More than a single (digital) story: Restorative practice in a climate of digital transgression

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ABSTRACT

Michael Silverblatt of the Los Angeles Times first coined the term transgressive story-telling in 1993 to describe a particular tendency to deliberately include unpleasant content, 'taboo sex, violence, and drug use' in stories solely to provoke the reader. Rather than acts of provocation, here we are interested in the ways that digital story telling enables the production of 'transgressive voice'. Our immediate context entails young people's online activities within Internet sites – both overt and covert - that deliberate upon, foster or celebrate anorexia nervosa (Pro-Ana), bulimia nervosa (Pro-Mia) and other eating disorders, particularly in young women. Pro-Ana websites maintains a narrative and story-telling discourse that actively resists the dominant cultural norms regarding 'healthy' eating. Among mainstream clinicians, both anorexia and bulimia nervosa are regarded as a serious physical and mental disturbance. This is not, though, the narrative voice that emerges from these digital media: Pro-Ana is a lifestyle choice, Pro-Ana is empowerment, Pro-Anna is self-determination and control, Pro-Ana is an act of sculpted beauty. Our research uses online ethnography to garner the storytellers' personal experiences, with each participant following a plot pattern that represents their emotional journey through growth and change (regardless of how their experiences are arranged). Our primary educational purpose is to share these storytellers' personal experiences in ways that relate, can be learned from, and expand what we know about human nature. Because it pre-dates therapeutic traditions, a narrative approach opens up the possibility of creating a common language to understand distress and troubling behaviour, one that allows us to draw on the insights of these different orientations. We will suggest that adopting a restorative approach, introducing the *Power, Threat, Meaning Framework* (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) provides an insight into these transgressive narratives and offers new opportunities for engagement and intervention that are not available from existing models.

Key Words:

Digital storytelling; transgression; identity; restorative practice; eating disorders

INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric around digital technology seems to be perpetually caught in a dichotomy of optimism and panic. Educators eagerly search out new and exciting ways to capture its potential for teaching and learning in school – as a vessel of creativity and agency - whilst others point to its capacity for expressing hate, sexual deviance and forms of self-harm, calling for greater forms of control. The latter is particularly compelling since *'the Internet presents some unique opportunities for deviant behaviour'* (Rogers, Smoak, & Liu, 2006, p. 246) and such anxieties are often fuelled by reference to high profile tragedies – Amanda Todd, Hannah Smith and, most recently, Molly Russell – young people who took their own lives whilst encouraged to do so by anonymous online users (Phillips, 2015). For us, such oppositional rhetoric is problematic because it sets up a false dichotomy; rather than asking 'what can technology do *for* our children' or agonising about 'what technology is doing *to* our children', we prefer to ask the question 'what are our children doing *with* technology' particularly if some of those things are difficult and uncomfortable.

In this paper we explore three distinct interests: (i) the nature of transgression, (ii) modes of narrative and (digital) storytelling, along with (iii) an educative (Restorative) ethos - and these three coalesce here in the form of 'transgressive digital storytelling'. We begin here by delineating some of the terms we use – like many expressions in social sciences research - they can be slippery and often difficult to pin down. First, we are interested in transgressive people rather than some broader abstracted sense of transgression. In this respect, we see transgression as both a personal disposition (for example, a persons' beliefs, identity, knowledge and emotions) as well as indicative of his or her relationship with culture and society (for example, norms, conventions, structures, policy and language). This intimate coupling of the personal and the social means that transgressive people and their transgressive actions are not fixed qualities but shift and change with time and context: people might be highly transgressive in some quarters of their lives but firmly orthodox and conventional in others. People construct and reconstruct their transgressions in different climates and contexts, giving rise to our sense of dialogical `ecological' transgression. Transgression is not then, in our view, a variable quantity (person A being more – or less – transgressive than person B) nor a fixed quality they possess ('A has always been transgressive in everything s(he) does'). As such, it is an interactive phenomenon, something that emerges and is enacted within (and against) continually shifting boundaries over time, something people do at certain points in life within certain situations and circumstances. We argue that this coupling is intimate: society creates the conditions for people to be transgressive, and transgressive people use social structures in order to be transgressive.

Second, we enjoy narratives in numerous forms, and see these as multi-layered and complex. For certain, there is more than one story to be told of any one particular setting or circumstance. When people tell a story, they give 'narrative form' to experience, and so stories provide windows onto (i) their individual experience of events, their feelings and how they confer their subjective meaning onto these

experiences, and (ii) how their story relates to wider circumstances and identifiable contexts, the 'so what' of the story. In his classical work, Bruner (1991) stood narratives in clear opposition to 'logico scientific' modes of ordering and the 'making sense' of experiences – with 'narrative knowing' centring around particularities and the specificity of what occurred, along with the involvement (and accountability / responsibility) of other people in bringing about these events. And, as in all matters of the 'web', stories, narratives, discussion and debate cross all international lines – there can be no national jurisdiction to such issues. Our purpose is to explore and illuminate the phenomenon of young people's cyber-social choices and acts of identity creation, rather than a detailed structuralised analysis of their overt behaviour. The immediate context of our research entails research of Digital Spaces – both overt and covert - that appear to deliberate upon, foster or celebrate anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, particularly in young women. The underground internet movement of the 'Ana Girls' (Uca, 2004) and so called 'Pro-Ana' (Pro Anorexia) online forums are seen as controversial – transgressive - cross-border spaces that endorse eating 'disorders' as a legitimate lifestyle choice (Crowe & Watts, 2014).

Third, we are also interested in asking 'educative questions' (Biesta, 2013) of forms of popular culture, and as a focus for wider discussion we offer illustrative quotes and field-note entries from the ethnographic data collected online to help address these questions. Our sense is that leaving the materiality of 'Ana' bodies sparsely documented and unexplained is a major source of educational concern and, in line with John Morgan, consultant psychiatrist and chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists's eating disorder section; we recognise raising awareness carries risks, but remains imperative. To research 'MiAnic' behaviour is to unpick and make sense of the complex relationship between anorexia, identity (or more correctly 'personhood') and the body. It is the tension between these three factors that makes it both interesting and simultaneously complex for us as educators.

The data we cite in this paper is taken from a 5-year ethnographic study of the MiAnic community. We offer both field notes and short extracts from online interactions, to illustrate the creative ways in which the girls tell stories about their MiAnic experiences. The piece focuses on three of our participants – 'Jazz' 'Hunger Hurts' and Runic Heart – who were aged between 16-18 at the time. The interactions cited were all collected online over a period of many months with each participant following a plot pattern that represents their emotional journey through growth and change (regardless of how their experiences are arranged). Our primary educational purpose here is to share these storytellers' personal experiences in ways that relate, can be learned from, and expand what we know about human nature.

MiAnic websites and stories

As a self-declared community (Burke, 2009) Pro-Ana websites maintain a discourse that actively resists the dominant cultural norms regarding 'healthy' eating

in favour of alternate (arguably resistive) expressions of the body – a position for which they are often vilified and denied a digital voice. Pro-Ana/Pro Mia expressions differ widely in their stances. Most claim they are principally an accessible non-judgmental 'space' for anorexics / bulimics, a place to discuss the illness, and to support those young women who choose to enter recovery. Others reject connotations of mental illness and maintain it is a 'lifestyle choice' to be respected by doctors and family. Recent reviews (for example, Norris et al. 2006; Perdaens & Pieters, 2011; Rouleau & Ranson, 2011) have explored the themes in these websites and discuss, for example, the prevalence of lifestyle descriptions and, commonly, 'thinspirational' photo galleries and quotes that aim to serve as motivators for weight loss.

Our research (see for example, Crowe & Watts, 2014) explores Pro-Ana advocates and considers the ways that their digital stories run counter to accounts articulated through wider social norms of what it means to be informed and knowledgeable, in control', 'self-disciplined', healthy and beautiful (and conversely ill-informed, out-of-control, 'unhealthy' and not beautiful). For example, two of our respondents, RunicHeart and HungerHurts, describe their choices as follows:

> *"Being Ana is about being thin and looking pretty. Like any athlete we control our food… and this helps us sculpt our body to be the shape that we want. Beautiful!"* – Runic Heart

> *"Those who are the strongest are those who can refuse to eat… that is strength and self-discipline at its best, like a meditation. Like art, they create beauty. Being thin makes us happy, Fat Girls are weak and don't deserve Happiness"* – Hunger Hurts

There are two prevailing orthodoxies that: (i) young anorexic or bulimic women are taken by a physical illness (PwC, 2015), and (ii) anorexia and bulimia can be described as a mental disorder (for example, PwC, 2015) that '*distorts [young women's] thinking and ability to judge*' (p. 4). We argue that the 'stories' offered by the girls indicate otherwise; that the proponents of 'Pro-Ana' websites, for example, are well informed on medical and health issues, they design the websites for those who most need the reassurance of talking to others who have been in similar situations, who can provide emotional and social support. In this instance, the websites are examples of these young women's ecological transgression, the use of social systems to rail against social systems. Pro-Ana / Bulimia stories cover a multitude of (sometimes) conflicting positional accounts, they are multiple and multi-layered stories. The girls have a complex relationship with MiAna – seeing it as an aspect of the feminine – being a (beautiful) woman – a comforter (the much-cited examples of a 'big sister' or 'Saint Ana'), often as a friend and occasionally as an illness or an enemy. For many it is about control: of what they eat, how a body 'should' look in terms of health and/or beauty, what it means to have personal agency *('I control my food, because that is all I can control for now, but I also don't see that I can't do what I want with my body'* – Jazz), and how they exercise their resistive, transgressive tendencies. In her extended conversations with one of us

(NC) Jazz 'stories' her ecological transgression as a *'glorious secret'*:

> *"MiAna is like a glorious secret you know. I don't want my parents or teachers knowing what I am doing, 'cos Ana isn't for them, she is here for us, like my blog is here to help and inspire my sisters. We can't be in the open because people don't understand – don't want to understand - Ana. They see her as something to be feared and try to close us down. Only an Ana girl understands another Ana girl and she is only safe on here and places like this… Of course I don't want to live my life in the shadows….but what choice do we have?"* – Jazz

Jazz's point is well made. Her assertion that the shadows of digital space offer a security not possible in the material world is the key to understanding the MiAna movement. The Internet has enabled the unprecedented option of interacting in a both an actual and perceived anonymous environment, and online sites allow young people to construct and rehearse a range of identities (Dowdall, 2009). The increase of web 2.0 tools, as well as growing online environments such as games and virtual worlds have magnified identification with online personae and identities. Indeed, they are designed to ease the use of the Internet and make it more personal. Negative online behaviour is diverse in the form it takes and spreads into several different actions such as online crime, piracy, hacking, production of computer viruses and trolling, all of which are all done under the cloak of the anonymous Internet. Yet as Joinson wryly notes, *"people have always lied, cheated, and stolen, but the Internet enables some of them to do it more easily, quickly, and cheaply."* (2005, p. 5). In this respect, people who operate under the assumption of anonymity have revealed an array of behaviours and tendencies that differ considerably from offline actions. The creation of a virtual, online, self reflects a range of discourse constructions that occur both within and outside of virtual space. We argue then, that Anorexia is not simply something that society 'does' to these young women, they are active participants who shape and influence how they (and we) conceive of anorexia/bulimia - this is the 'Pro' in Pro Ana – so MiAnic transgression is neither solely a product of a socially declaimed 'eating disorder' nor an act of personal agency.

Ecological transgression and an Educative ethos

Very little of life is engaged with formal educational systems: Falk and Dierking (2007) put this at just 15%, meaning that some 85% of a person's educational activity is 'post formal' (non-formal, informal) and takes place in everyday life outside of formal educational structures. One part of post-formal awareness is an understanding of the diversity that exists in the world. This leads to an appreciation that there may be (will be) multiple views over certain topics, and our own is just one of these. A second part is the recognition of paradoxes: what is seen to be right in one particular context may be wrong in another. Over time we come to realise that life is full of contradictions. Our

approach to education should be seen in this non-formal light. While we understand and appreciate society's need for general 'public health education', we can be critical of both the pedagogical 'medium' and 'message'. We side with Biesta (2013), who describes a 'pedagogy for the people' by saying,

> *'the main pedagogical 'mode' in this interpretation is that of instruction. In this conception of public pedagogy, the world is seen as a giant school and the main role of educational agents is to instruct the citizenry. This involves telling them what to think, how to act and, perhaps most importantly, what to be'* (p.691).

Unsurprisingly, the pedagogical framework that has overwhelmingly 'defined' MiAnic stories has been Medicine. Here Anorexic and Bulimic behaviours have been seen as a 'condition' to be 'cured' rather than a personal narrative to be explored and understood. The term anorexia nervosa originates from the Greek *an* (the prefix denoting negation) and *orexis* (appetite) thus signifying a resistance to eating (Moot & Lumsden, 1994) and highlighting the dieting behaviours that are usually considered to characterise the 'condition' (Dias, 2003). Yet, listening to the girl's stories, we see that to be MiAna requires a reconfiguration of what it *means* to be 'suffering' from Anorexia; a rational and informed representation of the healthy body rather than a condition that requires 'recovery'. So, for example, notice how earlier, Hunger Hurts adopts a positivistic approach to her fasting; it requires strength and self-discipline akin to that required by an acolyte (her comparison between not eating and meditation) or artist; Ana is an aspirational and legitimate expression whilst being 'fat' is simply weak. Similarly, Runic Heart subverts a discourse of both Health (her description of herself as an *'athlete'*) and Art (her use of the word *'sculpt'*) thus here again Ana makes demands on her followers that extend far beyond the domesticity of the everyday (the domain of the Fat Girls).

Under such circumstances, how might we conceive an appropriate education-based intervention? The Power, Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone et al., 2018) has recently been proposed as a legitimate alternative to psychiatric diagnosis, a rejection of the medical model currently employed to manage distress and troubling behaviours such as MiAna. Unlike clinical-based pedagogy, it emphasises the importance of individual narrative, thoughts, feelings and behaviours. The framework also considers ideas around how we experience power, the treats this might pose, the sense we make of experiences and situations and the subsequent scripts we learn to manage these *"patterns of embodied, meaning-based threat responses to the negative operation of power"* (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Because it pre-dates therapeutic traditions, a narrative approach opens up the possibility of creating a common language to understand distress and troubling behaviour, one that allows us to draw on the insights of these different orientations (Goncalves & Stiles, 2011). Whereas a clinical intervention uses narratives in order to 'diagnose', 'treat' and decide what's best for people, this approach uses narratives as the foundation on which professionals, firstly seek to understand and then enable individuals find their own solutions and ways forward.

Restorative responses to transgression

Such ideas are of course not new. Restorative Practice has a rich tradition and heritage spanning many years and, drawing on similar principles, has been widely utilised successfully in relation to other sites of transgression most commonly the criminal justice arena and more recently to tackle challenges such as bullying in schools. Restorative approaches seek to offer alternative responses to traditional (and arguably more popular) retributive positions. Zehr (2005) suggests some rudimentary suppositions occur when we label something as transgressive which in turn, we suggest, shapes societies view on what 'justice' looks like:

> "*We assume that 1. Guilt must be fixed. 2. The guilty must get their 'just deserts'. 3. Just deserts require the infliction of pain.4. The process measures Justice. 5. The breaking of the law defines the offence.*" (Zehr, 2005, p.65).

Although Zehr refers to justice, the law and offences here, we suggest that this model can be more broadly applied, for example instead of law, societal 'norms' and instead of offence, transgression or transgressive behaviours. This punitive approach has become our default, 'traditional' response to conflict or transgression and can be clearly seen in societal institutions and structures from the law and schools to medicine, families and communities. Retributive responses are primarily concerned with guilt, and seek to punish the 'wrongdoer' in order to deter them from repeating the behaviour and, more importantly, prevent others from carrying out that behaviour. This model is particularly pertinent in the case of troubling digital messages, where the overwhelming strategy to 'deal with' (what Zehr refers to as 'justice') such things has been to control and remove. The extent of the punishment is generally determined by a third, unaffected party; in the case of the criminal justice system a set of standardised sentencing laws designed to be 'proportionate' to the crime caused, but in a digital environment, whilst this is sometimes a regulator, it is more usually left to the hosting parties or platforms where there is considerable fluidity of guiding frameworks and against whom there is virtually no right of appeal. In a nutshell a retributive approach responds to harm (or a perception of harm) with harm. We argue that this offers little more than a 'sticking plaster' approach; it does not address – or seek to understand – the underlying motivations of the participants, rather, it removes the immediate 'problem' only to see it resurfaced elsewhere. Phillips (2011), Wall & Williams (2007) for example, note how trolls move across different digital platforms creating multiple accounts to evade detection. This echoes with our own experience of Pro-Ana advocates; we first met our participants on an online gaming platform where they had arranged to meet regularly following the removal of their websites and blogs by Google.

This is perhaps not surprising. Affect Script Psychology (Tomkins 1966) suggests that we all begin life hard wired with an innate set of responses (or 'affects') to external stimuli. These are either positive or negative in nature and exist to give us information about what is going on around us. We are intrinsically motivated to maximise positive affect and minimise negative affect, therefore when we are able to successfully manage

this mix, we are generally happy, and our emotional wellbeing is good. Affects turn to feelings when we become consciously aware of the affect, and they form part of our internal motivational system. These feelings in turn lead to emotions and, working in conjunction with our cognitive system or thoughts that "*gives direction and meaning to our feelings*" (Kelly & Thorsborne, 2014, p32), then lead to the formation of 'scripts' (patterns of behaviour) and ultimately our personalities. Human affect and emotion are distinctive because of their immediate entanglement with this very particular human capacity for making meaning (Wetherall, 2014). Negative affects (for example shame or anger) compel us to seek out ways to restore positive affect; something for which retributive responses offer little or no opportunity. If we continue to feel bad about what happened and what we have done it can begin to become part of our identity, we can begin to become defined by what happened. Depending on its intensity, the emotion of shame unmanaged can lead to damaging behaviours as outlined by Nathanson (1992) in his Compass of Shame. Without a way out, these become part of identity and if a person starts to feel that they are inherently bad it may lead to new 'scripts' being formed. So, rather than preventing a reoccurrence of the behaviour it is possible the very opposite can occur.

Let us illustrate this with an extract from our research:

> *Runic Heart brings out a small, neat canvas bag. "The tools of my trade" she laughs, as she spills its contents onto the desk in front of her computer. "A girl 'aint nothing if she can't beat down" She pauses (for dramatic effect) but has clearly noticed the puzzled look on my face, so feels the need to elaborate further. "Beat down! Looking good! Perfect makeup!" I know from old that she is quickly frustrated when she needs to explain herself. "Ana girls have to look good! If you can't beat face, then no one is gonna see the beauty in your body – they're just goin' ta label you as an ED[1] and then all your effort has just gone to shit because you just enter the same cycle of doctors, counsellors, ass-pain, and who is going to keep up the fight if I am not here. You may as well be a Fat Girl as ED and have an easy life but look like shit! She sips her sweetened water grumpily, obviously exasperated that I am not following her logic. She looks straight at the web-cam, her wide eyes bear down on me as she asks sarcastically "Know why Nic?" I shake my head and hopes she sees through the lagging connection. "Cos to be Ana you can't look Ana". – Edited Field Diary*

Notice here how Runic Heart reveals the lengths she is required to go to in order to hide her MiAnic identity from public gaze (echoing the need for secrecy that Jazz spoke about earlier). Although the act of ProAna has a very public dimension – the need to advocate for a particular body image – it simultaneously requires careful management to prevent the (retributive) labelling of '*ED*' – which itself carries sanctions which are both symbolic (entering the realm of the '*fat girls*') and real (fear of medical intervention). It is better to be MiAnic in secret, than publicly identified as such, only then can the act of transgression be maintained.

[1]ED: often used slang for someone with an 'Eating Disorder' as distinct from MiAna

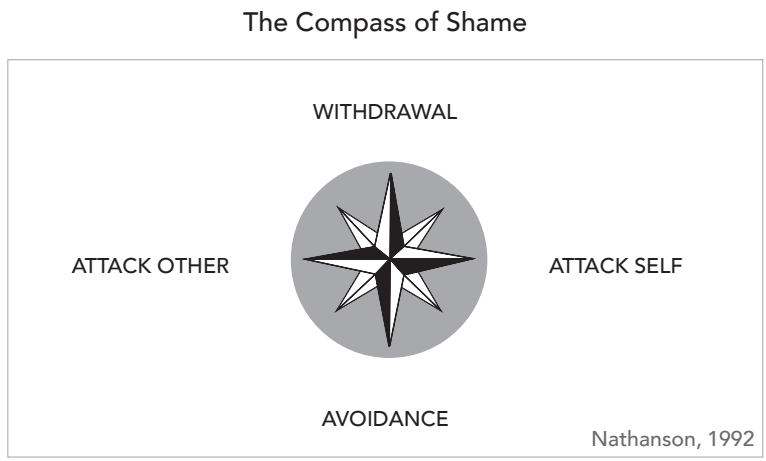

Figure 1: Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of the Self (Nathanson, 1992)

Nathanson (1992) builds on the work of Tomkins and argues that when our joy and interests are interrupted, we retreat into negative affect (a state that he refers to as 'shame' as this is the first of the negative affects). His Compass of Shame model (see Figure 1) details a library of four maladaptive scripts that might be activated as a means of restoring the disruption. Runic Heart is clearly in 'Avoidance' – she deals with her patterns of digital transgression by disguising it in material space – however other girls take a more pro-active position – 'Attack Other – as can be seen by Jazz in her posting following a counselling session:

> *I guess it is down to me if they think I am "recovering". Yeah, I pretended that I accepted my body, that food didn't scare the shit outa me – I even gained a fucking ton of weight to prove my point. Look at me! They were lies though, but at the time a small part of me believed it when I was telling them, that I was recovering. But you know what? In here I fucking know better, cos you – nobody – fucking recovers. And I don't fucking want to recover. I don't. I want to be more than that. You get it? To be ANA you can't just not eat, Ana demands more than that".*

Sometimes the intensity and enduring nature of the emotions of negative affect can result in the individual becoming 'stuck' in maladaptive responses and learning 'scripts' that are damaging to both themselves and others. Understanding what presents on the outside - become verbally or physically aggressive as we see here with Jazz - are not necessarily indications that people are not willing or able to take responsibility for their transgressive practices, merely that they might require some help and support to return to positive affect. As Rosenberg reminds us "*every violent action is a tragic expression of unmet need*" (2003, p.56) – in the case of MiAna digital expressions of the need to be recognised, the need for community, the need for control over one's life or body –and, we argue, it is only through a restorative dialogue that we can begin to explore how such needs might be addressed.

Digital Stories as Reflections.

Using a restorative lens, we argue that transgression should be seen as "*a violation of people and relationships. It creates obligations to make things right. Justice involves the victim, the offender and the community in a search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation, and reassurance.*" (Zehr 2005, p.185). 'Justice' for MiAnic practitioners is not about 'curing' their transgressive practices or shutting off their message(s) because we find them uncomfortable, rather it is something in which relationships need to be repaired as a primary focus (as opposed to guilt and blame being the driving forces). In terms of wellbeing this approach makes most sense as it puts those most affected by the challenging behaviour at the very centre of the process. The restorative approach, whilst acknowledging what has happened has its sights firmly set on the future, on understanding and mutual resolution. Rather than closing down their websites, forums and blogs – as advocated by those seeking retributive control - we argue that we should open up dialogue and see such spaces as a means by which they can digitally tell their stories and explore ways to restore positive affect; "*it is our shared biology that makes restorative practice possible and affective*" (Kelly & Thorsborne, 2014, p.35).

This ethos is particularly pertinent to those trying to work educationally in digital spaces. Wachtel and McCold (2003) in their Social Discipline Window (see Figure 2) outline the conditions required for a restorative approach. Tangney and Dearing (2002) in their research relating to parental discipline found shame-proneness in children was associated with either a lack of parental discipline or harsh parenting, parental put-downs and parentification which relate directly to the NOT, TO and FOR quadrants, suggesting therefore that positive effects are more likely to develop in the WITH quadrant.

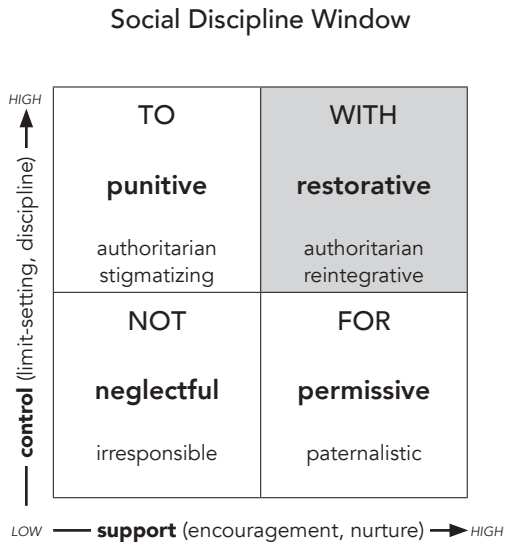

Figure 2: Watchtel and McCold (2003) Social Discipline Window

We can see how Jazz expresses a similar position in the quote below.

> *Sometimes I get sick of all the shit. People tell us that we are 'fucked up', that all this isn't worth it. I even got told the other day that I was evil* (laughs). *I can handle all that – I am used to it. But what gets me down isn't that the people who spit this stuff don't understand us, it's that they don't want to understand us. But that's because they don't know us – don't bother to see what we are really about. How are you going to understand girls like me, if you don't bother in the first place?*

Evans and Vaandering (2016) suggest some further illuminations to the Social Discipline Window that are worth consideration: *To*; people are seen as objects to be managed, *Not*; People are objects to be ignored, *For*; people as objects of need, *With*; people as subjects to be honoured. Jazz (like all the girls in this piece) speaks of her experience of the 'to' position. Her anger is directed at professionals who see her as an 'object' to be 'managed' or 'cured', a position within which she remains trapped (or as she says, 'misunderstood'). We can theorise her Pro-Ana activities as an attempt to relocate herself as a subject to be honoured. Kelly and Thorsborne (2014) point to how such narratives can be located within Watchel and McCold's model; in the 'To' box only the 'adult' voice is heard (in this case the 'voice' of the medical professional); in the 'Not' box there is no 'adult' voice (becoming 'Not Ana' like Runic Heart); in the 'For' box, only the child's voice is heard (or as Jazz shows us, misheard); and in the 'With' box, all voices are heard and the connection and reconnection are at the heart of problem solving (the state of equilibrium hinted at by the PTM Framework we considered earlier). As Jazz reminds us, listening to the girl's digital stories, provides a unique opportunity to work *with* their transgressive voice, to understand where they are coming from in a non-judgemental way, and to then explore how best to move forward.

Our research has been influenced by the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin (the legitimacy of transgressive space) and Giles Deleuze (the idea that pro-ana is a desire rather than a belief). The latter is particularly important to the discussion here because for Deleuze (1997), desire forms an element of analysis: it requires us to recognise that the Ana girls occupy the light and the dark simultaneously. Their digital stories ask us to consider why the girls might 'want' to embrace the identity – given the extremities of its practice – and whether such a desire can be socially acceptable (the transgressive dimension). As we noted earlier, Anorexia is not simple something that is 'done' to them, they are active participants who shape and influence how we conceive of anorexia/bulimia; MiAnic identity is neither solely a product of an 'eating disorder' nor an act of personal agency.

MiAnic digital stories require that we listen to (and make sense of) the desires of its practitioners. This is of course not a new aspect of social research, but Pro-Ana is arguably the first example of these debates extending to, and being expressed collectively by, the practitioners themselves (Burke, 2009). Pro-Ana websites therefore offer opportunities to observe the ways that young women make sense of their own

transgressive experiences, specifically '*struggles over where and how {young} women's stories of their body can be told'* (Dias, 2003, p.31). Our role as educational researchers is to *'actively engage with people in online spaces in order to write the story of their situated context, informed by social interaction'* (Crichton & Kinash, 2003, p. 2)

Importantly Morrow (2005) reminds us that young people are seldom active in the research process – it is often something done to them. If we are to respond to their personal narratives, it is important that we engage in methods that facilitate a sense of dialogue. Frustratingly much anorexia/bulimia research has concentrated on what the participants do in digital space rather than offering them any sense of personal voice. We argue that the strength of a restorative approach is that it allows participants to speak freely about their views and feelings towards their MiAna activities. The words presented are best left to tell their own story, in all its splendid complexity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

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