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NOTES FROM THE MOTLEY OFFICES

The Motley Undergraduate Journal comprises scholars, readers, reviewers, authors, editors, and storytellers. Our collective love of words and learning joins us in creating this wonderful collection of creative scholarship and community. We recognize that there has long been a bias towards the written word as being perceived as somehow more academic or 'legitimate' than oral storytelling, thereby invalidating many traditional practices of the Indigenous peoples. In the study of communications, our team works to recognize and incorporate as many forms of scholarship as possible, recognizing that no single form of academia is superior to another. Being based in Canada, we must reflect an awareness of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and the importance of preserving and highlighting Indigenous cultures. As a communications journal, we would be remiss to ignore the ongoing role of discourse in perpetuating ignorance and systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples. At the Motley Journal, we hope to actively deconstruct and dispose of these outdated and harmful forms of rhetoric. We cannot hope to move towards reconciliation and restitution if we do not first understand our past.

As such, as a community of people who teach, learn, and work on this land, we owe a debt of gratitude and honour to Moh'kinsstis and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy, which is composed of the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani. We also acknowledge the Îyâxe Nakoda, which includes the Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Wesley First Nations, as well as the Tsuut'ina nations. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3, within the historical Northwest Métis homeland. By supporting Indigenous scholars and amplifying Indigenous-led communication initiatives, you are part of a greater change: one that seeks equity and reconciliation. We hope you, the reader, take every opportunity to educate yourself on Indigenous histories and practices and the current issues that impact your specific region and its peoples. The Motley Journal would like to express deep gratitude to the Indigenous communities who care for the unceded land and whose knowledge and communication practices are integral to creating a reciprocal and respectful relationship with Turtle Island and its peoples.

It is also important to recognize the long-standing impacts of colonialism are not limited to our backyard; it is a global issue. In the spirit of calling for an end to systemic violence and oppression, we also call for a ceasefire to the ongoing genocide in Palestine. The struggle for

self-determination and sovereignty is one that colonized peoples around the globe face daily; we would also like to acknowledge and call for an end to the exploitation and genocide of the people of Sudan, Congo, and Tigray. The Motley Journal strongly believes that we must speak up and disrupt something when needed. We would like to express our solidarity with the people of Palestine, Congo, Sudan, and Tigray in line with our dedication to truth, justice, and reconciliation.

Our journal owes a great debt of gratitude to the Department of Communications, Media, and Film faculty at the University of Calgary. In addition to generously volunteering their time to contribute to the review process, these wonderful people tirelessly promoted the Motley and were responsible for nominating all of the papers in this issue. A special thanks is owed to Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Professor and Chair of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Calgary, and the Editor-in-Chief of the Motley, who provided direction and thoughtful support throughout the entire review and publication process. I would also like to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of Dr. Maria Victoria Guglietti, who continues to nominate the majority of our submissions and always offers insightful guidance. Lastly, there would be no journal if it were not for the extraordinary efforts of Melissa Morris, who built the Motley from the ground up. To read this journal is to understand the endless hours of love and dedication that Melissa spent creating it.

I would like to extend a special 'thank you' to the other professors who nominated and reviewed the student works you will soon read: Dr. Tamara Shepherd, Dr. Julia Chan, Dr. Maria Victoria Guglietti, Dr. Ronald Glasberg, Dr. Samantha Thrift, Dr. Gregory Taylor, Dr. Ali Karimi, Dr. Ryan Pierson, Dr. Charlene Elliot, Dr. Pablo Policzer, and graduate students Claire Hadford and Emilie Charette. We would have no journal without the support of those who see the potential in students, put their names forward, and donate their time to review these works.

Of course, no journal exists without authors. We are lucky to have an incredibly strong team of student writers with fresh ideas and the generosity to share them. Their talent and dedication make this journal what it is. As the name suggests, the Motley is composed of a great diversity of people, interests, roles, and worldviews.

The Motley is freely and publicly accessible thanks to the Public Knowledge Project's Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform, which operates out of Simon Fraser University. OJS allows academic journals to freely utilize their publication software and training resources to

make academic knowledge accessible to all citizens. The entire OJS library team at the University of Calgary offered the journal team invaluable assistance with building the site, resolving bugs, and providing continuous guidance.

Lastly, I want to thank you, the reader. Your engagement promotes the continued elevation of Communications discourse. On behalf of the entire team at the Motely, I sincerely hope you enjoy our most recent issue. A tremendous amount of time, love, effort, and even a few tears went into creating the work you are reading now. We hope you feel curious, educated, and inspired. We cannot thank you enough.

Skye Baxter, Managing Editor

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF, MARIA BAKARDJIEVA

The Motley's fourth issue exhibits all the best signs of a publication's maturity. It brims with talent. Its articles address highly important topics, approach these topics in original, intellectually surprising ways, and forcefully demonstrate our student-authors' ability to take academic theories and methods straight to the centre of acute social debates. But also, to skillfully use these theories and methods to cast intense light on skirted, buried and seldom-discussed problems and experiences that can have profound effects on individuals, families and communities.

Deserved attention is given in this issue to communication, media and health. The cultural processes of framing the nature of illnesses and the power of drugs, our authors show, are as important and consequential as the medical and pharmaceutical work surrounding these conditions and products. Social media portrayals and new forms of pervasive advertising by pharmaceutical companies influence our notions of healthy life and healthy bodies. Cultural discourses can shift the focus from patients' physical symptoms to their moral qualities and in that way delegitimise suffering and obstruct timely treatment. The research of Matthew Herring explains how that works.

Personal struggles for self-determination, mental and spiritual well-being and against digital data colonization are documented in the contributions by Natasha Bodnarchuk, Taylor Van Eyk, Shae Kubur and Daman Preet Singh. Through deep dives into their own experiences and those of others guided by theoretical concepts and insights, the authors detail the challenges facing women athletes, Indigenous and racialized youth as they negotiate their path to social acceptance, success and happiness.

The medium of film is examined by Vipasna Nangal and Chloe Deschamps in its ability to pose eternal moral questions against the background of unique historical conditions and social realities. By tracing the evolution of two central characters, Nangal and Deschamps illuminate the complexities and contradictions of lived experience that are often obscured by ideological stereotypes.

It is impossible to produce a short trailer for an issue containing such a bundle of diverse intellectual explorations, each fascinating in its own way. Let's give our authors their rightful due – an engaged close reading of their works. And let us thank again the Motley's loyal team, all students and professors who nominated, reviewed and edited these texts because our marvellous journal can only come into being through these people's concerted, competent and dedicated efforts.

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Editor-in-Chief

THE EDITORIAL TEAM

MARIA BAKARDJIEVA
Editor in Chief

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva (she/her), Professor and Chair in Communication and Media Studies at the University of Calgary. Her research examines the social construction of communication technologies and the use of digital media in various cultural and practical contexts with a focus on user agency, critical reflexivity and emancipation. She has numerous publications in leading journals and influential anthologies. The books she has authored and co-edited include Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life (2005), Socialbots and Their Friends: Digital Media and the Automation of Sociality (2017), Digital Media and the Dynamics of Civil Society: Retooling Citizenship in New European Democracies (2021), and How Canadians Communicate (2004 and 2007). Between 2010 and 2013, she served as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. Her current projects investigate the role digital media plays in citizen engagement and democratic participation. Dr. Bakardjieva teaches courses in communication theory and research methodology, communication technology and society, digital media and democracy. She works to promote undergraduate research activities in Communication and Media Studies and engages in knowledge mobilization and community outreach intended to advance the public understanding of issues related to Communication and Media Studies.

SKYE BAXTER
Managing Editor

Skye (she/her) is currently in her fourth year of a combined degree, studying Communications, Political Science, and Statistics. In 2023, she was awarded the PURE Research Grant from the University of Calgary to conduct a political critical discourse analysis, which sparked her love of research and academic writing. Having worked as the Managing Editor of the Motley Journal for over a year now, Skye has completely fallen in love with the editorial process and is thrilled that her days are filled with words. She spends most of her spare time reading or talking about the continued relevance of Shakespeare. With a special interest in political communication, feminist media studies, rhetorical analysis, the politics of representation, and literary studies, Skye takes a great interest in understanding the role that communication plays in social identity and collective discourse. She eventually hopes to pursue a career that combines her passion for writing, research, and community involvement.

BRANDON EBY
Peer Reviewer

Brandon Eby (they/them) is a trans-nonbinary recently Graduated student with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. They have participated in campus organizing around food security efforts with Food Justice Now, as well as union organizing with the GLU. They are planning on purusing a Master's Degree in Sociology, with a particular interest in the ways in which neo-vagrancy laws coordinate the lives of people internally displaced due to climate catastrophe. Brandon aspires to participate in Community informed, activist sociology, and is heavily informed by decolonial and activist scholars, such as Margereta Matache, Marquis Bey, David Graeber, and Sara Ahmed.

MAGGIE HSU
Copyeditor

Maggie (she/they) is a fifth-year Communication and Media Studies student with professional interests in social media management, community engagement, and journalism. Her research explores digital intimacy through online personas, fandoms, and influencers, with a particular focus on livestreaming, parasocial relationships, and gaming culture. Maggie is also passionate about sports journalism, where they aim to share human interest stories that reveal how sports intersect with broader cultural narratives, transcending their reputation as a niche pursuit of fanatical audiences. They are dedicated to exploring how sports function as a dynamic form of media and storytelling that reflects societal values and identities.

NICKEY GOULDEN
Peer Reviewer

Nickey (she/her) is a recent graduate of the Communications and Media program at U of C, and continues her work as a peer reviewer with the Motley. She currently enjoys her job as an art instructor downtown, and is hoping to pursue her goals in an artistic career soon. She enjoys reading, rock climbing, and writing in her free time, but her true love is film (and nachos).

MELISSA MORRIS

Communications Development Specialist

Melissa Morris (she/her) is the founding Managing Editor for The Motley. She graduated with a BA (Honours) in Communication and Media Studies in Spring 2023. In the first two years of her undergraduate degree, she published two papers in the Agora Undergraduate Journal, and won a Student Writing Award. Her Honours thesis Cottagecore and Colonialism: an Analysis of Visual Discourse in the Cottagecore Aesthetic Subculture delved into political ideology and subcultural identity expression through visual methods such as fashion. Her thesis presentation placed second at the 2023 Arts Undergraduate Research Symposium. Her experience publishing and editing with the Agora Journal spurred her passion for highlighting the ideas of student authors. Melissa has a passion for building community and empowering students to share the depth and variety of their knowledge with others. She plans to pursue a career that brings together her passion for building community, research, and global affairs.

LUKE POMEROY PYE

Peer Reviewer

Luke (they/he) is a 3rd year Media Communications major; they are a reviewer/editor at the Motley Journal and is inspired by all the hard work put in by the students who submit to the journal. Luke hopes to eventually achieve a master's in library science after finishing their degree and eventually work to provide better, more inclusive programming for indigenous and queer youth to help build a community they didn't experience as a youth. Luke also is pursuing a minor in museum and heritage studies to supplement their understanding of conservation practices surrounding indigenous culture and artifacts. Luke is a 2 Spirit Métis artist who has been on a journey of reconnection and reconciliation for the past 5 years and has found a great affinity for indigenous art, specifically beading both contemporary and traditional jewelry and fashion.

SEBASTIAN VASQUEZ GUTIERREZ
Peer Reviewer

Sebastian (he/him) is a copyeditor and peer reviewer who started in the fall of 2023. He has always been interested in Investigative journalism; his inspiration Sebastian has written for different newspapers where he discussed his struggles being an International student at UCalgary. He interviewed other students in similar positions, which further shaped his work. At Queensland University, he was involved with a group of journalists who investigated the gambling industry in Australia. Sebastian hopes to pursue a career in investigative journalism.

THE AUTHORS

NATASHA BODNARCHUK

Female Athlete Memoirs as Postfeminist Fairy Tales

Natasha Bodnarchuk (she/her) is an author, peer reviewer, and copy editor for The Motley Journal. She recently graduated from the University of Calgary with a BA in Communications and Media Studies with Honours. Her research paper, "Female Athlete Memoirs as Postfeminist Fairy Tales" is an abridged version of her Honours thesis, where she conducted a narrative inquiry to interpret how white female athletes use the genre of memoir to articulate their experiences. When she's not reading essays that critically examine how people and stories are framed in media, she can be found mountain biking, skiing, or spending time with her friends. She looks forward to reading the other undergraduates work!

CHLOE DESCHAMPS

Feminism, Capitalism, Death: Neoliberal Womanhood: and the Post-Soviet Person in Anna Melikyan's Mermaid

Chloe (she/her) is an English major with a minor in film studies. She is inspired by feminist criticism and the blending of film scholarship with history and sociology, as well as the role of filmmaking as a feminist practice. She is hoping to pursue further research in women's filmmaking in graduate school, with an interest in archival theory and queer women in film.

MATTHEW HERRING

It's Magic You Know: The Reframing of Ozempic as a Weight Loss Drug

In May 2024, Matthew (he/him) completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Calgary with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications and Media Studies and Geography. Much of Matthew's research focuses on the intersection of rhetoric's impact on the physical and social geographies of the world. His piece in The Motley, "It's Magic, You Know...", explores the rhetorical strategies used to recontextualize and frame the diabetes medication Ozempic as a 'miracle' weight loss drug, alongside the social impacts of this recontextualization on the perception of weight and the 'healthy body'. Since finishing his undergraduate degree, Matthew has been nervously contemplating pursuing graduate studies in Communications.

SHAE KUBUR

An Aesthete Thinks About Herself for Too Long: An Auto-theoretical Conversation on Behalf of Aesthetics and Its Importance in Our Society

Shae Kubur (she/her) is a Sudanese-Canadian filmmaker, with a B.A in Film Studies at the University of Calgary. A self-described "aesthete", Shae has had a fascination with aesthetics and the beauty of life since as long as she could remember. Her love of aesthetics started with photography, and flourished into film. While studying at the University of Calgary, and having an opportunity to watch films from around the world, Shae learned how different cultures and lifestyles influenced how others created aesthetics. She wrote "An Aesthete Thinks About Herself Too Long" in the Motley Undergraduate Journal as an analytical and creative lens to emphasize how much aesthetics are taken for granted. "An Aesthete Thinks About Herself Too Long" analyzes how gender, race, and personal taste may inform an individual's aesthetic. When she's not writing, daydreaming or trying to find the perfect angle for a photo, Shae can be seen screenwriting, storyboarding and podcasting. Shae hopes to carry her love aesthetics further into her filmmaking, creating unique stories with visually stimulating aesthetics.

VIPASNA NANGAL

A Metamorphosis: From HGW XX/7 to a Good Man: A Story of Encountering the Other and the Self in Music

Vipasna Nangal (she/her) is a fourth-year honours political science student at the University of Calgary. She is interested in understanding the political behaviour of racialized communities in Canada, diaspora dynamics and divisions, and how marginalized communities negotiate and navigate Canada's multicultural landscape. In the future, she hopes to explore these interests through the lens of law and legal research. Immersed in a household that celebrated the arts, she grew up witnessing the transformative power of creative expression as a tool for resistance and social change. These early experiences shaped her understanding of art's role in challenging rigid paradigms and redefining collective identities. This upbringing inspires her piece. She draws upon the evocative themes in The Lives of Others to delve into the intersection of art, politics, and power.

DAMAN PREET SINGH

So you like taking photos, huh?: A study about resistance against digital data colonialism through meaningful inefficiencies

Daman (they/them) is a second-year communications student with a strong interest in journalism and the visual arts. Their research interests lie where communications and culture theory intersect with identity, pop culture and subcultures while also learning how to communicate their findings through art mediums. Currently, Daman is one of the Visuals Editors at the UCalgary Student Newspaper, *The Gauntlet* and is keen on learning how communication theory can affect their work, in both journalism and photography.

TAYLOR VAN EYK

I Did Something Stupid When I Was a Teenager: Bodily Possession, Walking Corpses, a Dog's Sixth Sense, and Anishinaabe Land-Based Recovery

Indigenized Leisure alongside Data Colonialist Systems: Addressing Invisible Presence through the Visibility of Indigenous Identities

Taylor (she/her) is an Anishinaabe communications and new media scholar pursuing a bachelor of arts at the University of Calgary. Her family hails from Saugeen First Nation along the shores of Lake Huron and the lands in and around Stoney Point First Nation in southern Ontario. As a trans-disciplinary researcher, she studies artifacts of Canadian media through a First Nations lens. She currently holds a position assisting the Indigenous Student Access Program at the University, where she supports the integration of diverse Indigenous students into post-secondary. She also serves the Motley undergraduate journal as a peer reviewer and contributes content as an academic author. She will graduate from her program in December of 2024 and will continue researching and publishing in a creative context no matter where her next steps take her.

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Female Athlete Memoirs as Postfeminist Fairy Tales

Natasha Bodnarchuk

Abstract

Athlete memoirs are a popular sports genre. They are often marketed as tales of fidelity that candidly detail an athlete's journey to success. This paper conducts a narrative analysis of athlete memoirs to uncover how white female athletes present themselves and their experiences. The memoirs under analysis are Letters To A Young Gymnast by Nadia Comăneci, In the Water They Can't See You Cry by Amanda Beard, and Brave Enough by Jessie Diggins. This paper answers the research question: how do white female athletes utilize the memoir genre to construct their self-narratives and experiences? Postfeminism and feminist standpoint theory serve as theoretical frameworks to support the interpretation of the data. The findings of this paper identify how female athletes employ postfeminist tropes such as individuality, empowerment, and self-governance in articulating their athletic success. They describe their involvement in sports in ways that normalize the masculinization of athletics and do not demand changing the structures that make succeeding in this male-dominant industry feasible for less privileged athletes. A prevalent theme in the athletes' memoirs analyzed is that hard work and resilience always lead to individual success.

Keywords

Postfeminism, feminist standpoint theory, narrative analysis, athlete memoirs, heterosexism

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Introduction

In *Letters To A Young Gymnast*, Nadia Comăneci (2003) says, "The power to make it to the top and stay there comes from within alone" (p. 74). This quote can be analyzed through the lens of postfeminism, a term that claims the goals of feminism–namely equality–have been achieved. Postfeminism privileges individualism while overlooking the impact that race, class, and gender can have on one's means to succeed. This quote establishes the foundation on which Comăneci believes athletic success is achieved. The sports industry mirrors society. Inferring that success is inevitable if one works hard enough ignores systemic barriers which can impact the way sports organizations are run.

This paper will examine how female athletes use the memoir genre to narrate their experiences as professional athletes. The first memoir under analysis is *Letters to a Young Gymnast* by Nadia Comăneci (2003). Nadia Comăneci is a Romanian-American former gymnast. She competed in the 1976 Summer Olympics, where, at only fourteen years of age, she famously broke the World Record and scored a perfect ten, requiring the judges to break the scoreboard to display her result (Comăneci, 2003, p. 44). The second memoir, *In the Water They Can't See You Cry,* is by Amanda Beard. Beard is a former American swimmer and seven-time Olympic medalist. She won silver at the 1996 Summer Olympics when she was only fourteen and continued to have a successful career (Beard, 2012, p. 49). The final memoir, *Brave Enough*, was written by American cross-country skier Jessie Diggins. She and her teammate Kikkan Randall won gold in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games (p. 233). The pair made history, winning the first Olympic medal in cross-country skiing for the United States in over 40 years (p. 206).

Postfeminism and feminist standpoint theory form the theoretical basis upon which I will dissect and critique these memoirs. This paper examines how athlete memoirs reproduce or challenge dominant themes of athleticism and success. When I refer to these dominant themes, I am suggesting that sports and athletics have historically been viewed as patriarchal institutions created by and for men. The sports the women in my sample compete in are gender equal, yet it is important to note that it has not always been this way across sports disciplines. For many years, women were barred from competing in some sports disciplines as they were deemed 'physically weaker' than men.

Moreover, some sports are costly and largely inaccessible to more vulnerable groups. Sports participation of racialized women in Canada is hindered by experiences of racism and sexism (Joseph

et al, 2022, p. 873). Systemic racism and white privilege can impact the operation of sports institutions, limiting or rendering the accomplishments of women of colour invisible (p. 877).

Despite these structural barriers, a prevalent notion in the athletes' memoirs analyzed is that hard work and resilience always lead to individual success. The main research question this paper aims to answer is: How do white women construct their identity as elite athletes through the genre of memoir?

Memoir as a Genre

Memoir is a genre in which an author writes about a period of their life. Kerley (2014) describes memoirs as "an aspect of rhetoric that aims to take individual stories and communicate a narrative to a large, diverse audience" (p. 29). Memoirists utilize this genre to share important moments and aspects of their identity (p. 30). While current published memoirs are diverse, it was not until the women's liberation movement that there was a rise in memoirs written by women and people of colour (Couser, 2012, p. 150).

Memoirs can be discerned into two genres: "Somebody Memoirs" and "Nobody Memoirs" (Kerley, 2014, p. 32). "Somebody Memoirs" are described as memoirs written by an already-established figure, such as a celebrity or, in this case, an Olympic athlete (p. 32). In contrast, "Nobody Memoirs" are characterized as being written by someone who is not known in the public eye (p. 32).

The memoir genre is not simply a literary form; it offers the audience a moral and political model expected to be true and objective (Couser, 2012, p. 53). Yet, writing a memoir poses different ethical concerns compared to writing fiction. Memoirists are expected to be accurate in their depictions of real-life events and real people (Couser, 2012, p. 80). The frequent spectacularization of memoirs undermines this demand for fidelity for entertainment purposes, as memoirs are ultimately a product to be sold (p. 80). In addition, memoirs recount a person's life and rely on the author's recollections (p. 81). When an author's recollection is distorted, it affects not only the story they are telling but also how their identity is constructed. Couser (2012) claims identity is a core aspect of memoirs (p. 89). Yet many Somebody Memoirs are written with the help of a co-writer who helps the author construct their story, find their voice, and submit for publication. While the help of a co-writer—who was most likely not directly involved in the events the author is sharing—and the fickle nature of memory may influence the truthfulness of the stories, memoirs are widely accepted as truth (Kerley, 2014, p. 41). How an author narrates their life impacts how their

audience views the author's identity (p. 41). Sports memoirs are mostly written by accomplished athletes—they are well-known, have won medals or awards, competed on the international stage, earned sponsorships, and given back to their community. These memoirs document their successes and experiences. Memoirs may hold greater significance in the analysis of an athlete's construction of identity due to the assumption that the author has provided objective testimony in recounting their experiences. As this paper aims to understand how white female athletes utilize the memoir genre to construct their identity, it is increasingly important to be aware of the language and narrative patterns within a memoir. It is important to note that how athletes assert their identity may be impacted by their standpoint as women.

Feminist standpoint theory (FST) is a critical feminist theory that examines the distinctive experiences of women in a socially constructed, capitalistic, and patriarchal society (Intemann, 2020, p. 2). FST theorists argue that as women are oppressed in a patriarchal context, they develop a "double consciousness" through which they become aware of both their own lives and the lives of the dominant group in society (Watson et al, 2018, p. 296). One of the key theorists of FST, Sandra Harding, posits that marginalized people may gain a stronger knowledge of social reality, or what she calls "epistemic advantage" (Rolin, 2009, p 218). Epistemic advantage is the knowledge accessed through a feminist standpoint, which consists of recognizing how patriarchy and hegemony are upheld and disproportionately affect those who belong to marginalized groups (p. 218). As such, FST functions as a tool to "centralize women's experiences in the research process, viewing them as a point of entry for the creation of new knowledge" (Watson et al, 2018, p. 296)

I will incorporate FST in a unique and alternative way. Rather than using FST to articulate how the athletes in my sample experience oppression and thus have a unique viewpoint on the world, I will draw from FST to argue that the athletes in my sample hold privileged positions as white middle-upper-class women, and this blinds them to the inequities that exist amongst more marginalized groups of women. FST will serve as a way to acknowledge whether the athletes recognize their privilege and incorporate it as part of their story.

Female Athletes' Standpoint and Barriers to Self-Expression

Several studies examine how sportswomen attempt to control the construction of their identities. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) argue that sportswomen are constantly navigating the lines between "athlete" and "feminine" (p. 28). This dichotomy reproduces a view of female athletes that reflects the pervasive influence of traditional gender definitions and postfeminist tropes (p. 12). For

example, Toffoletti and Thorpe's (2018) content analysis found that female athletes post under three main themes: "self-love, self-disclosure, and self-empowerment" (p. 13). These themes contribute to the notion that a woman's own individual efforts will lead her to happiness and success. The authors argue that on social media, female athletes are frequently producing content that encourages other women to love their bodies and take control over their happiness (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018, pp. 13-25). The authors also note that female athletes tend to broadcast themselves as self-loving individuals who work to achieve success, feel confident or empowered, and create media coverage for themselves and their respective sports (pp. 28-29). These public accounts define women's success as an individual feat while ignoring the oppressive barriers they may face.

A similar finding is presented in Kane, LaVoi, and Fink's (2013) study, which interviewed female athlete participants and examined the images the athletes claimed best represent them and their sport (p. 287). The images chosen illustrate the participants' attempt to balance the dual identifications as women and athletes (pp. 287-288). This indicates that female athletes are aware of balancing their athleticism with femininity. This preoccupation with performing femininity challenges the stereotype that women who compete in male-dominated sports are "manly" or "lesbian" (Kane et al, 2013, p. 293). Using photographs that highlight women's athleticism, however, is an integral step to further the professionalization of women's sports. These studies demonstrate how common it is for sportswomen to advocate for themselves in ways that inadvertently contribute to a patriarchal view of femininity and athleticism.

Willson, Kerr, Battaglia, and Stirling (2022) recognize the greater implications associated with athletes' lack of voice (p. 4). Utilizing the method of participant observation, the researchers asked Canadian athletes, both male and female, how their national sports organization (NSO) could become a more inclusive, welcoming, and holistic space (p. 5). One of their main findings was that many Canadian athletes felt they lacked agency, power, and autonomy (p. 10). There are 49 NSOs in Canada, and only 39 have an athlete representative on their board of directors (p. 10). It is integral that athletes are included in decision-making processes as they are the ones directly impacted by such decisions. Many NSOs in Canada are self-governed (Willson et al, 2022, p. 10). The board of directors are largely made up of volunteers, and their decisions frequently remain unchallenged by other institutions (p. 10). The athletes' recommendations made in this study "reflect broader challenges to power structures seen outside of sport" (p. 10). This illustrates how external dynamics and systemic structures may impact how sports governing bodies are structured, which impacts how athletes are viewed and make sense of their roles. The limited number of athlete representatives in

each NSO illustrates this power imbalance. It reinforces the notion that athletes lack agency when they are not offered enough fair opportunities to self-advocate. This holds greater implications beyond simply providing a space for athletes to share their stories. Many athletes feared self-advocacy because their sport fosters a "culture of fear and silence" (Willson et al, 2022, p. 4). Athletes may be afraid to share their experiences if a potential consequence is neglect and verbal or psychological abuse (pp. 9-10). This is a critical point to consider, especially in the context of athletes' memoirs.

Many athlete memoirs are written after the athlete has retired—but not always. Memoirs offer an avenue for athletes to share the unseen parts of their athletic career—both positive and negative experiences. It is worth questioning whether the reason many memoirs are written after an athlete has retired is because the athlete will no longer need to report and abide by the regulations of their sport governing body. If athletes are only speaking out after they have left their sports institution, the tribulations they face may persist to the detriment of the next generation of athletes.

Female Athlete's Discursive Construction of Identity

Balancing female athletes' identity with femininity is a common finding in studies focusing on this experience. This duality is occasionally met with resistance, yet when sports are characterized as "manly" or in the "male domain," they reaffirm and normalize the underrepresentation of women in sports (Kavoura et al, 2017, p. 246). The discourse surrounding elite sports often determines what defines an athlete and what is "natural" and "unnatural" (p. 248). Examining the ways female judo wrestlers articulate their identity through a Foucauldian discourse analysis enabled Kavoura, Kokkonen, Chroni, and Ryba (2017) to recognize how these dominant discursive patterns shape our ways of thinking and understanding what is and is not true (p. 240). When women self-identify in ways that oppose the gender binary of what constitutes a female athlete, they are, in one way, challenging the status quo. Still, they are also inadvertently contributing to the discourse on "female biological inferiority" (p. 248). For example, Kavoura, Kokkonen, Chroni, and Ryba (2017) found that a team of female judo wrestlers "differentiated themselves from ordinary women by performing the self-image of exceptional beings, born with masculine qualities, such as competitiveness, tolerance to pain, and the ability to fight" (p. 248). When female athletes self-identify this way (e.g., as aggressive), they are placed outside the binary definitions of womanhood (p. 248). While using language that reaffirms sports as masculine normalizes the underrepresentation of women in sports,

it is possible that women may simply be using this language as a tactic to survive in this male domain (p. 246). Employing this language and omitting criticism appeals to postfeminist tropes.

Postfeminism, as a product of hegemony, adopts the aesthetics and façade of feminism to keep women subjected to patriarchy. A key critical feminist theorist who uses postfeminism to study this subjectification is Angela McRobbie. McRobbie (2004) describes postfeminism as the notion that there is no need to continue the battle for feminism and gender equality because, from a postfeminist perspective, equality has been achieved (p. 255). The notion that feminist tropes of freedom, choice, and bodily autonomy have been achieved suggests that feminism is "a thing of the past" (p. 255). Moreover, this infers that feminism has, on some level, been "transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 256). This further discredits the need for feminism's revival (p. 256).

One of the main tropes of postfeminism is female empowerment and choice. A key aspect that emerges through self-empowerment is the idea of female success. In a postfeminist landscape, where gender equality is said to have been achieved, the idea of success becomes an individual feat. The notion that there are no longer systemic barriers that prevent women from achieving the same professional and educational goals as men suggests that women must take responsibility for self-governance to achieve their goals and be deemed successful. This notion of female success then engenders a heightened sense of individualism—to be successful in a postfeminist society, the process of achieving female success becomes a "me" rather than a "we" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 257). This implies there is no need for a collective undertaking towards a fairer and more just society.

One of the criticisms of adopting a postfeminist lens is that it holds contemporary views of gender equality that are highly limited. For example, one of the themes associated with postfeminism is choice, which infers that women are fully capable of attaining the same type of job as their male counterparts (Tasker et al, 2007, p. 2). This not only illustrates how a postfeminist perspective fails to consider the socio-economic disparities in society but also assumes that a woman's decision to work is not influenced by necessity (p. 2). Therefore, postfeminism is exclusionary and assumes that the values and themes associated with feminism—individuality, choice, bodily autonomy, and professional or educational endeavours—are universally shared amongst all women (p. 2). It ignores intersectionality, overlooking the influence of age, race, and class on women's behaviour and choice (p. 2). This further excludes marginalized women, as it infers that the most affluent and privileged in society get to participate and thus demonstrate their capacity to achieve female success (p. 2).

Methodology

The purposive sampling method for this study consists of three memoirs written by female athletes who competed in sports for at least five years at an elite level (e.g., Olympics, World Championships, National Championships, etc.) and won Olympic medals. These parameters ensure that these athletes have been exposed to professional sports and are relatively well-known in their field.

It is important to note that all of the memoirs in my sample were written by white women who currently live in North America. As such, my analysis cannot account for the experiences of white women outside North America and the experiences of racialized athletes. Part of the reason why I chose to analyze memoirs written by white athletes is because I hold an interest in looking deeper into privileged experiences. This is important, as there are not many studies that directly interrogate a privileged standpoint—most studies that employ FST do so when analyzing the experiences of marginalized women. A limitation of purposive sampling is that the findings cannot be generalized. As the sample only includes three memoirs, my discussion of findings only extends to the cases I analyzed.

The method of data analysis will be a narrative inquiry. This qualitative method is concerned with studying descriptive accounts of people or characters. According to Butler-Kisber (2010), a narrative inquiry offers "distinctive ways of thinking and understanding… [which] integrates the physical and psychological dimensions of knowing" (p. 62). In other words, a narrative inquiry allows unique perspectives and ways of thinking to be disseminated. Storytelling allows individuals to make sense of their experiences, cultural life, and identity (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 63).

Analysis

Throughout this analysis, I will be referring to the protagonist/author of each memoir as "the heroine." A heroine is highly admired for her courage or achievements; she is seen as the ideal female character. Using this term positions the athletes in a narrative framework. I have divided my findings into three parts: the hegemonic heroine, the adversity, and the resolution, and I relate some of my interpretations to that of a fairy tale. When I refer to this fairy tale narrative, I am referring to a Western, patriarchal fairy tale, one which depicts a 'happily ever after' where all adversities are overcome, and the heroine finds herself in a romantic heterosexual partnership. The findings of this study are of my own interpretation and should not dissuade anyone from reading the athletes' memoirs.

The Hegemonic Heroine

Unlike the traditional fairy tale narrative where the female heroine needs a prince to save her, the athlete memoirs in my sample detail stories from women who are highly independent, motivated, and disciplined. Most of their stories defy traditional fairy tale narratives—they don't need a man to save them or achieve their goals for them. The memoirs in my sample all begin with a recollection of the athlete—the heroine—as a child. These memories allow the reader to understand how they got involved in their sport. Common descriptions of their childhood highlight their bountiful energy and supportive family members who encouraged them to participate in sports. Due to their keenness to play sports, the heroines describe themselves as "tomboys" (Comăneci, 2003, p. 11; Beard, 2012, p. 6). In addition, each heroine makes a point of saying how participating in sports was akin to doing something 'for boys,' yet this never held them back. For example, Comăneci (2003) says she "used to practice every day so that the boys would allow me to play on their teams" (p. 7). Similarly, Diggins (2021) states, "The more something was labelled a 'boy thing' because of how tough or gross or physically draining it was, the more I wanted to do it" (p. x). And lastly, Beard (2012) holds similar sentiments when she says, "I didn't care if they were 'boys' sports or not… I was the son [my dad] never had" (p. 11).

These statements reflect the hegemonic tendency to consider sports as belonging exclusively to the male domain. Rather than challenging the sexist connotations of these sentiments—such as drawing attention to the lack of logical reasoning to back up the notion that 'physically draining' sports are for boys—the heroines use these stereotypical statements to further a postfeminist agenda. This relates to McRobbie's (2004) description of "the new female subject" as someone who withholds the critique of sexism to demonstrate her freedom (p. 260). Rather than criticize the sexist ideologies around sports, which can impact the desire for girls and women to begin participating in the first place, the heroines imply that believing in themselves and working hard is the most effective way to earn their place. By omitting criticism, the heroines inadvertently advocate for feminism's dismantlement. They focus on what Tasker et al (2007) call the "production of the self," which is where individuals withhold critique in favour of demonstrating their independent empowerment (p. 2). The heroines do not challenge this stereotype and, instead, use it to further a heightened individual narrative.

When Diggins (2021) says, "If boys do that sort of thing, then I will too" (p. x), she fails to acknowledge the inequities that exist and continue to persist in high-performance sports and instead, turns this institutional issue into a matter of personal effort. This statement reflects 'girl power'

sentiments, which encourages individuals to chase their dreams rather than address the barriers that may make it more challenging—or impossible—for others to do the same. 'Girl power' is embedded within a neoliberal discourse of choice (Zaslow, 2009). This implies that girls can choose when they want to be perceived as powerful or girly (Zaslow, 2009). This type of discourse celebrates dominant forms of femininity but fails to advocate for social change. These statements relate to McRobbie's (2004) work on postfeminism, as they can be seen as "gentle denunciations of feminism" (p. 257). The heroines share how they didn't let the notion that sports are for boys undermine their vocation. In doing so, they suggest that young women can be responsible for their own social change. Early feminist standpoint theorists argued that gender division offered ways for women to identify assumptions that were problematic and held by the dominant group in society (Intemann, 2020, p. 2). FST suggests that women's experiences can be used to dismantle these dominant assumptions (p. 2). Yet the heroine's articulation of their early experience in sports does not challenge hegemonic ideas.

This discrepancy could be explained by considering the athletes' standpoint as white, affluent women. This privilege may impact their self-perception and belief that self-discipline leads to success. Unlike racialized athletes, who face oppression and stereotypes, the white heroines, who possess the means to be disciplined, can try any sport they want. Perhaps a reason Diggins supports this girl power mentality is because she competes in cross-country skiing. Men and women have the same number of races each season and earn the same prize money (McMahon, 2012; Small, 2022). Despite this, there are still barriers that make entering sports more challenging for marginalized groups. This fact goes unnoticed by all three heroines.

Another way these statements undermine feminism is by inferring that their achievements are a product of female individualism. The heroines write as if accessing sports from a young age is a widespread and normal experience and as if morally and financially supportive family members are something to be expected and not the exception. Beard (2012) shares how her seemingly endless youthful energy persuaded her parents to enroll her "in every activity under the sun" (p. 11). Diggins (2021) shares a similar sentiment by stating that her parents "started signing me up for any sport I wanted to try" (p. 11). Sports participation does not come without a cost. To participate, one needs access in the form of financial support, living in a geographical area with sports infrastructure, and the familial support the heroines describe. This is not everybody's experience. Perhaps a reason the heroines never acknowledge their privilege or the hurdles that make entering professional sports not universally accessible is because of how they grew up. They experienced supportive environments

where they were never told they would fail. Being surrounded by this kind of encouragement might have impacted how they believe success is achieved; in this environment, the heroines may have never considered the possibility of failure. The heroines in my sample do not appear to acknowledge that barriers to sports participation exist. By failing to recognize the privilege in their upbringing, the heroines regard their entrance and continuation in sports as a product of their own freedom of choice. It is then through this freedom to choose that they can begin to hold themselves accountable to achieve success. This is not to say they don't have an awareness of the relations of power that persist in a patriarchal, capitalistic society (and sports system), but they do not call it out. While they may have a "double consciousness," which means that they recognize the unfairness of women's life experiences in contrast to the dominant group (Watson et al, 2018, p. 296), their standpoint as white, middle-class women may prevent them from fully understanding or describing this in their memoirs.

In contrast, the heroines' narratives present frequent claims demonstrating their privilege. Diggins (2021) writes candidly about the emotional support she received from her family members. She recalls that

> I was raised in a culture where my parents and grandparents taught me that I could do anything I set my mind to, regardless of my gender, size, and age. I was always empowered to go outside, try something new, and be fearless (p. 7).

These recollections and statements contribute to the notion that athletes are made when they are children; an adult will rarely try a new sport, commit to training every day, hire a coach, purchase the proper equipment, and become the next best competitor. Additionally, sports are costly, yet even this seemingly clear barrier to sports is never acknowledged. In fact, it is dismissed by Comăneci (2003) when she says, "... a level of personal and financial commitment will grow if it's meant to be" (p. 80). The phrase "if it's meant to be" is dismissive and adheres to a postfeminist viewpoint of success; one's individual efforts measure success; if one wants to succeed, they must work hard, be disciplined, and stay empowered.

All these statements contribute to the notion that becoming an elite athlete requires a certain amount of financial breadth, familial support, and self-discipline. These conclusions overlook the impact of race, class, and gender on one's individual success. In addition to ignoring the difficulty of accessing some sports, the heroines make statements that further imply that becoming a professional athlete requires a type of resiliency that one either has or does not have. For example, Diggins (2021) states that she "inherit[ed] my dad's tolerance for pain" (p. 45). Similarly, Comăneci (2003) says, "My father was always filled with a sense of joy in life, and I believe I inherited that from him in the joy I

get from movement" (p. 7). It is noteworthy to mention how these traits are described as being inherited from their fathers, not their mothers. This contributes to sexist ideologies of sports and athletics. Employing 'masculine' language to describe their athleticism is a prominent pattern across my sample. For example, when Diggins (2021) is preparing for a race, she describes feeling "like a gladiator getting ready to go fight" (p. 215). Similarly, Beard (2012) refers to feeling like "a speeding bullet" (p. 13) when diving into the pool. It is of interest to question the truthfulness of these statements. Even if such descriptions are effective literary devices, they appeal to the hegemonic masculinization of athletics.

The Adversity

The second theme found in this sample is adversity. After the heroine has discovered a love for her sport, she runs into some sort of roadblock. Interestingly, the source of such adversity is rarely acknowledged. For example, one common form of adversity is an eating disorder. Both Diggins and Beard share their struggle with their body image and their disordered eating. While I am critical of the way overcoming this obstacle is depicted, I want to clarify that I am not trying to trivialize their experiences; eating disorders are nuanced and can plague anyone regardless of whether they compete in sports. Eating disorders are common in endurance sports, where Diggins and Beard competed. Neither one of them mentions the ubiquity of eating disorders in their sports or high-performance sports in general. Additionally, they don't address Western society's predisposition to favour thinness and how the 'ideal athletic body' often reflects this cultural ideology.

More importantly, overcoming this adversity is narrated as an individual process. By this, it is not only a matter of making choices to achieve female athletic success, but it is about making the right choices. This narrative ignores the fact that people who possess less economic or societal privilege don't have the opportunity to make such choices to begin with. For example, when Diggins was seeking treatment for her eating disorder, she lived in residency at The Emily Program, a costly eating disorder treatment centre. Privileging the freedom of choice ignores the instances of systemic disparity, such as socioeconomic class positions, which limits women's capacity to have and make the same choices (McRobbie, 2004, p. 261).

Beard describes other instances of adversity when she shares how she was bullied (Beard, 2012, p. 106). Beard (2012) explains how being bullied impacted her performance in races by saying, "too much negativity weighted down on me" (p. 198). She then shares how the bullying, coupled

with the stress of competing, led her to seek help from a therapist (p. 220). Despite acknowledging this help, she shares how she eventually stopped therapy and claims, "I didn't need [my therapist] anymore because I could do it on my own" (p. 220). This is once again reminiscent of a girl power attitude. It infers that even if people seek help to overcome an obstacle, they should inevitably become self-sufficient.

Similar sentiments are articulated by Comăneci (2003), who, while not suffering from an eating disorder or bullying, experienced her own form of adversity when she took six months off from competitive training (p. 68). She refers to getting back into shape as a highly individualistic endeavour when she says, "No matter how much support you're given from family, friends, and coaches, ultimately you have to succeed on your own" (p. 74). Such statements of heightened individualism seem to discredit the earlier mentions of her childhood, where she described growing up with family members who supported her athletic dreams. Yet it is this very part of her experience that perhaps contributes to her belief that hard work is solely an individual matter. Comăneci's comment reflects her upbringing and her experience as a young athlete; she achieved success by working hard and having the resources to train. Therefore, she believes anyone else in a similar situation will also be similarly successful. She embodies the empowered, self-disciplined, postfeminist athlete when she says, "I believe in being your own biggest supporter because that means you will always have someone in your corner" (Comăneci, 2003, p. 75). Moreover, she emphasizes her belief in the meritocratic ideology of sport when she says,

> Hard work will always get you somewhere. If you have a little talent and work very hard, then you have a shot at being a big winner. And if you have a lucky star in your hand, then you may just accomplish your goals (p. 79).

Ironically, this statement seems to contradict itself. Initially, Comăneci appears to adhere to the hegemonic notion of Western meritocracy; she declares that consistently working hard will inevitably lead to success. Yet she then contradicts this statement by inferring that luck is involved. While one might consider this to be a moment when Comăneci is acknowledging her own privilege—despite growing up under a communist regime in Romania, she was privy to resources that citizens who were not athletes did not receive—the mention of luck discredits the notion that working hard will inevitably lead to success. If luck is a crucial ingredient in achieving one's athletic goals, then one must ask why discipline is necessary at all. As if in response to this, Comăneci (2003) then shares, "It doesn't matter whether you win gold medals. What matters is that you strive to be your best and

then struggle to be even better" (p. 84). The point of overcoming adversity is to be a winner, regardless of whether this involves medals or not.

Comăneci embodies the idea of becoming the best version of yourself, which can only be achieved by holding yourself accountable and pushing through adversity, regardless of where it comes from. Rather than challenging the source of the adversity or attempting to dismantle the oppression underprivileged athletes face, the goal is to overcome it. This sentiment is also shared by Beard (2012), who discusses how after she switched swim teams and coaches, she was having more positive experiences and had fewer urges to harm herself (p. 211). This suggests that her previous environment was contributing to her deteriorating mental health, eating disorder, and self-harm practices. This goes unacknowledged, as the point of this story is not to call out the harmful practices that can occur in elite sports environments; the sole goal of experiencing such trauma is to come out on top. This is what it means to be a winner.

The Resolution

The final sections of the athlete memoirs are where they read like Western, patriarchal fairy tales the most. In my sample, each memoir ends with the heroine describing how she met her boyfriend or husband and how they got engaged and married. Additionally, they either share their experience of having children or express a desire to one day have children. While romantic partnerships and creating families are personal aspects of many people's lives, it is of interest to consider the ubiquity of this narrative across my sample. One would think that a memoir about athletic success would end with a remark about the experience of competing and having a career as a professional athlete. Yet all there is in the last few chapters is a detailed recount of their relationships, which are all heterosexual. Comăneci (2003) shares details from her wedding, reminiscent of a fairy tale. She said she wore "a gorgeous gown with a 23-foot train covered with 10,000 pearls" (p. 173). She also refers to her adversities and relates overcoming them to this moment when she says, "... everything I'd been through in my entire life was culminating in total happiness" (p. 166). Through this statement, she implies that one of the rewards of overcoming hardships is finding a romantic partner. Ending the memoirs in this way further restricts the meaning of what it is to be a successful female athlete.

A key point the heroines make is that female athletic success is not based on medals. Yet, all the athletes in my sample have won Olympic medals and, as such, hold this prestige and are offered the opportunity to control their narrative. Success, as defined by the heroines in my sample, comes

from self-discipline, believing in one's abilities, doing things even those just considered 'for boys,' and overcoming obstacles independently. Success is not defined by standing up for others or challenging institutions that oppress marginalized groups. Rather, female success is achieved when the heroine meets the love of her life. While achieving one's athletic goals does not require 'saving' or assistance from a man, a successful woman must have a romantic partner. Their heterosexual relationships become a key part of their story.

Throughout all the setbacks and challenges these elite athletes experienced, they recall their decision to have a romantic relationship as being one of their biggest rewards. For example, Diggins (2021) says, "Perhaps the part of my life where I feel I've been the bravest is starting a life with someone I love" (p. 269). Similarly, Beard (2012) shares a sentiment on her shifting identity when she says, "I found my groove when it came to the title of 'mom,' and soon I came to love it more than 'Olympian' or anything else I've been called" (p. 232). These sentiments relate to McRobbie's (2004) description and critique of "gender anxieties," which asserts that some popular cultural texts normalize postfeminist ideas, such as the worry that one may never meet "the one" or become too old to have children (p. 262). These anxieties contribute to the postfeminist parameters of choice. Despite athlete memoirs being marketed as tales of athletic success, they still end with remarks on their conventional desires. As McRobbie (2004) argues, these choices and descriptions of gender anxieties reaffirm what "constitutes livable lives for young women without the occasion of re-invented feminism" (p. 262). A new regime of female athletic success is established by including details of the heroines' romantic relationships and declaring such partnerships as more rewarding than Olympic medals.

The most interesting aspect of this fairy tale narrative is that it persists across all three memoirs, spanning nearly two decades. It is perhaps not surprising that the oldest memoir, written by Comăneci and published in 2003, adheres to the fairy tale narrative the most, as seen in statements such as, "It seemed my Prince Charming had finally kissed me and I'd awakened after a long sleep" (p. 166). Statements that adhere to patriarchal conventions persist until the final page. For example, when addressing where the future of the rest of their life is headed, the heroines share their desire to continue to contribute to the existing world of elite sport. Comăneci (2003) shares how she and her husband opened a gymnastics training facility and hope to train gymnasts to a level where they can obtain college scholarships (p. 177).

While the heroines make claims of leadership, giving back to their communities, and supporting causes they care about, they ultimately do not demand change. They contribute to the

cycle of athletics, which, according to them, requires self-discipline, inherited athletic traits, and luck. Despite seemingly positive representation in women's athletics, it does not mean that entrance and continuation in sports have progressed for women. Watson and colleagues (2018) argue that FST "centralizes women's experiences in the research process, viewing them as a point of entry for the creation of new knowledge" (p. 296). Perhaps a reason the heroines do not demand change or challenge the status quo is that they are still trying to survive in this male domain. Despite the heroine's 'girl power' sentiments and their encouragement of girls and women to chase their dreams, one must consider whether their sports environments are truly feminist spaces. Even sports like cross-country skiing and swimming, which offer the same competitive opportunities for both men and women, must be challenged. Perhaps perpetuating athletics as inherently masculine or sharing their desire to contribute to the sporting system without changing it is a coping mechanism for female athletes in this anti-feminist space. These narratives could be reflective of broader exclusions in the sporting world. They make visible the discriminatory practices in sports and produce a postfeminist narrative.

The heroines largely omit criticism and do not challenge athletic stereotypes. The reason for this is that the memoirs are fairy tales; the point is not to address their privileged standpoint, call out the institutional barriers that make accessing sport or sport-related resources challenging, or demand the dismantlement of harmful ideologies around success and the ideal athletic personality. The point of these stories is to inspire, motivate, and empower the reader. If the reader cannot achieve athletic success, they can find success in other areas of their life, whether through romantic partnerships or giving back to the systems that made them. While these stories are ultimately idealistic and lack a critical reflection of their upbringing and stereotypical descriptions, there is certainly something innately human in the desire to encourage one another to keep going.

Conclusion

The three memoirs analyzed can be seen as fairy tales in which the heroines achieve hegemonic success and find happiness in a romantic partner. Since this narrative persists across all three memoirs, it is interesting to consider whether the heroines were encouraged to write so openly and extensively about their interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the inclusion of the heroine's romantic life is meant to showcase the negotiation of the duality of being perceived as feminine and athletic. Both memoirs by Diggins and Beard were written with an accompanying author. These authors, Todd Smith and Rebecca Paley, have extensive experience in co-authoring memoirs. While

editing and collaborating are part of authorship, it is important to question whether the ideas and narratives in the heroine's memoirs are authentic and true. The pervasiveness of the fairy tale ending highlights the notion that sports marketing reinforces hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism. While writing about their relationships may have allowed the heroines to explore other facets of their identity, they ultimately connect them back to their athletic endeavours, thus reinforcing the idea that heterosexual partnerships are intrinsically tied to female athletic success.

By analyzing the memoirs through postfeminism and FST, I could isolate quotes that exemplified postfeminist tropes and revealed the standpoints of these athletes. While the omission of a feminist critique does not qualify a text as postfeminist, the way the female athletes refer to themselves as 'tomboys' and claim to have inherited athletic traits from their fathers appeals to the masculinization of athletics. They may not need a man to accomplish their goals, but they often attribute their success to their 'masculine' qualities. Moreover, they articulate their success as a highly individualistic endeavour. These two findings are consistent across my sample and adhere to tropes of postfeminism. This suggests that these texts function as feminine texts rather than feminist texts. Indeed, these memoirs offer what Alison Harvey (2020) calls "feminine leadership" (p. 165). Feminine leadership is when women combat exclusion at the individual level without engaging in feminist action (p. 165). For example, this happens when a woman succeeds in a male-dominant industry without changing the structures that make such success challenging. Feminist leadership, on the other hand, actively challenges the patriarchy and is "motivated by fairness, justice, and equality" (Harvey, 2020, p. 165).

There are limitations to this study. A narrative analysis is highly interpretive; my findings cannot be generalized. Despite the athletes in my sample being allowed to speak and share their stories, their words cannot represent all female athletes. While the heroines in my sample are all white and currently live in North America, I do not see this as a limitation. I intended to conduct a study that focussed on the lives of privileged athletes. I was concerned with uncovering how this privileged standpoint may be articulated and whether the heroines would recognize how their standpoint impacted their entrance and continuation in sports. I would argue it is important to recognize the unfairness in narratives that position athletic success as a product of individual empowerment. Several intersectional barriers make access to sports challenging. This realization does not mean we should no longer read these stories. A large component of these memoirs is that they inspire the reader, and inspiration can take on many forms. Winning an Olympic medal is no small feat, but it should not be the only indicator of success. We should not undermine the

importance of trying. Perhaps the understanding that these athletes come from privileged backgrounds and that this privilege has certainly shaped their success as Olympic athletes can promote change in the sporting world at the grassroots level by focusing on accessibility and inclusion from an intersectional feminist lens.

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Feminism, Capitalism, Death: Neoliberal Womanhood and the Post-Soviet Person in Anna Melikyan's Mermaid

Chloe Deschamps

Abstract

This piece works as a critique of neoliberal feminist ideology through an analysis of Anna Melyikan's 2007 film Mermaid. It begins with a close reading of several scenes in the film and how they operate as a criticism or representation of neoliberal post-Soviet existence. Alissa, the protagonist, is subjected to a series of events which shape her life as a post-Soviet woman—these events ultimately lead to her untimely death. The theme of labour, financially, domestically, and sexually, defines Alissa's life in Moscow. I use a sociological study on Russian post-Soviet self-help literature written for women as the ideological lens to study the film, drawing connections between the events of the film and the real contents of several self-help books, which are analysed and critiqued by the article's author. The film visualises a patriarchal double-bind where post-Soviet women are expected to be both patriarchally subordinate and independent economic subjects. This paradox is present in the self-help literature. The essay forges a connection between real-life feminist critique and film criticism, exploring how film criticism can be a vehicle for feminist thought. The essay also interrogates ideas of what a feminist text is and how the creation of a feminist text is an act of discursive meaning-making, a relationship to the viewer/reader as opposed to a definitive quality which takes shape during the text's creation.

Keywords

Neoliberalism, postfeminism, post-Soviet, framing, discourse, capitalism

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Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death; it's the jitters that give them a hard-on!

- Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Anna Melikyan's *Mermaid* (2007) offers a filmic framework for understanding the structures of neoliberalism that configure a post-Soviet woman's experience. A young woman, Alissa, experiences her coming of age as she and her mother move from a small Russian village to the bustling city of Moscow. She takes up several odd jobs and ultimately falls in love with a scam artist who 'sells property' on the moon. The film ends in her death as she is struck by a car in a busy intersection. By picking up on critiques of post-feminism, which asserts that the goals of feminism have already been achieved, as well as neoliberalism, which favours the free market and bootstrap mentality, *Mermaid* puts forth a criticism that points out the irrevocable connection between the two concepts. Neoliberalism ignores the goals of women's liberation as it views every person as a capitalist subject who is unaffected by social structures, with complete autonomy over their circumstances due to the 'freedom' offered by capitalism. The film uses street advertising as an integral part of the narrative structure, demonstrating how neoliberal capitalism has infiltrated Russian society. The film also utilises long scenes of erratic camera movement that capture the paradoxical urban experience of being both trapped within it and lost amongst anonymous crowds.

Furthermore, the combination of intimacy and financial subordination Alissa experiences is integral to her integration into neoliberal womanhood, as she is forced to be both financially useful yet sexually desirable, creating a patriarchal double-bind where she is simultaneously an independent, hyper-insular subject forced to 'make her own way,' yet also an objectified female body that must gain its worth through its indecipherable feminine essence. By understanding this particular experience of city life amongst the rapid rise of consumer society in Moscow, Melikyan's film creates a post-Soviet person who is distinctly affected by her womanhood and the intersection between patriarchal and capitalist oppression. By analyzing the film's content, I will interrogate how Alissa's narrative arc is defined by the intersection between neoliberalism and the patriarchy and how that can inform our knowledge of the post-Soviet female experience.

Alissa's time in Moscow begins with a massive advertisement blocking her apartment window. A giant image of a woman reads, "It's good to be home!" This completely bars Alissa's view of the outside world. Maria Adamson and Suvi Salmenniemi (2015) note that neoliberal Russian women's self-help literature that "emphasised femininity is construed in the books as the single most

important form of capital which women should cultivate and mobilise" (para. 31). The billboard displayed on Alissa's apartment serves as a sort of oracle for her initiation into the neoliberal social order and the cultivation of femininity as a currency. This overt and impossible-to-miss feminine image displays the fame and money women's bodies are capable of producing when they succumb to objectification and loss of identity. Adamson and Salmenniemi's "emphasised femininity" (2015, para. 31) is on full display: the woman on the billboard is a simulacrum of womanhood, a package advertising itself not as a person but as an image. Domestic labour itself is not being sold, but instead a 'utopian' image of domestic labour wherein femininity is being sold to women. The advertisement shows a woman with no visible clothing, her body wrapped around a washing machine, and a subtle smile on her face. She is telling Alissa that "It's good to be home." This creates an image of a *real* woman who was presumably paid to advertise the kinds of domestic labour, such as laundry, that she is meant to be escaping by configuring herself as an ideal feminine capitalist subject through modelling. The woman is paradoxically selling the domestic labour she, as a modelling subject, escaped through her career path selling emphasised femininity. This form of womanhood obscures Alissa's real view of the city. From then on, she narrates that "Moscow, as they say, laid itself at my feet with all its power, beauty, and unpredictability" (Melyikan, 2007, 29:50). Her assertion that Moscow laid *itself* out as if through some ritualistic submission towards her, reifies the fact that Alissa becomes seduced by the life consumer society seems to offer her, her real view of the city's hostility obscured by the promise of 'home' delivered in the package of femininity.

Alissa goes on to take up a series of menial, dead-end jobs that strip her personhood and instead configure her as merely a replaceable or even invisible body. In her job cleaning bathrooms, she experiences a man coming in while she is working, ignoring her presence and stripping himself in front of her to use the urinal. In the scene, the recruitment of patriarchy and capitalism is clear as Alissa enters a masculine space as part of the job she is forced to take to survive in a capitalist world. She is then subject to a male body which simultaneously ignores and disrespects her humanity. Alissa's experiences in these dead-end jobs, however, are distinctly non-feminine – she takes a job as a phone mascot that completely obscures and de-genders her body, vastly different from the billboards that sell an image of womanhood as a marketable object Through this degendered labour, Alissa resists using her femininity to gain access to the supposed luxuries she may enjoy if she did, choosing instead to try and forge her own path in the city. Eventually, Alissa encounters a woman while working who asks her if she knows "that if a pregnant woman looks at a picture of a beautiful woman, the girl will look like her" (Melyikan, 2007, 34:53). In this scene, Alissa and the woman are

in front of a massive billboard of Tyra Banks that the other woman is gazing at. The image of Tyra Banks represents the infiltration of Western influences that compound the promotion of neoliberalism and the imagined female subject. Alissa's body is obscured, while the advertisement employs the opposite: hyper-visible femininity, which seems to display itself, allowing women to gaze upon her in their superstitious hope of creating beautiful children. The woman believes her own beauty is the result of staring at pictures of Madonna. Like Tyra Banks, she is widely perceived as an icon; this signifies her existence as an object for consumption rather than a person with agency. This is one of the many representations of Western beauty standards and culture that infiltrated Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. Both Madonna and Tyra Banks are reducible to semiotic baggage of beauty, talent, and stardom: a non-corporeal sexuality focused not on female pleasure but instead on a displaced erotic gaze. Adamson (2015) writes that in Russian women's self-help literature, "female sexuality does not appear important in itself but is, once again, harnessed to serve the sexual pleasures of the male partner" (para. 41). This superstition voiced by the woman emphasises this – beauty is important to make one's children beautiful. It holds no intrinsic value in and of itself. This kind of self-surveillance is encouraged through the constant and forced surveillance of the image of the Other: the ultimate signifier of aspirational womanhood that exists to continue the cycle of reproductive heterosexuality. Even unborn babies are subjected to the expectations of beauty necessary to be successful under consumerism, emphasising the double bind of being forced to procreate and become subordinate to a domestic patriarch simultaneously, and also to market oneself and become subordinate to patriarchal capitalism.

Alissa also attempts to pass exams to study at university. After her failure, she meets a boy who tells her that "girls don't have to go to school, women are nymphs, they were created for another purpose" (Melyikan, 2007, 36:06), making fun of her ambitions because he believes that as a woman, such pursuits are 'unnecessary.' Adamson (2015) quotes a sample from a Russian women's self-help book, which notes that,

> "a real woman … will not bang her head against the wall to achieve something … A real woman does not compete with men … she does not try to educate or change them … she does not impose responsibilities. She creates an illusion of being defenceless, thereby awakening a man's desire to perform noble deeds" (para. 36).

This sentiment is espoused by the boy Alissa meets – that women are 'nymphs' without need of education, that they are simultaneously too stupid yet somehow rise above the crude logic that is

learnt in an academic setting. The neoliberal culture which rose in the wake of the Soviet collapse, as evidenced by the books Adamson (2015) reads through, was a paradoxical one; women were simultaneously meant to be independent yet also sexually subordinate to men, to use their 'feminine mystique' to get what they wanted. Alissa is encouraged against education because she is a 'nymph,' a nature spirit evocative of primitivism or prehistory. This comparison implies that women exist outside of society and instead occupy a space of magic or divinity. The cult of divine femininity is a pseudo-scientific method of upholding the patriarchy. It convinces women that they do not *need* to do the tough mental and physical labour of men because their feminine wiles and beauty are sufficient. It also attempts to position women as both innately spiritually superior to men yet incapable of achieving real personhood.

Further, as Alissa spends some time with the boy, he makes a pass at her to request sex. He suggests they skip all the relationship niceties, asking her 'why waste time?' Rather than sex being seen as an intimate act between two people, he views sex as something both necessary and yet not worth the investment of time. The interconnection between the neoliberal cult of convenience (where the highest cause is getting what you want quickly) and the mistreatment of women is on full display here: he wonders what the point could possibly be of treating Alissa with respect because time is of the essence. Sexual acts are turned into a form of neoliberal labour in which the woman must act as quickly as possible, another thing on her long list of tasks and expectations to meet.

As Adamson (2015) notes, within Russian self-help literature, sexuality is considered "essential in order to keep the man from leaving, which is an ever-present risk" (para. 43) in the context of configuring post-Soviet womanhood. However, in *Mermaid,* the effort sexuality must exert is never-ending – one must be visually flawless, yielding, and coquettish. Therefore, the goal of subtle manipulation is rendered impossible. Alissa and another woman, Rita, are involved and infatuated with the same man. In their desperation to maintain his attention without *seeming* desperate, they cast a spell by smoking a cigarette with his name written on it. Rita conforms to expectations of sexuality and femininity while Alissa does not – with her 'out of style' green hair, bare face and frumpy clothes. Both women attempt to combat the ever-present risk of their man leaving by undertaking superstitious spell-casting – not unlike the superstition related to beauty in childbirth. The through line of magical thinking being used as a way to combat the seemingly impossible-to-conquer standards for female existence speaks to the ultimate paradox of neoliberal femininity espoused by self-help books: you must "manipulate men without them knowing it" (Adamson, 2015, para. 32). The effort necessary to assimilate into post-Soviet society is too

immense, and so the turn towards superstition is the only means of manipulation. However, Alissa's youthful effervescence and enigmatic attitude earn her a place as the 'Lunar Girl,' the face of the man's scam business selling properties in space. After auditioning a group of explicitly sexualized women and then afterwards, a group of innocent children, neither group seemed to fit their bill – Alissa was found to be "quite the Lunar Girl" (Melyikan, 2007, 1:19:24). She is beautiful and titillating without any effort, inhabiting both the allure of womanhood and the cheerful innocence of childhood – in the spirit of neoliberal femininity, she "creates an illusion of being defenceless" (Adamson, 2015, para. 35).

The ending of *Mermaid* establishes that the burden of womanhood under capitalism is insurmountable. Alissa's disruption to the social order must be restored. As Helene Cixous (1976) writes in "The Laugh of the Medusa," "once the palace of magistrates is restored, it's time to pay: Immediate bloody death to the uncontrollable elements" (p. 76). Alissa is struck by a car in a moment of panic. Throughout the film, her insistence in defying expectations of femininity – going against fashion norms, refusing to endure gendered labour, her desire for education – forms her into an embodied disruption of an intended patriarchal social order. The moment of the car's impact is the moment of discursive meaning-making, which calls the viewer into conversation. Her death propels the narrative – like the intersection she stands in, vehicles of potential meaning move through every fibre of the text. Hindsight is crucial to the reception of the text because "a feminine text then has no fixed formal characteristics, precisely because it is a relationship: it becomes a feminine text in the moment of its reading" (Kuhn, 1994, p. 13). The moment of Alissa's death behaves as that critical point that a feminist reading can be formed, a collision of a conversation-starter building a relationship with the viewer. One might feel disappointed, expecting a text which encourages the idea of female perseverance – the moment of the car's impact may retrospectively change the meaning of the film, affirming the idea that feminist textual production occurs in the moment of its reception. I instead choose to read *Mermaid*'s ending through the lens of a radical feminist pessimism, where women's escape from the expectations and oppression of the patriarchy is rendered impossible, where "immediate death to the uncontrollable elements" (Cixous, 1976, p. 76) is the only possibility. Billboards surround Alissa, which read "Live in Glamour!" and "Don't Put it Off Until Tomorrow!" grimly predicting the events to come. 'Living in glamour' is a state rendered impossible to reach, and so she must die. Her death is precluded by her bombardment with the messages that cause her downfall – the capitalistic urgency to do things now, the cars which surround her in too much of a rush to stop, the kind of glamorous femininity necessary to 'live' at

all. In the end, Alissa is reduced to her image – no different than the women decorating the other billboards in Moscow, a hypervisible anonymous object, the only kind of woman that can truly assimilate.

Mermaid articulates a kind of feminism which eschews marketing tactics, self-help culture, and consumerism. A kind of feminism whose inevitable end goal is death cannot be abstracted into neoliberalism. Alissa's image haunts the film through time, informing each interaction she has by representing the ideal she can ultimately aspire to. By acknowledging the utter absurdity of expectations of post-Soviet womanhood, *Mermaid* suggests that liberation's end goal is perhaps unimaginable as everything can be subsumed into a marketing tactic. As the self-help books suggest, Soviet post-feminism asserts that women are in complete control of their own lives and that the goal of this must be to conquer womanhood and wrangle manhood in a sneaky recreation of patriarchal roles where the woman is 'secretly in control' (though in reality, she is not in control at all). Adamson (2015) says of Russia that "Feminist ideas appear to be in double jeopardy: they are repudiated for echoing Soviet gender politics, and at the same time (and paradoxically) they are understood as an invariably alien, Western-imported ideology is incompatible with 'Russian culture'" (para. 14). *Mermaid* perpetuates this through its critique of a patriarchal paradox – women must simultaneously deny themselves autonomy and be subservient to conform with the Russian patriarchy, and also make their own way in the world to conform with the newly burgeoning market economy.

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It's Magic, You Know: The Reframing of Ozempic as a Weight Loss Drug

Matthew Herring

Abstract

Advertising for Ozempic is inescapable. We have come to expect an advertisement for Ozempic around every corner. From scrolling social media to watching a hockey game, Ozempic is everywhere. This paper seeks to understand the multilayered and multimedia advertising campaigns, alongside lay-advertising on social media platforms that have allowed Ozempic and its producer Novo Nordisk to redefine and reframe the drug from its intended use as an insulin-producing type 2 diabetes medication to a widely sought-after weight loss medication. My analysis examines the role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions of Ozempic, the influence of direct-to-consumer advertising in promoting off-label uses, and the resulting consequences on drug accessibility and health perceptions. Specifically, by scrutinizing media portrayals on TikTok and direct-to-consumer advertising strategies, this paper unveils the dynamics of pharmaceutical product reframing and its effects on the dominant discourses surrounding said products. As Ozempic attempts to redefine what a healthy body should look like, it is imperative to analyze how social media and pharmaceutical advertising campaigns shift cultural understanding, reinforcing anti-fat narratives and limiting access to life-saving drugs for those who need them.

Keywords

Ozempic, reframing, advertising, health communities, social media, direct-to-consumer advertising, TikTok, miracle drug, off-label

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Introduction

Semaglutide, better known as the active ingredient of Ozempic and other brand-name drugs, is a medication used for the long-term treatment of type 2 diabetes. Ozempic has surged in popularity in recent years. This surge is not for its intended purpose of treating diabetes, but for its potential as a weight loss medication (Suran, 2023). The exact origin behind this surge of popularity is unclear, but stories from users on social media platforms and major celebrities, alongside official advertising campaigns for the medication, greatly contributed to putting Ozempic on the map and effectively reframing the medication. This paper aims to analyze the ways through which Ozempic has been reframed in Canada since the drug's approval in 2018 and how its reframing has impacted both those with type 2 diabetes who are reliant on the drug as well as those taking the medication for weight loss purposes. By conducting content analysis on purposively selected videos to examine the media representations of Ozempic via TikTok and direct-to-consumer advertising, it is possible to understand better how the purpose and perception of Ozempic and other pharmaceutical products morph and become reframed.

Background

Ozempic was originally approved by Health Canada in 2018 to treat type 2 diabetes (Health Canada, 2024). The drug is manufactured and distributed by Novo Nordisk, a pharmaceutical company that specializes in producing products for diabetes treatments (Novo Nordisk, n.d.). Ozempic is a brand-name version of semaglutide, a drug that mimics glucagon-like peptide-1, which increases the amount of insulin the body produces (Suran, 2023). A major side effect of semaglutide is that it makes users feel less hungry by suppressing their appetite, making users eat less, often resulting in the loss of body fat (Suran, 2023). Because of these side effects, Ozempic has become better known as a weight-loss medication. The medication is often prescribed off-label, meaning unintended and unapproved uses, for people experiencing obesity or seeking to lose weight (Suran, 2023). In 2021, in response to the shifting use of Ozempic, Novo Nordisk created Wegovy, a version of semaglutide specifically approved for chronic weight management (Suran, 2023). There are minimal differences between Ozempic and Wegovy, specifically in the dosage (Suran, 2023). While Ozempic has a maximum dose of 2.0 mg per week, Wegovy's maximum dose is 20% greater at 2.4 mg per week (Suran, 2023). Despite Novo Nordisk introducing Wegovy into the market, Ozempic

remains popular as a weight loss drug and continues to be prescribed for off-label use, making the product more difficult to obtain for those who need it for their diabetes treatment (Suran, 2023).

Methods

In analyzing the techniques and rhetoric used to reframe Ozempic as a weight loss medication, short-form TikTok videos promoting the drug and officially produced television and print adverts were purposively collected for analysis. With the rapidly rising popularity of Ozempic, it is important to consider the many ways that information about the drug is disseminated. These platforms and media were chosen due to their popularity, and ability to disseminate information to a wide demographic. By analyzing both official television advertisements and user-created TikTok videos, a better understanding of the many facets that act in the reframing of Ozempic can be attained.

To collect samples from TikTok, I performed a qualitative content analysis of the videos presented in the "TOP" section of the search term "Ozempic" using the platform's built-in search function. This process was performed using a freshly opened private browsing window to ensure that any previously obtained user analytics and cookies did not influence the content algorithmically placed in the search results. After performing this search, I compiled the top results and analyzed the videos, placing them into categories based on their messaging, producer, whether the video was an advertisement for Ozempic, and whether it contributed to Ozempic's framing as a miracle drug. The videos were placed in these categories by considering the video, audio, caption, and the account posting the video. For example, reuploads of official Ozempic television commercials with "#commerical" in the TikTok video description were categorized as advertisements. Finally, using this collected data, two videos were purposively selected for analysis in this paper to show the breadth of content and information presented when searching for videos about Ozempic on TikTok. These videos were specifically chosen to illustrate the breadth of content about Ozempic on TikTok and the pervasiveness of the idea of Ozempic as a 'miracle drug'. The process for collecting televised and print advertisements similarly used content analysis to analyze sources found from Google searches for print advertisements, and YouTube and Google searches for televised advertisements. Again, three samples from this analysis were purposively selected to best illustrate the marketing techniques used when advertising Ozempic. Television advertisements for Ozempic largely follow the same formula, featuring individuals in colourful environments speaking on the

positive health outcomes resulting from the medication. The advertisements analyzed in this paper were chosen due to their emphasis on weight loss as a positive health outcome.

This sampling method is not without its limitations. First, the sampling process was largely limited by the scope of this paper and could be strengthened by performing qualitative content analysis on a larger number of TikTok videos and advertisements to create a more representative dataset and provide more in-depth analysis. Second, due to the ever-changing algorithm on TikTok, the videos analyzed in the "TOP" section of my TikTok search are unlikely to mirror the videos presented to others. This highlights the ephemeral nature of social media platforms and the difficulties in analyzing online content.

Framing Ozempic as a Miracle Drug on TikTok

Scrolling through the top results of the search term "Ozempic" on TikTok yields hundreds of videos with captions such as "[C]all it what you want but the miracle shot LITERALLY changed my life" (West, 2024) and "The new "miracle" weight loss drug - Ozempic explained" (asapSCIENCE, 2023). The videos range from 'transformation videos' like May West's (2024) that praise Ozempic's weight-loss properties, to educational videos like those created by *asapSCIENCE* (2023) that seek to inform viewers about the effects and side effects of Ozempic. Despite the differing contexts between these two genres of video, one thing remains consistent— the framing of Ozempic as a thing of magic or a 'miracle drug.' The surge in popularity of Ozempic videos on TikTok has largely been attributed to its reframing as a miracle weight loss drug (Burns, 2023; Duboust & Huet, 2023), placing these videos at the center of discussions about Ozempic.

There is little doubt that TikTok introduced individuals to Ozempic who knew very little or nothing about the drug beforehand. In a descriptive analysis of the top 100 TikTok videos with the #Ozempic hashtag, Basch et al. (2023) found that videos about Ozempic are incredibly popular, garnering over 69 million views and 2 million likes. Notably, 86% of the videos were uploaded by consumers, with only 14% being uploaded by professionals (Basch et al., 2023), showing that individual narratives dominate the platform with little room for professional voices that could warn about possible side effects and dangers of using Ozempic for weight loss. Additionally, the majority of videos posted with the #Ozempic hashtag feature messaging about weight loss, with a third of those videos advocating Ozempic as an effective weight loss medication (Basch et al., 2023). What is most problematic about Ozempic's presence on TikTok is that less than one-third of videos mention

the potential side effects of the drug, with only three videos explicitly mentioning that weight loss is an off-label use of Ozempic (Basch et al., 2023). This research reinforces a similar study by Sabrina Han et al. (2024) which found that the relative Google search value for Ozempic as a weight loss drug greatly increased in the early months of 2023, coinciding with the drug's surge in popularity on TikTok. Notably, although Novo Nordisk released Wegovy for public sale in June 2021, Ozempic has remained more popular in searches than Wegovy (Han et al., 2024). Taken together, this research presents a picture of a landscape in which individuals online are more interested in discussing, sharing, and researching Ozempic as a means of losing weight.

Ozempic's popularity on TikTok can be seen as a result of anti-fat narratives proliferated by popular media. By employing fat studies, a field of research that examines portrayals and attitudes towards body weight and appearance through an intersectional lens, a better understanding of social media's role in the popularity of Ozempic can be obtained. In the media, the bodies most often featured are slim, creating a normalized image of the 'desirable body' as being one that is not fat (Kyrölä, 2021). The depictions of weight in media define how individuals are supposed to feel about their bodies and what they can do to make themselves look thinner, or 'normal' (Kyrölä, 2021). Media plays an important role in defining the body and what is deemed normal; social media platforms like TikTok are no different. Marisa Minadeo & Lizzy Pope (2022) found that the majority of TikTok videos under body image and eating behaviour hashtags are pushing normative ideas that portray weight loss as desirable and something to be strived for, with individuals acting as quasi-experts. They claim that "the many trends associated with weight loss omit lifestyle factors that play a role in weight and health, and leave viewers with the message that weight loss and thinness is achievable and desirable to all" (Minadeo & Pope, 2022, p.9). The main difference between new media like TikTok and legacy media in representing the body and fatness is that new media is participatory by nature. While the beacons of thinness and 'healthy,' normal, bodies in legacy media were often celebrities (Kyrölä, 2021), new media places that expectation on the individual. With new media, individuals are no longer simply spectators, but active participants held up to the same standards of desirability as others on the platform.

To better understand Ozempic's role in reframing weight loss narratives, it is important to understand why TikTok users may be so drawn to seeking out the medication for weight loss purposes. Deborah Lupton (1994) describes a power imbalance between doctors and patients, where the patient must advocate to receive proper medical care while navigating the power relations inherent between a doctor and a patient. To approach a doctor about health issues, individuals must

justify why they are seeking an appointment (Lupton, 1994). Those who are seen as fat must 'justify' their body weight to get treatment (Lupton, 1994; Hunt, 2003). Being obese or overweight is problematized and requires a solution before a patient will be taken seriously. Ozempic offers an easily attainable solution to this issue. Alan Hunt (2003) suggests that this power imbalance between the patient and healthcare provider, alongside a dispersion and incompatibility of expert knowledge, results in a distrust of expert opinion in favour of the opinion of quasi-experts. The quasi-expertise of TikTok users sharing their personal narratives about the effectiveness and benefits of Ozempic offers a more compelling and compassionate experience than seeking out a traditional expert. TikTok videos about Ozempic are free from the judgement and surveillance of traditional healthcare professionals, thus creating a more comfortable environment to pursue weight loss in the pursuit of healthiness.

Reframing Through Direct-to-Consumer Advertising

Though it is easy to attribute the reframing of Ozempic as a weight loss medication to the sudden increase in social media posts about the drug, the rhetoric was initially pushed by Novo Nordisk long before the drug's popularity surged on TikTok. It is important to analyze how the advertising disseminated directly from Novo Nordisk presents Ozempic's weight loss qualities. Flipping between cable television channels, it is likely to encounter one, or many, Ozempic advertisements. These advertisements are illegal in Canada. Health Canada defines three types of advertisements regarding prescription medication: *product claims*, which mention the name and use of medication; *reminders*, which name the medication without giving a use; and *help-seeking*, which informs that there is a new treatment for a health condition without mentioning a product name (Gardner et al., 2003). Both reminder and help-seeking advertisements are legal in Canada, while Health Canada has deemed product claim advertisements illegal (Gardner et al., 2003; Health Canada, 2020). However, the impact and consumer effect of these advertisements cannot be overlooked. As many cable television packages include channels broadcast from the United States and other foreign countries, Canadians are still likely to consume these advertisements, meaning that the impact these advertisements have cannot be disregarded when analyzing Canadian populations.

Direct-to-consumer advertisements from 2018, back when the drug was originally approved, touted claims about Ozempic's weight-loss side effects. One advertisement claims, ". . . and you may lose weight. In the same one-year study, adults lost on average up to 12 pounds" followed by a man

excitedly exclaiming "Oh! Up to 12 pounds?" (FilmComm Talent, 2018, 0:16). As Ozempic is not a weight-loss medication, it cannot legally be advertised as such (Health Canada, 2020). While this line is being read there is a message on the screen that reads, "Ozempic is not a weight loss drug," but by mentioning the weight-loss side effects of Ozempic, the advertisement reinforces the idea that the medication is effective for weight loss. This trend remains consistent throughout Ozempic's television advertising campaign. Advertising from 2019 utilizes the same "Oh! Up to 12 pounds?" line (Ozempic, 2019) and an advertisement aired in 2022 and 2023 begins with a man stating, "With my Ozempic Tri-Zone I lowered my A1C, CV risk, and lost some weight" (Commercial Archivist, 2022, 0:07), placing the weight loss benefits at the same level of importance as regulating type 2 diabetes symptoms. The visual elements of Ozempic advertisements continue to promote the drug as a wondrous product by using strategies not uncommon in advertising targeted toward children. Despite these advertisements not being directed toward children, the same techniques are used to help promote a sense of childlike wonder. Charlene Elliott (2021) uses content analysis to find that vitamin supplements targeted towards children often use child-friendly fonts, multiple bright colours, and fun shapes to appeal to children. These same techniques are used in Ozempic commercials. Take the Ozempic logo (Figure 1) that appears throughout the commercials, it is bright and bubbly, with the logo often seen floating like a balloon throughout the advertisements. The commercials also push the idea of fun through the background settings of the advertisement. The scenes jump between various fun locations, like a monster truck rally, a wild west town, an arcade, a mini golf course and more. Ozempic is not just a weight loss or diabetes drug, it is fun and youthful (Commercial Archivist, 2022; Ozempic, 2019). Though these advertisements follow rules and regulations and do not explicitly promote Ozempic as a weight loss drug, by enthusiastically exclaiming its weight loss benefit and using wondrous childlike imagery, these advertisements actively promote off-label use.

Figure 1

The logo used in Ozempic advertising and packaging.
From *Ozempic branding*. By Igor Biasini, n.d.
(https://creativepool.com/igorbiasini/projects/ozempic-branding-for-novonordisk)

Even disregarding the messaging about weight loss, the advertising materials for Ozempic are not innocent actors in promoting the medication as a miracle drug. The advertising material subtly and explicitly ensures that the viewer knows that the effects of Ozempic are magical. Almost every cable TV advertising for Ozempic begins with the same jingle: "Oh, oh, oh, Ozempic!" (Commercial Archivist, 2022; Ozempic, 2019). The jingle is a parody of the popular 80s song "Magic" by Pilot. At first, this music choice seems innocuous enough. Jingles are a common and effective way to increase brand awareness and help consumers commit brands to memory, and companies are willing to pay millions to associate their brands with popular music (Oakes, 2007). However, the specific song choice is no coincidence. The original section of the song that the advertisements parody contains the lyrics "Oh, oh, oh, it's magic, you know?" Though these lyrics are not present in Ozempic advertisements, those who are familiar with the original song are likely to associate or sing its original lyrics while listening to the commercial (Oakes, 2007). Thus, this song choice promotes a connection between the lyrics "it's magic, you know?" and Ozempic, further strengthening the idea that Ozempic is a magical drug. The weight loss effects of Ozempic are not just a nice side effect— they are magical.

Advertisements for Ozempic are everywhere. The vast majority of the direct-to-consumer Ozempic advertisements seen in Canada act as 'reminder ads' which Health Canada defines as advertisements that are "limited to the name, price and quantity of a prescription drug" and "do not include reference to a disease state" (Health Canada, 2020, Information for prescription drug manufacturers section). This allows Ozempic advertisements to omit crucial information about the purpose of the drug and focus on increasing the presence of Ozempic as a brand name in the minds of consumers. These advertisements are seen everywhere and are practically unavoidable, from large advertisements on street billboards (Figure 2) to small adverts displayed on the boards of hockey games (Figure 3). Notably, as reminder advertisements, none of these ads contain any more information than the brand name and a catchphrase. Reminder advertisements can prove problematic because they assume that the consumer of the advertisement already knows what the medication is used for. When Ozempic is not permitted to advertise its intended purpose, the meaning of the advertisement and use-case of the medication is prescribed meaning by the

consumer. If the public perception of Ozempic has been reframed from a diabetes medication to a weight loss drug, then the reminder advertisements effectively serve as adverts for a weight loss medication.

Figure 2

An advertisement for Ozempic is seen on a billboard in Toronto on Friday, June 16, 2023.

Note: An Ozempic billboard from Toronto with the text "I just asked. Ask your doctor about Ozempic." From Ozempic ads seem to be everywhere, doctors and ethics experts are worried. By Cole Burston, 2023, The Canadian Press (https://www.saobserver.net/trending-now/ozempic-ads-seem-to-be-everywhere-doctors-and-ethics-experts-are-worried-3761407).

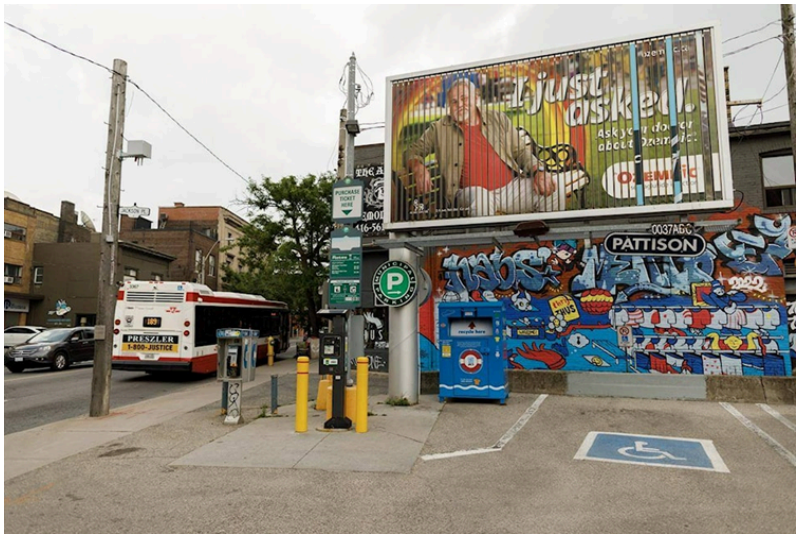

Figure 3

Ozempic Advertisements at a Winnipeg Jet's Hockey Game.

From *Ozempic - What's the Hype*. By Dauphin Clinic Pharmacy, 2019 (https://www.dauphinclinicpharmacy.com/health_articles_details.php?news_id=1488)

When examining advertisements for pharmaceutical products, it is important to question who these advertisements are for. Would those consciously living with type 2 diabetes not already know about the options available to them? It is unlikely that those who are viewing these ads are going to visit a doctor and leave with a type 2 diabetes diagnosis. Jerry Avorn (2023) finds that individuals with high exposure to direct-to-consumer advertising for pharmaceuticals were less likely to receive a health diagnosis for the product they had seen in advertising than those with low exposure to direct-to-consumer advertisements. Instead, it could be argued that the purpose of these reminder advertisements is not to remind people who have type 2 diabetes about possible treatments, but instead to recruit more individuals to buy into using Ozempic as a miracle weight loss drug. Research into the effectiveness of direct-to-consumer advertising in selling prescription medication has provided mixed results, with conflicting research and data lacking enough statistical significance to make any concrete claims (Avorn, 2023). However, if these advertisements did not provide Novo Nordisk with material gain and financial incentives, it is doubtful that the company would continue their advertising campaign. With that, there is little doubt why Novo Nordisk has been so accepting of the reframing of Ozempic. Simply put, it makes the company a lot of money. In the first seven months of 2023, Novo Nordisk spent $120 million US dollars on advertisements (Constantino, 2023) and made $33.71 billion US dollars in the same calendar year (Smith, 2024). It does not matter that the advertisements can be interpreted as deceptive or that they help promote, both implicitly and explicitly, unstudied and potentially dangerous off-label uses for Ozempic. It makes Novo Nordisk money, and if it continues making the company money, the advertisements will continue and off-label usage will continue to surge.

Impact and Considerations

By prioritizing profits over the needs of those using Ozempic for its intended purposes, Novo Nordisk has put both those living with type 2 diabetes and those using Ozempic for weight loss in dangerous situations. The reframing of Ozempic has resulted in an off-balancing of the supply and demand of the medication, creating a shortage of the drug and making it more difficult to obtain for those who need it to manage their type 2 diabetes (Edwards, 2024). This has resulted in the price of Ozempic quadrupling in the United States since 2020 (Gilbert, 2023). Additionally, the

weight-loss effects that make Ozempic so appealing for off-label use are not permanent. When people stop using Ozempic, it is most likely that individuals will regain most of the fat they lost as their body readjusts to the lack of semaglutide and increased appetite (Suran, 2023).

Ultimately, does looking thin equate to being healthy? Is diet culture and accelerated weight loss in general healthy? Richard Klein (2010) asks what it means to be 'healthy.' For Klein, 'health' is a loaded term that represents the unachievable. Individuals are expected to constantly aspire towards a greater level of 'health' or risk being seen as 'unhealthy'. Klein (2010) suggests that dieting culture is more harmful to the health of the nation than obesity, stating,

> "I don't think we should necessarily conclude that dieting is riskier than obesity. But the mere possibility calls us to be suspicious of the claim we have been persuaded to believe. Namely obesity is riskier than obsessive dieting or diet drugs" (p.16).

Instead of embracing the concept of biomedical health, he believes it is more effective to pursue pleasure. Klein emphasizes the importance of feeling comfortable in one's own body and doing what brings pleasure internally, rather than focusing on the external pressures that create a system where individuals feel expected and pressured to take weight loss drugs like Ozempic to appear as healthy members of society. By placing less emphasis on the messaging from social media and advertisements and more emphasis on our individual experiences, a more healthy and pleasurable way of living can be achieved.

Conclusion

Ozempic is unavoidable and will likely remain as such for the foreseeable future. The drug provides a unique example of how off-label uses for prescription medications are popularized through social media and advertising. TikTok presents an effective breeding ground for off-label drug use as personal testimonies disseminate rapidly on the platform. Traditional advertising coexists with social media, promoting off-label uses in more subtle ways while also promoting a drug's intended use. This paper only scratches the surface of how pharmaceutical products are advertised and how their meanings morph throughout time. To live in the modern age is to be advertised to and consume social media messaging, ultimately reframing the way everything is understood, of which Ozempic is a prime example.

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A Metamorphosis: From HGW XX/7 to a Good Man: A Story of Encountering the Other and the Self in Music

Vipasna Nangal

Abstract

This paper explores the transformative power of music on psychological and political ideologies through the lens of the film The Lives of Others. It examines the character of Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler, a Stasi agent whose life undergoes profound changes after encountering the piece Sonata for a Good Man. Integrating insights from musicology, psychology, Sufism, and political science, the paper delves into how music transcends ideological boundaries, enabling deep personal introspection and connection. Unlike prior studies that focus broadly on art, this paper focuses specifically on music as a transformative force, offering a deeper exploration of how music incites psychological and ideological change. The analysis argues that music creates a liminal space where conventional boundaries dissolve, fostering a critical re-evaluation of one's beliefs and perceptions. This transformation is evident in Wiesler's shift from a loyal ideologue to a compassionate individual, impacting his emotional and cognitive states as well as his actions and ideologies. The paper highlights the capacity of music to challenge and alter both political and personal landscapes, emphasizing its role in facilitating ideological and emotional liberation. The paper contributes to a broader understanding of art's impact on human behaviour and societal structures by examining the intersection of music and transformation within the context of East Germany. Through Wiesler's story, the paper illustrates how art, particularly music, can be a potent force in challenging and reshaping ideological confines and nurturing human connection and empathy.

Keywords

The Lives of Others, music and transformation, psychological change, political ideology, Sufism and music, musicology, art and political change, East Germany totalitarianism, interdisciplinary analysis

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"Without the musician, all life would be loneliness."

(Thein, 2016, p. 30)

"People don't change" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:16:03-00:16:15). In the first 20 minutes of *The Lives of Others*, Bruno Hempf's words envelope a celebratory event in cynicism. His words suggest human nature is immutable, incapable of transformation. The individuals illustrated in *The Lives of Others*, however, are anything but stagnant. The characters undergo significant shifts, with Wiesler's transformation being the most stark. While initially submerged in East Germany's rigid ideology, he emerges as a different - maybe even a good - man. Don Donnersmarck, the director, says that it was a conversation between Lenin and his friend, Maxim Gorky, that inspired the film and Wiesler's character (Diamond, 2008; Riding, 2007). Lenin lamented that he could not listen to Beethoven's *Appassionata*, his most cherished piece of music, because it made him "want to stroke people's heads" (as cited in Riding, 2007, para. 18). However, his duty demanded that he "smash those heads to bring the revolution to them" (as cited in Riding, 2007, para. 18). Wiesler's genesis is intrinsically linked to music, as is his metamorphosis.

The literature on music, emotions, and political change is limited. While scholars and writers have studied these elements in isolation and within the broader context of art, a cohesive analysis through an interpersonal lens is absent. The literature concurs that art helps the mind create and explore an imagined existence (Achebe, 1990; Jarvie, 1987; Kermode, 2000; Stamatopoulou, 2018). Art observers can make sense of the world they momentarily leave behind by entering this alternate plane. This is because art exercises the human imagination, taking the mind on unexpected journeys that provide novel insights that would not be possible in this world alone (Achebe, 1990). Some scholars have attempted to conceptualize and make sense of how music similarly takes the senses away to a different existence (Becker, 1994; Clarke, 2014; Gabrielsson, 2010). However, the literature in this area is limited, and discussion about the transformation that results from music is scarce. Many insights into music and the mind come from spiritual writings, which believe music's meditative effect catalyzes identity shifts (Akhtar, n.d.; "Interview: Davod Azad," 2023).

Political scientists have also dedicated their attention to music in their study of political resistance and structural change (Bennett, 2014; Hall, 2001; Street, 2003). However, this work tends to undertake systematic rather than interpersonal analysis. The focus is on how music mobilizes the masses (Street, 2003). Political scientists are uninterested in the political effect of music in intimate interactions.

Diamond's (2008) exploration of the identification process in *The Lives of Others* is the closest attempt at a comprehensive analysis. He explores how Wiesler's interactions with art allow him to identify with the artists whose lives differ from his own. However, Diamond (2008) does not give much attention to music. The most potent explanation Diamond (2008) provides regarding the role of music in *The Lives of Others* is that the Sonata reminds Wiesler to do the 'right' thing. The process by which music foments this transformation is missing. This paper seeks to differentiate itself from existing scholarship by focusing specifically on the role of music, rather than art more broadly, in catalyzing Wiesler's transformation. While Diamond acknowledges Wiesler's interactions with art, this paper delves deeper into the specific mechanisms by which music sparks a profound ideological and emotional shift. Furthermore, this paper not only engages with music as a narrative tool in the film but also considers its capacity to alter social and moral cognition. The aim is to explore whether the film's representation of music offers insight into music's broader potential to dissolve ideological conditioning and foster empathy, a phenomenon supported by research in other academic disciplines such as psychology and musicology. The paper seeks to answer the question: How does music catalyze Wiesler's psychological and political transformation? The paper will reference scholars, scientists, musicians, and writers to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of a scene that lasts only two minutes but transforms Wiesler and his perception of others.

Wiesler's interaction with music, specifically the *Sonata for a Good Man*, catalyzes his psychological and political transformation. It forces Wiesler to enter a liminal space, where the confines of ideology dissolve, facilitating a direct and uninterrupted encounter with the Self and the political Other. In this transcendent space, beyond the arms of a totalitarian regime, Wiesler steps out from his lonely cave to a place of connection and transformation.

The Confines of an Ideological Cave

In the film's early parts, Wiesler's selfhood is composed solely of East Germany's socialist ideology. For totalitarian regimes, the ideological alignment of the citizenry is critical (Márquez, 2016). Such regimes utilize all means to produce an "ideological monism," in which citizens yield to the state's desire for ideological control (Márquez, 2016, p. 39). While some academics argue that the totalitarian label is too excessive for East Germany, scholarly consensus suggests that East Germany fulfilled the totalitarian criteria (Fulbrook & Port, 2013). The Socialist Unity Party (SED) monopolized political power, exerting control over the economy, media, and cultural and social organizations (Fulbrook & Port, 2013). The party also promoted an official utopian ideology and

employed physical and psychological measures to maintain state repression (Fulbrook & Port, 2013). These characteristics underscore the totalitarian nature of East Germany, solidifying its classification under the scholarly consensus.

Wiesler represents a triumphant manifestation of the totalitarian state's desire for absolute ideological alignment. He bears the marks of a man drenched in ideology. The film begins inside a temporary detention center, a physical embodiment of the ideological confines that enclose Wiesler. They remind the viewer that no matter how far the film goes physically, the protagonist's mind lives inside these walls. The soldier instructs a detainee to address Wiesler as "Captain" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:00:52). In the interrogation room, Wiesler sits in his uniform at the head of the desk. Before the audience knows Wiesler's name, they know he is a man of authority and, therefore, a critical piece within the Stasi infrastructure. Introducing the room, the position, the uniform, and even the detainee before presenting Wiesler himself implies a distortion of identity. Rather than introducing the being before his identity markers, the film's sequencing gives these identity markers precedent. This introduction suggests that Wiesler is an East German soldier before he is anything else. The ideology takes precedence.

Wiesler's speech patterns solidify his radical ideological identification. Perceived identity is embedded in speech (Orvell et al., 2022). Personal pronouns can imply specific psychological orientation (Orvell et al., 2022). One of the first times Wiesler speaks, he asks the detainee, "What do you have to tell us? (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:01:14-00:01:15). He then asks, "You think we imprison people on a whim? (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:01:27-00:01:29). Wiesler, in these moments, identifies strongly with the "we" and the "us," suggesting the presence of a shared identity (Orvell et al., 2022). His sense of self rests with East Germany's political narrative. In these scenes, he is not simply Wiesler. He is a captain operating at the behest of the State.

Yuval Noah Harari (2018) claims humans are storytellers and story believers. Life's chaos forces one to search for meaning (Harari, 2018). Adhering to political, social, or religious ideologies contextualizes this chaos (Harari, 2018). Narratives, such as ideologies, provide individuals with purpose (Harari, 2018). The question, then, is not simply whether an individual ardently believes in a political ideology but the extent to which that ideology controls the individual. In Wiesler's case, that control is absolute. When "the state [is] meant to be total," someone like Wiesler does not have the liberty to exist outside ideological boundaries (Márquez, 2016, p. 40). An external doctrine dictates Wiesler's every movement, every action, and every statement.

Wiesler's intimate moments illustrate this high degree of state control. In the absence of duty, Wiesler is a carcass of a man. He has no one to return to, nothing to do, and nothing to believe in. He goes home to an empty and colourless space that lacks homeliness. He eats food not for enjoyment but for nourishment. His days consist of no hobbies or work outside his profession. Such scenes blend to paint an emotional and psychological void. Wiesler's reality coincides with the broader totalitarian goal, as the pursuit of a radically cohesive collective demands the dilution of the Self (Skya, 2009). Ultimately, Wiesler is nothing outside of his political identity. "The individual Wiesler [does] not exist" (Nystrom, 2014, p. 8).

Wiesler's Perception of Others in an Ideological Cave

Along with eroding his sense of self, Wiesler's submission to state ideology distorts his perception of others. Instead of engaging with people as complex individuals, he views them through the reductive lens of his ideological training. Wiesler's ideology begets binary thinking. Under the gaze of his piercing eyes, people become either traitors or supporters. He tells his students, "[y]our subjects are enemies of socialism," and materializes this instruction in his work (von Donnersmarck, 2005, 05:47-05:53). As he gazes down at Dreyman, he calculates that Dreyman is "an arrogant type, the kind I warn my students about" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:07:20-00:07:23). Before knowing anything about Dreyman, he places a reductive label on Dreyman's selfhood. Furthermore, the act of looking down with binoculars implies a constricted view. It illustrates that while Wiesler analyzes Dreyman and claims to have made a sound judgment, he does not truly see or know Dreyman. Wiesler's radically ideological outlook forces the individual to become an object of his ideological perception rather than exist as an entity in himself. In this way, Wiesler's constricted view transforms the person into the political Other, someone distinct, unfamiliar, and outside the scope of his understanding.

Wiesler's interaction with the detainee in the beginning portrays a similar dynamic. During the interrogation, he calls the man "prisoner number 227" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:01:32 – 00:01:42). Referencing the detainee by number rather than name separates the detainee from the element that makes him human. Such language strips the individual of a critical identity marker (McIntosh, 2021; Stollznow, 2008). Wiesler's participation in this dehumanization effort further illustrates his political Othering of individuals.

The Loss of the Self and Others in an Ideological Cave - A Lonely Existence

Isolated from the Self and from knowing the true reality of others, Wiesler exists in a state of loneliness. Loneliness is a critical element of totalitarian infrastructure (Arendt, 1973). Regimes institute organized loneliness by isolating people and instrumentalizing ideology (Arendt, 1973). Arendt (1973) asserts that "what makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of ... equals" (p. 477). She believes this momentary feeling of loneliness could transform into a permanent state of being (Arendt, 1973). Wiesler's complete submission to the state ideology illustrates a permanent state of loneliness.

This loneliness becomes apparent when the film contrasts the liveliness of Dreyman's life with Weisler's void. Wiesler's bare walls contrast the colorful ensemble that is Dreyman's home. In one scene, the viewer watches Wiesler spend his days alone (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:17:20 – 00:18:27). The shot then cuts back to Dreyman laughing and playing with the neighborhood kids (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:18:27 – 00:19:00). Wiesler desperately searches for warmth in a sex worker, while Dreyman makes passionate love to his girlfriend. Dreyman serves as a foil character to demonstrate the loneliness that encompasses Wiesler's life.

Arendt (1973) asserts that loneliness was a mechanism through which totalitarian regimes inflicted assault on reality. This is because such regimes went beyond creating ardent followers. "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi," Arendt says, "but people for whom fact and fiction… and the distinction between true and false… no longer exist" (p.474). Wiesler embodies this "ideal subject" (Arendt, 1973, p.474). Despite his ability to expertly rely on his senses to acquire details and facts, his lonely existence separates him from the reality of himself and the reality of others. In this sense, Wiesler is akin to a prisoner in Plato's cave. His selfhood and perception of others are like shadows on the wall. They may be reflections of truth, but reality in its totality remains far from his grasp. The prisoners will never be able to attain truth in the cave, just like Wiesler will not grasp the reality of the world and himself inside his ideologically constraining existence. Only by escaping his loneliness and stepping into the light will he be able to perceive reality.

Musical Trance

The *Sonata for a Good Man* pulls Wiesler from his lonely cave to a transcendent space. Art has this effect by forming an independent and fictitious world in the mind (Achebe, 1990; Jarvie, 1987).

It engages the senses in "imaginative identification" (Achebe, 1990, p.144). In this state, observers are not simply witnessing events but are immersed in them (Achebe, 1990; Jarvie, 1987). Music operates similarly. Historical work on the neurological impacts of music explored how certain pieces evoked strong emotions in listeners (Clarke, 2014; TEDx Talks, 2020). Contemporary literature built upon this work and concluded that characterizing the listener's experience as an emotional phenomenon is insufficient (Becker, 1994; Clarke, 2014). While listeners may feel sad, happy, or upset when listening to a piece of music, this explanation does not capture the almost divine experience that some listeners periodically report (Becker, 1994; Clarke, 2014). Music catalyzes a more comprehensive and complex shift in consciousness (Clarke, 2014; Gabrielsson, 2010). When a listener dwells in music, they can enter a different zone of existence. Gabrielsson (2010) attempted to record this transformative experience. His study involved 1000 participants over 20 years. Many of these participants reported feeling a change in perception-cognition after listening to an emotionally charged piece of music. They felt emotions in a heightened and mystical state. The music absorbed them into a different state of consciousness. In this state, "the world around disappear[ed], one dwell[ed] in one's world, inaccessible to others" (Gabrielsson, 2010, p.558).

The film illustrates visual references to Wiesler being in this trance state. A character like Wiesler, who remained stoic and rigid up to this point in the film, becomes visibly emotional as he listens to the piece. Wiesler looks spellbound, almost absorbed in the music. His body is present, but his mind is drifting. His gaze, which has always concentrated on the tasks ahead, now drifts into the distance. His expression softens, and his mouth hangs open. His eyes, usually dark and expressionless, fill with emotion. While the cave of ideology may physically confine Wiesler, when he listens to the *Sonata for a Good Man*, his mind wanders away from the ideological boundaries of the regime.

Finding the Self in a Musical Trance

Abraham Maslow (1954) characterizes this transcendent state as a "peak experience" and believes that it could aid the self-actualization process (p.165). When absorbed into a piece of music, an individual's ego momentarily dissolves (Maslow, 1954). The listener, separated from who they thought they were, can discover other elements of themselves, leading to revelations about identity (Maslow, 1954). Ultimately, listeners can find themselves in music by losing themselves in its emotional depth (Clarke, 2005; Clarke, 2011).

This momentary encounter with the Self can cause long-term effects on an individual's psyche. Eastern thought has been vocal about this process. Sufism, a mystic body within Islam, has maintained an acute focus on the metamorphic powers of music (Alam, 2020). This mystic body believes music is a conduit for spiritual awakening (Akhtar, n.d.; Alam, 2020; Avery, 2004; "Interview," 2023). The ancient Sufis believed that the soul was composed of sound (Alam, 2020; Avery, 2004). When listeners dwelled in music, they accessed a state that was untainted by worldly confines (Alam, 2020; Avery, 2004). This Self was inherently compassionate because it was closer to the divine source (Alam, 2020; Avery, 2004). Consequently, encountering this Self led to more compassionate and self-aware listeners (Alam, 2020; Avery, 2004).

Wiesler encounters an unfiltered version of himself in this transcendent and emotional space. The Sonata's sentimental undertone aids Wiesler's encounter. Jerska wrote the *Sonata for a Good Man*. He, like Wiesler, was suffering from loneliness (Taylor, 2011). He lost his sense of self after being blacklisted by the regime. The identity he clung to was lost (Taylor, 2011). The piece he composes in response to this loneliness carries the imprint of his disarray (Taylor, 2011). When Wiesler encounters Jerska's loneliness in the Sonata, it reminds him of his void. In this way, Wiesler encounters the Self in music, which is deserted and hidden beneath the political narratives of the regime.

The compassion Wiesler finds after listening to the Sonata is a testament to his encounter with the Self. After listening to this music, he begins acting in ways believed to be outside his political doctrine. Instead of interrogating the young boy he meets in the elevator about his father's political remarks, Wiesler ignores his comments. He later talks with Christa and persuades her to have confidence in her art. These small moments of kindness amplify when Wiesler begins to protect Dreyman and the other artists. He alters reports and even physically intervenes to protect Dreyman and Christa. His encounter with the Self catalyzes a shift from an ideologically confined individual to an individual acting closer to his compassionate Self.

Finding the Other in a Musical Trance

Scholarship on this musically induced tranced state suggests that it can also foment connections between people. Maslow (1954) believed this transcendent space caused a fusion of the observer and the observed. Listening to emotional pieces blurred the line between the listener's experiences and the experiences of others (Maslow, 1954). This blurring comes from music's capacity to tackle universal themes (Bellour, 2017). Experiences of grief, love, or anger are

ubiquitous. Weaving these themes into music reminds listeners of the struggles and joys that bind people (Bellour, 2017; Rabinowitch, 2015).

The *Sonata for a Good Man* is composed by Jerska, a man struggling with social isolation. When Dreyman plays the piece, he mourns Jerska. The layering of these emotions produces a connection between Dreyman and Wiesler. Wiesler listens to a dead man's expression of loneliness and Dreyman's longing for that friend. Wiesler, a man who has never before contended with the complexity of others, listens to a non-verbal expression of that complexity. In this way, he can foment a connection with Dreyman, someone he hastily characterized as an enemy. Music allows him to see Dreyman beyond the boundaries of the State.

Wiesler's interactions with Christa and the little boy in the elevator further illustrate his newfound ability to look beyond the ideologically oriented binary. Wiesler's ritualistic and interrogative tendencies disappear when the little boy blurts that his father opposes the Stasi. Wiesler visibly stops himself from inquiring about the boy's father. Instead, he asks the boy, "What's the name of your... ball?" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:55:40 – 00:55:48). Rather than resorting to seeing the boy in relation to the State, Wiesler adjusts his question to be more childlike and less antagonistic. For the first time, Wiesler perceives a boy as a boy rather than an extension or enemy of the State. The film further emphasizes Wiesler's cognitive shift in his interaction with Christa. When Christa lies to him at the bar, he tells her, "[y]ou weren't being yourself" (von Donnersmarck, 2005, 01:04:38-01:04:42). At this moment, Wiesler is observing her, but not at the behest of the State. His words suggest that he truly sees her. After listening to the Sonata and encountering the Other in the form of Dreyman, people regain their complexity and form. Wiesler's perception of others changes. People become slightly more human and less Other.

Conclusion

Contrary to Hempf's logic, Wiesler changes. To Hempf's fear, a simple melody aids in Wiesler's transformation. The film illustrates how Wiesler begins as a lonely agent in a deserted cave. Indoctrinated by the Stasi ideology, he remains isolated - separate from both the Self and those around him. As the film progresses, Wiesler becomes an increasingly compassionate character. Jerska's piece plays a critical role in this shift. As the literature suggests, the *Sonata for a Good Man* pulls Wiesler into a transcendent state, away from his ideological confines. In this state, he encounters both his deeper self and the humanity of others. While initially trapped in an ideological cave, Wiesler can make his way away from the dark into reality.

Centuries of writings have wrestled with the transformative capacity of music. It continues to dumbfound philosophers, poets, and musicians alike. Music, composed simply of notes, can be much more than the sum of its parts. It can express love between people, leave nations bewildered, be used to charge the public in protests, or aid soldiers in their chants for war. In Wiesler's case, a small and brief expression of grief changes the trajectory of his life and the lives of others.

The implications of this exploration extend beyond film analysis. Music's potential to dissolve ideological conditioning and foster empathy has significant social and political ramifications, particularly in ideologically polarized societies. As such, Wiesler's journey in *The Lives of Others* acts not just as a narrative of personal transformation but also as a commentary on the political potential of music. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how art, especially music, can challenge rigid ideological systems, influence moral cognition, and foster human empathy, creating a space for broader societal shifts. As political tensions rise and ideological divides deepen, it becomes ever more essential to reflect on tools like music that can help foster understanding and bridge ideological gaps.

Hempf says that "[h]ope always dies last" (von Donersmarck, 2005, 00:16:41- 00:16:43). He is not wrong. Perhaps art keeps this hope alive. When the ideological and political corridors become constricting, art becomes the light that guides the prisoners away from their lonely cave, ushering them into reality.

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I Did Something Stupid as a Teenager: Bodily Possession, Walking Corpses, a Dog's Sixth Sense, and Anishinaabe Land-Based Recovery

Taylor Van Eyk

Abstract

First Nations, Metis, and Inuit ways of knowing have always drawn knowledge from the land and the internal realms of self or feeling to guide and heal. Teenage self-harm and turmoil resulting from the generational trauma of colonialism serve as a reflexive case study for understanding how Anishinaabe ideologies around land-based well-being are applicable in the instances following an overdose. This project is an interpretive phenomenological analysis of a reflexive recount of the author's overdose as an urban Anishinaabe teenager. Utilizing First Nation's theories and teachings on land-based wellbeing as a framework, this text unpacks the unexplained events of an overdose with Anishinaabe worldviews in mind. Storytelling techniques such as self and situational reflection are used to communicate data (the experience) in a creative way unconventional to colonial research structures, and better aligned with the author's ancestral practices. This is a creative project in self-reflection, trauma exploration through Indigenous frameworks, and communication removed from colonial conventions. This project serves as illuminating towards urban Indigenous challenges which acts as a case for understanding Anishinaabe knowledge of self thrivance.

Keywords

Storytelling, First Nation, Anishinaabe, wellbeing, substance abuse, overdose, reflexivity, teenage, paranormal, land-based, family, death

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Inexplicability in the Meaningless and Reflexive Storytelling Design

When asked about a life-changing paranormal experience, I think about the scariest experience I have ever had. This experience was damaging yet necessary for altering the course of my life. I consider it paranormal due to the unfolding of events, some may consider the nature of this experience to be nothing more than the manipulation of the brain and the logical consequences which follow. With perhaps coincidence sprinkled in and around the manipulation and its consequences. This is the story of my overdose at the age of 16, one week before my 17th birthday. I was on a poor course of life, one which was setting me up for severance from my family by way of self-inflicted hardship. This experience came at such a time and with such unnegotiated force that it demanded me to change my ways by showing me the value of life and the profound depth to which my life is connected to the world and unseen realms of life around me. Though I did not fully understand or have the words to describe what happened to me and what I experienced accurately, I knew it was profound. Currently, I still struggle emotionally with recounting my experience; studying and becoming familiar with ontological and spiritual ideologies stemming from my Anishinaabe ancestry has helped me grapple with and assign meaning to what nearly killed me and the reasons why I survived.

This essay will reference First Nations' ideologies around land-based spirituality, healing, and wellness since these ideas are ones which now effectively frame my experience and flesh out reasons why my overdose so profoundly redirected the course of my life. An initial written construction of events will be followed by their connections to feelings of the inexplicable or paranormal. These recountings and establishments of paranormal elements or happenings will be analyzed through Indigenous texts centerd on healing and spirituality as it is connected to the land in interpretive phenomenological analysis. I will construct and recount events of their lived experience, analyzing and understanding it with assistance from guiding theories, effectively conducting an interpretive phenomenological analysis of an internalized and individual experience. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a method of understanding a person's experience and the significance that a person assigns to their own experience. This analysis method is appropriate for this project as it allows room for data such as self-perception and feelings toward a specific experience to be included in the full breadth of the project. Indigenous theories and literature which connect and illuminate in these ways are important, despite this profound experience being one largely of the individual-internal. This internal experience communicated with the unseen realms of life, for example, spirit realms and realms of energy within the land, in a way which allowed greater insights

into the nature of relationality outside of the individual self. An understanding of relationality between self and the varying realms of life is foundational in many Indigenous viewpoints and ways of knowing. The discussion of this project will explore how the fallout of the overdose has altered the course of my life; through this exploration, I will also touch on ways the paranormal has been baked through my adult life following this experience. Answering the question, 'How has land-based ancestral knowledge of well-being contributed to one's recovery from substance abuse?'

This study has a root practice in discourse creation through storytelling, followed by an analysis and study of discourse realized through Anishinaabe ideologies. As a communication study, this project takes an untraditional course as it is both a practice of creating a communications artifact and then turning critically on that artifact within the same project. Though this story is the recount of events which exist in memory, its manifestation in an academic project is a practice of active discourse creation and dissemination. The analysis portion of this project, though it reflects on my memory, is an analysis of the written discourse produced early in the project. Though this study does not place a theoretical primacy in understanding the function of discourse, as a traditional communications outlook may call for, this study utilizes Anishinaabe understandings of wellness to pull apart the discourse of an overdose and understand and thus construct further understanding of events, contributing to existing discourse. This project utilizes my academic background in communications to inform the composition of storytelling and the analysis of creative constructs.

What Happened? The Overdose.

A week before my 17th birthday, my dad was away working overnights, and my mum was with the rest of our family on our ancestral lands in Ontario. At this point in my life, I had lost sight of my direction and purpose. The colonial world, which can be thought of as an unseen space centered around assimilation and capitalist expansion and its multiplicity of hierarchical systems, had asked me to remove myself from a meaningful lifeway. I complied. However, my purpose and direction are intrinsic to my spiritual nourishment and the powerful yet non-physical ties between myself, my family, and my ancestors. Colonialism and its many systems asked me, as it has asked many Indigenous individuals, to separate from these ties and your purpose because you are easier to control with no roots in solid ground. When I had lost sight of these ties and no longer deeply understood their value in my life, I began to use drugs and seek out people who believed money, and what it could buy, was more worthy than the unseen nourishment and teachings of my family ties: people who fed my bad habits. It was with these people with whom I spent the most time. I

effectively used them and the drugs as a wedge between my family, direction, and self because I had been told to believe this was where I was best aligned. My spirituality and its thrivance held no value, so when my parents were preoccupied and I was out of view a week before my 17th birthday, I decided then would be the perfect opportunity to get high undisturbed by caring eyes.

I was completely alone, sitting at a desk, waiting for some unreliable friend to join me. I put the sheet in my mouth, administering a dose an hour before they showed up. It tasted bitter, and I did not feel safe, but I held it anyway, convinced that my intuition meant nothing. By the time my friend showed up and took their dose, the sheet had nearly dissolved to nothing in my mouth, and the experience began and escalated quickly. I then knew what I had taken was poison and that this was going to hurt, so I told my friend to spit out what they had taken. For me, it was already too late. I went blind, I went deaf, yet I was reportedly up talking and walking around, but my consciousness was in another place. I was gone for twelve hours, and I had lost all my senses. It was like my body was now a vessel or a puppet to the drugs I had taken, and my spirit had gone elsewhere. When my body was up and running around the house, I remember being in a dark pit and feeling an evil presence with me. I remember witnessing and being conscious of a sea of black. I knew I was dying if I was not already dead. I woke up in bed with my friend at my feet. It was like a fever had broken. I felt completely sober, but almost like I was a ghost. Nothing felt real, and my house felt very artificial. I knew where my family was, and I knew they had no plans to come home, but I became very concerned about where they were. I needed them to come home, so I began calling all of them and asking where they were and who they were with, asking them to come home and telling them I loved them. I changed out of the clothes I had overdosed in and laid down in a room I had not been in during the experience. I was convinced the energy and entity associated with the overdose was like a pungent smell, and it soaked into everything I touched during it. I needed to get away because I was terrified of it.

My dog was in the house with me during my overdose, according to my friend, I had picked her up and sought comfort or a sort of forgiveness from her. My dog had witnessed what had happened to me; she had seen me pass away. I feel it is important to note that this experience revealed something about animals to me: their incredible sense of being in touch with the unseen realms of energy that permeate all life and witnessing the realm of the spirit in a way. Many hours after my overdose, I saw my dog again. I sat down on a chair in the kitchen and called her towards me, but she would not come. She stood at the end of the hallway and watched me with some fear. I grabbed her bag of treats and offered some, with much time and reluctance, she slowly came

towards me with her tail between her legs to accept the treat, then quickly ran off. I was initially confused but then quickly understood her hesitancy. She knew that I was not there, she knew she was accepting a treat from a fresh walking corpse. She had watched my soul depart from my body and effectively die. This overdose was the closest thing I have experienced to possession. My body was no longer mine, and my dog was the only other being who could agree with me.

I tried to drink water, but my body would not accept it, and the water would come out. I drank so much water, but my body remained dehydrated. My body would not accept food. Rather, I wished to smell and be surrounded by it but not consume it. When I lay, I felt the blood rush to the back of my skull and the side of my body closest to the ground. I felt it swish and rock inside me when I would roll over. When I looked in the mirror, my skin was white and swollen. It looked as though my skin was no longer attached to my face and may slough off at any minute. I had lost most of the feeling in my skin, it was numb or pins and needles all over. My brain was shot; I struggled to do basic math and think with any coherence. I could not sleep, so I spent the next day admiring old photos of myself, finally recognizing how beautiful I had been. I admired the art I had made; I was amazed at what I had once been able to create. It was like looking at myself in the third person; I was no longer able to identify with the girl in those pictures and the things she had made. Rather, I was saying goodbye to her and admiring her beauty. I did not sleep for three days because I was afraid that if I closed my eyes, my body would stop before my mother came home and I was able to say goodbye. My family came to see me over the days following my accident. Mostly upset with what I had done, they slowly became solemn and afraid once I had disclosed all I was hiding and witnessed my body's inefficiency to function.

Once my mother was home, I could apologize and tell her I loved her. After this, I felt the need to drink water again, and this time the water stuck. I do not know how to describe it, and this is kind of gross, but this detail signalled a crucial turning point in the experience. I drank so much water, and I peed, properly peed, it was dark and ridiculous! But my body had finally flushed out whatever was residing within me; the colour and elasticity of my skin instantly began to return. It was like life was breathed back into my body after being a corpse melting into a bed. My organs began to function again, and I knew I was going to live. Then and there, I knew I had been given a second chance, and whatever entity I had invited into my life during my drug use was angry. I did not die, but it was warded away and suppressed from my body. My dog would finally come to see me, tail wagging, and I knew then that I must reinvent myself from the ground up: model myself

after the child I had once been who knew my place alongside my family, the unapologetic child I was before the colonial world had broken me down.

I knew whatever entity was with me in my overdose and possessed my body was angry and wanted me dead because it tried to distract me from my family. During phone calls with my family, it would make sounds of strung out and grumbling through the phone, and my calls would drop for seemingly no reason. It tried to prevent me from connecting with them. Abusers and people who had harmed me in the past tried to get in contact with me during the days following; people who had not spoken to me in years were trying to get back into my life. It was upset I did not die and was trying to draw me back into death while I was still vulnerable.

Once I knew I was going to live, my body still struggled. Doctors would not help me, but I am certain I died of a heart attack during my overdose. In the months that followed, I would wake up in the middle of the night with searing and shooting pains in my chest. I could not eat anything salty or spicy without heart palpitations and tightness in my upper back and chest. I had to be kind and gentle with myself so I could heal, so I could live. I only wanted to be outside and listen to the birds and see the plants. It was the middle of winter but I was grateful to feel the cold on my skin and to be able to hear and see the world around me, really see it. I still have heart palpitations. Stopping the pain in my chest took years of healing, and I suspect I will never fully recover. I have a weak heart, which sometimes burns after a stressful day. In ways like this, I know I will one day have to face the entity which wanted my death, it has permanently scarred me. But so long as I fulfill my responsibility to myself, the people around me, and the physical as well as the unseen realms, I know that I can trust in what may happen to me in death. Now, I do not fear death. I do not know what will happen at my end, but I know my spirit will not be lost, and there is a place for me to reintegrate into all things.

Where is the 'Paranormal' Present?

I consider this experience one of the paranormal for three key reasons: the entity which made its presence known to me, the difference in experience from that of my consciousness and my external body, and my dog's reaction to the experience. Redvers, in her (2020) article *"The land is a healer": Perspectives on land-based healing from Indigenous practitioners in Northern Canada* described 'land-based' in healing and cultural practice as "a reminder of humanity's fundamental and inherent connection with the natural world and was agreed upon as a common English term across all regions for cross-cultural dialogue… This culturally-infused term differentiated the concept from

western-based conceptions of nature, which were seen to approach humans and the land as separate entities" (p. 95). Here, an understanding of a middle ground or connecting force between a human individual and all things is established. We are the same as nature and not categorically different as colonial ideology may have us believe. There are indeed connecting and shared forces between us and the differing realms of life which deem us more like family than we could possibly imagine. I pose that this connecting aspect is the realm of the soul or energy, this existence of an unseen realm creates a common theme in the three aspects of my experience, which may be deemed paranormal. It makes sense that my dog would be in touch with the happenings of this unseen realm because, despite living in colonial Canada, my dog's internal and spiritual realm is untouched by the effects of colonialism, which asks us to ignore our attachments to the paranormal. If there were to be a drastic change in my relation to this realm or a disruption by introducing an evil presence, my dog would be more inclined to recognize it than I or others around me. Nightingale and Richmond's (2022) article *Reclaiming Land, Identity and Mental Wellness in Biigtigong Nishnaabeg Territory* says this about Anishinaabe wellness concerning the realms of life, including animals;

> According to the Anishinaabe philosophy of mino-bimaadiziwin, living in a good and healthy way involves sustaining relationships of reciprocity and responsibility with all living things, including humans, animals, spirit, and future generations. Through the individual and communal protocols required to maintain these relationships, the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness of communities is strengthened. In return, the land upholds its own responsibilities by providing the gifts necessary for living well. The land is thus more than a physical landscape or the location of material resources for survival. It is the source of Indigenous knowledge that guides communities' social, political, ceremonial, and everyday practices, and shapes Anishinaabe culture and identity (p. 1).

We can establish from this that relationships and responsibility to all entities of life (like my dog) serve beneficial and vital roles in the lifeways of humans. Broadly speaking, it could be argued that all life entities serve vital roles to one another and that one cannot truly achieve wellness without the other. Redvers includes animals as serving crucial roles in the definition of essentialist 'land-based' ideology; "Relationship with the land is a central feature or concept rooted in Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy. Land-based implies a deep connection with and non-separation between human beings and the natural world. A reference to land includes all aspects of the natural

world: plants, animals, ancestors, spirits, natural features, and environment (air, water, earth, minerals)" (2020, p. 90). In many ways, the reactions and interactions with my dog indicate the state of my relationship to the connective energy of all realms and the land.

When my consciousness or 'internality' was separated from my external form in the period following the overdose, I experienced extreme physical unwellness followed by an extended period of recovery. During this period of recovery, I found solace in nature, in closeness with my family, and a profound appreciation for the functioning of my senses. I imagine these practices rebalanced my 'internal realm' (related to the soul, affective self, and identity of self) with the 'external' (physical or tangible realms) and brought my spirit back into alignment with wellness from the physical displacement it experienced during my overdose and circumstances precluding it. Nightingale and Richmond highlight how land-based healing contributes to wellness for spirituality by balancing individuals with all realms of life; "Access to land is essential for food security, physical activity, medicines, and environmental resources that support healing and physical wellbeing. Equally important, however, the land provides the space for learning and teaching Indigenous knowledge through intergenerational relationships" (2022, p. 2). Furthermore, this article understands the land and its integrated practices as being "where families and communities gather to fulfill their responsibilities, practice their skills, and connect with each other in ways that foster confidence, belonging, pride, and social support." (2022, p. 2). Healing from my experience involved recognizing nature, my family, and my relations to the spirit realms through grappling with unseen realms of natural energy in the face of my mortality. "Being on the lands of one's ancestral territories simultaneously links community members with their ancestors and future generations, and reinforces the spiritual relatedness between humans and all of creation" (Richmond, 2022, p. 2). It can be argued the ways in which I reclaimed my spirit and participated in recovery following my experience are aligned with land-based healing methods. Though I was not aware of it at the time, I was simply in the position to address my needs as I felt they were needed for my survival and eventual thrivance. This included reconnection to my family and participation in land-based activities with effects similar to those described by Nightingale and Richmond. There could be something paranormal about this as viewed from a Western standpoint, as land-based healing methods address feelings as rational knowledge, view non-human realms as kin, and look to the land for the wellness of both the physical and the spiritual. Though Indigenous scholarship handling land-based wellness and healing does not hold all the answers or terms for describing the entirety of my experience, it does provide a framework for understanding the significance and logic behind the proceedings of events. Utilizing

these ideologies has also helped me keep on course with a healthy life and maintain a responsibility to my family and the realms of life and land, which I must steward or, at the bare minimum, respect and recognize as living entities.

Persisting Impacts

This brings me to discuss how the paranormal of this experience continues to impact and shape my life into adulthood. My overdose, the paranormal happenings and the entities which surrounded it formed such a jarring experience that revealed the existence of realms and responsibilities with which I had previously lost touch. This experience, in many ways, asked me to realign myself on a better path or to die young for no reason. It also made it very clear to me that if I continued to live and even if I died, there are systems in nature which would support my spirit and care for my physical form either way. This experience's ability to remind me of my responsibility and role to my family was more impactful than anything else. My family was the reason I fought to keep living. Now, my responsibility to my kin is a primary motivator for my life's efforts. This experience and the paranormality which surrounded it acted as a no-nonsense coercive life compass that showed me the right direction and then asked me to follow or simply get off the path altogether because I had been going the wrong way for too long. Since then, I have always kept that compass in my back pocket, and I am more in touch with the directional knowledge it has to share. The teachings of this experience will always influence the course of my life, and I will always look back on this experience when I need a reminder of where life is present and the purpose of my path during difficult times. Adversity breeds invention and resilience, this adversity killed me but also allowed me to rewrite my story to better align with my family and the unseen realms of life. Though my heart is now physically weaker, I know because of this, I am stronger, and my family can rest assured I will never leave their side.

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An Aesthete Thinks About Herself For Too Long: An Auto-theoretical Conversation on Behalf of Aesthetics and Its Importance in Our Society

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Abstract

This is an auto-theoretical essay on the importance of aesthetics and its nuances concerning identity. Autotheory is a literary practice in which the author presents a theory and uses autobiographical evidence to support it. There is a disregard for aesthetics on a societal level. Aesthetics are defined in this essay as personal tastes that are core to a person's identity, whether that identity is true to the subject or what they feel they should aspire to be. When thinking about aesthetics, there is a common belief that aesthetics are a superficial aspect of one's identity. While aesthetics is mostly visually based, this essay argues that aesthetics evoke deeper meaning based on the already established identity of the subject. Through the dissection of identities and their nuances, this essay discusses how aesthetics play a deeper role in identity and community building. This essay also breaks down certain connotations of aesthetics, especially concerning femininity and Blackness. There is a notion that women should care about how they look because they are expected to present 'acceptably.' If aesthetics concerns how subjects present themselves, this essay argues that there is a negative view of aesthetics due to its association with femininity. When analyzing femininity through the context of Blackness, aesthetics are now something that a Black female subject should aspire to, whether she wants to or not. This essay argues that the intersectionality of Blackness and femininity means that certain aesthetics can be imposed onto others. Aesthetics are integral to how subjects want to or feel they should express themselves. It is worth discussing because it can show how or why certain aesthetics are adopted or rejected. This essay also notes that an acknowledgment of one's aesthetic can allow for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject's self. Due to the unconventional nature of auto theory, this essay does not follow traditional essay rules in terms of format, voice, and language.

Keywords

Social media, journalism, Instagram, ethnography, resistance

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A quick aside for the uninitiated, like myself before writing this piece; "autotheory" is a literary technique that combines autobiography and theory. Author Laura Fournier notes that it "integrates autobiography with theory and philosophy in ways that are direct and self-aware" (Fournier, 2022, p.7). Fournier further explains that auto theory is a popular literary device in feminist, BIPOC or Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and queer writing. She says, "I suggest that auto theory can be approached as a practice that artists, writers, critics, curators, activists, and others tend towards as a way of coming to terms with 'theory' – whether as the 'master discourse' of theory and philosophy…in relation to their experiential, affective lives and embodied, relational practices as human beings in this world" (Fournier, 2022, p. 6). In essence, Fournier suggests that the practice of engaging in theory in a self-aware manner may be a way for subjects to understand theory in relation to their lived experiences. She also states that it is an artistic practice where "feminist, queer, and BIPOC…spaces…live on the edges of art and academia" (Fournier, 2022, p. 7). Typical 'subjects' of theory (aforementioned female, queer, and subjects of colour) exist on this interesting plane where their art can be viewed as academia.

With that being said:

Everything you are about to interact with is part of an aesthetic, autotheoretical performance. I even hesitate to call this academic writing. The things I'm talking about, the thoughts I'm expressing, the memories I'm presenting, the people I choose to reference; all are meticulously chosen and presented to fit an aesthetic I'm [*attempting*] to emulate.

[*Lucky you!*]

I.
Aesthetics in the Mundane.

My favourite colour is pink. [*It makes plain things look pretty.*]

I was born in February of 2000, making me an Aquarius [*the better of the two types of Aquariuses.*] and born in the year of the dragon [*the coolest of all the Chinese zodiacs!*]

My top four movies on Letterboxd are In a Mood for Love (dir. Wong Kar Wai, 2000), the Love Witch (dir. Anna Biller, 2016), the Grand Budapest Hotel (dir. Wes Anderson, 2014), and Kiki's Delivery Service (dir. Hayao Miyazaki, 1989)
[*The posters for these movies are red and pink, but the one for Kiki's is blue. I want to change it, but I want a Miyazaki/Studio Ghibli movie to be in my top four.*]

I read books under 200 pages. [*I like how the smaller, thinner books look in my hand.*]

I find that I have an extremely difficult time wrapping my head around the concept of 'aesthetics.' I know that all of the things I like can fit into the 'Shae Box.' I know what movies I like, what coffee or tea I like, what style of clothing I like. My problem comes when I think about other people. I see women, or even anyone, my age and I can understand that they, too, fit their own personal aesthetic [*some people are really good at making it seem like they don't even think about their aesthetic, like it comes naturally to them. Very jealous.*] I think my confusion comes when I interact with literally anyone else. I was listening to "Kiss of Life" by Sade and I found myself realizing that the music she makes was carefully thought out. It's silly, but at that moment I realized that Sade puts a lot of effort into her Look. Her Look matches the type of music she makes. That's what I was having trouble with. I couldn't imagine someone like Sade staring at her closet for a long time, wondering which shirt to wear. I couldn't imagine her putting rings on, then taking them off, then putting different ones on. Sade just…looks like that. Then I started thinking about the type of men I see on my commute. They all look the same. I can see a man on a train and can tell what type of man they are [*I'll admit; I only really think this in the morning when people are going to work. But, walk with me.*] It's funny to me because I think of these men the way I think of Sade. I can't imagine them deciding which button-up shirt to wear that day. I can fathom them always ordering a black coffee, but I can't imagine them Liking that black coffee. I can't imagine them thinking of that black coffee as part of their personality. They just drink black coffee.

I think my dilemma here is the label 'aesthetic.' I went to middle school and high school at the time of the 'art hoe' movement on Tumblr [*13-15 year-old me having a Tumblr was definitely something I was proud of.*] The 'art hoe' movement consisted of mostly young girls and women who seemed to carefully and meticulously curate what they liked. Art hoes had mustard yellow backpacks and wore earth tones. They had round thin framed glasses and curly hair. They painted. They called dogs 'doggos' and were open about their struggles with anxiety. Most importantly, they were aesthetes: "[a] person who has or affects to have appreciation to arts and beauty" ("Aesthete", Oxford Dictionary). I wanted to be an aesthete so badly. Not only that, I wanted to look like an aesthete. I wanted someone to look at me and think, "she must be an aesthete." This is [*kinda*] where my obsession with aesthetics [*and the Idea of it*] began. I found that I started to like things solely for the aesthetic. I created a new Tumblr page and only reposted things with the colour pink in them. I painted a cheap phone case with the word 'Wilde' for Oscar Wilde [*the founding father of The Aesthetic*] on it. I started painting. I took pictures of buildings and plants and lights. THAT was what 'aesthetic' was to me.

Interesting to note: the 'founding father of aestheticism' [*or, I suppose the one who Tumblr felt should be the face of it*] was a queer man ("Aestheticism", Britannica). Also interesting to note: the 'art hoe' movement was started by a young, gender-fluid, Black artist [*Their name is Mars!*] (Frizzell, 2015). In fact, the very intention behind the 'art hoe' movement was to empower and uplift "participants of colour in this movement" (Frizzell, 2015, para. 2). But participants of colour weren't part of the

images I was seeing online. Gender-fluid participants weren't part of the images I was seeing online. I [*against my own will, to be frank*] was shown a very co-opted, watered down, white-washed version of the 'art hoe.' And *that* was who I wanted to be.

[*Something tells me that this version of events will dictate how I view myself and the world around me. Hmm…*]

It's hard for me to separate the idea of an aesthetic, and curating one, from femininity. Like I said, the 'art hoes' that I aspired to be when I was younger were all women [*as we learned, this was intentional.*]. Of course, there was a type of man they would date but that was also a 'part of The Aesthetic.' I find that a lot of the things that aesthetics are concerned with somehow relate to femininity. [*Walk with me.*] Carefully and femininely choosing what you're wearing, painstakingly and womanly-y picking out jewelry to go with the 'vibe,' making your shoes go with your girly little bag. It's all 'girl' things. Girls don't think about anything else! [*Duh!*] So, of course, a big, strong, important, testosterone-filled, black coffee-drinking man isn't thinking about what he's going to wear to the office today. He doesn't have taste; that's for women.

I think people don't realize [*or maybe don't want to admit*] that they care a lot about their aesthetic. Even the people who claim they don't care, the ones who 'just threw this shirt on' or 'will just have a green tea, with a dollop of honey' care about their aesthetic. I think people like to say they like things, just as much as they actually like those things. I like coffee with a lot of sugar; therefore, I like to say I have a sweet tooth. I like movies with stylistic cinematography; therefore, I like to say I like 'pretty' movies. Everyone does this! [*Or maybe I'm projecting!*] It's funny because everyone is too concerned with their own lives to take a moment to realize that they care a lot about what they like. Not only that, they like that what they like is part of who they are.

Honestly, I even feel silly talking about this. But trust me, aesthetics aren't just nice things to look at. Humans are visual creatures, and sometimes they like to pretend they're too intelligent [*or too masculine*] for that.

[*Walk with me.*]

II.

<u>Aesthetics in Womanhood.</u>

Cleanser, toner, essence, serum, serum again, eye cream, moisturizer, sunscreen. All of these are Korean skincare brands [*they work better.*]
At night, two cleansers, retinol, and no sunscreen.
When I'm feeling gross, a sheet mask.
If I bother to remember, a clay mask.
[*But only if I have the energy.*]

Primer, colour corrector, setting spray, concealer, setting spray, setting powder, eyebrow pencil, eyebrow gel, blush, setting powder. [*This is called 'no makeup' makeup.*]
Depending on my mood, clear lip gloss, clear lip gloss with black, blended lip liner, tinted lip gloss, tinted lip balm, or regular lip balm.
If I'm going out, I wear foundation, contour my face, put on my fake eyelashes, and apply lipstick. [*But only if I have the energy.*]

Ring one on my middle finger, ring two on my thumb.
[*Wait…*]
Ring one on my middle finger. Ring two is also on my middle finger. Necklace. Bracelet one. Bracelet two. Rings on my left hand. Bracelets on right arm.
[*But only if I have the energy.*]

Earlier I mentioned that I couldn't separate aesthetics from femininity. I'm sure that's what makes people not really understand how central aesthetics are to our lives. Women [*derogatory*] are the only ones who are concerned with aesthetics. They are the ones who wake up in the morning and decide to look nice. Men don't decide to look presentable. If they do, it's because they must have an important job or are simply an important person. Women, no matter how important or unimportant they are, must look Nice. They must fit The Aesthetic [*whatever that is*].

Don't worry. It's not any of our fault. There's this [*funny little*] thing called 'socialization.'

"Social Learning Theory, most closely associated with the work of psychologist Alberta Bandura, is an outgrowth of the behaviorist tradition, which defines learning in terms of stimulus and response" (Kretchmar, 2009, p. 2).

So, the story goes like this: you are a young boy, and you love playing with dolls. Your father, however, doesn't like that, so he ignores you. You love your father, and you don't like this negative reaction, so you stop playing with dolls. You are a young girl. You like playing in the mud with your male friends. Your mother doesn't like this, so she scolds you. You love your mother, and you don't like this negative reaction, so you stop playing in the mud with your male friends.

[*Congratulations! You have been socialized.*]

There are, actually, many "agents of socialization" (Kretchmar, 2009, p. 5) or things that would cause a child to learn through stimulus and response. Family, peers, and media, to name a few. You are constantly [*whether you like it or not*] being socialized based on your perceived gender. Not only are you being socialized, but you are being rewarded for doing it well (Schwarz, 2017). You're a girl, you dress up and your female friends, your family, and [*hopefully*] the person you like compliments you. You've done socialization correctly. You have performed your gender correctly.

You see, this is where I'm coming from when I say, "men don't decide to look presentable." Men aren't socialized to think [*and I mean Think*] about what they look like. At least, not in the way that women are. I argue that women are socialized to look like women, but men are socialized to act like men. Are there expectations in behaviours for women? Yes. Are there expectations for appearances in men? Yes. Women are socialized to be more docile and agreeable. Men are socialized to be stronger and physically bigger [*than women*]. Everyone is encouraged to be well groomed, but men have far fewer steps. Being a manly leader has more emphasis on how you act rather than how you are dressed. So, yeah, you wear your best suit. You drink your coffee black because a leader doesn't need silly additions like sugar or syrups or cream. But you also have assertively spoken to your staff. You took control of the room. Maybe you lost your temper but at least your coworkers know not to mess with you. You acted like the man you were socialized to be.

And your lovely female coworker who you can't remember the name of took the time to get dolled up for work. What a treat. Is she a hard worker? I guess. But damn she looks good.

It's incredible to think how closely women are tied to the idea of aesthetics [*did I say incredible? I meant insufferable*]. So much of a woman's perception is tied to how she looks. I think about it any time pop culture followers are surprised that a conventionally attractive female celebrity does something bad. I think about it when men who care about their personal hygiene are perceived as gay. I think about it when Black women tell stories about how people thought they would be bitches before they spoke to them. [*I think about it when my mood suddenly dampens when I don't like how I look.*]

That is where I'm coming from when I say, "I can't separate aesthetics from femininity." Women, femmes, people who were assigned female at birth; we're socialized to care [*a lot*] about what we look like. My personality takes a backseat to my appearance. This is why, when I want to be perceived as someone who has their life together, I get dressed up and take extra steps in my skincare routine. This is why, growing up, if I saw a man who really cared about his appearance, his masculinity was questioned. Or, if a man really, *really* cares about what he's wearing, he gets suspicious glances and eyebrow raises.

But, even when a man partakes in an aesthetic, the skater-boy, the hipster, the musician, I don't think he's *actively* trying to look like that. He just *looks* like that.

He wasn't socialized like that. I was.

[*Like I said, we're all encouraged to be well-groomed. Just don't do it in a girly way.*]

It's funny; I still find myself feeling a little guilty when I feel bad about not putting on makeup in the morning. You see, I wear makeup for myself [*no one else…?*] and I want to look pretty for myself [*no one else…!*]. If I don't wear that makeup, then I don't feel pretty. Once again, I want to look pretty

for myself. But newsflash: it's not just for myself. I feel self-conscious not because I'm not pretty but because I'm worried whether other people will find me pretty. I tell myself that I've done a good job decentering men, but I still feel disappointed when I don't get complimented on the street. I feel like I've failed [*to be a woman is to perform, amirite?*]. I think I feel worse, though, when I don't get complimented by women. We've all realized that we won't appear presentable to fit The Aesthetic anymore, and perhaps there's a new Female Aesthetic [*the one where we look pretty for ourselves*] that we are striving towards. So, why do I still feel guilty?

I think the idea of even fitting into an aesthetic [*could be*] patriarchal. We couldn't look good for ourselves without being told that we must look good for men. We couldn't wear makeup for ourselves if we didn't wear makeup for men. The patriarchy did a damn good job of conditioning women to think of Them when they are alone. Even when we couldn't give less of a fuck about them.

But…I don't do that. So, what, I have a moment where I desire romantic attention. Does that mean all the work I've done to decenter men is now futile? Does my favourite lip gloss that I bought for myself automatically belong to this Imaginary Man I'm trying to impress? [*Why don't we walk outside the Shae Box for a second.*] Do women who dress nice to get the romantic attention of other women not fit into this? Is what they are doing futile? What about women who don't experience romantic attraction at all? Are they, themselves, futile?

[*Stepping more outside the Shae Box*] There are women on this Female Aesthetic Scale who intentionally don't present in a typically 'feminine' way. I'm not just talking about 'tomboys' or women who dress more gender-neutral. Women who truly, and intentionally present in a [*I guess we can call it*] masculine sense.

Women who are butch, or a woman who is LGBTQ+ and embraces identity markers that are associated with traditional expressions of masculinity ("Butch", Dictonary.com), make a conscious effort in their aesthetic to embrace 'traditional masculinity.' I think this is an interesting case [*and further proves my point on how important aesthetics is*] because, while they were socialized as women, a man has been removed from the equation. They aren't dressing specifically for the attention of men. They aren't presenting as masculine so other socialized males can reward them for performing their gender 'correctly.' I feel it would be a bit reductive to say they are dressing specifically to attract women [*because a woman wouldn't have to specifically present as masculine to attract a woman*] but the butch aesthetic is very prominent and relevant in the queer women's space. In a book called *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, author Sue-Ellen Case is theorizing on butch-femme dynamics. She notes "…as Nestle describes it: 'none of the butch women I was with…ever represented themselves to me as men; they did announce themselves as tabooed women who were willing to identify their passion for other women by wearing clothes that symbolized the taking of responsibility" (Cleto, 1999, p. 195).

That's the point. They aren't presenting as men. They are presenting as 'masculine' women. The 'masculine' in this case is completely removed from A Man and is now a part of a woman. This is 'masculine' that resonates with some queer women and is central to her queer identity.

[*I, also, think she may just like how she looks. Isn't that the point?*]

Speaking of an aesthetic that is central to a woman's queer identity [*and stepping out even further from the Shae Box*], we introduce a new aesthetic: the Stud.

Women who are studs, or Black masculine identifying lesbians (Chesson, 2021) exist in an interesting plane of combining Black female identity and queer female identity.

I think people who are not Black were socialized to view Black women in a specifically masculine way. Black women are socialized to be viewed as sexual deviants, out of control, angry, and uncivilized. "Black femininity became synonymous with ruthless seduction and rage and resulted in the labelling of Black women as un-feminine and non-human" (Gammage, 2021, p. 9).

Labelling Black women as un-feminine. [*Hmm…*]

I think that's what makes the Stud Aesthetic such a powerful thing. Like how the butch aesthetic exists separate from A Man, the stud aesthetic exists separate from white people. Studs are a uniquely Black, queer, woman aesthetic. "Many studs have unknowingly formed their masculinity (and femininity) in the sacred spaces where their cishet family and friends were allowed to be their full selves…Places, where everyone wore their absolute best to dance, eat, talk shit, and commune after what may have been a heavy-laden week" (Chesson, 2021, para. 5).

So, while a stud may not be presenting specifically as A Man, she is presenting in an intentional, Black masculine aesthetic. An aesthetic that is specifically relevant to her Black identity. An aesthetic that does not exist in relation to an Imaginary White Person.

[*I, also, think she may just like how she looks, too. See what I'm getting at here?*]

Going back to when I said the idea of fitting into aesthetic [*could be!*] patriarchal; I think aesthetics like these reassure me that all this aesthetic talk isn't entirely futile. At least I know there are women who adhere to an aesthetic separate from the eyes of A Man.

I have moments, though, where I go back and forth on the Female Aesthetic Scale. On one side, I do my skincare routine because I want my skin to be healthy. I use lip liner because it compliments my lips. I wear perfume because I love how it smells on me. On the other side, I wear shirts and pants that compliment my figure. I think about how attractive a good-smelling woman is. I view myself, outside myself, and wonder if I am approachable to men.

The problem [*if I should call it that*] isn't just that aesthetics is tied to femininity. I think it's that now so much of what I do has so much meaning behind it. Honestly, I hate that I think so much about this. So much of what other women and I do [*yes, that includes studs and butches, I fear*], has so much nuance behind it. There are classes and schools of thought dedicated to this. And it's going to keep going. As long as there's a patriarchy, as long as there's a makeup and fashion and overall beauty industry, as long as there's femininity and masculinity, as long as there's socialization, it's going to keep going. As long as young girls starve themselves or fatten themselves up to put that fat in a more desirable place, it's going to keep going. But I've done the work. I've unlearned dressing for men, now my red lipstick is a radical feminist choice. I've unlearned superficial choice feminism, now I wear red lipstick because it looks nice. And, you know what, I'm a woman who experiences romantic attraction. So yes, I wear the red lipstick for men. But wait, I don't wear red lipstick for men. It's actually super feminist of me to wear red lipstick. Who am I kidding, feminism isn't red lipstick. It's for me. And the men I like. But wait-

[*"Male fantasies, male fantasies," Margaret Atwood says. "Is everything run by male fantasies? It's all a male fantasy." She smiles while I look in the mirror, picking at my face, staring until I see something wrong. "You are your own voyeur"* (Atwood, 2011, p. 441).]

III.

Aesthetics in Romance.

A$AP Rocky, an American rapper. Dominic Fike, an American musician. Kento Yamazaki, a Japanese actor. Riz Ahmed, a British actor. Steven Yeun, an American actor. Skepta, a British rapper. Depending on the day, Shawn from Boy Meets World [*but only the seasons when he's dating Angela*].

When someone asks me what I'm looking for in a partner, physically, I name these men. [*They don't look the same. But they match a ~vibe~ I'm going for. "Pretty Boys" I like to call them.*]

It's weird to think of another person as 'fitting into your aesthetic.' That's what a type is, essentially. Let's say that, rather than another person fitting into your aesthetic, you find someone who compliments your aesthetic. Opposites attract. Sometimes they don't.

I find that I have to think a little harder about whose aesthetic I fit into because my aesthetic is seen through a filter. A filter of black skin. A guy [*non-Black or Black*] can say he wants a woman he can go to a café with, but that doesn't always mean a Black woman. Or a woman of colour. Women of colour are their own 'type' that some men go for.

I feel weird admitting this, but I used to be a bit more radical with my opinions on racial preferences. [*Don't get me wrong, they're still racist.*] Now, I find myself not being as concerned with them as much, in regards to others. When I was younger, if a man didn't date Black women, there was something

inherently problematic about him. I didn't really consider the idea of racial fetishism because racism was something that was outwardly negative. A non-Black man wanting to 'try' a Black woman out wasn't racist to me, because how could a racist see a Black woman in a romantic way? It wasn't until high school, and entering university that I really let the idea of fetishism sink in. Before, I understood the issues with only seeking out Black women but [*to be frank*] I didn't care because I wanted to be desired. If that desire came from my Black skin, then all the better. I think my de-radicalization of racial preferences came when I saw Black men who dated white women. When I was younger, I was exposed to a lot of Black men who would seek out white women because "Black women were too ghetto." They wanted 'submissive' white women who would give them light-skinned daughters. It made me mad. I mean, how could it not? Black women aren't ghetto; your mother is a Black woman! That white girl's family would probably hate you! I would go into tangents about how backward that line of thinking was. I would find myself getting frustrated. Are they being dense on purpose? You don't really think white women are 'less ghetto' than Black women, do you? I would look into myself [*I would project my perception of myself.*] I'm not 'ghetto' [*not that there's anything wrong with that!*] in a traditional sense, so what do you mean you don't want a Black woman for that reason?

And then we went about our day. This Black man [*whoever he is*] is dating his white girlfriend and I'm minding my own business. He's not checking for me; I'm not checking for him. I'm not his type, so he does not pursue me. And thus, I live peacefully. He does too.

My de-radicalizing of racial preferences [*kinda*] stops at Black men and white women. It's such a specific case, ya know? There are still Black men who have this "I hate Black women" mentality, but then there are Black men who are simply just dating white women. There are non-Black men who date women of their own ethnicities, or women outside of their ethnicities. [*Those ones kind of worry me a bit.*]

Whether you or I like it or not, people will notice that I am Black [*Humans are visual creatures!*]. I'm okay with not fitting into a certain men's aesthetic. But if I do, how can I know that it's not superficial? Are you a man who dates Black women, or a man who Dates Black Women?

I read this reading by bell hooks where she talks about 'eating the other.' She spoke about how white college students talked about sleeping with every race of woman they could. She said, "To these young males and their buddies, fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind white 'innocence' and enter the world of 'experience'" (hooks, 2014, p.368). She said that fucking the Other would change them in some way. It was a life experience for them. A crazy time in college. [*Oh dear…*] That, weirdly, sounds like many of the sentiments that Black women had in my early internet days. "A Black woman will change your life," they said. And that's what I thought. I had to change someone's life. My Black womanhood was [*supposed to be*] magical. These non-Black men expected this of me too. Hell, these Black men expect it. It's almost like a Black manic pixie dream girl. She takes you down the aisles of the beauty supply

store and tells you which products do wonders for your hair. If you're Black, she's someone you can rub shea butter onto and help her unbraid her hair. If you're not Black, she can teach different 'Black trends.' If you're white, she can make fun of you for not being able to handle spice. She's always doing something for her man. She raises your social capital. If you're Black, you two are a Black power couple, saving the sanctity of the Black community. If you aren't Black, you can say you've 'tried' a Black girl.

Am I even capable of that? Am I ready to be part of a Black power couple? Am I prepared to teach someone about my hair? Do they even want that? Will I be okay if they don't?

[*Notice how all my problems started with the internet.*]

I think about the Black women on the internet and their white partners. "Haha," they say. "I say I hate white people but then I go home to my white boyfriend." I cringe a little bit. I wonder if they have the same thought processes that I had. They had to have, right? I think you must, in order to make jokes like that. Do they also toss and turn thinking about what it means to be The Black Girlfriend? Are they afraid of being turned into a Black manic pixie dream girl?

[*Notice how all my problems started with the internet…*]

I'm giggling thinking about how earlier I said that I was frustrated that everything I do has nuance to it. It really does. It doesn't matter if a man is Black or not, I still have to wonder if he would date a Black woman. If he is non-Black, I have to wonder if I'm something he's trying out. Someone for fun, not to take home. If he's Black, I have to wonder if I'm expected to uphold traditional Black family ideals, upholding the Black patriarch and giving him an heir. Sometimes, I wonder how other women of colour feel. Sometimes, I wonder if it's even possible for me not to be fetishized in this way. Sometimes, I wonder if I'm my type's type. If the men I named would go for a woman like me. Sometimes, I wonder if it was really beneficial to read about all these nuances before I entered the dating scene. Maybe I'd be less afraid.

[*Maybe I'd learn my lesson the really hard way.*]

IV.
Aesthetics in Revolution?

I've never been ashamed of my African identity [*not once*]. But, when I watched Black Panther (dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018), I think it changed my relationship with my African-ness. It was [*something magical*] seeing Africans portrayed in a complex and beautiful way. As *All the Stars* by Kendrick Lamar ft. SZA plays at the end credits of the film, I leave the theatre a different person. I am the Ethereal East African.

The Ethereal East African has her flag in her Instagram bio. She reps her country proudly. She posts about whatever's going on in her home country. She makes inside jokes with other Ethereal East Africans. She has impeccable bone structure, supple skin, and an amazing physique. She is proud to be East African.

[*I'm glad I can see myself in her.*]

I was speaking with my sister about seeing people walk around with a Palestinian keffiyeh. ("A[n] Arab kerchief, worn as a headdress" ["Keffiyeh", Oxford Dictionary]). We pointed out that we both thought it looked cool. I remember feeling guilty. People wearing Palestinian keffiyehs aren't wearing them to Look Cool. It's a show of support for the Palestinian people.

I can't remember how old I was [*I was definitely young*] but I remember seeing the phrase "being beautiful is revolutionary." As a young aesthete and an aspiring social justice warrior, this was right up my alley.

In a very specific context, I think this phrase is really meaningful. There was never a time that I felt ashamed about my cultural Sudanese clothing [*I can attribute this to going to a middle that was most Middle Eastern and South Asian, and by the time I got to high school, xenophobia was soooo 2014*]. Sudanese clothing is beautiful. And I think, being a person of colour living in the West, that can be a really revolutionary thing to think.

I was constantly fed a certain Aesthetic. As long as I stuck by it, I would be safe. And I watched my young peers of colour be ridiculed for matching the Aesthetic of back home. Deviating from the Western Aesthetic [*whatever that is, I think. They don't even know*]. I think that's why I feel so moved when I see people wearing their culture clothing. Something so simple feels so important. I think that's why certain movements have a Certain Look.

If I think of a Black American activist, they have an Afro, sunglasses, and gold jewelry. It's simple. An Afro is revolutionary because Black people, globally, are dictated by their hair. Relaxers, perms, and hot combs all exist to 'tame' the Black hair. Sunglasses evoke imagery of the Black Panther Party members in the United States. An organization created to uplift a historically battered community. Gold jewelry is often present in Black American aesthetics. Stacks of gold rings, gold chains, gold teeth jewelry [*grillz, for the cool kids*]; all are meaningful to the look of revolution. These are deviations or responses or results of being a part of a dominant Aesthetic. Creating your own aesthetic and demanding that it is beautiful or cool or nice to look at means a lot [*well, to me it does*].

I find myself going back and forth [*as I have this whole time; thanks for walking with me!*] on this idea that Aesthetics can be revolutionary. Why is my finding a Sudanese thobe [*"amply cut, colo[u]rful, often highly*

decorated robes worn by women…" (Campbell, 2024, para. 2)] pretty so important? It's meant to look pretty anyway.

I can argue it's not. I think to do that would be a little irresponsible though. Sure, I call it pretty. It doesn't mean anything. But, I am part of a diaspora. I am part of a population that experiences oppression based on skin colour. [*My country was part of the Muslim ban that Trump enacted, go figure.*] So, once again I call it pretty. It's not pretty because it's different. It's not pretty because it 'deviates from the norm.' It's pretty because it's meant to be. It's meant to be pretty in Sudan, and I will make it pretty in Canada.

[*So, yes. I think the keffiyeh looks pretty cool.*]

V.

Aesthetics in the Self! or The Power of Like

I like pop, rap, and R&B. I'm starting to enjoy jazz music. I like music in English, Spanish, Japanese, and Korean. Sometimes French. Sometimes Portuguese [*one song in Russian; thanks Tik Tok!*]. I like love songs performed or written by women. I like listening to male musicians I find attractive.

I like saying I like these things.

I like Jordan Peele, Wes Anderson, Hayao Miyazaki, Boots Riley, and Sofia Coppola.

I like saying I like these people.

I like being Sudanese. I like Sudanese food. I like Sudanese cultural clothing. I like the landscape of Sudan.

I like saying I like these things.

I like 'pretty boys.'

I like saying I like these things.

I like the 'clean girl' aesthetic. I like vanilla-scented things. I like dainty gold jewelry. I like no-makeup makeup looks.

I like saying I like these things.

I like being socially aware. I like being a feminist. I like being an ally. I like being intersectional. I like trying to decolonize myself.

I like saying I like these things.

I think people need to be aesthetes sometimes. Don't overanalyze what you like and what you don't. But, think about how central they are. Humans are visual creatures [*!!!*] I don't think it's out there to say we like pretty things. We like things that make us feel good.

We need to step outside ourselves for a little bit. Aesthetics are so fun because they're so personal. They can mean so much. And sometimes, they don't mean anything. They exist to look pretty. As a woman, I definitely relate to existing to look pretty. [*I'm growing, though.*]

Everyone likes things. I think everyone also likes saying they like things. The things they like *are* them. Everything you like, everything you've liked about someone else, everything you dislike, it's you.

[*It's not shallow to say that you like to say you like things. You've taken time to decide what you like. You've incorporated yourself into what you like. That's you! You like saying you like you!*]

[*I think everyone would benefit from saying they like themselves out loud, more often. I know it benefitted me.*]

[*Things that helped me get my point across, or-*] References

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So You Like Taking Photos Huh: A Study About Resistance Against Digital Data Colonialism Through Meaningful Inefficiencies

Daman Preet Singh

Abstract

Taking photographs to capture moments is not a novel activity. Taking pictures is an activity we are so accustomed to that it often escapes conscious thought; it has become habitual and ingrained in the human experience. The digital age of photography brings a sense of comfort in photography that has made documenting memories easier, but it also brings a new form of surveillance and data harvesting. Digital photo cataloguing applications like Google Photos and Apple Photos quantify every image they store and capture metadata and location data. These applications process and assign the images to 'auto-generated' albums without user authorization. This study aims to understand what data is being captured and to what extent by digital photo cataloguing applications. Withdrawing from digital photographic mediums, this study uses analog film mediums to capture daily life. Throughout this experience, I conducted an auto-ethnographic study on photography practices. Findings introduced and proved the primary concern of data surveillance in digital photo cataloguing applications. While the process of resistance proved to be inefficient on some ends, it provided great insight into how analog media is a strong medium of resistance against digital data colonialism.

Keywords

Data colonialism, meaningful inefficiency, photography, resistance, auto-ethnography, data harvesting

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Documenting Memories in the Digital Age and the Perils of Digital Data, Data Harvesting

In the essence of the form, the process of taking a photograph is intentional and deliberate, it captures a fleeting moment and "creates [a] body or mortifies it" (Barthes, 2010, p. 11). Mediating this documentation experience through digital media is enriched with interactivity and efficiency. The digital camera redefined the boundaries of capturing moments; it is not just an intentional activity, it is not the "death" of an intimate moment anymore (Barthes, 2010, p. 15). The mediation is not just a camera now; the ability to take pictures on the phone introduces convenience that takes away from the 'essence' of photography that Barthes (2010) describes. Digital mediation of photography introduces commodification and collection of data, whether the image is taken on a mobile phone or a digital camera. On a digital camera, each image is embedded with metadata, which is structural data concerning the exposure settings of an image, as well as archival data. A mobile phone camera introduces a third element of geographical data; each image is 'geo-tagged' with an approximated location of where the image was taken; this, in turn, allows for cataloguing software (Apple Photos, Google Photos, and so on) to configure the data for "capture" (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011, as cited in Couldry and Meijas, 2019, p. 339). The "capture" of data comes to the surface in processing and cataloguing images into auto-generated albums [Figures 2 - 3].

Couldry and Meijas (2019) define "personal data" as "data of actual or potential relevance to persons, whether collected from them or from other persons or things" (p. 339). The personal data in these images is treated as a "natural resource" (p. 339) for harvesting by cataloguing apps to create slideshows, giving recommendations concerning the mapped locations and so on. This harvesting moves online to social media by sharing the same images online to create an online presence that indulges in disciplinary regimes of the social media platforms. Social media platforms heavily influence the activity of digitally documenting one's daily life, and there is a "threat of invisibility" if you do not engage in the platform's rules (Bucher, 2012, p. 1171). For a personal account, this threat of invisibility is not having one's community know what they have been doing. As a long-term Instagram user, my account is a social catalogue of all my day-to-day activities.

My study focuses on Instagram as a digital documentation platform using digital cameras and resists posting daily activities onto my feed to resist voluntary data surrender. While heavily analog, my study is ironically still in the realm of digital media by engaging with technology for scanning and sharing, where the project engages in Gordon and Walter's (2016) notion of "meaningful inefficiencies." The data was documented using film photography to engage in the

materiality of the art form, and the archiving process was done by memory to invoke memory, structuring the project around memory and materiality as resistance against digital data colonialism.

The Process of Shooting Film

Barthes (2010), in Camera Lucida, establishes three key practices for photography: The *Operator*, the *Spectator*, and the *Spectrum* of the photograph. The operator is the photographer, the Spectator is the person glancing at the image, and the Spectrum is the person or thing photographed (p. 9). While to Barthes (2010), the Operator's practice was foreign. For myself, that was the only practice I ever engaged in. Contrary to the impatience Barthes found in the practice of an operator, I embody that slow process in my practice. The operator's practice provided the foundation for studying the tangible order: I had to take pictures of a fleeting moment from my own perspective to tell a story. On the other hand, the spectator would engage only in the process after the images had been processed; this is the practice I found myself invoking while archiving my images.

The study involved resisting documenting my day-to-day activity on digital devices and social media platforms and doing it using analog methods like photographic film. The process of documenting this experience for research was two-fold, with videos to visualize the activity and the creation of a zine to engage in the recollection of thought. For about 25 days, I documented all of my activities on photographic film using two cameras that had to be on my person at all times. I shot eight rolls of film, totalling up to 168 images, with no metadata, geographical mapping, or digital archival data. I did not keep a digital journal to capture any archival data as the activity went on to keep the project as analog as possible, given that I would not usually do the same if I were to take photos of daily, mundane things. Instead, the archival data was created in the form of recollection, which was mediated through a reflective artifact, a zine.

As described earlier, taking photos is not something I do deliberately, but introducing material limitations to the process enforced active engagement on my end. Moving to use only my film cameras involved introducing numerous limitations, including but not limited to the price, number of images, choice of lens, choice of film stock, choice of film type, and so forth. Figure 1 showcases the cameras used for this project. Both cameras were equipped with fixed lenses, also known as 'prime' lenses; both cameras were also completely manual and analog. Limiting myself by lens choice enforced the first crucial limitation: framing capacity. Prime lenses, by nature, force a photographer to be more conscious when approaching a scene; given that condition, I chose a wide focal length as I had to consider that my subjects would be at face distance to me.

Figure 1

Image of analog film cameras used for the study.

My film stock choices were dictated by the lighting conditions I would be working under, the core limitation I observed moving away from digital photography was the ability to adapt to changing lighting, making taking pictures a convenient activity. Figure 2 exhibits the different kinds of film I shot, including 35mm and 120 film formats. 35mm film rolls had 36 exposures each regardless of what camera I used, whereas the 120 film format exposures are more flexible and dictated by what camera the film is being used in. The camera chosen for this activity was a 6x6 format, resulting in only 12 square exposures per roll and making the process more intentional. I chose a black-and-white film stock because of the format's ability to be more adaptable to consistently changing light and dropping my concerns about lighting affecting the colours of my final images, given that colour film does not fare well at higher sensitivity. Black and white film has more latitude regarding how far it can be pushed. 'Pushing' film is the process of exposing film for a higher ISO than it is meant to be shot at. ISO or film speed is the standardized light sensitivity of film, it is also the third pillar of photograph exposures. For my activity, the chosen film stock was HP5, which is at box speed supposed to be shot at 400 ISO, but I proceeded to shoot it at 800 for the most part and push it even beyond to 1600, which resulted in really contrasty and grainy images.

When I knew beforehand I would be in daylight while taking pictures, I chose to shoot low-speed colour film. My choices throughout the activity were dictated by the lighting and intensity of the activity I would do; lighting dictated my lens and film choices, whereas the intensity dictated if I would use only a 12-exposure roll [120] or a 36-exposure roll [35mm]. I shot colour only in the 120 format and had to rush to finish the rolls, given how little time I had in daylight. I chose Cinestill 50D, a daylight-balanced film stock with warmer tones and low sensitivity, producing low-grain and high-resolution images for the colour film stock.

The process of shooting film is documented here; the video briefly showcases the process of shooting, developing, and scanning film. Developing film on my end gave me control over how my images look in the result, from how grainy I wanted my images to be and how contrasty or flat my images come out. Since I pushed all my film, given the changing lighting conditions, I increased all my development processes to compensate for the underexposed film. Scanning film myself provides the same flexibility, scanning on my camera to digitize negatives provides control and more resolution.

For about a month after taking these images, I withdrew from posting them to my Instagram feed and held only an offline archive of them. Still, there was 'anxiety' about not being seen on my Instagram account. I consistently engage with my Instagram account, which gives me a sense of control as I participate in my community by sharing what I do regularly. Since I had not posted for a month, I felt 'invisible' (Bucher, 2012), which resulted in my return to Instagram. Even though I did post back to Instagram, it engaged in Gordon and Walter's (2016) notion of meaningful inefficiency. While voluntarily engaging in Instagram, I did not work within the system as intended, rather ironically.

Taking Pictures as an Act of Surveillance.

My study was informed by my experience with photo cataloguing applications like Apple Photos, which continuously captured more data than I needed or wanted for photos I took on my phone. I observed how much data Apple Photos captured from each image I took. On the surface, it seemed to be just archival data. However, upon further investigation, I observed how every image was catalogued. Faces, content, and textual information were scanned in each image to be used for archiving into catalouges..

Figure 2

Metadata information captured by a mobile phone camera.

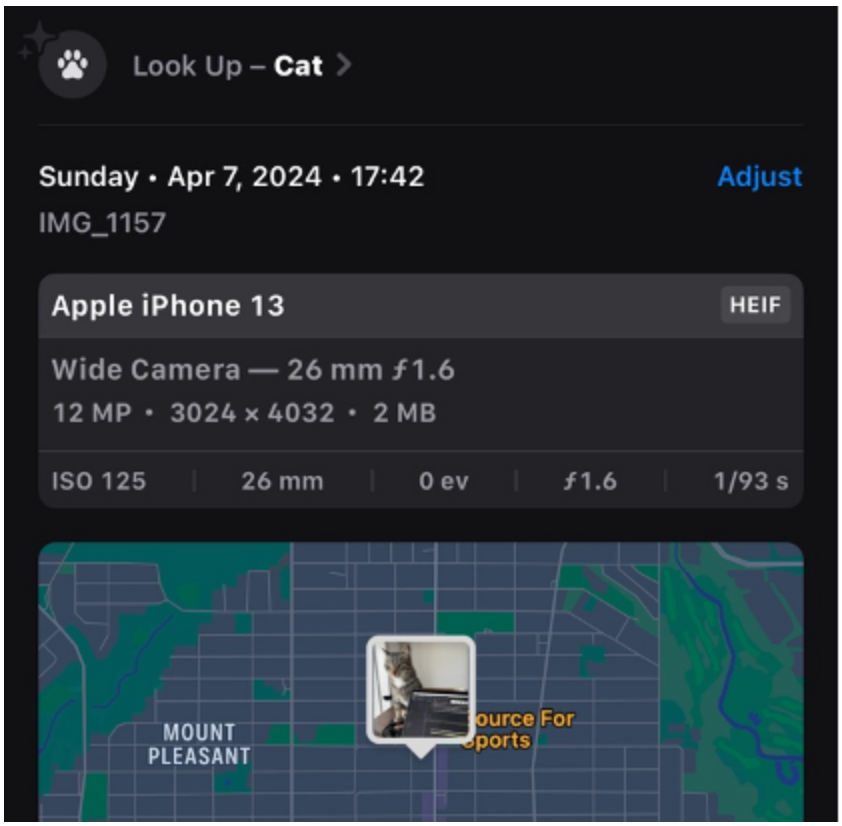


Figure 2 demonstrates the metadata captured in an image of a cat, and it exhibits the amount of data each image was marked with. This included geo-tagging and image scanning to recommend a reverse image set. The interactivity of digital image capture found in these cataloguing applications operates in a sense to control the users, as Andrejevic (2019) argues that the end goal of surveillance is to have "total information capture" through "more and better data" (p. 11). He uses Deluze (1992) to construct a framework of "automated surveillance," with the key characteristics being "environmentality, operationalism, and framelessness" (Andrejevic, 2019, p. 10). The latter two are observed in cataloguing applications, and even offline, the images are subject to surveillance.

Figure 3

Memory album created by Apple Photos for concerts.

Figure 4

Memory album created by Apple Photos for location setting.

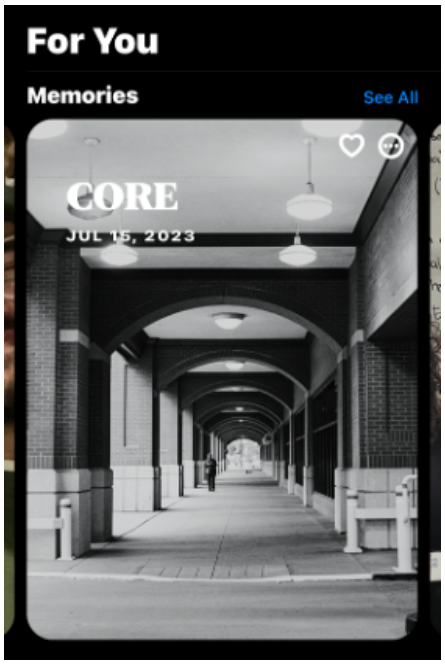
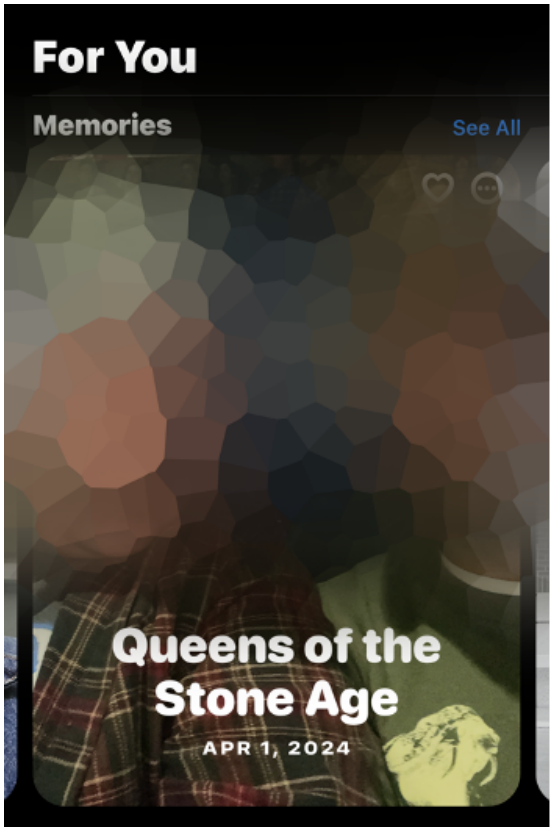


Figure 5

Memory album created by Apple Photos for a specific event.



Figures 3 – 5 exhibit 'memories,' which are slideshows created from images in my catalogue. None of these images were backed up to my iCloud drive; every image on my phone is offline stored to not have all my pictures up for digital data commodification. It became clear that every image in my offline catalogue was subject to surveillance. Figure 5 includes a slideshow archive of a concert; neither these images nor videos were uploaded to my iCloud. This made it to a catalogued carousel that scanned through the images to title it "Queens of the Stone Age," surprisingly, none of these images included any information that could be traced back to Queens of the Stone Age unless the videos were analyzed and traced back to the music in the capture. This exhibited the frameless nature of surveillance. Andrejevic (2019) described it as having no "clear delimitation on what is to be collected, sorted, and processed" (p. 12) and through this observation, it becomes evident that the data capture has permeated into mundane daily activities.

The surveillance through the cataloguing applications also exhibits Couldry and Meijas's (2019) discussion of the naturalization of personal data capture (p. 339). For capture, raw image data from everyday mundane activities is "configured" (p. 339). Raw data is considered useless unless image data can be commodified and assigned a unit for the market. This surveillance makes it onto social media practices through documenting daily life on a platform like Instagram. The platform captures everyday social acts and translates them into profitable data by establishing social rationality around reducing the labour to be "just sharing" (Couldry and Meijas, 2019, p. 340). This frameless data capture through cataloguing applications and platforms tracks a "permanent feature of life" (p. 344). It moves by creating a sense that this data is irrelevant, and the capture does not mean much to make the voluntary surrender much easier.

Resisting Cataloguing Applications and Digital Photography

Digital cataloguing applications and platforms like Instagram form a framework of efficient civic systems by appropriating existing technology (Gordon and Walter, 2016) and enhancing the experience of taking and archiving pictures. Taking pictures is so streamlined and 'efficient' that it becomes second nature to facilitate governance over the captured content, as observed in the 'memories' catalogued in Figures 3-5. Instagram is built on sharing one's life to 'save the moment' in an archive. The 'efficiency' in the system is to play actively by the platform's rules to stay active and

visible in your community. Those who act as good users get rewarded in this civic engagement system with the private sector.

Such enforced civic systems demand 'civic inefficiencies' to counteract the dominant design values and integrate "meaningful inefficiencies" (Gordon and Walters, 2016) into human life. These inefficiencies call for tools, systems, events, etc., that disrupt efficient civic systems. Gordon and Walter (2016) describe meaningful inefficiencies as recognizing and accommodating play in which the user is propelled toward action, not just labour. Furthermore, Walter describes how players voluntarily enter a system ostensibly to pursue some goal (pp. 251- 252).

Preceding my study, I involuntary surrendered my data to efficient systems, given the ease of interactivity and usability in digital mediums. My study was structured around meaningful inefficiency, creating tension between new and existing efficient systems. Shooting film became an activity of inefficiency in the streamlined system of digital image documentation. The process is slow and unnecessary, but it acted as an attempt to step back from the efficiency of modern digital system to get an oppositional gaze at it. This process employs 'play' (Gordon & Walter, 2016) as since the means of the activity were more meaningful than the end and the activity was done for the sake of doing it. Shooting film by itself is not 'meaningful' as it could just be taken as a hobby, but once a stance of active resistance is taken, it becomes a critical activity. In the study, The purpose of shooting film is to engage in a civic system of documenting daily life, but in a completely analog manner, resist data capture and governance over it for the most part. Shooting photographic film still engages in the digital media system as scanning film negatives into process involves a digital camera.

While I playfully shot my photos in an analog manner, I had to come full circle to digital media to be able to view those images, as my other option would have been complete analog printing. Analog darkroom printing is an impractical and tedious process owing to the time needed, prices, and availability of equipment.. Figures 6 – 9 are samples of the images I got during my film shooting project. While replicants of digital photos and visual memoirs of a moment, they lacked archival information.

Figure 6

Picture of a dog taken on black and white film.

Figure 7

Picture of a conference taken on black and white film.

Figure 8

Picture of a street on technicolour motion picture film.

Figure 9

Self-portrait on technicolour motion picture film.

The digitizing process introduces the exact metadata I attempted to resist, but this time, it is all meaningless because it is common metadata in my scanning gear. This EXIF data also exhibits the play of film as there is some metadata, but it is meaningless to anyone attempting to govern these images as they do not exist outside the archival data I created for them outside the EXIF. Furthermore, all metadata is erased once I convert the negatives to positives, as exhibited in Figure 10. This contrasts with the amount of EXIF data in an image from a digital camera capture, displayed in Figure 11

Figure 10

EXIF data of a film negative converted into a positive.

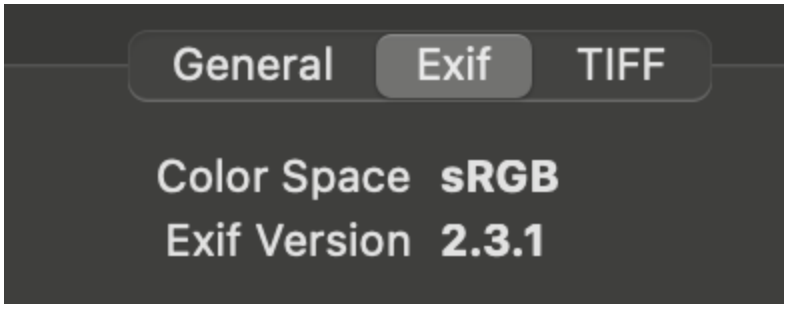


Figure 11

EXIF data of an image captured on a digital camera.

Creating a tangible archive for the images was the second play of meaningful inefficiencies employed in my study. Given that there was no archival data for my photos, I decided to create my own from memory and my experiences shooting these images. I created a zine, *Materiality & Memory*, which provides enough metadata for my film photos. At its core, making a zine as such is an act of

resistance and inefficiency as it still engages in the civic systems of image cataloguing, just in a very playful manner. While this zine was supposed to be a tangible archival document, due to the inefficiency of printing as a format, I had to publish it digitally, which exhibits the inefficiency of this attempt.

My plays on inefficiency became 'meaningful' only as they provided a new view of efficient systems. Sitting in the slow system of film allowed me to see how much data was being voluntarily surrendered to the cataloguing applications. The activity provided me with a scope of understanding of how digital cataloguing shapes me and how I could, in turn, shape it (Gordon and Walters, 2016, p. 250).

Sharing on Instagram and the Fear of Invisibility

Bucher (2012) describes a regime of visibility in Facebook's algorithm as the 'real-time feed' users believed they were seeing. The algorithm highlights what Facebook wants users to see based on how relevant and recent the post was made (pp. 1168-1169). Bucher (2012) argues that contrary to the panopticon, where the threat of permanent visibility disciplines behaviour, for platforms, there is a "threat of invisibility," which implies the fear of disappearing from the newsfeed at any given time (p. 1171). This fear shapes my social media use the most. In the case of Instagram and my study, the platform's rules shape how I document my daily life on the platform, even if the platform is created to document memories. Throughout my study, while I resisted documenting my activities on my Instagram account, I felt a sense of anxiety over not being seen by my community, as no one knew where I was, what I was up to or what I had done.

After a long gap between deliberately posting nothing, this fear of being 'unseen' found me sharing my images on my Instagram account. As I noticed in my gap between postings, the images I posted for work reasons would not see the same level of engagement I usually observed on my account. This displayed not only Bucher's (2012) notion but also the example of Deleuzian control in how the platform enforces a regime of control on its users. On Instagram, the rules of engagement are dictated by the algorithm that makes the user dependent on — posting consistently, using the right tools (hashtags and/or captions), and post format (reels/video-based posts, or image-based posts). As Deleuze (1992) notes, "Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt" (p.

6); the 'debt' becomes the visibility and the eventual reward from the platform for abiding by the rules of engagement.

Noticing the lack of engagement and my anxiety, I posted my images to my feed again. The fear of invisibility slowly disappeared, and I observed the engagement return to my account. This establishes Instagram as a disciplinary regime using visibility as a reward for participating in the platform. It also applies the logic of control to reinforce the logic of participation in its users. While I did engage with Instagram's rules again, I approached it with the play of meaningful inefficiency as I did not use all the right tools of engagement and made sure I was not documenting all of my personal details with the posts. My captions were humorous and poked fun at the documentary nature of this visibility regime I observed on Instagram.

Limitations and Conclusion

Through this study, I showcased how much data captured through a task is as meaningless as taking mundane photos is naturalized. The study provides insight into how analog forms act as a method of resistance against data colonialism. The experience, as intricate as it became, was limited by the inefficiency of the film form. Throughout the study, I had to engage with digital media, from documenting the experience to digitizing my negatives and presenting my zine. The equipment limited the study; my work could have been documented entirely offline using cinema film or compact discs to avoid any form of digital surveillance I was attempting to avoid. My zine was supposed to be a print artifact, but given the inability to print and time constraints with resources, I could not and had to resort to online publishing methods. This raises the question: Is it ever enough? As detailed as my attempt at resisting digital photography for personal use got, it is not feasible for anyone. Fiscally, film prices were a big factor. While my scanning setup was something I invested in before the study, that cost cannot be ignored if someone attempts to shoot, develop, and scan film independently; they would need all the equipment I have acquired over time. While I digitized my images because that is the more convenient and feasible option, my pure analog method would have been to print these images in a dark room, which is, once again, not feasible fiscally as I do not own a darkroom. Considering all this, the study becomes a feeble attempt at resisting but still opens room for discussion about how digital civic systems can be disrupted.

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Indigenized Leisure and Data Colonialist Systems: Addressing Invisible Presence Through the Visibility of Indigenous Identities Online

Taylor Van Eyk

Abstract

Social media sites and the opportunities they advertise are often promoted as facilitating community connection, creativity, and listening with others. Many facets and descriptors of social media opportunities can be related to First Nations' understanding of what comprises wellness and leisure. With this in mind, many Indigenous users may partake in social media with the expectation of a primarily leisurely online experience that would contribute to an individual's health and wellness. Couldry and Mejias' (2019) concept of 'data colonialism' frames the purpose of online spaces such as the social media platforms TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter) as having a very different goal, one removed from leisure or where leisure is nothing more than a symptom of data collection efforts. This digital auto-ethnographic project, assisted by discourse analysis, utilizes the researcher's Anishinaabe identity markers through site profiles to gather data which explores whether or not social media sites are truly a space of leisure for First Nation's users under 'data colonialism.' This project finds a clash in data collection functions and online community opportunities, which renders Indigenized leisure within the digital space a fallacy. In council with teachings from Velkova and Kaun's (2021) article Algorithmic Resistance: Media Practices and the Politics of Repair and Wemigwans' (2018) A Digital Bundle; Protecting and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Online, this project looks to the future, discussing the manipulation of social media affordances towards a true online wellness space for Indigenous users.

Keywords

Anishinaabe, New Media, Social Media, Leisure, Data Colonialism, Third-Party, Visibility, Invisibility, User Experience, Identity, Data Appropriation

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Documenting the Realizations of Anishinaabe Relevant Leisure on New Media Platforms

Introducing the Experience and Defining 'Leisure' Through World View

This project and critical media experience aims to illuminate the question: *Is it possible for the New Media or Platform Media experiences of First Nations Individuals to truly be a site of leisure in the face of expansive Data Colonialism?* This project aims to answer this question with a multistep approach that begins with defining 'leisure' as it applies to First Nation ideologies around relaxation and wellness

Entailing a digital autoethnography, this project captures the researcher's own experience as a First Nation's new/social media platform user on TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter). Therefore, it will be the researcher's actions and own identifying data that will be used to measure the extent to which data colonialism is interested in Indigenous identity markers and cultural data and how this contributes to the realization of these platforms as leisure sites. Small, in her (2007) article *Aboriginal Recreation, Leisure and the City of Calgary,* establishes this about the nature of 'leisure' as viewed within an Indigenous context.

> "The misunderstanding of Aboriginal "recreation" and "leisure" by nonAboriginal individuals and organizations occurs when, for example, dancing and singing are seen as hobbies, culturally related activities, or occupation in some cases. This is not to say that people who pursue professional dance do not do so for some greater purpose; however, hoop dancing, pow wow dance, Métis jigging, pow wow singing and any other outward expression that one may see in Aboriginal communities have the by-product of fitness and skill building. In addition, in most cases there is also a huge spiritual component to the action, as well as a traditional handing down of ways of life, cultural messaging and lessons about how to act, such as values and ethics" (pp. 112-113).

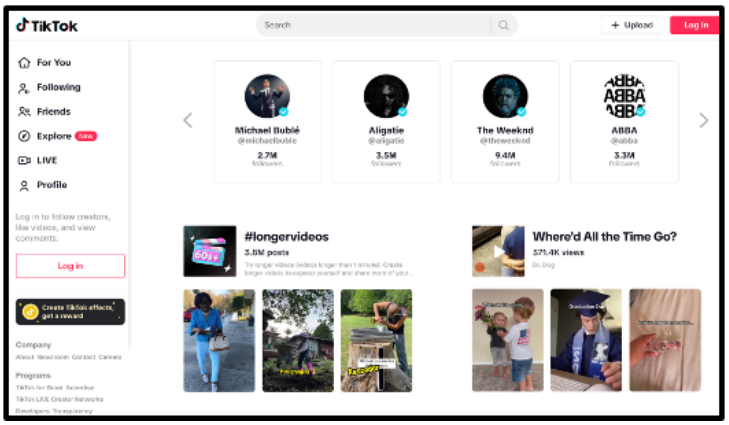
From this, we can establish that activities traditionally imagined as 'leisure' under Western standards are much more complex and serve more multifaceted purposes within Indigenous standards. It may make sense that 'leisure' viewed through Indigenous ideologies may be considered closer practices which evoke teachings, kinship maintenance, and land-based ideas of wellness and health. Small elaborates, "Leisure or recreation… is often not recognized as potentially contributing to positive communal or societal advancement. Where, then, would Aboriginal concepts and manifestations of recreation and leisure fit? For example, where would hoop dancing fit, with its physical, spiritual, and community demands? What of the elements of creative expression? Similarly,

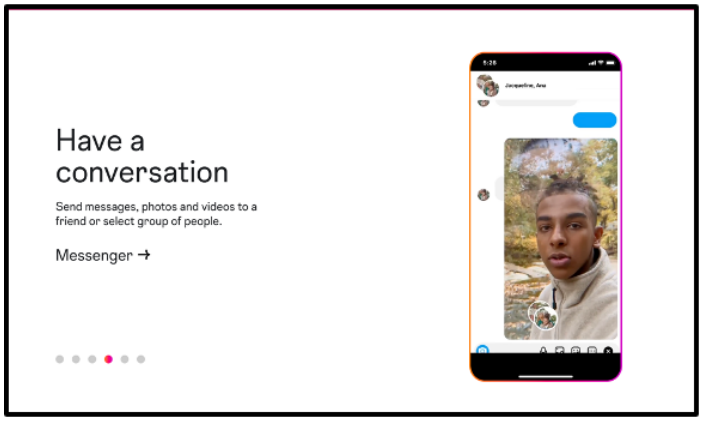
beadwork has a physical dynamic, but it is essentially creative" (2007, p.112). These elements of creativity and spirituality align well with Indigenous notions of 'leisure' attached to elements of wellness and healing which are simultaneously decolonial, land-based, and exercise responsibility to self.

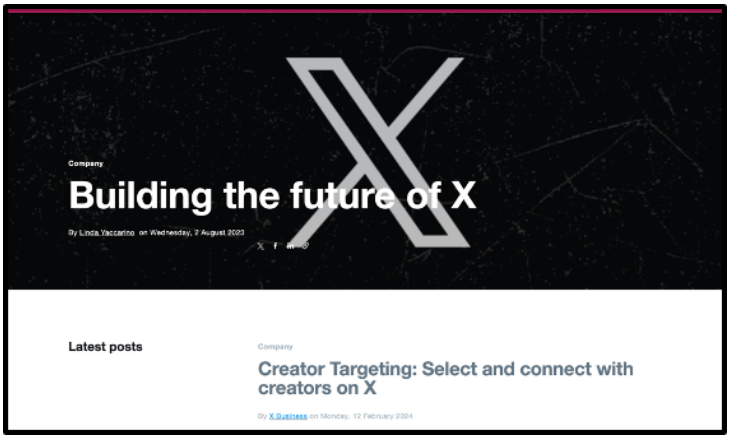
The definition of 'leisure' within an Indigenous context is shaped by an opportunity for creativity and meaningful spiritually forward practice. Often, activities of 'leisure' are categorized similarly to those of Indigenous concepts of wellness. Therefore, this project will use markers from wellness descriptions and those proposed in Small's article to identify markers of 'leisure' as they are relevant to First Nations audiences of new/social media platforms.

New/Social Media Presenting as Aligned within 'Leisure' and Wellness

Fig 1. Fig 2. Fig 3. Fig 4., pre-signup 'home' and 'about' pages advertising elements of leisure.







Referring to the 'About' or 'Home' pages of popular social media sites Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok, which are not forwardly established as business or professional networking sites, themes consistent with community, growth, creativity, passing of time, and connection to others are evoked through statements describing the platform's capabilities for users. Gonzalez and Steinberg et al.'s article *Indigenous Elders' Conceptualization of Well-being: An Anishinaabe Worldview Perspective* categorizes key routes for realizing wellness in the Anishinaabe tradition;

"• Helping others (e.g., relationships with our fellow Anishinaabe, helping our fellow Anishinaabe, helping at ceremonies, having unconditional love for one another)

• Engaging with nature (e.g., taking care of the earth and spending time in nature)

• Sustenance practices (e.g., working for our necessities, getting our food/medicines from the woods, cooking, making, walking)

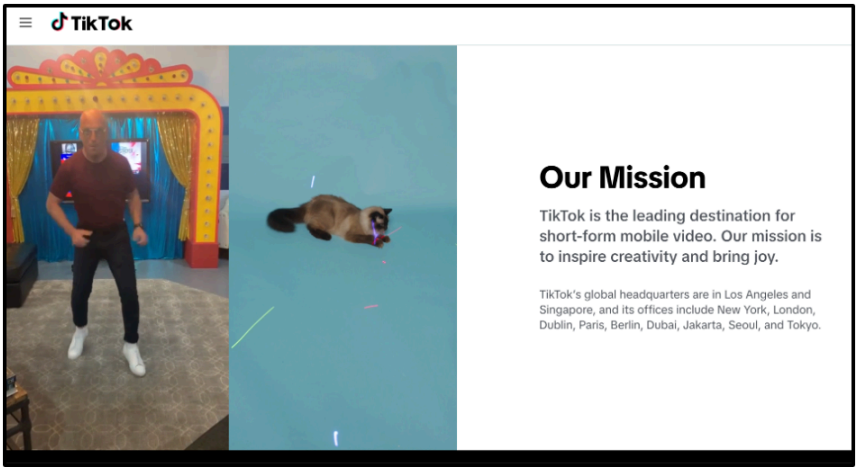
• Spiritual practices (e.g., attending ceremonies, praying, using asemaa, using our pipes, smudging, fasting, feasting)

• Listening to our Elders (e.g., asking Elders for advice, help, knowledge)

• Speaking our language" (2023, p. 8).

In one way or another, the informational pages of social media sites appeal to all of these points except for spiritual practices. Engagement with nature is appealed to by featuring content that captures the natural world, listening to elders, and helping others, which are appealed to through the advertised ability to connect and directly communicate with others. In these ways, social/new media sites present themselves as spaces facilitating the capacity for wellness in an Anishinaabe context. Therefore, they align with ideas of 'leisure' and may be expected to be sites of leisure among Indigenous audiences.

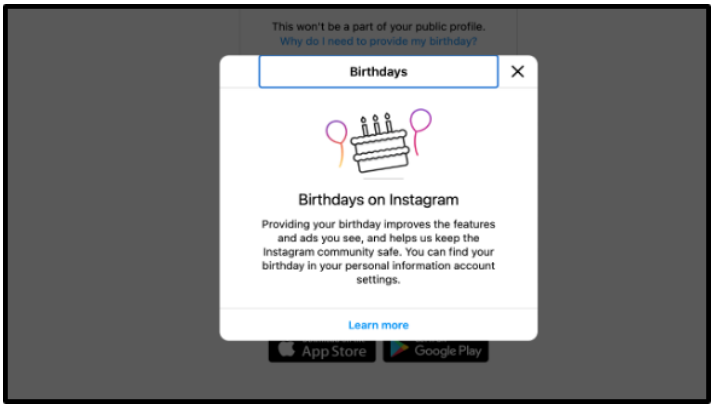
Fig 5., Tik Tok 'about' page advertising elements of leisure

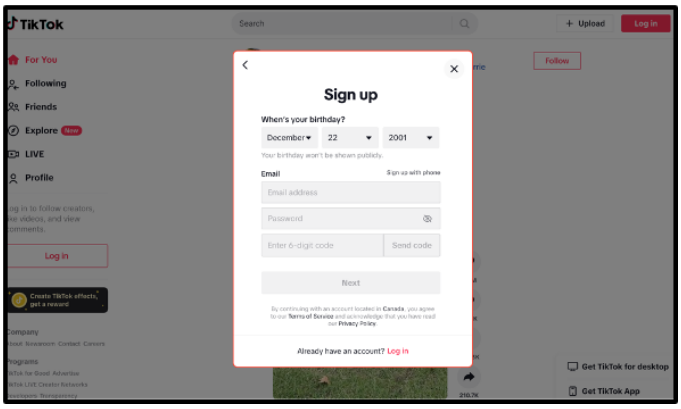


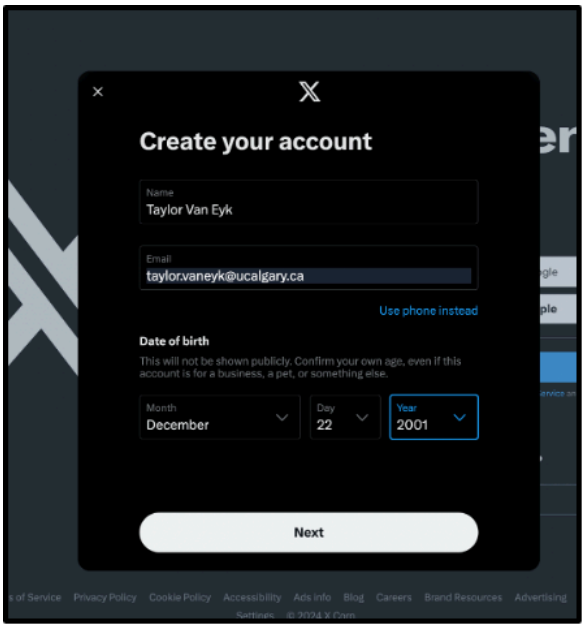
Establishing Accounts; Searching for Leisure in the Sign-Up Experience

The new media platforms (Twitter [X], Instagram, and TikTok), which present as aligned with 'leisure' and wellness, all ask users to sign up and create accounts to participate in the facilities of 'leisure' advertised on the public-facing sites. These sign-up processes all require a standardized set of information all users must provide to create an account. This information includes email or phone number with verification, birthday, and password selection.

Fig 6. Fig 7. Fig 8., standardized account signup info pages



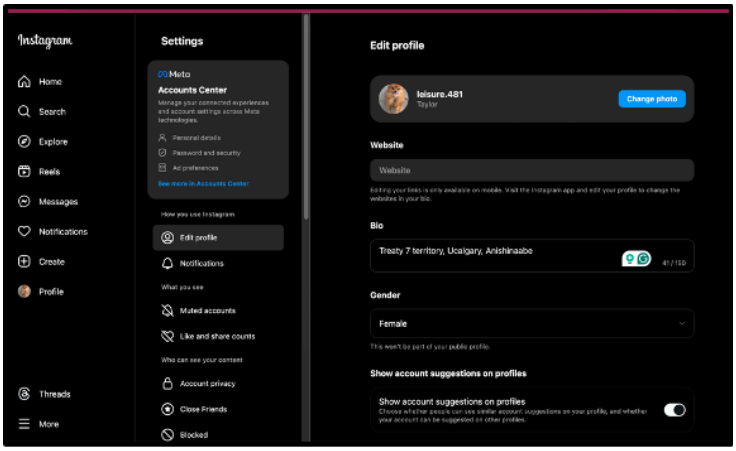


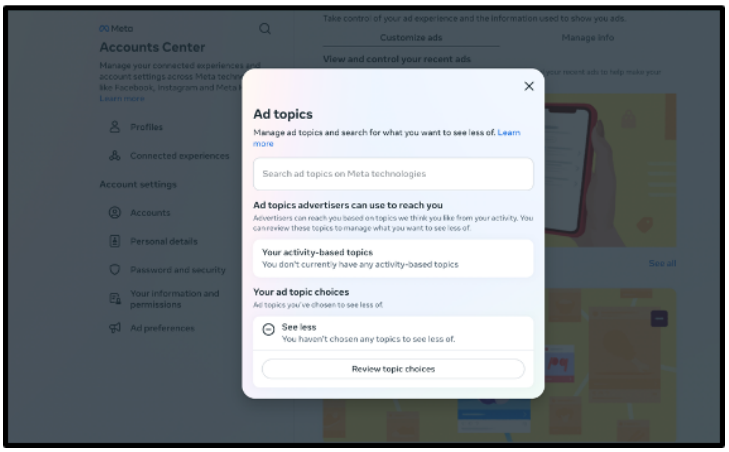


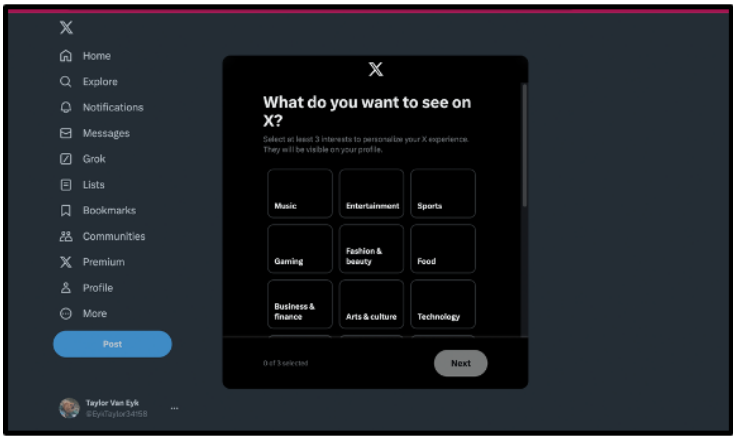
After the initial account setup, the information that the platform asks of users is then diversified according to the platform's needs for data collection. These data collection fields ask for data concerning user preferences, which are arguably more personal and related to identity than the

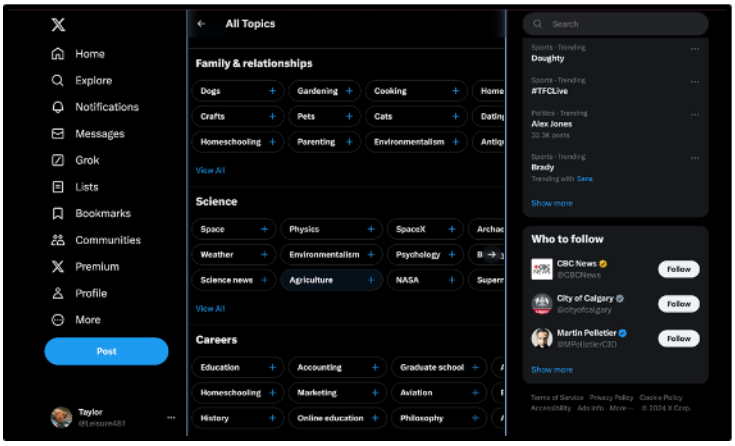
general profile-creating data. Both TikTok and X (Twitter) ask for the user's preference on which content they would like to be shown, effectively contributing to an identity profile of the user composed of interests, likes, and communities. All of the platforms also facilitate areas for users to add descriptive bios, usernames, profile pictures, and occasionally gender identifiers, as well as external links which are accessible to users and administrators viewing user profiles. At this stage in the user experience, ad preferences and data collection policies may be explored, though little meaningful information is usually initially revealed about them. Despite none of the sections here explicitly asking for user data on race, culture, or markers of marginality (apart from gender), there is plenty of opportunity for users to self-identify cultural marginality for data collectors, online communities, and administrators of the platforms. Users can include culturally relevant data and leave out others when content preferences are selected, and bios are added. This is precisely what the researcher has done with the project's accounts, utilizing these facilities to select preferences and include information relevant to their Anishinaabe identity. This contributes to an Indigenized user experience relevant to the project's primary question.

Fig 9. Fig 10. Fig 11. Fig 12., preference and preferred content selection pages



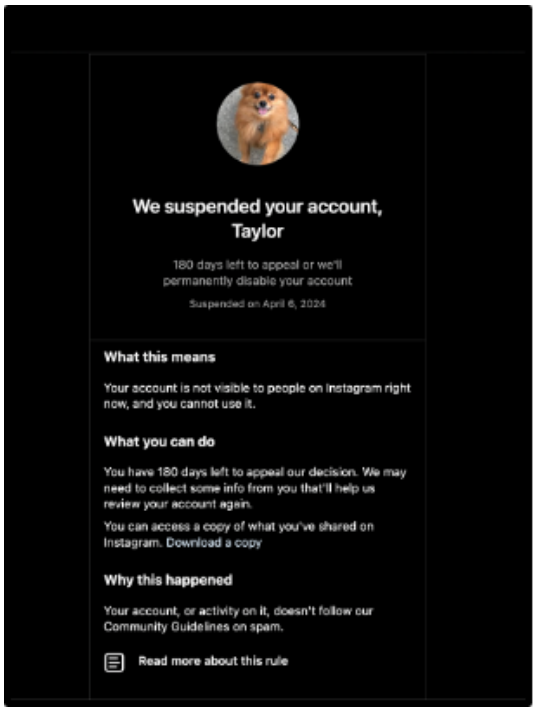


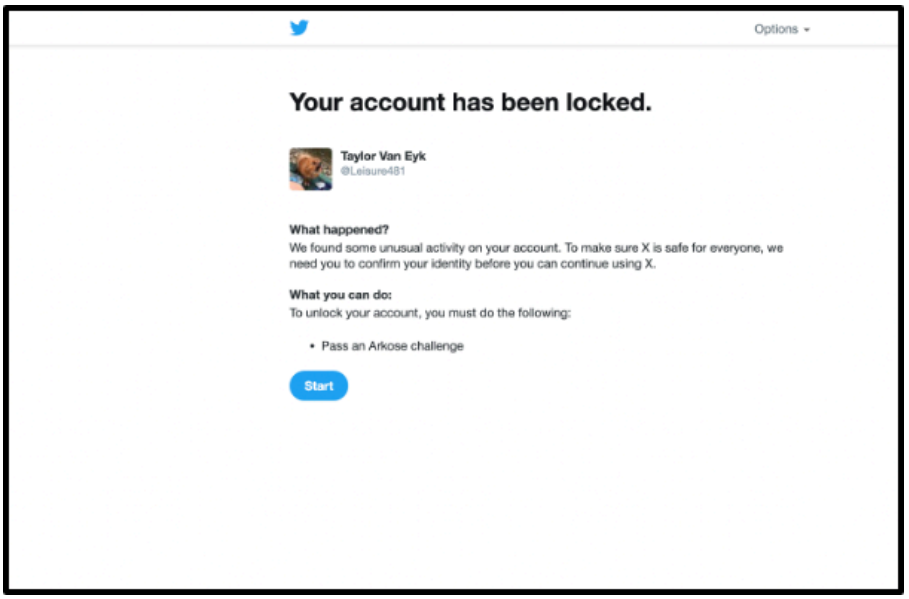




It is also worth noting that around the preference selection account-building stage, where the following lists and content shown are established, both Instagram and X (Twitter) banned the account which the researcher was creating. Both accounts were eventually successfully recovered so that the project's data collection could continue as planned.

Fig 13. Fig 14., Account ban notifications



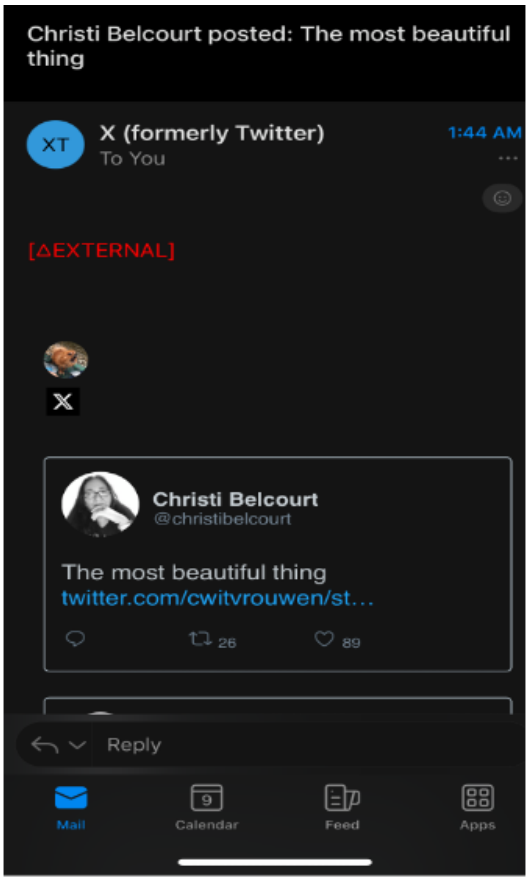


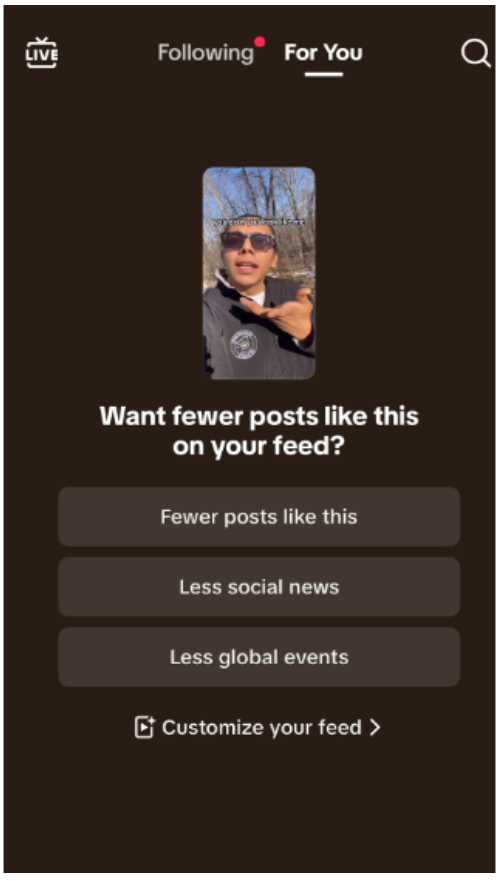
Findings: the Requests of Platform to User

After account creation, following lists on each platform were composed of Indigenous-identifying creators which informed the 'following' and 'for you' pages of the platforms to show culturally and politically relevant Indigenous content. Remaining in line with Bucher's (2012) notion of 'algorithmic power,' daily interaction with the account in the form of community content engagement continually informed the algorithm and data collectors of the researcher's content preferences, effectively contributing to the culturally informed data profile of the account. These actions also inform the types of notifications received from the platform which invited the researcher to interact with content that may be appealing based on recent interactions on the platform, effectively giving more information to the algorithms and data collectors so content which

is more likely to evoke a sense of online community connection aligned with 'leisure' can be suggested. These notifications, alongside the platform's requests for further identifying markers and preference information, will inform the final analysis portion of this project. Notifications were observed in the form of emails containing content relevant to the researcher's established preferences, as well as mobile notifications inviting the researcher's continued interaction with platform content. Notifications and information requests from platforms go beyond standardized algorithmically supported content interactions which rely on the functions of the platform (likes, comments, sharing among contacts), this reaching out by the platform asks for more thoughtful action from the user, which often works out of line with the definition of leisure established prior in this project.

Fig 15. Fig 16., platforms asking for content preference action





Methodology: Establishing the Analysis Course

This analysis aims to explore the data collected over 3 days in the form of a digital auto-ethnographic interaction with new/social media to answer the question: *To what extent is it possible for the New Media or Platform Media experiences of First Nations individuals to be a site of leisure in the face of expansive Data Colonialism?*

A search for New Media Platforms or sites constructing their public-facing presence with themes stemming from the definition of 'leisure' established earlier will be selected. The signup process and any data requests or marketing prompts related to the user's culture or identity will be captured via a screenshot. Data collection and experience documentation will take place over three days, platform attempts at cultural or identity-based data collection captured via screenshot will be used as data. This data will then be interrogated through the established definition of 'leisure,' Couldry and Mejias' (2019) concept of 'data colonialism,' and Bucher's (2012) idea of 'algorithmic power.' Additionally, Velkova and Kaun's (2021) 'politics of repair' alongside Wemigwans' teachings from the publication *A Digital Bundle; Protecting and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Online* (2018) will be utilized to imagine reform and establish ways in which new/social media platform use can be better realized as decolonial and thus a space closer to 'leisure' for First Nation's users.

This experience set out by establishing an Indigenized definition of leisure which may be applied to the public-facing presentations of new/social media sites. This definition was deciphered from Small's (2007) notions of leisure in the article *Aboriginal Recreation, Leisure and the City of Calgary* as well as notions of wellness derived from Gonzalez and Steinberg et al.'s (2023) article *Indigenous Elders' Conceptualization of Well-being: An Anishinaabe Worldview Perspective.* This definition aligns Indigenous notions of 'leisure' very closely with community building, creativity, and spirituality as they are connected to land-based decolonial notions of responsibility to self and, thus wellness. The social/new media platforms selected as seemingly aligned with Indigenized 'leisure' are X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. Presentation in this way may establish the expectation of leisure related to wellness to be the primary affordance of these platforms for Indigenous individuals looking to participate in the digital community and creativity which the platforms appear to offer. We can begin to dive into whether or not this expectation is realized by a qualitative content analysis of the account sign-up process and the account-building process through the lenses of Couldry and Mejias' (2019) concept of 'data colonialism' and Bucher's (2012) idea of 'algorithmic power.' Furthermore, activity and data requests by the platform in the form of notifications and preference updates will be analyzed through the definition of 'leisure' as well as the above-mentioned critical theories. These

analyses will be taken together to determine if new/social media platforms can serve as genuine sites of 'leisure' for Indigenous audiences.

Analysis of Experience

The Gateway to Visibility; Initial Sign Up

The account sign-up process is fairly standardized across new/social media platforms of the sample (X [Twitter], Instagram, and TikTok), they all require account creation to participate in the 'leisure' or 'wellness' features advertised in public-facing sites. The 'documentation of experience' portion of this project uncovered that standardized sets of information such as name, birthday, email or phone number, along with some variety of contact verification, were required to create a basic account largely removed from the cultural/personal identity of the user. Cloudry and Mejias establish 'data colonialism' as combining "the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing," exemplifying that "Understanding Big Data from the Global South means understanding capitalism's current dependence on this new type of appropriation that works at every point in space where people or things are attached to today's infrastructures of connection" (2019, p. 337). Here, it can be understood that the 'appropriation' that the authors discuss online are the identifying markers of personhood and identity aggregated through platform infrastructure because they are points of interest for data collectors (digital colonizers) to profit from. In the initial sign-up process of new/social media, the mandatory information (name, birthday, email or phone number) is not directly 'appropriated' by data collectors however, they do indirectly assist in the way data is handed over from user to platform. Metrics like birthdays, however, contribute to a user profile, which categorizes them by whether or not they are old enough to fully utilize the platform; it also determines which ads they encounter This is disclosed when the platform asks for date of birth at sign-up. This is perhaps the most clear example of 'data colonialism' in the mandatory sign-up process since birthdays are a primary way in which personhood in the form of online data is 'appropriated' for efficient ad delivery to the user.

Bucher's (2012) 'algorithmic power' describes platform infrastructure in which "there is not so much a 'threat of visibility' as there is a 'threat of invisibility' that seems to govern the actions of its subjects. The problem, as it appears, is not the possibility of constantly being observed but the possibility of constantly disappearing, of not being considered important enough. To appear, to become visible, one needs to follow a certain platform logic embedded in the architecture" (p. 1171).

The perceived 'leisure' functions of the new/social media platforms ask users to become visible under the platform's terms to participate in the perceived or expected 'leisurely' affordances. Handing over this data in the initial sign-up process does not necessarily threaten users with affectively-driven invisibility, so much as it threatens them with missing out on what the platform and the visible online community have to contribute within the social space. Bucher's 'visibility' in this step of the user experience is the user's visibility towards data collectors and platform administrators (rather than online audiences or communities) in exchange for basic access and the privilege to view user-generated content. In this way, a user's visibility is demanded in the form of basic verifiable data before access to the facilities of 'leisure' in the most basic forms is granted. Further account building, which consists of data 'appropriation' in the form of content preferences, ad preferences, self-identifying account information, and interactions within online communities such as 'likes' and 'follows' are then exchanged for a more tailored and fully realized abilities to participate in 'leisure' as advertised in public-facing communications.

Identity Markers in Exchange for a Comprehensive Experience of 'Leisure'; Further Account Building

Further account building is achieved through the inclusion of data within the user profile fields of bios, usernames, profile pictures, and often gender identifiers, as well as external links, which all allow the user to include markers of marginalized identity and/or culture which are visible to fellow online platform users as well as interested data collectors and invisible platform administrators. Less public-facing account builders, such as content and ad preferences, are asked of the user to showcase relevant content on feeds, but perhaps more importantly, this data profiles and categorizes users before the algorithm has the opportunity to collect user data through understanding which categories of content have the highest user interactivity. The steps required for account creation afford users greater participation with expected opportunities for creativity and community, resulting in 'leisure.' This portion of the experience requires significant effort and reflection of identity on the user's part, which is to be shared with invisible third parties. However, it is presented as an effort that primarily contributes to enhancing a user's 'leisure' experience; it is presented for the user's benefit. This portion of the user experience is extremely well tied to notions of 'data colonialism' as the user's efforts in this section are related to cultural identity; therefore, user-selected preferences act as the starting point for ad and profit-driven data to be collected. Imagine that the data collected from users' content preference declarations do not immediately

inform ads but purely inform a filter for what user-generated content is shown, user interactions with content may still be observed through algorithms, as elaborated by Bucher, in ways which afford power to data collectors who may 'appropriate' thus 'colonizing' and profiting from what data the user hands over. However, these findings suggest that preference declaration informs advertisement metrics and data-collecting algorithms. This step of the user experience, therefore, has the potential to colonize user data at several points.

> "For personal data to be freely available for appropriation, it must first be treated as a natural resource, a resource that is just there. Extractive rationalities need to be naturalized or normalized, and, even more fundamentally, the flow of everyday life must be reconfigured and represented in a form that enables its capture as data." "[A]vailability to capital" itself had to be constructed through elaborate means of marketization. So too with what we now call "personal data," but which is the outcome, not the precondition or prior target, of a newly "computed sociality" (Alaimo and Kallinikos 2016). That is the underlying reason why there cannot be raw data (Gitelman 2013): because what is 'given' must first be configured for 'capture' (Kitchin and Dodge 2011). Natural resources were and are not cheap per se, but legal and philosophical frameworks were established to rationalize them as such" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 339).

Here 'data colonialism' is related to the historically established frameworks to justify and assign value to colonized resources. In the case of further user account building, similar frameworks and means of 'resource' capture are set in place for data collectors to benefit from visibility and appropriate personal data for eventual profit. It can be argued that these data-collecting frameworks manifest on platforms in the form of content preference declarations that, in the researcher's experience, are presented as unavoidable if the user wishes to be aligned with routes of 'leisure' best suited to their individual and perhaps cultural identity.

Returning to Bucher's lens, these sites or points of content declaration exercise power over users as they appear to demand certain points of data to be made visible. When a user complies and provides content preference data, they submit to the systems or of power enacted through the user's visibility to the invisible 'colonial' parties. If a user does not comply with this visibility, they are disciplined by being unable to access the personalized routes of 'leisure' sought when joining the

platform. In many ways, these users are still punished through a form of invisibility, so much as their connection to culturally relevant online communities is difficult as they are not immediately afforded the visibility of this content as it requires a declaration of preference data. "Essentially, becoming visible is to be selected for by the algorithm. Inscribed into the algorithmic logic of the default News Feed is the idea that visibility functions as a reward, rather than as punishment… [S]tories without significant interaction seemed to be filtered out" (Bucher, 2012, p. 1174). In this instance, Bucher describes another example where user content preference data is exchanged for the visibility of certain content. With this example in mind, the refusal to provide preference data may be punished through two methods of invisibility. First, the user is punished by tailored data being made more 'invisible' to them than if they had provided preference selections, meaning accessibility is reduced. Secondly, creators of the platforms are punished as their content is missing out on further community visibility as it can no longer be algorithmically promoted by way of new user interactions from profiles with similar preferences. Though the initial declaration of content preference and self-identifying elements of the profile is extremely key to determining the user's ability to access online spaces of 'leisure', they are not the only points where data must be made visible through preferential interactions which produce data for 'appropriation'. The updating of content preferences is an evolving and active process on new/social media platforms. Whether it is done algorithmically, such as appears to be the case on Instagram, or it is achieved through the digital labour of users when requested by platforms.

The Evolving User Profile; Cyclical Systems for Requesting Data Divulgation

Notifications delivered off the platform through the means of contact information provided in the initial account set-up stage alongside on-platform requests for further and more detailed content preference data are both ways in which 'data colonialism' and 'algorithmic power' continue to challenge as well as grant opportunities for 'leisure' to be achieved on new/social media platforms well into the user experience. Notifications and further requests for preference data, outside of what is automatically determined by the algorithm through regular interactivity, interrupt what can be established as 'leisurely' activity within platforms as they request data-producing effort from the user, which in turn is made visible to third parties and appropriated under 'colonialism.' However, compliance with the requests of these notifications and in-app pop-ups allows users to eventually return to their algorithmically curated experience of 'leisure' through others' visibility. These requests for further interaction or the sharing of preference data are often accompanied by content selected

through previous data divulged by the user. When these requests are accompanied by content that is being interacted with or the request is for user interaction with curated content, the platform asks for user visibility in the form of data-producing interaction. This can profile the user to suggest even more curated topics and collect data for third-party appropriation. When further content is suggested accompanied by the request of data divulging action, it establishes a system of power where the user's actions and preferences become visible so that data may be colonized and frameworks for its colonizations are perpetuated by the user's reward of relevant visible content under the idea of 'algorithmic power'. The opportunity to participate in curated 'leisure' entices users to volunteer their data within data colonialist platform frameworks. At the same time, this participation in platform-facilitated 'leisure' is also a route of profiling and data collection, which goes against the definition of leisure established for this project.

Since the definition of Indigenized 'leisure' or 'leisure' relevant to First Nations users is closely aligned with decolonial facets of wellness, contribution to systems of the colonization of personhood or profiling data cannot also be considered 'leisure' within a healing and decolonial context. On social media, the opportunity for connection with online communities, communication with others, the practice of creativity, and experience nature and culture through the posts of fellow users are all facilitated; these functions or opportunities fall in line with Indigenized 'leisure' as they can be described through traditional Anishinaabe facets of wellness. However, all of these functions require participation and a non-negotiable degree of submission to platform frameworks that demand control over users so their data or profile may be visible to invisible parties that can appropriate data in acts considered 'data colonialism.' Couldry and Mejias relate compliance with online monopolized systems of 'data colonialism,' like those found within platform use, to the function of historical colonial demands.

> "The parallels between the fictions that operationalized the dispossessions of historical colonialism and those that work today to enable data colonialism are striking. Consider the Spanish empire's Requerimiento, whose absurdity was first recounted by Bartolomé de las Casas (1951, 58). The purpose of this proclamation, read in Spanish by conquistadors to a non-Spanish speaking audience, was to introduce the natives to the strange new world order they were about to be colonized under, and to demand their simple acceptance (or face extermination, which frequently arrived regardless of compliance). Today, in the era of data colonialism, we are accustomed to similarly incomprehensible

> documents called Terms of Service, which contain outlandish appropriative claims by corporations. The force of the Requerimiento depended on an effective monopoly of physical force. Today's "muscle" lies in various forms of economic concentration, one of which is the digital platform. Whatever the form of force used, its effect now, as then, is through the discursive act that accompanies it to embed subjects inescapably into relations of colonization" (2019, pp. 340-341).

The continued push for compliance within these systems (like those established within 'Terms of Service') manifests through notifications and requests for user data updates. This signals that 'data colonialism' as achieved through data visibility is an ongoing cycle which effectively farms data from users seeking to participate in 'leisure.' For this reason, compliance with systems of 'data colonialism' which visibly align with Anishinaabe wellness cannot be truly considered 'leisure' in an Indigenous context. However, platform functions may be used in unexpected ways, and culturally relevant content may be dispersed in a pushback to 'data colonialism' and disguised as 'leisure'.

Conclusive Discussion: Paths for Reimagining Platforms as Spaces of the Decolonial

Both Bucher's 'algorithmic power' and Couldry and Mejias' 'data colonialism' work together to shine a light on the platform systems which both facilitate the potential for indigenized 'leisure' and destroy the possibility for true 'leisure' by way of user control and possible data appropriation. However, these frameworks and theories do not primarily focus on ways of potential resistance and reform to sites of online colonialism. This is where Velkova and Kaun's (2021) article *Algorithmic Resistance: Media Practices and the Politics of Repair* alongside Wemigwans' teachings from the publication *A Digital Bundle; Protecting and Promoting Indigenous Knowledge Online* (2018) are introduced to build on ways platforms may be realized as better fulfilling expectations for indigenized 'leisure.' Velkova and Kaun propose that

> "algorithmic resistance evolves in conjunction with the properties and logics of technologies that channel media power (see Williams, 1974). It is a complicit form of resistance, one that does not deny the power of algorithms but operates within their framework, using them for different ends… The aftermath of algorithmic curation forces resistance to be articulated through 'repair' politics of acting upon the cultural politics of attention generated after data sets have been aggregated, computed and curated. The notion of 'repair' is a metaphor

> that signifies the symbolic act of correction of a perceived 'brokenness' of an algorithmic system, through which the dominant meaning of algorithmic systems may also be challenged" (2021, pp. 535-536).

Relevant to this project, this essentially means that 'data colonialism' can be challenged through the controlling platform systems which support and perpetuate its data collection and appropriation. This could be made possible by spreading anti-data-colonialist narratives within user-generated content that was shared in compliance with data-colonialist systems. Despite theoretical posts of this kind still allowing data collectors to measure audience interaction and observe user data, posts now also carry an element of 'callout,' which puts a spotlight on the systems of 'data colonialism,' which traditionally finds power in invisibility. Systems of 'algorithmic power' and 'data colonialism' can still function the same regardless of the content's ability to call them out. Therefore, this is a type of 'compliant resistance' since the realized 'repair' of systems is put in the hands of users who consume anti-data-colonialist narratives.

Wemigwans posits that it is Indigenous knowledge and the communicative capacity of online media that carry forth that knowledge, which acts as a powerful method of reinforming digital spaces. "The notion of a digital bundle demonstrates that online spaces can be defined and validated through cultural protocols. Distinct from digital storytelling through its grounding in cultural protocols, Indigenous Knowledge online is a new kind of tool or resource—and hence a new opportunity to support the ways in which Indigenous communities are decolonizing the digital" (Wemigwans, 2018, p. 43). With this in mind, perhaps new/social media platforms could be better realized as indigenized leisure spaces by the user implementation of Indigenous knowledge and protocol within the content. It should not be the platforms and their systems that we look to for 'leisure' and 'wellness' online so much as it should be the decolonial knowledge of Indigenous creators on platforms which call out systems and utilize them in unexpected ways. This unexpected utilization of data-colonialist systems in tandem with the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge robs systems of their powerful invisibility and better adjusts the online ecosystems' alignment with indigenized leisure. If Indigenous creators act as stewards to the content of online Indigenous communities, carrying forward protocols from more 'traditional' modes of knowledge communication, ecosystems of Indigenous knowledge transfer aligned with wellness may be possible. "The role of the cultural custodian frames responsibility and accountability to the wider Indigenous community regarding care and maintenance of the site, but it also acknowledges the deep commitment to interrelationships and relationality and how these relationships come into

being through the process of ceremony. The cultural transference of the site, then, becomes a very important responsibility that must be considered and attended to in the future because, as a bundle of knowledge, it must be transferred lovingly and with great care, according to cultural protocols" (Wemigwans, 2018, p. 45).

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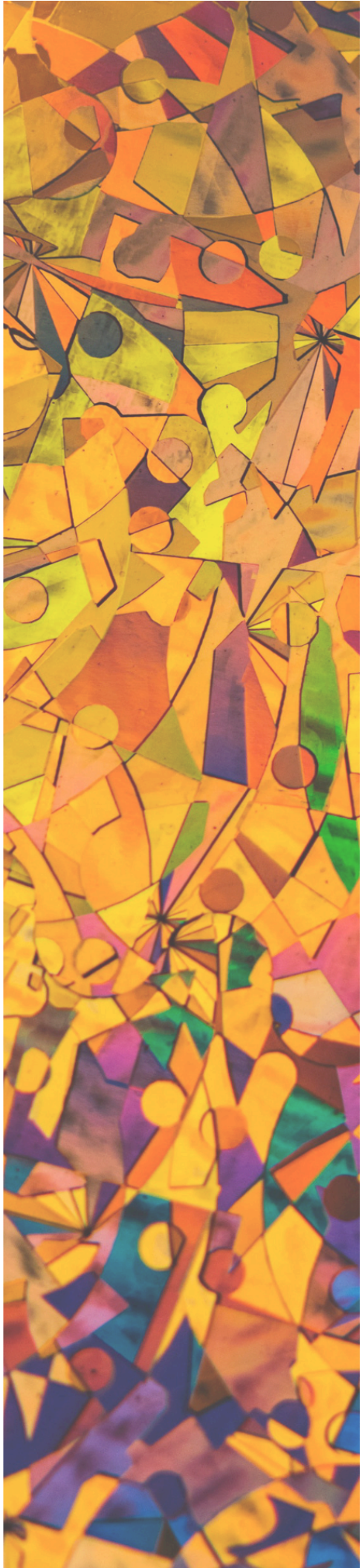

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