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**“What i see when my eyes fall out”: anticipations, intensifications, immediacies, and transitions of identity construction, affect design, and movement building in digital spaces**

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**“What I see when my eyes fall out”: anticipations, intensifications, immediacies, and transitions of identity construction, affect design, and movement building in digital spaces.**

A thesis presented for partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts

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July, 2020

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## Abstract

This thesis project explores how social media intervenes in and co-constructs spaces, affects, communities, and identities. I demonstrate how autobiography through social media constrains, expands, automates, normalizes, and surveils us as we write, post, and share ourselves into a profoundly communal existence. I argue that social media guides our experiences and understandings of gender, race, class, and (dis)ability. By incorporating queer theory, feminist autobiography, disability justice, and narrative therapy frameworks, I recall how I have storied my life and how my life has been storied for me online over the past 20 years to curate a *mad auto ethnography* of social media profiles. This thesis brings together multiple interdisciplinary theoretical fields and works within emergent methodologies rooted in (dis)ability justice and madness liberation to give a surrealist sense of space and emotion reflected in both the mania of insanity and the rush of social media experience. By doing so, I demonstrate and reveal how social media impacts identities and communities via new sensations characterized by anticipation, intensification, immediacy, and transition.

**Content and trigger warnings:** descriptions of mental illness, suicidal ideation, police violence, state surveillance, hospitalization, racial violence, gender violence, and other forms of discrimination and marginalization.

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## Chapter 1: *anticipations*

The resident was a reclusive artist of some modest fame in a previous Chicago. He often expressed his affective state in poems and sketches. As his social worker, I was tasked with regular check-ins that often consisted of completing State mandated wellness and symptom assessments for audits and Medicaid funding at this low-income rehabilitation nursing home. After a few weeks of building rapport with this resident, around the time I was to complete my first formal assessment with him, he let me see some of his sketches and poetry. This was in response to me asking how he had been doing lately, and he said, “The doctors would say I am feeling very schizophrenic.” I asked what *he* meant by that—“what does schizophrenia feel like for you?”—and he showed me a sketch he made earlier that day. It was on white printer paper, drawn with a grey ballpoint pen of a face shaped like an egg: the nose was a round circle over an inverted triangle, and the mouth was agape, filled in with ink, stretching from the edges of the face. Two eyes on the face held pupils that were upside-down towards his crown; lids closer to chin than brow and set parallel to the ridge of his nose. The most shocking aspect of this self-portrait was that three additional eyes were falling out of both sides of his head, all attached to the eyes with inverted pupils. He told me, “Schizophrenia is what I see when my eyes fall out.”

“Ultimately...with all creative work, you, like all artists, want to alter, however slightly, the way you look at the world. You want to change the reader’s sense of what the world is like” (Anzaldúa, 2015). I am writing this from the positionality of a white, middle-class, US citizen, who is queer, mentally ill/mad, non-cis, and relatively able bodied. As a professional social worker and millennial, I have been keen to learn more about how social work praxis and care

work models of interacting with illness and (dis)ability<sup>1</sup> might be applied to our digital realms. What are the differences between being mentally ill in person and on Facebook? How does symptom disclosure differ between mediums? What are the therapeutic potentials and challenges of these emerging digital topographies? How do techno-cultural landscapes design race, class, gender, and (dis)ability in alignment with Nation-State normalizations of emotion? And how might storying our lives look different from traditional autobiography to digital postings and shares? These questions will guide the intentions of this project. I hope to impact care workers' understanding of social media, people with mental illnesses' (PWMI) reflexive perception of self, academic perceptions of autobiographical theory, madness advocacy, digital humanities' approaches to affect theory, as well as provide myself a space to explore how I personally engage with my own mental illnesses and identity more generally on digital platforms.

Taking inspiration from the abovementioned resident's vulnerable portrayal of self, this thesis will question how mainstream conceptions of mental health, illness, wellness, and madness are constructed and construed through social media platforms.<sup>2</sup> This thesis explores how social norms are formed around nexuses of wellness, how various diagnostics are embedded into cultural readings of society – what gendered, classed, and racialized assumptions are made in the process of defining madness – and how neoliberal political power paradigms influence the construction of mental illness (MI). I explore how PWMI auto-biography (used as a verb) our lives on social media in ways that reflect, challenge, and disidentify with mental health (MH) hegemonies. I believe that those of us who live with MI cannot separate the symptoms from their

<sup>1</sup> I will be presenting this word as such, (dis)ability, inspired by Sami Schalk's (2018) approach, which references the porous relationships and boundaries between disability and ability. I will also use this writing approach for "(in)sane"/"(in)sanity" etc.

<sup>2</sup> "Social media refers to multiple technologies that include computer-based communities and environments along with their corresponding modes of expression, documentation, and communication. Social media are not solely defined by their components (networking websites, blogs, podcasts, wikis, etc.) but also by their cumulative effects on the dynamics of information processing and human relationships..." (Belkofer, 2011)

societal framings, nor our “disordered” predispositions from how we, and others, come into awareness of them. Our sense of being mentally ill is negotiated, revealed, moderated, challenged, restricted, expanded in ways that reflect, reject, and re-imagine the already established determinations of wellness on social networking sites (SNS) as well as in real life (IRL).

A theory of digital interpellation and madness will result from an auto ethnographic exploration of my own experiences of autobiography-online. If my sense of being an individual is the result of something prior to “it”, as Foucault (2003) argues, then I want to understand what that *something* is. For me, for my generation at large and the ones after me, that is social media. Does social media exist prior to the individual? Communities and ideologies always exist prior to the individual. I will share anecdotal formations of my adolescent sexuality and gender in relation to early chat apps, the recognition of my mental illnesses through blogs and proto-profiles, the understanding of my race through community social media like Facebook and Tumblr, and more aspects of my identity throughout. This will entail an exploration of the rise (and often fall) of various social media platforms and companies, as well as how their structures designed new techno-cultures, developed emergent affects, curated and capitalized off progressive social movements, and automated identity formation processes.

***Theoretical framings: Cascading sight– A Queerleidoscopic Mad-tryoshka***

In honoring the sketch of the resident described in my introduction, I consider my theoretical approach (as written in the title to this section) as a cascading series of multitanuous, differential sight: a queer, kaleidoscopic vision that is fragmentally nested (like the Matryoshka dolls) in an imaginative expansion of the (in)sane. (This metaphor is apt for our digital encounters as well, considering how algorithms function as multitanuous yet fragmentary). I will

draw primarily from seven theoretical fields to guide these discussions: post-structural theory, queer theory, critical (dis)ability studies, Black feminist and feminist autobiographical theory, digital humanities and geographies, critical race theory, and narrative therapy theories. There is a lot going on in the sight, mind, and emotions of the (in)sane person, and the discursive conversation between these theoretical traditions will help track how the infinitely diverse capacities and (in)sanities of PWMI are contracted within social media settings; this thesis is, even in the articulation of theory, a process in mania. Social media itself is a sensation of mania: the unlimited overflow of information; this thesis hopes to reflect the scrolling through infinity.

The above mentioned theoretical disciplines will be utilized as follows. Post-structural theory (Puar, 2012, 2017; Foucault, 2003) is used to deconstruct and analyze the elements of power that structure discourse, place, identity, and community; queer theory (Ahmed, 2004; Esteban Muñoz, 1999) will reveal the creation and subsequent subjugation of the subject as constructed in digital media power-apparatuses, and the sexual potentials & queer longings in contention with automations of neoliberalism; critical (dis)ability studies & madness studies (Ben-Moshe, 2014; Cvetovich, 2012; Foucault, 2003; Kafer, 2013) informs my critiques of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) & their Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-V, currently in its 5th edition), ableism and saneism more generally, and how illusions of “normalcy” & “authenticity” manifest through exclusion, inaccessibility, surveillance, and control; Black feminist theory & narrative feminist theories (Smith, 1987; Connell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Hall, 1990; Pickens, 2019; Schalk, 2018) contribute significantly to my readings & performances of autobiography as a gendering and racializing project, as well as how automation intensifies and complicates gendering and sexualizing processes of adolescence, while informing my readings of the racialization of digital spaces and an intersectional analysis

of whiteness as programmed into to the very architecture of the internet that is prescribed as “wellness” “normal” and “sane”; Digital humanities and geography (Balsamo, 2011; massey, 2005; Russel, 2019; Harvey, 2005) provides a class analysis to the biases of Silicon Valley products, and how they automate desires within the restrictive imagination of individualistic capitalism as well as extract free labor from user bases, and what is reflected in the nation-state construction project for the complications of space & place that digital topographies imply; and finally I will be doing much of this with the hope of adding to narrative therapy theories (White et al., 1990; Moon, 2012; Tilsen, 2018) and techniques, as well as complicating the concept of narrative & therapy by realizing a “therapy of literary merit” (White, 1990) within the new literacies of digital media, perhaps even leading to a therapy worth sharing & posting. This is a lot. It feels like learning through Tumblr posts and free google docs: disjointed and in tension. Like me. Like being online. Feelings can be theoretical. Feelings, like theory, can be a lot...

This thesis considers social media as an assemblage of spaces and places, often referred to as Social Networking Sites (SNS), social media platforms, or in general, networked publics. “Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (boyd, 2014). Networked publics and spaces as constructed through non-corporeal technologies is not a new ideological construct. “An understanding of space as not innate but constituted and reconstituted through our actions and interpretations is longstanding (Bondi, 2005; Cronin, 2014) and has been applied to online settings (Marino, 2015)” (Brownlie, 2018). An effective analogy for networked publics as geographical sites could be the use of counter topographies and contour lines for considering the ways algorithms create routes of

communities, histories, cultures, etc. “The notion of counter topographies picks up on and fleshes out one of the key metaphoric associations of topography: the contour line...imagine a politics that simultaneously retains the distinctness of the characteristics of a particular place and builds on its analytic connections to other places along “contour lines” marking, not elevation, but rather a particular relation to a process...” (Katz, 2001). Algorithms could be recognized as contour lines of digital topographies.

“If poststructuralist theory propagated the insight that we needed to decenter the subject and subjectivity as the locus of self-present rational knowledge, the companion move suggested by techno science studies, especially actor-network theory, asserts that the object too must be radically decentered as the privileged locus of coherence in accounts of technology development and deployment” (Balsamo, 2011). Poststructuralist approaches to social media will focus on decentering both the subject of the user and the object of the platform. “Interpellation”, or being “called forth” refers to how identity is developed in “recognition and identification” (Jargose, 1996). How do disclosures of and descriptions of mental illness differ between literacy technologies, between print and digital? And more, how does the function of our personal narratives change forms based on the mediums they are presented in? Social media, and the algorithms that construct them, create new challenges and possibilities for narrative theories and therapies, as a significant array of our identities are being constructed through our vulnerable engagements with automated social curations. “Since autobiography is understood to be a process through which the autobiographer struggles to shape an ‘identity’ out of amorphous subjectivity, the critic becomes a psychoanalyst of sorts, interpreting the truth of autobiography in its psychological dimensions rather than in its factual or moral ones” (Smith, 1987). Our new autobiographies reflect some of this but challenge the idea of *shaping identity out of amorphous*

*subjectivity*. Social media profile construction and the user interfaces through which people interact with online communities create a set of standards and modes of engagement that further complicate the myth of *a priori* authenticity.

However, even prior to social media, has any autobiography or identity construction ever truly been developed “out of amorphous subjectivity”? Black feminist scholars using intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1991; Schalk, 2018; Pickens, 2019) have argued that identity is always partly rendered through established power matrices of race, class, gender, ability, age, etc. “The idea of the intersection requires that one encounter it, approach it, or deliberately traverse it – eking out the space for intersectionality to think through identities as in flux and in processes of becoming as well as being spatially and temporally contingent” (Pickens, 2019). While social media presents new forms of address by which we are interpellated, the larger cultural forces behind those forms still evidence whiteness, straightness, maleness, saneness as presumed centralities. Chapter three of this thesis explores in some detail the digital movement building of #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo as sites where we can recognize intersectional readings of identity in new digital platforms. Our identities are not shaped out of amorphous subjectivity, but are legible and recognized through intersections of race, gender, class, (dis)ability, etc.

Black feminists such as Theri Alyce Pickens and Sami Schalk have been projecting new methodologies for understanding (dis)ability and mental illness. In *Bodyminds Reimagined*, Schalk (2018) asks, “What might it mean to imagine disability differently? Differently from the stereotypical story of pity, helplessness, and victimhood, of evil, bitterness, and abjection, of nonsexuality and isolation, of overcoming and supercrips? What would it mean to imagine (dis)ability differently than these dominant cultural narratives we typically encounter? What

might it mean to imagine Blackness differently? Womanhood differently? Sexuality differently?”<sup>3</sup> Schalk and Pickens explore works of speculative fiction written by Black women to “imagine disability differently”. In *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*, Pickens (2019) writes, “Here, I invest in the ‘politics of the possible’ regarding modes of interpretation that function as alternatives to mutual constitution.” While I will not be exploring works of speculative fiction, I too will be investing in the “politics of the possible” and consider social media as a sort of speculative social space where our identities can take fantastical forms, whether it’s via Instagram filters changing our faces and voices (harkening back to *what I see when my eyes fall out*), or Pokémon GO, rendering our world as a fully realized game (complicating what it means to experience seeing and hearing things other people do not see or hear), or even Facebook marketplace changing flea market landscapes (altering our accessibility of consumerism from physical dollars to digital –even speculative– banking). Exploring madness and (dis)ability online through a Black feminist framework offers similar speculative possibilities as in works of science fiction. After all, isn’t having a digital life more than a little sci-fi?

MI typically only takes the form of tragedy within the mainstream news. (Dis)ability justice and madness scholars cite the potential of (dis)ability to unhinge power structures and forms of oppression in their works, however in news media, films, and television, (dis)ability and mental illness are almost always seen as the primary oppressive and limiting force in a person’s life (Kafer, 2013; Russo, 2016; Ben-Moshe, 2014). The depictions of MI in particular take several forms in mainstream news cycles: the mourning of celebrity suicides (e.g. Robin Williams and Anthony Bourdain) & overdoses (e.g. Amy Winehouse and Mac Miller); the

<sup>3</sup> To clarify a term here: *crip* is a term in the midst of a reclamation process by some (dis)ability justice scholars and activists, most notably Robert McCruer, David Mitchell, and Alison Kafer, which refers to a set of politics and ideas around (dis)ability that is intentionally antagonistic and resistant to dominant cultural norms surrounding ability and access. *Mad* or *madness* is the related term for mental illness.



violence of mass shooters (e.g. Dylan Roof and Stephen Paddock); and the celebration of “super-crip” (e.g. Stephen Hawking). Kafer (2013) discusses the super-crip, for example, as the blind Everest climber or Christopher Reeves types, however for my project I am interested in the super-mad or super-sane: I argue that the super-mad/sane is not someone who is “high-functioning” or who has overcome, but someone who has assimilated into whiteness, heteronormativity, nationalism, or other such sites of privilege with relative ease. This thesis brings into conversation David Mitchell’s (2015) *ablenationalism*— developed from Jasbir Puar’s (2008) *homonationalism*— to develop *sanenationalism*, which is what the current nationalist imperatives for sanity and wellness are. Sanenationalism is different from my understanding of Rachel Gorman’s (2013) mad nationalism, in that sanenationalism articulates the current cultural hegemonies of saneism, whereas mad nationalism refers to the co-option of mad liberation rhetoric and work, as well as how mad people assimilate into national legibility. Gorman’s mad nationalism is more akin to Puar’s homonationalism and Mitchell’s ablenationalism in that these are projects of otherwise marginalized people accessing privileges of citizenship through assimilation into other markers of national identity. Sanenationalism is more the cultural hegemony of sanity (thus sanenationalism is to mad nationalism as heteronormativity is to homonationalism). *Sanenationalism* includes a set of affects, cognitions, behaviors, emotions, desires, etc. are seen as *sane*, and *sane* as that which is affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally authentic, desirable, hoped for, and generally legible to the Nation-State. I argue that sanenationalism is the hegemonic mandate for certain forms of thinking and feeling in alignment with national identity. In the United States, to be *sane* is to have, or to at least desire, wealth, happiness, entertainment, etc. There is a homogeneity in our sense of saneness. Sanenationalism is socially reproduced (Katz, 2002) by social media architects reflective of nationalist norms of

affect, behavior, and cognition (ABC), all of which are predicated on dominant identity hegemonies. These dominant identity hegemonies for the US nation-state project typically include whiteness, wealth, particular forms of masculinity/femininity, and heterosexuality; sanity hinges on our ability to pass into one of or some mixture of these social-identity categories. The colonizing gaze is also a gaze perpetuating the insider/ outsider politics discussed above, which is related to sanenationalism. Sanenationalism is thus the reductive political alignment of affect to national identity, and marks our apparent displays of (in)sanity within the binaries of “mentally ill” and not a legitimate upstanding citizen, or *sane*. Divergence from these dominant identity hegemonies furthers one from a sense of sanity in as much it does distance one from a sense of legitimate citizenship. As we will see, many mental illness diagnoses are rooted more in difference from national legibility than in any actual sensation of pain or confusion etc, such as hysteria for women, drapetomania for enslaved Black people, and gender identity disorder. Sanenationalism is replicated in digital spaces as it is created in physical spaces. What is sanenationalism within the mania of social media?

### ***Mad Methodologies***

“The professoriate hinges on our ability to pass as sane, or rather the right type of sane” (Pickens, 2019). Pickens (2019) writes in her introduction that her reliance on Black women who write speculative fiction is “not [used as] illustrative examples of ... critical conversations but rather as interventions. The artists- theorists in this [her] study press us to pause in the breaks of the critical literature and undergo another process of intussusception.” Similarly, I will use my experiences in chatrooms, on blogging sites, forums, social media platforms, and dating apps *not as illustrative examples* but rather as *interventions*. *Interventions* into queer theory, feminist autobiography, narrative therapy, and (dis)ability justice through the use of a social media and

madness methodology. These *interventions* will contribute to a larger discourse analysis interwoven with critical auto-digital-ethnography. Much like the movement in gender studies to *queer* virtually everything, I hope to *mad* or *(in)sane* the virtual and our shared spaces therein. Pickens (2019) inspires me to think of madness and (dis)ability as a methodology in their /our own right. Experience is methodology.

MI in autobiographies typically takes a different form than in mainstream news media. While the news media holds tight to those three narratives of madness – grief, antagonism, and celebration – autobiographies written by people with MI can be instructive in creatively re-assessing what MI is. Monica Coleman’s *Bipolar Faith*, Esme Weijun Wang’s *The Collected Schizophrenias*, Adam Grossi’s *Wind Through Quiet Tensions*, Kay Radfeld-Jamison’s *An Unquiet Mind*, and Mark Vonnegut’s *Eden Express & Just Like Someone Without Mental Illness, Only More So* each provide rich insights into how PWMI reclaim language or conform to diagnoses, disidentify with sanenationalism or conflate dominant hegemonies with “wellness”, and generally are thoughtful examples of how we tell our stories with the totality of our experiences at the fore. Each of these writers shares diagnoses I have been given. I appreciate how they reclaim language for what MI is, and inspire my pursuit of more ways to describe and discuss MI within social media. How does “cramming whole lifetimes of thinking in between sips of coffee” (Vonnegut, 1975) take form in having a bazillion tabs open and scrolling through countless tweets, thoughts, pictures, videos, and memes? When a whole lifetime of thinking is available in a few hours of social media use. Social media use, and madness, are some of the most ubiquitous experiences of Anzaldúa’s (2017) *nepantla*: the spiritual in between space; the dream world and the waking world merging; the *mestiza* consciousness transcending boundaries and becoming an entirely new, third way; a mixed-reality space. Mania is a form of *nepantla*. Is

Social media a form of *nepantla* as well? Borderlands of the social? When Coleman (2016) writes: “Considering bipolar as a lack of balance seems...unbalanced...to me... Perhaps, instead, we could conceive of wider definitions of joy, and challenge bipolar as being unbalanced—differently centered? Could one ever measure the balance of the sea? Its waves rise and placate, calm and terrible, surf and drown, feed and destroy— always balance”. What do we assume a “balanced” interaction with social media is, especially if we consider social media as a primary form of connection and inter-personal relationship building and identity construction for many young people (especially now amidst global quarantines)?

My use of narrative therapy theories guides my reading of MI online, and inspires me to act as a “culture therapist”, observing how dominant narratives and *data culture* (Albury et al., 2017) align to form identity and influence MI. By “culture,” I am referring to “a system... defined as a grouping of elements-values, norms, outlooks, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and empirical assertions (not always verified), linked with one another to some degree as a meaning-system” (Alexander, 2004). My autoethnographic work of digital autobiographies thus, will not heavily rely on academic criticism, but will be an exercise in therapeutic approaches to digital spaces I have engaged in. How does narrative therapy alter when not in person or in a traditionally written form? What are the therapeutic challenges, potentials, and inevitabilities of caring for one another online?

Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook offer speculative identity formation capacities that may be informed by, as well as offer challenges to how news media shapes our understandings of identity and MI, and how traditional autobiography can complicate and harmonize dominant approaches to MI. Sara Ahmed (2004) writes, “Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily

have the same relationship to the feeling.” Social media as a novel form of autobiography will add to Sidonie Smith’s (1987) work that notes, “autobiography and the history of autobiography became another two of those public narratives men write for each other as they lay claim to an immortal place within the phallic order. Thus delineated, both autobiography and its history represent two more stories of origins that, as they privilege patrilineal descent and androcentric discourse, erase the matrilineal trace of woman’s subjectivity”. Smith (1987) goes on to write “every woman who writes an autobiography ends up interrogating the prevailing ideology of gender, if only unconsciously and clumsily”. Social media’s open ended framing allows more voices to be shared and exposed, as opposed to the repressive “cultures of silence” historically enforced in the publishing world. On SNS, the complications of expressing emotions is amplified by the diversity of users, and the diversity of users also adds to the interrogation of *the prevailing ideology of gender*, race, class, and (dis)ability. How do Silicon Valley’s *data cultures* (Albury et al., 2017) reflect Smith’s “cultures of silence” in how our lives are storied online? How are emotions and the discussions of them gendered, raced, and nationalized, and how do we experience this online? How does feminist autobiography benefit from the faux-anarchy of digital spaces, and what challenges remain the same between traditional and emergent / speculative forms of auto-biography?

Digital humanities impart several methodologies relevant to this thesis, as does critical geography, because “the study of algorithms requires embracing new methods and forms of research participation.” (McKelvey, 2014). As we are all dis assembled and re assembled daily by these forms of social control, it feels pertinent to include personal anecdotes, stories, and reflections; I do not presume to know about algorithms outside of my experiences with them. “What might it mean to reorient this imagination, to question the habit of thinking of space as a

surface? If, instead, we conceive of meeting-up of histories, what happens to our implicit imaginations of time and space?” (massey, 2005). Such a critical geographical perspective on autobiographies informs this project’s view of MI by understanding social media as an emerging autobiographical space. Considering social media as an emergent sensation of or engagement with time, which is in itself situated in the construction of sanenationalism. The emergence of this space can be related to how speculative fiction informs readings of MI (Schalk, 2018). “The process of techno-cultural innovation is the stage for the performance of two critical practices: 1) the exercise of the technological imagination; and 2) the work of cultural reproduction” (Balsamo, 2011). In other words, autobiography has been a continuous practice for those of us who have been raised in the digital communication era. The time of our autobiographies is constant yet not static, as the space of social media transcends linear time. “Scholars must attend to algorithms precisely because media and information systems cannot be wholly understood without a sense of the underlying routines that regulate them” (McKelvey, 2014). These routines and regulations of the relationships of time, space, and self-storying are uniquely articulated in digital spaces.

“I would add that it is definitely an oppressive scholastic practice if we choose not to reflect on how our intellectual enterprise is upheld by sanist notions of mind” (Pickens, 2019). Pickens, here, is referencing how the traditional forms of our academic output mirrors the forms of saneism that people in (dis)ability justice and madness studies are seeking to undermine. Throughout the course of this thesis we will see how social media provides meaningful interventions into our sense of space, affect, communities, and identities that can expand the possible for each of these topics. The thesis will also demonstrate how social media’s artifices constrain, normalize, and surveil our spaces, affects, communities, and identities at alarming

speeds and with no apparent system for accountability. These sentences and this paragraph demonstrates what Pickens (2019) so wonderfully accomplishes in her own work: a mad methodology—a writing style that neglects many traditional forms and embraces cognitive difference as meaningful, useful, valid, and important; a form of discourse not focused on linearity and that eschews conclusions (or cures for that matter); a celebration or at least articulation of inconsistency, or a reflection of *balance* like sea waves; an engagement with subjects that feels at once neurotic in its specificity and repetition, and manic in its free-wheeling and surrealist landscaping. The internet is my home, my mind, my emotions, my gender, my sexuality, my illness, my wellness. I am overwhelmed at the intensity of the infinite flow of information and stimulation of social media existence. Bear with me as I use this thesis as a personal opportunity to engage in a sort of self-therapy.

This specific iteration of a mad methodology is an intentionally scattered discourse analysis between narrative therapy practices, autoethnography/ autobiography, post-structural approaches to identity, community & space, madness liberation, digital architecture, and the theoretical traditions mentioned in the previous section. I hope this thesis proves to be overwhelming, difficult to categorize (let alone follow), though somewhat enjoyable, formulaic, and discernable in its own manic construction and writing. A part of me hopes that I do not realize the goal of bringing these seamlessly into conversation. I hope I sound more than a little insane, flustered, mad, crafty, unwell in suggesting this conversation let alone facilitating it. And I hope that in doing so, I can contribute to a new methodology honest to those of us who are mad: that the incomplete sentence, the stammered out half-thought, the rickety-bridge of free association, the many eyes cascading from our heads can communicate, reveal, connect us, and show something. That our ways of feeling, knowing, being, speaking, listing, sounding, seeing

etc. is valid in its very invalidity. That there is a persistent politics of possibility in our expansive experiences of (in)sanity.

### *Spiraling anticipations*

In these times, typing under quarantine during a global health pandemic — not the world’s first, but surely mine, and I doubt our last — I am reminded by (dis)ability justice activists on twitter that so many of us have lived our lives online already. That this form of digital community is not new for people with (dis)abilities, queer people stranded in rural LGBTQ+ deserts who have demanded accessibility publicly or online with petitions and more. Have we lost countless generations of queer and (dis)abled people because the access to communicate our longings and confusions and needs were never accommodated? The Communications Age has shaped our gender and (dis)ability discourses. I know this because it has shaped mine.

Sometimes the most therapeutic place is not in a psychologist’s office, but in the shared DM inbox of someone you trust. Sometimes the most profound words we encounter are not bound with covers, but glowing blue in the palm of our hands. Some of my most restorative moments happened in forums with strangers at 3 am, and some of my greatest anxieties happened when the bubbly “...” from a texting session vanished. My generation has fallen in love with reading. Reading one another. (Both in the “queer art of insult” [Pickens, 2019], and in the dignifying choice of acknowledgement). How does reading change with the technologies we use to read? “In fact, to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)” (Balsamo, 2011). We story our lives in conversations, we write novels of ourselves— interactive, pop-up, pop out, sound effect(ed), remixed, novels; our autobiographies gain new pages with each post and new chapters with every trending app. Our autobiographies exist without pages; there are no chapters; we are not



sections of a narrative novel— we are learning to tell our stories without the constraints endemic to *story*. Learning to tell our stories with a fretfully infinite amount of features and mediums, expanding the possibility endemic to *story*. We have different versions, volumes, audiences. We are reading and writing and posting and sharing ourselves into a profoundly communal existence. We are using social media to socially mediate our way through gender and (dis)ability. It all matters so much to those of us who see and hear things other people do not see and hear, and to those of us who cannot sleep, or who are so afraid of our thoughts and need to share them with someone, anyone... as long as they do not know us. To be able to express our deepest insecurities to others, without having the people we rely on in our daily lives hold us to an expectation of consistency amidst the ever oscillating realities of ourselves – that is a revolutionary therapeutic breakthrough. This option of autobiography, of therapeutic encounters with the other. In complete isolation, we are posting ourselves into individuated, unique, collectivist-yet-libertarian isolation.

There is a celebrity feeling to it all, an entertainment quality, a consumptive community of relationships and common interests, a democratic public forum, and a quiet support group. There is a narrative, a curated narrative that I admire in all of our picture choices and caption choices and what we share and who from, and our guest features. It is also the addiction to the dopamine high the blue light gives off, and the sensation of easy community, enjoyment, news, etc. I get so overwhelmed, but can't stop scrolling. It is addictive, it is built to be addictive, it is a new form of relational codependency, it is a dysphoria that the mirror only hints at, it is a perfection the magazines only glimpse at, it is the fame we once day-dreamed about, it is unreal in its realness, it extends the boundaries our imaginations, it limits but puts praxis to our imaginations. But its (un)realness is a largely unexplored reality for care work professionals and

queer theorists alike. Despite incredible activism and organizing done on social media, despite so much sex and love being facilitated by these spaces, so little work is being done to queer the interpellative capacity of the internet or study online engagement as a therapeutic event, let alone as a space of mad liberation and oppression.

Have you ever talked to your therapist about something that happened on Grindr? Or snapchat? Or bumble? Or Facebook? An argument? A hope? An insight? How did that therapist handle it? Any time I've talked to a therapist about an issue that arose in an online platform, I was cautioned to disregard the seriousness of it. I was advised by my calm and caring professional to dismiss my emotions. Emotions, implied by these mental health care workers, are only valid in certain contexts— the internet is not one of those contexts. Facebook is for keeping up with friends, not for arguing with friends when you find out one of them supports racist immigration bans, while you work at a refugee agency. This is not the place to work that out. This is not the place to allow one's emotions to get the best of us. This is not the place.

This is not a place. Facebook, Instagram, etc. are not places. What are the rules of engagement, then, in a non-place? What is proper etiquette for spaces that “don't matter”?

These are real places. These spaces hold meaning, value, and merit. Emotions exist on them, through them, because of them, in relationship to them. I exist in part because of these places, and in part on these places. “Social media isn't a real place” is so far from my emotional truths. I cannot relate to this, and will not take it as the normal reality. Each platform is a city in the nation-state of their parent company, and I live in multiple city-states online with my friends (some whose bodies I've never met, but minds and emotions I know intimately). Some of my identity is stored in cloud drives that my friends have access to and inform and parse out amongst themselves and share to people I don't know. Some of my identity is disembodied from

me and lives lives of their own. Isn't it odd to have personality and mood disorders in a world where we can now exist in multiple places at once? How convenient of a place to live in, where I can be multiple people in multiple places all at once. How therapeutic, affirming to...

How maddening.

How horrifying, how multiplying, how can I get all these eyes off me? When I can't leave my bedroom, riddled with paranoia of the public, add in anxiety about existing in this liminal celebrity sphere of online non-places; so many of my bodies and minds and relationships and ideas just floating in the ether for prying eyes eyes eyes falling from my front facing camera staring at me through their NSA, their marketplace, their jealousy, their lust, their disappointment, their expectations. How triggering to always be existing, to have a part of my identity disembodied from me, to have emotions circulating through machines and not resting within my skin. Existing online is class alienation. My mania has a thousand tabs open at one time. My anxiety closes them at random. How dysphoric to project my gender through app lenses that cannot exist in reality – my gender cannot exist in corporeal reality, my gender doesn't need a body? My face is so contoured with this front-facing-filter, my eyes so much larger; my body feels more trans online. How therapeutic to find a place my body can be trans; how haunting that this space isn't real, and that my body as trans isn't real. How inconvenient to only access some of the most affirming communities and relationships through the most convenient of communication media giants; built by cisstraight white capitalists. "...recognizing problematic elements in a text or in our world [does not negate] our capacity for pleasure" (Schalk, 2018). I am affirmed in my multiplicity online, as I am terrified of my disassembly and eternity online. As a creature of mortality, the never-ending of my cloud-based identity seems antithetical to my existence.

### *The places of this thesis: Chapter Outlines*

This introduction brought forth the significance and importance of this project for several theoretical fields and my own personal grappling with social media and MI. It introduced the theoretical and methodological frameworks I will be working within and developing, as well as provided brief backgrounds and foreshadowing of these topics and MI more generally. In the following chapters I will present the case studies from my life online. Chapter two will explore the emergence of the digital autobiographical form and community engagement, and their workings on affect and emotion, in conjunction with the digital experiments of the late 90's and early 00's. This includes my introduction to AOL Instant Messenger, Xanga, and Myspace to explore what affective norms are curated in digital spaces, how these norms press themselves differently based on identity differences, and what the foundations of online autobiography are. This will address how life stories are mediated through public disclosure, how social media offers linear and broken narratives, and what is affected in the politics of likes, shares, re tweets etc. The chapter concludes with an exploration in collective trauma, grief, ceremonies, and rituals online in relationship to #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) and #MeToo. Chapter three will explore the extremism of digital identities through an analysis of gender and globalization, the automation of gender, the gendering of social media profiles or the datafication of gender through social media profiles, controversies around gender and race in the wake of #BLM and #MeToo, and the automation of queer community and sexuality specifically looking at Grindr. Chapter four, the final chapter, I further reflect on the previous chapters with close attention to queer theory, MH care work & narrative therapy, and (dis)ability justice. Queer theory will enter

into conversations of automation and the interplay of interpellation and algorithms, as well as how gender, race, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability shapes what constitutes data and how data impacts these identity categories as well. Implications for MH care work will address the challenges, potentials, and possibilities of social media's role in therapeutic care, the need to repoliticize trauma, as well as the development and entanglements with new emotions created by social media and the therapeutic complications of privatizing affect. Finally, I will explore a (dis)ability justice intervention into the politics of algorithms, deconstruct what data is in alignment with the deconstruction of (dis)ability, and explore what an anti-racist autobiography for mad SNS users might feel like. Each chapter weaves in the narrative arcs, or identity values I have noticed in the social media process: *anticipation, intensification, immediacy, and transition*.

This thesis lacks a traditional conclusion (or perhaps it succeeds in not really concluding at all) and will simply end when the conversation ends. If I accomplish reflecting on the mania of online identity building then, like Stuart Hall (2015) romantically quips, these sentences will continue to communicate meaning past their punctuation marks. "The creative rush of ideas, the sudden flash of an 'other' reality rising out of the sea is exhilarating" (Anzaldúa, 2015). We embark into this sea of my mind online, in print.

## Chapter 2: *intensifications*

This chapter is divided into four parts. First I will explore how the curation of identity occurs in online community spaces. This section will explore how gender, race, class, and (dis)ability frame dialogue on social networking sites (SNS), how life stories are mediated through public disclosure, and how consumption of narrative data influences the assimilation into dominant cultures and accessibility of legibility of MI narratives. The following section will explore the general uses and constructions of emotion, drawing heavily from madness studies, affect studies, grief therapy theory, and queer theory. I will move from there to explore public feelings in digital spaces, such as how community groups and support groups materialize on social media spaces, how SNS algorithms and profile sections influence our sense of place and space in ways that (as feminists have long argued) blur the lines between *private* and *public*. Finally I will explore legal and illegal emotions through an exploration of suicide disclosure, the policing of public mourning, and psychotropic medications.

### *Curating identity, affect, and community*

My digital auto-ethnography begins with controlled chat rooms. America Online (AOL) Instant Messenger (AIM) was the first social online presence I had. AIM was released in 1997 as a free program designed by AOL programmers. The aspect of it being free made it massively popular until Facebook became the behemoth that it is. AIM was the first widely used internet-based chat platform in the United States (Abbruzzesse, 2014). Not only was it the first, it even predated cell phone text-based messaging popularized with full keyboard phones and eventually smartphones. Nonetheless, even with smartphones and Blackberries, AIM would prove influential to the culture of online communication even into our current era.

This is most true in the US6750881B patent, filed in 1997 along with the release of AIM, which is the socio-technological tool that reveals in real time when people are online; for AIM, this was the program box which indicated which “Buddies” were online (with a door opening sound effect, a bold name, and eventually a green dot next to their name) and who was offline (greyed out names, or under an “idle” column). “A real time notification system that tracks, for each user, the logon status of selected co-users of an on-line or network system and displays that information in real time to the tracking user in a unique graphical interface. The invention provides user definable on-line co-user lists, or ‘buddy lists,’ that track specific co-users in real-time automatically” (AOL, 1997). This patent’s primary assignee is currently Facebook, who uses it in their chat platforms WhatsApp, Messenger, and the DM function of Instagram. “The success of social media must be understood partly in relation to this shrinking social landscape. Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace are not only new public spaces: they are in many cases the only “public” spaces in which teens can easily congregate with large groups of their peers. More significantly, teens can gather in them while still physically stuck at home” (boyd, 2014). The feeling of knowing your friend is available, online, greenlit, logged on, is a new sensation; a sensation that was developed by programmers; a feeling with a patent. At what point does the program that facilitates the feeling become the feeling? That is, AIM’s buddy system ushered in a new era of social consciousness and corresponding affects, one that is owned by a company.

“While we know that new genres can develop very rapidly (the homepage, for example), the elements that give rise to a genre (such as the capabilities of authoring tools, the semiotics of the design language, the affordances of the medium, the sensibilities of the reader or audience member) are difficult to specify in advance” (Balsamo, 2011). How our realities, relationships, and identities have been impacted by such entrepreneurialism; the neoliberal chat room, where

new emotions are developed. When one's reality is facilitated, hosted, developed, automated, coded, and curated by a company, are the sensations, feelings, desires, etc. owned by the users or the creators? When we discover we are trans through chat rooms and a newfound bodily awakening happens, is this a gender that is dependent on the internet, or is it only the *revelation* that is dependent on the internet?

What I call the neoliberal chat room, and digital-neoliberalism, is in references to the modern stage of late capitalism and globalization. Neoliberalism refers to our current moment of capitalism developed in the West for the primary benefit of Western and Northern Europe, as well as the United States and the establishment elites within all of their respective colonial projects (Harvey, 2005). We will begin to see how SNS are products and tools of neoliberalism, especially with regards to “the increasing geographical mobility of capital... the greater openness to capital flow” (Harvey, 2005). The *geographical mobility of capital* has never been more fluid than it is online, when users, consumers, producers, and creators are blurred in the experience of simply being online “as it profits large corporations through the free labor of its citizens” (Fallon, 2014) by virtue of how user engagement is monetized in data extraction. Neoliberalism is both the capitalist imperative to profit, as it is the set of cultural values that promote individuality, freedom of speech, limited government oversight and intervention of markets, and the development of the sharp divide between the personal, private, and public. These values are both challenged by social media users, as they are promoted by the architectural designs of social media. This is digital-neoliberalism: our current moment in late Western capitalism existing in digital, mixed-reality spaces that facilitates an easy, near-borderless (or perhaps a new sense of borders between sites) and thus globalized flow of speculative capital, data, resources, and labor.



In 1997 AIM was not charging its user base, but still tracking their usage, locations, and doing so in an attractive way that would inform, definitively, for one user another's availability. Was this the first time in social, human history that a person could be assured of the presence of another person, without being in the same physical space as them or interacting with them over phone? How does AIM shrink our spatial difference and impact our affective and social realities? "Online space challenges the classic definition of place as a bounded physical location and necessitates new theoretical constructs that account for unbounded communities and spaces online" (Aourog, 2012). It is startling to note, in retrospect, the datafication of my online presence and location for the past twenty-three years; well over two thirds of my life has been commodified, surveilled, and in turn digitally curated in response to my lifelong interactions with SNS. Although AIM was a proficient early social media platform, it lacked two defining elements of modern SNS: the profile & the timeline. That is unlike its successors, specifically in the guise of Facebook, using AIM only required a username. (Incidentally my usernames were almost all worryingly apocalyptic, 'Human.Extinction' becoming my primary online moniker for well over a decade on AIM, as well as several forums, game servers, and blogs [is it any wonder I have seen a therapist since 1994?]). So the earliest iteration of my and many others' digital autobiographies was in the form of the aesthetically lacking, non-profile, online chat based app AIM. "Places are identified with what does not change; their 'sense of place', 'character' or 'identity' is seen as relatively stable. Places are experienced primarily in terms of stabilized contexts of everyday life and they are a primary means by which we stabilize our identities in that world." (Dovey, 2010) AIM was a place for us. The text box was a place that *stabilized contexts of everyday life* and Instagram today is a *primary means by which I stabilize my*

*identities*. Our early experiences of autobiography online were in the form of conversations, letter writing almost; identity rooted in dialogue as opposed to static profiles.

I return to thinking through social media as a unique form of automated autobiography. Facebook is autobiography – at least a form of it – and is where fiction meets self-analysis; as biography is to psychoanalysis so too is Facebook a form of psychoanalysis. How much did Facebook write you into existence? Or social media generally? How much did the frames and forms of profiles tell you about yourself? More generally and hypothetically, if you were to write an autobiography about your life, but you read a biography about your life first, written by someone who followed you for decades, how would their biographical account of your life impact your autobiographical reflection of your accumulated experiences? And more, what if you could only write your autobiography in the technical form and order that that mystery biographer used – how would your autobiography reflect yourself? Would certain moods and emotions be lost while others are centered? This already happens in the social media autobiography.

With these questions in mind, what identities does the digital biographer (in the form of social media profiles) legitimize? The social, cultural, and political narratives and roles assigned to gender, race, age, ability, etc. are the pre-written biographies of our lives. These pre-written biographies are embedded into the programming algorithms of our digital social lives.

“Algorithms function as control technologies in all sorts of media and information systems, dynamically modifying content and function through these programmed routines. Search engines and social media platforms perpetually rank user-generated content through algorithms”

(McKelvey, 2014). Social media profiles and apps do not use a “participatory design” approach to developing computer systems, which would be predicated on strong industry unions and

consultations with the people who are meant to use the programs (Eubanks, 2011). Thus, algorithms function as social control technologies.

How do we story our lives knowing that political and cultural signifiers have already brought us into legibility for ourselves and others? Storying our lives on these apps is not participatory, but instructive. Aurora Levins Morales (2000) writes that “Storytelling is a basic human activity with which we simultaneously make and understand the world and our place in it.” Entering into, developing, and accepting narratives are a key part of our experience of being human. We are now storytelling at a post-industrial scale; our literacies are exploding into an unprecedented amount of narrative potentials. “Lifestreaming (Freeman, 1997; Marwioc, 2013), a rhetorical act of streaming documents, texts, and visuals to curate an imagined and real self, is becoming a common everyday practice for adolescents... Lifestreaming is a highly rhetorical, and as I argue, literate practice” (Wargo, 2015). Lifestreaming is an interesting example of post-industrial autobiography within digital-neoliberalism, in that it intensifies and diversifies the stories of assembled moments, moods, and sensations of reality through automated *literate practices*.

Eubanks (2011) argues that “none of us are perfect interpreters of our own experience, the gaps in the knowledge of the powerful are systemic and significant... Socially or culturally sanctioned ignorance that supports the status quo is created and maintained by institutions...” Cultural hegemony impacts our sense of identity; interpellates us through pre-determined stories about ourselves. The internet reflects this when we literally write, share, post ourselves into public. Many of our emotions are given meaning by social media corporations and, as I will show, by pharmaceutical companies, psychiatric associations, and nation-states; our reflections of our experience are defined in part by these constructed emotions. “That which makes us happy

also makes us vulnerable; all the more so when it is tied up, as it so often is, with confirmations of identity” (Segal, 2017). Facebook in particular (especially through Instagram) codifies (literally) our happiness as an essential form of our identity; the pursuit of happiness becomes an addiction to scrolling, swiping, and otherwise consuming bright, well-curated, content. Digital-neoliberalism commodifies our emotions through techno-cultural productions of desire and affect

*The constructions, economics, and illusions of emotions and madness*

Accessibility of space within the internet provides a unique opportunity for people with (dis)abilities, especially as, “to put it bluntly, disabled people were—and often are—figured as threats to futurity” (Kafer, 2013). In part because to participate in public dialogue online does not require *physically* moving into a public space, thus crip temporalities, or mad temporalities, can function with less impediments. Alison Kafer (2013) describes crip temporalities as a challenge to the nostalgia of bodily functioning. Within a digital space, where all information is perpetually stored and often repurposed in branded bites for users’ self-consumption, crip temporalities can take a new form as longevity is guaranteed. To a fault, at times... Multiple studies have shown how the Facebook “Year in Review”<sup>4</sup> feature often proves to be triggering for people who have experienced a severe loss or trauma the year prior. That said, it is interesting to note how the timeline features of social media might interact with later-in-life experiences of being on the memory-loss-spectrum. Can our digital presence supplant our physical memories once they begin fading from us? (Dis)ability justice and the madness liberation movement give ample critique, tension, contradiction, and possibility that is applicable for how our stories might manifest online. Including how social media might act as a memory-prosthesis, a personality-

<sup>4</sup> The year in review feature is an automated little video Facebook puts together at the end of a given calendar year, which highlights users’ most interacted with content. It is one of the rare ways we are shown how our data is collected.

enhancer, a tool of social-accessibility; how our profiles are a digital-neoliberal, personality-assistive technology.

“Within the shadow of neoliberalism – and the seductively libertarian ethic of individualism and consumerism that it has unleashed – the so-called ‘mentally ill’ have been turned into ‘users’ and ‘consumers’ in the public imagination” (LeFrancois et al., 2013).

Neoliberalism shapes the “mentally ill” into “users” and “consumers” already, and social media, as a necessarily neoliberal public domain, further pressures a “libertarian ethic of individualism and consumerism.” Digital-neoliberalism on social media also blurs the consumer and producer into what Balsamo (2011) terms “prosumer”: the user experience of consuming through the act of producing. “Those studying algorithmic control must contend with a number of issues. First, most of the code of algorithmic media is proprietary. Consequently, researchers do not generally have access to it” (McKelvey, 2014). What does it mean to be both a “user” and “consumer” of social media *and* mental health care? How do we become “prosumers” of mental health care? How do the power dynamics of prosumption within social media mimic those of psychiatric power? How are we prosumers within the era of *proprietary* affective architectures? Or, what are the effects of privatization on the construction and maintenance of affect and mental illness? Jasbir Puar (2012) brilliant describes the horrific the relationship between economic neoliberalism and health & wellness in the United States in the following text:

“In the United States, where personal debt incurred through medical expenses is the number one reason for filing for bankruptcy, the centrality of what is termed the medical-industrial complex to the profitability of slow death cannot be overstated... If the knitting together of finance capitalism and the medical-industrial complex means that debility pays, and pays well, then the question

becomes, how can an affective politics move beyond the conventional narratives of resistance to neoliberalism?”

Segal (2017) writes that “...the labeling of mental illness [is] one of the most cunning conspiracies of the capitalist class.” Different diagnosis according to a homogenous diagnostic standard did not lead to increased accountability but to more effective isolation via individualization. Chapman, Carey, and Ben-Moshe (2014) note that, in the United States and Canada, PWMI were initially, much like in France, hospitalized in conditions not easily differentiated from prisons. Health care reformists from the emergence of hospitals even to this day argued that these spaces required specialized confinement based on group affiliation, where they could be “educated or rehabilitated... to ready them for the responsibilities of ‘economic freedom’ ” (Chapman et al., 2014). The emergence of MI was the recognition that not all bodyminds were suited for capitalism. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) writes that mad, crip, (dis)abled bodies are seen as unsuited to capitalism primarily due to their incompatibility to producing traditional labor, and this incompatibility is the basis for our expendability, imprisonment, perpetual hospitalization, hyper-surveilled lives. By further segregating us in different forms of confinement disguised as care, our bodyminds become more politically polarized, yet less able to effectively organize cross movement solidarity for mad liberation. Yet, “In our contemporary moment in which the value of speculative capital far outweighs that of productive capital, race, gender, and sexuality are categories created by the process of turning existence itself into forms usable for speculative capital, as sheer surplus.” (Kyungwon Hong, 2015). This complicates the DJ notion asserted by Piepzna-Samarasinha that (dis)abled bodies are useless to capitalism. Digital-neoliberalism has evolved to the point that life itself is a marketable commodity, even when it has no real regard for the living conditions of those who

are “prosumers”. Thus the ways that (dis)ability were first constructed as in tension with the productive capacity of labor is complicated within digital-neoliberalism’s prosumer.

What mental illness actually is has been contested, constructed, and mused over historically since around the 16th century. “Historically speaking, the creating of disability, race, and gender occurs at the same time. The strands of what would become modern medicine worked to differentiate bodies from each other, specifically normal bodies from abnormal ones, where abnormal was constituted in gendered, raced, and abled terms” (Pickens, 2019). Foucault (2003) traces the emergence of recognizing what was then termed *madness* in conjunction with the rise of *psychiatric power*, arguing that MI culturally and socially did not exist prior to the disciplinary apparatuses developed to contain it. Much like how identity is structured online – to recall “the individual is the result of something that is prior to it...” (Foucault, 2003) – madness was the result of something prior to it; psychiatric power begets the differences madness entails; the structures of psychiatric power are the definitional spaces of mental illness. In Foucault’s sense, psychiatry, or more, psychiatric power, predates MI as a concept.

MI as a concept in the West became more commonplace throughout the 18th-early 20th century, fully cementing itself as a hegemonic political force during and after the Second World War (Foucault, 2003). Mental illness has a problem with being named (LeFrancois et al., 2003), and is really defined by outside forces who are able to prescribe significance to patterns of affect, behavior, and cognition. These identity markers are defined by psychiatrists, who enact a sort of “sovereign power” (Foucault, 2003) over the masses, and, as such have provided us the names for our emotions. Any mental health care clinician may use the work of psychiatrists to diagnose an illness or disorder on anyone who submits, consents, signs off to that clinician’s authority. This automation of diagnosis, and the data-collection, confessional approach to information

gathering and sharing that mental health clinicians use to provide diagnosis is strikingly similar to the data-collection, surveillance, and confessional approaches social media companies use to ascertain user preferences and consequential product development & advertising. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM; currently in its fifth edition: DSM-V) developed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), and largely based on the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Diseases (ICD; currently in its 11th revision) is the primary symbol attributed to psychiatry in the United States; a clipboard scepter for the psychiatric sovereign, sworn in on the holy diagnostic manual. These tools are deeply integrated into the capitalist psyche.

Just as the APA provides “an epistemology of the tangible body, the object of medical knowledge” (Cook, 1996) social media companies similarly provide an *epistemology* of the affective social reality of their curated, capitalist spaces. These affective social realities are currently comprised of a politics of *conventional narratives*. On what constitutes mental disorder, the DSM-V states:

“A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion, regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behavior (e.g. political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are primarily between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above.” (APA, 2013)



This is a circular definition that relies on a professionalized, external gaze to measure discrepancy between normal and abnormal. It assumes a rational definition of emotions, reminiscent of the neoliberal *common sense* (Harvey, 2004) dictates of ethics. It also suggests a panoptic approach to who we are and are not: who is well and who is disordered, unwell. “It runs counter to the work of disability activists who frame disability as an issue of social justice, not of medical condition; disability lodged not in paralysis, but rather in stairs without an accompanying ramp; not in depression or anxiety, but rather in a whole host of stereotypes; not in dyslexia, but in teaching methods unwilling to flex. It ignores the reality that many of us aren’t looking for cures, but for civil rights” (Clare, 2013). The DSM is a source of pathologization, as well as depoliticization. Its logic is rooted in biological essentialisms and does not recognize the relationships between social conditions and mental, social, emotional stress. Moreover, it does not reflect on the myriad differences of cultural approaches to affect. This is most significant for politics related to trauma. “Trauma discourse is important precisely because it challenges distinctions between the mental and physical, the psychic and the social, and the internal and external locations or sources of pain...when trauma becomes too exclusively psychologized or medicalized, its capacity to problematize conceptual schemes, the exploration of which is one of cultural theory’s contributions to trauma studies, is lost” (Cvetkovich, 2003). Cook (1996) writes on “how the medical profession, paradoxically coauthors our autobiographies with us”. This co-authoring has proven dramatically abusive in such cases as *drapetomania* (“runaway slave syndrome”), *hysteria* (women who challenge patriarchal laws, cultures, and homes), *paraphilia* & *ego-dystonic homosexuality* (classifying homosexuality as an aberrant disorder) (King, 2016; Russo, 2016). “The DSM as an evolving set of hypothetical constructs... has instead taken on a dominant and reified status in determining how and why individuals are classified as

psychiatrically ill (Gone & Kirmayer, 2010). Through this reification, Indigenous peoples and perspectives are essentially silenced within clinical contexts, self-determination efficiently denied, and the machine of Western cultural proselytization (Gone, 2008) rolls on” (Hill et al., 2010).

In the seminal madness studies text, *On Our Own*, Judi Chamberlin reminds us that many of us have become too comfortable and familiar with our psychiatric labelings, and that psychiatrists are making laws about what humans have grappled with for our entire existence: what is the mind, what is the relationship between our bodies and minds, etc. That is, our professionalized modalities of diagnosis interpellated, diagnosed, codified, curated, and co-authored forms of identity that we begin to believe. No, that we begin to internalize. The DSM becomes the mirror for our difference. To understand our emotions, desires, feelings, revulsions, contradictions, we must examine and interrogate and question the institutions that claim to be the arbiters of these knowledges and objective instruction. To understand how social media intervenes on our emotional selves, we must be privy to how *emotion* has been politically harnessed and how illness has been tactically deployed by psychiatric power. Psychiatric power operates via “the police power of the state... used to justify the involuntary confinement of people labeled mentally ill.” (Chamberlin, 1977). This sentiment is more apparent than ever, as social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter have partnerships with local police departments to automatically notify police when users make suicidal or homicidal posts.

As I wrote earlier, social media has at first inadvertently, and now very much intentionally, created a plethora of new emotions. Or, perhaps they have curated a host of affect-structures. I noted the experience of knowing when one’s friends are online at the same time as oneself. From 1997, until even as I type now, when I am frustrated, writer-blocked, confused at

my own thoughts, tired of the loneliness that writing notoriously entails, I check my Instagram page to see who has the green dot by their profile picture; who is online; who can I message; who can I ask to check in on me by the act of me checking in on them; who will participate in the panopticon of my wellbeing, where the very act of being ‘seen’ and allowing to ‘see’ is therapeutic, in the least clinical of senses. The emergence of new emotions also exists in the forms of digital sexualities and the automation of cruising (to be explored in the following chapters). Emotionality cannot, as psychiatric interlopers have availed at propagating, be separated from sexuality, although this has come to be via the detriment of PWMI, people of color, women, and queer people, making us, our sexualities, and our preferences, the subject of their white-male, psychiatric inquiries, debates, diagnoses, and metrics of danger to self or others, and proof of needing inquisition inspired types of reform.

What is an emotion that only exists online? What is a digital sexual desire? Are there feelings you’ve had that wouldn’t have been possible without social media? Are there lusts that only exist on Instagram? Are there feelings that may exist in other places but are intensified in digital spaces? I’m starting to think that *anticipation* is the emotion that exemplifies online culture. The acts of swiping, scrolling, and tapping are probably the most physically ubiquitous motions associated with social media, thanks to the proliferation of smart phones and touch-sensitive screens. The unlimited content, communities... *feelings*... that scrolling reveals to us is the essence of this addictive *anticipation*. The stakes shift based on the context, the vibes and *affects* alter with the content, the sensations of self and identity are experienced in relation to the profile structures. But it is *anticipation*, I think, that keeps us scrolling. “This creates an interactive text in that all authors are simultaneously audience members (and vice versa), but it works against any type of linear progression or individual narrative” (Fallon, 2014). When we

think through making spaces & narratives not only accessible to (dis)ability, but also a feature of it, we might create new norms entirely. Alison Kafer (2013) asks, “how might we imagine futures that hold space and possibility for those who communicate in ways we do not yet recognize as communication, let alone understand?” *Anticipation* gives way to anxiety; there is always something to do, something to see, something to hear, someone to speak with, something to catch up on – always, always, always. There is a particular way of being, and an anticipation of what the future holds in the eternity of scrolling literacies. Digital anxieties, *anticipations*, are the laboring alienation of our new social-digital economies. Our *anticipation* of identity, to me, is most salient through the public profile and the experience of public feelings in digital spaces.

### ***Public feelings in digital spaces***

Xanga was the first website based social media page I, and many in my generation, used.<sup>5</sup> “It was so heart-on-your-sleeve earnest, the sad sack sister of the too flashy MySpace and too young LiveJournal. And it’s totally the spiritual uncle to at least a third of Tumblr” (Knibbs, 2013). Xanga was essentially a microblogging platform that incorporated badly designed social media elements that would inform Facebook’s “Like” feature, as well as having an instant messaging system connected to a website platform also now ubiquitous on SNS. In my experiences of social media use, Xanga and Tumblr were very compatible in their archiving of alternative lifestyles and affects. “Tumblr...acts as an archive for the artifactual visual literacies youth use to categorize and index themselves” (Wargo, 2015). If you will recall, Human Extinction was my online moniker during this time. Right before graduating from undergrad I made sure my Xanga page was deleted, and have been successful in not finding any traces of it online anytime I have a fever dream about it somehow resurrecting to haunt my present (does

<sup>5</sup> “Website based social media page” is specified as such to differentiate between app based social media profiles.

anything really ever die online?). My Xanga featured a fire background and played various music I was into at the time – oh yes, Xanga had a music feature. It was always too loud and very angry. My Xanga became rather popular for the many European catholic church burnings I would find and post as gifs (I had the foresight to appreciate church burnings only in Europe, recognizing church burnings in the US as having a distinctly white supremacist invocation – of course now as an adult I’m not one to celebrate my 13-15 year old self’s shock-value interests, but I share to give context to the public feelings I explored in that era of life: a rage at prescribed Christianity). My Xanga page was the site of many frustrated arguments, as we could post comments on one another’s pages; the comment section, the public forum, of our digital identities – the beginnings of ephemeral celebrity.

While there was regular derision or celebration towards my church burning posts, a particularly tense encounter I recall having was centered more around mental illness. I think many of the interactions on this page were tense because of the contrarian subject matter, and I include the above to give a bit of background as to what people anticipated in their encounters with this page, as well as what sort of disidentification (read: parental rebellion; diagnosed as oppositional defiance disorder, in part because of my worrying online personas ) I was using this space for. Perhaps I was one of the early online users who was given a clinical diagnosis based solely on my online behavior. “Why is [they] posting all this violent imagery?” “It seems [they] is out of sync with the behavioral norms of [their] peers in this social media space.” While my parents attempted to place restrictions and blocks on certain sites I frequented, namely Xanga and several metal and punk forums, they also took me to a psychologist and psychiatrist who began prescribing me medication and offering diagnosis options based on my online behavior.

This all was an early linking between public feeling, online spaces, and psychiatric power in my own life.

Xanga was the first time I experienced genuine cognitive differences online. It was a space of reflected (in)sanity. Spaces can hold multiple forms of affect, including ones deemed disordered. Certain emotions only exist on Facebook, Instagram, etc; specific emotions are developed for consumption by corporations and nation-states; they set the stage for places of sanity, fermenting to sanenationalism. Xanga was not a place of sanity, and I reveled in the digital delirium. I posted some series of text regarding sadness or depression. Considering the era and the medium, several people wrote-off what I had written: “Poser”. But considering the many digital gestures I used, some were able to see something more underlying than what was traditionally welcomed into the self-storying space of Xanga; there was a sensitivity I revealed; a fear, an illegal, ominous desire. Really the text was my first attempt at expressing suicidality. My friends’ responses initially were that this was a fad cry for attention. Apparently it was cool to want to die? I’ve never understood suicidal ideation disclosure as related to wanting attention; suicidality and agoraphobia go hand in hand for me— to disclose my suicidality is to place a big “DO NOT ENTER” sign on my mind, in the conversation, on my SNS profile. At least on Xanga it was. Several other people, some I did not know and some I did, jumped into the fray to argue on my behalf. “Dismissed as incompetent, the psychiatrized person cannot get their knowledge, the content of their experiences, or their ways of knowing recognized and heard as legitimate. Alternative experiences of reality – defined as “psychosis” or “hallucinations” – become the rationale for the denial of their legitimacy as a knower” (Liegghio, 2013). The most surprising comment was from a high school senior (we were all freshman or sophomores) whom we all admired who posted, “[they] can feel how [they] feel. I feel like this sometimes.” The arguments

ended. I was no longer a suicidal-poser. I was just suicidal. Thanks to the legitimation of a presumably-sane, cis, straight, white man, all of which at the time I was presumed to be as well. But the further one drifts from any one of these privilege modifiers, the legitimacy of one's autobiography diminishes in transit.

Suicide narratives are probably more common than ever thanks to the internet. More affect narratives in general are common because of our shared digital spaces. "This character of space as the dimension of plurality, discrete multiplicity, is important, both conceptually and politically" (massey, 2005). The digital space in particular is characteristic of this *plurality*, *discrete multiplicity* and its importance in the case of suicide narratives, as well as other politicized emotional states. Social media registers our emotions and social lives in accordance with dominant political norms of our economic and national ethics: productivity and *pursuit of happiness*. "Thus, any collective efforts at repoliticizing depression, or mental health generally, need to be part of a very broad project that not only analyses the concrete ties between mental stress and what are right now only ever-increasing social hazards, but works to provide more caring support in a multitude of ways. It will never be possible to eliminate sadness from our lives, even in its most acute forms, though many more of us could more usefully be supported in managing to live with our everyday unhappiness while dreaming of better lives" (Segal, 2017). Sadness in this example may be more aptly replaced with chronic illness or cultural traumas, both of which disrupt clinical, curative, and self-help approaches to wellness and community.

I remember when Robin Williams died as a moment on Facebook of shared public grief and mourning; eulogies for famous people could become a *trend* or *meme*;<sup>6</sup> narratives of death

<sup>6</sup> *Trending* is a phenomenon when algorithms curate an immensely popularly discussed topic within a certain time frame. A *meme* is often the result of, or the precursor to, a *trend*, and typically situates or locates the subject of the *trend* within an image, or specific sets of media displays.

vary based on who dies. The public outcry over R.W.'s death happened amidst the rampant (and ongoing) suicides of Indian sharecroppers, online sex workers, and trans youth around the world. Palestine had just been sieged, again, by Israel, with heavy youth-civilian casualties. None of this was trending or had been, only R.W. A trending hashtag for tragedy is a fluid monument, a grief ceremony; who do we trend? A white friend involved in justice work posted, "It's telling to see people mourn a dead white celebrity, instead of dozens of murdered Palestinian children." I was hurt, livid, resonant, aware of these racial differences, aware that most Americans have some personal tie or experience or enjoyment associated with Robin Williams and virtually no engagement with Palestinians let alone Palestine, and I was frustrated that that impacts our public mourning. I've noticed this sort of rhetoric happening on social media now as well with #BLM uprisings when, especially white people, weaponize the grief of Black people and Black communities against whiteness. "Blackness becomes a reduced space where whiteness enacts its privilege by instrumentalizing Blackness. In this paradigm, Blackness for all its cultural complexity becomes another reactionary space that exists to indict whiteness, rather than a culture and system of thought all its own" (Pickens, 2019). Tokenizing the traumas of one group to antagonize whiteness is a missed opportunity to recognize how Blackness (or in the case of the aforementioned FB discussion, Palestinian cultural identity) holds their own set of intricate cultural phenomena; cultural traumas of a people and group are not alleviated when politically misused, or when the complexity of grief and mourning is not honored in and of itself. Black grief in the United States and Palestinian grief in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora are complex systems of culture, practice, and relating that do not need to orient around whiteness. This is not to say that Black people, Palestinian people, etc., can or should not recognize grief as political and in opposition to white supremacy, but rather to say that reducing such experiences



of “others” to be about educating white people or *indicting* whiteness is missing the point, especially (if not exclusively) when it is coming from white people. This conversation gains more nuance with the platforms that the grief is being displayed & practiced, as well as who is displaying the grief. In the context of my example, the person was white, not Palestinian, and to my knowledge had never posted about suicidal ideation (not that they did not experience it, but that they did not align themselves publicly with the politics of suicidality). And honestly the reason this hurt so much was because as someone who has previously lived in the Occupied Territories and regularly experienced suicidal ideation, I was hurting and was craving community with fellow suicide survivors as the floodgates of inappropriate suicide reporting poured into every social media feed I live in; and I wanted to hold my Palestinian friends and feel the safety of their bodies while their homes continued to be destroyed. And I didn’t want to have to prioritize being triggered & angered by State violence over my own grappling with public suicidality as proof of my allegiance to liberation justice work. I just wanted to hurt... publicly...

The politicization of our emotions through public feelings is largely attached to the normalized sentimentalisms & sensationalisms peddled to us by the media; we are not taught to mourn or sentimentalize Palestinian or trans people... Can shared moments, experiences, timings of grief lead to movement building and coalition work? Narrative therapy helps us develop movements of solidarity and understanding; we can develop mourning practices and grieving rituals through storying online, often this happens through meme making and sharing. Narrative therapy practice encourages the emergence of individual narratives to be read alongside “localized”, “subjugated”, and “Indigenous” knowledges (White et al., 1990). Yet, “local knowledge’ can be fetishized, resulting in essentialist narratives about differences that minimize

opportunities for alliance building and political mobilization” (Eubanks, 2011). The fetishization of local knowledge often occurs in the widespread rejection of the political nature of mental illness and mental health care as well as the distancing of capitalism from alienation, or in the weaponizing of such knowledges as reductive indictments that de-center the people who hold or produce the knowledge (as in the above mentioned example). Thus movement work oriented around affect, grief, and “illegal emotions” / public feelings must also attend to appropriation, and decolonizing our senses of emotion (specifically trauma) in the context of nation-state construction project.

“A notable feature of the project of examining national history as trauma history is the emphasis on the role of personal memory in the construction of public histories and memorials” (Cvetkovich, 2003). What are the ongoing national traumas for the pseudo national corporate states? And notice both in digital spaces and in national contexts “the ways in which nationalism becomes the only available language for making sense of death” (Kyungwon Hong 2015). Thus sanenationalism prevents mainstream mourning of suicide and disavows the socio-political conditions associated with suicide. How is grief complicated when in the transnational space between the United States and digital media pseudo nations? More significantly, how is grief denied when it is the state who perpetuates violence? Making sense of death is a Black & queer tradition when the state refuses to acknowledge itself as the source of violence, or when it regards the subject of death as being worth killing. This references “disenfranchised grief” (Harris, 2016). “Examples of disenfranchised grief include stigmatized deaths such as suicide or death from AIDS related complications, where the deceased may be viewed as having committed an act deemed reprehensible in regards to normative religious beliefs and thus, not ‘deserving’ our grief” (Harris, 2016). Notice how both the grief of Palestinians, the grief of people who die

by suicide, and the grief of Black America in light of police violence is disenfranchised, silenced, repressed; grief is political. Yet it exists boldly as a public feeling online – a digital archive of cultural traumas.

In a moment where SNS profiles and timelines were participating in the grief and mourning of this celebrity, we were developing a new form of public feeling, a new set of rituals around grief due to the new spaces in which we articulate this grief. Tying the narrative of grief and mourning from the mainstream celebrity of Robin Williams to the plight of Palestine seems like less of a stretch when we rely on the designed structures of affect to transport us between these places and moments. Techno-culture designs structure affect and community in ways that enable cross movement solidarity not necessarily from roots of shared interest, but from shared affective states. Perhaps this observation of design -> structure -> space -> affect -> community may guide a narrative therapy approach to reading the formation of grassroots, political mourning groups, such as with the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. “Queer activism insisted on militancy over mourning, but also remade mourning in the form of new kinds of public funerals and queer intimacies” (Cvetkovich, 2003). Queer activism inspires a sort of resistant grief. Yet the role of nationalism is important in this paradigm as well, particularly the role of corporate nationalism. The #BLM posts by Instagram, the loading page on Tiktok (which occurred after the company was outed for flagging and taking down images of police brutality and Black resistance),<sup>7</sup> and other ways #BLM is being depoliticized is a stark

<sup>7</sup> I was encouraged to add a source for this observation and sadly my own infatuation with TikTok is the source for this observation. Prior to accessing the content feed of TikTok there is an advertisement screen or load screen (sort of like watching all the ads at once before streaming a show on Hulu). After Tiktok received backlash about removing posts with BLM tags (which I learned about through TikTok users) they created a #BLM loading screen. It was digital performative allyship worthy of an award ceremony.

reminder of how nationalism and corporatism only politicizes certain grief. Digital-neoliberalism appropriates grief only inasmuch as it must to maintain a user / consumer base.

Segal (2017) reflects on Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* as an exploration of how public forums facilitate the "sharing [of] negative feelings". "She described the different forms of consciousness raising where people come together to discuss and act upon the significance of their common injuries from the past that feed into their depression. As she says, this experience of deep injury is most vivid for those living in the long shadow of racism, sexism, and colonialism in the USA, issues which remain unresolved, even expanding to significant degrees and in various forms in the present" (Segal, 2017). What Segal is arguing has urgent implications for the affective trajectories unique to the digital humanities, which are especially relevant when exploring the rise and importance of Black Lives Matter as a site of communal grieving and healing. Moreover, the experience of protest further disrupts the binary of digital space and physical space. Protestors are live-streaming images of police brutality at demonstrations (as I have been doing this spring and summer), coordinating with legal clinics and groups through social media, and organizing support and critical mass for street movements. This blurring of space and place occurs through public feelings of grief, rage, hope, & other intensified emotions that could be classified as disorders by the white psychiatric impulse to codify emotions. But what we can recognize through narrative therapy, grief therapy, and decolonial activism is the urgent need to cry out, to "break open the bone" (Poole et al., 2013) in grieving the traumas endemic to white supremacy. To queer and politicize grief; to *mad* the places of our affects, and refuse polite, quiet mourning.

By *externalizing* the problems (White et al., 1990) of white supremacy through public displays of grief (Harris, 2016), Black activists and communities are challenging affective

hegemonies of stability, niceties, constructions of mental illness, and of course most saliently Black subservience to whiteness and white supremacy brutally experienced in police and State violence. Blurring boundaries of space and place through public emotions in digital spaces is revealing the temporality and liminality of police coercion in Black lives & communities. The restoration of Black and Indigenous narratives necessitates tearing down the affective order of white comfort and the structural designs of psychiatric power without allowing these “localized knowledges” (Eubanks, 2018) to be fetishized and co-opted. Black Lives Matter is a leader in illegal emotions, in emergent affects; the internet facilitated the communal experience of illegal emotions in the modern Black liberation struggle in many ways through an affective-neoliberalism. Robin Williams died in part due to undisclosed emotions that are undesirable, in fact carcerable. These emotions of Black anger and suicidal pain are illegal because of the normalized affective social orders of saneism and white supremacy, both of which exist partially in the service of capitalism.

Sami Schalk (2018) cogently articulates this relationship between saneism and white supremacy in the US:

“Denials of systemic violence and dismissal of Black fear and anger serve to deny the reality of Black people and to continue to position us outside of able-mindedness through accusations of paranoia, overreaction, and unreasonableness. Ableism against those positioned outside of able-mindedness – people with mental disabilities – is therefore used to dismiss our reality as false and allow for the continuation of racist violence. In order to resist this racist dismissal of Black realities, we must also challenge the ableism inherent in it. To be clear, I am not saying that Black people’s realities are equivalent to the realities of people with mental disabilities, but rather that some of the discourses used

to discount and disbelieve both Black people and mentally disabled people are based in ableism.”

When we recognize the public grief of Robin Williams in relation to public grief of racial justice movements, we can build bridges of solidarity rooted in our public displays of affect. Affective resistance, in other words, is a racial justice project, a decolonial project, a grieving process, a blurring of boundaries, a recognition of harm, a narrative therapy; public feelings in digital spaces leads to public change in physical spaces. Black Lives Matter is not just a hashtag— it is the rage of youth screaming at a sea of blue uniforms, it is tears of Black mothers, it is the joys of activists who get cops out of schools, it is the third precinct on fire,<sup>8</sup> it is the marching of masses, it is the creation of a safe future – but it also is and necessarily has to be a hashtag; hashtags are emotions and movements.

***Legal emotions, illegal feelings, and the policing of affect***

“By insisting that treating different groups of people differently is only ever bad, we find peace with our own normative violence and extend the historical legacy of secular liberal individualism through which we have gradually begun to narrate what it is to be human for five centuries” (Chapman, 2014).

Part way through high school, with most of my grades hovering around an F, my parents bring me to see yet another psychiatrist. This one prescribed me Adderall<sup>9</sup>. Adderall being a

<sup>8</sup> Referencing the Third Precinct Police Station in Minneapolis that burned to the ground amidst the uprising in response to the racist police killing of George Floyd.

<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup> As a relevant side note: Adderall is a type of amphetamine developed by a weight loss company in the 70’s, but repurposed in the mid 90’s to treat people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a disorder that has exploded in diagnosability directly linked to the popularity of prescribing Adderall (literally shorthand for “A.D.D. for all”) and Ritalin during the 00’s (the same time as the rise of social media giants). “pharmaceuticals are created and tested on the basis of certain beings and yet dispensed under the assumption that they will work for all or most bodyminds” (Schalk, 2018). Stimulants netted over \$8 billion in sales in 2012 for pharmaceutical companies in the United States alone, a \$6 billion increase from 2002 (Shwarz, 2013). Facebook finished 2012 with just over \$5 billion in earnings (Gorman, 2013), whereas Friendster, the largest social media platform in 2002 & ’03 (although not explored here) was estimated to be worth between \$30-\$50 million (AP, 2007). The focus of this section is not

medical stimulant that is culturally analogous to being situated between the acceptable professionalism of LinkedIn and the overwhelming sensory overload of Twitter. My grades picked up, my attendance bounced back to pre-middle school times, and my eyesight felt strangely clearer than ever. But I couldn't stop thinking about dying. Adderall was the intensification of my focus; I felt automated, like the rigid structures my bodymind was fed into mechanicalized my everything. Yet I couldn't tell anyone. My first introduction into (dis)ability studies was on Xanga; depressed kids posting their life stories to other depressed kids; a cathartic, grassroots, support group. I knew from their posts about *hospital* that disclosing my symptoms to doctors or parents would lead to a further restriction of the few joys I had; my emotions were illegal. At first I thought they were illegal because of content + age, but now I recognize that my emotions are always illegal; we cannot want to die, *hospital* or the psych ward or the stabilization unit or whatever one wishes to refer to it as is the prison for those who break the laws of affect. As one youth told me whom I worked with in a social work capacity, "Hospital is the prison for privileged people". Xanga, for me, predated unpacking the archaeology of psychiatric power and disciplinary power through the work of Foucault.

The kids on Xanga who had been to *hospital* taught us how to hide our scars, our burn marks, and how to say we wanted to die without triggering the disciplinary responses of our panoptic educational & family institutions. Tumblr continued this education for those of us with

to trace the relationships between social media usage and the rise of ADD / ADHD, nor the cross-capital benefits that social media and pharmaceutical giants have reaped over the past two decades. But these connections are interesting, important enough to note, and worthy of further exploration and criticism. Moreover, these two industries more than most capitalize on creating and curating what emotions are desirable and undesirable, eventually leading to what feelings are legal and illegal, what needs to be mediated and medicated. Social media and pharmaceutical giants have the power, the psychiatric sovereign power, to give us emotions, to legitimize for us what emotions we must have, pursue, anticipate, experience, express; they are our affective gatekeepers; medical & social, pills and profiles. "Indeed within global capitalism the imperative is to have more pleasure (through the consumption of products designed to tantalize the senses). And yet alongside this imperative to enjoy, there is a warning: pleasures can distract you, and turn you away from obligations, duties and responsibilities" (Ahmed, 2003).

eating disorders, self-harm habits, and more. We could create mad, disidentificatory communities without much fear of reprisal online. “Disciplinary power has an inherent tendency to intervene at the same level as what is happening, at the point when the virtual is becoming real; disciplinary power always tends to intervene beforehand... and by means of an infra-judicial interplay of supervision, rewards, punishments, and pressure” (Foucault, 2003). The *point when the virtual is becoming real* was visceral at the moment of messaging a friend on AIM (one of the very friends who had denied my suicidality back on Xanga, and I would have never messaged him on Xanga about this) to let him know I was more suicidal, but more productive than ever. Thankfully the *disciplinary power* Foucault describes above did not *intervene* at this moment, but the form of confession to having suicidal ideations (SI) (and it was confessional) was determined by the *disciplinary power* of psychiatry I learned about on Xanga. That is, there was an *interplay of supervision, rewards, punishments, and pressures* I anticipated or felt that led me to using AIM to disclose this most personal confession; “there are powerful norms that make it difficult to seek emotional support on Facebook (Buehler, 2017) and, for some, its very interconnectedness made it a less than safe space for sharing emotional distress” (Brownlie, 2018). Seeking emotional support in public spaces is always a risky endeavor; clandestine disclosure remains a preferred form of admitting to SI. But typing it –suicide– would lessen the intensity speech is laden with. “i feel like no one will believe me because im doing things again... but i am really afraid... i really want to die all the time.” A kind response this time. What is the timeline, he asked, of these SI? Around when I started taking the Adderall. “POS” (Parent over shoulder). I was on my family laptop. The Twitter app, Radar had yet to be developed, so “emotional surveillance” (Brownie, 2018) was only relevant in the experience of parental warnings, guidelines, blockers, and literally viewing over the shoulder. “Radar, under



the tagline, ‘turn your social net into a safety net’... allowed registered users to be alerted when a Twitter account they followed included messages that might suggest depressed or suicidal thoughts” (Brownlie, 2018). But none of these program blockers or filters or controls addressed self-harm or suicidality; sex, drugs, alcohol, and such were the blocked features, emotions had yet to be realized as legal or illegal by corporate surveillance systems prior to Radar (a short lived project that Twitter discontinued soon after its release). When we were younger we did not have such a rigorous understanding of digital surveillance, so shorthand digital gestures sufficed to communicate being watched.

When my friend learned that Adderall coincided with my suicidal ideation (an apparently uncommon side effect, so I read), he encouraged me to tell my parents and psychiatrist immediately. I did... sort of. “Like any smart crazy, I don’t want anything I can prevent on my permanent record, and I definitely don’t want Danger to Self or Others” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). I told them Adderall was giving me searing headaches, dehydration, lack of sleep. All the side effects other than the only one I was actually experiencing. My parents were incredulous. “But you’re doing so well in school.” My psychiatrist encouraged me to keep taking it at a lower dosage. It didn’t help. I stopped taking it, but pretended to for my parents’ sake. Somehow I was able to continue doing well in school despite the lack of stimulants. In part I knew it was the fear of being forced back onto the medicine that was whispering death threats in my mind. It was strange, though, to prioritize productivity over life. To prioritize consumption over life. To equate living with doing. “Capitalism says that disabled, tired bodies that spend too much time in bed are useless. Anyone who cannot labor to create wealth for owners is useless...crips are useless to capitalism” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Capitalism says that tired disordered, confused minds are useless. That *madness is useless to capitalism*- this is sanenationalism.

Jacques Ellul (1964) writes that “If a machine can yield a given result, it must be used to capacity, and it is considered criminal and antisocial not to do so. Technical automatism may not be judged or questioned; immediate use must be found for the most recent, efficient, and technical process.” The machine here being social media or the mind – the technical automism being algorithms or the stimulant medicine – the result being the endless capacity for content creation, curation, and consumption. Yet Ellul does not reckon with the infinity of the internet; there is no limit to the capacity of this automatism. There is an equally infinite, perpetual criminality of antisociality within capitalism mediated via compulsory hegemonic community in the space of social media. Capitalism’s inability to be satiated and its systemic, urgent need to be participated in through social media (the *immediate use*) speaks to this alienating anticipation. Our social lives, our affective realities, our autobiographical identities, our psychiatric encounters are on repeat through this never-ending online community. Ellul also does not reckon with the pharmaceutical industry’s ability to automate our emotions through medication. Reworded: if an SSI (anti-depressant) can yield a given result, it must be used to capacity, and it is considered criminal and antisocial not to do so; we must stay medicated, useful, productive, and social. We must be happy, productive, social, consuming. Sanenationalism is the post-industrial production of emotions: if an emotion is out of sync with national identity, then technical automism via medication must be employed to user-capacity to yield the result of affective-assimilation.

Thinking of social media as a technical machine of capitalism, as an interpellatory process of modern identity construction, as a curator and creator of affect, makes our identities products of capitalism. Participation in capitalism is intensified through social automation. If automation is *intensification* (Eubanks, 2018), and scrolling / swiping is *anticipation*, then social

media is the capitalist *intensification of anticipation*. It is not just the alienation of our labor (though it is this), it is also the alienation of our affective lives; it is the *intensification* of our *alienation* in a techno-Marxist sense. “[We] are stripped of [our] faculty of choice and [are] satisfied. [We] accept the situation when [we] side with technique” (Ellul, 1964). For Ellul (1964), technique is “*the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency*”, which sounds rather fascist in form; efficient productivity over all else. And within social media, the boundaries between production and consumption are intensely blurred. The boundaries between how our identities are formed via psychiatric power are intensified yet equally blurred in the culturally-homogenizing automation of social media, where our actions carry with them immediate identificatory reactions of the spaces we are participating in. Yet, “we return to the old schema of Marx: it is the automatism of technique, with its demand that everything be brought into line with it, that endangers capitalism and heralds its final disappearance” (Ellul, 1964). In the automatism of affect and the intensification of identity, we are yielded as more alienated than ever, and so more able to disidentify than previous generations.

Am I a machine of capitalism? By taking Adderall was I alienated from my emotions, though more in step with society; are my emotions out of step with society? By taking mood stabilizers now, am I experiencing an automation of affect and intensification of normalcy? By taking antipsychotics now am I experiencing an automation of sanity and intensification of rationality? How does being a user and consumer of social media and as a person with mental illness collide in the intensifications, automations, and anticipations of affect & identity? Am I more social because I participate in SNS? Is my identity more static or adaptable because of algorithms? Do YouTube and Spotify and Instagram know me better than my psychiatrist?

I recall how the consumptive habits of taking medicine interacts with the productive impulse of capitalism, but also in the mandate to be social with the global encouragement to participate in digital dialogues. Being social is perhaps the highest echelon of being human, and being social is made easiest via digital media. It is how we story our lives and how our lives are formed for us. It is where we write ourselves into existence. In the days leading up to my most severe suicide attempt, several friends noted that I was not posting anything on Facebook or Snapchat. “Are you okay, you haven’t been online much lately?” I was not okay. Why is social media engagement and consumption such an accurate prediction of my wellness? Social media is a non-place, but it is a social space; it’s hard to be social when one wants to die; it’s hard to be social when one is shedding their life; it’s hard to have a desire for life and maintain a presence, an online presence that is constantly giving form to friendships, identities, desires.

My emotions are illegal and the illegality of my emotions are shielded by the whiteness of my skin so when I post on disembodied platforms of Instagram and Snapchat a silhouette self-portrait with a barely legible caption, maybe “I can’t make it through this weekend”, the criminality of my emotions maintains a certain level of privilege. The reality that I can write a thesis on these emotions indicates how far removed from the disciplinary apparatuses of affect I am. My whiteness protects me from the social consequences of my suicidal ideations. My whiteness allows me to publicly share my feelings without (reasonable or logical) fear of reprisal.<sup>10</sup> Can the same sort of safety be said of Black Lives Matter activists who reflect on their own troubling emotions in online spaces? The blurring of spatial boundaries while advantageous

<sup>10</sup> My social class standing also enables this as well. Although, as the Canadian and British madness liberation movement has shown, psychiatric power cares little for class though a lot for race (LeFrancois, 2014). That is, people of any class can be psychiatrically incarcerated, but it is a privilege of white people to be psychiatrically hospitalized (regardless of class) as opposed to the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, who often are psychiatrically imprisoned rather than hospitalized, again, without regard to class. Psychiatric power and police state violence coalesces into a racialized triage of illegal emotions: white people are incarcerated in hospitals, non-white people in jails and prisons.

for movement building also holds psychiatric implications for more vulnerable and marginalized populations whose lives are more heavily and critically surveilled than my own. The blurring of spatial boundaries may occur when a distress post on a social media profile triggers a police response, the ever dreaded “wellness check”. The technologies of social spaces intensify not only our affects, but also our experiences of race, gender, class, and other identity markers. They intensify our insider/outsider politics.

Chapter two described some of the intensities of online autobiography and social media with regards to madness and affect. Chapter three will explore how gender and sexuality are shaped in mixed-reality spaces through social justice movements and dating apps.

### Chapter 3: *immediacies*

The following chapter includes sets of ramblings stretching topically from puberty, to gender based social justice movements, and concluding with my current internal-dilemmas posed by my experiences with mental illness, and queer dating. The first section of this chapter, *puberty and autobiographical profiles*, traces the relationships between politics of masculinity and gender and the technological designs of our social spaces, and continues this conversation by using personal narrative to reflect on how feminist autobiographical theory interacts with social media profiles. In the second section, *safe spaces, sane spaces, and movement building*, I discuss three prominent gender based digital activist campaigns, Gamergate, BlackLivesMatter, and MeToo. In the final section, *Curating queerness and transgression*, I delve into the global politics at play in the widespread use of the mostly gay dating app Grindr, and how (dis)ability justice, collectivism, and my own experiences of mental illness intervene into our new interconnected social-sexual worlds.

#### ***Puberty and autobiographical profiles***

The internet is a space where puberty thrives. “Everyday life is an arena of gender politics, not an escape from it. Gender terms are contested because the right to account for gender is claimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge” (Connell, 1995). The internet is a reflection of daily life, not an escape from it. My own experiences of gender, the *arena of gender politics* that I was raised in, was discursively established through social media interactions. People assigned male at birth are introduced to a world of masculinizing forces online, from the obviously sexual in the forms of pornography, to the consequentially competitive in the forms of video gaming, and the homogenizing of gesture and patriarchal reasoning through forums and comment sections; young adult and teenage internet spaces are

increasingly masculinizing. People assigned female at birth are introduced to a world of feminizing forces online, from the representations of women in pornography, the sense of safety women have in public forums & comment sections, and the administrative aesthetics made famous by Pinterest boards and Instagram profiles. For many young people the internet is an increasingly feminizing space. Moreover, queer people experience a host of gender and sexual complications, whether through the moderating of space, the popularization of queer forms of pornography, or the popularization of gender-bending art and community gathering spaces (such as Tumblr), the internet is an increasingly queer place. But what is masculinity? What is femininity? What is queerness? How does the internet expose us to and interpellate us in these various gendering apparatuses and hegemonies? How is it that the internet can simultaneously be a place of masculinization, feminization, and queerness? Balsamo (2011) developed several programs for how feminist theory and movements might participate in the designing of culture via the rise of the tech industry. “An early objective was to encourage gender studies students to imagine the social and political possibilities of new media and to inspire them to learn how to design and develop new media applications... technology must be more fully integrated within women’s studies curricula, as an object of theoretical analysis, as a topic of critical investigation, and as a platform for creative and political praxis” (Balsamo, 2011). And as the internet is a gendering place, it is also a racializing place. The “echo-chambers” one reads often about, especially in light of the 2016 elections, reveals how white internet users have increasingly become either more entrenched in their sensations of whiteness and white supremacy, or educated in “post-woke” sensibilities (e.g. learning about white privilege). Moreover, Black twitter, Black Instagram, etc. have been fertile ground for the proliferation of Black culture, ideology, theory, and an often safe / unsafe space for Black community to gather and Black

identity to develop. “To gender the technological imagination is to acknowledge that all participants bring gendered, racial, and class-based assumptions to the designing process. These assumptions contribute to the creation of meaning for a technology-under-development” (Balsamo, 2011).

In 6th grade (for me, 2001-2002) my family moved to Sweden where I attended a British international school in the small city of Malmo, while my father consulted at TetraPAK, which all sounds much fancier than it was, though no less privileged with all its trappings and problematics. This was the year I was introduced to MSN messenger. AIM was still installed on my father’s laptop for us to communicate with friends and family back home, but MSN messenger was the messaging app of choice for international students in Malmo. MSN was tied to AIM, literally. Microsoft developed MSN messenger by “reverse-engineer[ing] AOL's chat protocol to allow MSN Messenger to sign into AIM” (Warren, 2014). MSN messenger was replaced by Microsoft’s more relevant and specific chat tools, such as Xbox Live and Skype. MSN Messenger was revered, in part, upon its release because of the ability to play games over chat. AIM’s online buddy system was the first time we could experience the sensation of knowing another person’s location without sharing presence or being on the phone, and while online gaming was becoming more popular even in the mid to late 90’s, MSN messenger’s game functions was likely among the first experiences for mass audiences to simultaneously play a game, draw a picture, or sweep a mine, without being in the same location. Location was an increasingly important concept to me, as I was an ocean, sea, and large swaths of land between my friends and my childhood-self. AIM felt like home, MSN felt like the adventure I was in.

These early memories of stifling loneliness when a friend was miles away late at night when we stole our parents’ laptops were foundational in shaping my social upbringing. MSN



Messenger was also the first place when a French girl in that international school asked me if I liked her, yes: liked-liked her. The thought of liking her hadn't crossed my mind until Microsoft's Times New Roman popped up on my laptop screen. I checked to see if my Canadian friend Eric, who was my true interest that year (though neither of us could articulate it at the time), was online. "Do you like me? Check Yes or No" had a buffer time back in the era of paper-based crushes, but her question needed to be answered; her online status was active, there was an in-person immediacy to this- my online status was also active, there was an online anxiety to this: she knew I was online, present, in sync with her time. There was an immediacy to this. The anticipation of gendered pubescent exploration of affection was intensified when manifested online. The green light of availability taunted my youthful asexuality and confused queer curiosities, teasing yet a possibility of what desire could become through this medium usually reserved for basic classroom gossip, makeshift tutoring and cheating, or lousy computer games. I didn't know if I was waiting for Eric to come online for any particular reason, but that his username was grayed out, idle in the Not Online box, added to my mounting anxiety, pestering my confusion, and suggested that answering this question/not answering this question/having received this question at all would be something I would want to/need to tell him immediately/as soon as he popped online/(in private)/not around anyone else. Why? A particular set of emotions I had not yet experienced. These were emotions specific to presumably being a boy. A presumed boy going through puberty. A presumed boy with a confused and emerging sexuality. A presumed boy online. A presumed boy online receiving sexual ques and instructions from social media messaging. These were new emotions not just for me, but the adaptation of them on this space and place is a new emotion for our species. I wanted to tell the French girl yes. She was, according to the other boys, desirable, but to me the desire was as a

diligent friend and curious playground explorer. I wanted the boys to think I was cool, I wanted her to know that she was too. All these emotions... I surfed through the list of proto-emojis to visualize how I felt, none of the icons were resonant with the many sensations inspired by this inquiry.

More importantly to me then... would Eric think I was more interesting if I told her no? This desire for him to be online predated my experiences with dating app crushes who would appear online to chat with, but these experiences have been logged into my sexual awakenings and gendered reckonings. How many chat rooms informed your gender? How many forums brought forth your sexualities? The chat lingered for several minutes. I remember standing on our cushioned swivel chair trying to touch the ceiling after failing to find a useful emoji. Would a hug have been an acceptable reaction had she asked me this in person; neither yes, nor no, but *embrace* as the answer. I looked for a hug emoji. It was how I felt, even if it answered very little for her question. Yet I began to wonder if this was a practical joke. Was Eric in on it? Why isn't he online, does he know, has this been planned, will he laugh, why is she... Years later I would read *Notes from the Underground* and be astonished at the audacity of Dostoevsky's neurotic narrator because of how irritably paranoid he was, and how much I felt like him so much of the time, especially online; how the realization that everyone was always online, always in communication with me, without me, for me, against me... that there was a me-centric aspect to how I perceived and experienced reality, especially in these digital contexts. How it never ended online, an eternal spiral of content to fuel our paranoia. How years later I would recognize that the sense of what "me" is was rooted in being white, being male; that taking such time to answer such a simple question of "Do you like me" was the privilege of masculinity added with the

anticipations of heterosexuality. There is a queerness to my anxieties; my affect has sexual qualities; my mental illnesses are contained within and themselves contain my sexualities.

Before I could respond to my French friend, she messaged again, “Omg, so sorry, that was my little brother lol.”

“Lol. I was confused.” If a period comes after a ‘lol’ then the comment was/is not funny, it is meant to pacify the receiver’s anxiety, embarrassment, frustration, and so on - it communicates a false smile. Punctuation in chat rooms offers a lot of insight into the digital gestures of our era.

Eric didn’t acknowledge it when I messaged him later that day. We never spoke of our friend’s question towards me or whether it was a prank from a younger sibling (which is entirely likely) or the embarrassed, rescinded acknowledgement of eros (equally entirely possible). We never, Eric and I, spoke about sex or romance towards anyone, as the other boys did (in my pubescent experience, Sweden is as sexually free a country as the rumors have it), though once he asked me if I would watch pornography with him. I agreed and asked what he hoped to see... He did not respond. He walked ahead. Watching pornography together was an excuse to feel aroused in proximity with one another, the salacious imagery was less important than the shared experience, but having been raised in heteronormativity, pornography was the necessary excuse. We were only 11 or 12 but I still feel like a coward for not simply speaking to and exploring this desire. We lost touch. Years later I would look him up on Facebook. I was not sure if it was him, but the resemblance in the sharp eyes, pointed nose, and gaunt cheeks was there. All of his pictures were shirtless with various flattering filters. All of his captions were alluring. What poured out of this boy’s profile was the lingering sexual tensions of gay puberty in a straight world; social media became his, and mine, and so many others like us, queer utopia. Where our

queer gestures were coordinated in the anxieties of online green dots, emojis to communicate touch and affection, lighting filters to offer insights into sexual preferences, and captions to round out our intentions and personalities. He has not since responded to my message, left on read,<sup>11</sup> walked ahead into the life we could not then share. A social media profile can be queer, read as queer, scrolled as queer.

Writing out these memories is helpful, but only possible when reciting my significant histories with these platforms. There is something wrong with my internal narrative. Many people can trace their lives in linearity. I can do that too, but I don't know if it is too much trauma, head contusions, or something else, but I need an aid, a reference, a guide through my own life's stories. The internet offers me this me-centric framework for exploring personal histories. Profiles were one of the first times we were writing our lives out for the public, and it is in remembering and recalling both these experiences of chatting and messaging, along with the recitation of social media profiles that a personal narrative of a queer, mentally ill, young weirdo comes to type this now. The public to which I spoke to then was different than that which I engage with now. The geographical proximity of physical life informed our distance-free online lives and relationships more so the younger we were. "Unlike me and the other early adopters who avoided our local community by hanging out in chat rooms and bulletin boards, most teenagers now go online to connect to the people in their community. Their online participation is not eccentric; it is entirely normal, even expected" (boyd, 2014). IRL<sup>12</sup> geographies still inform our digital lives, but as less a filter. This is in part due to hashtags and search engines, friends and families moving around the world — borderless relationships and automations of the

<sup>11</sup> Being "left on read" is the common expression for when a "Read receipt" (the automatic digital notification below a text, typically from iMessage or Facebook Messaging services) is active (meaning the text receiver has read or at least seen the message) but has not responded.

<sup>12</sup> IRL, as in the introduction, stands for 'In Real Life'.

internet. As an adult, I notice how digital geographies have done more to shape my physical interactions with the world. My dating life was almost exclusively digital, meaning my sexualities were being engaged with through affective structures of intensification & anticipation. My employers, schoolings, friendships, organizing, interests, etc. all were revealed or facilitated through internet spaces. The internet used to be a place we would connect with IRL friends when not in person, or where we could avoid IRL communities to connect with people more like us; it is still both of these spaces, and more: it informs where we can be safe IRL & whom with. The geographies of my memory are mapped in the social media profiles of my online identities.

How does Facebook construct its own layers of happiness? If, as Sara Ahmed (2004) shows, affect is derived and communicated and sensed as a project of the nation-state, then how do we make-up the emotions associated with genders? Is it democratic, propagated, automated? How does nation-state-emotion-creation project inform gender discourses of the state? How does the pseudo-nation of Facebook enlist nationalist affects for their own structuring of desire and feelin? What emotions are valid, and what does that tell us about citizenship, race, and gender? As discussed in the previous chapter, the profile sections of social media platforms are designed to elicit certain emotions, they are also designed to facilitate certain experiences of gender and sexuality. “They [Western powers and regimes] had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as ‘Other’” (Hall, 1990). Does the autobiography of social media automate this process of experiencing the self as ‘other’?

Perhaps an early victory for AIM was that it did not include the forms we are now so used to with Facebook and even from Myspace. The miniature about me sections on most platforms are the few spaces we have where identity is not mediated via forms (despite this blank

section technically being a ‘form’). But as Eubanks (2018) notes, simply ignoring bias when developing automated social tools can reify existing types of oppression. We were allotted certain personalities in the early days of the internet. Many were not so interesting. Some lovable clichés of personality in these profiles that reflected our real life avatars: the athletes with their motivational quotes, the Christians with their supposedly motivational quotes, the music fans of various sorts, the happy girls, the jock boys, the sad girls, and the queer emo kids. The girls were often mocked for how they portrayed themselves online. And if boys were to have emotional profiles, or use certain fonts or colors – to pay attention to their digital aesthetic in any obvious and direct way – there would be questions of effeminacy or even queerness. In recognizing the prevalence of Fall Out Boy, Dashboard Confessional, and other such lyrics in purple font on pink backgrounds that attested to the depths of emotions and incredible sensations of sadness unique to 12-14 year olds, of which no other soul may match and no writer over this age without eye-liner and a raspy falsetto may approach (more relevantly the prevalence of a gendered expectation for whom such personal profiles were meant to be for, and what such a person’s emotional state might be, as in these “emo” pages were for “moody girls” and “gay boys”... other descriptions were not unfit albeit perhaps unkind to me and others), and in recognizing all of this through a lens of feminist autobiography I present Sidonie Smith’s discourse on the silencing of women’s contributions to the genre of autobiography. This passage speaks to how social norms of storying our lives take a gendered form both historically in print, and digitally in social media:

“...contributions of women to the genre [of autobiography] have traditionally been perceived as forms of contamination, illegitimacies, threats to the purity of the canon of autobiography itself; and their works, defined as anomalous, are set aside in separate chapters, at ends of chapters. They are silenced. Or they are lauded insofar as they imitate

male models and continue thereby to enhance the image of men... Perhaps [women] must be erased from the great tradition of autobiography because that very erasure somehow defines it. To write them in and to privilege them would be to undermine the very notion of artistic and intellectual creativity in autobiography as that which is not spoken by woman. And so, to supplement this study of women's autobiography, I wish also for someone to offer an exploration of the relationship of men to autobiography that would reread the male tradition with attention to the repression of woman and the ideology of individualism. For we need not only to disrupt the quiet efficiencies of the prevailing canon of autobiographical texts by insisting on situating authority in women's stories; we need also to reread and thereby to critique the basis on which male autobiographical authority asserts itself. We need, that is, to challenge the fictions of power and the very sources of self-knowledge privileged by 'autobiography' "(Smith, 1987).

The intensity, importance, and significance of patriarchal erasure of women's autobiographies – the intentional, methodical, specific, and brutal suppression of women's life stories, as in not accidental or random – may seem a stretch to compare to AIM personal profiles or other such social media pages. But I argue that this very form of erasure and removing the significance of women's stories happened and still happens all across the internet; that these apps are in part designed to do so because of the capitalist-patriarchal agenda of their almost always white and male and middle class designers and owners. Also, "the more technology becomes embedded in all aspects of life, the more it matters whether that technology is biased, alienating, or harmful" (Wachter-Boettcher, 2017). In contrast to what I just wrote, I also argue that AIM's personal profile was an early indicator of the disidentificatory potential for women, queer people, and people with disabilities to articulate their life dramas, comedies, and romances online. To not

just write in women's stories, but enable women to write their stories for themselves on a shared multimedia platform invites the possibility of also privileging these women's stories. Moreover, social media profiles may be the most ubiquitous and mainstream space for Women of Color to autobiography their lives. The ways Black women have created and maintained Black Twitter is an example of the Black disidentificatory potentials and possibilities for Women of Color online. Smith's reasoning and quote was never truer for Black women, who, as described by Pickens (2019) and Chapman (2014) were all but barred from entry into literary tradition and even literacy until very recently in global history. This was an institutionalized form of white supremacist and patriarchal debilitation; a socially created learning disability. Social media is becoming a massive counter to this elaborate history of literacy restriction and repression for women across lines of race and sexuality. Thus it is remarkable to have gone from centuries where very few Women of Color and Black women would write, even could write, or be considered for publishing let alone canonizing, into this era of mass self-publishing. New linguistics have emerged due to this democratization of writing, new voices can be heard. They are being documented, disseminated, valued, and people can resonate with the myriad voices and identities previously regarded as "illegitimacies, threats to the purity of the canon of autobiography itself" (Smith, 1987). Social media profile autobiographies also create visible lines of cross-movement solidarity possible in learning whose stories are more easily believed, and how the telling of a story, how it matches and cleanly syncs with dominant hegemonies, contributes to what is authentically autobiographical – what may make it into the canon of autobiography. Social media, then, may pose the greatest threat to the patriarchal order of autobiography and the privileging of men's stories. Even as most SNS are designed by men with patriarchal structures embedded into the sites' very algorithms. Thus, social media also may pose



the greatest threat to the authenticity and originality of women's stories as profiles and digital discourse appropriate and assimilate differences into commodified sectors of homogenization.

When thinking through the profiling of gender via social media apps, as in the literal production of gender through a social media profile, we return to the interpellatory capacities of digital media as explored in the previous chapter as it related to saneism. The ideas of *anticipation, intensification, immediacy, and transition* remain at the fore for the discussion of gender, race, class, sex, (dis)ability, and the internet. If social media privileges, produces, propagates certain emotions over others, then surely it does so with gender as well—surely these politics of genders and constructions of emotions are intimately entangled. Anne Balsamo (2011) writes about the intentional cultural designs that structure our digital lives: “The foundational philosophical project for ...Barad, Harraway, Harding... is similar: to create an account of technological practice that acknowledges both the contingency of knowledge and the matter of the real world without resorting altogether to a positivism that forecloses agency and transformation, or to a constructivism that implodes as relativism and ends up over privileging language and culture. Understanding the epistemological structure of the practice of designing is another important step in gendering the technological imagination.” Gendering the technological imagination includes gendering techno-cultural affective structures.

In this era of political and economic extremes, of billionaires, soon-to-be-trillionaires, massive poverty and homelessness, war and those who become rich from its spoils, critically examining the creation of nationalist identities is key. Our era of extremes is dependent on a sensible and legible gender order. The tools of disidentification are shrinking in this neoliberal era where appropriation offers a sanitized experience of any identity, emotion, or experience that may prove threatening to coercive power mechanisms. Mirchandani (2012) writes about

“cultural cloning” as the process of low wage workers in India dialoguing as tele-support with US customers to facilitate a sense of Americanness with their accents by “practic[ing] to remove language deficiency, which is termed as their mother tongue influence.” Cultural cloning is a form of emotional labor in its most literal sense. Cultural cloning is forced on laborers around the world to assimilate into the hegemonies of whiteness. Cultural cloning is also reproduced in profiles; cultural cloning is the conditional emotional labor for legitimating identity on social media. Cultural cloning is necessary to offset the disidentificatory potentials and resistance efforts antagonistic to cultural hegemonies. Cultural cloning is an *epistemological structure* in the social media profile. Digital-neoliberalism renders us all as prosumers, and as prosumers under a certain affective and cultural-hegemony, we submit to a cultural cloning within social media. *Transition* is among the only constants of digital exchanges, whether the transition is in the forms of cultural cloning or in automated redirections, we are consistently changing or experiencing change.

If ‘extremes’ in economic and political terms is code for ‘inequality’ and ‘oppression’, then cultural cloning is the pragmatic necessity for the advancement of an alienation that globalized capitalism foregrounds: to dissociate people of color, women, queer peoples, (dis)abled peoples from them/ourselves while simultaneously hyper-specifying and segregating us. The assimilationist project of capitalism is predicated on a singularity of identity and desire. Political extremes that use assimilationist projects uniquely interact with the intensifying effects of social media algorithms. How does social media disidentify with this singularity? How does it expand the assimilationist reach? How does it inspire disaffection from cultural hegemonies and how does it interpellate a submissive response to dominance? The social divides of our era of

extremes are as gendered as our social media profiles are. Are our social media profiles evidence of an intensity of identity?

***Safe spaces, sane spaces, and movement building***

“Masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation” (Connell, 1995).

Gender is an underreported aspect of Black Lives Matter. “Black men and boys like Trayvon Martin had already been systematically criminalized, not by their individual actions but by their collective identity, their posture, their positionality, and sometimes even their fashion choices. They were typecast in popular culture and popular media as menacing, violent, and dangerous: bodies to be feared, contained or even killed” (Ransby, 2018). How is gender constructed differently for differently racialized persons? Of course I cannot speak to this with my own experiences, but I hope to offer a few sensitive reflections alongside some key quotes and stories related to the Black Lives Matter movement and the #MeToo movements as they relate to gender, race, and the construction of identity online. Online identities have been forever impacted by BLM and MeToo. These movements have shed light on gender and racial oppressions and marginalizations, privileges and the forms of identity that are centered. #BLM and #MeToo are the two shifting places on social media where gender and race commentaries, critiques, and community building occur and contribute to gender and race knowledge online—that they are shifting entities made up of disparate actors (literally and figuratively) is fittingly symbolic for the IRL fluidity of race and gender. Moreover these movements are examples of how race is used as technology,<sup>13</sup> and how communities are mediated to develop safe spaces

<sup>13</sup> “Crucially, ‘race as technology’ shifts the focus from the what of race to the how of race, from knowing race to doing race by emphasizing the similarities between race and technology. Indeed, ‘Race as technology’ is a simile that posits a comparative equality or substitutability—but not identity between the two terms. ‘Race as technology,’ however, is not simply an example of a simile; it also exemplifies similes by encapsulating the larger logic of

through anti-racist feminist discourses even within the restrictive white, patriarchal orderings of social media places. And finally, these movements are responses to cultural traumas experienced by marginalized groups due to our current power structures and paradigms. “Cultural traumas are not born but made—that is, cultural traumas are socially mediated” (Willig-Onwuachi, 2016). Cultural trauma refers to when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004).

Where do Black Lives Matter and the Me Too movement overlap and where do they splinter? Who are common enemies and allies of these movements? Both movements were founded by Black women. “#MeToo” was first used as an organizing term online in 2006 when Tarana Burke coined the hashtag on MySpace. The term started trending in 2017 after Alyssa Milano used it to describe her experience of Harvey Weinstein’s sexual assault (Murray, 2017). How does organizing shape identity? What does organizing do to a sense of victimhood? Through #MeToo, Tarana Burke notes, “empowerment through empathy” (Murray, 2017) can transform the identity of victim to survivor. Is there a step past survivor? To organizer? Resister? If so, how does the internet facilitate these steps of self-understanding, narrative reclamation, and community organizing? The role of organizing in some ways is taken up by the algorithms themselves, which arrange what is and is not trending, and what information is available to which user base.

“By altering the relation between the symbolic and the material of meaning-making processes, the layer of materiality introduced by social media contributes

comparison that makes both race and similes possible. ‘Race as technology’ reveals how race functions as the ‘as,’ how it facilitates comparisons between entities classed as similar or dissimilar” (Kyong Chun, 2011).

to transform both the content and the process of the aforementioned ‘meaning work’. More specifically, by becoming a ubiquitous presence in our portable, always-on personal devices, the ‘material’ powered by, and enshrined in social media, has multiplied the opportunities for experiencing the collective dimension of social action beyond sporadic events like protest marches or strikes. In so doing, the ‘material’ of social media has developed into the primary vehicle of meaning work, adding to (and somewhat substituting) other traditional mediators like mass and movement media but also face-to-face exchanges. In other words, this materiality is not only the support of the mere physical and/or virtual representation of the symbolic, but also the process through which the symbolic takes shape” (Milan, 2015).

Symbolic processing is the meaning-making process between algorithm and gender anticipation, between automation and race anticipation. There is a gender politics in automated digital organizing; there is an organizing of gender in automation.

While the #MeToo movement predates the GamerGate controversy, GamerGate gained widespread notoriety prior to #MeToo’s 2017 explosion into our public consciousness. Gamergate may have been one of the first times in online history that the experiences of women online were publicly marked as substantially different from the experiences of men online in mainstream press outlets. In 2013, feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian released a series of videos on her YouTube page Feminist Frequency titled “Damsel in Distress – Tropes vs Women in Video Games” where she criticized common video game tropes of women, specifically, the depictions of women characters in video games (Sarkeesian, 2013). Sarkeesian demonstrated through copious examples of popular games how most women in video games are represented as in need

of saving by a strong male protagonist who uses violence to liberate the femme character. Sarkeesian also argued that most of the women characters in video games were highly sexualized and existed within the popular and problematic tropes which objectify women (Sarkeesian, 2013). A year later in 2014 Zoe Quinn released an independent game called *Depression Quest* that operated as an interactive story and art-piece that reveals a young person's experience of depression (Dewey, 2014). Sarkeesian and Quinn were viciously harangued and threatened with violence by large segments of the male gaming community, even receiving death and rape threats, as well as threats of mass shootings at speaker engagements they were booked for (Dewey, 2014). This backlash to Sarkeesian's YouTube videos and Quinn's non-traditional video game is what people refer to when they say Gamergate. I will not be exploring much of Quinn's game or Sarkeesian's arguments in her videos (although I think Quinn's game is an interesting and thoughtful project, and that Sarkeesian's arguments are fine but far from radical), but rather will situate the experience of femininity and womanhood online as a distinct threat to masculinity as a key identity feature of the digital space. Gamergate in many ways demonstrated that the space of the internet was not ready for a "feminist revolution" (even in its most white and liberal forms), but the galvanized support that mainstream critics, and even gaming industry execs gave to the women at the center of Gamergate informed the future support MeToo would experience. In essence, Gamergate was the first gender-centered battle ground for the modern culture wars online, and galvanized both the incel far-right as well as the feminist left on a new terrain for an old fight: whose voices are heard, prioritized, valued, believed.

Gamergate was an early revelation for how channels of internet community formation exist within spheres of white masculine domination. While the mainstream media was mostly protective of Quinn and Sarkeesian, as were academic and university settings, popular online

forums such as Reddit, 4chan, 8chan, and even some incel-sectors on twitter were the perpetrators of these threats and masculine bravado (Dewey, 2014). Why did a woman criticizing the Mario-world, and another woman who created a vulnerable depiction of depression gain so much ire from these men? If the internet reflects the biases of its designers, and these trolls reveal widespread toxic & fragile masculinities, then is the internet a toxic & fragile place? To reference Milan's (2015) quote again, the altered relationship between the symbolic and the *material of meaning-making* work exists in gendered and racialized arrangements. In the context of Gamergate, the symbols involved a feminist threat to masculine gaming without actually critically intervening into the gaming industry per se, and the reactionary threats of men whose online rhetoric served as a part of the material function of maintaining patriarchal control of digital spaces. When we consider our identities online we must recognize the ways the space of the internet reflects the space of our corporeal realities. Reflecting again on Sidonie Smith's quote regarding the erasure of women's lives in the work of biography and autobiography, we may consider Gamergate a form of forced erasure, and perhaps one of the first times that mainstream knowledge mechanisms used their political influence for the cause of advancing women's autonomous critique of patriarchal gate-keeping. Quinn's game in particular is a case in which male gamers attempted to deride her experiences and life stories. How does this happen now, in the space of video game culture, and more prominently with social media games and apps? I will explore more in the following section how sexuality and gender muddles the difference between profile, socialization, and gaming through my exploration of Grindr. But until then I want to suggest that for many people, games are the primary social media platform where they interact with others. "At first, we played video games because we were friends; now

we're friends because we played video games. Gaming wasn't an escape from community, it was a portal into it" (Suderman, 2019).

The contentious relationship between gaming and gender, and gaming and community & identity reveal a complex layering of possibilities and challenges for therapists and feminists engaged in digital culture analysis. The #MeToo movement, as stated earlier, solidified the entertainment industry's masculine violence in our public consciousness. The #MeToo movement has received copious support from feminists and allies around the world who are horrified and angered at the likes of Harvey Weinstein and many other celebrities and producers who sexually assaulted women and stifled thousands of careers, and caused tremendous traumas to women and femme people in the entertainment and arts industries. Gamergate is, in many ways, a part of the trickle down of masculine violence towards women in the entertainment industry. "To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity" (Connell, 1995). The gender politics within masculinity in the entertainment industry has a significant range. A troubling though not so surprising trend amongst male allies of survivors of violence and the protagonists of #MeToo & Gamergate are the reliance on police surveillance and traditional forms of the US justice system to seek punishment and retribution for the harms of the cultures and patterns of toxic masculinity apparently embedded into our entertainment cultures. This is symbolic solidarity in which the material meaning-making is still rooted in current power structures. It reflects the ways our society pushes collective care and accountability responsibilities off of communities and onto professionalized (militarized) so-called "services".



Digital-neoliberalism asks for allies of women survivors of violence to support police action, without attention to the violence perpetrated by the police that disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and queer communities. That is to say while patriarchal violence is the defining attribute of men outed as predators by the #MeToo movement, it is both the shared form of masculinity relevant to Gamergate (even as the articulations of this toxicity and violence are contextually specific to mixed-reality spaces and gaming content / culture), as well as it is the form of masculinity utilized by men who support these women in that their backing is defined in large part by relying State and police violence and retribution. State violence is always a form of patriarchal violence, equally predicated on white supremacy.

How does this reflect social media allyship? How does the state perpetuate symbolic, gendered allyship? Perhaps the Black Lives Matter movement can assist in expanding our understanding of the *gender politics within masculinity* that exists online. Black Lives Matter is a movement that has avoided traditional power establishments. It calls for police and prison abolitionism in a way that the #MeToo movement and Gamergate has yet to reckon with, retaining both of those movements then within the confines of white feminism, and their uses of social media as still adherent to the forced *cultural cloning* of whiteness regularly practiced in social media usage. Black Lives Matter activists have also been quick to note the limitations of the #MeToo movement in the lives of working-class women, specifically economically oppressed Women of Color and immigrant women; mainstream, frequently appropriated #MeToo reporting and pseudo-activism prioritizes presumed innocence, fame, and whiteness and reliance on police. Of course, #MeToo and Gamergate did fight for agency and visibility, and effectively demonstrated the resilience and power of women who have been harmed; both movements are important, and the women involved are not to be blamed for this, rather, I mean

to interrogate the systems of patriarchy and white supremacy within these feminist movements and organizing. Barbara Ransby (2018) writes that the Black lives matter movement “is the first time in the history of US social movements that Black feminist politics have defined the frame for a multi-issue, Black-led mass struggle that did not primarily or exclusively focus on women.” This quote is relevant in that Black Lives Matter provides a discursive intervention into the online fray of feminist activism that was previously unheralded within the Gamergate and much of the #MeToo organizing. Black Lives Matter was and is an intersectional approach to grassroots organizing. The Black Lives Matter movement even eschewed the need for innocence to predicate action and solidarity work; #BLM was not interested in innocent victims, but in tearing down systems of violence while publicly mourning loss of life and grappling with trauma and grief. “There did not have to be a correlation between ‘sainthood’ and Black citizenship. This was an important shift in the discourse about who is or is not a sympathetic victim of injustice. [Michael] Brown did not have to be a church-going, law-abiding, proper-speaking embodiment of respectability in order for his life to matter, protestors insisted” (Ransby, 2018). Michael Brown’s death trended and received national attention because of organizing work that Black women led on Twitter and Facebook without regard to his own “sainthood”. Within the Black feminist politics of #BLM, we did not necessitate a static divide of *innocent victims* and *always perpetrators*. “A consequence of this static divide is that socially constructed notions of *who is a legitimate and innocent victim* and *who is a real and always/already perpetrator* are often tied up in dominant power relations of race, gender, class, and sexuality” (Russo, 2019). Data points on the internet reflect our social-ethical binaries by immediately triaging our interactions; the flow of information on our feeds and timelines are *tied up in dominant power relations of race, gender, class, and sexuality*.

Here we see the intersectional, disidentificatory power of social media in the age of racial, classed, and gendered civil unrest. “Rage is not always ineffective. If channeled and mobilized, collective rage can be simply the refusal to tolerate the intolerable. And that refusal can show up in many forms, from the streets to the polls” (Ransby, 2018). I want here to offer an idea I have yet to encounter in the literature or even in Twitter or other social media activist spaces that may seem like a side point, but I feel is revealing to the relationships of capitalism, prosumption, and race as technology: Black Lives Matter makes Twitter and Facebook money. #BLM’s reliance on social media spaces has enabled its successes across the country. Twitter and other SNS make money purely off of user engagement. Twitter’s net worth is about \$35 billion, and there are close to 40 million “mineable” users on Twitter who self-identify as Black (Iqbal, 2020; Wojcick, 2019). Research shows that Black users of social media engage more frequently than do White users (Jones, 2013). Moreover, #BLM is one of the most common trending hashtags over the past 6 years of the internet. This means that #BLM has made Twitter, Facebook, etc. millions if not billions of dollars as a hashtag. The architecture of social media profits off of Black rage and organizing even as organizers disidentify with the very power structures benefiting. This is digital-neoliberalism; this is like the colonial mining of resources using free labor of Indigenous inhabitants of a place; this impacts collective identity, the continual profiting of race and co-opting of justice movements. What would Twitter and Facebook reparations look like for #BLM? Can Twitter track how the trending hashtags of racial and gender justice generated profits for them? Has digital capitalism surpassed performative *cultural cloning of whiteness* embedded in SNS algorithms so that power and wealth are automatically generated no matter how one uses these apps? Can we abolish capitalism, the police, prisons, white supremacy, and the patriarchy within a space that is developed to profit

those power structures? Even if we disidentify and protest and organize, the people who own these spaces will still profit— how do we evict the landlords of our digital spaces?

Why is it important to bring Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and GamerGate into conversation? Because each movement holds important implications for community development and identity formation online, specifically via social media, for women and queer folks, as well as for people of color. Where #MeToo was able to gain large scale celebrity and public figures support, Black Lives Matter has established that violence against Black bodies and Black women was co-constitutive of the violence women face globally, the violence of capitalism & colonialism, and the effects of wide spread white supremacy built into the structural power dynamics of this nation. With these fluid, largely grassroots movements, people are receiving a new set of narratives with which to situate their lived experiences. Being Black in the United States, or a women or a queer person, is no longer defined by tropes and stereotypes on television, because Twitter, Facebook, and more have given people a platform to organize, disseminate stories, challenge authority, reclaim narratives, and re write our/their his/her/theirstories. In discussing the political realities of Black people online, “there must be public discourse about the meaning of the routine harm, a harm that usually occurs in the form of governmental or legal affirmation of the subordinated group's marginal status” (Willig-Onwuachi, 2016). While representation of suffering, struggling, rage, and at times overcoming are important attributes of these digital movements, I am still interested in the autobiographical potential of these online engagements and what the therapeutic potentials are within them. That is, when Black teens post on twitter their experiences of suffering the traumatizing imagery of videos of Black people being brutalized by police, they are curating an identity in relation to the experiences & self-representations of their communities (Patton et al., 2016). Is #BLM the

largest non-physical memorial lives lost to violence in existence? Does Black Lives Matter exist as a place of public mourning? Do certain Twitter threads feel more holy, more sacred? #BLM is one of the most therapeutic movements of our era; how are therapists and narrative therapy theorists responding to this new wave of autobiography online that is formed amid anti-racist political organizing and Black grief/ rage/ resistance? The roles, realities, articulations, structures, and forms of autobiography have irrevocably changed due to algorithmic designs *and* racial unrest; algorithmic designs and racial unrest also cannot be separated from one another.

In reflecting on the previous chapter, I want to offer that this imagery of trauma and Blackness online is not meant to homogenize or stereotype Black experiences, although it is a necessary feature of articulating Black narratives. “A Black cultural context mandates a different set of interpretive strategies because of the confluence of structural racism from the outside and its impact on the intracultural community, and structural patriarchy and ableism emanating from within the community. Parsing mental illness and cognitive disability allows for a certain type of granularity when discussing Black cultural contexts and madness” (Pickens, 2019). Our narrativized identities are collective in form and culturally significant. Public grief and public mourning take place in the physical realities through rituals, progressions, marches, statues, memorial sites, etc. Online, this narrativizing of grief – the ceremonial joining of grief and collective identity – can take place through a variety of mediums from hashtags (such as #BLM), to Instagram pages dedicated to survivors of police violence, to Facebook groups that offer support and organizing. The following section I *transition* rather drastically away from public grief and organizing online, as well as narrativizing experiences from movement building and building movements from narrativized experiences. I pick up more on the processes of automation in regards to sexuality. Much more can be written about the above interactions of

social movements, racial justice, gender justice, abolition work, etc., but my attention span of digital-mania...

### *Curating queerness and transgression*

“With millions of daily users [75% are millennial and Gen-z] spanning almost every country in every corner of the planet, Grindr brings you zero feet away from connecting to a community that grows stronger every day” (Grindr, 2018). This promotion from Grindr’s website exemplifies the gay community’s transition into queer-consumer-citizens. “Queer liberalism and queer liberal subjects is a reconciliation of queerness (with all its myriad criticisms and epistemological, ontological, and methodological workings) with traditional liberal ideologies, especially as it relates to “national subject formation” (Puar, 2005). Grindr’s ad dismisses topographical realities of geographic distance, and asserts a queer, digital-neoliberalism of borderless connections rooted in consumption and expansion, in desire and seduction. Does Grindr amplify or deconstruct the boundaries of gay space? Grindr’s new global feature allows a sort of postcolonial cruising of the world, people may set their location feature to be anywhere they choose. Grindr was founded in 2009 by Joel Simkhai, a gay Israeli entrepreneur (Halutz, 2016), and was acquired by the Beijing based Kanlun Tech Company (a gaming company expanding itself to incorporate lifestyle and culture apps) in 2016 (Isaac, 2016). To re-share a previously cited quote by Balsamo (2011), “To gender the technological imagination is to acknowledge that all participants bring gendered, racial, and class-based assumptions to the designing process. These assumptions contribute to the creation of meaning for a technology-under-development.” Simkhai developed Grindr amidst Israeli pink-washing<sup>14</sup> – often one finds advertised the Israeli PRIDE parade in Tel Aviv on the homepage of the app.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Shulman (2011) defines Israeli “pinkwashing” as “a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians’ human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life.”

This app's challenge to borders (in the name of "queer love") becomes far more arresting when reading Grindr as a product of queer-consumer-Zionism; a tool that disregards borders, much like the home country of the app's founder (and consequent owner, as Chinese neo-liberalism continues to spread across the globe at alarming and dangerous rates [Harvey, 2005]). Digital colonialism has different topographical implications than physical colonialism: homonationalism becomes what I term *homoglobalism* in the use of Grindr. Globalization and Westernized homonationalism create homoglobalism, which is an inevitable sexual-identity tool of digital-neoliberalism to assert a faux-inclusivity. That is, homoglobalism is what the West uses to justify its capitalist expansion; digital-neoliberalism facilitates this homoglobalism through Grindr, among many other things. "Global capitalism involves the relentless search for new markets, and queer consumers provide such a market. The production of surplus value relies, as Marx argued, on the exploitation of the labour of others. The commodification of queer involves histories of exploitation: the leisure industries that support queer leisure styles, as with other industries, depend upon class and racial hierarchies. So it is important not to identify queer as outside the global economy, which transforms 'pleasures' into 'profit' by exploiting the labour of others" (Ahmed, 2003).

Grindr collects significant amounts of user data, including device information, location and distance info, cookies and log files (information websites store on the accessing device that other sites and apps may access and collect), HIV status (allegedly not shared with any other org or advertiser, except for "companies that host data on our behalf" [Grindr, 2018]). According to Grindr (2018), the data is collected to improve services, as well as to market products. "By continuously collecting data from consumer preferences and interactions, they profile users in view of offering a customized service but also of monetizing user exchanges" (Milan, 2015).

Grindr consistently collects user data – how sexual preferences become data points; how the security of data points is tied up into issues of consent and disclosure. (Dis)ability justice author, poet, scholar, and activist, Eli Clare (2013), asks us, “What would disclosure look like if [queer] communities shaped a politics around self-determination, rather than privacy?” Eli Clare questions queer politics’ narrow focus and definition of disclosure. Clare suggests that self-determination, right to understanding oneself and being the primary mover of one's life, might be a more resonant and inclusive value for queer communities.

Disclosure, or “coming out”, is a flawed platform to organize from, because it presumes a normal. This puts many types of bodies at risk, as “many people don’t have access to bodily privacy” (Clare, 2013). Clare, in the above quote, is making reference to more apparently visually-obvious forms of difference, such as race, gender, and (dis)ability. Clare is contending with the apparent *normal* that the politics of “out” and “proud” delineates; it is a privilege to be able to choose to be “out” reserved for whom is deemed *normal*; people with noticeable (dis)abilities, or who use assistive technologies (wheelchairs, scooters, etc), who are not white, who are trans and do not “pass” etc. are not subject to the same implications of being “out” that white cis masc gays are. The politics of desirability play into the structures of disclosure in significant ways for people who are not white, thin, masc, or able bodied on gay dating apps in particular. “There are stories of people embracing their bodies, proudly proclaiming disability as sexy, powerful, and worthy” (Kafer, 2013). Queer techno-cultures must attend to the self-determination of people with (dis)abilities, who themselves are queered in their very appearances and no disclosure is allotted to them. People with (dis)abilities not experiencing pleasure, connection, or intimacy on these apps is not just an issue of user-to-user ableism and racism, but an issue of encoded, structural ableism and racism. Not only is the penultimate gay political-



value of disclosure problematic for multi-racial, (dis)ability inclusive queer communities, it is also unrealistic within the porous boundaries of digital-neoliberalism.

Grindr might be read as a queer, neocolonial database where millions of people's identities are available to bidders and intruders for the extraction of information (resources), without informed consent, or regard for potential consequences (think again of queer-consumer Zionism – homoglobalism and colonialism). Thinking of Grindr as a gaming-app is also a strange although not inaccurate musing, which leads to “a clear pattern emerg[ing]: an industry that is willing to invest plenty of resources in chasing ‘delight’ and ‘disruption,’ but that hasn't stopped to think about who's being served by its products, and who's being left behind, alienated, or insulted” (Wachter-Boettcher, 2018). While Grindr articulates its operation within the rhetoric of disclosure, several high profile breaches of information over the past 4 years have demonstrated the vulnerability of Grindr's pro-user security infrastructure. As recently as March 2018, a website called C\*ckBlocked proved that Grindr user information could be rather easily accessed, allowing hackers to pinpoint exact user location, extract demographic data, HIV status, and collect and disseminate all other data that Grindr stores, even if users had previously opted out of sharing that data (Cameron, 2018). Trever Faden, founder of C\*ckblocked, stated that Grindr's ability to leak user biodata is “a feature, not a bug” (Barasch, 2018). This most recent hack is one of several over the past four years, others of which released the HIV status of millions of Grindr users. If our queer communities are becoming more digital in form, and the right to privacy is increasingly more challenging to protect let alone define, especially within digital-neoliberalism, then perhaps Clare's encouragement towards self-determination is more salient than ever. That said, how does self-determination actualize amidst a static architecture of automated social curation? What is queer agency for a depersonalized algorithm?

How can Grindr's privacy blunders inform a new queer ethic towards self-determination and self-identification? By considering Grindr's data sharing as "a feature", security becomes performative while surveillance and codification are standardized; Grindr is already disrupting the discourse of "out", the conversation of self-determination is already operating at a corporate level. But the corporate appropriation of queer *self-determination* enters into those same frameworks we have been considering with regards to affect, gender, desire, race, etc. A sexualized digital-neoliberalism creates *queer prosumers*: we simultaneously create and consume complex sets of curated queernesses. Automation also challenges my belief in self-determination, even as digital spaces have enabled far more agency for people with (dis)abilities than previous generations had access to. "Societies that are more strongly collectivist contest the very concept of self-determination" (Healy, 2007). Would self-determination as a core queer value hold merit in such contexts? Interestingly, significant research shows that people diagnosed with schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders living in collectivist cultures tend to experience delusions and hallucinations with little fear of violence and surveillance that is characteristic of much of the altered-realities experienced by similarly diagnosed people in the United States (Khazan, 2014). This creates a tension between the ideas of self-determination and collective care. I wonder if we can move away from a politics of disclosure that has all but ruptured from false-advertising in the guise of data-security (and was never universally relevant, as Clare point out, for racialized people, trans people, and people with bodies who do not fit our socialized imagination of 'normal'), as well as the politics of self-determination that can easily lead to queer libertarianism and does not engage with the inevitabilities of automation and *technique* nor collectivist cultures, and embrace a politics of narrativized resistance? Can our queer sexual politics be informed by radical disidentifying possibilities revealed and in practice

by #BLM? I think a queer politics of self-determination must be predicated by a queer politics of accountability, and voiced through a reclamation of narrative resistance.

Grindr manipulates the transience of data to make formulaic grids of queerness, where biodata is accessible for corporate exploitation, enabled by coerced consumer complicity.

Moreover, the act of using Grindr is one of queer-consumption through the intake of gay bodies as a side-function of the revenue generating intentions of the app. Grindr measures users' app engagements, habits, etc. to advertise products in their app, and sells data to other organizations who then may target advertising with greater likelihood of someone making a purchase.

“Thinking about queerness through gesture animates how bodies move in the world, and how we assign meaning in ways that are always already infused with cultural modes of knowing”

(Rodriguez, 2014). How Grindr digitizes queer gestures – the automatic connections between queer gestures and consumption. What are the buying habits of someone looking for a hookup? What types of hook ups equate to what forms of consumption? These are questions that inform proprietary socio-sexual techno-designs. How does digital cruising shape online consumer habits, and how do our buying patterns impact our dating lives? How does globalization impact our queer desires through the real purpose of Grindr's queer community as a marketplace and revenue giant? Identity is shaped, especially within capitalism, by what and how we consume. Our narratives are linked to the profiting of our daily interactions.

How does one maintain participation in these queer spaces without becoming complicit? Is there a liminal space that one can disidentify in? “The notion that one is either co-opted by consumerism or fighting the ‘real’ fight against it poses a reductive binarism between representation and ‘reality’” (Esteban Muñoz, 1999). Gay identity interpellation even within Grindr culture is far more complicated than automation, security structures, and data sharing

features can condense. Nonetheless, how the effects of these forms of security, surveillance, consumerism, and data / identity construction manifest do in turn contribute to gay identity. “Think of the ubiquity of sexting, applications like Grindr, Manhunt, DIY porn, and cellphone mass circulation of images — technologies that create simultaneous sensations of exposure (the whole world is watching) and alienation (no one understands). These cyborgian practices constitute new relations between public and private that we have yet to really acknowledge, much less comprehend” (Puar, 2012). The blurring of public and private and of sensations of exposure and alienation are best noted in the sense of being centered yet invisibly arranged within the space of the dating app. Profiles on Grindr are designed to fit a particular framework, with various options provided for personal representation, within confines predicated in biased and contrived data categories. The ways in which queerness is statically performed in the app’s home screen layout in user profiles are collated by Grindr’s algorithms and presented in its UX. The profile structures identity in self-referentiality to a normalized center that is both curated and challenged by Grindr, wherein particular bodies are normalized in automated processes, while the focal point of the geolocator is still one's own location. That is, one's body is the centerpiece of the user’s conscious experience of the app, even as the app’s algorithms reflect Silicon Valley & mainstream homoglobalism’s biased whiteness, maleness, cisness, saneism, thinness as the literally encoded center or *normal* (Wachter-Boettcher, 2018). The algorithms are the centering of the app, while the socialized biases of the apps designers who construct an idealized, homogenized, normalized image of queerness or gayness are the center point of the app even as we stand, holding our phones, looking for intimacy in *my* proximity. How do we disidentify with the sensations of being both exposed and isolated with our own automated centering?

“‘[D]ifference’ is encased within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid” (Puar, 2005). Puar’s formulaic grid is literally realized and sexualized in Grindr’s geographically positioned mural of bodies. This grid, Grindr’s homepage, showcases difference and the app’s sexual racialization implicitly encourages a syncopated “racial and gendered dynamics” (Rodriguez, 2014) where non-whiteness, femininity, trans and gender non-conforming presentations are ‘differences’ in Grindr. In Grindr’s grid, “femininity is [assumed as] inherently ‘contrived’, ‘frivolous’ and ‘manipulative’ that allows masculinity to always come off as ‘natural,’ ‘practical,’ and ‘sincere’ by comparison” (Serano, 2013). This description of masculinity in Grindr recalls the perceived native-ness of masculinity online revealed by the male incredulity at the #MeToo movement and Gamergate – Smith’s argument that women’s narratives are erased from the canon of truth gains more context. Women’s stories and affects and presentations are unreliable – normalcy confirms trustworthiness; the disordered are a gendered group. On Grindr, unless someone is a white, cis, gay man, there is suspicion, fetishization, and discrimination. The profiles on Grindr, thus, are images produced in liminal spaces between a formulaic identity performance, body presentation, geographic grids, and corporate culture. The implicit biases further an anticipatory sexuality; the app’s ubiquity intensifies queer desire; the app’s geo-locator demands immediate pleasure. But as boyd (2014) indicates, users of apps tend to find their own ways to harness the tech platforms and create a multitude of options for engagement that the designers did not even reckon with upon structuring any given platform; social spaces online are typically in transition. Queer culture on Grindr is situated between automation and disidentification.

Foucault (1984) asserts “we are dealing less with *a* discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different

institutions.” This multiplicity of discourses on sex further explodes when considering the multiple ways sex-data is discursively formulated in millions of forms of extraction and production. Also, this *multiplicity of discourses* suggests that sex and sexuality are not singular conversations, but co constitutive of many discourses – as argued before, these being, capitalism, nationalism, race/racism, saneism/ableism, cisheterosexism, geography, and more. “Some argue that when people are faced with an abundance of choices (for example, of relational or sexual partners), there is an increased pressure to take on the role of ‘maximizer’— someone who does what they can to select the best possible option and avoid settling (Simon, 1990)” (Alexopoulos et al., 2020). Not only do dating apps offer this abundance of choice, but they create a form of queer sexuality that becomes ordered and colonized not just in the lenses of its gaze but in its process of expansion, maximization, and intensity. This also reflects Ellul’s (1964) argument that a technology must be used to its maximum capacity, to do so is antisocial. Does Grindr maximize queer sexuality? Does it interpellate a sexuality driven by expansion and maximization? These complications and maximizations require “Development teams [to] create shallow perceptions of audiences and their needs, and how those perceptions lead to products that, at best, leave out huge percentages of users—and at worst, take advantage of our personal data and encode bias into systems” (Wachter-Boettcher, 2018). And again we return to the binary triage discussed in the previous section that regarded *victim / perpetrator*, whereas here we have *desirable / desirous*.

Our desirability, I believe, is in part rooted in our ability to pass as sane. Sanenationalism is entangled with homonationalism, in that there are certain ways that the nation demands us to feel intimacy, to experience sexuality, and share in pleasure, even outside of cisheteronormativity. Being sane then is attractive, while being (in)sane/mad is worrisome if not

ugly. Saneism occurs frequently in the dating app world. Referencing back to Serano (2013), there is a presumed inauthenticity in femininity, and so too is there a presumed unreliability or dislike-ability or incompatibility with the (in)sane person. Saneism, in my specific experience, is often directly related to timing. Time seems to be something I am out of sync with. The capitalist US imperative to operate in a linear time, and to measure our worth within the metrics of productivity or units of things produced and consumed over specific sets of time, is for me one of the primary social articulations of sanenationalism. I never have had a mutual relationship with time that the rest of society seems to share. And this proves to be a problem in a digital dating world where immediacy is anticipated. My experiences with dating apps has taught me that I *must* disclose my mental illnesses for me to practice self-determination in a socially and emotionally responsible way with new relationships; as Clare argues, I don't have much of a choice. I hurt people because of my disjointedness with time. I disappoint people. I develop and forget feelings for people. I am a mess of over affection and under developed time management skills. I was told several times, "I know you just got bored of me", "You are careless with other people's time", and "You clearly don't have intentions of getting to know me." And once, painfully, "I felt more accepted as a trans woman because you, as a cis man, accepted me, but I don't feel that anymore." ("But I'm not cis..." I whisper to my anxieties as I want to assert my gender as a transitory experience and say it had nothing to do with her gender which I always affirm, but, given my sensitivities, I cannot find the words and I can't figure out how to care for both of us once I've been hurt by ableist feedback and queerphobic assumptions. So I retreat). While I recognize I harmed others, I wish they had asked questions about what happened and believed answers. I was suicidal. I was hiding from my mind in a tower of pillows. I forgot I had triple promised my availability that day and my sister moving was the priority. I took too many

edibles the night before so I could sleep through my mania and not wake up with nightmares to sort through in the morning and discern reality from dream world again – what a constant blur my life is of digital unreality, supposed reality, hallucinations/delusions, and an intensely life-like dream world. Offices have always had trouble with my task and time management capacities. I feel guilt and self-doubt about this too... but I try to recognize my madness and symptoms as an anti-capitalist lifestyle. It is a helpful lie. But how do I hold myself accountable to the harm this “lifestyle” has on people I care about and want to get to know? I have only briefly used Grindr (once I received the first Tel Aviv Pride ad I lumped it in with the BDS<sup>15</sup> group, but that is not to judge, indict, or condemn those who find meaning, affection, connection and more on this platform...), but not a single dating app has an option to openly disclose something like being bad with scheduling, but earnest nonetheless. No check box for: “cancels almost every date and because we’re not close yet I don’t want to disclose what’s really happening in my mind because I don’t want to go to the hospital again or ever have police called on me a-fucking-gain”. “Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies. We can then understand the flexibility of crip time as being not only an accommodation to those who need ‘more’ time but also, and perhaps especially, a challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace

<sup>15</sup> “On July 9, 2005, Palestinian civil society launched what is now widely recognized as a qualitatively different phase in the global struggle for Palestinian freedom, justice, and self-determination against a ruthless, powerful system of oppression that enjoys impunity and that is intent on making a self-fulfilling prophecy of the utterly racist, myth-laden foundational Zionist dictum of “a land without a people for a people without a land.” In a historic moment of collective consciousness, and informed by almost a century of struggle against Zionist settler colonialism, the overwhelming majority in Palestinian civil society issued INTRODUCTION 5 the Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it fully complies with its obligations under international law” (Barghouti, 2011).



and scheduling. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (Kafer, 2013).

I reclaim my time now. I assert my absence as madness liberation. Kafer (2013) continues to ask, “This idea of conserving energy, of anticipating, can be read as queer in that it bucks American ideals of productivity at all costs, of sacrificing one’s body for work. In other words, how might we begin to read these practices of self-care not as preserving one’s body for productive work but as refusing such regimes in order to make room for pleasure?” But it is not always to make room for pleasure. Sometimes I reclaim additional time because there is no room for pleasure in my bodymind, or my imagination. The insistence modern queer-crip communities has on focusing on pleasure is important and special for so many people who have long been denied their / our pleasures. Even in the above section with regards to my 6th grade queer crush, I wish those forms of pleasure had been allowed and encouraged for us to explore. Nonetheless, it is reminiscent of “the pursuit of happiness”-the imperative to be happy at all costs. There is a curious thing: I don’t want to be happy, at least not in the ways I’ve seen it. I find pleasure here and there, but it is not the focus of my life, nor do I want it to be. And I do not think that makes me any less queer, or separated from myself. I just don’t have enough dopamine or stability to recognize pleasure as a thing to seek. I like the idea of dying. I like being in tune with my pains and anxieties. All these apps and entertainment spectacles demand my pleasure, interpellate my desires; it is insufferable to constantly *enjoy*. I do not reclaim my time, and take my time, and conserve my energy-in-time only for pleasure and joy (though at times I do), but because I must. Time ruins me.

I try to be more honest that I’m disabled or mentally ill or whatever and now if people are upset that I am “flippant” or “lazy” or “careless” I can just chalk them up to ableism and

saneism. “I told them I get too anxious to get out of the house about one to fourteen days a week, so I think it’s kind of on them...” Does that sound ethical to you? Does that sound like a reasonable negotiation between disclosure, accountability, and mad agency? Does it sound like I can do that sensitively for others and with conviction for myself on a digital platform? It is certainly an effort to appear desirable and crazy with only the use of my digital, queer, mad gestures. My madness is at odds with my self-determination, it foregrounds my sexual disclosures for queer intimacy, and exists as a necessary state of resistance to normalized romantic encounters. Madness is disidentification.

Chapter three spoke to the relationships between gender and affect, as well as how social movements such as #BLM and #MeToo have shaped not only our digital discourses, but also our senses of self and community. Chapter four will round out the conversations, disclosures, and ideas from the previous three chapters by exploring what queer theory, narrative therapy, and madness liberation / (dis)ability justice implications there are for cultivating community, movements, and identity online.

## Chapter 4: *transitions*

In the previous chapters I shared personal anecdotes and cultural reflections of my own online upbringing and observations/ participations to give context for theoretical approaches to how SNS interpellates us. I used intersectional lenses to examine how gender, sexuality, race, affect, capitalism, and community are storied online, as well as how stories take new dimensions with emerging digital literacies. How mapping the digital margins reveals the artificial centers of our social media empires, the pseudo-nations of the internet. “A democratic response to algorithmic media requires translating the fleeting operations of software system routines into knowledge that is conducive with democratic debate.” (McKelvey, 2014). While I am not offering a comprehensive translation of *software system routines*, the following explorations will hope to use queer theory, narrative therapy practices, and madness studies and (dis)ability justice to enter into a democratic debate with the structuring of our digital social spaces. Within my reflections for queer theorists, I will explore assemblage theory to analyze digital identity, how techno-cultures and neo nation corporate states may be queered theoretically, and the automation of gender and desire. Within my reflections for narrative therapists, I discuss queer auto biographies and their digital gestures, how surveillance was construed as wellness, the power of naming, and the importance of repoliticizing trauma. Finally in my reflection for madness studies and (dis)ability justice, I explore the accessibility of mad spaces, the ways social media facilitates an intervention into emotional surveillance, and what a politics of anti-racist madness for the digital autobiography might be.

### *Reflections for queer theorists*

For an internship in 2018 we took a series of personality tests that were all administered online. We filled out forms and checkboxes and received automated feedback about

our personalities. “Male or Female?” Yes? No? Both? Neither? “Are you single?” No? Yes? I have multiple answers for questions that cis, hetero, monogamous people have singular answers for. The interpretation of my identity through these data-app renderings will not yield the queerness of fluid difference of my experiences of gender and sexuality. I mentioned this to staff at the internship site and no one had thought of those questions (or the many others) as limiting. Is my gender and sexuality an edge case? I recall again how people frequently say, “It’s not the platform of social media, and it’s how you use it.” I feel like that is only true in part. “Most teens aren’t enacting an imagined identity in a virtual world. Instead, they’re simply refusing to play by the rules of self-presentation as defined by these sites” (Boyd, 2014). Part of the reason teens, as well as other people who were “raised online” don’t *play by the rules of self-representation* is because we don’t see ourselves well represented on these sites. This is particularly true the less one’s identity aligns with those of the app designers. I took the personality test at the internship, and intentionally answered every answer after those first two as wildly inaccurate to my actual sensibilities as possible. The following sections explore the assemblage of digital identity, how we queer the techno-cultures of neo states, and the ways I’ve noticed an automation of my sense of gender and embodiment online.

### ***On assemblage and digital identity***

Is there an intentional erasure of queer, (dis)abled, and people of color online? Most companies would scoff at the suggestion and point to their diversity and inclusion practices as evidenced of having taken an intersectional approach to their algorithms’ designs and corporate staffing. However, “Much like the language of diversity, the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself” (Puar, 2012). This is not to dismiss the importance of intersectional analysis or diversity, but instead to say that the

semantics of language associated with intersectionality often, at the institutional level, replaces the work of intersectional analysis altogether. Ahmed echoes this idea with her iteration of “feminist killjoy” in *Living a Feminist Life* when she argues that to the institutions and established power structures, a problem is not the problem— the person who points out the problem is the problem. Applying this to the realm of algorithms, we may find that companies do not intentionally write out people from their algorithms and thus out of our futurity, and to point out evidence that it does happen is to point to edge cases that do not need attending to. They may say that the user base is X% POC, or they have X% women on staff, or that they give X proceeds to (dis)ability funds, etc., but by doing so they are mistaking representation and charity for social change and equity. Is Diversity a diversion tactic?

As Eubanks (2018) demonstrates, algorithms do not need to be designed with the intent of marginalizing people, they only need to be written without bias being addressed to intensify the already existing marginalization. These designs give anticipation to our futures – what sorts of sexualities and genders are predicted or anticipated in social media designs? “Futurity has never been given to queers of color, children of color, and other marginalized communities that live under the violence of state and social erasure, a violence whose daily injustices exceed the register of a political organized solely around sexuality, even as they are enmeshed within a logic of sexuality that is always already racialized through an imagined ideal citizen-subject” (Rodriguez, 2014). The surface of social media organizations appear intersectional in the most flattened and liberal of senses: representation of user base, centering of user experiences. But in reality, they evade any instructive intersectional discourse through a myopic appeal to immediate senses; the UX of apps is a racialized experience. Surface level diversity is not structural level transformation. Surface level diversity does not impact our sexual and racial imaginations for the

future. Sara Ahmed (2017) writes, “Diversity is a thing, but it is not everything.” Things looking more diverse does not mean that things operate with increased accessibility, inclusivity, or equity.

Assemblage theory gives texture and feeling to intersectionality that make flattening intersectionality less attainable, in part because assemblage theory recognizes the presumed center as always fluid, in motion, more of a set of apparatuses than a gridlocked intersection. This is helpful because of how algorithms literally interact with us as assemblages, that our experiences of apps are always as the centers, even as the user interface and structural designs of the app are the “true” center of the space of the app. Algorithm architects may argue that they are inclusive, and that their designs are unbiased; an intersectional critique of this might look at who is creating the algorithms, and who is explicitly and implicitly benefiting and being harmed from it. What an assemblage theory critique of current algorithm techno-cultures does is challenge the “presumed ... automatic primacy & singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation” (Puar, 2012). By doing this, what we find is that race, gender, class, and (dis)ability are not only identities to be mapped on an online space, but that these identitarian markers are switch points in algorithm functions. Race, gender, disability, and class are embedded in algorithms; they are data points; race, gender, (dis)ability, and class are forms of data as “data” co-constructs these very identity categories. “All told, social media redesigns the process of identity building, but also the notion of what is collective in collective identity—that is to say, the experience rather than the belonging. I call this transposed identity building process ‘visibility’. Visibility is taken to mean the virtual embodiment of individuals and groups and their respective meanings, as these are relentlessly negotiated, reinvigorated and updated in online platforms”(Milan, 2015). Just as I described hosting my emotions online in cloud storage

platforms, so too does my race and gender become codified in digital interactions. Race as a form of technology is nothing new, neither gender, nor (dis)ability. As racialized & gendered prosumers, what disidentificatory possibilities do we have? How can we queer the forms of visibility and virtual embodiment prescribed to us?

***Queering techno-cultures in neo nation corporate states***

Cindi Katz (2001), Richa Nagar (2002), and J. Alexander (2006) all contend that the state is a gendering and racializing apparatus; intersectionality contends that the constellations of gender and race orbit one another in patterns of privilege and oppression – the state is a co constituent of gender, race, and class construction, as social orderings of gender, race, and class also confer citizenship upon a people. To quote Linda Carty (1999), “Why should gender be so integral to Empire?” We can rephrase that here to wonder *why should gender be so integral to social media companies?* Data being the code points for which the algorithms’ math processes computing realities is a racialized and gendered being; computer processing is identity processing – it is relational. There are multiple ways data are cultivated, but to understand data cultivation and its relation to queer theory and identity online, we must continue to explore the epistemology of data. All data has cultural significance; it is a form of epistemology. Data mining is a commonly used phrase, but ineffective in articulating what “mining” is or what “data” is, let alone what the processes for how those things came to be what they are. Essentially data mining is both biased and alters the already contrived state of data (Albury et al., 2017). “*The datafication of culture*” is the “algorithmic logics of digital media” that are reflexively shaped by consumers’ habits as they are by automated programming, and corporate interests (ibid.). “Cultures of production” are “institutionalized routines, habits and knowledge practices of the app publishers [that is] a complex articulation of Silicon Valley’s individualistic and

libertarian ideologies” (ibid.). Finally, “Articulation of data...*cultures of use*” (ibid.) is how data is received and processed by users, and the everyday life encounters that describes, manages, and is influenced by app usage. “Those ... engaged in political and academic practice must not only recognize the illegitimate, we need to intervene in the formal institutions that define the terms under which legitimization is authorized” (Rodriguez, 2014) It is important to intervene in the presumed legitimization of data culture as defined by Silicon Valley, especially when analyzing ways “technology is biased, alienating, or harmful” (Wachter-Boettcher, 2018).

Considering that data can be transferred and *mined*, we can consider data creation and cultivation as an emergent moment in globalization. "Instead of seeing the spaces of globalization as consisting only of formal economic and political spheres and being constituted only by abstract flows, we advocate analyses that attend to the relations between and among flows emanating from different places and circuits (e.g., the linkages among debt repayments, state withdrawal from the provision of health care, and the rise of neighborhood clinics or relations between global media and transnational movements of indigenous identity formation). We argue that analyzing the interdependencies between formal and informal circuits of globalization can reveal the ways in which globalization depends on both gendered processes of marginalization and emergent processes of gendered resistance” (Nagar, 2002). Nagar here reveals the interdependencies which globalization is dependent on as being rooted in gendered processes of marginalizations. Data points are thus gender markers in abstract ways but that data is an articulation and manifestation of social norms requires us to *attend to the relations between and among flows emanating from different places and circuits*; data points are relational, the paths and processes of their mining is revealing of these *interdependencies*. Cindy Katz (2001) argues that social reproduction is a defining aspect of globalization. Digital-neoliberalism



manifests social reproduction through the globalized use, production, and consumption of data (both in that data is borderless albeit rooted in a particular hard drive, storage system, and cloud, and that programming languages are standardized across the web), thus “culture is both produced and reproduced. In the interchange, the social relations of production and reproduction that characterize a particular social formation at a given historical moment and geographical location are encountered, reproduced, altered, and resisted” (Katz, 2001). Katz here is referencing mass media as well as religious affiliation and practice within nation-states, and how nation-states use these to, again, *produce and reproduce* a form of sociality or culture. Social media corporations do this as well, though they code their language literally and figuratively. All of this leads to wondering what sorts of cultures are developed by data? How is culture produced and reproduced by data based technologies of our social lives? How do communities form within this transnational space of digital-neoliberalism? What are the queer-consumer implications for digital-neoliberalism?

“Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 1990). Yet for social media institutions, the idea of identity is fixed within the platform's profile. While users may make infinite edits to most essential features of a profile, and one may even embark on curating multiple profiles, we are still limited in our capacity based on any particular SNS's epistemology of data and resulting technologies of literacy. The forms themselves are the structures of our identities, and those structures are shaped in a capitalist hierarchy that excludes participatory design (Eubanks, 2011). Cook (1996) writes about the experience of being known through medical forms patients must fill out prior to meeting with

physicians as a form of autobiography. “As I record the facts of my sexual and reproductive life, of my family history, I am forced to confront the meaning and implication of the Kay Cook who has, even in these early stages of the examination, become a medical text” (Cook, 1996).

Whenever I login to my social media accounts, I am forced to confront the meaning and implication of the Joshie Tikka who has become a marketable text, a sexualized text, a minable text, a contributing text, a racialized & gendered text. The sensations of becoming legible; on being a text. Dynamic and static. While social media is rarely as invasive as medical forms (although healthcare tools such as ZocDoc and TalkSpace<sup>16</sup> may be the exceptions to this, and usher in an era where one can book medical appointments or even receive checkups via Facebook), the situatedness of the form as static dictates the options for how we may identify and experience a socialized identity.

The *cultures of use* described above are the ways we experience the user interface of an app; it is how app designers intend for all audiences to engage with their product, their image of our social lives. App designers appeal to the largest possible audiences – their image of the largest possible audience; it is the datafication of multiculturalism. “Multicultural pluralism’s rhetoric of inclusion homogenizes difference. Difference becomes part of the race, class, and gender mantra, essentially a form of sloganeering” (Esteban Muñoz, 1999). Can digital-queer cultures lend to “the *possibility* of counterpublics – communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere” (Esteban Muñoz, 1999)? Perhaps it is more complicated now than when Esteban Muñoz was writing about disidentifications over two decades ago. This is due to, again, the homogenization apparent in social media *cultures of use*.

<sup>16</sup> Zocdoc is an online medical scheduling assistant that automatically curates potential medical appointments based on user preferences and filters. Talkspace is a digital therapy platform and app that allows users to schedule appointments with therapists, as well as meet digitally, and even maintain regular texting conversations.

Though the *datafication of culture* might reflexively impact what content is prioritized for each user, the interpellation of identity through datafication is still mediated through the same disciplinary apparatuses. These *counterpublics* are no more counter-informed than the actual publics. I am not sure that a Facebook community for queer-kinksters is any more a counterpublic than a page for the culty-evangelical youth group I joylessly endured. If the forms of the community are the same, the space is the same, and the structure is the same, is it really a counter public, or is the space of the hegemonic public expanded out to assimilate more identities? That said, the cultures of use may be disidentificatory even if the articulations of data are consistent; so yes, a Facebook page for queer-kinksters is going to be very politically different than that hell-hole of heaven-obsessed homophobes.

Nonetheless, this discourse of space, cultures of use, and homogenization of data (culture) also gets at the distinction between place and space. If space is a reference to use in time, and place to design and general local, as both Balsamo (2011) and Dovey (2010) indicate, then how does the space of Facebook change with regard to its static place. I often hear the phrase “it’s not Facebook itself, it’s how one uses it” to describe how Facebook is not racist, it is the racist trolls who use Facebook who are racist. I’m not sure I fully believe either. Perhaps Facebook’s faux-libertarian algorithms enable the racist trolls to be racist trolls, and the algorithms are enabling a feedback loop of stabilizing identity that is dependent on their whiteness in as much as they are choosing to post and participate in social media spaces as they do. Esteban Muñoz (1999) describes how in neoliberalism “multicultural pluralism disarms the politics of specificity”. Within digital-neoliberalism, algorithms are able to simultaneously specify and segregate differences, but through the same apparatuses of organization and formation regardless of those differences. Thus queer, assemblage theory is useful to the digital

humanities and online anthropologists to recognize how lines of sight and automated switchpoints of a post-panopticon surveillance process interpellates identities.

### *Automating gender & desire*

“The media’s and audience’s fascination with the feminization of trans women is a by-product of their sexualization of all women” (Serano, 2013). The sexualization and feminization of trans women as a digital process is described in Andrea Long Chu’s essay *Did Sissy Porn Make Me Trans?*, in which Long Chu details a Reddit post from 2014 about a trans woman’s engagement with trans-baiting pornography:

“In typical post from 2014, titled ‘Did sissy porn make me trans or was I trans all along?’, one user writes: ‘About 3 years ago, I discovered sissy hypno [short for “hypnotism”] videos, which in a nutshell are flashing subjective images telling you to wear panties, be girly, suck cock, and even take hormones. I became completely obsessed with these videos. Nothing got me off like these. It got to the point where I started wearing panties and imagining myself as a girl when I would masturbate.’ The poster is ‘95% sure’ she is trans, but the sexual nature of her desires gives her pause. What if real trans women just aren’t into this kind of thing? What if her therapist, like the one described by another user, tells her that she has ‘a kink, not a gender identity crisis,’ since ‘real MTFs don’t do that. Ever’?... This means that sissy porn is porn about porn, a genre that takes the formal structure of all pornographic reception, which I’ve argued is basically feminizing, and promotes it, often spectacularly, to the level of explicit content. In this respect, sissy porn is more sex than text, less of an object and more of an event, the basic idea being that by showing sissies online, the genre is creating sissies in real life” (Long Chu, 2018).

Long Chu goes on to describe this event as interpellative to trans people as learning their gender through a fetishization process. By having a visual and textual representation of ourselves in a structured profile, we are more self-surveilling and self-analyzing than ever. Our sexualities and genders become *events* as opposed to *texts*. The sensations of being an event. What does living in a funhouse full of interpellating mirrors do to our sense of gender and sexuality? These “sissy videos” that Long Chu discusses are hosted online, and their online curation is using these same algorithms, data cultures, cultures of use, etc. that I have been describing. What then are the relationships between automation and transness? The expansion of social media has coincided with the rise of acceptance and population growth of the LGBTQ+ community. We have platforms now just like everyone else. Yet the block quote reflects the popularized myth of trans deception being just as relevant online: that people only become trans through hypnotism or other dubious means. “The recurring theme of “deceptive” trans women retaliating against men, often by seducing them, seems to be an unconscious acknowledgment that both male and heterosexual privileges is threatened by transsexuals” (Serano, 2013). As the internet is a place often scapegoated for deceit and “catfishing”, it becomes fertile ground for transphobic conspiracies to spread about the authenticity of trans women’s experiences and lives. Generations who were not “raised” on the internet may not easily recognize the different ways younger people in particular represent them/ourselves online outside of binary literalisms of misrepresentations or authenticity. “So when a teen chooses to identify as “Jessica Smith” on Facebook and “littlemonster” on Twitter, she’s not creating multiple identities in the psychological sense. She’s choosing to represent herself in different ways on different sites with the expectation of different audiences and different norms. Sometimes these choices are conscious attempts by individuals seeking to control their self-presentation; more often, they are

whimsical responses to sites' requirement to provide a login handle" (boyd, 2014). This is important because even though trans people existed before these "sissy videos" existed (or the internet for that matter) – our bodies were not just interpellated into existence by awkwardly sexualizing algorithms – many people see differences in personality depiction on various social media platforms as deceptive as opposed to *whimsical* or tailored to specific audiences.

Nonetheless, we now have the abilities to be more visible while maintaining a safe distance as well – we can show ourselves off a little less discreetly as well. "Bodily difference means one thing in isolation and quite another when we come together, finding ourselves reflected in each other's stories" (Clare, 2013).

Queer and trans porn is the most obvious and salacious example of how gender becomes a data point. Gender is a form of technology online. The internet is a place of tolerance for the experience of transition, both with regards to affect and gender. This mirrors Foucault's (2003) assertion that "The brothel and the mental hospital [are] those places of tolerance..." That said, a meme I saw the other day reminds me that "My trans body is protected by my whiteness and that is not okay." My experience of the internet being a place of tolerance is also predicated on my whiteness. And recognizing whiteness within transness is crucial for cultivating sustainable cross-movement solidarity within queer communities, because attending to race and racism is as important in queer and trans communities as in cishetero communities. "The elision of intersectionality in the name of coalitional myth-making served to reinscribe other myths. The myth of equal transgender oppression left capitalism and white supremacy unchallenged, often foreclosing coalitional alignments unmoored from gender analysis, while enabling transgender people to avoid considering their complicity in the maintenance of simultaneous and interlocking systems of oppression" (Gan, 2013). Transness is often recognized as a form of gender-

resistance, and if trans people are assimilated into the dominant gender orders we will simply experience normalization and consequentially erasure of our differences. Assemblage theory remains instructive for recognizing how algorithms automate gender and difference, as we experience ourselves mapped as data points: white, middle class, trans identified, mentally ill, etc.

Transness is resistance only in as much as it resists patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, ableism, colonialism, etc. Caitlyn Jenner<sup>17</sup> is not a symbol of trans resistance, even if she has been supportive in reducing experiences of violence in the community (has she?). But who constitutes her community? Other wealthy, white trans women. Noble (2013) writes, “Whiteness comes into visibility when it is articulated through class. If that is true, then under what conditions can transed bodies, bodies that similarly matter when invisible and/or fetishized, emerge within the feminist analytical intersections of capitalism, class, and race?” My own transness was not affected by the images of porn described by Long Chu or by the neoliberal assimilationist projects spearheaded by Jenner. My transness is revealed through my madness. This is not to say that trans is an illness, but rather that my sensations of difference from the norm permeated from my initial experiences of madness and eventually wrapped up my entirety. In as much as I resist the DSM labels I resist my cis labels. There is a political incentive to it, but more viscerally, there is a wholesome desire to feel at home in a body that has always felt strange to me, and to feel at rest with a mind that attempts to escape the boundaries of my skull even in my dreams. For many of us, resistance is not simply an escape from hurtful normalcy but a hope for a new home. For many of us, resistance is not an option to choose but an inevitability

<sup>17</sup> Caitlyn Jenner is among the wealthiest (and politically whitest) trans women alive. She was a former Olympic athlete and is in part famous for her roles in the E! TV series “Keeping Up With The Kardashians”. She is an open and proud republican.

we must live— it is simply living honestly to ourselves in a world that refuses to acknowledge us, and writes us and automates us out of our collective future imaginations.

I have always felt more trans online than in person. In part because I have always felt far away from my body... for so long it was a distance to my gender and the machinations of it. The internet relieves some of the tensions of dysphoria. The internet becomes an extension of my gender. Even my face is more recognizable in selfie filters than in my bathroom mirror (a reflection technology I try to clean as infrequently as possible, so my IRL reflection can be blamed on grime more than genetics). Filters project a trans futurity for my face. “Filtered images do not claim ‘this is how it looked’ but rather ‘how I wanted it to look’ or ‘how I felt it looked’” (Fallon, 2014). The selfie holds unique art therapy potentials, as well as narrative therapy potentials. The selfie is also a chance for trans people to recognize themselves without the dysphoric gaze of the mirror, but instead the affirming gaze of the filter (Tiidenberg, 2015). “The selfie compromises a part of a dynamic, unfolding interactive narrative socially authored by the self and the wider world” (Fallon, 2014). In all my reflecting on the relationships between selfies, filters, and gender dysphoria, I begin to wonder how much optics and visuals contribute to my sense of transness and queerness.

Why is it that the image of transness authenticates transness? Obviously there weren't many positive (or any) representations of trans people for many of us to relate to or project ourselves onto growing up. Through selfies and filters, I can project that image of transness I have desired and become my own representation of gender nonconformity. Yet I still question my fixation on the need for an image, or a visual representation, of transness to inform or define my own sensations of it. Could we be trans if we didn't see trans? Seems ocularcentric, and yet I know so much of transness for me is visual... But like with madness, I don't think there was a



way to hide it, conceal it, or a real need for it to be visible for it to be real. We can all obviously be mad, even when we don't see it. Trans visuals can reveal and confirm what we know, and it can make it apparent to others that we exist in multiple forms, genders, cognitions, realities, etc. The spread of representation and normalization can aid in people reckoning with their breaks in gender and sanity orders. But ultimately, visual representation is not what confirms or defines gender/transness or madness, these are innate traits of our species that will emerge in any social-historical context. The visual image or general representation functions more like a therapeutic support for the subject. Honestly my dysphoria and dysmorphia enjoy the healthy dose of app addiction, the occasional breaks from being bodily is warmly welcomed; automating my gender out of my skin.

#### *Reflections for narrative therapists*

I recall last fall sitting in my internship-therapy office in Evanston, IL, speaking with a young man about 15 years old. We were discussing his social life. The conversation mirrored one I had had just a week prior with a 22 year old young man. Both of them told me they did not have many friends at school or work. I asked if they felt lonely regularly. Not really, they told me. I wondered how much of that answer was rooted in masculine rejection of complicated feelings. Nonetheless, I inquired more about this. It turned out they both had similar social lives to when I was in early high school – almost completely online. They both regularly chatted with friends through the Discord app (a popular video and voice chat application used primarily by gamers, as it facilitates plug-ins to popular games) and Snapchat. They also were both frequent Reddit users, and made friends through Reddit whom they would then game with on Steam (a popular PC gaming portal) and Xbox Live (which uses much of the same chat structures as MSN messenger). I asked about what those relationships were like. Did they ever feel hopeful,

uplifted, cared for, understood, or maybe even jealous, confused, cautious, desirous, etc. of these online relationships. Yes, they told me. I asked if they had spoken with previous mental health care workers about their relationships online. No, but they said they think it is because they were speaking with older therapists. I could relate. They went on to describe complicated relationships that revealed truths about themselves they were nervous to grapple with, desires they could acknowledge but not sit with for long, and general anxieties that mirror any relationship IRL.

The interpersonal social connections people make online can feel as real and important as those connections we make in person. These relationships can be characterized by sending one another relatable memes, playing games we both like, or screen sharing movie watching. “It is increasingly presumed that social networking platforms have the potential to ‘promote positive change’ in relation to mental health (Inkster et al., 2016) and to offer digital ‘safe spaces’” (Brownlie, 2018). Perhaps now with the COVID-quarantines the general public will see relationship formation and maintenance online as actually nourishing, valid, and supportive. I asked if they felt that those relationships were different than their corporeal ones. Did these online relationships described in the abovementioned therapy sessions take on different sensations because they were largely text based? Yes and no, in part because these relationships also incorporated voice components thanks to Discord’s voice-chat function, and Xbox Live’s headset speaker attachments. But what also struck me was how much of these relationships were built on non-written and non-verbal languages. How images, digital gestures almost, created a profoundly new form of non-body language. Of course this was my experience too, but hearing it spoken to me confirmed it. The following section “implicitly juxtaposes cultural production and therapy, not in order to dismiss the latter but in order to expand the category of the therapeutic beyond the confines of the narrowly medicalized or privatized encounter between clinical

professional and client” (Cvetkovich, 2003), to trace how queerness, digital encounters & spaces, and movement / identity building online impacts what caring is, as well as to stage an intervention into professionalized care work. The following sections explore queer autobiography & digital gestures, the uses of digital surveillance to facilitate psychiatric power and illusions of wellness, the power of naming within the DSM, and the importance of repoliticizing trauma.

### ***Queer autobiography & digital gestures***

“We have accepted the proposition that spoken and written languages have different domains of existence, although we do acknowledge that there is considerable overlap” (White et al., 1990). Michael White and David Epston were the vanguard narrative therapy theoreticians and practitioners in the 80’s-00’s. They discuss the therapeutic benefits of the written form, and how we structure our lives through narrative means. How the story of our lives, the form the story takes, impacts our understanding of our sense of self. How does our sense of self adjust with so many new forms of communication? How do techno-cultural literacies impact the writing and reading of our lives?

White and Epston (1990) ask, “How do persons organize their stock of lived experience? What do persons do with this experience in order to give it meaning and to make sense out of their lives? How is lived experience given expression?” Queer theory extrapolations of algorithmic identity interpellation makes an intervention into how we organize our experiences and give meaning to our stories. Many of us now *organize the stock of our lived experience* through posting pictures in the digital time capsules of cloud based platforms. Many of us *give expression to our lived experience* through meme making or sharing, through likes and emojis, through a host of new found digital gestures that complicate existing narrative therapy domains.

Juana Maria Rodriguez (2014) writes, “Gestures can be literal – actual movements of the body – or figurative, gestures that reach out to manipulate how energy and matter flow in the world... gestures serve metaphorically to register the actions of the body politic... Gestures are where the literal and the figurative copulate.” What is a digital gesture? Is it a literal movement of the body, or is it a figurative indication of affect the user is communicating to the receiver? “Since all gesture and rhetoric is revealing of the subject, autobiography can be defined as any written or verbal communication. More narrowly it can be defined as written or verbal communication that takes the speaking “I” as the subject of the narrative, rendering the “I” both subject and object.” (Smith, 1987). The sender and receiver, the subject and the object, the space between the “I” and the space in which the “I” exists, is ever blurred by the reflexivity and structured reality of social media interactions. The subject formation of the “I” is produced in part by these digital gestures.

If digital gestures are figurative in this latter sense, then what options are available to the communicator? As gestures are social-performances indicating the liminal spaces where *the literal and the figurative copulate*, and digital gestures exist on controlled social media platforms that reflect dominant hegemonies, then our gestures are influenced by a monopoly of expectations from market demands. “As social actors, we find that our corporeal movements are intelligible only in relation to accepted modes of behavior dictated by our surroundings, but we each bring the particularities of our bodies, experiences, moods, and desires to these everyday performances” (Rodriguez, 2014). The first half of this quote speaks to the hegemonic influence social media has on our *accepted modes of behavior*. This is akin to Puar noting the presumed primacy of the disciplinary subject in relation to the central power apparatuses of the state or in our case the architectural designs of proprietary algorithms as well as the diagnostic mandates of our current psychiatric order; *accepted modes of behavior* are reflected in traditional diagnostic

methodology of psychiatry. “Socio-medical discourse has always had fundamental connections with the principle of social control, indoctrinated by the premise that if an aspect of humanity deviates from the norm, it needs to be cured or ‘cut off’... Psychiatry expanded this hegemony by conflating the notion of being ‘mentally ill’ with ‘dangerous’, a fusion that remains inextricably linked for many even in contemporary society” (Livingstone, 2010). That is, digital gestures are developed and manufactured by tech companies (a process of the *datafication of culture*, or the homogenizing and flattening of identity), communicated and articulated through algorithms, all to mediate *accepted modes of behavior* that may reify psychiatric power structures of normalcy; saneism is embedded in our social media profiles and practices. This happens subtly & automatically. To recall a quote from the introduction, Sidonie Smith (1987) notes “Since autobiography is understood to be a process through which the autobiographer struggles to shape an “identity” out of amorphous subjectivity, the critic becomes a psychoanalyst of sorts, interpreting the truth of autobiography in its psychological dimensions rather than in its factual or moral ones.” The amorphous subjectivity of self-hood is given gesture, narrative, structure through social media apps. Can an algorithm be a therapist?

To attend now to the second part of Rodriguez’s quote above, how do we *bring the particularities of our bodies, experiences, moods, and desires to these everyday performances*? How do we shape an identity that in some ways disidentifies with automating, psycho-normalizing algorithms? Jose Esteban Muñoz notes three forms of responding to dominant ideologies. The assimilationist, the resistant, and disidentifying. “Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification,

assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counter identification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (Esteban Muñoz, 1999). For Esteban Muñoz and Rodriguez, these disidentifications can be noted through queer gestures and non-white forms of communicating. Digital gesture examples might include using the \*clap\* emoji before or after words as commonly practiced by Black women on Twitter to emphasize a point, a double tap on a text thread to <3, a swipe right to indicate affection or attraction or desire, a reaction to a picture, a series of buttons pressed on a game controller to impact an avatar’s movement, the eggplant emoji with two eyes looking to the side sent to people with penises to indicate requesting the recipient to send... well... certain types of pictures. These examples demonstrate how we bring the particularities of our bodies into these dominant spaces online. I asked in the previous chapter if we as a queer community might be better suited to move away from the politics of disclosure, past the politics of self-determination, into a politics of resistance, but perhaps more realistically and what may already be in practice is a politics of disidentification. How are we working on and against the digital authorings of our lives? How do we work on and against the *dominant ideologies* of wellness?

An additional form of disidentification can be in the form of madness. What are mad gestures? What are the *particularities of* insanity that differently shape online spaces and challenge sanist normalcy? How does madness uniquely intersect with Blackness, queerness, etc, and how do social media platforms assemble what a non-sane subject or user profile is? And more back to the point of this section, what is a therapeutic approach to digital madness? How can we care for relationships, people experiencing psychic breaks with reality, people drowning

in the chaotic throws of their own flooding subconscious evident in their postings, online behaviors, and mad digital gestures? So much attention was placed in the previous few pages on digital gestures to note how therapy might not lose the body language dialogues so important for mental health care work; social media algorithms have constructed a new set of gestures that necessarily create a psychotherapeutic relationship with an app itself (whether because, to recall Smith, the app creates the subject and critic and thus we become the patient and psychoanalyst, or because, to recall White & Epston, the social media space is a narrative space of meaning making where we keep stock of our lived experiences). To realize the therapeutic potential of social media encounters, the space of our practice must be *queered* and *mad*. Or to reference Puar, we must recognize the queerness and madness always inherent within the internet.

“Queering my practice comprises interrogating principles both within and beyond each particular therapeutic relationships – striving to facilitate freedom from oppressions – in collaboration with and at the pace of the client. It is about consciously interrogating the power within the therapeutic alliance, rather than denying such power exists, and enabling the re-framing of subjectivities so that they do not strangle the subject” (Livingstone, 2010). Queering in the instance of digital therapeutic work means interrogating the interpellative capacities of algorithms, and the automation of power dynamics between consumer and designer. It also means taking an intersectional approach to critiquing how identities interact with apps, and how apps marginalize certain people and groups. From the same collection of essays as the Livingstone quote, Lindsey Moon discusses how language is restrictive in identity formation. Specifically affective language, emotive language. Moon hopes to liberate a democracy of language for emotions, to make more free our imaginations of affective and feeling selves, and argues that emotions are indicative of social relationships, morality, cultural norms, etc.

“Feelings are products of a biological body simply because it is living, breathing, feeling and sensing. This is not the same as socially ordered emotions which are words and concepts shaped by societies, naturalized and embedded within everyday social narratives to describe ‘feeling’ in relation to social practices. Queering these meanings will propel the democratization of feeling into the forefront and allow for a poly-emotionality to operate where emotions are no longer fixed to sex, gender, or sexuality but are freely used to denote the variation in the materiality of the body” (Moon, 2010). Thinking of social media profiles as autobiographies in psychoanalytically relevant fashion according to Smith, with disidentifying potential according to Esteban Muñoz to construct a new form of narrative therapy with White & Epston’s ideologies in mind assisted in part by Rodriguez’s insistence on gesture as a necessary component of communicable & legible identities, Moon’s thinking on how queering *meanings* attached to emotions can democratize feeling and detach emotions from a centralized point becomes instructive for narrative therapy in mixed-reality, digital contexts. Moon noted the corporeality of the body as essential to this practice. Digital gestures, online autobiographies, social media sexual encounters, and the therapeutic potential of the internet are all ways that we can explode difference (to paraphrase the ever hyperbolic Puar) and allow mental health care and social media prosumers to experience an entirely new set of emotions, or at least give more descriptive and resonant language with already existing emotions. To recall Milan (2015), the relationships between material meaning-making of emotions and the symbolic processes of emotionality are heavily altered in digital spaces. If we recognize algorithms as having therapeutic impact, then we can also understand the space of therapy (therapist : patient / client) in similar terms: the space of therapy, and the meaning making of wellness and illness, are co-constructed in the power dynamics of the therapy space itself.



*Surveillance & 'knowledge as wellness'*

Foucault (2003) writes, “I think this direct and continuous relationship of writing to the body is new. The visibility of the body and the permanence of writing go together and obviously their effect is what could be called schematic and centralized individualization.” A *continuous relationship of writing to the body* is very evident in social media profiles. Foucault famously references Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon to describe how disciplinary apparatuses interpellate identity through constant surveillance from a centralized location. In the digital age, this location is decentralized to a point that the lines of sight from the centrality of a (for Bentham and Foucault) prison or hospital desk that can view all inmates or patients at once are no longer linear—in a digital context, the lines of sight themselves are the panoptic points of centrality. “These concerns tune into anxieties about emotional surveillance and about whether or not we can control information about ourselves, including our emotions (Brandimarte et al., 2013). This brings us to a key distinction between outreach and surveillance: the notion of consent. Becoming aware that one is part of an infrastructure of ‘noticing’ online that one has not directly consented to can lead to an unease with, and a reaction against, the reading of such information, not least because it may not speak to *who* people believe they ‘really’ are. (Ball et al., 2016)” (Brownlie, 2018). Algorithms in their complex and multitanuous reflexivity to user engagement operate as an automated point of surveillance. The *schematic and centralized individualization* of writing to the body is permanently encapsulated in these social media functions; the individual becomes the center of their own panopticon, while the panopticon ever expands into the very act of writing that makes sense of our bodyminds.

Foucault notes Bentham’s somewhat deranged although now realized potential use of the panopticon to trace children’s genealogies of ideas, as if they were a Hegelian map of tabula rasa

curiosity. That said, the scope and practice of social media in the daily lives of children and parents often does just that. “Helicopter parenting” is the popular term used to describe parents who hyper-surveil their youth with recording devices, and pressure them into certain ways of being and thinking. Tracing their youths’ progress through apps that can track participation in group activities, academic progress, social maturation, political allegiances, sexual deviancies, general developmental goals, etc. becomes for these parents the de facto means of child rearing. While these parents are curating a vision of childhood and adolescence prescribed as ideal for the youth’s present and future, the techno-cultural tools they are using to do so reflect Bentham and Foucault’s panoptic conspiracies. What is the role of the therapist for digital surveillance? “when pediatric trainees and faculty were given a series of hypothetical vignettes involving concerning information (e.g., suicidal ideation or reference to drug use) gleaned from a patient’s public social media site profile, respondents differed on how they would use that information, from immediately contacting the parents/guardians or law enforcement to using that information at the next clinical visit to doing nothing. So, while the initial action of looking up patient information may be ethically sound, there lacks consensus about how best to use this information in clinical care. It is also unclear how routine use of patient search information might impact the patient-physician relationship” (Chretien et al. 2013). What ethical standards will various licensing bodies need to consider for emerging therapy practice in digital spaces? What therapeutic innovations will techno-culture designers implement for the wellness of their prosumers? In my own upbringing, digital surveillance played heavily into interactions with digital spaces, from content blockers, ad blockers, parental controls, etc. There is a lingering sense still that to care for someone is to provide surveillance for them; how the processing of the panopticon is self-replicating, or passed down.

Moreover, as *the visibility of the body and the permanence of writing* are evident in social media engagement, I argue that youth are made more deeply aware of their corporeal selves through social media engagement at younger ages. What is your earliest memory? Or more, what is your earliest sense? What are the first inklings of movement? Or what was the genesis of your own sense of consciousness? For youth today there is no real break in their narrative history. I have often referred to my generation, the millennials, as the last forgotten generation. The last forgotten generation means that we have lived parts of our lives without the constant, literal surveillance of automated panopticons; without a cloud memory storing and storying our lives. There was at least 10-15 years for most millennials in the West where we did not have the genealogy of our looks, ideas, interests, and feelings permanently inscribed in digital media profiles of our parents or ourselves. We will forget ourselves. We will be forgotten, at least in part. Gen Z, and future generations will not have this experience. They will always have the permanence of their bodyminds and social lives affirmed in the visibility and legibility of the pictures, videos, audio recordings, game scores, chat records, etc. from the time they were infants on. They will have a constant relationship with themselves. A never ending memory.

What does this mean for therapy in the coming generations? What does this mean for ACEs<sup>18</sup> and childhood trauma when the vision of a past self is always made visible and accessible? “It may be prudent for art therapists to introduce their own social media policies as an explicit part of their intake and introductory protocol for new clients and for establishing individual and group norms. In addition to creating a safe and predictable therapeutic environment, a discussion of social media management also could offer a therapeutic opportunity to explore healthy interpersonal boundaries and limit setting. Having a clearer understanding of

<sup>18</sup> Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs is an alternative wellness assessment tool to the DSM that focuses on childhood trauma.

the boundaries and nature of the client–therapist relationship may accelerate issues that may typically arise in therapy, such as the role and identity of the therapist and issues around transparency” (Belkofer, 2011). Cathay Cohen (1999) on the topic of AIDS discusses how medical discourses around queer and Black sexual health hovered in a realm between state and medical surveillance. How do care workers perpetuate surveillance in a way that reifies citizenship and nationalist insider/outsider politics? Heteronormative family structures? How do we conflate wellness with surveillance and what clinical assumptions do we make on algorithms to aid this process? “The fact of knowing that one *can* always be watched, that one is always under the potential power of a permanent gaze, has therapeutic value in itself” (Foucault, 2003). When Foucault says this he is speaking from the perspective of psychiatric power, specifically, the faux-therapeutic value of hospital surveillance. Psychiatrists understand their mere presence and ability to *see* and *know* a person as therapeutic in itself. While this is untrue, there is a spiritual importance to *knowing oneself* and as we have been exploring from a postmodern lens, *knowing oneself* is not a stalled process but an always imperfect and consistently occurring series of events in constant relation to the social, political, economic, and culture contexts the self is enmeshed with. This may be nearly or falsely perfected in social media profiles, where there is a permanent gaze that has a sort of therapeutic value in itself. How can care workers navigate boundaries in the digital age, and what sorts of therapeutic values of boundaries can algorithm architects embrace to inform their own user surveillance?

When someone feels lost, confused, abandoned, invisible, etc. whether due to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. there is always a heavily curated community or group or platform that a person can turn to. In my own phone I have an album of pictures titled “You’re not always alone” for when the loneliness of existence drowns me in a sea of self-hatred – it is a photo

album of pictures of me with friends and family. It saves me. It knows me. It is automatically curated now, as any picture on my phone with myself and at least one other person in it is suggested by my phone to be added to this folder. Happily it grows, oddly not from my own efforts. And there is a power in that. In that space is shrunken into a phone and vastly expanded past all boundaries of historic social consequence; in that a healing space is automatically curated for me. The algorithm doesn't know it is healing, it is just data collection and coordinated, curated distribution.

### ***On the power of naming***

In light of anti-racist therapeutic discourses, I question who professionalized mental health workers are accountable to, and how surveillance circumvents accountability to confirm power dynamics as opposed to questioning them. “A *communal* approach to accountability means that we build relationships and communities that can hold the inevitable conflict, oppression, and difficulty that we will inevitably experience given the ongoing work of interlocking systemic oppression” (Russo, 2019). A significant amount of Foucault's (2003) theorizing about psychiatric power and Brownlie's (2013) contextualization of psychiatric surveillance online raises important questions about how to “make the therapist accountable in the first instance to the person/family and secondly to their professional community” (White et al., 1990). “Acknowledging that the client's value orientation may conflict with the professional and personal beliefs held by the social worker can remind the practitioner to consciously consider whose interests are being served” (Mattison, 2000). These many places of identitarian specification are possible due to the *potential power of a permanent gaze* of algorithms and offer therapeutic value for those who are lost, wondering, confused, questioning, lonely, and uncertain.

Can we reframe, then, the DSM and psychiatric power more generally given the complex potentials of autobiography through social media?

Monica Coleman in her autobiography *Bipolar Faith* offers an interesting defense of the DSM. “There’s something to be said for knowing and naming the condition” (Coleman, 2018). Coleman had gone until her late 20’s / early 30’s without a mental illness diagnosis despite living with a host of troubles and confusions about her mood, behavior, thoughts, and emotions since her childhood. Once she began reading about bipolar, she realized this is what she “had”. She saw her therapist who confirmed that this was the diagnosis she was billing Coleman for. Coleman was empowered by having this name for her many confusions, behaviors, inexplicable “episodes”, etc. It was something she could tell her friends and family as a reason (a trace), something she could relate to herself, and something she could receive in the permanent gaze of the DSM as having therapeutic and social power; something the outside world would have to believe; she would have to be believed, because the DSM now supported her claims. However, Coleman does not rest her identity on this psychiatric marker only. She has a card she keeps with her, inscribed on it is a series of titles and descriptors for herself so she doesn’t get lost or too dependent on one of her many faceted selves: “Teacher, Grandma’s prayer, daughter, dance, natural dread...” (Coleman, 2018) more as well. It is powerful and beautiful. She keeps it to remember that she is “more than this...” (Coleman, 2018) More than depression and more than bipolar. I love Coleman for this insistence on multiplicity.

Nonetheless, I want to encourage Coleman to think outside of the doctors’ and their diagnostic naming for us. We can cultivate new phrases and reclaim old terms. Claiming for Coleman Black women’s grief and resilience (which she does, but then goes onto privilege the psychiatric label over the cultural and communal experience), claiming of mad people’s balance

and waves; a rejection of illness and an embracing of difference outside restrictive emotional imaginations. Claiming our (in)sanity on our terms. When we accept names for us, as opposed to asserting our own names, we center existing power structures. It is the responsibility of mental health care workers to change these dynamics; if mental health care workers do not challenge current diagnostic methodologies, we are not participating in liberation work necessary for healing or expanding capacity. “These practices of listening, decentering, minimizing intrusiveness, and stepping back often create discomfort, particularly for those with internalized entitlement to structural advantage” (Russo, 2019) There is a power in naming. To whom do we give this power? Who takes this power from us? Who told me I have bipolar, depression, PTSD, ADHD, ODD, and more? Who marks us as the data points we presume as? What power is given to naming us in our digital profiles? Do we have deeper knowledge of ourselves when we are named, or is our imaginative capacity restricted? Psychiatrists have *internalized entitlement* due to the *structural advantages* of professionalizing mental health care work, which gives them the power of naming. What would it take for the APA to be decentered? How can mental health care workers engage with the discomfort of stepping back?

I have begun saying I do not have a mental illness, I am *disorder*. *Disorder* to the normalcy that seeks to balance the waves of my internal oceans. *Disorder* to the patterns doctors try to make sense out of from the sprawling branches and twigs of my many forested minds. *Disorder* to the prescribed set of desires for wellness, a good life, and stability as dictated by sanenationalism and capitalism. *Disorder* to believe the images of my mind and the sounds of my ears as evidence of the validity of non-dominant sensations’ revelations. *Disorder* to believe when my friend says, “It’s like I’m the only one who sees the racism in our group” without having to struggle because I can believe the visions of those who see what I don’t, experience

what I don't, live in an entirely different universe than I do, even when that universe is rejected by dominant cultures. *Disorder*, to me, is liberation, is disidentifying, is disclosure, is self-determination, is resistance. I am *disorder*. I will seek to upset any sense of *order* that this country, this world, has set in place; whether it be power structures of oppressions, emotions of validity, cognitions of sensibility, or behaviors of decency; my *disorder* will be unceasing in her chaotic rejection of that which contains us all. In my *disorder* I notice the challenge to identities online. In my *disorder* I notice the potential disorientations of identities online; that we can have so many profiles, identities, stories, lives, social spheres all within our phones, browsers, apps.

And in these online identities, in our social structures, in my medicinal intake and therapeutic consumption, in my social media profiles, in completing two graduate programs I reject my *disorder*. I embrace *order*. I enjoy the ease of a life where rent is paid, where friends are not worried about my constant oscillations, where I can look cute and affable in my online persona. I embrace *order* and do my homework, do my taxes, do my medical check-ups. I embrace *order* when I enjoy the fruits of our capitalist empires through our massive entertainment industry, our agricultural forces... I cannot say how deeply I am *order*, and how queerly I am *disorder*. I think my social media feeds demonstrate these oscillations with ease, ironically enough.

Hall and Puar assert that identity is never an accomplished fact, but a continuously occurring process. The permanent gaze of our identities indicates, within traditional psychotherapy, a therapeutic value, a stabilizing presence to the instability of identity, a constant direction in the multitude of orbits our lives encounter. "As Crenshaw indicates ... identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multi-causal, multi-directional, and liminal; traces aren't always self-evident. In this 'becoming of



intersectionality,' there is emphasis on motion rather than gridlock; on how the halting of motion produces the demand to locate" (Puar, 2012). Puar here describes how intersectionality, the metaphor of intersectionality, is usually articulated via an image of stillness for the intersections of identity. Foucault's permanent gaze is fixated on the *traces* of identities Puar recognizes as always being in motion. And here is the brilliance of identity construction through social media applications and online engagements: there is no halting of motion that demands to be located; there is no location in this place. Algorithms can be the fixed and permanent gaze of the panopticon, the very line of sight between the panopticon and the subject/object, the location for the subject/object, and at no point does it necessitate a halt of motion or time. Social media in many ways is an advanced articulation of intersectionality in that it reveals the margins, is a decentering, re centering, and center-affirming process, that is not dependent on a halting of motion or an approaching of the intersection even despite its static grids of profiles and timelines; the intersection bustles in the space of social media. This presents a dilemma, opportunity, newness, complication, amplification of selfhood, space, the concept and experience of relationship, for the therapist to unravel. An *intensification* of identity itself. An *intensification* of reality, time, and space. There is a density to all of this, but it is relevant to the world of therapy and mental health care work. This is because, as mentioned throughout this thesis, the subtleties of automation are constructed within the same dynamics of power structures noted previously by Marx, Lacan, Foucault, Crenshaw, Puar, Esteban Muñoz, etc. "Psychiatric power is that supplement of power by which the real is imposed on madness in the name of a truth possessed once and for all by this power in the name of medical science of psychiatry...The essential function of psychiatric power is to be an effective agent of reality, a sort of intensifier of reality

to madness. In what respect can this power be defined as surplus-power of reality?” (Foucault, 2003).

### ***Repoliticizing trauma***

Among the therapeutic lessons learned from #BLM, #MeToo, etc., is the need for our mental health and trauma care to remain political. “Trauma forges overt connections between politics and emotion” (Cvetkovich, 2003). In addition to traumas’ forgetfulness is the imperative of traumatizing forces of authority and power to disrupt archives and lineages of trauma to disconnect communities generationally and prevent solidarity building rooted in historical resistance. The forced-forgetfulness of the sources of trauma also foregrounds a purely clinical and individualized understanding of trauma: a universalist model of trauma experience and consequential “treatment” that is depoliticized and strategically “dividuated” (Deleuze, 1968). The white rejection of Black collective traumas is an aspect of the psychiatric power’s *surplus-power of reality*, especially when the affect-effects of structural racism is de-contextualized to enforce a *normalized* reality; whiteness is saneism when politicized to assert a particular reading of authentic reality. “I reject the search for a universal model of trauma because it runs the risk of erasing essential differences between traumatic experiences, differences of historical context and geopolitical location, as well as the specificities of individual experiences that can be lost in a diagnosis that finds the same symptoms everywhere” (Cvetkovich, 2003). The communicative-cultural norms of a particular community can be revealing to the specificity of collective traumas that impact that community. It is more than an individualized or universalized process – it is a political tracing of gestures revealing of affects.

“Gestures reveal the inscription of social and cultural laws, transforming our individual movements into an archive of received social behaviors and norms that reveal how memory and

feeling are enacted and transformed through bodily practices” (Rodriguez, 2014). New gestures reveal the memory fatigue experiences by Black Americans in our current era of white supremacy and digital media. Sami Schalk (2018) memorably concludes her brilliant text with this rememorying of Black trauma through digital interactions: “The traumatic rememories of the murders of Martin, Brown, Garner, Rice, Dawson, Castile, and others whose names pile up faster than I can revise this conclusion each impact how contemporary Black Americans experience reality. We have now all lived it and relived it. We live in various levels of fear of it. These rememories catch me whenever I see a police car behind me on the road or another Black person pulled over or stopped on the street by police. Each time I wonder if it's about to happen again.” Social media becomes a sort of exhibit of pain, trauma, and grief. The everyday traumas of Facebook’ing while being Black. “Each of these visual images has deepened the pain of African Americans, but they have also exposed many whites to the over policing, the bias, and the tragic killings that African Americans have endured, complained about, and protested for centuries” (Willig-Onwuachi, 2016). Black affective archiving on social media through the storing of traumatic imagery; storing pain on SNS autobiographies and community chronicles. These curated archives of traumatic images become an important aspect of narrative identity for Black SNS users. “Museums and museum exhibits focusing on tragic events can serve as ‘healing spaces’ for individuals and communities who have been impacted by these events” (Harris, 2016). The same ways in which Facebook etc. can be harmful in the experience of trauma, so too can they be utilized as effective archives of oppression and resistance; the design of such spaces will determine how widespread the experiences of them will be traumatizing or healing. When white therapists disregard the therapeutic and traumatizing roles that social media

interaction has on a daily basis it recalls hooks (1992) observation that “it is easy for white observers to depict Black rituals as spectacle.”

The relationships between psychiatric power being able to not just name but also be an agent of authentic reality and social media power being able to literally construct, host, and mediate authentic realities suggests a psychiatric impact on a fundamental level of awareness and resulting agency in the social media profile and through our digital discourses, conversations, thirst trapping, and video gamings. Autobiographing, storying, and otherwise sharing our experiences to any entities who can guide us through these narratives, moments, motions, haltings, disidentifications, identifications, namings, orderings, disorderings, disassociations is maybe the most recognizable work related to therapy and counseling in digital spaces. Speaking to someone who listens, and offers feedback, advice, affirmation, refutation, support, guidance, empathy, and direction. Someone who is licensed. Someone who cares. Someone who believes and affirms an experience of reality that is not dominantly accepted. The social media profile is just that. The panopticon is just that. Yet they operate in opposition of this as well. These are automated processes of multitanenous praxis. The reflexivity between a user’s engagement and the surrounding world, the app platform, the digital spaces’ reflect first and foremost the user, but the form of the reflection is again psychiatric and normalizing. Nonetheless, the panopticon of social media algorithms, mirroring psychiatric power, is also the digital autobiography itself. Prosumers experience and create therapeutic healing in the exact moment of identity interpellation, restriction, extraction, commodification, and most importantly, construction. Prosumers experience and create marginalization in these exact moments as well.

Maybe what the autobiography of social media tells us is that our lives are not chapters in a book; our emotions often lack narrative structures, but once these feelings are locked into a

narrative they can become more self-replicating, queerly reproducing. We are moments, vibes, rituals, routines, gestures, revelations and repressions; we are assembled first to become storied second. Social media offers us a space to represent our lives in assembled parts, lists, folders, stories, albums, galleries, chats, etc. What social media profiles and experiences does to our collective autobiographies can inform and challenge narrative therapy encounters with the therapeutic storytelling of our lives. Do we need a story anymore? Do we have more options than stories? Are our stories now forced into a restrictive bind or diversified with a host of mediums?

Alongside my harsh criticisms and traumas at the hands of psychiatrists and therapists are my many experiences of healing, growth, appreciation, clarity, confidence, queerness, possibility, affirmation, calm, steady, purposefulness of life in the sitting, breathing, sharing, confiding, confessing, birthing of ideas and feelings with therapists and other mental health care workers. I felt like Coleman when I was first diagnosed, relieved to be believed and affirmed in being named. I am more whole because of therapy and psychiatry, more myself. The individuals who I met with — their calmness, kindness, and assurance — were the reason for this; compassion and accountability guided their discourse with me. They gave me a sense of respect. I promptly handed their respect back, unintentionally, when I overdosed on the medicines they prescribed me, when I yelled at them over the phone from the stabilization unit, when I decided that socialism was a better form of social-emotional support than Christianity... They gave me names for my emotions. I accepted them all with glee and hope and feeling understood. Now I question them, wondering how I felt so lost that I'd rather take an inaccurate map of false sensibilities than grow a home in the very sensations of being lost, a nomadic identity of mad displacement. There were other people there, but I looked to "professionals" instead of comrades; for diagnosis and prescription instead of solidarity and revolution. Yet I maintain

there is a difference between the work of therapy and that of psychiatry, between that of care and coercion. I have been cared for well, and harmed indelibly by professionalized mental health care workers.

*Reflections for madness studies and (dis)ability justice*

I've been thinking through the use of social media profiles as a sort of narrative prosthetic. It is a memory enhancing device, it allows us to categorize our social lives, and to assemble a linear understanding of ourselves with memories we want to enhance and experiences we want to make note of but not necessarily archive for the world. I use my cloud drives to store all my writings, excel sheets, assignments, pirated books, reading notes, pictures, music, etc. Meaning a significant part of my brain is connected to the internet in nearly inseparable ways. Part of my identity is stored here as well. We discussed earlier how social media disrupts the idea of borders and boundaries; the public and private are porous realities both on and off social media. Yet (dis)ability justice and madness activists, scholars, and online personalities have championed this critical geographical analysis digitally through ongoing organizing and community building online. In reality, there may not be a more direct threat to neoliberal geographies than queer-crip communities— “to put it bluntly, disabled people were—and often are—figured as threats to futurity” (Kafer, 2013), yet the power of neoliberalism manifests in the commercialization of these communities through social networking sites. The final portion of this project reflects on how queerness, space, and therapy are all co constructed in the projects of ableism and saneism, and how autobiographies through social media act as a sort of prosthetic to personal narrative as well as a barrier to the myriad idiosyncrasies that experiences of (dis)ability entails.

“I, we, need to imagine crip futures because disabled people are continually being written out of the future, rendered as the sign of the future no one wants. This erasure is not mere metaphor. Disabled people—particularly those with developmental and psychiatric impairments, those who are poor, gender-deviant, and/or people of color, those who need atypical forms of assistance to survive—have faced sterilization, segregation, and institutionalization; denial of equitable education, health care and social services; violence and abuse; and the withholding of the rights of citizenship” (Kafer, 2013). The erasure of racialized trauma, the erasure of queer trauma, the erasure of daily trauma is a necessary facet of white supremacist, capitalist life in the United States. This nation must consistently pathologize difference, and reject the marginalization of daily life incurred on people who are not of dominant hegemonies. Through an anti-racist, crip-queer approach to narrative movement building online, we can transition into a future where people who only find harm in our physical world can find hope in our digital worlds. Can an algorithm be anti-racist? Do we have alternatives for surveillance in our digital spaces?

### *Accessibility and mad spaces*

“Bringing people together... can only endure when there is also space for the recognition of a plurality of differences, which – in consciously combating the hierarchies of privilege and power consolidated around difference – creates spaces of excitement” (Segal, 2017). The *recognition of a plurality of differences* has to be realized through accessibility. Accessibility is probably the most appealing aspect of the internet. As Schalk (2018) and Kafer (2013) have shown, isolation is one of the most common social associations and realities for people with disabilities. Social media has become the most accessible social space. Is social media the space with the best disability justice practices? If not, can we *crip/mad* social media? Have we already?

Considering all of the repetitive and manic analysis of design and structure for space, can we think of *sanity as a space*? Social media is the most accessible of social spaces because it does not require any movement to access it. But does it require emotional-labor to insert one's *disordered* orientations into this space? We often discuss spaces as being queer, or queering spaces; there are safe spaces, activist spaces, Black spaces, and trans spaces. I wonder what a sane space is. Well I suppose all spaces are presumed *sane* by order of them being *ordered*, structured, and designed. So is social media the most accessible sane space for those of us who are *mad*? Can social media be a mad space? Chamberlin (1976) recalls the first psychiatric patients conference in the United States as having no agenda, no order, and no schedule. Several hundred anti-psychiatry, psychiatric survivors, ex patients/consumers met to discuss their experiences and collectively discover what their goals would be. Arguments were had, episodes were witnessed, yelling, laughing, confusion. Not much progress towards liberation, but a lot of solidarity in narrative/relationship sharing, which is in itself a form of progress I suppose. Is solidarity of madness and people with mental illness what maddening a space is? Doing away with structure, design, and anything that even hints at psychiatric *order*. We need to have mad and crip spaces online, as well as IRL. "Disability, then, plays a huge, but seemingly uncontested, role in how contemporary Americans envision the future. Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability, while dystopic, negative visions of the future are based on its proliferation; as we will see below, both depictions are deeply tied to cultural understandings and anxieties about the proper use of technology" (Kafer, 2013). Social media simultaneously reinforces sanist norms in its structures while also complicating the fantasies of reality and myths of sanity in the chaotic multitudes of alter-spaces. And I rather enjoy how



those trained in saneism struggle with digital landscapes as I flounder in this supposed real world.

I quote Livingstone (2010) above who writes about what it means to “queer” their therapy practice. In light of the recent discourses, however, I wonder what it means to “mad” a therapy practice. Can it even be done? What can therapists learn from the anti-psychiatry and madness liberation movements of the late 20th century? We, as mental health professionals, have effectively co-opted the language of the movement, and even professionalized self-help movements (now commonly referred to as mutual aid groups). “Co-optation is a process by which a dominant group attempts to absorb or neutralize a weaker opposition that it believes poses a threat to its continued power” (Beresford, 2016). What I am suggesting through all of this is that as (dis)ability justice (DJ) is making necessary interventions into the realms of queer theory, how might mad liberation do the same? Accessibility & self-determination are the primary goals of DJ. Ann Russo (2019) articulates the goals of inclusive, anti-racist community building well when she writes “The goal is to cultivate more intentional communities through the building of critical consciousness and skills for communal support and healing, for intervention and accountability, and for prevention and social transformation. This is the essence of community accountability and transformative justice.” How we do this digitally will become a core point of liberation work and theorizing over the course of the next decade. Freeing all psychiatric inmates, disbanding the APA, de-codifying the DSM and doing away with the ideas of normalcy and sanity seem to be the goals of the madness movement; police and prison abolitionist work must convene with the psychiatric survivor movement (and vice-versa, especially as the madness movement has often been a white movement). But as described by Chamberlin, mad liberation was (and still largely is) a rather disjointed movement. A mad

analysis of social media thus is a disjointed process. Perhaps that is what madness is, a process, a series of events, a voyage into difference, an exploration or even embracing of *disorder*.

What are the lessons we have to learn from social media autobiographies in terms of madness? For me, they have been that consistent social contact is as healing as harmful; the internet is an intensification of our social realities— an intensification of our prescribed affects. An additional lesson has been that disjointed narratives, manic flows of data, and new literacies are related experiences to my own sensations of madness. Esmé Weijun Wang in *The Collected Schizophrenias* writes between personal narrative and journalistic inquiry for mental illness. The writing style itself feels like scrolling through the feed of a singular social media profile. From an activist post, to a food post, to a romance post, to several political posts, to several memes, the feed is a frenzy of disjointed personalities, affects, interests, and sensations. Wang’s text, similarly to Coleman’s and other autobiographies by people with mental illness often are met with confusion by those whom I recommend the books to. “The writing style was hard to follow.” “The flow of ideas felt disjointed. Sometimes she would start an idea and not finish it, or reference it much later after I had forgotten about it.” These autobiographies, however, are the easiest texts for me to snap my mind into. They write how we think. It does not feel disjointed to those of us out of sync with saneist expectations. (Does my thesis feel harder to follow because of the madness it is typed with)? Maybe the *anticipation* of social media feeds can inform the apparent *disorder* of our autobiographies of mental illness. When I get so depressed and afraid I become nonverbal. My mouth closes and my hands open. I type my emotions. It is such a challenge, even on good days, to follow the pace, flow, and energy of any given conversation. “What did you just say?” “Sorry, I didn’t hear you.” I am trying to pay attention, but despite my dyslexia, reading your words is so much easier than hearing you talk. Social media has clipped

into my nervous system and directly syncs your communications to my sensory inputs; my responses can be recorded in a few clicks. Despite the lights, scrolls, constant, immediate content, my mind finds a sense of balance in this place of non-bodily mania.

*Anti-surveillance as wellness praxis*

While Coleman and Wang are interested in preserving the order of psychiatry to an extent at least, so as to have access to a lineage, to a term, to a name, to a marker of validity to their experiences, I maintain a rejection of the DSM and psychiatric power as necessary for the wellbeing of our mad-communities. “[R.D.] Laing believes that schizophrenia is not an illness, but a ‘metanoiac voyage’ – literally, a ‘mind-changing’ experience. Traditional mental hospitals – indeed, traditional psychiatric practices generally – are set up to thwart the voyage rather than aid it” (Chamberlin, 1976). What is the power in naming? I recognize that there is one, but is naming and controlling the same? I recently watched a show with my roommate that was not particularly good but I enjoyed a line when a character responded to the question of what their name is with a belly laugh and memorable retort, “Don’t know it, forgot it a loooong time ago!” What would it be like to forget my diagnoses? What would it be like to genuinely lose the many namings I’ve received throughout my life? I feel like that character’s identity was much freer than mine is. I am so restricted by ‘Joshie’ (which is a lazy alteration to an ever more restrictive name).

In 2018, I saw a few friends with (dis)abilities post on their Instagram stories the pills they take for their respective (dis)abilities, why they take them, and for how long they have had them prescribed. It was an inspiring display of solidarity for people with (dis)abilities, and helped normalize daily medicine intake for people. I decided to participate in this. I shared the six prescribed meds I took at the time (two mood stabilizers, an antidepressant, an allergy med,

an anti-psychotic, and a safe sex drug), and the 6 vitamin supplements I used to assist with mood stabilization, energy improvement, memory functioning, and iron, b12, and D deficiencies. After posting, I received a few messages from my cousins and my sister. Apparently, several older relatives had seen my posts. They messaged my relatives of the same age to inquire if I was gay or bi. My cousins and sister of course know I am queer, and my social media profile has my gender pronouns. The disclosure of my Truvada Prep prescription, however, was the point of knowing for my extended relatives. They never reached out to me, and I blocked them all from seeing my posts. They had always previously describe me as either “the wild one” or “too quiet” with little in between. Disclosure of medicine can indicate disclosure of sexuality and gender identity. For me to have disclosed these medicines was to incite a form of heteronormative surveillance that paralleled psychiatric power; sanity is heterosexuality for the normative family unit.

Foucault (2003) argues that “The watchful family eye became a psychiatric gaze... a psycho-pathological, a psychological gaze.” *The watchful family eye became a psychiatric gaze*, but in my case above, the psychiatric gaze was no different than the heteronormativizing gaze. How do we live queer narratives as co-constitutive of (dis)ability and madness online? The therapeutics of (dis)ability must attend to the differences of race, queerness, class, and gender. Julie Tilsen and David Nylund (2010) write that “The notion of ‘queer’ is itself a critique of identities rather than a new constitution of its own.” Madness is a critique of identities, *and a new constitution of its own*. Queer identity and mad identity are both critiques and actual entities. The psychiatric gaze enabled by social media has to be challenged by (dis)ability justice projects, just as it must be by queerness. Moreover, much like how Tilsen describes queer as more than a new constitution of its own, Nakamura (2012) argues that “Race has itself become a digital

medium, a distinctive set of informative codes, networked mediated narratives, maps, images, and visualizations that index identity.” Race here then is a critique, an identity, and a process. Indexing identity is both the work of the DSM, the hetero/homonormative nationalist imperatives, and social media profiles. “Whiteness, in other words, depended on the linkage of race, class, and disability for meaning” (Kafer, 2013). I share my experiences of family surveillance towards sexuality, online disclosure, queerness and madness, with the technoculture of race to highlight how social media autobiographies have a set of predictable yet difficult to assess surveillance praxis dependent on assembled identity markers and narrativized intersections. Surveillance is always presumed for psychiatry, digital communities/identity, and the family unit. How do we disidentify from surveillance?

***A politics of anti-racist madness for the digital autobiography***

While my example above disclosing my medications to the private/public space of the Instagram story is devoid of multi-race dynamics as the family members in question were all white, I would argue that the trolls of twitter, Instagram, and Facebook utilize their whiteness as a *networked mediated narrative* to utilize their “race as technology” (Kyong Chun, 2012). If we consider race as a *digital medium* and sanity as a prescriptive space, what are the relationships between maddening a space and making a space anti-racist? “Blackness and disability have the potential to destabilize the rhetoric of normalcy that holds them as abject, but they are curtailed in doing so when mislabeled as agentive” (Pickens, 2019). How does madness inform anti-racist work and anti-racist work inform madness liberation? Racism and saneism have always had a close relationship. “We need to explore how neo-colonial whiteness emerges unconsciously in the linguistic codes of mental illness and the diagnostic frameworks of the International Classification of Mental and Behavioral Disorders (ICD) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual

of Mental Disorders (DSM)” (King, 2016). Sanity is whiteness for the APA, and sanity is heterosexuality for my family. Does anti-racism constitute queerness because of the rejection of sane-insistences on hegemonic discourses of our current realities? These connections are far from noticeable collisions, but there are tensions here – tensions require contact.

“Given the history of literacy and race in the United States, all Black writers are science fiction come to life. Including me [Therí A. Pickens]. Within the long history of Black literature, madness surfaces not solely as pathology or as part of a holy fool tradition, but also as a viable alternative to engagements with white racism even if it does not result in increased agency” (Pickens, 2019). Pickens (2019) references here back to “the politics of possibilities”. Social media enables more Black, trans, (dis)abled, and other marginalized communities to gather and story their / our lives publicly. The public feelings of these individuals and communities are a form of science fiction. The insistence on being validated and believed, on eliding values of *authenticity* to be worthy, is an anti-racist politics when practiced by Black people and people of color, and a part of the mad and (dis)ability justice projects when practiced by people with (dis)abilities, and otherwise disidentificatory and resistant when practiced by others associated with marginalized people groups online. *Given the history of literacy and race in the United States, all Black social media users are science fiction come to life.* An anti-racist politics online is a science fiction politics of the possible come to life. Blackness and (dis)ability can destabilize the normative whiteness and saneisms deployed by SNS designers. What technological innovations are required to decenter saneism and whiteness, to expand our possibilities of what kinds of bodyminds may exist in the future of our shared publics?

***Disorder: identities of anticipation, intensity, immediacy, and transition***

Maybe the reason my identity feels fuller online than in text or narrative-description is because it doesn't have to be linear. Not just the story, but the act of reading itself. Maybe it's because everything feels more intense online and everything feels more intense to me anyways. Maybe because I'm always anticipating something to happen at any moment in life and anything could happen at any moment in the scrolling, swiping, and notifying of SNS. Social media enables more literacies, more literacies can tell more stories and more types of stories. It is not true that all stories have been told, in part because of oppression, marginalization, and silencing of people groups, and also in part because we have not discovered all possible forms of storying and storytelling. Digital literacies tell new types of stories. Maybe this is why my mind can "click" into digital self-literary spaces with more ease & interest: my mania & distractions and forms of thinking are better matched with the controlled insanity of the internet. One of my former therapists told me the goal of a good life is "consistency". "Mental illness makes consistency difficult." I realized I was not looking for consistency, I was and am hoping to live a life of contradiction and confusion, of *disorder*. I don't want a consistent sexuality or gender because I don't feel a consistent cognition. Social media gives a space of consistent mania. I don't know if therapy is compatible or consistent with (dis)ability justice and madness liberation. Maybe a lesson to be learned from social media is that we experience healing and therapeutic values from a variety of sources; queerness, (dis)ability justice, madness, and anti-racism offer values that can inform a just social media space. Appropriate social media analysis may reveal a lot about what our communities need to consistently challenge any dominant hegemonies.

It takes many cascading eyes to see the multitanerous identity construction and restriction of internet spaces; it takes a level of acquired madness to live these lives online; many eyes to see many lives, many ears to hear many voices...

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### Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

This glossary is provided to assist the reader in making sense of this tornado of swirling disciplines. The terms are presented in the order in which they appear in the text, and are provided a brief definition and when relevant a source.

- **Schizophrenia/Schizophrenic:** Schizophrenia is a politically contested mental health diagnosis (King, 2016; Gorman, 2013) that generally refers to a disjuncture or lack of compatibility with certain mainstream senses of reality. There are many symptoms, and it can take many forms. Many people in the madness liberation movement understand the term as a form of social control and do not identify with it.
- **Mad/Madness/Mad liberation/Mad theory:** Mad and Madness are terms indicating mental illness but have been reclaimed by psychiatric survivors since the 1960s in the United States and Canada. The term reclamation is reflected in the movement name, Mad liberation, as well as its field of study, Mad theory, all of which are characterized by a rejection of traditional and clinical conceptions of mental health and mental illness.
- **Non-cis:** Cis gender is the gender a person is assigned at birth, whereas non-cis usually refers to trans or non-binary individuals.
- **(Dis)ability:** (Dis)ability is a literary technique Sami Schalk (2018) uses to demonstrate and acknowledge the inherent fluidity and porous boundaries between ability and disability.
- **(In)sane:** (In)sane borrows from the same literary technique as Sami Schalk's '(dis)ability'. This thesis is, to my knowledge, the first work to use of this technique to communicate sanity and insanity, or 'madness', as having fluid and porous boundaries.
- **People with Mental illness(es) (PWMI):** PWMI are individuals and communities who have been diagnosed with a form of a "mental disorder" by a qualified professional, as well as those who experience affective, cognitive, and behavioral differences but have not been diagnosed.
- **Social Media:** Social media refers to "multiple technologies that include computer-based communities and environments along with their corresponding modes of expression, documentation, and communication" (Belkofer, 2011).
- **Social Networking Sites (SNS):** SNS and social media are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, though some digital humanities and media scholars do use them differently, noting SNS as the platform or place, and social media as the effect, intent, or space.
- **Neoliberalism:** Neoliberalism refers to the dominant global political, cultural, and economic systems of our current moment, which has existed since the 1950's and is characterized by globalization, speculative capital, late-stage capitalism, privatization, and austerity.
- **Digital-Neoliberalism:** Digital-neoliberalism refers to the unique forms neoliberalism takes in digital contexts. It is differentiated from traditional neoliberalism due in part to the emergent forms of online banking, the profiteering of social media, automation of capital, transfers between mixed-reality spaces, near-borderless (or perhaps a new sense of borders between sites) and thus globalized flow of speculative capital, data, resources, and labor.
- **IRL:** In Real Life

- **Interpellation:** A term developed by the mad, Marxist, abusive murderer Louis Althusser, to indicate how forms of address develop the subject; how identity is structured by the ways power structures and authority figures interact with us.
- **Techno-Cultures:** Techno-cultures refers to cultures that are dependent on and created by technological innovations. Techno-cultures in this thesis typically refers to cultures developed via and maintained by social media technologies.
- **Saneism:** Saneism is the specific form of ableism evoked with discriminatory references to and depictions of sanity, or mental health.
- **Sanenationalism:** Sanenationalism is the sanist cultural hegemony by which nations co-create and authenticate senses of reality, affect, cognition, and behavior. Sanenationalism refers to the perceived forms and degrees of sanity one must 'pass' as or assimilate into to access legitimate citizenship. Sanenationalism is predicated on and supportive of other dominant narratives ascribed to that nation with relation to race, gender, class, etc. To my knowledge, this thesis is the first work to use the term sanenationalism.
- **American Psychiatric Association (APA):** The APA is the primary and most influential professional organization of psychiatrists in the United States, and the largest such organization by membership in the world. The APA produces, edits, and publishes the DSM-V.
- **Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5th Edition (DSM-V):** The DSM-V is the main clinical mental health and mental illness or behavioral disorder diagnostic text in the United States. It is used by most mental health care professional, insurance providers, hospitals, etc. in the country diagnosing mental illness, as well as to guide the treatment of the mental disorders it categorizes and describes.
- **Multitaneous:** A digital architecture and algorithm design term that describes the simultaneity of sync with time in the relation to multiply affected (im)materialities, meanings, or realities.
- **Prosumer/Prosumption:** Prosumption is the simultaneous act of producing and consuming content or resources. Prosumer is used to reference the users of digital-neoliberal spaces that disrupts the commerce binary of consumption and production to develop a new form of economic engagement unique to the mixed-reality space of the internet.
- **Trend:** A trend references the digital phenomenon of ideas, thoughts, memes, hashtags, or other moments, images, digital-sensations of culture or news that becomes very popular. A trend is typically a popular search term. Trending items improve visibility and cultural significance for the subject of the trend.
- **Meme:** A meme is a form of mimicry, or cultural reproduction. Memes often trend, and memes often result from a trending item, making them a somewhat self-replicating, or meme'ing process.
- **Hashtags:** Hashtags is the modern parlance for '#', and function as a sorting filter by which search engines locate and collate information. Hashtags frequently trend, and memes can take the form of hashtags as well. In conversation and frequent usage, hashtags also often refer to a mood or a vibe, as well as a marketing or propaganda slogan, and frequently reference other social or political issues.
- **Cultural Cloning:** Cultural cloning is the enforced assimilation of certain cultural norms. This term is typically used to describe how labor with social interactions often requires cultural cloning to 'pass' into dominant hegemonies (e.g. whiteness, accent).

- **Homoglobalism:** Homoglobalism is the result of homonationalism and globalization. It is a form of sanitizing harms caused by the West through appeals to liberal values of apparent LGBTQ+ inclusion. Homoglobalism also entails the default expectations and identity performances expected of “queer” people internationally. Even use of the term ‘queer’ in transnational contexts may be regarded as a form of Homoglobalism, in that ‘queer’ is a Western term.
- **Pinkwashing:** Pinkwashing is a distraction and diffusion tactic employed by the Israeli government to draw attention away from their occupation of Palestine, and to their supposedly liberal, democratic values as it relates to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Pinkwashing is the unique term for how it occurs in Palestine, but pinkwashing is very much a smaller piece to the larger project of homoglobalism.