting to use the project as a vehicle for promoting better understanding of dyslexia amongst their peers, and so were willing to accept the risk” (7). The students in Barden’s study, much like the vloggers in this paper, seek to use Social Networking Sites (SNS) to educate others regarding dyslexia.

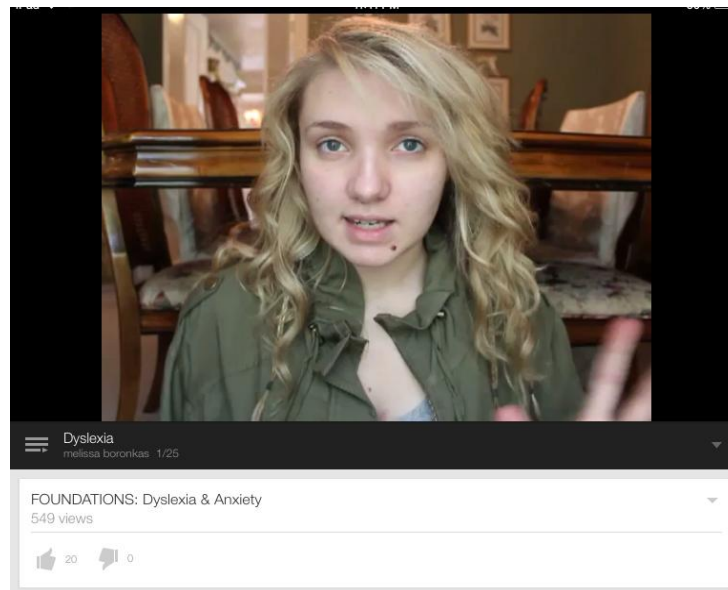
Social Networking with YouTube

YouTube is a Social Networking Site (SNS) that has more than 1 billion users watching, creating and participating in user created “television.” The site allows users to upload and share “originally-created videos” via their web platform and manage a personal profile known as a

“channel” that other users may subscribe to. Popularity is determined by the number of subscribers a channel has, in addition to the number of views an individual video receives (Youtube.com). In addition to managing a personal channel, many users also create a “playlist” or “series” which is a group of videos centered on a common theme. There are many different types of videos posted to the site. For this paper I will be focusing on three YouTube video bloggers who record video diaries. All three have recorded publically available confessionals in which they disclose their dyslexia.

While research has been conducted on using SNS as a technological aid to support the education of dyslexic students, the literature on those with learning disabilities using SNS recreationally to create peer support networks is slim. While not specifically related to dyslexia, Naslund, Grande, Aschbrenner and Elwyn looked at people with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) using YouTube to develop peer support networks. The study found four themes in the way those with SMI connect via YouTube. These included "minimizing a sense of isolation and providing hope; finding support through peer exchange and reciprocity; sharing strategies for coping with the day-to-day challenges of severe mental illness; and learning from shared experiences of medication use and seeking mental health care" (6). The first three findings are the most relevant to the aims of this paper. The young adults in this paper also use YouTube to disclose their stigmatized identities in order to provide hope, find support, and share strategies. All three YouTube videos in this paper followed a similar structure of disclosure. Through personal stories, the vloggers shared about what it is/was like to experience their dyslexia, offered suggestions to help those with dyslexia, and expressed a desire to educate non-dyslexics and parents of children who have dyslexia. While the SMI communities are focused on

helping others with SMI, the three vloggers here look to support both those with dyslexia, as well as educate a wider public. In the accounts below, we will see how our three young adults, Haleigh Birdie, Joey Graceffa, and JayTeaXOXO, use YouTube to build an allied culture where sharing information on perceived social deficits is the norm and harassing users for their personal disclosures is discouraged.



[Foundations: Dyslexia & Anxiety with Haleigh Birdie](#)

Haleigh Birdie is a YouTube vlogger in her early twenties. She has 4,836 subscribers to her YouTube channel as of May 16th, 2015 which features videos on fashion, makeup, and style. According to her public profile, she is a Christian living in Texas and currently attends school for fashion design. Her most popular video, an intimate tour of her bedroom posted on August 11, 2012, has received 955,584 views as of May 23, 2015. She also posts various style guides where she helps viewers conceptualize different ways to wear a pencil skirt or denim shirt. Her Foundations series is the most relevant to the aims of this paper. This series is based on her 100th video where she shared 10 things her viewers may not have know about her. Her list of

10 things included revelations that were benign and also intimate. She revealed that she was homeschooled, that she loves coffee, that her brother has autism and that she will remain celibate until marriage. From this video she started the Foundations series where she explores the more personal topics on her 10 list in greater detail. In these videos she talks about a topic while putting on foundation. The focus of the video is on the theme and not an advertisement for the beauty products she uses in the video. These videos were designed for her to share foundational things that are important to her.

Birdie's video, "Foundations: Dyslexia & Anxiety," posted on August 10th, 2013 has 559 views and 20 likes as of May 16th, 2015. She begins by saying that she does not talk about dyslexia that much. As she talks, she casually puts on makeup and explains the multifaceted nature of dyslexia. She does not seem concerned with her self-disclosure. There is an ease about her as she speaks; she is very comfortable in front of the camera. She first addresses some of the stigmatizing ideas around dyslexia: "It's not a disease, it's not a syndrome, some people consider it as a learning disability. I don't really consider it a learning disability. I just kind of think of it as a different way of processing, a different way of thinking. "

Here Birdie has reframed her dyslexia from something that could be stigmatizing and debilitating to something that is a positive asset. As Evans found in his study, framing dyslexia in a positive way aids in disclosure, "students rejected traditional medical and disability/impaired language when framing their dyslexic identity and instead embraced more contemporary constructions, including being extra able and creative." Birdie does this multiple times in the video. Later she goes on to state: "It's not like there is something wrong with you, it's just that

you process things differently if you have dyslexia. You're right brained which means you are probably pretty artistic."

Birdie is aware of the negative public image of those with dyslexia. In the video she talks about how those with dyslexia can also have social anxiety. In her language, she is hyper-aware of how she addresses dyslexia. At one point in the video, Birdie is applying foundation while looking in a hand held mirror. While doing so she is about to describe how the dyslexic brain works and begins by saying, "the problem is." She quickly looks up from her mirror and directs her eyes to the camera to correct herself, she continues: "it's not a problem." Looking back at the mirror, she casually says "there's nothing wrong with you." She is aware of her need to remain positive to help shift the stigma surrounding dyslexia and to help others.

Birdie is creating this video for herself as much as for her viewers. She delivers the line, "there is nothing wrong with you," while looking at herself in the mirror. Gerber found that "one of the key features of successful adults with learning disabilities is that they have been able to reframe their earlier learning difficulties and put them into a more positive context" (qtd in Riddick). Birdie affirms to herself directly that there is nothing wrong with you/her. Birdie's internal struggle with reframing her dyslexia is evident. However, her ease on camera and her confident tone, provide her with status. She is not concerned with being perfect and this gives her power.

As Livingstone asserts, youth who use SNS "are seeking to share their private experiences, to create spaces of intimacy, to be themselves in and through their connection with their friends" (406) and in Birdie's case also strangers who may have or know someone

with dyslexia. At one point in the video she hits her head on the table and takes a moment to recover. At another point she mentions that her nose is itchy. Towards the end she forgets the first name of the author of the book she recommends. While she occasionally apologizes for some of these actions, she does not edit the video to remove the scenarios. She is comfortable being human, being herself. She is not embarrassed or ashamed of her actions; she owns her dyslexia and all the smaller intricacies that make her who she is.

Birdie ends the video with avenues for peer support. Research suggests that “Peer support offers optimism and hope for a better life and acceptance as well as opportunities to relate to one another through common experiences and shared struggles” (Naslund 2). Birdie suggests resources to her viewers, affirms that those with dyslexia are not “weird,” and states that she is available to talk about whatever her viewers want to talk about. Through her self-disclosure, Birdie seeks to build a community, a relationship and a dialog with her viewers. This can be seen in the comments section on her Foundations video.

Richard R: Great Video for us parents who are just finding out about our children with Dyslexia.. My Ex wife and her father have it and now we believe (He is being tested) my oldest son has it. He has all the symptoms you mentioned and it gives me hope and relief that he will make it like you.

Birdie: Yeah, totally! Dyslexia is not a death sentence. It doesn't mean your stupid, or not smart. It just means that you think a little differently, and that you might struggle/need a little more help than others. But having dyslexia is also a gift because dyslexic people can do things that other people can't.

Birdie could have easily chosen not to respond to Richard R's comments or any of the comments on this video. However, she purposefully chooses to respond, sometimes at length, to build a relationship with her viewers and to help them better understand dyslexia. She is providing her viewers with "hope and relief" by talking about her dyslexia in a public forum. Birdie is breaking down the shame and isolation surrounding her learning difference and public disclosure. Another commenter HXO writes, "i have dyslexia but i didnt know much about it ... makes a hoal lot more seance now .. and it nice to know im not the only one out there ." It is here that we can see Berlant echoing through the comments page on Birdie's video. HXO is saying to Birdie "I am not isolated" any longer. Birdie's bold disclosure and her positivity help to make her approachable to viewers.

Birdie is concerned with sharing about her dyslexia in a positive light. Research has shown that those who share positive news on SNS are more likeable than those who focus on negative news (Utz 8). As I've discussed, Birdie is very cautious with her language around dyslexia. This is to affirm and take power away from the idea of dyslexia as disability, yet I also suspect this is to have her video adhere to the conversational norms of YouTube. Remaining positive and not seeming pessimistic is important on the site. As Bryan Appleyard writes on the New Statesman.com, "Social media, with their chattering pursuit of 'likes,' followers, comments and shares, are overwhelmingly biased in the direction of . . . positivity." While Appleyard may view positivity on SNS as a negative trait, it has empowered those with stigmatized identities to speak out. YouTube has created an allied culture where users seek to support one another and shield each other from negative feedback. The word "hater" was coined to denote someone who speaks or comments negatively about another person (Lange 366). Of the 18 comments on

Birdie's video, none are from "haters." This could be that Birdie has a smaller fan base than other YouTube vloggers and therefore attracts less negative attention. Yet it could also mean that she has deleted any negative comments. We will look at the "hater" phenomena more with our next vlogger, Joey Graceffa, who has a larger fan base on YouTube and experiences more negative feedback.



[My Learning Disability with Joey Graceffa](#)

Joey Graceffa is an actor, author, and YouTube personality in his early twenties. He has over 4 million subscribers to his YouTube channel which features daily vlogs, collaborative videos with other YouTube personalities, a science fiction YouTube series "Storytelling," and short comedy videos among other content. He began his channel on October 25th, 2009. Outside of YouTube, Graceffa starred on season 22 and 24 of the Amazing Race.

His video "My Learning Disability" has 319,228 hits with 11,024 likes and 110 dislikes as of May 24, 2015. The video was uploaded on October 15th, 2011. Graceffa sets up the video as

an intimate disclosure that he hopes will lead to peer support. The following description accompanies the video on YouTube:

I almost didn't post this. It's really scary opening up and sharing my weakness with people. But I know that it can help some of you who are going through a similar experience. Or at least educate people who might not understand how hard it can be for someone in that situation. There was a lot more I wanted to say in this video, but it's hard for me to express what I want to say verbally sometimes.

The video begins with Graceffa in his bedroom addressing his viewers; he keeps his eyes on the camera and alerts his viewers that he is going to talk about a serious topic. Most of Graceffa's other videos are emotionally lighter and less personal. In this video his unease can be felt. He stumbles over his words, fidgets and apologizes to his viewers for the video being a "downer". He is concerned that the video is not delivering the upbeat positive content his viewers have come to expect. He tries to remedy this by focusing on helping others "who are going through a similar experience." Graceffa then explains that he was diagnosed with a learning disability after consuming lead paint chips as a child. He does not disclose the nature of the learning disability in the video. However, the video has a dyslexia tag and Graceffa makes reference to dyslexia on his blog with a post entitled "Dyslexic Joey Strikes Again." The core of the video surrounds the stigma Graceffa felt when he had to go into special education classes.

Graceffa attended special education classes until sophomore year of high school and attempted to keep his learning difference a secret.

Alot of my friends uhm, in high school or just like growing up, they never knew about this, like, I kept it so secretive because I was so ashamed of it and I just was really embarrassed that I had a learning disability and I was in special education classes. And now it's something that I don't really talk about to people or bring up um, because it was very traumatizing, like, experience growing up just because me, like, I was so judgmental about myself. Like worrying about what people were going to think about me and I mean some people did make fun of me because of it.

Graceffa's experience with dyslexia and his disclosure is vastly different from Birdie's. Graceffa struggles with accepting his learning disability and seeing it as positive. He was traumatized by his special education experience. Birdie was homeschooled and did not experience the social indicators of disability (going to the special education classes) in front of her peers. She was able to come to terms with her dyslexia at home, in the care of a dedicated instructor and at a younger age. In her video, we do not hear about her public struggle with dyslexia until college. Birdie has a professor that does not understand her learning needs: "she was treating me like a leper." It is here that she gives indication of her public struggle with dyslexia as Graceffa has. Birdie felt like an outsider in her college class because the professor did not know her as well as the other students. Birdie, like Graceffa, wanted to be like her peers, to be "known" by this professor, to be treated the same as the other students. While Graceffa and Birdie view their dyslexia differently, both yearn to be part of a peer group.

Graceffa shares a lot about his desire to be treated the same as his peers. It is this desire to be "normal" that drove him to find a way out of his special education classes.

My sophomore year came around and I was like I need to get out of these stupid classes . . . I can't live up to my full potential if I'm treated differently. Like, I want to prove all these people wrong, like, just let me out. So 10th grade I was old enough to sign myself out of the classes for good and I'm not sure if that hurt me in the long run, with like applying to colleges or whatever....I don't care; I just want to get out and be normal.

Graceffa's will to shed any visual signs of his learning difference is developmentally appropriate for an adolescent coming to terms with his diagnosis. As Rodis states, the "tendency . . . is to pull away from the familiar environments – like the resource room – that no longer seem to promise security but instead intensify the degree of exposure to social danger and misfit status" (216). For Graceffa, this desire to be "normal" was driven by more than his learning disability; he faced multiple stigmatized identities while in high school. In another video, "Draw My Life," he makes reference to having a hard school life. He mentions that he was generally friends with girls, as the boys in his school would taunt him and call him "gay" and "girl." This caused Graceffa to feel different from his peers. The special education classes added to the stigma he already felt. In the "Learning Disabilities" vlog, he makes a plea to his viewers, "I know . . . nobody's normal but it, I don't know, it can be very painful, like having to like, I don't know, just being different." Already a target in school, the act of going to the special education classes made his learning difficulty apparent and compounded his exposure to negative attention from peers. Currently, Graceffa's popularity on YouTube has increased his exposure to negative feedback from users.

Graceffa has a high profile on YouTube and therefore garners more attention than the other vloggers in this paper. Of the over 3,000 comments on this video there are both positive and negative remarks. The positive comments focus on admitting a learning difference and applauding Graceffa for his disclosure:

Beth: i have add, dyslexia and im also dyspraxia. i started crying when you explained how you felt because the truth is i feel 100% the same way. so much so i wont take any help that comes my way from being scared what every one will think... but this has helped me alot <3 x

Libs: Joey you are amazing! I can't believe you have the courage to share this! I salute you!

Tara: I have ADHD and everyday is a struggle, and I was very depressed. Then I found your channel, your videos were the only thing that made me smile and laugh. Thanks so much for making this video. <3

The positive comments build a supportive network for other viewers as well as for Graceffa. They seek to affirm that those with dyslexia are not alone. The comments that are not positive either attack Graceffa's perceived sexual orientation, his speech pattern, or others who have left comments. As Lange writes, "people who post criticisms . . . fail to display affinity with the video. They effectively reject a social link to the video maker's social network members for whom the video represents an emotional connection point" (368). While Graceffa does not respond to comments, his viewers are very active. For example, the following thread was posted to the comments on Graceffa's "Learning Disabilities" video:

Olivia: I have dyslexia and i am in honers

Destiny: maybe if you were in honors you would know how to spell honors.

Olivia: she is a Bitch

Olivia: @DestinyBriana Hater Bitch

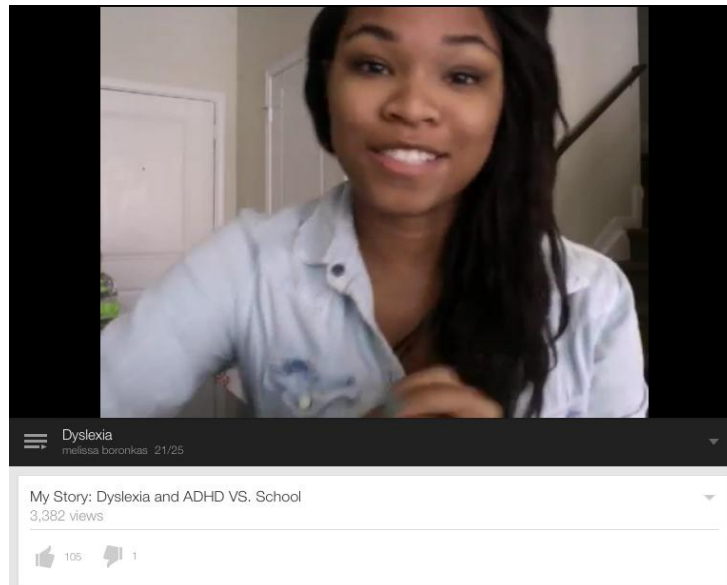
Jonathan: Destiny you ignorant idiot she has dyslexia. Being smart academically does not involve little petty spelling mistakes. Ignore that persons hate. I'm glad for you.

Olivia: @JonathanYap Thank you

“Haters” on YouTube are discouraged by the majority of positive YouTube commenters who act as an allied community. In the above exchange, Destiny was harassing Olivia for her learning difference. This behavior was considered unacceptable and Jonathan commented to police the communication and show support to Olivia. Graceffa’s fans set the tone for comments and moderate the remarks. They decide which comments are acceptable and which are not. On this video, the comments that are the most offensive receive the most replies.

One commenter, Simon Templar, left a disparaging comment about the number of views the “Learning Disabilities” video received. His comment received 44 replies as of May 23, 2015. Ten of Graceffa’s fans came to the rescue in an attempt to defend him. Templar and the fans sparred back and forth. One fan, Olivia SP, in response to the comments, wrote: “Don't feed the troll! This person comments on a lot of Joey's videos and posts crappy stuff.” The term “troll” as used in this comment means a person who “deliberately posts provocative messages” to cause an argument (urbandictionary.com). While a “hater” may only post one disparaging

comment, a “troll” posts multiple comments attempting to incite a reaction. Olivia SP’s reaction to the critical comments supports and protects the vlogger and the audience by discouraging harassment. She is attempting to silence the harasser by appealing to those who have come to Graceffa’s aid.



[My Story: Dyslexia and ADHD vs. School with JayTeaXOXO](#)

JayTeaXOXO’s real name is Jordan Tea. She is a YouTube vlogger in her early twenties with 323 subscribers to her channel as of March 17th, 2015. Her vlog posts have centered on her relationship with her boyfriend, racism, and adopting a pet. In addition to her vlogs, she also posts hair tutorials and style videos. Tea’s video “My Story: Dyslexia and ADHD vs. School” was uploaded on August 27th, 2013. The video has 3,431 views, 105 likes, and 1 dislike as of May 17th, 2015. Like Birdie and Graceffa, Tea created this video to help those who have dyslexia or who know someone who has dyslexia. She opens the video by saying, “this is for the kids that have dyslexia . . . or any other type of learning difference . . . I know how hard it can be and so hopefully you can share this with the kids that have learning differences or maybe their

parents.” She then goes on to state, “This is YouTube, you should use it for the betterment of people and I want to help someone out.” Unlike Birdie and Graceffa, Tea makes it clear to her viewers that she believes YouTube, not just her individual vlog, should be used to make the world a better place. Her tone conveys that using YouTube for the “betterment of people” is common knowledge to her and her viewers. She sees herself as part of a larger YouTube community that seeks to educate and support others.

Tea spends much of the video relaying her story around her struggle with dyslexia. Throughout her school career, she wanted to take on additional challenges in the classroom because as she says “she was just as smart as everyone else.” This included requesting extra words on her 3rd grade spelling test, which only happened once, and getting into AP and gifted and talented classes in junior high school. It was in her gifted and talented classes that Tea realized she was not able to keep up with her peers. She was not able to read as fast as the other students and process the necessary information. Reflecting on this experience she states, “I felt dumb. I felt stupid. I felt like I was mental. I felt bad and that right there is what started it all. The frustration, the anger and to a certain degree the depression about not being able to kind of keep up with everyone else and that really sucked.” Like Graceffa, Tea strongly wanted to be like her peers and became angry when she was unable. Coleman asserts, “Stigmatization or feeling stigmatized is a consequence of social comparison” (217). Tea now felt like she had something to hide and it was difficult, especially when she was called on to read in class.

Tea’s greatest fear was having to read out loud, “that is so embarrassing when you are dyslexic, it is so horrendous, when you just sit there and you know that you are about to get

called and you just pray that you know, you don't mess up and if you do and you mess up on some easy word and everyone laughs at you . . . you'd literally rather gnaw your arm off." Tea, like Graceffa, also had to face bullying behaviors from her peers. However, in retrospect she is able to get angry with her classmates for their behavior. She continues, "The kids would make fun of you. Like excuse my French for this . . . but Fuck them for that because that hurts like nobody's business." Graceffa briefly mentioned that he was "made fun of" by his peers. In his video his anger is mostly directed at himself for being different, while Tea's is focused on her peers for being callous. This is most evident in the statements each vlogger makes about their high school graduation. Tea confidently talks about her graduation, "I walked across that stage in some glittery high heeled pumps and I was like I'll never care about these kids again." Graceffa states, "I graduated feeling equal to my peers and that's what I wanted." Tea was motivated to set herself apart from her peers, unlike Graceffa who wanted to blend in to prove he was "normal" in order to avoid criticism.

Unlike Graceffa and Birdie, Tea was diagnosed with dyslexia after high school. She spent her elementary and secondary school years struggling to keep up with her peers. It is in Tea's personal story that Riddick's assessment becomes apparent. Riddick asserts, "Children felt stigmatized by other children because of visible signs like poor spelling . . . or because they always finished last not because of the label dyslexia" (658). Even though Tea was not labeled dyslexic until after secondary school, she still felt stigmatized because she struggled with decoding words. She continues, "I remember feeling relieved but even more frustrated. Cuz I was like give me a break. It's not fair that I find out now I'm about to go to college, all this reading, like how am I going to deal with this. And the anxiety set in even worse and I just

freaked out.” Tea struggled with the symptoms of dyslexia throughout her academic career and now had to identify with a disability label. A year later Tea was also diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She continues, “I’m learning all this at 19 years old. Talk about, like, changing times. I learned all this and I went through hell and it sucked. It sucked feeling stupid. It sucked feeling like you’re the dumb one of all your friends. It sucks when you think to yourself I don’t have my life together and everyone else does. But I’m here to say . . . that I made it to this point . . . you can do it too.” Tea experienced some relief through labeling as it gave her the ability to learn strategies to help her succeed in school. However, through diagnosing her learning difficulty, it also made her experiences more concrete and rooted in disability. Tea acknowledges her struggle, she cries and gets angry in her video; however she keeps her message positive and focuses on her resilience.

Tea, like Birdie, addresses her dyslexia as a learning difference versus a disability. In this respect, she is taking on a positive view of her dyslexia. In the video she says, “Everyone’s smart, just in a different way.” She sees herself as part of the larger YouTube community that supports the “betterment of people.” She closes the video with an affirmation to her viewers: “You can do it. You will do it and I believe in you even though we haven’t met.” Her positivity echoes through the comments on her video. Tea’s following on YouTube is smaller than Birdie and Graceffa’s. Of the 24 comments on her video as of May 17th, 2015 all are positive. The comments are similar to those found on Birdie and Graceffa’s videos.

S Le: Thank you to your honesty. My daughter was dianosed with dyslexia and add. She has the same frustrationas and anxiety's you described. I'm going to

share your video with her. She needs to see someone that's been through what she's going through and did not give up. Thank you again.

SG: Great Job, I have a similar story. I went through a lot of the same struggles as you. I use to hide my educational issues, but when I went to law school I could not hide it . I had to accept help and not let the label bother me.

From these comments it can be seen that Tea effectively created a video for the “betterment of people.” She was able to reach a parent who has a child struggling with dyslexia and provide hope. Additionally, she gave voice to another user who struggled with claiming the dyslexia label. Through her video Tea was able to maintain that those with dyslexia are not alone.

Conclusion

Haleigh Birdie, Joey Graceffa, and JayTeaXOXO, by taking a risk and sharing about their experience with dyslexia, were able to create supportive peer networks that sought to decrease isolation for themselves as well as their viewers and to educate non-dyslexics. Birdie provided a message and resources that were useful to a parent with a child who was just diagnosed with dyslexia. Graceffa’s disclosure helped to aid two viewers who self identified as dyslexic to feel less isolated. Tea inspired a parent to share her video with her dyslexic daughter so she would know that she was not alone.

Through their self-disclosure, these vloggers were able to address the stigma surrounding their dyslexia and provide positive messages. Birdie was adamant about dyslexia being a different way of thinking rather than something that is wrong with her way of processing. Graceffa was able to give voice to his trauma around attending special education

classes and uncover a secret he had been hiding. Tea expressed her anger and frustration with her classmates while applauding her own resilience.

YouTube is not a utopia; criticism does exist on the site. However, those who commented on the videos analyzed in this paper acted as an allied community. They worked together to discourage and protect each other from harassment. YouTube users are ushering in a new form of intimacy which collectively celebrates difference by championing positivity to safeguard against isolation, criticism, harassment and discrimination. As JayTeaXOXO says, "This is YouTube; you should use it for the betterment of people."

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