

‘There’s Nothing I Can Do’:

Subcultural micro-celebrity, transgressive bodies and the discursive practices on YouTube



Master Thesis: New Media & Digital Culture

Utrecht University, April 2018

Puck Swarte, 4143159

Supervisor: René Glas

Second reader: Jasper van Vught

Annotation style: APA

Amount of words: 11.556

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the discursive practices of YouTube vlogger Eugenia Cooney and how she is able to attract large groups of audiences with her controversial content. The reason why her videos are controversial is because she is extremely thin. Lots of people are worried that she has a severe form of anorexia, but Cooney herself claims that she is just naturally this way. Due to her non-normative appearance, I argue that Cooney should be seen as a subcultural micro-celebrity that uses the affordances of YouTube and several discursive techniques that allow her to commodify her so-called transgressive body. The findings of this inquiry show that her unique selling point is the mystery of the cause of her transgressive body. She deliberately creates this mystery by using clickbait titles and thumbnails which suggest that she is going to be addressing her physical appearance in her videos. As soon as the video starts, it becomes clear how she doesn't meet the raised expectations over and over again and how she avoids talking about the real issue, while still implicitly addressing it. Furthermore, this thesis also sheds light on the discussion of the mechanisms and algorithms of the platform YouTube that are promoting and recommending extreme content. By using the right techniques, micro-celebrities can actively play with this development and gain commercial and/or social capital.

Keywords: subcultural micro-celebrity, transgressive body, YouTube

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF IMAGES	4
INTRODUCTION	5
SITUATING MY RESEARCH	8
METHODOLOGY	11
ANALYSIS	14
YouTube affordances as a resource	14
Body as a resource	17
(body)language as a resource	19
Stylistic characteristics as a resource	25
Resources in video ‘I’ve Been Keeping a Secret...’	26
Concluding the analysis	30
DISCUSSION	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY	33

LIST OF IMAGES

IMAGE 1 - TITLE AND THUMBNAIL VIDEO 'THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO'	14
IMAGE 2 - TITLE AND THUMBNAIL VIDEO 'I'M SORRY'	15
IMAGE 3 - DESCRIPTION OF VIDEO 'I'M SORRY'	15
IMAGE 4 - TITLE AND THUMBNAIL VIDEO 'I'M NOT DEAD'	16
IMAGE 5 - BODY AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO'	17
IMAGE 6 - BODY AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'M SORRY'	18
IMAGE 7 - BODY AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'M NOT DEAD'	18
IMAGE 8- BODY LANGUAGE AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'M SORRY'	22
IMAGE 9 - CAMERA WORK VIDEO 'THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO'	25
IMAGE 10 - TITLE AND THUMBNAIL VIDEO 'I'VE BEEN KEEPING A SECRET...'	26
IMAGE 11 - DESCRIPTION OF VIDEO 'I'VE BEEN KEEPING A SECRET...'	27
IMAGE 12 - BODY AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'VE BEEN KEEPING A SECRET...'	27
IMAGE 13 - BODY LANGUAGE AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'VE BEEN KEEPING A SECRET...'	28
IMAGE 14 – EDITING CHOICE AS A RESOURCE VIDEO 'I'VE BEEN KEEPING A SECRET...'	29

INTRODUCTION

On August 17, 2018 YouTuber and beauty/fashion vlogger Eugenia Cooney posted a video titled 'There's Nothing I Can Do'. In this video, we see Cooney exercising some sports and showing how she has difficulty practicing these. The reason why she is almost not able to practice these exercises is reasonably because she is extremely thin. However, this is not being discussed or mentioned by Cooney herself. At the same time, the title of the video suggests otherwise.

What we see here is a rather new and unique phenomenon. When solely looking at the content of her YouTube videos, this vlogger doesn't differ much from all of the other vloggers that talk about clothing, beauty, and fashion. But other than most beauty/fashion vloggers, Cooney has a remarkable appearance because of her thinness. It has been speculated that she has a severe form of anorexia, but Cooney herself states that this is not the case and that she is just naturally this way (Cooney, 2016). In the meantime, this vlog has over 600.000 views and her YouTube channel has more than 1,5 million subscribers. A quick scan through the comments beneath the videos indicates that most people are not watching her videos for beauty or clothing advice: rather, they are surprised and disturbed by her physical appearance. The top comment of the aforementioned video states: 'I feel like I come back to this channel only to make sure she's still alive'. Other comments are: 'It's like watching a suicide in slow motion' and 'seeing a practical skeleton "attempting" to do sports is... just disturbing'. One commenter hits the nail on its head in regards to the aim of my research: 'she made this video to display her body for the views. That's why it's titled like that (...) She knows what she is doing, she thinks she's being slick with this title. Clearly it worked, because here we all are...'. And indeed, it seems as if micro-celebrity Cooney is using certain tactics that could potentially attract viewers.

The term micro-celebrity was coined by new media scholar Senft in 2001 when she aimed to describe how camgirls utilized video, blogging, still images, and crosslinking strategies to shape an identity which they could sell to their online fans (2013, p. 346). Since that time, the term has evolved and adjusted to the new social media era. She now defines micro-celebrity as "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good" (2013, p. 346). Already lots of research has been done on micro-celebrities and most scholars draw the conclusion that the most important currencies for micro-celebrities are that of authenticity and intimacy. By showing the 'real you', YouTube vloggers are able to

create a feeling of intimacy so that their followers get a feeling of connectedness and having a real relationship with the YouTuber. These characteristics could be explained as important currencies to attract audiences (Berryman & Kavka 2017; Berryman & Kavka 2018; De Kosnik 2013; Jerslev 2016; Marwick 2014; Marwick & boyd 2011). These studies, however, are mostly researching (hetero)normative micro-celebrities. New media scholar Raun (2018), on the other hand, is one of the view researchers who highlights the importance of diversifying, specifying, and nuancing the discourse about micro-celebrities as a practice and a concept by analyzing the videos of the non-normative transgender vlogger Julie Van Vu (2018, p. 99). Nonetheless, Raun draws the same conclusion as the other researchers who inquired normative micro-celebrities: he concludes that “intimacy as a genre and as capital is deeply ingrained in the strategies, dynamics and affective labour of micro-celebrities” (2018, p. 99). With my thesis, I aim to continue with diversifying and specifying the discourse by focusing on Cooney who has a non-normative appearance. I question whether authenticity is an important part of Cooney’s strategy as well or that maybe she is using other tactics and currencies compared to the previously researched micro-celebrities. Moreover, I will investigate whether the physical appearance of Cooney plays a part in the shaping of her online identity and whether she is using her what has been called transgressive body. This leads to the following research question: *How does micro-celebrity Eugenia Cooney discursively convey her online identity on the platform YouTube, and how can we understand this in the light of the notion of transgressive bodies?*

Transgressive bodies are bodies that differ from the norm. Gender and media scholar Richardson explains that people have a fascination with deviant bodies, and “in today’s Google and YouTube obsessed society, obtaining a representation is easier than ever. A couple of mouse-clicks and we can find the transgressive body of our dreams or nightmares” (2010, p.4). Since the work of Richardson stems from 2010, what is missing is how people on the internet are displaying their bodies nowadays. Therefore, I am going to be focusing on Cooney in order to analyze what role her transgressive body plays in her online identity on YouTube.

Additionally, I am going to investigate which affordances of YouTube she is using in order to attract audiences. The term ‘affordances’ is defined by Bucher and Helmond (2017) as “a range of possible actions linked to features of a platform” (p.3). They add that this concept is mostly used to describe what certain media platforms and technologies allow people to do. For example, YouTube allows Cooney to use a catchy title to attract viewers. In this manner, the title is an affordance of YouTube.

Furthermore, this research ties into the discussion of the controversial and extreme content that is omnipresent on YouTube nowadays. A lot of research has shown that the recommendation system of YouTube is promoting extremist content due to its endorsement of popular videos (O’Callaghan et al. 2015; Paolillo 2018; Schmitt et al. 2019). As explained by social scientists O’Callaghan et al., this recommendation system presents users sets of related and recommended videos, based on aspects such as prior viewing history and co-visitation (2015, p. 460). In their research, they focus on the role of YouTube in recommending extremist content and political extremist content in particular. The discussion has also sparked the interests of the public. More and more newspapers and journalists are reporting on and investigating the dark side of YouTube. Journalist Tufekci in the New York Times concludes: “YouTube leads viewers down a rabbit hole of extremism, while Google racks up the ad sales” (2018). But not only YouTube earns money by promoting controversial videos: also the creators and uploaders of these videos receive economic and/or social capital by posting controversial content. The terms stem from the work of philosopher Bourdieu (1986), who made a distinction between economic and social capital: economic capital refers to power achieved through money. Social capital refers to power achieved through respect and/or status within a social group. In regards to YouTube, micro-celebrities could obtain economic capital through the income they receive by posting videos. Additionally, they can earn social capital by obtaining a lot of subscribers, likes, and views. But where most research about extreme content on YouTube is focusing on the mechanisms and algorithms, what is still missing is an understanding of how YouTubers themselves are responding to this development. Adding to that, the aforementioned research mainly focus on extreme content in regards to political and ideological content. However, there are also YouTubers who are creating controversial content that doesn’t deal with political issues per se. Cooney is a striking example of that.

In order to answer my research question, I first need to make clear in what ways we should understand Cooney as a micro-celebrity and what transgressive bodies are. A next step is to explore how YouTube facilitates the possibility to sell or commodify online identities. Subsequently, I am going to analyze YouTube videos of Cooney by using a multimodal discourse analysis. The multimodal discourse analysis is a qualitative method that aims to depict all important elements of texts that convey meaning. Other than textual discourse analysis, which solely focuses on language, the multimodal discourse analysis and this thesis extends the study of discourse by combining it with other resources, such a body language, gesture, music and sound, images, and editing choices (O’Halloran 2012). The method will be explained in

further detail in the method section, which follows after I have situated my research in the theoretical framework.

SITUATING MY RESEARCH

As stated, Cooney is a YouTube vlogger who is attracting audiences with her unique identity and image. New media Scholar Senft coined the term micro-celebrity which we now understand as deploying and maintaining an online identity as if it were a branded good (2013, p. 346). The idea is thus that one can create or shape an identity and sell this online. The shaping and selling of an identity can occur on multiple platforms, but the most prevalent form in regards to videos can be found on YouTube, being the market-leader among video sharing websites (Pace, 2008). Despite the notion of micro-celebrity, other terms are used to describe the phenomenon of selling an identity online. In regards to the case of Cooney, the explanation by media and communication scholars Khamis et al. (2016) is useful in order to understand why her physical appearance matters. They use the term ‘the branded-self’ to describe the mechanism of “individuals developing a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or social capital”. They emphasize that “central to self-branding is the idea that (...) individuals benefit from having a unique selling point” (2016, p. 192). When focusing on YouTuber Cooney, it could be questioned whether her unique selling point is her extremely thin body, even though she is not explicitly mentioning this.

The videos of micro-celebrity Cooney are very different compared to the more mainstream, normative micro-celebrities. For this reason, the work by new media scholar Raun (2018) is helpful because he investigated a micro-celebrity that also differs from the norm: he coins the concept of the ‘subcultural micro-celebrity’ while investigating the characteristics of transgender video blogging on YouTube. Within his research, he focuses on transgender micro-celebrity Julie Van Vu since she is one of the most famous transgender vloggers at the moment. The term ‘subcultural’ should not be confused with micro-celebrities that vlog about a specific subculture such as gaming. In this case, ‘subcultural’ refers to non-normative micro-celebrities, i.e. micro-celebrities that differ from the norm. In the research field of micro-celebrities, this is a rather unique inquiry since the author is steering away from the general discourse by adding a non-normative case study to the discussion. When looking at the case of Cooney, the notion of subcultural micro-celebrity can be applied to her situation as well. Due to her non-normative appearance, I argue that her video content on YouTube should also be understood under the notion of subcultural micro-celebrity. However, although Cooney and Vu should be considered

as subcultural micro-celebrities, this doesn't mean that they are not able to attract large groups of audiences. The reason why this article is helpful in regards to the case of Cooney is that both transgender-vlogger Vu and beauty/fashion-vlogger Cooney are examples of how one can potentially commodify a subcultural identity on YouTube.

The term transgressive bodies in relation to media studies stems from the work of gender and media scholar Richardson (2010). In his book *transgressive bodies: representations in film and popular culture* he investigates representations of transgressive bodies on television shows and explains the human obsession with non-normative bodies. Since the work stems from 2010, Richardson mainly focuses on the medium television and doesn't include social media platforms. Nonetheless, his work provides relevant insights in regards to the aim of this thesis. He argues that in recent years people have developed a particular interest in the non-normative body. Because of this, there is a rise in television shows and documentaries that showcase 'freak' bodies. According to the author, this spectacle is known as the "freak show" (2010, p. 1). He states that the deviant bodies of interest are mostly over-weight bodies, extremely tall or short bodies, bodies that are most modified, and gender/sex transgressive bodies. In this line of reasoning, the extremely thin body of Cooney could also be considered as deviant. The author explains that the reason why people want to watch videos of extreme forms of body types is that such videos "bring to life our darkest, most secret fears (...) Yet this nightmare is made safe as it is removed from us, contained within the representation and establishes a 'them and us' boundary" (2010, p. 8). Additionally, another important notion is that of the 'self-made freak'. Self-made freaks are people who had no physiological differences when they were born, but instead, their bodies are different due to cultural influences (2010, p.9). An example given by Richardson is that of a documentary that shows a woman with the most surgically augmented breasts in the world. According to the author, people are nowadays extremely fascinated by "the horror of the overwhelming power of contemporary culture in shaping the body" (2010, p. 9). In regard to this example, it could be stated that the woman went too far in persuading the Western beauty standards where big breasts are being considered as beautiful. When looking at YouTuber Cooney, her extremely thin appearance could also be understood as a result of her persuading Western beauty standards where being slim is considered as beautiful. And although I'm not saying that these cultural influences are the reason why Cooney is extremely thin, because I simply cannot know, I do think that it is reasonable to believe that most viewers assume that this is why she is so extremely thin. For instance, in 2016 more than 20.000 people who believed that Cooney has a severe form of anorexia signed a petition that called for

temporarily banning Cooney from YouTube because of her ‘thinness’ and because it could be “triggering her fanbase” (Kelley, 2016). These insights of Richardson explain why people would potentially want to spectate transgressive bodies, and I believe that Cooney is responding to that by using her transgressive body and the affordances of YouTube in order to potentially attract audiences.

The term ‘affordances’ is defined by Bucher and Helmond as “a range of possible actions linked to features of a platform” (2017, p. 3). They add that this concept is mostly used to describe what certain media platforms and technologies allow people to do. In other words: the affordances of a platform determine which actions are possible and which actions are not. For this thesis, I’m interested in how Cooney uses the affordances when potentially attracting audiences to watch her videos. Accordingly, the work by new media scholar Bishop (2018) is helpful because it addresses the way vloggers use certain affordances of YouTube in order to attract viewers. The author states that in order to be a successful vlogger, the YouTubers need to make themselves legible to the platform’s algorithms. This means that in addition to making the content appealing, they also need to optimize the metadata of the video. She explains that these metadata include video titles, textual keyword tags, and thumbnails (being a still image from the video). Using these affordances strategically increases the visibility and discoverability: “As YouTube puts it, *discoverability* takes the form of promotion through high billing within search rankings, inclusion in automatically generated rolling playlists, and promotion via personalized ‘recommended for you’ links embedded within the platform’s interface” (2018, p. 22). In other words: by using the right techniques, vloggers are increasing the possibilities that their videos are being recommended by the algorithms. Bishop concludes that the way popular vloggers make use of these affordances shows their “awareness of, and a response to, the high value attached to commercial and advertising relevancy on the platform” (2018, p. 29). In this line of reasoning, I will be investigating whether Cooney too is aware of these mechanisms and is using them for economic and/or social capital.

In addition to the aforementioned affordances, the article by Zannettou et al. (2018) offers some other interesting insights when discussing strategies to attract views on YouTube. They state that several YouTubers use specific techniques with the aim to deceive and attract viewers into clicking on their content. These techniques include: “ (i) the use of eye-catching thumbnails (...) which are often irrelevant to video content; (ii) the use of headlines that aim to intrigue the viewers; and (iii) encapsulate false information to either the headline, the thumbnail or the video content” (2018, p. 1). The authors refer to videos that use such techniques as

clickbait. Thus, several affordances of YouTube allow for clickbait to attract audiences. In a marketing book about YouTube, YouTube brand and marketing strategist Eagle even states that the use of clickbait results in obtaining more money (Eagle 2019, p. 100). According to the author, the positive outcome of using clickbait is that it attracts viewers into clicking on your content. As a result, you will receive more views on your videos. However, he also highlights that there are some consequences when using clickbait: it can result in angry viewers and more dislikes because people feel misled. The author concludes: “clickbait is a piece of content designed to attract attention and get a click, often stretching the truth in order to get more clicks and potentially misrepresenting the content” (Eagle 2019, p. 100). In the analysis of this thesis, I will partly focus on the use of these affordances when investigating the multimodal discursive practices of Cooney, which I will explain next.

METHODOLOGY

As already briefly mentioned in the introduction, in order to get an understanding of how Cooney is conveying her online identity on YouTube, I will be using a multimodal discourse analysis when analyzing her videos. The multimodal discourse analysis is a qualitative method that aims to depict all important elements of texts that convey meaning. The text by O’Halloran (2012) is a helpful introduction to this specific method. As explained in this chapter, other than textual discourse analysis, which solely focuses on language, the multimodal discourse analysis extends the study of discourse by combining it with other resources, such as gesture, music and sound, images, and symbolism. As stated by O’Halloran, the reason why it is important to integrate these resources as well when studying discourse is that nowadays there is “the need to account for the meaning arising from multiple semiotic resources deployed in various media, including contemporary interactive digital technologies” (2012, p. 121). In the analysis of Cooney’s videos, all these aspects are indeed important when aiming to depict her strategies and practices in regard to her branded-self. Because apart from what she is (not) saying in her videos, resources such as the title, the thumbnail, the description, body language, and gesture all play a part in the conveying of her image online. By doing a multimodal discourse analysis, attention would be paid to all these important elements that can be found in the videos of Cooney.

Although the text by O’Halloran (2012) is useful in order to get an understanding of the method of multimodal discourse analysis, what is still missing in this text is a concrete approach that could also be applied to the analysis of Cooney’s videos. Therefore, the way multimodal

discourse analysis is used in the article by Caron et al. (2018) is better applicable to that of my research because it also focuses on vloggers on YouTube: they used a hands-on approach that is also beneficial for my analysis of Cooney's videos. By doing a close, multimodal analysis of youth-produced vlogs, they explored how adolescents aim to raise awareness about social issues through their vlogs and how they "conveyed their online civic voices through multimodal digital texts" (2018, p. 6). As they acknowledge that this is a time-consuming task, they decided to select four vlogs. Caron et al. continued their analysis by creating a table in which they state the mode (e.g. gesture), describe the details (e.g. a vlogger counting on her fingers), provide a screenshot of the video, and provide an analysis of the codes and conventions (e.g. that the gesture seems scripted because her hand is perfectly in the frame). Furthermore, the authors stress that they "reflected on the vloggers' editing choices and identified key terms that seemed to describe and analyze how the vloggers designed their messages to convey online civic voice" (2018, p. 8). For my research, I will also be focusing on the editing choices of Cooney to investigate whether this plays a part in the conveying of her online identity. Finally, Caron et al. make a valid point by emphasizing the importance of the spoken text (language or speech). They stress that while videos offer multiple ways to convey a message, the importance of what they are actually saying cannot be ignored: "therefore more traditional tools of discourse analysis remain useful" (2018, p. 9).

In order to do so, I will be using the work by Gee (2014) to do a more traditional discourse analysis of the parts where she is using spoken and/or written texts. Gee provided a handbook with some practical tools that could be used when doing a discourse analysis. These tools exist out of questions that should be asked when analyzing a spoken or written text. For example, a question could be whether a certain context is of importance in order to understand what someone is saying (Gee 2014, p. 18). Additionally, apart from what is being said in the vlogs, I argue that what Cooney is not saying (e.g. explicitly not discussing her physical appearance) should also be addressed since this is an important part of her content.

In regards to ethical considerations, one should always be careful when using people as a subject of their analysis. However, Caron et al. argue that it is acceptable to analyze videos from vloggers and to use their full name when their account is public and when they are obtaining many views and subscribers (2018, p.7). Since this is also true for the case of Cooney, I argue that it is correct to use her full name and analyze her videos in my thesis.

Furthermore, Just like Caron et al. I will be doing a close analysis of four videos because this thesis asks for a precise and detailed investigation. In order to decide which videos I am

going to analyze, I made an overview of the videos in which I noted down the following aspects: the title of the video, the number of views, the number of comments, the number of likes and dislikes, the content, and whether or not Cooney used a clickbait title and/or thumbnail (appendix 1). Whether she used a clickbait title or thumbnail was decided by comparing the title and the thumbnail with that of the actual content of the video. For example, the title of the video ‘I’ve Been Keeping A Secret...’, in which the actual content is Cooney discussing being a fan of a boyband, could be categorized as clickbait. Additionally, as previously mentioned, a high amount of views and dislikes indicate that someone used a clickbait title and/or thumbnail (Eagle, 2019). As such, I selected four videos with a high amount of views and dislikes and a clear use of clickbait. Out of almost 200 videos, I came to the following selection:

- ‘There’s Nothing I Can Do’ (17-08-2018)
- ‘I’m Sorry’ (14-10-2016)
- ‘I’m Not Dead’ (22-09-2016)
- ‘I’ve Been Keeping a Secret...’ (08-05-2015)

When doing the analysis, I will be focusing on the following resources: the used affordances of YouTube, the use of her body, the use of her (body)language, and the stylistic characteristics. Important to mention is that part of the analysis of the resource ‘affordances’ is going to be textual because in some affordances she is using written texts. E.g. the title of the video, which is an affordance of YouTube, is also a written text. As such, within the analysis of the affordances, a textual analysis will be included when needed. Furthermore, I decided to make a distinction between the use of her body and the use of her (body)language. When analyzing the use of her body I will investigate whether - and if so: how - she is exposing her transgressive body in order to potentially attract viewers. When analyzing her (body)language, I will investigate what type of message she aims to convey through her body language and her oral speech. Lastly, the stylistic characteristics include her editing choices (e.g. the use of background music), the use of the camera, and symbolism. I will start by analyzing all resources for the first three videos. In the end, I will analyze the last video in which all resources come together.

ANALYSIS

YouTube affordances as a resource

Video *'There's Nothing I Can Do'*



Image 1 - title and thumbnail video *'There's Nothing I Can Do'*

In the video *'There's Nothing I Can Do'* it is clear that several affordances of YouTube are used that could potentially attract viewers. These affordances are the combination of the chosen title and the thumbnail (image 1). When focusing on the title, the context of Cooney's situation is of importance. In this case, by using this title Cooney asks her viewers to make assumptions about what the video is about. As advised by Gee when doing a discourse analysis: "for any communication, ask: based on what was said and the context in which it was said, what needs to be filled in here to achieve clarity? What is not being said overtly, but is still assumed to be known or inferable?" (2014, p. 18). In regards to Cooney, she is well aware that people assume that she has a severe form of anorexia. This context is of importance when understanding what she tries to do with this title: she gives the impression that she is going to be talking about her transgressive body. As such, she makes the viewers fill in this assumption when using this title.

The thumbnail of the video contributes to the idea that she might be going to address the cause of her transgressive body. Cooney chose a thumbnail in which the expression on her face is sad and in which it seems as if she is shocked. This thumbnail, in combination with the title, gives the impression that she is going to address a serious issue in the video. Furthermore, Cooney decided to choose a thumbnail in which her transgressive body is clearly visible. Since a lot of people have stated that they think her body looks disturbing, this thumbnail can be

classified as eye-catching. As explained by Zanettou et al. (2018, p.1), the use of an eye-catching thumbnail increases the possibility that people are going to click on the video.

Video 'I'm Sorry'



Image 2 - title and thumbnail video 'I'm Sorry'

The used affordances for this video are less revealing compared to the previous one: her transgressive body is almost not visible in the thumbnail and the title is less explicit (image 2). Nevertheless, the title can still be interpreted as if Cooney is going to address the predominant perception that she is not being honest about the cause of her transgressive body. Judging from the headline, it is not weird to believe that she hints towards an apology for her assumed dishonesty. Adding to that, the video has over 60.000 dislikes, which means that a lot of people are not happy or angry after watching it (Eagle 2019). This indicates that Cooney was using clickbait, meaning that she didn't meet the expectations she raised when using these affordances (Zanettou et al 2018, p. 1).

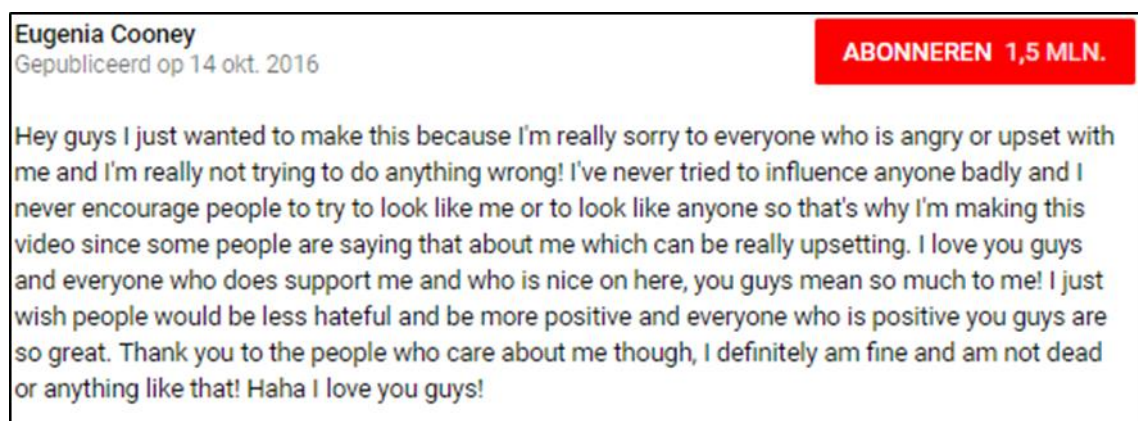


Image 3 - description of video 'I'm Sorry'

Another affordance that Cooney used for this video is the added description (image 3). In this description, Cooney explains what the video is about. As stated, since this is a written

text, a textual analysis of the text is needed in order to understand the meaning of the use of this affordance. When reading the description closely, she remains unclear about why people are angry or upset with her. Apparently, she is commenting on people who state that she is a “bad influence” or that she encourages people to look like her. Nevertheless, it still does not become clear why she would be a bad influence and why it would be an issue if she would encourage people to look like her. Clearly, this is because people believe that she is having an eating disorder, but Cooney remains vague about this topic in the description. Furthermore, it is remarkable how she is labeling these comments as “hateful”. As explained by Gee, it is important to question for any communication what types of grammar and vocabulary is used and why speakers/writers build their messages in this way and not in some other ways: “always ask how else this could have been said and what the speaker was trying to mean and do by saying it the way in which he or she did and not in other ways” (2014, p. 62). In the case of Cooney, she approaches these comments as hate, while she could also interpret these comments as concerns. And when looking at the comments beneath the video, it becomes clear that this is noticed by other people as well. One commenter states: “People aren’t ‘hating’ on you, they’re concerned. There is such a big difference”. By labeling these comments as hateful, it seems as if she is not taking them seriously and even dismisses them. Lastly, what is striking is that in the last sentence she added “haha” after stating that she is not dead. The written text “haha” signifies laughter. This is another sign of how she is not taking the concerns of her being ill serious. More so, the text “haha” even indicates that she is ridiculing these concerns.

Video ‘I’m Not Dead’



Image 4 - title and thumbnail video 'I'm Not Dead'

For this video, Cooney chose to use an eye-catching thumbnail and an intriguing title (image 4). In the thumbnail, the transgressive body is again clearly visible: due to her pose and clothing, her body is on display. In regards to the title, again the context is of importance. A lot of people believe that she is mentally and physically ill. They are worried that because of her

supposed illness, Cooney might die. The title suggests as if Cooney is going to talk about these beliefs in relation to her physical appearance. As such, the title and the thumbnail complement each other in raising the expectation that she will be talking about her transgressive body. Thus, by using these affordances Cooney is asking her viewers to fill in and make assumptions about what she would be addressing in the video. The usage of such techniques and the combination of these two affordances could potentially make people curious and attract them to watch the video.

Body as a resource

Video 'There's Nothing I Can Do'



Image 5 - body as a resource video 'There's Nothing I Can Do'

Throughout this entire video, the transgressive body of Cooney is prominently visible because she is practicing sports while wearing revealing clothing: by wearing a short skirt and a top, Cooney's non-normative body is almost completely out in the open (image 5). In addition, by recording herself while she is doing sports like basketball and football she is actively using her transgressive body which makes it even more viewable.

What is also noticeable when analyzing the use of her body is that Cooney is demonstrating how her body is not able to practice the sports that she aims to do. While playing basketball, it seems as if she is not having enough strength in her arms to throw the ball. This is also the case when playing football: she isn't able to kick the ball in the right direction. Eventually, it becomes clear that what she wants to show the viewers is that she is not able to practice any sports with her transgressive body (hence the title). By doing so, she actively uses her body as a resource to convey the message that her body is not able to practice simple things such as sports activities.

Video 'I'm Sorry'



Image 6 - body as a resource video 'I'm Sorry'

Contrary to the other video, this time Cooney is not exposing her transgressive body. Throughout the whole video, she is sitting in front of the camera while her body is not on display (image 6). And although somehow still revealing, her clothing covers most part of her body. Thus, in this case, it can be concluded that she is not directly using her body as a resource to attract viewers.

Video 'I'm Not Dead'



Image 7 - body as a resource video 'I'm Not Dead'

In this video, the transgressive body of Cooney is visible the entire time (image 7). She chose to wear revealing clothing, and because of that almost her entire body is on display. Adding to that, she is using specific poses which are highlighting her non-normative appearance: by spreading her arms several times, the contours of her figure are exposed. What is also noteworthy is the fact that she is standing the entire time during the video. Usually, when micro-celebrities talk about certain topics they choose to sit in front of the camera. Cooney, on the other hand, decided to record herself while standing. By doing so, she is able to display her

entire transgressive body. Her body use also didn't go unnoticed by the viewers, as one commenter states: "You are the only YouTuber that stands 20 feet away from the camera, instead of sitting down like everyone else". This is thus another example of how Cooney is intentionally exposing her transgressive body.

(body)language as a resource

Video 'There's Nothing I Can Do'

At the beginning of this video, Cooney is explaining the purpose of the video:

"Today I'm going to be doing a really random video. I've never tried to do sports in my life. I've always been really bad at sports. Like, at school and stuff, and every time I've tried them. But I thought I would see if like maybe somehow, hopefully, you know, maybe somehow throughout my life I've just like magically improved sports. I don't know. So I thought today I was going to try playing a bunch of different sports and see if I'm actually any good at them. And see if I can become like a sports person" (0:00 – 1:00)

It immediately becomes clear that Cooney is not going to address the cause of her physical appearance after all, even though she implied to do so in the title and thumbnail of this video (image 1). Where she was suggesting with her title and thumbnail that the video was going to be about a serious issue, when focusing on her speech it becomes clear that she is not going to meet the expectations she has raised with the use of the affordances. Rather, she tells the viewers that she is actually going to do the opposite of something serious, namely practicing sports. What we see here is that she is clearly playing with the expectations of the viewers.

Furthermore, what is remarkable when analyzing her language is that she doesn't provide a coherent explanation for why she wants to do sports in this video. First, she states that she never tried to do sports and that she is really bad at it. Then, she states that in this video she is going to do sports to see if she is any good at them. This doesn't make any sense. Gee explains that in such cases it should not just be questioned what the speaker is saying, but also "what he or she is trying to do" (Gee 2014, p. 52). In this case, her lack of justification for the making of this video could be seen as an indication that doing sports is not her primary motivation. Rather, it seems as if her actual goal is to mainly display her transgressive body and how it is not able to practice sports. As she is starting to play basketball and dribble the ball, you can hear her say:

“I’m going to try to get it in into the hoop, ready? Ouch, ouch! O my gosh how do people do this? I can’t get it in...” (1:30 – 2:05)

What is striking is that she is saying ‘ouch, ouch’ when the basketball bounces against her body. This indicates that she is feeling a sense of pain when the basketball touches her, even though the ball hits her really softly. However, why she is in pain is not being explained or mentioned. She is also stating that she can’t get the ball into the hoop, and throughout the video she shows how there are also other sports she has difficulty with. This is what the title really is about: she isn’t able to do the sports she is attempting to do. When analyzing her language it is remarkable how she is not giving an explanation for the fact that she isn’t able to practice these sports. Even though she is clearly mentioning and showing that she cannot do it, she is not discussing why this is. By doing so, she is keeping the cause of her transgressive body a mystery. At the end of the video, she concludes by saying:

“If you guys enjoyed this video, then make sure that you give it a thumbs up and subscribe if you want to see more videos from me because I post a lot. See you guys in the next video, love you guys so much. Bye!” (7:17 – 7:32)

These kinds of texts are very common for micro-celebrities on YouTube because they are explicitly asking for likes and subscriptions. Such language could be understood as the social language of micro-celebrities. Social languages are explained by Gee as “styles or varieties of a language (...) that enact and are associated with a particular social identity” (2014, p. 162). By using such words and sentences, it becomes clear that being a micro-celebrity is part of her social identity. Furthermore, as explained by Bishop (2018, p. 22), the more views, likes and subscriptions a YouTuber gets, the higher his or her discoverability on the platform is going to be. Subsequently, this will lead to more economic and/or social capital. The fact that Cooney is using this text is a sign that she is indeed embracing the mechanisms of micro-celebrities and that of the platform YouTube.

Video ‘I’m Sorry’

In this video, Cooney is responding to comments from other people. And even though she is not exposing her transgressive body in this video, it can be argued that she still refers to her transgressive body since she is commenting on people’s reactions about her physical appearance. During the video, she is repeating herself plenty of times. Therefore, I am not going to analyze every sentence she is using. Rather, I’m going to analyze the most significant statements she is making. She starts the video by saying:

“So I just want to make this video today and I’m not really sure how to say everything that I want to say right now, but I just have noticed that there’s just been like a ton of hate and pretty much every video that I post just gets swarmed with dislikes, no matter what I post people just go and dislike it like crazy. But I just want to say, since obviously, it seems like some people are really really angry with me right now, I am really sorry to anyone that I am angering or upsetting. Because I seriously never mean to do that. It sucks that I kind of feel like so many people on the internet just like hate me right now and seem to think I’m like a really bad person or something.” (0:00 – 0:43).

What is remarkable is how she is using the words “hate” and “angry”. Instead of using the words “concern” or “worry”, she labels these comments in a negative way. This indicates that she is either not understanding the difference between hate and concern, or that she doesn’t want to acknowledge the difference. Furthermore, she is still not mentioning what the so-called hate is about. She remains vague about it and acts as if the hate is coming out of nowhere. As one commenter mentions: “Notice how she constantly avoids the words anorexia and eating disorder”. Additionally, she seems to be upset over the fact that her videos are getting a lot of dislikes. However, as shown in the previous analyses, she is deliberately using clickbait and other techniques that could potentially attract viewers. Because of this, I argue that she is acting surprised and upset instead of being sincere because it is generally known that using clickbait results in a lot of dislikes (Eagle, 2019). She continues:

“There’s been like some people lately making videos about how they think I’m ‘too skinny’ and that I have a ‘problem’ or whatever. And I think like sometimes there’s a lot of like drama on the internet and then sometimes when like one person sees someone else made a video saying that I’m like ‘too skinny’ or they don’t like this or that about me or whatever, then kind of like another person makes one and another person is making a video and then suddenly there’s like all these videos and stuff.” (1:45 – 2:12).



Image 8- Body language as a resource video 'I'm Sorry'

In this part, she is finally addressing what the comments of other people are about: they think that she is too skinny and that Cooney is having a problem. But as she is pronouncing the words ‘too skinny’ and ‘problem’ she is using her two hands in such a way that it signifies quotation marks (image 8). Thus, by using these gestures she is making clear that these words are not her own words but that they are the words of others. As a result, she is distancing herself from these statements in order to make clear that this is not how she thinks of herself. After a while, she starts explaining what other things people are saying about her:

“Some people have been titling videos very dramatic things, and it’s just been kind of getting like more and more dramatic. Some of the titles are like ‘Eugenia Cooney died’ or ‘Eugenia Cooney might die soon’. Don’t worry guys, seriously I’m definitely fine haha. I’m definitely not dead or going to die right now or anything like that so don’t worry, I’m alive! I’m okay haha!” (2:57 – 3:17)

The word she uses to describe these titles is interesting. She states that these titles are ‘dramatic’. This is another example of how she is saying one thing, but doing the other (Gee 2014, 52): she says that she thinks such titles are dramatic, but at the same time she acts differently because she is making use of such titles herself as well (e.g. the title ‘I’m Not Dead). Furthermore, when stating that she is fine and that she is not dead, she again starts laughing. This is remarkable because she also added “haha” to the description after stating that she is not dead (image 3). Thus, she does this both in written and in oral speech. Gee describes this phenomenon as “building significance”: “we use language to make things significant in certain ways or to downplay their significance in certain ways” (2014, p. 98). In this case, by laughing

after addressing these concerns she is downplaying the significance which again shows how she is not taking these comments seriously. She continues:

“One of the main reasons why I really wanted to make this video is because some people are saying I’m like a ‘bad influence’ on girls, I just want you guys to know I’ve seriously had never tried to be a bad influence on YouTube or to influence anyone badly.” (4:58 – 5:15)

When pronouncing the words ‘bad influence’ she again uses her hands as a gesture to signify quotation marks, meaning that she wants to make clear that these are not her words and that she is distancing herself from it. And, again, she avoids explaining why she would potentially be a bad influence on girls.

Video ‘I’m Not Dead’

When analyzing what Cooney is saying in this video, it becomes clear straight away that the actual content of the video is not entirely about what the title insinuated. She explains that within this video, she is going to do a Q&A. The term Q&A is a well-known abbreviation for Questions and Answers. As explained by Gee, abbreviations are often part of the social language of a certain group (Gee 2014, p. 162). In this case, this abbreviation is part of the social language of micro-celebrities when making videos in which they answer questions from their viewers. By using this term, Cooney complies with the social world and mechanisms of micro-celebrities. Remarkable is that while she is explaining the aim of her video, she sounds very enthusiastic and cheerful. She is also smiling and laughing and coming across really happy. As advised by Gee, in such a case the following question should be asked: “what sorts of attitudinal and/or affective (emotional) meaning does the intonation convey?” (Gee 2014, p. 34). When analyzing this video, it can be concluded that her intonation conveys that she is cheerful and happy. This is conflicting with the title and the thumbnail of this video that both suggest that the content is going to be serious and/or worrying (image 4).

As she starts answering the questions, she talks about topics that are not related to the title. These topics include her favorite music bands, her hair, braces, etc. Only from minute 09:30 on she starts answering a question that is related to the chosen headline ‘I’m Not Dead’. The question she starts answering is: ‘are you okay?’, and she begins by saying:

“I’m definitely okay. I know like the last like four weeks or so there has been a lot of people like freaking out in the comments. The main reason for all these

comments lately is because there's been a couple of people who are making a lot of videos about me lately. And some of them have like these super super dramatic titles like 'Eugenia Cooney died'. And I'm definitely not dead as you can see! I'm alive, I'm definitely not dead at all! *laughing*" (9:30 – 9:57)

Here, we see the same things happening as shown in the previous analysis. First of all, she states that people are “freaking out”. By doing so, she instantly dismisses all comments and she does not acknowledge that a lot of these comments are actually concerns. Moreover, she is again addressing the rumors while not explicitly mentioning what these rumors are about. This is another example of how Cooney is hiding behind her words by avoiding to talk about the cause of her transgressive body while still implicitly addressing it. This can be understood as a technique in order to keep the cause a mystery and to keep people curious. Furthermore, she again starts laughing after stating that she is not dead. She continues:

“One thing that I did want to say though is I saw that some people were also saying that I'm like a bad influence on people kind of or affecting people badly. I just really don't want people to think that like that is one thing I don't really don't want people to be saying about me or thinking about me. Because I literally would never try to badly impact anyone or to be a negative impact in any way. And I love you guys so much so I would never want to do that. I never try to say that people should look like me or to try to look like anyone other than themselves. The only thing I try to encourage people to do is to be themselves and not to feel like they have to try to be anyone else. Be yourself and be happy. Also, I'm definitely not dead. I'm alive. *laughing*" (10:21 – 11:04)

Also in this section, Cooney again avoids talking about the real issue. When taking the context into consideration, it is safe to say that people are worried that she might be triggering people with eating disorders by exposing her extremely thin, transgressive body. And even though Cooney is addressing these concerns in this video, she leaves out the part that explains why she would be a bad influence. Thus, she remains mysterious about it. Furthermore, she repeats herself by highlighting that she is not dead and again starts laughing while saying this. She ends the video by saying:

“If you enjoyed this video, make sure that you give it a thumbs up so I know you liked it. And subscribe to my YouTube videos if you want to see more videos of me!” (11:46 – 11:54)

Also in this video, she is actively asking for likes and subscribers, which means that she is well aware of the micro-celebrity mechanisms and making use of it as well. More so, this indicates that she is aiming for more economic and/or social capital.

Stylistic characteristics as a resource

Video 'There's Nothing I Can Do'



Image 9 - camera work video 'There's Nothing I Can Do'

In this video, Cooney decided to let someone else do the camera work while she is practicing sports (image 9). Of course, when doing sports it is not practical to be filming yourself and it is logical to ask someone else to do the filming for you. However, besides this practical argument, as already shown in the previous analyses of this video it seems that Cooney mainly wants to expose her transgressive body the entire time. By letting someone else film her, this aim is being accomplished. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that she added a cheerful and happy sound as background music. By doing so, a light and happy ambiance is created. This is in contrast with the controversial aspect of this video, namely the exposing of her transgressive body.

Video 'I'm Sorry'

The stylistic characteristics of this video have less to do with her transgressive body. Instead of standing, this time Cooney chose to sit in front of the camera and because of that her body is not on display (image 6). Also, no background music was used or other editing techniques to convey a certain meaning. However, there is one important symbol present in the video that needs to be highlighted: the scalp figures on her T-Shirt. The scalp symbol is very common in Cooney's videos: she has a lot of clothing with scalp figures and she is a big fan of the character Jack Skellington (a Disney character of a skeleton). She even has a life-size doll of this persona in her bedroom (see for instance videos 53, 54 and 40 in Appendix 1). The scalp and skeleton references in the videos can be interpreted as metaphors for extremely thin bodies. More so, it

symbolizes death. Given the fact that a lot of people are worried that she might die because they think that she is too skinny, the use of these symbols clearly shows how Cooney is playing with these assumptions.

Video 'I'm Not Dead'

Throughout the complete video, there is background music to be heard. The music is a joyful, childish sound that reminds of computer games such as Mario Bros. Adding this type of music was a choice Cooney made. It is in line with her behavior: cheerful and happy. Again, this is in contrast with the expectations Cooney raised by the use of the serious thumbnail and title.

Furthermore, she decided to keep a certain distance from the camera so that her transgressive body is on display (image 7). This was already mentioned in the analysis of the use of her body, but this is also part of a stylistic decision: by positioning her camera a certain way, she is able to get her entire body in the frame. As such, the use of her body and this stylistic decision are interrelated. As one person comments: "I don't want to be mean, but there's a reason all her videos are full body shots. She knows the controversy gets her views". And indeed, she is deliberately choosing to use a certain camera angle to expose her transgressive body.

[Resources in video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'](#)

As stated, in the last part of this analysis I am going to analyze the last video by looking at all resources and how they are complementing each other.

Affordances as a resource



Image 10 - title and thumbnail video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'

The YouTube affordances in this video used by Cooney that could potentially attract viewers are not only the title and the thumbnail (image 10), but also the added text that functions as a description (image 11).

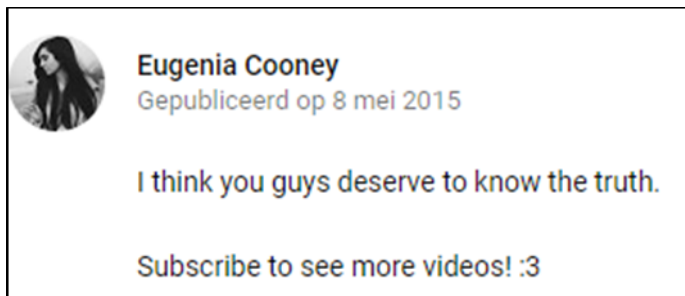


Image 11 - description of video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'

The chosen title is again suggesting that she is going to be talking about the reason for being so extremely thin. The thumbnail portrays Cooney appearing to be disturbed about something. However, this time her transgressive body is not clearly visible. Nonetheless, the way the title was chosen and the look on her face in this thumbnail gives the impression that she is going to be talking about something worrying. The additional text added as a description contributes to this expectation. She states that she is been keeping a secret and that people deserve to know the truth, and again by doing so the context of Cooney being dishonest about the cause of her transgressive body is of importance. It is reasonable to believe that because of the use of these YouTube affordances people expect her to be talking about supposed dishonesty.

body as a resource



Image 12 - body as a resource video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'

In this video, the transgressive body of Cooney is less visible compared to the other videos. Nevertheless, her body is still an important aspect of this video since she is walking around a lot. Because of this, her transgressive body is still viewable.

(Body)language as a resource

When analyzing her body language in this video it is striking to see how her facial expression changes over time. In the first 28 seconds she seems sad, while after 28 seconds onwards she seems joyful:



Image 13 - body language as a resource video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'

In order to understand why her facial expression changes, it is important to analyze what she is talking about. She starts by saying:

“Hey guys, so this is going to be kind of a really serious video. I don’t really know how to tell you guys this but I have not really been completely honest with you guys about everything...” (0:00 – 0:09)

As she is saying these things, she not only seems sad but also sounds sad. As such, she continues with raising the expectation that she is going to talk about something really serious. She even says so literally. Furthermore, she states that she hasn’t been honest. This text strengthens the assumption that she going to be talking about her supposed dishonesty regarding her transgressive body. She continues:

“A long time ago I did something that maybe a lot of you guys wouldn’t exactly expect from me, but in the moment I just felt like I had to do it. I just feel like I couldn’t control myself to be completely honest. I should tell you guys these kinds of things and be honest with you guys which is why I’m making this video...” (0:09 – 0:28)

Again, while she is saying this she looks and sounds sad. It remains unclear what she is talking about, while at the same time she is building the suspense of finally saying what she

wants to say. This can be understood as a technique to make sure people remain curious and continue watching. After 28 seconds she finally reveals what she is really talking about:

“What I’m trying to tell you guys is: a lot of you guys might be fan of the band Panic at the Disco. I’m a fan too! Only at one point in my life, I took my fandom inside of me to kind of a whole new level... That maybe some of you guys would consider ‘stalking’ but it’s really not *laughing*” (0:28 – 0:46)

From this moment on, her facial expression and intonation have changed into being cheerful and happy. And most importantly: she doesn’t meet the raised expectation by talking about something completely different than she insinuated. Instead of talking about something “really serious”, she starts talking about how she is a fan of a boyband. This is another clear example of how Cooney is tricking people into believing that she is going to talk about her transgressive body.

Stylistic characteristics as a resource

In this video, Cooney used some remarkable editing techniques that emphasize the transition from the part where she acts sad to the part where she is happy. First of all, she added a filter to the images that marks a clear shift (image 14):



Image 14 – Editing choice as a resource video 'I've Been Keeping a Secret...'

As already stated, from 0:28 onwards there is a complete shift in tone and content. The fact that she added a filter herself at this exact moment shows how she is well aware of what she is doing and that this is a deliberate choice of Cooney. Moreover, aside from the use of this filter, she also decided to change the background music at 0:28. Up until this moment, the background music is sad. After 0:28, the music changes into a cheerful sound up until the end of the video. Thus, this juxtaposition and the editing choices of Cooney are part of how she is tricking people into believing that she is going to talk about her transgressive body.

Concluding the analysis

The analysis has provided relevant insights in regards to the research question: the findings show that Cooney is indeed embracing the mechanisms of micro-celebrities by actively asking for likes and subscriptions. This indicates that with her videos she hopes to obtain economic and/or social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Additionally, by using clickbait titles and thumbnails as strategies Cooney is using techniques that could potentially increase her discoverability. These examples show that Cooney is aware of and responding to the mechanisms of YouTube as well (Bishop 2018, p. 29). Furthermore, it has become clear how Cooney discursively conveys her online identity and how her transgressive body is a salient aspect of this: in all four videos her transgressive body played an important part, whether it was explicitly by exposing it or implicitly by hinting towards it. She knows very well how to use her transgressive body in such a way that it could potentially attract a lot of views and engagement on her videos: by making sure her transgressive body is visible in the thumbnails and by the use of clickbait titles, she keeps the audience curious. First, she raises the expectations by suggesting that she would be talking about her transgressive body and as the video starts it becomes clear how she doesn't meet the expectations over and over again. As such, she keeps the cause for her transgressive body a mystery. As mentioned by Khamis et al, in order to brand yourself online it is important to have a unique selling point (2016). For Cooney, I argue that this is the mystery of the cause of her transgressive body. She uses certain discursive techniques to make sure that the cause of her transgressive body remains unknown. These techniques allow her to talk about her physical appearance while not explicitly mentioning it. For example, by using her hands and fingers to signify quotation marks she is able to talk about the possible causes of her transgressive body (e.g. having a problem) while keeping a distance from these comments and refraining from making statements on her own. Moreover, when analyzing the stylistic characteristics of her videos it became clear that she deliberately chooses to trick people into believing that she will be discussing the cause of her physical appearance. This indicates that she is well aware of what she is doing. When taking all these discursive practices into consideration, it can be concluded that Cooney is actively commodifying her transgressive body and that it is a crucial part of her online identity.

DISCUSSION

This thesis has shed new light on the discussion around micro-celebrities and provided answers to the research question, being: *How does micro-celebrity Eugenia Cooney discursively convey her online identity on the platform YouTube, and how can we understand this in the light of the notion of transgressive bodies?*

First of all, it became clear that Cooney should be understood as a subcultural micro-celebrity who is able to attract large groups of audiences by actively using her transgressive body. Even more so, her transgressive body is a salient aspect of her online identity. As explained by Senft (2013) and Khamis et al. (2016), micro-celebrities are selling their identity online by the use of a unique selling point. I argue that the unique selling point of Cooney is the mystery she creates around the cause of her transgressive body. This outcome is in contrast with the results of previous studies about micro-celebrities in which authenticity was seen as the most important currency. Cooney, on the other hand, should be seen as a micro-celebrity who is actively playing with the expectations of the viewers. As such, she is being the opposite of authentic.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown how Cooney is using her transgressive body for commercial and/or social capital. By focusing on the use of her language, it became clear that she is actively asking for more likes, subscribers and engagement. Moreover, as explained by Bishop as well (2018), Cooney strategically used several affordances of YouTube and stylistic characteristics as a technique to attract audiences. By doing so, she is responding to the high value attached to relevancy on the platform. Overall, these insights have shown how she is deliberately capitalizing her transgressive body as part of her online identity.

As such, this thesis has shown that the strategies of micro-celebrities can be deployed when developing controversial video content on YouTube: if you know how the system works, you can actively play with it. However, the question of whether Cooney is complying and responding to the mechanisms and algorithms of YouTube that promotes extreme content cannot be answered based on this research. In order to investigate whether this could be understood in the discussion of YouTube promoting extremist content, a different kind of approach is needed in which the algorithms and recommendations system of YouTube would be scrutinized based on this specific case. Nonetheless, the results have shown that not only YouTube plays a role in the promotion of extreme content: by using the affordances of

YouTube in a clever way, YouTubers themselves can make sure that their controversial content attracts large groups of audiences.

This thesis asked for an extensive, closed analysis of the videos in order to gain in-depth insights and answers. However, because of this rigorous approach, the results are difficult to generalize. For this reason, a suggestion for future research would be to investigate multiple sub-cultural micro-celebrities to discover whether there are more currencies besides authenticity and inauthenticity that are being deployed by YouTubers. This would contribute to the diversification and specification of the discussion and research on micro-celebrities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berryman, R. & Kavka, M. (2017). 'I guess a lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend': the role of intimacy in the celebrification of beauty vloggers. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 307 – 320. DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2017.1288611
- Berryman, R. & Kayka, M. (2018). Crying on YouTube: vlogs, self-exposure and the productivity of negative affect. *Convergence*, 24(1), 85 – 98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736981>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education*. (241 – 258). New York, USA: Greenwald Press.
- Bishop, S. (2018). Vlogging parlance: strategic talking in beauty vlogs. In C. Abidin & M. Brown (Eds.), *Microcelebrity around the globe* (21 – 32). New York, USA: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Bucher, T. & Helmond, A. (2017). The affordances of social media. In J. Burgess, A. Marwick, & T. Poell (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media* (233 – 253). New York, USA: SAGE Publications.
- Caron, C., Raby, R., Mitchell, C., Théwissen-LeBlanc, S., & Prioletta, J. (2018). How are civic cultures achieved through youth social-change-oriented vlogging? A multimodal case study. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17(4), 1-20. DOI: 10.1177/1354856518795094
- Cooney, E. (2016, October 14). *I'm Sorry* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFcGOHEAypM>
- De Kosnik, A. (2013). 'Fandom as Free Labor'. In Scholtz, T. (Ed), *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (13 – 23). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Eagle, W. (2019). *YouTube marketing for dummies*. New Jersey, USA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to do discourse analysis: a toolkit*. New York, USA: Routledge.

- Jerslev, A. (2016). In the time of the microcelebrity: celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella. *International Journal of Communication*, 10(2016), 5233 – 5251. DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2015.1095644
- Kelley, D. (2016, October 26). Should this severely anorexic woman be banned from vlogging? *Yahoo*. Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/should-this-severely-anorexic-woman-be-banned-from-vlogging-180237727.html>
- Khamis, S. , Ang, L., & Weiling, B. (2016). Self-branding, ‘micro-celebrity’ and the rise of Social Media Influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191-208. DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292
- Marwick, A. (2014). *Status update: celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. New Haven, USA: Yale University Press.
- Marwick, A. & boyd, d. (2011). ‘I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience’. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313>
- O’Halloran, K. L. (2012) Multimodal discourse analysis. In *Discourse analysis: an introduction* (120 – 137). London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- O’Callaghan, D., Greene, D. & Conway, M. (2015). Down the (white) rabbit hole: the extreme right and online recommender systems. *Social Science Computer Review*, 33(4), 459 – 478. DOI: 10.1177/0894439314555329
- Pace, S. (2008). YouTube: an opportunity for consumer narrative analysis? *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 11(2), 213 - 226. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750810864459>
- Paolillo, J.C. (2018). The flat earth phenomenon on YouTube. *First Monday*, 23(12). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v23i12.8251>
- Raun, T. (2018). Capitalizing intimacy: new subcultural forms of micro-celebrity strategies and

affective labour on YouTube. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 24(1), 99 – 113. DOI: 10.1177/1354856517736983

Richardson, N. (2010). The “freak” body: nature versus culture? In *Transgressive bodies: Representations in film and popular culture* (1 – 22). Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate.

Senft, T. M. (2013). Microcelebrity and the branded self. In J. Hartley, J. Burgess & A. Bruns (Eds), *A companion to new media dynamics* (346 – 354). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Tufekci, Z. (2018, March 10). YouTube, the great radicalizer. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html>

Zannettou, S., Chatzis, S., Papadamou, K. & Sirivianos, M. (2018, May 24). *The good, the bad and the bait: detecting and characterizing clickbait on YouTube*. Paper presented at the IEEE symposium on Security and Privacy Workshops. DOI: [10.1109/SPW.2018.00018](https://doi.org/10.1109/SPW.2018.00018)

Corpus:

Cooney, E. (2016, October 14). *I'm Sorry* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFcGOHEAypM>

Cooney, E. (2016, September 22). *I'm Not Dead* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFcGjW6Bwjs>

Cooney, E. (2015, May 8). *I've Been Keeping a Secret...* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nEmBTyYNNc&t=28s>

Cooney, E. (2018, August 17). *There's Nothing I Can Do* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsCfy__TZ-g