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Creative Research

Acknowledgements

We want to first acknowledge that the University of Calgary and all those who teach, learn, and work within it, including the authors and editors of this journal, occupy Treaty 7 territory. In the spirit of respect, reciprocity and truth, we honour and acknowledge Moh'kinsstis, and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, as well as the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland. Finally, we acknowledge all Nations – Indigenous and non – who live, work and play on this land, and who honour and celebrate this territory. This sacred gathering place provides us with an opportunity to engage in reconciliation, a duty we all have of occupants of this land.

The appearance of this first issue of the The Motley Undergraduate Journal became possible thanks to the collective efforts of a number of key contributors. Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Professor and Chair in Communication and Media Studies at the University of Calgary, recognized the lack of opportunities for undergraduate students to showcase their academic work and proposed this journal as a solution. Students and faculty who volunteered their time and acted as reviewers and editors have been integral to the realization of the idea. The Department of Communication, Media, and Film at the University of Calgary gave the project decisive support.

The Motley is freely and publicly accessible thanks to the Public Knowledge Project's, Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform operating out of Simon Fraser University. OJS allows academic journals to freely utilize their publication software and training resources, with a mission of making academic knowledge accessible to all citizens. The entire OJS library team at the University of Calgary, especially Sarah Adams, offered the journal team invaluable assistance with build the site, resolving bugs, and providing continuous guidance.

Special recognition should go to undergraduate students Madison Daniels, Kaari Hall, Bray Jamieson, and Abigail Atmadja for their consistent support, advice, and excitement that

motivated students to get involved with the journal. Each of these students brought unique skills to The Motley. Their careful editorial eyes, networking and promotion shaped The Motley greatly. Dr. Maria Victoria Guglietti played a central role providing mentorship and guidance to the whole editorial team and spurring students into action with submission nominations.

The entire faculty of the department of Communication, Media and Film backed the initiative and donated their time, valuable perspectives, and expert feedback on submitted manuscripts. Special "thank you" to those who nominated and reviewed submissions, Drs. Annie Rudd, Charles Tepperman, Jessalynn Keller, Marcia Jenneth Epstein, Maria Victoria Guglietti, Ronald Glasberg, Tania Smith and graduate students Xenia Reloba de la Cruz, Asma Bernier, Brennan Chaudhry, and Amanda Zanco.

This first issue owes its existence to the phenomenal student authors who contributed their work to the journal. As The Motley's first authors, you are trailblazers. Your ideas and creativity testify to the excellence of the teaching and learning that takes place at the University of Calgary, and they will inspire others.

The Motley builds upon the example and inspiration gleaned from other student groups and prior student journals. As the first Managing Editor of The Motley and a former Red Deer Polytechnic student, I wish to acknowledge that my love for the publication process was sparked and my skills were first learned through the invaluable instruction I received from two key members of the Editorial Board of Red Deer Polytechnic's Agora Journal, Dr. Jacqueline Cowan and Dr. Heather Marcovitch.

Lastly, on behalf of the Motley team, I thank you, the readers of this journal, for giving us your time and attention in a world where everyone and everything are fighting for it. We hope you are inspired, educated, and invigorated by the work you find on these pages, and that you will join us again for the next issue!

-Melissa Morris, Managing Editor

Letter From the Editor, Maria Bakardjieva, PhD.

The Motley has arrived! Let us welcome it as a peer, a friend, a colleague and a liberator! Why liberator? Because it comes to liberate the best academic work that our undergraduate students do from the obscurity of professors' drawers and hard drives, from the secretive passwords of university servers. It comes to bring that work out into the light of day. Yes, there are personal blogs and social media platforms where students could have published their papers before, but the Motley is different. Papers appearing in it have passed muster, and a tough one for that matter. It is not the "likes" of like-minded friends that raise these papers to the top of visibility. It is the vetting performed by people who may agree or disagree with each other, peers and professors alike, and where knowledge, talent and good argument win the day. That is why the Motley is the opposite of an echo chamber. It is after all a motley of topics, views and forms of expression, all of which have only one thing in common – the high standards of quality that they have met. In our present day of fake news, false theorizing, and vacuous influencing, we have learned how important it is to have a steady intellectual anchor like that.

The liberatory mission of the Motley includes taking down the walls that conceal from the eyes of the community what we learn, create and discuss in our classrooms. It will showcase the gems of original analysis and creativity that our undergrads produce. Where else will your grandma get the chance to revel in your brilliant argument illuminating the major communication and cultural issues of society? How else will your future boss learn about your superior powers as analyst, artist and wordsmith? And maybe, just maybe, your opinionated neighbour or your younger cousin will come to understand some of those complex issues in a new way.

While opening our academic spaces to the outside world, the Motley will also work to bring us, their inhabitants, closer to each other. It will reveal what we collectively value, what we find important and for which we strive. It will compel us to work together – as it already has – by creatively combining the efforts of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, club leaders, librarians, administrators… It will be our collaborative effort, our joint achievement, and our shared pride and joy. We are in it together and we all have a stake to keep it bright, honest, fair and vibrant.

The Motley is marching into the limelight today in shining colour thanks to the tireless work that numerous champions and supporters performed on the backstage for months. Starting a project like this from scratch takes faith, dedication and perseverance. The authors, reviewers and editors of this first issue did not have an established publication outlet to hang their labour and hopes on. They had to take a bold step over the gorge that separates an idea from its realization. And they did a gorgeous job at that! The Motley knows it was all these contributors who breathed life into it, and it is their example that will inspire and instruct others down the road.

Of all those to whom the Motley will remain forever grateful, one name should be flashed across its first page – Melissa Morris. As its first managing editor, Melissa managed the Motley Undergraduate Journal into existence. She brought together people and computer systems, navigated publication formats and citation styles, wooed, nudged and nagged. She convinced all of us that the Motley was possible, and sure enough, it is here – to stay.

Now, it is your turn, the Motley's first readers. The Motley team expects you to do your job diligently and devotedly. Read, view, discuss, criticize! Then come and join us as authors, reviewers and editors - a motley of powers, all in your hands!

The Motley Editorial Team

Maria Bakardjieva PhD. Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, 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 play 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.

Melissa Morris, Managing Editor

Melissa Morris is the founding Managing Editor for The Motley. She is currently completing her final year of her BA (Honours) Communication and Media Studies degree. In addition to her role with The Motley, she is the Director of Student Affairs for the Students in Communications Club. 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 current research looks at the ways political ideology and subcultural identity can be expressed through visual methods such as fashion. Her other areas of academic interest include intersectional feminist research, queer studies, and governmental policy concerning communication and media. Her experience publishing and editing with the Agora Journal spurred her passion for highlighting the ideas of student authors. This February she will be presenting at the National Student Journal Forum. 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.

The Motley Editorial Team

Bray Jamieson, Assistant Editor

Bray (he/him) currently serves as the Motley Undergraduate Journal's Assistant Editor. Bray is a fifth-year student completing undergraduate degrees in the disciplines of Communications (Honours) and Philosophy. His research interests primarily focus on contemporary applications and understandings of Marxist theory, the discursive representation of restaurant workers, and the rhetorical construction of political discourses.

Abigail Atmadja, Communications Coordinator

Abigail (she/her) is the Motley Undergraduate Journal's communications coordinator, peer reviewer, and editor. She is an international, fourth-year undergraduate student working towards a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Communications and Media Studies. As a media scholar, her areas of expertise include critical race theory, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies. She aspires to become a corporate communications and public relations professional specializing in brand management.

Sarah Chung, Communications Coordinator

Sarah (she/any) is the Motley Undergraduate Journal's communications coordinator, peer reviewer, and editor. She is currently a third-year, prospective honours student working towards a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Studies. They are experienced in various media work and they aspire to continue pursuing research in academia. Eventually, she hopes to work in the fashion publishing industryas a journalist, copy editor, or public relations professional.

The Motley Editorial Team

Asma Bernier, Peer Reviewer

Asma Bernier (she/her) is a first year Graduate student in the department of Communication and Media studies. She is one of the Motley Undergraduate Journal's peer reviewers in addition to having her own work published in the first issue. She is currently deepening her research by exploring politics and fashion, the politicization of hijab, and social movements.

Brennan Chaudry, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Brennan (he/him) is a first year Graduate student in the department of Communication and Media studies. He contributes as a peer reviewer and copy-editor with the Motley Undergraduate Journal. Brennan's area of research interest is in digital media, algorithms and Marxism. He believes that communications is a discipline that grows in importance every day, and undergraduate students deserve a venue for their voices to be heard.

Drew Miller, Peer Reviewer

Drew Miller (he/him) is a recently graduated student with a Bachelor of Arts, with a double major in Communications & Media Studies and Psychology. He is currently a peer reviewer and editor for the Motley Undergraduate Journal. His involvement in the Motley is driven by the hopes that academic writing in the Department of Communication, Media, and Film will flourish beyond his own time at the university.

The Motley Editorial Team

Kabir Singh Bedi, Peer Reviewer

Kabir (he/him) is an international, second-year student working towards a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Studies. He is a peer reviewer for the Motley Undergraduate Journal. His involvement with the Motley is inspired by his engagement in various student-run organizations. He is currently exploring career options and is hoping to find something he is passionate about for the long term.

Luke Pye, Peer Editor

Luke Pye (he/him) is a 2nd year of his BA in Communication and Media Studies and a peer editor for the first issue of the journal. One of Luke's career goals is to work as a copyeditor for either the municipal government or a non-profit organization. With this in mind, when Luke heard about the Motley journal, he jumped at the opportunity. In his time editing for the Motley, he has seen some excellent work that he otherwise would not have been privy to, and has met some amazing authors who he can see going far in their respective studies. Luke hopes to have work of his own published in a future issue of The Motley and looks forward to seeing what amazing work will be submitted next by the Communications student body!

Haley Pelletier, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Haley Pelletier (she/her) is in her sixth year of a combined Communications and Political Science degree. She is a peer reviewer and editor for the Motley Undergraduate Journal. Through her role with the journal, she hopes to gain formal experience in publishing, editing, and facilitating this unique undergraduate opportunity for the Communications department and its students.

Meet the Authors

Ariadna Alvarado

Ariadna (she/they) is a fourth-year undergraduate Communications Student with a Minor in Political Science. They are a writer for the first issue of The Motley Undergraduate Journal with a piece on visual culture and race. Currently, she is keen on producing video essays, practicing analogue photography, web programming and dancing to K-pop. Although uncertain whether her plans will change, they aspire to work at the intersection of UX/UI Design and Front-End Web Development.

Abigail Atmadja

Abigail (she/her) is the Motley Undergraduate Journal's communications coordinator, peer reviewer, and editor. She is an international, fourth-year undergraduate student working towards a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Communications and Media Studies. As a media scholar, her areas of expertise include critical race theory, diaspora studies, and postcolonial studies. She aspires to become a corporate communications and public relations professional specializing in brand management.

Asma Bernier

Asma Bernier (she/her) is a first year Graduate student in the department of Communication and Media studies. As a veiled Muslim woman who explores fashion and modesty in her own life, Asma was interested in studying how other women, particularly hijabi influencers, define modesty through their online fashion practices. Throughout her life, she realized there is this binary understanding of Muslim women as either oppressed and liberated. She wanted to explore Muslim women beyond this binary and examine how they engage in creative and unique ways of dressing, which adds to their identity. Now she is deepening her research by exploring politics and fashion, the politicization of hijab, and social movements. Being both an author and part of the editorial team for this new UCalgary journal has been a rewarding process.

Meet the Authors

Lana Coles

Lana (she/her) is in her fifth year of undergraduate studies at the U of C studying communication, media, and political science. Moving forward, she is planning to pursue graduate studies and continue doing research in communication and media. Her research interests include television studies, popular culture, and fashion.

Claire Hadford

Claire (they/them) is in their fifth and final year in Honours philosophy with a minor in Sociology at the University of Calgary. Claire's current work focuses on standpoint epistemology, oriented towards epistemic justice and social change. They hope to pursue graduate studies in education and philosophy. Their work published in this issue of The Motley brings together a longtime, rudimentary interest in internet subcultures and memes with a slightly newer but nonetheless cemented interest in the epistemic conditions within alt-right and white supremacist groups and institutions.

Bray Jamieson

Bray Jamieson currently serves as the Motley Undergraduate Journal's Assistant Editor. Bray is a 5th year student completing undergraduate degrees in the disciplines of Communications (Honours) and Philosophy. His research interests primarily focus on contemporary applications and understandings of Marxist theory, the discursive representation of restaurant workers, and the rhetorical construction of political discourses. Jamieson's article in the inaugural edition of the Motley was also accepted to be presented at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (April, 2023). Notably, he is also an above average bowler and a devoted pug-father.

Glory Okeleke

Glory (she/her) is a Communications and Media Studies student at the University of Calgary, currently in her 4th year. After taking a class in Feminist Media Studies, she became well-acquainted with the importance of media spaces when created and curated by women themselves. And so as her program draws to an end, she decided to invest her time into crafting together this blog post: a safe space for women and those willing to be open-minded by seeking to learn more. Glory believes that "women around the world, the ones who look like me especially, may sometimes feel overwhelmed and oftentimes misunderstood because of certain choices they make and the multiple ways in which they decide to express themselves, this blog, therefore, aims to amplify our voices and the issues which pertain to our amenities and freedoms".

Calum Robertson

Calum Robertson (fae/faer//faeself/they/them/themself) is a full-time tea-drinker, part-time forest cryptid from Mohknistsis/Calgary, Treaty 7, Alberta, currently studying communications in Kitchener-Waterloo, Dish with One Spoon Treaty, Ontario, Canada, Turtle Island. Fae have written nonfiction articles for publications as diverse as university campus newspapers (the Gauntlet), the Christian Courier (community newspaper) and filling Station (experimental literature). Faer poetry and prose has appeared in numerous magazines both online and in print, including Canthius, nod, deathcap, the anti-Langurous Project, Lida Literary, Bourgeon, peculiar, Red Coyote, and Tofu Ink. They'd like to be reincarnated as a peacock, next time around.

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Frederick Douglass: Visibility of a visionary

Ariadna Alvarado

Abstract

Historically, tools of ocularity have enabled the racialization of marginalized individuals through invisibility. During the antebellum period, these tools were coopted to naturalize discriminatory beliefs without agency from the photographed subjects. Douglass' portrait, taken by Samuel Miller, showcases the subversiveness of his use of the daguerreotype to uncover race relations in antebellum America. Douglass knowingly sat for the photograph as an effort to move away from the visual scrutiny Black individuals faced; Douglass' efforts are exemplified in the more than 160 pictures he sat for throughout his lifetime. The picture in possession by the Art Institute of Chicago showcases Douglass' agency and right to see and look back. A picture that redefined Blackness by breaking through the racial categories that visually maintained white supremacy as hegemonic.

This artifact also symbolizes the overwhelming number of African American contributions to visual culture that, unfortunately, remain overlooked by scholars. Whether as sitters, daguerreotypists, gallery owners, and more, visual culture was profoundly impacted by Black Americans during the 19th century. For instance, Ball, a Daguerrean gallery owner and a daguerreotyper, was featured in Frederick Douglass' paper, highlighting the importance of self-representation and self-possession. Moreover, the mystification of pictures that uncovered race relations in America is disputed; to regard photography that depicts oppression as artistry is contentious. However, in this analysis, I propose a way to highlight the visualization of invisible gazes that have taken away the right to look back.

Keywords

Frederick Douglass, visual culture, race, daguerreotype, portrait photography, antebellum era

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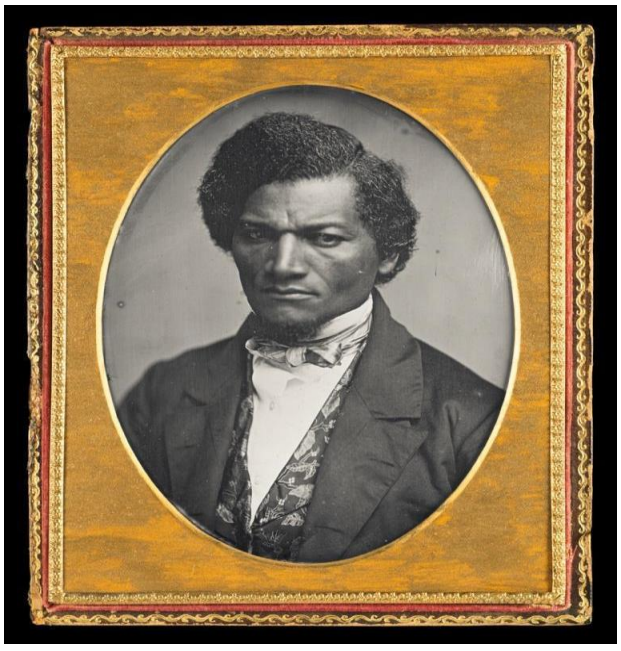
The artifact analyzed in this essay (Figure 1) is a daguerreotype with a portrait of Frederick Douglass produced approximately around 1847-1852. The portrait was captured by Samuel J. Miller, a daguerreotypist who owned a studio in Ohio, a center of abolitionism before the American Civil War. The photograph showcases a black-and-white picture surrounded by a copper-plated frame, which is allegedly the original work. As Westerbeck (1999) mentions, Miller's daguerreotype came in a case: "the plate in its preserver, the back of the case, and the cover all fit each other snugly, and on the inside of the cover embossed on the velvet lining is 'Samuel J. Miller, Akron, O'" (p. 152). This artifact became crucial for the abolitionist movement as it was for developing daguerreotype portraiture and its exhibition.

Figure 1

A copper-plated daguerreotype of Fredrick Douglas.



Note. (Samuel Miller, 1847).

In fact, it is significant that of the more than 160 portraits that Frederick Douglass sat for (as the most photographed person in the 19th century), this portrait is one of the two whose producer was recognized[1]. As Westerbeck (1999) remarks, "only one besides the Art Institute's has had its daguerreotypist identified" (p. 148). The complications tracing the ownership of the portraits of Douglass, however, might just have asserted his reputation and respect. As a "self-made man" (Douglass, 1872), the portrait was also an opportunity to "self-possess" (Westerbeck, 1999, p. 158) and be recognized by others. Precisely, in Daguerrean galleries, where the abolitionist movement was propelled and uncovered the cultural mores that indicated who was a worthy subject to *look at,* a fact which Frederick Douglass did not ignore.

The photographer's intention is commonly considered when assessing the purpose of a picture. Nonetheless, in a medium (such as the daguerreotype) where the subjects were considered agents of the gaze, "there was very little a daguerreotypist could do to alter the basic facts of the sitter's looks and attitude" (Westerbeck, 1999, p. 154). Plus, the fact that the photographs produced by the daguerreotype were, essentially, inalterable (unlike paintings, for instance) also provided a more accurate representation and preservation of subjects over time. That is to say, the possibility of later changing the depiction of the subject was impossible.

The latter implied a particular vulnerability from the sitter, as not only would their picture be cemented into history as it was, but also with an awareness of the public visibility of their picture. Westerbeck (1999) hypothesizes that daguerreotypes' galleries were the beginning of mass media. (p. 157). As he further explains, most Daguerrean establishments had a common practice of having Daguerrean galleries which the public attended to "see and be seen" (Westerbeck, 1999, p. 151),

[1]"Researchers have found at least 160 photographs of Douglass, who praised the medium of photography for enabling him to counter the racial caricatures so frequent in artistic representation of black people at the time" (Gathwright, 2015, para.2).

implying that the subject knew that their portraits would most likely end up as a public display eventually. Thus, Douglass then knew that his public perception depended upon this. This knowledge pushed him to be the embodiment of his cause.

It could be theorized that visibility was a double-edged sword. For some, to be seen during the postbellum period was an act of resistance, notably against the strong anti-abolitionist sentiments that drove Douglass to self-exile. However, for others, being visible translated into social prestige. For instance, the Daguerrean galleries which allowed visitors to be seen and to see. As articulated by Westerbeck (1999), "these places were fashionable in the way a trendy art gallery might be today" (p. 151). Daguerrean galleries imply a relation to the Foucauldian *panopticon,* a "machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault, 1975, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 76). I contend that the surveillance aspect granted these galleries their status and a disciplinary "white gaze," which I will explore later.

To be constantly observed by an invisible disciplinary power might drive subjects to internalize the "observing gaze" and attempt to put up a facade. Foucault **(**1975**)** conveys this through this quote:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 76).

It is precisely this same dynamic of power which provided Douglass with a desire to be visible in Daguerrean galleries. The latter showcased local clientele or famous figures (Westerbeck, 1999, p. 151). However, the invisibility of African American citizens in public galleries proved that not everyone ought to be seen. According to Blight (1990), the erasure and exclusion of Black sitters, daguerreotypists, and gallery owners were representative of their "moral, social and political

death." (p. 306). This notion is all encapsulated in what Blight (1990) coined as the "white mind" (p. 306), an indicator of the invisibility of Black people according to the gaze of white individuals.

Despite efforts to erase history, black sitters, daguerreotypists, and gallery owners were vital to the development of 19th-century visual culture. Thus, in instances in which individuals like Ball, a renowned black daguerreotypist and gallery owner, were successful, it was critical to recognize it. Frederick Douglass **(**1854**)** featured a review of Gleason's pictorial in his periodical:

> Mr. Ball takes them [portraits] with an accuracy and a softness of expression unsurpassed by any establishment of the Union. His spacious saloons show how widespread is his reputation, and how successfully he has worked himself into popular favor (as cited in Daguerreian Gallery of the West*,* pg. 1).

Paradoxically, however, Ball's Daguerrean Gallery of the West designated one of the four rooms to an exhibition of baby photos (Library of Congress*,* 1854); this example conjures two issues, one concerning the purpose of these photos at the intended time of exhibition, and the abovementioned disciplinary "white gaze." According to Smith **(**1999**)**, tracing the trajectory of babies and children through pictures came to signify a "racist fantasy" of eugenicist pseudoscientists (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 359). Additionally, the continuous collection of pictures documenting children's growth created meticulously crafted classifications that drew on distinctions that defined "whiteness." By erasing the whole process and justifying the practice as scientific, tracing family lineage became a legitimate way to invisibilize whiteness (Smith, 1999, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 369) and champion white supremacy.

Douglass' purpose was disruptive to the portrayal of Black people, and he acknowledged it: "Douglass had deliberately planned to connect the progressive nature of photographic technology—praising 'the multitude, variety, perfection and cheapness of its pictures'—with the progressive nature of the Civil War" (Blackwood, 2009, p. 94). As stated in this quote, not only

did Douglass strategically choose the daguerreotype as it would democratize visuality, but also because it provided fewer distortions than a painting would provide. As Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841) states, "the artist stands aside and lets you paint yourself" (as cited in Westerbeck, 1999, p. 154).

Moreover, it allowed him to write his autobiography without compromising authorship; per Westerbeck (1999), it allowed him to self-possess since, until then, he had been someone else's possession (p.158). Despite so, as Douglass **(**1950**)** conveyed in this extract, increased agency for subjects of portraits did not render the pictures impartial:

> He did not trust them to make images of blacks. 'Negroes can never have impartial portraits, at the hands of white artists,' he said. 'It seems to us next to impossible for white men to take likeness of black men, without grossly exaggerating their distinctive features'. (as cited in Westerbeck, 1999, p. 155)

As previously mentioned, the distinctiveness and similarity of features between Black people were emphasized through surveillance, upholding the idea that 'all black people looked the same' and the notion of micro-policing whiteness. Smith **(**1999**)** mentions how eugenicists also did this: "Galton emphasizes uniformity in the photographic recording, stating that the images should be consistent in size to enable accurate comparisons" (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 366). The surveillance factor in eugenics imposed an alienating external gaze upon people to scour for similarities or differences, like objects in a laboratory.

The early depiction of people of colour in the antebellum era proves the latter. The reproduction of a "scientific gaze" – one that treated its subjects like a specimen or criminals – justifies Douglass' skepticism towards non-Black daguerreotypists. Such is the case of Agassiz, who attempted to standardize and stereotype the perceptions of Black people; Foucault would argue that uniformization of racial perception through ocular instruments created relations of discipline

and control. In this case, the power relations directed how Black people ought to be gazed upon using visual tools: "use instruments that render visible, record, differentiate and compare: a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations (Foucault, 1975, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 78).

Hence, I contend that Douglass' attempts to break and critique stereotypes of African Americans through daguerreotype photography, as exemplified in the Art Institute picture, was produced to record a historical moment in American history. For historical context, Douglass had just returned from England after having fled from slavery in America and his portrait is said to have been taken a month prior to his speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (Cutter, 2020, p. 17), in which he addresses the marginalization of Black citizens within White American society. Therefore, his expression in his portrait conveys his awareness of the visual power such an artifact can possess and the impact it can have on socio-racial stratification.

Additionally, his careful selection of daguerreotypists suggests that his role as a subject was active rather than passive (Cutter, 2020, p. 16). As a subject, Douglass did not conform to the view of a portraitist, and if we draw back on Douglass' statements about white daguerreotypists, he claims that "negroes can never have impartial portraits at the hands of white artists" (Blackwood, 2009, p. 94). Moreover, his posture, pose, and facial expressions in the Art Institute portrait all suggest a particular distaste or anger, implying there are underlying socio racial power relations concerning visual culture and Douglass' vocation.

According to Tagg (1993), poses aid in denaturalizing iconographic codes of the time (p. 35). Therefore, Miller's portrait should be examined critically, with special attention to Douglass' posture. For instance, the angle of Douglass' body, which creates a three-quarter pose, might suggest a reticence to facing head-on – as if to resist and challenge the visual distortion of

portrayals African American people faced until then. Thus, viewers can hypothesize a tension between the producer and the subject of the picture. This tension is made clear in the shoulder position of Douglass, not facing completely sideways but also not facing upfront and is supported by Tagg's (1993) statement on heads and shoulders as the parts of our bodies which imply truth (p. 35). Another reading could suggest that Miller was not an amateur daguerreotypist as he avoided photographing Douglass with a 'head-on view' and instead opted for a three-quarter pose.

Moreover, Cutter (2020) suggests his clothing choice might underscore "African American civility" (p. 16). The double identity of African Americans, as citizens and as Black individuals, were two clashing identities at the time of production. His expression of disgust, however, was intentional. According to Cutter (2020), the ire on his face was "consciously selected" (p.16); considering this, we can partially assert the intention of the author to use daguerreotype as a medium of resistance to "white racist attempts to commodify and objectify his physicality and the corporeal realities of enslaved and self-emancipated black women, children and men." (Bernier, 2015, p. 324). The Chicago Art Institute (n.d.) recognizes Douglass' intention: "Douglass knew that this picture, one of an astonishing number that he commissioned or posed for, would be seen by ardent supporters of his campaign to end slavery".

The recognition of Douglass' intention leads us to question the degree of naturalness and objectiveness of portraiture. Since poses, whether self-imposed or coerced, mediate pictures, it is challenging to uncover ocular technologies' constructive aspects. Despite this, it is evident through the election of compositional elements, such as specific frames and angles, that photographs are far from depicting reality. Nevertheless, this led Douglass to embody and normalize an authenticity for African American people that popular media did not choose to popularize. A gaze that defied

stereotypes by "looking back" at the camera, injecting the scene with disruptiveness and unnaturalness.

The extent to which Frederick Douglass' portrait could be considered a work of art is contested. Firstly, the contextuality of how portraits are classified must be considered: the subject of the photograph oftentimes is the factor which determines whether the image is regarded as evidential or auratic, terms coined by Walter Benjamin. Westerbeck (1999) arguments on classification being "equally important in any consideration of the daguerreotype as an art form is acknowledgement of the role that the subject inevitably played" (p. 154) supports a critical approach to African American contributions to visual culture.

Benjamin **(**1953**)** defines 'aura' as "'cult value' (which) haunts the photographic portrait." (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 368). In other words, the aura which surrounds a specific artwork is defined by the "beholder's investment of the image with sentiment." (Benjamin, 1935, as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 368). Furthermore, images are applicable for evidentiary purposes, such as Galton's attempt to, as Smith **(**1999**)** puts it, "demystify the once sentimental meaning of the individual portrait, reclaiming it for science" (as cited in Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 364). Since we are uncertain of the author's intention when producing this photograph, we can claim that it is unknown whether the image was auratic or evidential.

Nonetheless, spectators can contend the suggestion that a portrait should be considered an artwork, especially since the Douglass portrait is in possession of The Chicago Art Institute. Westerbeck (1999) disputes this idea by asserting that the "fact that it is now in the possession of an art museum does not make it such" an artwork (p. 153). The reservation to regard portraits as artistry relies on the relationship between the subject and the producer showcasing tension, thus it is challenging to know the authentic sentiment of the beholder. Moreover, the ethics of art

ownership is highly politicized in contemporary Western society as museums come under fire for appropriating cultural artifacts and obtaining them through questionable means. As such, it is crucial to address the efforts of Black gallery owners, portraitists, and subjects in 19th-century visual culture as a way to highlight the visualization of invisible gazes that has permeated visual culture scholars in addressing the importance of African American engagement with visual technology of the 19th century.

In summary, the instability of racial categories was maintained by ocular tools that made pictures appear truthful. In that sense, Black people were marginalized and discriminated against through structures that deprived them of their right to see due to their constant subjection to surveillance. Therefore, Douglass' Chicago Art Institute portrait redefines how Black people were perceived and moves away from visual scrutiny while conveying important social and political messages. Associations of the daguerreotype with truthfulness and accuracy contributed to the redefinition of Blackness which Douglass consciously pursued through the 160 pictures he sat for during his lifetime. The latter showcases the overwhelming contributions of African Americans in visual culture that are, unfortunately, still overlooked by scholars.

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The face of Orientalism: The western appropriation and commodification of Asian culture

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Abstract

Contemporary society today is made up of the intricate fusion of cultural systems. Bound by diaspora, culture becomes a site of open dialogue, wherein its legitimacy is contextualized and positioned by geographical location and traditional accuracy. The construction of cultural identities reflects the cultural norms and codes from which its characterization originates. The construction of cultural identities is evident in a TikTok commentary video by Cantonese model and content creator Ka Laam Chan, where she presents a highly problematic representation of the Asian American identity and their experience. Despite being born and raised in Hong Kong for most of her life, Chan situates herself as the mouthpiece of all Asian persons in the Chinese diaspora. In situating Chan's TikTok video as an emerging site of racial ontology where academic dialogue can take place, we can attempt to understand the nuanced delineation of the heterogeneity in the Chinese diaspora.

Keywords

Asian identity, diaspora, cultural identity, racial ontology, TikTok

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In the age of globalization, what were formerly considered unique cultural units belonging to distinct nations now transcend the globe linked by diaspora. The dispersion of cultural systems – the boundaries of which identities are formed, and senses of selves are realized – are blurred heavily by geographic and societal lines. Beyond racial classification, the degree to which one participates in cultural traditions and their alignment with ethnic origins and values holds prominence in one's construction of their identity. Contemporary Western society is littered with the intricate fusion of elements from various cultures from genres of music, hairstyles, cuisines, and fashion – stemming from the belief that the mixing of cultural components advertises the welcoming of the 'Other' into Western society while claiming the ideals of post-racial unity by extension. This paper aims to analyze and deconstruct the rationale of cultural appropriation and the geographical disconnect in distinguishing the perceptions of Asians overseas and Asian-Americans, along with the Western commodification of Asian culture through the TikTok commentary video made by the Cantonese model and content creator Ka Laam Chan. In referencing Christopher R. Campbell's three racial myths in media, Edward W. Said's notion of Orientalism, and Richard Dyer's sense of whiteness as a skin colour, I will critique Chan's video on her invalidation and dismissal of the Asian American experience in her dysfunctional presentation of the Western appropriation of Asian culture.

Firstly, there is a need to put into perspective Chan's racial and ethnic identity in contextualizing the significance of the issues of cultural appropriation and Asian representation presented in Chan's TikTok video. Chan (2021a) is a Cantonese, Hong Kong-born-and-raised model currently residing in the United States, as she made explicitly clear in her video, "I'm an Asian from Asia" (0:03 – 0:05). Chan's video is a commentary on the Western appropriation of Asian culture through the lenses of an overseas Chinese. Amongst the many things she touched on

in her video, the overarching theme seems to be the assertion of her ideals by acting as the mouthpiece of Asian-Americans in permitting the Western adoption of Chinese culture. She elaborates to express her distaste for Asian-Americans for 'gatekeeping' Asian culture from Western consumption. Additionally, her complete dismissal of racial struggles experienced by Asian-Americans breathes life into the harmful narrative that Asian-Americans are not considered rightful Asians due to the differing experiences between them. In an earlier video, Chan (2021b) explains that she moved to the United States to further her modelling career because her height of 5 '10, weight of 155 lbs., and 41-inch hip size are considered obese in Asian beauty standards (0:00–0:11). Despite claiming her Asian authenticity and superiority over Asian-Americans, Chan's immigration to the United States is fueled by the desire to fit into Western beauty standards from which she can benefit and profit.

The ideological configuration of what comprises the practice of cultural appropriation is dichotomous and is ever-changing within its depending context. While cultural relics represent nuanced historical values to their ethnic origins, they are now often regarded as trendy garments and accessories in contemporary Western pop culture. In her video, Chan (2021a) states that "Culture is meant to be shared" (2:23 – 2:25). While reception to Western adoption of culture is frequently perceptible as a welcome protection of ethnic and racial identities, cultural borrowing into urban trends often dilutes their sacred significance and is often reduced to meaningless practices that undermine people of colour (Siems, 2019, p. 408). The dynamic of unity advertised through cultural borrowing is deeply rooted in post-racial rhetoric. According to Campbell (2017), the "myth of assimilation" argues that people of colour and their white counterparts are equal and that racial minorities have "overcome racism and (are) fully assimilated into the American mainstream" (p. 15). By normalizing Western appropriation of other cultures without credulity or

consideration of their historical importance, there is an assumption that the cultural components hold no significance and are, therefore, 'free for the taking.' Within this rationale, it is ironic that the notion of unity used to justify cultural appropriation is intentionally divisive; it assumes that race relations within contemporary Western society exist on a level playing field and that the unequal history of power dynamics is nonexistent.

Within this post-racial rhetoric, Chan's commentary on gatekeeping and culture appropriation lacks an understanding of the nature of Western consumption of Asian cultures. Chan (2021a) states, “If you love Asian culture, just go for it.” (2:21 – 2:23). Following this line of reasoning, we can consider Western adaptations of Japanese culture that are often manifested in white women dressing up in Japanese schoolgirl uniforms and doll-like makeup to achieve a ‘kawaii’ or cute aesthetic to present a highly caricatured front of Japanese femininity (Pellitteri, 2018, p. 1). Often popularized by anime, this act, in itself, does not attempt to steal or claim a part of Japanese heritage – similarly, cosplaying has no cultural significance and is more so considered a commercial hobby. Although these acts are applied as a tribute to their general interest in Japanese culture, this practice propels a Western portrayal of historically sexualized stereotypes of Asian femininity as docile, innocent, cute, and pure (Pellitteri, 2018, p. 3). Campbell's (2017) idea of the "myth of difference" identifies how media constantly represent people of colour differently than white people to reinforce racial and historical stereotypes associated with skin colour (p. 15). In this example, white portrayals of Asian femininity are often misguided and therefore propagate historical stereotypes of Asian women, condensing their personhood to mere objects of fetishization. There is a blatant ignorance of how "stereotyped assumptions are difficult to overcome" (Campbell, 2017, p. 16), and the critical message Chan deploys is that inaccurate and demeaning depiction of Asian culture is not only acceptable but encouraged.

Much like media representations of people of colour, the "myth of marginality" illustrates how racial minorities are frequently ignored and underrepresented in the news, therefore exhibiting a sense of insignificance to their existence and the general invisibility of their voices (Campbell, 2017, p. 15). Cultural appropriation works similarly to minimize the realities of people of colour as if their cultural traditions no longer hold as much importance and their cultural significance is extinct. As a powerful socializing agent, the media is plagued by monolithic stereotypes of the ways in which people of colour live their lives. Cultural relics are often dubbed as "exotic" and treated as if the origins of a distant and faraway land stray from what is considered normal in Western civilization (Brown & Leledaki, 2010, p. 129). By completely disregarding the historical significance behind what is now considered “trendy” cultural accessories, Chan distorts the importance of the cultural systems that make up her Asian identity. Cultural appropriation allows the concurrent invisibility in media images to significantly impact how Asian-Americans develop the agency to realize and shape their own racial and cultural identities (Besana et al., 2019, p. 202). The general invisibility of the existence of people of colour is executed to justify the vicious cycle of cultural appropriation functioning as an extension of oppression (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021, p. 586). Since people of colour do not seem to exist, there is no longer a need to acknowledge cultural differences because the Other does not exist in the first place, which then circles back into the notion of post-racialism.

Some proponents of cultural appropriation are supposedly done under the farce of allyship and solidarity. However, equating appropriation with appreciation is a dangerous rhetoric that can further demoralize people of colour. The cultural landscape of Western society prides itself in multiculturalist acceptance but fails to acknowledge its own dysfunctional tendencies that disprove its claims of racial unity and progress. Chan (2021a) says, “If anyone ever needs permission…wear

your qipao, I love to see it" (00:58 – 1:09). When Western practices of cultural disrespect are enabled by an overseas Chinese like Chan, who grew up living in a completely different political and racial climate than Asian-Americans, it is relevant to refer to the power imbalance that favours the hegemonic systems of white power in Western society (Siems, 2019, p. 418). As an ethnic majority in Hong Kong, Chan does not experience the world the same way as an average Asian-American in the West – whose entire existence has been defined by the racial axes of their identity. While Asian-Americans perpetually experience the denial of their existential rights to be treated as equals to their white counterparts, Chan wields power and privilege as part of the dominant racial group in her home country (Mistry & Kiyama, 2021, p. 590). This geographical disconnect between overseas Asians and Asian-Americans ignites the conversation regarding the appropriative process of orientalism which stems from the imperialistic Western knowledge of Orientals.

The discourse surrounding Chan's commentary video hints at the Western propensity of underplaying the historical and modern repercussions of colonial oppression. Chan (2021a) mentions how exhausted she is when hearing Asian-Americans' discontent with the appropriative tendencies of non-Asian people, "we [overseas Asians] love when people share our culture, we love… when we see foreigners in qipao" (00:42 - 00:50). The problematic means to which this statement is uttered lies in the discursive setting in which ideologies are thus formed. Chan's opinions manifest through an institutional understanding of the racial climate of Hong Kong. The keyword here is "foreigner" – pertaining to those other than one's own, a stranger, an outsider. Ironically, this definition can accurately describe the lived experiences of Asian-Americans residing in Western societies today. As explained by Said (2014), the issues arising within Orientalism originate from where the Orients are studied, "in what institutional or discursive

setting, for what audience, and with what ends in mind" (p. 129). By drawing parallels from the Orientalist relationship between Europe and Asia, the exact correlation can be derived from the disconnect occurring from Chan speaking for Asian-Americans through the lens of an overseas Asian. By categorizing herself as different from other Asian-Americans, Chan aims to draw a distinct line separating herself from Asian-Americans – similar to the hegemonic "line separating Occident from Orient" (Said, 2014, p. 128). This distinction is emboldened by the intellectual need to speak on issues about another region of the world, fueled by the belief in upholding her knowledge of Asian authenticity.

Praising the Western adoption of Asian culture while condemning the Asian-American community for attempting to protect their cultural identity from possible disrespect indicates the erroneous epistemological contexts in which Chan is being studied. It is crucial to discuss the "subject doing the studying as well as the object or realm being studied" (Said, 2014, p. 128) when examining Orientalism. Chan's immediate environment overseas is surrounded by the cultural ideologies of her political origin, which is later contaminated to integrate herself into Western civilization as she moved to the United States; this is evident in her partaking in the modelling industry and aligning herself with the Western beauty standard. On the other hand, the acceptance of Chan's American counterparts into Western society has always been contingent on them taking the position of the oppressed. Discursive reductions of Asian societies enveloping the transcendental appeal of Eastern culture persist prevalently in Western modernity through Orientalist perceptions (Brown & Leledaki, 2010, p. 129). By immigrating to the United States to pursue her modelling career, Chan is negotiating her definition of beauty through the Western psyche that perpetuates the continuous search for the commercial appeal of the exotic 'other.' This connection is fascinating as Chan's livelihood depends on her assimilation into the Western beauty

standard – one that can only be preserved by the denial of the backward exotification of her Chinese origins, thereby misconstruing the true meaning of cultural appreciation. Ironically, her video commentary primarily reflects her disassociation from her own cultural heritage, despite her claims to be the righteous Asian over Asian-Americans.

In conjunction with Chan's understanding of cultural appropriation due to her social environment, it becomes increasingly clear that her rhetoric truly endorses the merchandising of diasporic Asian culture. In referencing the sexualization of the traditional Chinese dress, qipao, Chan (2021a) says, “It’s fashion. It’s not just a traditional dress anymore.” (2:09 – 2:12). Admittedly, there has been some documented usage of traditional garments worn to accentuate the alluring charms of Asian femininity, such as the Oiran kimono style traditionally worn by high-ranking courtesans of the Edo period in Japanese history (Hughes, 1995, p. 187). However, to water down the historical significance of its usage as a traditional garment into urban fashion blatantly displays the ideologies of cultural commodification and erasure. The commercialization of cultural heritage is a violent act of extracting sacred values from their origins. This social phenomenon can be understood by a framework of categorizing whiteness as a particular skin colour. Richard Dyer (2017) claims that whiteness is "internally variable and unclear at the edges" (p. 48). Verifiably, the Western capitalist system has profited and thrived off of treating people of colour and their cultural artifacts as public domain – with elements that can be adapted into whiteness whenever deemed convenient for the dominant group (Hassan, 2009, p. 338). By overlooking the cultural importance behind what the traditional Chinese dress signifies, Chan permits the theft of her culture and disallows the historical uniqueness of Asia to exist in Western society.

Cultural commodification and appropriation are profitable because it warrants the narrative of stripping away cultural identities of the Other to appease the Western gaze. "In China, we sexualize ourselves," Chan (2021) says (1:27 - 1:30), in support of Western-produced sexualized versions of the qipao. Unbeknownst to her, the evolving styles of qipao symbolize liberation and progressive modernity for traditional Chinese women (Ng, 2015, p. 56). Western modifications of cultural commodities, such as the embellishments and sexualized reproduction of the qipao, are attempts to westernize China's cultural entities because they are made specifically for white people. With respect to the practice of tanning, Dyer argues how "it displays white people's right to be various literally to incorporate into themselves features of other peoples" (Dyer, 2017, p. 49). Applying this rationale similarly to cultural appropriation demonstrates how the diverse cultural markers that hold significance in Asian culture are borrowed by Western adoption and, therefore, translated and folded into whiteness. White people are allowed the privilege to pick and choose elements from different cultures to integrate themselves into while retaining the status and power of being white. In reality, the dilution of cultural differences and the importance of people of colour primarily function at white people's disposition; ultimately, people of colour will have nothing left to identify with other than the capitalist culture of Western society.

Thus far, this paper has encompassed the theoretical frameworks of the racial myths in media, Orientalism, and the sense of whiteness as skin colour to highlight the geographical tension between Chan and her American counterparts and understand the adversity that appropriative practices have on their rightful owners. Dissecting Chan's TikTok commentary through these different cultural frameworks concedes a profound underlying rationale behind cultural appropriation in the West – that the nature of every cultural exchange is and has always been unequal. When opening the floor to Chan's dialogue in speaking for her American counterparts,

there is a sense of danger felt by Asian-Americans who may not wish to see their cultural identity disintegrate in the avalanche of globalization. Culture is a precious fragment of one's identity, so it becomes a secret to be kept, a hoard to be guarded. The spatial relationship between this geographical disconnect also paves the way to understand how cultural appropriation functions to establish hegemonic dominance over those deemed as Other, sustained by cultural commodification in a capitalist society. The fluidity of culture makes sharing its elements inevitable and a potentially constructive agent to achieve a harmonious society. However, deep-seated systemic issues must be dismantled and unraveled long before the gaps in the cultural bridge can be built between people of colour and Western society. On a more cautionary note, it might momentarily suffice to leave the onus on Western society to take a step toward reconciliation.

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Performing Muslim identities through embodiment- self-representing through fashion, aesthetics, and style

Asma Bernier

Abstract

Modesty is practiced by people regardless of their class, sexuality, gender, race, or religion. However, there is an association between modesty, Islam, and the Islamic veil (or hijab). Hijab is an Islamic garment that is meant for Muslim women to wear if they choose to do so. Vast interpretations of Islamic texts produce variability in the definitions and understandings surrounding modesty. Veiled Muslim women practice modesty by concealing their hair, skin, and body. The veil is a signifier of their religious affiliation and modest lifestyle. This paper is a study of performance and visual enactment within the photos and videos posted by a sample of veiled Muslim women influencers, which include Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed. Hijabi influencers, or hijabistas, are veiled Muslim women who are consistent with fashion trends and hijab styles in an online context. This article uses visual rhetorical analysis to examine the captions and the clothing, pose, background, symbols, colours and textures present in the photos and videos. By doing this, this paper seeks to examine how hijabi influencers define Islamic modesty through the photos and videos uploaded on their visual social media platforms. Theoretical frameworks, such as post-colonial feminism, orientalism, and creative labour support the interpretation of the data. This research demonstrates that the definition of Islamic modesty can be understood beyond a binary perspective.

Keywords

Hijabi influencers, female identities, modesty, visual rhetoric, identity politics, fashion

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Introduction

There is immense variability in the interpretations of the hijab, which illustrates the versatility of clothing in terms of the social, cultural, religious, and political significance that it perpetuates (Hoodfar, 1993; Shirazi, 2020). However, two main discourses are pervasive in Western society when discussing the veil: it is seen as either a signifier of oppression or liberation (Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014). Veiling is associated with being submissive to and controlled by a patriarchal order (Hoodfar, 1993). Many women in Middle Eastern countries are forced by patriarchal regimes to dress modestly and to veil; therefore, they do not find beauty or liberation in modesty (Lodi, 2020). Moreover, competing discourses attempt to negatively define veiled Muslim women and the veil becomes a signifier of gender oppression and as a barbaric – or radical – religious practice (Droogsma, 2017; Ternikar 2009). However, veiling is also seen as a way for Muslim women to resist patriarchy (Hoodfar, 1993). For instance, Muslim women situated in the West believe that modesty is liberating (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Lodi, 2020). Lodi (2020) claims that many women who dress modestly for Islamic purposes believe that their "portrayal of modesty is inherently liberating" (p. 238). Veiled Muslim women, who are also social media influencers, demonstrate this liberation through the exploration of different styles, such as streetwear and unique poses (Lodi, 2020). This liberation is also achieved as Muslim women believe their veil is an escape from a "hyper-sexualized society" (Lodi, 2020, p. 240).

Clothing is a form of identity expression that facilitates an association between individuals and a social group (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020). Therefore, veiled Muslim women publicly identify themselves as participants in Islam (Droogsma, 2007; Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020). Shirazi (2020) claims that the veiled Muslim women in her study are the same as other women in the sense that "they are interested in how they look and the clothes they wear" (p. 412), meaning that they are fashion conscious (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Fashion consciousness is defined as a "person's awareness to fashion and the ability to pick, dress similarly or imitate and be responsive to fashion" (Hassan & Harun, 2016, p. 480). Veiled women creatively style and wear their hijab by following fashion trends (Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020); therefore, they are being fashion conscious by exploring and consuming hijab fashion as an attempt to identify, or associate, with images of Muslims (Hassan & Harun, 2016). These women are referred as hijabistas, which are veiled women who engage in fashionable lifestyles and accentuate

themselves through stylish hijab practices (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016). In their study, Hassan and Harun (2016) discover that hijabistas aim to dress by following trends and maintain their pious image simultaneously. However, in Iran, particularly, women who explore fashion through clothing and style their hijab in different ways are often viewed negatively by hardliners (Shirazi, 2020). These women are labelled as "Westernized" as they do not follow the traditional or proper ways of wearing the hijab (Shirazi, 2020). The Iranian government that makes the hijab compulsory believes that a "proper" hijab is black and simple (Shirazi, 2020). Therefore, veiled Muslim women living in Iran may face harsh consequences, such as tickets, when they are wearing the hijab in an "improper" way (Shirazi, 2020). This indicates that much like the hijab, modest fashion is subjective as it holds multiple meanings depending on "culture, class, ethnicity and generation" (Lodi, 2020, p. 19).

By analyzing visual artifacts produced and shared by Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed, this work examines the ways in which hijabi influencers perform their values and beliefs surrounding Islamic modesty through content creation. Influenced by Foss & Foss' (2020) work, "An Explication of Visual Enactment in *Advanced Style*: Fashioning a Challenge to the Ideology of Old Age", this paper uses a visual rhetorical approach to analyze visual enactment. There will be ongoing interrogation between the elements within each image/video which will assist in identifying emerging meanings and interpretations. This is done through an analysis of the ideological meanings performed through elements such as attire, body language, symbols, and the background/location.

Nawal Sari is an Arab-Australian hijabi influencer based in Sydney, Australia. Sari is highly integrated within the Western fashion industry and collaborates with and models for high-fashion brands, like Gucci. She has a large following on her platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, and is a verified user on Instagram. The second influencer, Rawdah Mohamed, is also verified on Instagram. Mohamed models for many high-fashion brands and tends to wear bold outfits. She has been featured in fashion magazines, like Vogue Arabia, and is an editor for Vogue Scandinavia. She is a Somali-Norwegian content creator based in Oslo, Norway. These influencers were chosen to be included in this study based on both their online practices surrounding modesty and Islam, their immense popularity, and presence online. Photos and videos of these influencers

will be examined through a visual rhetorical lens, which will assist in revealing patterns or inconsistencies in definitions of modesty.

Method

The method of analysis that this research follows is visual rhetoric. Visual rhetoric is a method that primarily focuses on "the symbolic or communicative aspects" of visual texts (Foss, 2005, p. 145), such as images or videos. According to rhetorical scholar Sonja Foss (2005) the use of visual rhetoric has grown considering that the method "provides access to a range of human experience not always available through the study of discourse" (p. 143). Studying visual imagery offers an alternative lens to human interaction and experience that is analyzed through "non-discursive symbols" (Foss, 2005, p. 143).

Visual rhetoric focuses on the symbolic meanings of an artifact and how ideologies are performed (Foss, 2005). Using visual rhetoric, I analyze the ways these influencers are engaging in the rhetorical strategy of visual enactment. Essentially, I will examine the ways they embody, or enact, their ideologies and meanings surrounding the veil and modest fashion. Through the elements present within each artifact, I develop an understanding of how these influencers perform their ideologies surrounding their identities. I examine how meanings are conveyed through different elements in the artifact, like clothing, body language, facial expression, symbols, and backgrounds. By doing this, I will reveal potential meanings and agendas that are being conveyed (Foss & Foss, 2020). These visual components constitute a performance (Foss & Foss, 2020). Individuals or groups of people can deliver and subvert hegemonic meaning regarding a particular topic through visual performances (Gries, 2020). Visual rhetoric studies how persuasion arises from symbolic action (Gries, 2020) that is "virtually limitless" (Foss, 2005, p. 145). Essentially, the meanings are dependent on how the researcher views and analyzes the image.

The goal of visual rhetoric is to understand how a visual artifact "operates rhetorically in contemporary culture" (Foss, 2005, p. 151). It is important to note that "not every visual artifact is visual rhetoric" (Foss, 2005, p. 144). A visual object must comply with three main characteristics to be studied under the lens of visual rhetoric. These three characteristics are: symbolic action, human interaction, and presence of an audience (Foss, 2005). Foss (2005) explains that the visual artifact must communicate meaning through a system of signs (symbolic action), involve human action "either in the process of creation or in the process of interpretation" (human interaction),

and communicate with an audience (presence of an audience) (p. 144). The visual artifacts that I analyze fit into these characteristics. The images/videos included in this study produce rhetorical meanings through their symbols and signs, incorporate human intervention as the influencers are featured in each image, and are uploaded to social media platforms intended to be viewed by a large audience.

While using visual rhetoric, the researcher aims to understand the rhetorical response of an image (Foss, 2005). Developing a rhetorical response involves attributing meaning to the elements of an image, such as body language, colours, and textures (Foss, 2005). Moreover, visual artifacts can perform ideological meanings (Gries, 2020). Individuals or groups of people can deliver and subvert hegemonic meaning regarding a particular topic through visual performances (Gries, 2020).

Veiled Muslim women influencers communicate meaning through their online performances. According to Foss & Foss (2020), "performance is a major aspect of how visibility is made" (p. 141). A core concept in this study is 'visual enactment,' which Foss & Foss (2020) define as "the way in which a challenge to an existing belief system and the presentation of an alternative are performed in some detail for viewers, primarily via the dimension of visibility" (p. 141). A focus on performance or visual enactment requires the examination of how "individuals enact the part" (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 125). This reveals the "ideological meanings", or "social agendas" conveyed through the artifact (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 127).

My analysis will focus on both the performance and "sensory aspects of the image", such as colour and texture (Foss, 2005, p. 145). This research aims to find out how the images/videos uploaded by hijabi influencers constitute an online performance and contribute to the definitions of Islamic modesty. In my analysis, the focus is placed on the hijabi influencers' attire (colour, texture, fabric, patterns, etc.), body language (eye contact, placement of hands, and pose), symbols, and the background/location of the artifact. Clothing can influence social change by resisting hegemonic "rhetorical code or syntax of dress" (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 127). Hijabi influencers engage in visual enactment as they embody ideologies through clothing and style. In addition to a focus on visual enactment I will consider the captions of images and videos as framing the performance of modesty in each case.

Performing Through Photographs

Figure 1

Screenshot of Nawal Sari's Instagram photo

Note. (Sari, 2021a).

There is a level of confidence that Sari embodies from the way she is dressed to the way she is posing and staring directly at the camera. Her pose is striking as she is standing up against a wall and holding up one of her hands against the wall. Sari's head is lifted upward, and she holds a straight face. Her pose alone demonstrates confidence and agency. The background consists of a white wall and concrete floor, which acts as a perfect canvas for Sari to show off her outfit. She is wearing a short-sleeved calf-length dress. The dress has a checkered pattern which entails different shades of yellow. Under the dress is a tight long-sleeve top that is white in colour which

allows for modesty but does not take away from the detailing of the dress, such as the puffed sleeves. Since the dress is not long enough to conceal the skin on Sari's ankles and calves, she wears long leather boots. The pointed toe, loose-fit, and length of the boot adds dimension to her outfit while offering more modesty. The shape of her body is completely covered as the dress and boots are loose. By doing this, Sari demonstrates to her audience that she is staying consistent with the modest practices of Islam while also being trendy. The lilac purple and fire red hijab add a pop of colour to the neutral outfit. Sari ties it in a way that allows the hijab to fall in the front which works to conceal her chest. The black, leather shoulder bag matches perfectly with her boots as they share the same material and colour.

Through her performance, Sari is experimenting with alternative ways of tying her hijab to develop a more stylish look. This indicates that she is exploring hijab fashion through clothing and styling as many hijabistas do (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016). This often equates to being labelled as "Westernized" by other Muslims since the traditional wearing of the hijab is not being practiced (Shirazi, 2020). Rather than wearing plain attire and a simple black hijab, Sari experiments with different patterns and textures. From a leather bag and boots to a checkered yellow dress and purple hijab, Sari's performance entails levels of integration within the Western fashion industry while still following the Islamic rulings of modesty. She is following mainstream fashion brands and selecting pieces that are unique and modest. Sari covers her hair, neck, chest and ears while also concealing the shape of her body (Al-Saji, 2010; Droogsma, 2007; Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014; Najmabadi, 2005). Through the pose, outfit, and caption of her photograph, it can be inferred that Sari holds agency.

The caption of this photograph states that it is an advertisement for Hana Tajima's 2021 Spring and Summer collection. Sari expresses her interest and appreciation for this collection and Hana Tajima's ability to maintain diversity and inclusivity in the mainstream fashion industry. Sari says that "this collection is a modest fashion dream" within the caption of her image. This demonstrates that the mainstream fashion industry and veiled Muslim women are in conversation with one another. This is consistent with Ahmed's (2000) new framework that calls for Westerners to establish dialogue with strangers (p. 61). Essentially, when Islamic modesty is understood in a broader context, brands can incorporate modesty and develop ongoing dialogue. There is more agency in the representations of veiled women as they are in control of the performative aspects

of advertisements, for example, Sari uses her platform to model a fashion brand's new collection that contains modest styles. She uses her voice to express appreciation for the integration of modesty within the industry. This indicates that Sari, who is part of a group of women that has historically been considered as subalterns, has the agency to speak on her own behalf and use her voice and fashion skills to integrate herself within high fashion. Finally, as Sari is wearing clothing from a high fashion brand and promoting it through her photograph, she is engaging in creative labour. Although Sari is gaining economic wealth through this labour, she is also engaging in self-exploitation. This may take away from her agency as her body, fashion sense, and modest lifestyle is being commodified through her labour practices.

Figure 2

Screenshot of Rawdah Mohamed's Instagram photo

Note. (Mohamed, 2022a).

In *Figure 2* Mohamed is wearing a completely red outfit. Rawdah is not looking directly at the camera. Instead, she is looking to the side and her eyes are covered by large sunglasses. The sunglasses reflect the sun, sky, and trees that she is gazing at in the distance. With one foot in front of the other, Mohamed stands effortlessly in the snow. This directs all attention toward her outfit and how it is styled. The background contrasts with her outfit in multiple ways. For one, the bright red colours that make up her outfit stand out against the white snow and blue sky. The winter snow and weather typically call for cozy outfits like puffer jackets and oversized sweaters; however, Mohamed is wearing a fashionable outfit despite the location. She is experimenting with bold colours and statement pieces while being in the wilderness, which demonstrates uniqueness and fashion consciousness (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Fashion conscious individuals often wear unusual clothing to adhere to a unique fashion style that enhances their self-representation (Hassan & Harun, 2016, p. 483). Mohamed is playful in her fashion choices. Even though red is already a bold colour, she is completely covered in it. Through this, Mohamed challenges the traditional expectations of veiled Muslim women and how they should wear plain attire to ensure there is no attention drawn to them (Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014; Shirazi, 2020).

The red theme that Mohamed integrates within her performance appears to be purposeful. This inference is made through her caption as she says "on some red tings" with red exclamation marks and a red stop sign. These emojis are used to show excitement. The term '*tings'* is slang for "things". The caption allows for viewers to directly look at Mohamed's outfit and observe the unique qualities of it. Mohamed wears red, baggy pants with white stripes on the sides of them and tucks them into white snow boots. She pairs these pants with a red asymmetrical long dress-like top. The short side exposes one side of the red pants, and the long side conceals shorter one until the knee. She wears a metallic red jacket on top and finalizes the outfit with a red hijab. This offers modesty as everything is covered including skin, body shape, and hair. Mohamed embodies her Islamic beliefs through the wearing of modest clothes. Rather than perpetuating the hegemonic understandings of the veil, such as it being oppressive and backward, Mohamed engages in a playful performance surrounding modesty and the Islamic veil (Droogsma, 2007). This playful performance is demonstrated through the bright colours she is wearing. Red is not a traditionally accepted colour for the veil. Black has traditionally been the accepted colour for veils. The combination of different materials, such as metallic and matte red, demonstrates that Mohamed can fully represent her fashion interests and creatively style her hijab (Hassan & Harun, 2016;

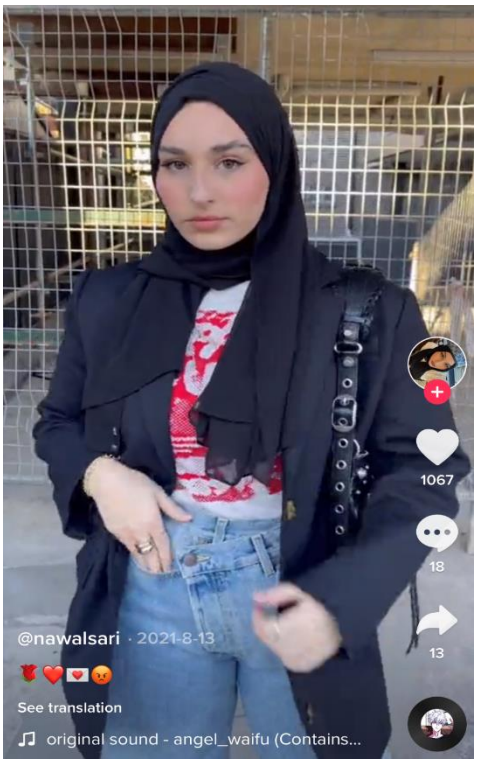
Shirazi, 2020). This resists the dominant stereotypical beliefs that that Islam limits women through the veil.

Mohamed's performance entails bold attire, fashion experimentation, and a confident pose. This performance maintains the idea that modest fashion can be practiced through bold fashion statements and by being integrated within the mainstream fashion industry. This demonstrates that Mohamed is culturally translating Western fashion and showing its potential to accommodate modesty. Mohamed holds agency through her ability to choose what to wear, how to wear it, and whom to share it with. She engages in re-representation of veiled women through her boldness and high levels of agency, which complicates the belief of veiled women as a "single monolithic subject" (Mohanty, 1984).

Performing Through Videos

Figure 3

Screenshot of a TikTok video produced by Nawal Sari TikTok



Note. (Sari, 2021b).

By putting a series of short clips together and experimenting with different poses and angles, Sari creates a playful TikTok video to showcase a trendy outfit. The caption of the video is 4 red emoticons (emoji), which includes a rose, heart, letter with a heart on it, and an angry face. These emojis seem to add stylistic features to Sari's performance rather than ideological meanings. Behind her is a metal gate that completely encloses the area behind it. This is a simple background for Sari to showcase her outfit, while also adding mysterious elements to the video. The song she uses for this video is called 'What You Waiting For' by Gwen Stefani. It is popular on TikTok as it is loud and repetitive, which makes it catchier. The loud qualities of Gwen Stefani's voice and the beat within the song contrasts with modesty as it brings attention to Sari and engages users. This song adds to Sari's performance as she is negotiating the meaning of modesty by introducing "untraditional" music for veiled women while posing to show off her fashion look. This music is defined as untraditional as it explores louder vocal and instrumental sounds. Through both the music and the exploration of metals and textures, Sari is capturing grunge aesthetics in her performance. This performance is an alternative to the hyper-femininity often associated with veiled Muslim women.

Sari stares directly into the camera at the start of her video while adjusting her jeans and placing her hand, which is covered in big, gold rings, in her front pocket. She looks to the side briefly, then back at the camera with her initial pose. While fixing her bag, she looks to the side again. She poses to emphasize the front of her outfit and her side profile. For face makeup, Sari wears natural-looking makeup and brightens her cheeks with pink blush. She does the 'soapy' brow look, where gel is used to brush the eyebrows in an upward motion. She wears lipstick and eyeshadow that are different shades of pink to keep her makeup subtle and neutral. Unlike most jeans, the pair that Sari is wearing has a 'crisscross' quality to them. Rather than zipping up straight, the buttons are sewn diagonally on. This makes a simple jean appear classier and adds dimension to the outfit. Paired with the blue, baggy jeans there is a graphic tee that is mainly white with red detailing. The red detailing of the shirt matches the pink tones in Sari's makeup look. To complete the look, the influencer wears an oversized black blazer that has gold buttons. She keeps the blazer open to show the 'crisscross' on her jeans and the pop of colour from her graphic tee. Her hijab is simply black, which matches well with the blazer and bag. Sari, who wears a straight face at the beginning of the video, starts to smile when she shows the back of her outfit and the detailing of her shoulder purse, which is black leather and much metal detailing, like zippers and

buckles. The amount of metal on her purse, thick rings, oversized black blazer, and asymmetrical jeans offers a grungy look. These aspects of her outfit, along with the song used, provides an edge to the outfit. Throughout the video, Sari is showing her outfit and makeup at multiple angles. Near the end of the video, Sari's back is completely facing the camera. She slightly turns around and while looking over her shoulder, she does a "duck face" by pressing her lips together and pouting.

The loud characteristics of the outfit, like the leather and metal features of the purse, crisscross jean, hints of red colour, and song, add emphasis to the overall performance. There is a level of experimentation associated with the way Sari is dressed, how she stares as intimidated by the camera in the beginning, and the song attached to the video. She also engages in playfulness through certain poses and facial expressions. There is ease in her movements. This is seen through her ability to act natural in her performance while clearly posing and trying to look good. Her smile and pout demonstrate that she is engaging in a leisure experience. This allows Sari to embody the experience of being a liberated Muslim woman, which is contrary to many discourses. The liberation achieved through her appearance is a sign of detachment from popular beliefs surrounding veiled women, such as hyper-femininity and traditional clothing (black abaya and black hijab). She demonstrates this to her rhetorical audience (Foss, 2005), which are her TikTok followers and anyone who sees this video on their 'for you page (FYP)'. She engages in visual enactment (Foss & Foss, 2020) through the performative aspects of the video. In this sense, she is challenging the notions that veiled Muslim women cannot be playful or creative in their appearances and behaviour. Moreover, she is wearing a black hijab, which is a colour that has oppressive connotations attached to it when referring to hijabi women (Droogsma, 2017; Shirazi, 2020; Ternikar 2009). However, while she wears it, she does not demonstrate that she is oppressed. Her performance indicates that the colour black is used mainly for fashion purposes, such as matching colours, and to add to her edgy look. This illustrates that Sari is negotiating the understandings of modesty. This is contrary to the dichotomy between the East and West that is discussed in the theoretical framework (Mohanty, 1984; Said, 1978). Rather than completely practicing the Islamic traditions of modesty or integrating within the West, Sari finds her own way of maintaining piety and fashion.

Figure 4

Screenshot of an Instagram video uploaded by Rawdah Mohamed

Note. (Mohamed, 2022b).

Mohamed is walking across a street, in what appears to be a French city based on the sign that is written in French that reads ‘Rue Sainte-Cécile’ and translates to ‘Sainte-Cecile Road’. Mohamed edits this video into slow-motion, which acts as a form of dramatization. This is because the action of walking across the street appears dramatized as her body movements are slowed down and we can see slight movements of her clothing, like the blazer and skirt, which are caused by the wind. The audio that Mohamed uses for her video has one lyric, “it’s a look”, which is a phrase repeated throughout the song. The beat to the audio sounds like something that is used in a fashion show, which fits the video perfectly as Mohamed is strutting across a street in a fashionable way. Through her performance, Mohamed uses the aesthetic streets and neutral background as a fashion runway to emphasize the uniqueness of her outfit.

As she walks across the street, Mohamed looks ahead of her and slowly glances to the side. Covering her eyes are a pair of black sunglasses which are tucked into a black hijab. For a clean look, her hijab sits tightly around her head, and is tucked into her red blazer. In her caption, Mohamed gives credit to the person who seems to have designed the "magnificent blazer" (2022). The red blazer is unique in every aspect. Firstly, it has intricate details where white lines are sewn on in a specific pattern. There is a white line that goes upwards and two lines on each side that are sewn on diagonally. This pattern is all over the blazer, and on both sides which develops symmetry. The blazer also has padded shoulders and big collars, which gives it a bolder look. The blazer is cropped, and Mohamed closed it with the two medium sized buttons at the bottom. The sleeve of the blazer falls just above the knees, which covers Mohamed's entire arm. The design is purposely supposed to be oversized and hide the arms of the wearer. Although this is the style of the blazer, there is a functional feature where the inner sleeve has slit for the arms to escape. While wearing a pair of straight-leg leather pants, Mohamed layers it with a skirt with a large open slit in the front. The skirt could be buttoned but Mohamed only keeps one button enclosed at the very top of the skirt. To complete the entire look, she wears square-toe leather boots. By wearing black leather on black leather with a bold, red blazer, Mohamed demonstrates the versatility of clothing. She also wears black lipstick on the outer areas of her lips, leaving the middle of her lips a natural colour.

Since Mohamed explores fashion through bold statements, layering, textures, and patterns, she performs the idea that unique fashion can be worn with the hijab. Mohamed's performance indicates that she is fashion conscious (Hassan & Harun, 2016). This fashion consciousness is presented through the pairing of different pieces of garments and responding to fashion trends through bold statements. Moreover, she is interested in her appearance through the carefully planned outfit (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Mohamed wears original clothing that enhances her individuality and acts as a method of self-representation. This awareness influences their decision to wear bold colours and explore a variety of fashion styles (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Her outfit is mostly all black, excluding her blazer. However, her use of black is liberating through the unique textures and styling methods. By being fashion conscious, Mohamed holds a level of agency. She can represent herself and her hijab in an alternative way. This can be described using Benjamin's (1923) theory of cultural translation as Mohamed reveals the limitations within the original definitions of modesty. She uses bold fashion to demonstrate that modesty can be playful. To do this, she wears fashion garments from luxury brands and styles it with the hijab. This reveals that

Islamic modesty and fashion is not limited and develops deeper meanings that are not present in the original. She seems to subvert the tensions surrounding the veil and Muslim women by being loud in her fashion decisions. The first thing that the viewer may notice about Mohamed's performance is the clothing and the last noticeable feature would be the veil. This blends the differences between the veiled woman and the West. The West tends to identify these differences to make 'the stranger' recognizable (Ahmed, 2000). Mohamed performs the idea that all veiled Muslim women embody different experiences and represent themselves through fashion. Therefore, they do not hold homogenous experiences (Mohanty, 1984).

This analysis demonstrates that there are similarities in how these two veiled Muslim women define Islamic modesty. Islamic modesty can be explored through different aesthetics, such as grunge and feminine styles. The analysis indicates that the different aesthetics can be incorporated into Islamic modesty and hijab practices without taking away from the overall purpose of the veil. However, at the same time, these hijabi influencers negotiate the meanings of the veil as they are not practicing Islamic modesty exactly how it is outlined in the Qur'an. The Qur'an outlines that modesty is achieved through veiling everything except the face, hands, and feet. Fares and Zein reveal their ankles. The Qur'an also mentions that Muslim women should conceal, or hide, their adornments, removing any attention from one's body by avoiding bold accessories, jewelry, make-up, and colours wearing outfits allows for greater modesty. Each of the influencers wear statement pieces, whether it is a purse or blazer, and eye-catching colour schemes. Although this is not entirely consistent with the Islamic rulings of modesty, their hair, skin, and body shape are completely covered. These veiled women are also practicing Islamic modesty in a way that resists and challenges dominant views, which suggest that the hijab oppresses women and veiled women only wear black, simple attire (Droogsma, 2007; Shirazi, 2020). Instead, these hijabi influencers explore fashion and trends through their clothing.

All the influencers engage in a form of creative labour, which becomes integrated within their daily lives (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Although this labour allows for self-representation and self-actualization, it contributes to the commodification and exoticization of veiled Muslim women. As these influencers pose for the camera, wear stylish clothing, and advertise for different brands, they negotiate their modest lifestyles. Modesty is maintained through clothing and refraining from practices that bring high levels of attention to oneself. The influencers may believe that their

practices are revealing a level of agency and inspiring other modest/veiled women, which is true to an extent. However, their agency is also being compromised and they are further exoticizing their veiled and modest lifestyles through self-exploitative practices.

Conclusion

Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed explore modest fashion, Islamic modesty, and fashion trends on their platforms. The bulk of their online content is related to modest fashion. This analysis offered insight on how visual elements of an artifact, like clothing, pose, background, and logos, can communicate meaning. This thesis demonstrates that veiled Muslim women engage in visual enactment, where they perform their beliefs and ideological views through visual components of their performance (Foss & Foss, 2020). They are also continually negotiating the definitions of Islamic modesty. This is because their practices contrast with dominant views of veils and modesty and do not completely align with the Islamic doctrines of modesty.

There are multiple similarities and differences in how hijabi influencers define modesty in Islam. For one, each influencer appears to be integrated within the mainstream fashion industry in a certain way. They wear luxury, or extraordinary clothing, and work in the fashion industry. By building an association with corporate fashion these influencers demonstrate knowledge and experimentation in fashion, as well as economic wealth/power. Moreover, each of these influencers demonstrate the versatility of clothing by taking an immodest garment and modifying it in a way that maintains modesty. This demonstrates creativity and the idea that veiled Muslim women are not limited to certain brands or types of clothing, like traditional dresses (abayas) and simple, black hijabs. This constitutes cultural translation to an extent though the notion does not fully capture the fact that most influencers were born and/or live in the West and the fashion codes they are translating are not entirely foreign to them. Moreover, these influencers experiment with different aesthetics. For instance, Sari embodies some features of grunge-aesthetics through the buckles on her purse and experimentation with the colour black in contrast to red, white and blue. Mohamed has a unique sense of fashion. She explores fashion statement pieces that are separate from trendy attire. Through their unique styles, these fashion influencers define Islamic modesty as something that can be practiced within Western societies through incorporation of different styles, trends, and high-fashion brands.

These influencers engage in creative labour, which is a form of labour comprised of activities that depart from traditional notions of work (Gill & Pratt, 2008). They blend their work with their everyday work, which means that they are continually engaging in self-exploitation (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In return, they make profit and gain notoriety. However, this form of labour objectifies their performances by rendering them into content to be consumed by global audiences, and, in turn, facilitating the future commodification of modesty.

The codes of modesty in Islam are simultaneously practiced and compromised in the influencers' visual performances. This is demonstrated through the apparent distance from traditional notions of Islamic modesty, like wearing simple attire. Instead, the adornments of the hijabi influencers' outfits attract attention and illustrate that modesty can result from stylish performances. This paper reveals that the influencers contribute to complicate mainstream views of veiled Muslim women and their modest fashion practices. The visual performances analyzed in this thesis show that neither are veiled women oppressed by their male counterparts (Byng, 2010; Satiti, 2017; Zine, 2002), nor modesty is a homogenous set of practices that grant veiled Muslim women's autonomy. Instead, veiled Muslim women resist aspects of the Islamic doctrine and completely challenge Western beliefs toward the veil. There is a range of modest practices and understandings in Islam. The analysis shows that the hijabi influencers conceal their bodies, hair and skin the way that Islam outlines. However, the way that these influencers approach modesty differs. On one side of the spectrum, there is extravagant high-fashion clothing that is worn to turn heads. The last noticeable feature while wearing such bold pieces of clothing is the hijab. Mohamed resides on this end of the spectrum as she wears monochromatic and layered, bold outfits. On the other side of the spectrum, there is fashionable and trendy attire that is more typically modest. This attire is trendy and explores ways of incorporating different types of garments, modest or immodest, into their every-day attire. Even by doing this, modesty is still achieved.

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The contemporary aesthetics of adolescence: How *Euphoria* uses style to spectacularize representation of modern youth in the articulation of a teenage gaze

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Abstract

The release of the second series of the HBO hit television series Euphoria was met with large popular culture criticism of the stylization of the teenage experience. In this analysis the method of visual rhetorical analysis is used to demonstrate how visual elements of the television series Euphoria, in its performance, communicates ideas about how Euphoria prescribes audiences a certain way of viewing the experiences of adolescence in a thematically significant way, producing a 'teenage gaze.' Euphoria relies on a heavily stylized manifestation of mature themes, described by critics as "aesthetic pretensions," to convey a sense of performance that is well suited to the visual rhetorical analysis of color and light, aesthetics of technology, fashion, and setting (Lawson, 2022). This analysis expands on how these visual elements contribute to spectacularized performance, supported by commercial adoption of the teenage image and experience that is oppressive in the othering of real teens and their authentic experiences. In addition to deconstructing spectacle, this analysis focuses on the role of liminality in the visuals presented by Euphoria, and how they negotiate visual and thematic boundaries to produce nostalgia, an essential element of the teenage gaze. The evolution of the teenage gaze, and its study in popular culture contexts, is significant when considering the current sociopolitical environment where youth are often marginalized in the face of crisis. This study of visual rhetoric in Euphoria finds that through the articulation of the teenage gaze amongst mature Euphoria viewers and producers, the teenage experience is assimilated into mainstream culture by a media industry that can force experience into oblivion through stylized, aesthetic representation.

Keywords

teenage gaze, aesthetic pretensions, performance, teenage image, Euphoria

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The HBO television series, *Euphoria,* invites viewers into an electrified world of youthful transgression, made more alluring through a highly stylized depiction of contemporary adolescence and the challenges that come with it. Controversially, *Euphoria* visually explicates dangerous behavior associated with themes of sexuality, substance abuse, addiction, and identity formation through its aestheticization of a version of youth that has widely resonated with global audiences. To contextualize its viewership and pop culture significance, HBO authorities recently confirmed that *Euphoria* had rivaled the classic television program *Game of Thrones* in audience reach, and was the second most watched TV series released by the company, ever (Spangler, 2022).

Euphoria follows the unreliable narrator Rue, as she moves through the world of her youth and the ins and outs of an opioid addiction, while also chronicling the trials and tribulations of teenage angst and desperation experienced by her peers, inviting elements of fantasy and reality that grounds the series in a literal and visual euphoria. Critically, the visual aesthetics associated with these dichotomies have been described as "aesthetic pretensions" enacting a visual narrative that is "too stylish" for its own good, where the sense of performance by series creators is perpetuated by the "older folks," producing it and ultimately undermining the stakes it seeks to embolden (Lawson, 2022). As youth experiences can be marginalized through stylization, this project contends that *Euphoria* is worthy of academic attention, particularly in a context of increasing awareness of youth addiction and substance abuse, and mental health crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, in my examination of *Euphoria*'s visual rhetoric, I argue that the show utilizes visual strategies to spectacularize contemporary youth experiences. In turn, I argue that the spectacularization of youth experiences results in the articulation of a "teenage gaze" that reduces the complexity of youth's everyday experience for the consumption of older audiences. The manufactured "teenage gaze" produces a nostalgic imagination of young people's experiences as the visual rhetorical analysis of the first two seasons of the show reveals.

Historically, HBO has relied upon its 'prestige' television network reputation to produce bold, distinctive television that elicits "characteristics of exclusivity and prestige, of representing a particular approach to TV style and aesthetics, narrative and storytelling, as well as a way of thinking about television as culture" (Akass & McCabe, 2018, p. 2). The analysis of teen representations in shows such as *Euphoria* is increasingly relevant when considering how depictions of adolescence are rapidly changing, potentially transforming the teen genre through

visual aesthetics, and the way that youth is perceived through narrative constructions in popular culture discourses going forwards. This becomes evident in the production of a "teenage gaze," a powerful way in which the cultural industries have capitalized on the nostalgia of youth through a return to an idealized past, in the future, while simultaneously packaging it as a way to view the world that is lighter and more glamorous physically and, consequently, spiritually through the function of liminality in visual forms. As a result, I use visual rhetorical analysis to deconstruct functional visual elements of fashion, aesthetics of technology, setting, color and light, and the ways in which these elements work in conjunction with narrative to produce a teenage gaze made significant through the effects of spectacle and liminality.

Method

In this project I have employed Foss's (2004) theory of visual rhetoric to explore how *Euphoria* utilizes formal visual elements to construct a teenage gaze. Visual rhetoric is a critical study of the function of imagery in a work that seeks to inform or persuade viewers. This allows viewers to understand and interpret visual symbols, and subsequently their operation in contemporary culture (Foss, 2004). Visual rhetoric allows scholars to assess how communication is performed through images and the symbols associated with them (Foss, 2004). Accordingly, the perspective established in *Euphoria,* through the identification of pervasive visual images and themes through formal visual elements and modes of discourse (components) are enhanced by the study of visual rhetoric. Foss (2004) articulates how this operates, where "Human experiences that are spatially oriented, nonlinear, multidimensional, and dynamic often can be only communicated through visual imagery or other non-discursive symbols" (p. 143). Foss (2004) continues by claiming that "to understand and articulate such experiences require attention to these kinds of symbols" (p. 143).

In its production, *Euphoria* is a proponent of an approach to youth through a teenage gaze, in pursuit of a notably nostalgic worldview, through the exploration of spectacle and liminality, in their formal visual forms, including the aesthetic manipulation of color, form, imagery, medium, setting, and fashion. Liminality uses visual cues to allow viewers to move in and out of reality and fantasy, and the past and present. Alternatively, spectacle speaks to how *Euphoria* uses these aesthetics to spectacularize representations of a modern teenage experience in formation of a teenage gaze. This is best identified and deconstructed through a visual rhetorical perspective as

visual rhetoric is concerned with how visual artifacts are used to communicate with audiences through literal, substantive formal content elements and the symbolic, stylistic nature of images (Foss, 2004). Therefore, visual rhetoric is a method that allows for a close reading of the nature of images produced throughout the series in its imagery that ultimately constructs larger narratives about teenage representation that have allowed for critics to coin terms like "The Euphoria Effect," a term used to describe the resurgence of Y2K fashion trends made synonymous with the series (Moore, 2022). A rhetorical perspective on visual imagery is also valuable to this study because it provides knowledge of how visual imagery produces discourses that, in the case of Euphoria, contribute to the 'othering' of modern youth (Foss, 2004).

To deconstruct the images presented throughout the series, Foss (2004) offers a framework for the study of visual images: a focus on the nature, function, and evaluation of the rhetorical text. Meaning is attributed to images through the identification of nature and function in a text, as "colors, lines, textures, and rhythms in an image provide a basis for the viewer to infer the existence of images, emotions, and ideas" to be deconstructed in the process of evaluation of the text (Foss, 2004, p. 145). Therefore, those who study visual rhetoric engage in identification and evaluation of visual elements that produce meaning in a work. These perspectives, used as a method, act as "conceptual lenses through which visual images become knowable as communicative or rhetorical phenomena" and reveal a particular way of viewing images (Foss, 2004, p. 145). Within this analysis I will adopt Foss's visual rhetorical perspective to explore how *Euphoria* utilizes formal visual elements to articulate a teenage gaze, and how the evolution of this gaze results in visual cues that are politically and culturally significant when considering representation of youth discourses through a nostalgic lens.

The nature of the image is defined by "the distinguishing features of the visual image" (Foss, 2004, p. 146). The distinguishing features of an image are delineated through the identification of presented and suggested elements. Presented elements include the naming of the major physical features in the work, including: space, media/medium/technology, color, setting, and imagery (Foss, 2004, p. 146). Alternatively, suggested elements include "concepts, ideas, themes, and allusions that a viewer is likely to infer from the presented elements" (Foss, 2004, p. 146). Therefore, the nature of the image is the connection of presented, physical elements with the

meaning that an image is likely to have for an audience through the suggested, implicit elements (Foss, 2004, p. 150).

The function of the image is an attempt to discover how images are operationalized symbolically. Function is the overall action an image communicates. In this way, the function of an image is to articulate emotional appeals that are generated through intentional design choices within the work (Gries, 2020). Function is identified in the text by taking a rhetorical perspective in analyzing how interpretation of a text may be actionable for an audience (Foss, 2004). Function encourages scholars of rhetoric to adopt new ways of experiencing an image (Foss, 2004). Overall, function is essential to visual rhetoric because it is the avenue for understanding how interpretations of an image can be mobilized in larger ways. To illustrate, "The Euphoria Effect" is the subsequent global fashion influence that has followed the series, which signifies a connection to youth culture in a popular culture context outside of the teen genre (Picchio, 2021). While this may seem abstract, function is not synonymous with purpose, as an image may function in opposition to the purpose a creator has made for that image, or series of images (Foss, 2004). This very well may be the case for *Euphoria,* and the conclusions I will draw in this analysis. Nevertheless, design choices facilitate the visualization of social and political tropes, most specifically the return to the idealized past.

The evaluation of an image consists of the assessment of the potential rhetorical impact of the image and its overall legitimacy as a visual artifact. The evaluation component allows scholars to determine whether an image is "congruent with a particular ethical system or whether it offers emancipatory potential" (Foss, 2004, p. 147). Critics focus on images' contemporary and historical contexts, subject matters, communication channels, and forms, and how these components work in conjunction. In this study I will use the evaluation aspect to identify how *Euphoria* might be subversive in its articulation of a teenage gaze.

The visual rhetorical approach employed in this study is also influenced by and relies upon classical Aristotelian rhetoric as it focuses on the show's emotional and logical appeals. Aristotle's three rhetorical *pisteis* derive from communicative acts of the speaker, speech, and the audience (Longaker & Walker, 2011). This analysis is concerned with the speaker and the speech presented by *Euphoria,* with emphasis on *pathos* (emotional appeal) made to the audience, and *logos* (logic and reasoning) inherent in the direct argumentation made by the visual artifact (Longaker &

Walker, 2011). These aspects of Aristotelian rhetoric are essential to the interpretation of nature and function within a text, and ultimately inform the evaluation of meaning.

The Teenage Gaze

Through its formal visual elements, *Euphoria* develops and articulates a teenage gaze that produces social implications beyond its function within the series by removing teenagers from competitive, academic and peer-based environments into illicit, transgressive settings where everyone dresses well. *Euphoria* invites viewers to see the world through a teenage gaze, an unreliable perspective informed by age and inexperience, made desirable for audiences seeking a return to the (idealized) past, when the future seemed more appealing. In *Euphoria*'s representation of modern youth culture – supported by visual components of fashion and highly stereotypical depictions of a teenage worldview related to space and setting – stylized youth can be packaged as a fetishized view of one's own youth or past. *Euphoria* invites adult viewers to receive a sense of gratification or pleasure by looking at the teenage experience, therefore the teenager being represented is the bearer of the gaze, which makes the mature spectator the empowered individual in the interaction – the one executing the powerful act of looking. As a result of being subjected to television representations within a commodified cultural industry, the teenager also becomes a capitalist product, partaking in symbolic exchange in the market economy (Olin, 1996). Accordingly, the teenage gaze is an often oppressive point of view that draws from youth for the adult creators and viewers of *Euphoria.* As Olin (1996) suggests, a gaze invites desire for self-completion through another, where one gets to look and one gets to be looked at, and consequently extends beyond gender differences to other differences, like age, experience, and identity that accompany adolescence. In its logical and emotional appeals through the function of visual rhetoric in the components of setting, fashion, color, and medium, *Euphoria* creates a teenage gaze. A gaze confers meaning upon a work through the viewers' reception of the text, in an ongoing negotiation between the art and audience (Reinhardt, 2023).

When considering the formation of the teenage gaze, one must evaluate the visual rhetoric presented by the settings and spaces which contribute to the distinct and stylized way of viewing the world in *Euphoria*. Throughout the series, there is a use of settings and spaces that become liminal as they intertwine reality with fantasy in ways that are visually and narratively difficult to delineate, as exemplified by color and light and unreliable narration. In reference to liminality, I

will rely upon the term as presented by Victor Turner (2002) in his exploration of social process and experience, where liminality is defined by a cultural phenomena's relationship to boundaries and thresholds that classify and locate states and positions in cultural space; liminality is a transitional experience. The concept of liminality, in this context, facilitates the identification of spaces in the HBO series where fantasy is contrasted with reality. This is especially pertinent to the experience of youth where real experiences are intertwined with naivety and desire (and in *Euphoria* mind altering substance abuse) and loosely separated from the imaginary. Liminal spaces in the series are always associated with settings that are stereotypical when considering representations of teenagers in mainstream media. These spaces include fairgrounds, bowling alleys, roller rinks, school dances and plays, and house parties. While these design choices may seem arbitrary or predictable in the production of a television show about teenagers, and highly contentious to critics who have described them as a "millennials' revisionist fantasy" within the HBO media environment, the ability to contrast reality with fantasy within these spaces contributes to the articulation of a teenage gaze. When characters enter these spaces they act as a visual cue for events that can be perceived as imagined as opposed to real (Esquire Editors, 2022). I argue that *Euphoria* presents curated cliches within classically stereotypical teenage environments, like the high school dance and fairground carnival, to audiences to contribute to a distinctly stylized teenage gaze, supported by the use of color, fashion, and technology.

Setting

Euphoria offers a unique visual performance in the way it manufactures and manipulates certain settings to capture feelings of both unease and empowerment connected to the experience of youth in a timeless way. In season one this is exemplified in the culture *Euphoria* creates surrounding the teenage bedroom as a setting of extreme vulnerability and self-discovery. It is within the bedroom space that characters experience the most narrative and physical visual vulnerability. The design of a setting is what constructs these moments for viewers where the bedroom is a space for transformation. Throughout the series the bedroom acts as an arena for coming of age. For example, Maddy's character (Alexa Demie), is the most popular person in high school and has a bedroom that emulates her appeal to others, cast in delicate pink lighting with a gauzy curtain sheathing her bed frame. Her characterization introduces her own innocence as an emancipatory tool in her relationships with others, especially men, presenting her power as

emanating from the command of her own femininity (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Likewise, this behavior is also evident in the characterization of Kat (Barbie Ferreira). Particularly, in her exploration of the world of pornography, as she seeks self-empowerment and confidence through 'camming,' a practice where individuals perform acts that are sexual in nature in front of a webcam for financial compensation. Kat's bedroom space also visually reflects features of her character and personality, with a shiny brass bed, large mirror, and cast in hazy gold lighting. These engendered characterizations would not be successful without the curated bedroom setting, where physical attributes of set design act as visual cues that heavily contribute to the audience's perception of intimacy and privacy.

Figure 1

Kat's Bedroom in Euphoria

Note. From [Kat's Bedroom] [photograph], by HBO, 2022a, House Beautiful (https://www.housebeautiful.com/shopping/home-accessories/a39228634/euphoria-characters-beds/).

Figure 2

Cassie's Bedroom in Euphoria

Note. From [Cassie's Pink Bedroom] [photograph, by HBO, 2022b, House Beautiful (https://www.housebeautiful.com/shopping/home-accessories/a39228634/euphoria-characters-beds/).

Alternatively, season two offers a unique use of setting, curating a design that appears to be vintage in nature, with suburban homes taking on design qualities of the 1970's facilitated by the visually rich properties of the Kodak EKTACHROME film (Kodak, 2022). The mid-century modern home design is illustrated through carefully styled features including wood paneling, floral wallpapers, brass fixtures and furniture, which all work alongside the rich saturation of color and grain inherent in the film this season is shot on (Figure 3). This is an interesting design choice because it is contradictory in nature, opposed directly by the technology used within these spaces throughout the season, including smartphones and laptops, that characters are made to rely upon to give weight to their modern teenage experience. Therefore, this is an intentional design choice that well demonstrates how *Euphoria* is highly aestheticized to produce a certain type of imagery connected to nostalgia, which achieves visual continuity in set design for the enactment of the

teenage gaze in an aesthetically vintage environment. The result is a gaze inauthentic in logical appeal.

Figure 3

Intimate Living Spaces, Continued

Note. Filmic aspects of set design.. From [Kat on Bathroom Floor] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, 2022a, i-D (https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/wxd78y/euphoria-bts-photos-eddy-chen).

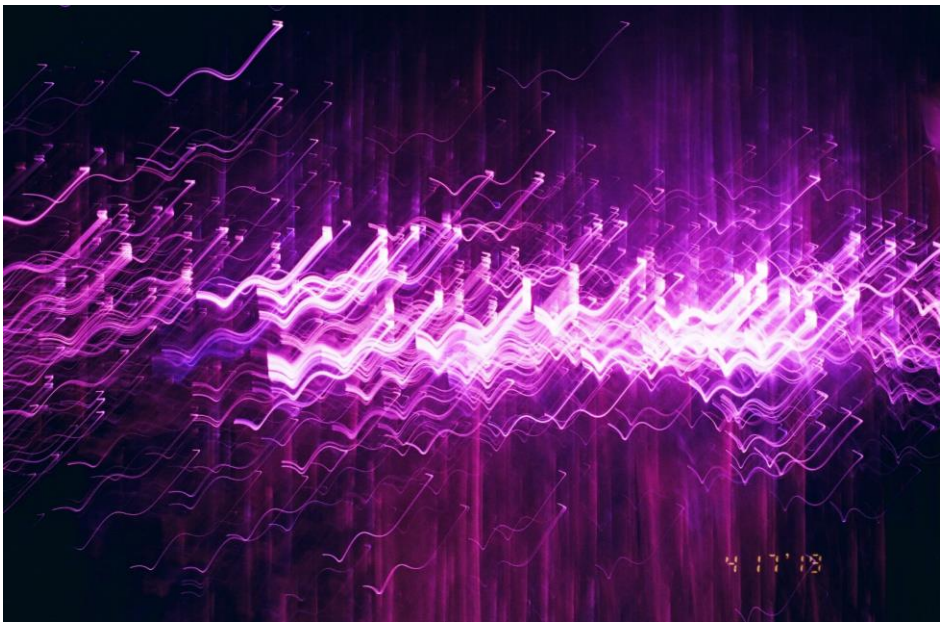
Color and Light

As formal visual components, color and light are used throughout the entirety of the series to allude to a sense of reality and fantasy within liminal spaces. Color and light work together as cues for liminality in imposing thresholds between what is real and what is imagined for unreliable narrator Rue and the other characters as they navigate the world through varying emotions and states of sobriety. Fantasy and escapism become the main thematic elements associated with light and color throughout the series, as suburbia is frequently transformed into an environment that is made illicit as intermittent neon lighting imbues exceptionally average-looking single-family homes with an element of magical realism (fig. 4 and fig. 5). Alternatively, sepia tones, desaturated, and low contrast lighting and color return viewers to reality, where fantasy is

abandoned, and an element of narrative and visual reliability are restored as neon colorways go away. The intentionality behind the color and lighting decisions become more apparent in the liminal, curated environments as these spaces are the main arenas for fantasy, elevated through highly emotional experiences connected to substance use and sexual behavior. *Euphoria's* producer and writer Sam Levinson describes the intention of reception for these design choices as "We wanted this show to be a sensory experience more than anything. And I do think the audience response has been in large part due to the way that it looks" (Kodak, 2022, para. 4).

Figure 4

Light as a Visual Cue



Note. Intermittent neon lighting transforms household environments. From [Light Leaks 1] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, n.d.a, Eddy Chen Photography (http://www.eddychenphotography.com/recent/#itemId=5fa8fd1136ca92025d675df0).

Figure 5

Light as a Visual Cue

Note. Intermittent neon lighting transforms household environments. From [Light Leaks 2] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, n.d.b, Eddy Chen Photography (http://www.eddychenphotography.com/recent/#itemId=5fa8fd1136ca92025d675df0).

Aesthetics of Technology

Levinson acknowledges that color associated with medium is used in pursuit of a "visual mission" that is connected to an "emotional expression before a logical one. So, our approach for this [year] was to make the show look like a reflection of a memory or something we're looking back upon. And for us, those memories all started on film" (Kodak, 2022, para. 6). The glossy neon-color ways used in season one transition to deeper, warmer, and more textured visual elements of color and vintage set design, and to some extent fashion in season two on account of the shift in medium from digital videography to film (Kodak, 2022). Functionally, this allows viewers to not only gaze upon the characters in the show, but to place themselves within the setting through the vintage and communal elements of the film medium that is highly relatable to mature viewers who experienced youth without the easily accessible and affordable digital photography. Ultimately the aesthetics associated with the film medium evoke the nostalgia required for the fulfillment of the teenage gaze through a return to the past inherent in the use of film. Film invites

a sense of antiquity and community because it is a one-to-one production method where continuous patterns of light produce a visual pattern (Figure 6), this direct materiality of the image invites intimacy among viewers because its production is less manipulated and more direct in intention (Rose, 2016). The film medium, in opposition to digital videography, also invites an appraisal of the social and political realities in which Levinson is advocating for by using visual elements to convey a sense of nostalgia for the past, while also constructing a representation of modern youth culture for a large audience. One could argue that *Euphoria* is avant-garde in its capacity to adapt the film medium for television, in addition to its rebellious fashion and dynamic lighting processes.

Figure 6

Protagonist, as shot on Kodak EKTACHROME

Note. Aesthetics associated with the film medium in Season 2. From [Rue in Natural Light] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, n.d.c, Eddy Chen Photography (http://www.eddychenphotography.com/recent/#itemId=5fa8fd1136ca92025d675df0).

Fashion

One of the most polarizing aspects of *Euphoria* for audiences and critics is the fashion it employs and the influence it has had following the show's release. Throughout the series, wardrobe

design is used to articulate the freedom and fluidity of identity construction that is attached to how characters are dressed and made up. *Euphoria's* element of fashion is both widely criticized and celebrated by both high and low fashion following a revival of campy Y2K style and whimsy. Berman (2022), writing for *TIME* magazine, argues that, in part, *Euphoria* has triggered an era of people vibrantly, unapologetically embracing the 'bad taste' associated with the lightness of Y2K style: "What we're dealing with is a full-blown cultural moment" (para. 4). The article continues "The 20-year nostalgia cycle, climate-change nihilism, information saturation, streaming-era content overload, and our collective Long COVID of the soul have converged in a tidal wave of tackiness" (2022, para. 4). This fashion phenomenon and trend-spotting in *Euphoria* has been heavily covered by many major fashion outlets, most notably *Vogue* magazine and its international counterparts, in an attempt to decode decisions made by costume designers in their stylization of teenage characters in ways that are incongruent to a teenager's life, as most modern teens cannot afford the labels (detailed extensively by *Vogue* magazine*)* that the characters in *Euphoria* are wearing, and later representing outside of the television landscape (Bhatt, 2022). The fashion in the series demonstrates that the teenage gaze does not equate to the teenage experience or accurate representation, but is a stylized way to package the perspective of youth through dress (Figure 7). Characters navigate and display their identity, body image, and sexuality through the way they dress (Figure 8), contrasting bold and risk-taking looks with the reintroduction of twee to the mainstream, in addition to narrator-Rue's found fashion. Most real teenagers are not conceptually or financially able to wear the fashion that *Euphoria* is notorious for. While characterization in *Euphoria* relies upon the visual form of fashion, authentic experience and identity building that is essential to the awkwardness of the real teenage experience minimally relies on how one styles oneself in the highly physical sense of fashion.The fashion-reliant characterization in Euphoria highlights the capacity of aesthetics and self-presentation in identity-building and allows viewers to vicariously experience unrealistic external expression. Ultimately, fashion has the capacity to endear viewers to a version of the teenage experience that is commercially appealing.

Within the function of visual rhetoric, the visual signs associated with fashion are designed to inspire indistinct feelings within the viewer according to costume designer Heidi Bivens, who took an abstract approach to connecting fashion with film. When interviewed, costume stylist Bivens stated that "Things don't always have to make sense to evoke feelings from the audience," and "Ultimately in watching Euphoria, I think the whole team has created an opportunity for the

viewer to feel something, whatever that may be" (Bhatt, 2022, para. 5). This disjointed approach to costume design works illogically, like many other visual aspects in *Euphoria* (such as the medium of technology) pointing to the evolution of a heavily stylized aesthetic. Fashion aesthetic is used to provoke emotion, adaptable to a teenage gaze that allows audiences to negotiate with the work through its (commodified) reception while also achieving some sense of self completion. The project of creating nostalgia for a younger version of ourselves is fulfilled in the way that we dress, color, and frame the world.

Figure 7

Y2K Fashion

Note. Fashion employed for character development. From [Maddie, Cassie, Kat, Fashion] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, 2022b, i-D (https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/wxd78y/euphoria-bts-photos-eddy-chen).

Figure 8

Bold Fashion Decisions

Note. Kat, Barbie Ferriera's character is used to present the bold, and often sexual looks, associated with *Euphoria* in the mainstream, popular culture media. From [Kat in Red] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, 2022c, i-D (https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/wxd78y/euphoria-bts-photos-eddy-chen).

Spectacle in *Euphoria*

In view of a dominant understanding of teenage life, *Euphoria* offers a representation of youth that is rooted in spectacle, which is used to enforce the teenage gaze. *Euphoria's* creators and producers failed to consider how this ultra-stylized depiction of teenage life influences the way that real-life young people can be viewed by mainstream culture. They also failed to acknowledge the social and political realities that teenagers, and the adults that gaze upon them, face today. The current cultural landscape for teenagers is significantly darker than in the past, political and personal crises are much more devastating for youth today, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, n.d.). This has resulted in a shift in genre where teenage dramas have subsequently become thematically darker using gothic noir and horror styles and genre, including programs like *Riverdale* and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (Elgenaidi, n.d.). As a result, it is important to highlight how spectacle is used within the series to achieve the teenage

gaze. Debord (1994) states, “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (p. 12).The spectacle of *Euphoria* conveys how people can acquire youth by changing the way they look at and construct their world, while authentic experiences in life are being replaced by spectacular representations of life (Debord, 1994).

The replacement of authentic experience is significant as dichotomies of reality and fantasy, given life by spectacular representation, subvert mainstream expectations of a lived teenage experience (Debord, 1994). Debord advances the idea that spectacle cannot be placed in opposition to this reality, “Thus the spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity” (Debord, 1994, p. 14). In this way, the ‘real’ activity of images identified by Debord, working with the spectacle that falsifies reality, is evidenced in *Euphoria* through its extensive appropriation of liminality to construct an emotional spectacle that is connected to nostalgia among mature viewers (Debord, 1994, p. 3). Youth is fetishized and consumed by viewers, which produces an oppressive social relationship between teens and adults that is mediated by images of a spectacularized teenage experience (Debord, 1994). As Olin (1996) suggests, the analysis of the gaze is an attempt to address the consequences of looking, and as the teenage subject becomes the object of the gaze. When teenagers are made to be exotic in their representation, they ultimately lose their own sense of self mastery as real, independent subjects (Olin, 1996, para. 17). Ultimately, *Euphoria* produces an image of the teenage experience that is widely adopted commercially through its spectacularization, and is therefore oppressive in othering real teens. This is well demonstrated by the non-teenage cast of *Euphoria* participating in Fashion Month, where some characters represented major brands such as Prada, Saint Laurent, Valentino, and Balenciaga (De Klerk, 2022). As a result, the significance of *Euphoria* as an HBO program with wide viewership lies in its contribution to programming that is connected to a visually aesthetic, yet inauthentic, representation of the teenage experience on mainstream television.

The Liminal in *Euphoria*

In its spectacularization of the teenage experience through the teenage gaze, *Euphoria* relies on liminality, and the boundaries it creates visually and thematically, to produce a feeling of nostalgia. Turner (2002) outlines how in the transitory phase of ritual, where communities,

cultures, and individuals move and change in social life, liminality presents itself as a threshold of ambiguous conditions in relation to states and positions in cultural space (p. 327). This way of moving through the world is demonstrated by symbols through which societies ritualize social and cultural transition (Turner, 2002). *Euphoria* works to use formal visual and thematic symbols, including curated cliches, fashion, color, light, and technology to communicate liminal, transitory spaces for a new way of viewing youth through the teenage gaze. Liminality monopolizes idealized aspects of youth and is expressed through the manipulation of color and rhetorical function of visual aspects (Turner, 2002). As this occurs, liminal phenomena rely on the "sacred" working in conjunction with the homogenous (society) to present a "moment in and out of time" (Turner, 2002, p. 360). Therefore, *Euphoria* allows mature viewers to co-opt the gaze of youth for their own pleasure through the show, as a cultural artifact, by the sacred elements of liminality that allows for a new relationship to one's identity.

Euphoria is transformative in this capacity to put forward a notion of liminality in a visual sense. As well, due to its potential to push viewers to assess their relationships to larger structures of society and *communitas* (social relationships) in the transition of time related to the experience of adolescence communicated in *Euphoria's* liminal visuals (Turner, 2002). Therefore, *Euphoria's* ability to create a visual world that weaves the past with the present makes liminality essential to articulating the teenage gaze."These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture" (Turner, 2002, p. 373). In this way, *Euphoria* communicates an emotional appeal of pathos in its style and aesthetics. Therefore, the teenage gaze provokes desire and nostalgia in viewers beyond a physically emblematic change in appearance or behavior. Instead, it induces reactions in the way that one relates to youth discourses. Put simply, the ways that individuals orient themselves towards society is greatly impacted by the cultural industry, which is delivered – in a contemporary sense – through popular culture phenomena like *Euphoria* in its liminal aesthetics (Turner, 2002).

Euphoria also connects viewers to a sense of faith in the context of liminality where there is an observable maximization of the religious, opposed to a secular depiction of addiction (Turner, 2002). *Euphoria* uses explicitly visual ways to depict addiction as complete obedience to a force that is both unseen and larger than oneself. In particular, the depiction of addiction as a godly,

religious experience, such as where Rue visually manifests "sacred folly" in complete acceptance of the pain and suffering her addiction causes herself and others (Turner, 2002, p. 370). This imparts a relationship to faith that liminality is characterized by its connection to ritual symbols (visual rhetoric) and the transcendence of literal boundaries or thresholds in what is real and what is imagined (Turner, 2002). The protagonist, Rue, is often removed from her body in purely visual ways as the experience of drug use sets in. This is communicated symbolically using a fantasy approach that is implicit to the teenage gaze, in addition to music and fashion details.

Figure 9

Main protagonist, Rue, in the throes of addiction and holiness.

Note. Representation of Rue's addiction demonstrating liminality. From [Rue in Holy Addiction] [Photograph], by Eddy Chen, n.d.d, Eddy Chen Photography (http://www.eddychenphotography.com/recent/#itemId=5fa8fd1136ca92025d675df0).

Conclusion

Following an expansive visual rhetorical analysis and evaluation of the first two seasons of *Euphoria*, I conclude that through the articulation of the teenage gaze amongst mature *Euphoria* viewers and producers, the teenage experience is assimilated into mainstream culture by a media industry that can force youth experiences into oblivion through stylized, aesthetic representation.

Euphoria appropriates images of teenage experience and spectacularizes them through vibrant, gripping visual aesthetics that encourage a return to an idealized past that targets mature viewers and producers who can occupy a teenage gaze. Through the teenage gaze, audiences force themselves onto and into the images we see on television, both consciously and passively. This is socially and politically dangerous as it contributes to the othering of youth through a gaze that glorifies the past towards an idealized future, while neglecting the realities youth face today.

The evolution of the teenage gaze is increasingly relevant in the current socio-political environment where youth are often marginalized in the face of crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how young people are easily and systemically left behind in a crisis, mental health issues are now commonplace amongst young people, and a sense of pessimism has been imparted on their view of the world (UNICEF, 2022). Moving forwards, further analysis of youth discourses in popular culture, and the ways in which the genre is rapidly growing and changing on television call for greater scholarship. This is especially true of media reception, such as the widespread critical response to *Euphoria*. While highly qualitative, this visual rhetorical analysis reveals how there can be larger social implications when constructing teenage experiences for television audiences in a visually aesthetic way. Revisiting Debord (1994), contemplation of the spectacle put forward by *Euphoria* is important as spectacle is a product of reality. Therefore, any representation of youth that is designed for shock and awe in its bold depictions of fashion, sexuality, violence, addiction, and mental health crises speaks to an alienation of youth that could be concerning, as images can influence beliefs and desires (Debord, 1994).

This becomes increasingly relevant given the rapid politicization of youth, with figures like Greta Thunberg rising and demonstrating greater youth engagement with political activism in response to global issues. As the United Nations (2013) outlines, young people demonstrate a creative, dynamic force of innovation and political participation in response to the barriers they continue to face globally, including poverty, educational adversity, discrimination, and limited employment opportunities compared to previous generations. The United Nations (2013) contends that political participation of young people in formal, institutional settings is low in comparison to older citizens throughout the world, and that political participation of youth is dependent on cultural and socioeconomic contexts (p. 1). As a result, cultural industries and their representations of youth can contribute to tensions that are inherent in the politicization of youth, as young peoples'

relationships with politics and the adversity they face is complex. It is known that youth are both politically engaged and disengaged, but the idea that the youth are apathetic to political engagement is untrue, as political power is often withheld from young people by electoral strategies of (older) political figures (Amiwala, 2020). To better engage young people in new and relevant ways, socially and politically, there must be better consideration of the consequences of the representation of teenagers, and who is looking at them, as depictions of mental health and addiction issues in mainstream media may be disenfranchising and belittling in significant ways.

Finally, *Euphoria* is successful in producing meaning through aesthetics that extend beyond the series, as demonstrated by the capacity of visual rhetorical evaluation. Overall, the rhetorical impact of the images in the show are a spectacularization of youth. As a result, *Euphoria's* legitimacy as a visual artifact is observable in popular culture and its critiques. This visual rhetorical analysis reveals how *Euphoria* is subversive in the articulation of youth discourses through its spectacularizing teenage gaze. In its framing of formal visual elements of color and light, fashion, setting, and technologies of display, *Euphoria* ultimately returns some viewers to a romanticized past, while looking towards the future, creating a legacy of aesthetically pretentious and culturally controversial representations of the teenage experience.

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The sigma male grindset as alienation and asceticism: A rejection of individual emancipation in the work of Karl Marx

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Abstract

While the applicability of Marxist thought to the present era can be contested, this paper argues that the Sigma Male Grindset, a subversive masculine persona conjured by the alt-right Manosphere, can be utilized as a case for the relevancy of Marx's theory of alienation. To begin, I describe the basics of Marx's outlook, and outline how Marx's theory can, but need not be understood as a form of class reductionism. Despite the multiplicity of axes of oppression, I argue that subjects make some significant conceptions of themselves under capitalist terms. With this abreast, I propose the Grindset presents an interesting counterexample to self-understanding in the late-stage capitalist age. Sigma Males seem to both circumnavigate the aspirations inscribed by traditional masculinity by rejecting external validation of one's self-worth as well as the capitalist mode of production, by resisting traditional labour as a means of sustenance. It might then be tempting to assume an individual attempt at emancipation from class oppression is possible. However, I demonstrate that Marx's theory of alienation from one's species-being and from fellow humans positions the Sigma Male Grindset as an intensified form of already existing frustrations, culminating in a concentrated form of asceticism. I conclude by sketching what an unalienated life would look like for Marx, drawing on current events to demonstrate the lukewarm future of a successful communist revolution. From this observation, I will conclude with proposing more immediate responses in the form of rejecting collective asceticism.

Keywords

Sigma Male Grindset, Marx, alienation, asceticism, individual emancipation

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While Wolff & Leopold (2021) are quick to point out the desire to study Marx's analysis of the capitalist state has changed in motivations over time, the extent to which Marx's thought is criticized for its lack of explanatory power in our contemporary political economy and culture cannot be understated. A quick search on Twitter for "Marx failed to consider" yields a vast and dizzying array of chronically online, and uniquely 21st-century phenomena that Marx certainly could not have predicted. In particular, certain internet cultural movements, such as the Sigma Male Grindset, seek to circumnavigate the prescribed ills of later-stage capitalism and the so-called "end of history", while not acknowledging the deeply theorized arms to which capitalism can reach. In turn, the communist project exhibits a tendency to reduce all oppression to that of class antagonisms. Presently situated in the midst of a historical labour movement, as well as a significant period in the battle for racial equity and reparations, it is questionable to what extent individual emancipation is viable, and, if Marx is a tenable source for answers.

Meditating on contemporary attempts at individual emancipation tease out important, long pondered queries: why one would wish escape capitalism, is such an escape possible, and how we might go about it. Directing these questions towards dissecting the Sigma Male Grindset, the project I will undertake here is to demonstrate that individual emancipation from oppression under capitalism only aggravates it, particular through alienation from *species-being* and resulting in a form of asceticism. To do so, I will provide a brief summary of Marx's critique of capitalist society, highlighting and responding to criticisms of class reductionism often waged against Marx. I will then describe the Sigma Male Grindset, addressing a present gap in digital masculinity literature, to map the Sigma Male Grindset into the digital "manosphere". This description illuminates the Sigma Male as a remediation from both class oppression and gender expectation, but ultimately an insufficient path to emancipation due to its emphasis of individuality. Finally, I will begin to sketch what an unalienated life would look like for Marx, drawing on current events to demonstrate the lukewarm future of a successful communist revolution. From this observation, I will conclude with proposing more immediate responses in the form of rejecting collective asceticism.

The salience of Marxist theory in developing 21st-century cultural understandings, especially those espoused online might seem mismatched. Karl Marx takes the unique feature of human beings to be that we create the furnishings of our world—so how did we create a world that is so repugnant to live in? Despite so-called advancements in the Industrial Revolution, Marx and

Engels (1998) argue we find ourselves in "too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce." (p. 9). They problematize many facets of society for this development but argue the underpinnings can be found in class antagonism that makes living a good, human life impossible (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 3). Class antagonisms are far from a newfound phenomenon, but rather have animated a large portion of history; whether it be between patricians and plebians, lords and serfs, or, as it is now, proletariat and bourgeoisie. On the contrary, Marx notes that "[our] epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possess, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms." (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 3). In every opportunity, the bourgeoisie sought to remove other significant sources of differentiation in society, whether that be religious fervour, chivalrous enthusiasm, or philistine sentimentalism (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 5). In this newfound society, one can only think of themselves in capitalist terms, turning personal worth into what one can exchange for literal capital and stripping occupations of reverence in their inauguration as wage-labourers.

Yet, as has been criticized in the past, Marx's class reductionism struggles to map effectively to our socially complex world. Gender, race, sexuality, ability, education, and other social identities should be considered when attempting to understand how one experiences oppression and marginalization in the world. One status as a member of the proletariat does not sublate the various areas of their lives in which they are privileged and oppressed. A white man engaging in entry-level pencil-pushing is surely a member of the proletariat, alike with the South Asian woman garment worker, but by virtue of their identities and professions will experience varying levels of precarity, barriers, and marginalization. Marx and Engels admit that organizations of workers are "continually upset again by competition between workers themselves." (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 12), tacitly indicating that workers are not a homogenous category. Therefore, hoping for an "ever-expanding union of workers" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 12) would remain a far-off objective if the sole underpinning was the shared experience of being exploited under capitalism—one must consider the underpinnings of racism, misogyny, homophobia, etc. in order to facilitate a more powerful union.

Still, it is difficult discretely separate these categories—class touches each area on one's life, the same way any other social identity does. The way these practices of oppression are upheld is undoubtedly the dominant ideologies of our time, which must be realized in order to form the

powerful union Marx and Engels describe. We could concede, then that considerations beyond class oppression could be considered within their framework, insofar as capitalism mutually animates iterations of other forms of social oppression, keeping abreast that "man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his existence, in his social relations and in his social life" (Marx & Engels, The Communist Manifesto, 1998, p. 24).

Seeing oppression under capitalism as a significant, albeit not the sole, engine for the degradation of human beings, the immediacy for finding how agents might escape accelerates. While there might be 21st-Century phenomena attempt to alleviate the pain of modern existence, perhaps by breaking down the institutions and dominant cultural forms, the Sigma Male Grindset does not fall into the category. Rather, it appears to circumnavigate the intersection of oppression that arise from capitalism and masculinity. The Sigma Male Grindset claims to have liberatory power from both patriarchal expectations of men, and capitalist expectations of human beings. Therefore, it is useful to understand Sigma Male Grindset in terms of doubly rejecting mainstream society. Although the Sigma Male Grindset poses as a novel iteration of masculinist individualism, it provides a cultural touchstone to a larger reaction to the longevity of neoliberal ideology.

The Sigma Male Grindset offers a unique cultural artifact to examine reactions to changes in the political economy and advances won by feminists in Western society, particularly in the last 20 years. Moreover, the Sigma Male Grindset emerges a significant cultural reaction to neoliberalism. Sigma Males find themselves well-situated in the digital "manosphere", which has emerged as an amalgamation of antifeminist counter-discourse and hegemonic masculinist individualist discourses (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 3). The manosphere itself has become a salient cultural phenomenon in light of "the institutionalization and professionalization of feminism, the emergence of a widespread postfeminist cultural sensibility, and the development of a neoliberal economy." (Messner, 2016, quoted in Ging, 2019, p. 639) within the last few decades.

Antifeminist counter-discourses tend to be the more prominent, public-facing movements within the manosphere, with aims to correct the crisis of masculinity resulting from the "feminization" of society (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 7) through advocacy and public policy. Particularly, this sect of the manosphere is concerned with the injustices men face within their socially instituted roles as spouses and fathers and rose to prominence in the 1970s Men's Rights Movement. Although anti-feminist discourse proper has not been absent from online discourse in

the digital manosphere, paradigmatic Men's Rights Activists comprise a piecemeal segment of the manosphere.

Sigma Males, however, are situated in the hegemonic masculinist individualist wing of the manosphere, which encapsulates both philosophical and pragmatic individualist cultural struggles. Hegemonic Masculinist Individualists can be Red Pills, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), Incels, and NoFap. Each group within this diverse sect of the manosphere nonetheless shares a "total rejection of inclusive masculinity" and participates in the "cultivation of a personal lifestyle" (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 13, fig. 2).

Although perhaps lacking as many real-life adoptees as other sects, (Yalcinkaya (2022) speculates it might have next to none, due to its rapid transformation into parody), like other identities in the manosphere, the Sigma Male Grindset possesses "both the intention and the effect of reasserting male sexual and cultural dominance" (Ging, 2019, p. 648). The online prevalence of fringe masculine identities has bolstered the proliferation of anti-feminist harassment online within manosphere sect-specific message boards and other online forums (Ging, 2019, p. 646). In other words, the lack of any genuine adoptees of the Sigma Male Grindset need not detract from the value of investigating it—both Han and Yin (2022) and Ging (2019) have called for more academic research into the rapidly expanding list of manospheric identities. Moreover, the matrix of qualitative variables proposed by Han & Yin (2022) to describe other sects of the manosphere can be similarly used to describe Sigma Males and the Sigma Male Grindset. These variables include community organization, financing, ideological discourse and causal narratives, purpose and goals, and actions and performance of masculinity (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 6). In examining the characteristics of the Sigma Male Grindset through this framework, it is evident that far from a novel or fleeting cultural phenomenon, the Sigma Male Grindset shares many aspects with other manospheric identities.

Firstly, under Han & Yin's (2022) own description, Sigma Males would be considered a subset of Red Pill, since they adopt a vernacular contingent with Alpha and Beta male identities (p. 8). Red Pill is defined as a subset of the manosphere who have, in the spirit of *The Matrix,* have come to a fundamental realization that their world is structured to feminize and exploit them by forcing them into unjust relations with women. Mimicking Red Pill, Sigma Males share a fuzzy community organization, that lacks an organizational structure or a key figure. Sigma Males indeed

idolize certain masculine figures in popular media, whether that be fictional characters like Patrick Bateman or Jordan Belfort, or public figures like Gary Vaynerchuk (GaryVee). Nonetheless, the objects of Sigma Males' idolatry are not directly creating content for a Sigma Male audience, do not self-identify as Sigma Males, or directly teach the Sigma Male lifestyle. In this way, the Sigma Male community has a decentralized organization, which cultivates those it perceives to be worth emulating through their own curation, primarily Sigma Male Grindset edits and compilations on TikTok and YouTube.

Despite lacking a central figure or "guru", Sigma Males share a similar financing structure to Pick-Up artists— "monetization of contents, selling digital books and courses, coaching sessions, seminars" (Han & Yin, 2022, p. 13, fig. 2). Yalcinkaya (2022) highlights the sale of branded supplements to achieve a god-like physique by an alt-right social media persona as a key example. Further, the founder of a popular Instagram page mentioned by Yalcinkaya (2022), @entrepreneurshipfacts, offers coaching and content editing services on his website to help users grow their businesses on Instagram, starting at 500$/month (Dang, 2023). Monetized Sigma Male Grindset content is aimed towards rapid self-improvement and seeks to manifest in highly visible success. Yalcinkaya (2022) describes Sigma's aims: "perennial masculine ideals of success – defined loosely as financial and physical gains". While the figures offering monetized services lack traditional credibility, they often utilize their personal successes in their respective pursuits to justify offering their services.

It is certain, then, that buff physiques, and financial success through non-traditional means comprise a significant piece of the Sigma Male Grindset. For Sigma Males, material goods and societally expected achievements cannot replace the value of self-worth that is realized through pursuit of one's passions (TopThink, 2021, 2:38-3:00). These pursuits are unified by a primacy of self-discipline and actualization, including some of the practices upheld by NoFap. Han and Yin (2022) remark that NoFap allows its participants to discover a "new meaning to their sexuality" by focussing on "aspects related to the health and personal benefits of avoiding masturbation and pornography consumption." (p. 11) In this way, Sigma Males can be thought to be participating in a similar ideological discourse as NoFap, which Han and Yin (2022) describe as stoically self-disciplined (p. 11). As a result of being Red Pilled, Sigma Males recognize that the traditional organization of wage labour—working for a boss, being unable to do "what they want, when they

want to", pursuing goals independently—are incompatible with their aims (Topthink, 2021). As a result, Sigma Males advocate for breaking off from the beaten path, rejecting authority and hierarchy, and the pursuit on one's own aims.

The Sigma Male Grindset's purposes and goals, however, stretch further than reigning in one's sexual desires. Like other manospheric identities within the individualist masculinist sect, Sigma Males' purposes and goals are directed towards individual lifestyle changes and aim to reject inclusive masculinity. In other words, the Sigma Male utilizes an individualist approach to reaffirm and intensify hegemonic masculinity. This hegemony is justified by both hegemonically dominant identities, including Alpha Males, Pick-up Artists, and subordinated identities like Beta Males and Incels. However, an instinctive drive for the Sigma Male is to differentiate themselves, foremost by rejecting external valuation, breaking off from the pack, and being a "lone wolf". Being wholly reliant on oneself is possible for the Sigma Male because of the Grindset. Sigma Males seek to integrate a practice of intense and dedicated work, or grind, into the daily practices of their lives, resulting in a particular worldview, or mindset. Doing so involves a recognition of what pursuits are worthy of one's focus and time, and a subsequent streamlining and "hacking" of one's typical functioning. Since Sigma Males value a buff physique, utilizing steroids and workout supplements (Yalcinkaya, 2022) is a permissible manner to grind towards. Further, since Sigma Males reject hierarchy and subordination to one's so-called superiors (TopThink, 2021), and frequently opt to engage in investments, crypto, and other forms of "passive income" (Yalcinkaya, 2022) instead of wage labour.

The actions and performance of the Sigma Male identity reflect the orientation towards self-improvement shared with NoFap. Whether it is either true that abstinence from pornography, masturbation, and orgasm yields to physical and mental health benefits, or mystic powers of attraction (Han & Yin, 2022) does not deter those adopting NoFap from adopting a high level of self-discipline. Moreover, like Red Pill and MGTOW, Sigma Males engage in some level of mockery of inclusive masculinity, highlighted in the proliferation of the *If You're 20-30 and Your Main Circle Isn't Discussing* meme among many Sigma Male motivational pages where men are criticized for not having friendships oriented towards financial prosperity, fitness, and committed [romantic] relationships (Know Your Meme, 2021). Nonetheless, the most salient form of Sigma Male performance is through the Grindset, described above.

Firstly, by resisting hierarchies and social expectations typically demanded of *men*—to climb the corporate ladder, attract many sexual partners (TopThink, 2021)—Sigma Males inch closer to a truer, rarer masculinity. Sigma Males sometimes practice NoFap, engaging in sexual practices such as semen retention and "edging" (Yalcinkaya, 2022) that directs his individual and sexual worth inward, rather than for the external validation of sexual partners. This masculinity not only transcends the Alpha-Beta Male binary but dictates that one does not desire to be understood. This moment in the Sigma Male's thought process is significant—while Marx's imagines his revolutionary subject to recognize their experiences among their peers and initiate a struggle, the Sigma Male disregards recognition altogether. Sigma Males similarly reject the capitalistic demands that seek to create docile workers, stating that "material goods are not a replacement for self-worth" (TopThink, 2021. 2:38-2:40), and actively resisting authority figures in the workplace (3:05-3:56).

However, the façade of the Grindset is easily toppled—the deeply restrictive, regimented, and rigorous lifestyle of the Sigma Male does not allow one to maximize their potential but makes its mission to systematically shrinks one's life into nothingness. The Grindset demonstrates how capitalism shrinks human needs "to the barest and most miserable level of physical subsistence, and by reducing his activity to the most abstract mechanical movement." (Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, 1932, p. 50). This observation captures two dimensions key to the Grindset. Firstly, "stacking cash and self-actualizing" (Yalcinkaya, 2022), evidenced in the focus the Grindset places on "passive income" in the form on investment properties and crypto *abstracts* rather than abolishes the mechanical movement associated with labour. Indeed, the Sigma Male Grindset may not involve traditional wage labour but does still performs a from of abstract labour. That is, the Sigma Male expends a significant amount of their mental capacity and time overseeing and intervening on their passive investments. This makes the frequent comparisons of the Sigma Male Grindset to stoics of monks more apt, since they primarily utilize their minds, rather than bodies, to achieve their aims. Secondly, the emphasis on withholding orgasms and eating a strict manner in order to build up testosterone in increase "gains" at the gym (Yalcinkaya, 2022) demonstrates a shrinking life to the most miserable level of physical sustenance. This seems contradictory—Sigma Males frequently advocate for the pursuit of one's passions, yet fail to identify any passion in particular, despite minizing their other life's pursuits for those aims. In both dimensions, it is observed that the Sigma Male takes an unconventional

and highly symbolic approach to what remains well-trodden paths in capitalism life. In short, the Sigma Male Grindset is merely a deeply modern approach an ascetic lifestyle which remains ultimately subservient to the typical pursuit of capital.

But simply reversing this ascetic lifestyle is not sufficient, since the root of the problem makes any attempt at individual emancipation from societal, capitalist pressure is ultimately untenable. This is revealed in Marx's theory of *alienation*. Alienation refers to a painful and arbitrary separation or estrangement from entities that ought to be united. These separations include alienation from the products of one's labour, the process of production, one's species-being, and one's connections to other people (Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, 1932, p. 29-32). For the purposes of critiquing the Sigma Male Grindset, I will turn particular attention to alienation from species-being and alienation from one another.

Species-being is a term uniquely employed by Marx (1932) to be similar to human nature, but specifically concerned with a human beings' life activities that affirm they are a "universal and therefore free being." (p. 31). Therefore, alienation from one's species-being is two-fold. Firstly, in affirming one's universality, their activities ought to conform to a universal humanity to which all are in membership to. Secondly, to affirm that one is a free being, all beings ought to engage in free activity that formulates their species-life (Marx, 1932, p. 32). As the name would suggest, if our *species*-life is a location of alienation, then individual life cannot free us because we are a part of a universal species. Therefore, one's freedom cannot come at the expense of anyone else, and one is not free if their efforts only serve to assist themselves.

When one's species-life is transformed into solely a means for one to assert their individual ability to survive, one is necessarily separated, painfully and arbitrarily, from those who surround them. Since one's feelings towards others is a reflection of their feelings towards their labour, and towards themselves, under capitalism one sees the people around them as foreign, *alien*, and esoteric. Indeed, "contemporary economic relations socialise individuals to view others as merely means to their own particular ends." (Wolff & Leopold, 2021). In other words, through alienation, it becomes impossible to meaningfully connect and genuinely bond with those around us. For Wolff & Leopold (2021), this is a threat to human wellbeing, since:

> [whether] or not we explicitly recognise it, human beings exist as a community, and what makes human life possible is our mutual dependence on the vast network of social and

> economic relations which engulf us all, even though this is rarely acknowledged in our day-to-day life.

Such an experience is ever-present for the Sigma Male, who is described as a lone wolf, favouring instrumental relationships in the workplace, and hook-ups—if they're having sex at all—over long-term romantic connections (TopThink, 2021) (Yalcinkaya, 2022). When Sigma Males do prioritize long-term romantic commitments, as demonstrated in the *If You're 20-30* meme, it seems to be oriented towards the achievement of a statistically longer, healthier, more successful life, rather than any inherent quality of the relationship itself. Echoing Marx's early warnings, the Grindset "reflects our current neoliberal climate, where everyone is a commodity and products are catered to appeal to people's biggest anxieties and aspirations." (Yalcinkaya, 2022).

Therefore, while the Sigma Male Grindset is an extreme example, its roots are situated in issues which all people under capitalism face. Marx and Engels, of course, sketch what an unalienated life could look like, and can give us some indication of what a transcendence from the Grindset might look like. An unalienated life for Marx and Engels must emerge from a radical overturn of our current societal arrangements. This revolution, much like the system it is attempting to break down, arises gradually, due to various issues within the proletariat. For instance, although capitalism is animated by class conflict between oppressor and oppressed, Marx and Engels (1998) note that due to the arrangement of wage labour, competition between labourers occurs frequently. However, as society becomes more industrialized, labour becomes precarious and proletarians increasingly devalued. And yet, this unifies them, and erodes the union of the bourgeoisie, who must constantly attempt to respond to the incoming crises capitalism enthralls them into. Far from being a work of fiction, this dynamic is playing out alongside the Sigma Male Grindset. Early in 2022, New York organizers waged a historic victory, establishing the first labour union at Amazon in the United States. Organizers note that their victory had in some part to do with Amazon making "critical mistakes ahead of the vote, such as pushing to reverse policies relaxed under Covid, including allowing workers to keep their [cellphones] with them while working." (Sherman, 2022)

If the proletariat is able to come together effectively, form a popular political party, and usurp the state, Marx and Engels (1998) identify a few central aims of communism, and conversely, bringing about an unalienated life. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the abolition of classes into a single, unified class of proletarians is necessary to other aims occurring (Marx & Engels, 1998, p.

26). Secondly, communism aims to abolish (bourgeoise) private property (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 18). It should be noted that private property is not the source of alienation, but rather reinforces and aggravates it (Marx, 1932, p. 33). Still, seeing as private property as the manifestation of "the antagonism of capital and wage labour.", communism seeks to convert private property into the property of all members of society (Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 19). This would likely entail an end to excess production and overconsumption, ultimately conducive to each member of society getting what they need. Secondly, communism would demand an abolition of notions of nationality (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 23). Abolition of such would entail a rejoining of all working people rising to the power of a nation, and conversely breaking down the arbitrary distinctions between them that reinforce mutual competition and expropriation. While it could be argued that this would remove national character and culture along with it, it is important to recall that since the dominant ideologies of our time arise from the dominant class of people (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 24). This could mean that marginalized and oppressed cultures could begin to flourish.

While contemporary advances in labour unionization demonstrate the viability of a Marxist project, it is worth noting, as we have seen through the Sigma Male Grindset, that many people would sooner adapt themselves within the dominant ideologies of our time in order to survive, than to deconstruct the ideologies themselves. Instead, contemporary capitalism is observed to adapt and revolutionize itself in order to prevent its collapse. Marx and Engels (1998) list several policies which a communist party must install to ensure their success, including "centralization of transport in the hands of the state", "free education for all children in public schools", "abolition of children's factory labour in its present form", and "a heavy progressive tax" (p. 26). In some capacity, there policies have already existed in capitalist societies, demonstrating a frustrating permanency of capitalism and the bourgeoisie's own revolutionary capacity (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 6).

I have hitherto presented a variegated set of arguments. The Sigma Male Grindset demonstrates a dizzying combination of alienation, individualism, and asceticism, and yet, this is only symptomatic of a an equally frustrating historical progression of which solution and culmination has effectively been staved by the very things that were thought to end it. Moreover, the Sigma Male Grindset may at best be a fleeting glimpse at a larger, more disastrous cultural intensification of hegemonic masculinity. What then, if anything, can one do to begin living an unalienated life

in the here-and-now? I see the answer in lying within the asceticism of the Sigma Male. If the condition of the Sigma Male Grindset, that is, individual asceticism, contributes to alienation from species-being, then perhaps we might enter into a collective rejection of asceticism. If the Sigma Male Grindset is, as Marx (1932) believes, "[the] science of marvelous industry is simultaneously the science of asceticism, and its true ideal is the ascetic but extortionate miser and the ascetic but productive slave." (p. 51), then a reclamation of leisure and philistine sentimentalism becomes urgent. Indeed, Marx (1932) purports that:

> The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theater, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save – the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust will devour – your capital. The less you are, the less you express your own life, the more you have, i.e., the greater is your alienated life, the greater is the store of your estranged being. (p. 51)

Therefore, if we wish to embark on the first waking of an unalienated life, it would be required that we shift focus away from capitalist forms of self-affirmation, and endeavour to pursuit amongst others, more creative human projects. These would have to still satisfy the conditions outlined by Marx (1932) on alienation from species-being: we must, in these processes, affirm a universal membership to the species, as free beings (p. 31).

It is clear then that an individual circumnavigation of the oppression of capitalism is untenable, but I leave open the possibility that an unalienated life could be possible, at least in terms of species-being, insofar as it satisfies the aforementioned conditions. Indeed, capitalism is worth escaping because class antagonisms play a key part in social oppression, tandem with other axes of marginalization, despite claims that Marx and Engel's class reductionism to diminishes the potential of their liberatory frameworks. The viability of an escape from capitalism, is of course, is not present in the Sigma Male Grindset, as its emphasis on individualism, accumulation of capital gains, instrumental relationships, and social isolation alienate one from others, and from their species-being, resulting in a parasitic asceticism. And indeed, getting rid of the Grindset is not sufficient to end alienation, as Sigma Males embody an exaggerated form of a pervasive phenomenon. While Marx and Engel's propose many policies in an attempt to bring about communism and an unalienated life, these policies have manifested in the contemporary world at

the hands of democratic capitalism, in an attempt to prevent its collapse. Knowing that individual emancipation from oppression under capitalism only aggravates it, we must begin carving a way to collectively create a universal, free being, in manners presently available.

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Can the line cook speak: a critical discourse analysis of the voice and representation of Canadian restaurant staff during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, restauranteurs and wage-earning restaurant staff found themselves positioned as the focus of an immense amount of mainstream media attention. The restaurant industry has never been the recipient of such frequent and consistent coverage, yet scholars have yet to engage with the available media discourse critically. This research explores the mainstream media depiction of the restaurant industry and challenges journalistic practices prioritizing the voices and ideological perspectives of those atop the restaurant industry hierarchy. To demonstrate this phenomenon, I engaged in a critical discourse analysis of 55 published online news articles through the theoretical lens proposed by Gayatri Spivak. The sample was examined to demonstrate who was afforded the discursive space to utilize their voice and share their ideological disposition, as well as the ways in which the discursive voice found within the sample shaped a representation of wage-earning restaurant staff. The primary findings of this paper reveal that wage-earning restaurant staff within the selected sample were discursively silenced and needed to be provided with an adequate opportunity to share their experience of working in a customer-facing position throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Wage-earning restaurant staff were rarely afforded the opportunity to speak. Instead, they were spoken for. I argue throughout this paper that those atop the restaurant industry hierarchy craft the voice of wage-earning restaurant staff and that this phenomenon validates traditional restaurant industry hierarchical structures and reinforces hegemonic ideological perspectives. This study emphasizes the need for journalists to embrace the theoretical disposition of a standpoint theorist and strive to ensure that members of subordinated populations are not subject to the imposition of an inauthentic voice.

Keywords

voice, discourse analysis, restaurant, representation, silencing, standpoint theory, epistemic violence, hegemony

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Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic served to impact workers in the hospitality industry dramatically. Many restaurant workers struggled financially due to being laid off during government-mandated closures and mentally as government restrictions and an increased workload imparted a heavy toll. Throughout this period, members of the hospitality industry found themselves positioned as the focus of a great deal of media attention. As the restaurant industry began to maintain some semblance of normalcy in their operations, discourse pertaining to labour shortages began to circulate in alternative media sources as many restaurants struggled to find adequate staff to fulfill day-to-day operations. Mainstream media has presented discourse which appears to serve as the antithesis to the narrative offered by alternative media sources, such as social media sites and small independent news sources, which problematized the work ethic of former, and current hospitality industry members and stipulated that they would rather receive government payouts rather than return to work.

Never has the restaurant industry been the recipient of such frequent and consistent media coverage, yet scholars have yet to critically engage with the available mainstream media discourse. The restaurant industry garners plenty of academic attention in economics, sociology, public health, and psychology, yet it is rarely highlighted as a discursive phenomenon. Because restaurant owners and employees were thrust into the forefront of public health discussions, an immense sample of media coverage is available for examination. A keyword search of the terms 'restaurant' and 'Covid-19' on the *ProQuest* database generates a sample of 11,758 Canadian newspaper articles. This sample of data provides an avenue to investigate relations of power as they pertain to the restaurant industry and how these relations serve to inform and regulate the lived experiences of those who work in the restaurant industry and the external perception of the industry itself. The objective of this study is to explore the mainstream media discourse on the hospitality industry throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to provide a holistic account of the discourse offered by mainstream news publications and demonstrate how prioritized voices serve to construct the perception of wage-earning hospitality staff.

My interest in the following research stems from my involvement in the hospitality industry as an employee and the experiences related to me through conversations with colleagues. My work in the restaurant industry continued during the Covid-19 pandemic as I worked part-time as a

restaurant server. This personal experience served to inform my research. However, it also fueled a biased perspective which I had to challenge throughout the research process constantly. Ultimately, my time working in the hospitality industry, both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, provided me with invaluable insights into the hospitality industry, which greatly aided and guided this research project.

Literature Review

Various academic studies prior to the Covid-19 pandemic have outlined employee dissatisfaction with the working conditions offered by the restaurant industry. Employees have expressed frustration with careless supervisors, the lack of provided employee benefits, low rates of pay, and poor treatment of employees perpetuated by their superiors (Young & Gavade, 2018). The restaurant industry is also perpetually plagued by instances of wage theft (Baum, et al., 2020), wherein wage-earning staff are underpaid, subject to illegal wage deductions, or have their tips stolen by members of upper management. It is documented that women must navigate sexual objectification and the consequences of the incessant male gaze (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014) and that people of colour often find themselves battling systemic industry-imposed barriers which segregate the workforce and impose hierarchical structures and inequality amongst wage-earning staff members (Revelle & Wilson, 2020). Wage-earning restaurant staff members work under heavy constraints and feel an immense lack of autonomy which often leads to occupational dissatisfaction (Fine, 2008). Employees often work long and ambiguous hours during both weekends and holidays while others are out engaging in enjoyable activities (Fine, 2008). It is extremely common for restaurant workers to sacrifice time with friends, family, and their community for the sake of their occupation (Fine, 2008).

Because the Covid-19 pandemic has propagated the most rapid global occupational disruption ever experienced, it seems imperative to examine the effects of these shifts among service workers (Malkawi et al., 2021). A holistic review of the academic literature pertaining to the working conditions of restaurants, both prior to and throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic, demonstrates that the working environment of restaurants is highly stressful, the conditions of labour are precarious, and the restaurant workers' experience of the unsavoury conditions of restaurant work has been amplified on account of the Covid-19 Pandemic (Baum, et al., 2020, Khawaja et al., 2021, Jones & Comfort, 2020, Fine, 2008, Rožman & Tominc, 2020). Restaurant

employees were placed in a position wherein if they wished to remain employed, they were required to navigate the typical stressors of the hospitality environment while also negotiating their fears and anxieties regarding the possibility of being infected by a virus which was poorly understood (Khawaja et., 2021).

Recent work completed by Lippert et al. (2021) found that 75 percent of workers who participated in restaurant labour during the pandemic experienced heightened concern for their health and personal well-being, and 50 percent of these workers also perceived it to be the case that their employers were willing to place their staff in harm's way should it lead to fiscal gains (Lippert et al., 2021). Wage-earning restaurant staff members also addressed that the continually shifting government-mandated legislation also increased their perceptions of anxiety (Lippert et al., 2021). Not only were they forced to navigate altered legislation, but they were also placed in a subjugated position such that they needed to comply with the ways in which the policies were implemented by their employers or find themselves subject to lost shifts or fired. Many of these workers mentioned the fact that various government-mandated restrictions were inconsistently enforced by their superiors (Lippert et al., 2021). The increased and prolonged levels of stress experienced by restaurant staff led to greater levels of anxiety, fear, detrimental impacts on both physical and mental health, and feelings of burnout (Lippert et al., 2021). Of the sixteen workers interviewed, half claimed that they could not cope with the stress levels caused by the conditions of their working environment (Lippert et al., 2021).

Davahli et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of published studies of the hospitality industry throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. They found that research focused primarily on the economic hardship experienced by restaurant owners rather than investigating the impact of the pandemic on wage-earning hospitality staff members (Davahli et al., 2020). Academic papers were more than twice more likely to explore the economic impact of the pandemic on restaurants than they were to examine the lived experiences of staff members (Davahli et al., 2020). Overall, academic research has yet to explore the experiences of restaurant workers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, nor have researchers engaged with the media representation of the hospitality industry. This study aims to examine mainstream media discourse to provide an account of who is permitted to share their perspective and how a hegemonic representation is serving to reinforce the imbalance of power between restaurant owners and wage-earning staff members.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the theoretical frameworks proposed by Gayatri Spivak and Michel Foucault, specifically, Spivak's subaltern theory of voice and conception of epistemic violence and the Foucauldian tradition of recognizing silences as discourse. Spivak (1988), in her text, *Can the Subaltern Speak,* acknowledges the practices wherein dominant social groups participate in the subordination of the subaltern. The restriction of voice alters the ideological perspectives and undermines the experience of being of those unable to speak knowledge into existence (Spivak, 1988).

Spivak (1988) highlights the colonial practice of imposing homogenizing narratives upon the subaltern and claims this practice enables dominant members of society to construct a totalizing representation of those positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy (p.101). The act of restricting and subjugating the voice and epistemological position of marginalized populations, Spivak (1988) labels "epistemic violence" (p.102). One of the profound consequences of "epistemic violence" is the "disappearing" of subjugated knowledge at the hands of their oppressors (Spivak, 1988, p. 102). In the context of this paper, hierarchical structures are understood through the lens of a Marxist interpretation: dominant parties are those who own and control the means of production, and the "subaltern" (p. 102) are best understood as the proletariat: wage-earning employees.

The work of Michel Foucault also inspires the theoretical disposition of this paper. Critical discourse theory advances the notion that discursive silences play a foundational role in the formulation of discourse (Foucault, 1978). Statements and silences form a discourse that produces knowledge and power. There is no inherent distinction between what is and is not said; the stated and unstated work simultaneously produces discourse and thus reinforces structures of oppression and domination (Foucault, 1978).

I want to make a brief note regarding the use of theory and terminology. I am distinctly aware that there is a chasm of privilege separating Canadian restaurant workers and the individuals whom Spivak originally called the 'subaltern.' The intention of this work was not to coopt Spivak's work in a manner which disrespected the original context of the theory. Rather, the aim was to

explore the discursive voice produced by the selected sample; in this sense, Spivak's work is highly appropriate. It is worth noting how I opted to utilize the term 'subaltern' and the way in which the term intersects with the discursive representation of wage-earning hospitality employees. In the context of this paper, 'subaltern' is defined as those at the bottom of a particular social hierarchical structure. Wage-earning hospitality staff do not occupy the primary subjugated hierarchical position in society at large. However, as will be demonstrated, it is the case that wage-earning hospitality staff occupy the primary subjugated position in the restaurant industry hierarchy.

Methodology

This qualitative study employs a critical discourse approach to analyze mainstream media discourse about the hospitality industry. Critical discourse analysis is a methodological framework wherein texts are examined in relation to power and hierarchical socioeconomic structures. As stated by Foucault (1978), within the confines of a discourse, "power and knowledge are joined together" (p. 100). The primary inspiration for the methodology of this project is the framework for critical discourse analysis proposed by Normal Fairclough. Critical discourse analysis highlights how a discourse reinforces and maintains existing power structures and modes of domination (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough (2003) argues that embedded within a textual discourse are elements of structural power which contribute to real-world social effects. Texts, as per Fairclough (2003), have a direct impact on lived experience, though lived experience also directly impacts texts; in other words, "social life and language are dialectically related" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2).

The data for this research project was collected through purposive sampling. The sample consists of 27 articles from *The Globe and Mail* and 28 from Postmedia-owned news sources: *The National Post* and *The Financial Post.* Articles were collected using a keyword search of the following terms: 'Covid-19 and Restaurants', 'Coronavirus and Restaurants', and 'Restaurant Impact and Covid-19'. Searches were conducted on the online platforms offered by *The Globe and Mail* and both Postmedia-owned news sources as well as the ProQuest research database. This combination of keyword searches generated a sample of 6505 articles. To refine the sample, each article was briefly analyzed, and articles were selected for the sample only if the article's content demonstrated a primary focus on the intersection of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the restaurant industry. Selected articles were all published between April 17th, 2020, and March 30th, 2022. Note

that the selected sample also included three published opinion pieces because they played a significant role in formulating the restaurant industry media discourse.

The selected sample was systematically analyzed to provide an account of who was granted the opportunity to speak and the ways in which the textual content and silences produce knowledge and power effects that intertwine to formulate a discursive representation of wage-earning restaurant staff members. Spivak postulated her theory to advocate for those whose voice was restricted; this paper aims to follow in this tradition.

Findings

Silencing of Staff Voices

Throughout the discourse in its entirety, wage-earning hospitality staff are rarely afforded the opportunity to speak. However, it was found to be customary practice for journalists to turn to industry executives or restaurant owners to speak on behalf of wage-earning industry members. Only four percent of the direct quotations allocated throughout the discourse are attributed to and discuss the perspective of wage-earning restaurant staff. Comparatively, 76 percent of the direct quotes were attributed to restaurant owners, hospitality industry executives, upper-level management, or head chefs. The remaining 20 percent of the quotations are attributed to outside experts, such as professors or prominent figures within various government agencies (15 percent) or politicians (5 percent). This phenomenon permits those atop the industry hierarchy to perpetuate a hegemonic narrative with little to no resistance. The dominant members of the hospitality industry hierarchy are afforded discursive perspective to such an extent that their speech serves to construct a totalizing representation of not only the hospitality industry itself but also those who participate in restaurant employment. The *Globe and Mail* and Postmedia sources perpetuate the neo-capitalist notion that those atop the industry hierarchy have a greater understanding of the industry itself. Because of this understanding, these are the voices that should be amplified for the sake of generating knowledge amongst media consumers. Moreover, it was found that not only did the discourse serve to lay the groundwork for a relatively unchallenged media representation of hospitality staff, but it was also the case that language was used in such a way that it served to obscure or completely erase the existence of those who were being spoken on behalf of: the wage-earning restaurant staff members.

The personification of the 'restaurant'.

Eighty-two percent of the articles in the sample participated in the linguistic practice of personification wherein the author employed the term 'restaurant' in such a way that the restaurant was presented as an entity capable of participating in human affairs. Most instances of personification throughout the sample either obscured the existence of wage-earning staff members (56 percent) or excluded wage-earning staff members as a collection of agents not entailed as a component of the 'restaurant' (43 percent). Only two instances of personification were noted wherein the journalist utilized the term 'restaurant' such that it was evident that the use of the term entailed the existence of wage-earning staff. For example, Corey Mintz (2021) of the *Globe and Mail* personifies the term 'restaurants' in the following way: "restaurants scrambled to serve diners with skeleton crews" (para. 6); in this instance, it is evident that in the discussion of 'restaurants,' wage-earning staff are included as a component of the restaurants. However, as noted above, most instances of personification obscured or excluded the existence of wage staff.

In multiple instances, the term 'restaurants' was blatantly used synonymously with the terms 'restaurant owners' or 'restaurant managers.' For example, consider the title of the following *National Post* article*:* "Restaurants near virus hot spots weigh safety-vs-profit with locals only dining" (McKenzie-Sutter, 2020). Note that in this sentence, the term restaurant is used as a stand-in term for the individual, or individuals, who was/were tasked with deciding whether their restaurant should prohibit the visit of non-local guests. This was a commonplace practice amongst the journalists who contributed articles to the sample of this project.

Pronoun usage.

It is also worth noting that pronoun usage served to further obscure the existence of wage-earning staff members. Pronoun usage in written texts is a key component of the representation and construction of groups and communities (Fairclough, 2003). Of particular importance within the selected sample are first personal plural pronouns such as 'we' and 'us.' Most uses of these pronouns enhanced the silencing or obscuring of wage-earning staff. A detailed analysis of pronoun usage amongst the selected sample reveals that the pronouns in question rarely provide clarity for the question of who is being spoken of or addressed. This phenomenon was most evident in the analysis of direct quotations.

It was common for restaurant owners and managers to use the terms ‘we’ and ‘us’ as they discussed the inner workings of their restaurants or the restaurant industry itself. However, it was unclear whether the usage of these terms necessarily entailed wage-earning hospitality staff. For example, the head chef of Enoteca Sociale, an Italian restaurant in the heart of Toronto, stated the following: “we can’t wait to be able to invite guests back and get to really share what we do with our guests” (Dawson, 2021, para. 21). This statement does not make clear who is entailed by the use of the pronoun ‘we.’ Perhaps wage-earning staff were spoken with and shared in the desire to welcome patrons back into their dining room. Conversely, it could also be the case that the chef is solely touting the perspective of the restaurant’s ownership team. The sample provides little evidence of who is included when restaurant owners employed personal pronouns such as ‘we’ or ‘us.’ Either restaurant owners opted to speak on behalf of their staff, or the perspectives of their employees were silenced and excluded from their discussions of the hospitality industry.

Representation of homogenized experience.

This section of the paper will explore the representation of wage-earning restaurant staff members formulated throughout the discourse. The first task will be to examine the discursive representation perpetuated by the few token wage-earning restaurant staff members who were afforded the opportunity to speak and share their perspectives. This task will be completed by analyzing the direct quotes allocated to wage-earning staff members throughout the sample and the one opinion piece written from the perspective of a former wage-earning hospitality staff member.

A small selection of the examined quotations, as well as the knowledge produced by the token opinion piece, aligns directly with the academic literature produced by Lippert et al. (2021), which qualitatively examined the lived experience of hospitality staff members throughout the pandemic insofar as they highlighted the unsavoury working conditions of the restaurant industry. Restaurant workers claimed that their working environments “[were] hot and stressful, the hours long, and the pay awful” (Bundale, 2021, para. 3). They also expressed their experience of “working to the point of burnout” (Bundale, 2021, para. 4). Lori Fox, a former restaurant server, noted that “restaurant workers don’t want to work a physically demanding job in substandard conditions without benefits for minimum wage” (Fox, 2021, para. 7). Consequently, a small portion of quotations found within the sample serves to formulate a representation of wage-earning

hospitality workers as hard-working individuals who have suffered increased levels of stress and hardships because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, on account of the aforementioned phenomenon wherein wage-earning staff members were only allocated a minuscule number of quotations (20 out of 511 quotations) to share their perspectives, this representation does not dominate the discursive space in its totality.

The discourse generates a representation of wage-earning restaurant staff wherein the Covid-19 pandemic ultimately had a negligible impact on their general well-being. Hospitality staff are presented as a privileged group of workers who, when the pandemic struck, fell upon their savings to pursue novel business ventures, learn new skills, return to school to further their post-secondary education, or take time to relax and focus on their physical and mental health. The following selections of text highlight the discursive representation of hospitality staff that permeates throughout the discourse:

> "When bars closed, I was so happy because I was so tired," Gagnon said in a recent interview. "And on top of that, it was like there was a little lucky star over my head; I found horticulture evening classes I was able to attend (Ann, 2021, para. 3).

> Jonathan Frederic...He took sound recording lessons with a friend who works in the television industry and enrolled in classes in information technology at a junior college (Ann, 2021, para. 16).

> Luke Bergmann...spent most of the time at home collecting the $2,000 a-month Canada Emergency Response Benefit. As the pandemic dragged on, he began to worry that his experience was not giving him the skills to survive tough economic times. So, he decided to learn to code (Hannay, 2021, para. 14).

> With my hours open, I was able to grow my freelance business and secure a regular income as an editor. I also enrolled in an MFA program at the University of British Columbia, because I realized I want to teach writing (Fox, 2021, para. 14).

These examples suggest that wage-earning hospitality staff could navigate the pandemic's inception and the loss of their employment with ease because of either personal savings or reliance upon government pandemic response benefits. The extensive coverage of government assistance programs and their impact on staffing levels in restaurants formed a representation of hospitality

workers wherein the sole factor as to why wage-earning staff were opting not to return to their previously held jobs is because the government provided them with support payments. This idea further cemented the discursive representation discussed previously, where it was deemed the case that hospitality employees who lost their jobs because of the pandemic ultimately experienced little hardship. Representation of this nature is amplified throughout the sample and is evident in consideration of the immense amount of coverage dedicated to staffing shortages and government assistance programs. For example, consider the following selection of text:

> The pinch is felt by restaurant owners across the country, particularly as many servers or cooks remain hesitant to return to work amid Covid-19. Many business owners say the issue is due to a decision by employees to try new lines of work, while by far the next highest concern is the federal government's continued support programs for the unemployed (Snyder, 2021, para. 16).

The text gives the appearance of a nuanced and balanced perspective as it highlights the viewpoints of both hospitality workers and their employers. However, the article wherein this selection of text is situated, other than the one sentence provided, dedicated most of its coverage towards examining government assistance programs and their contribution to the occurrence of staffing shortages. The notion of restaurant workers being “hesitant to return to work amid Covid-19" (Snyder, 2021, para. 16) was not mentioned again anywhere in the article, nor was the phenomenon of restaurant staff “trying new lines of work” (Snyder, 2021, para. 16). This selection of text, when considered in context, mirrors the sample at large; it contains minimal traces of a nuanced discussion regarding the lived experiences of wage-earning hospitality workers while simultaneously formulating a homogenized discursive representation.

Throughout the sample, wage-earning restaurant workers are represented, by journalists and restaurant owners alike, as a homogenized group that was able to weather the effects of the pandemic with ease. Wage-earning restaurant workers were homogenized into a distinct and unified class with little individual deviation. Contrastingly, restaurant owners, who were afforded a more distinctive voice throughout the sample, were presented as a nuanced group of individuals with personal struggles and distinct burdens to navigate throughout the pandemic. Restaurant owners were provided with a platform to discuss the internal challenges facing their restaurants

and used the increased media spotlight to discuss their increased workload, decreased revenue, personal finances, levels of stress, and mental health struggles. Wage-earning restaurant workers were not afforded such a nuanced perspective.

The homogenized discursive representation of restaurant workers formulated throughout the sample neglects to account for the vastly nuanced lived experiences of an immensely diverse group of people. The discursive representation of hospitality workers built throughout the sample fails to examine or discuss the fact that the pandemic was experienced differently by individuals who vary by gender, racial background, or socioeconomic class. Instead, the sample presents wage-earning hospitality workers as a homogenized group who could avoid the pandemic's detrimental effects because of their personal savings and government assistance programs. While it will not be explored directly in this paper, it seems likely that the lived experiences of many wage-earning hospitality workers throughout the pandemic would not align with the discursive representation embedded within the examined sample.

Assumptions and silences

The notion that the experience of working in a restaurant throughout the pandemic was inherently stressful, as demonstrated, was not completely silenced from the discourse entirely. A small selection of token articles within the sample recognized the difficulty wage-earning staff members faced while working in restaurants throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this recognition, it was continuously assumed that the role of the restaurant staff was to accept these working conditions as the reality of their occupation. Consider that from the onset of the pandemic, health officials bombarded Canadian citizens with messaging that emphasized the need for increased social distancing, especially around those outside of one’s immediate household, and perpetual mask use in public spaces. Only two articles within the sample discuss hospitality workers being placed in a position of increased exposure to Covid-19 because it is a necessary component of the dining experience for a diner to remove their mask (Brehaut, 2020). In many smaller restaurants, social distancing measures would not have been possible, and thus staff would have found themselves in close contact with maskless individuals (Brehaut, 2020). For those hospitality industry members who took government legislation and suggestions seriously, this likely would have been their only close contact with maskless individuals outside of members of their household.

In multiple instances throughout the sample, restaurant owners are presented as struggling with the decision of whether it was appropriate to open their restaurants to the public. "Roger Yang, owner of Avelo Restaurant and Pizzeria Du" (Brehaut, 2020, para. 4), claimed that he opted to refrain from opening his dining room to the public because he didn't feel it was safe and he "'wouldn't want anyone to work in a position where he himself wouldn't feel safe'" (Brehaut, 2020, para. 4). Contrastingly, wage-earning restaurant staff are not afforded the discursive space to share perspectives of this nature. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that not all restauranteurs shared the sentiments of Mr. Yang. Many restaurant owners opened the doors of their establishments the moment they were given the green light from their respective provincial governments. This decision to reopen would primarily have been made without any input from wage-earning staff members, many of whom had no other option but to return to their previously held positions of employment (Brehaut, 2020). Amidst the discursive representation of the restaurant industry, there is an evident underlying assumption that wage-earning restaurant staff inherently agree with the decisions made by, and share in the ideological perspectives of, their respective employers. Because restaurant owners and executives were allowed to speak on behalf of their members of staff, the perspectives they shared were taken to be synonymous with those of their members of staff.

Hospitality workers, as discussed, were afforded almost no voice to express concerns for their personal safety in the workplace. Instead, their perspectives were discursively formulated by restaurant owners and hospitality industry executives. Even when "more than half of Canadians had the intent to hold off on eating out as a means of protecting their health" (Brehaut, 2020, para. 5), wage-earning staff were expected to carry out their routine tasks as usual. It is discursively assumed that because the wage-earning staff were working in a restaurant, then it must be the case that they feel safe and comfortable doing so. Consider the following example wherein Laura Brehaut (2020) of the *National Post* claimed that "patio season, after all, is about fun, and ensuring that everyone is as relaxed as possible" (para. 13). The article continues by stating that "if you are ready to return to restaurants, the best plan of attack is to conduct a quick assessment of the environment to gauge your comfort level" (Brehaut, 2020, para. 13) and "above all else, choose a patio where you're going to enjoy yourself and feel safe" (Brehaut, 2020, para. 13). These statements, when examined within the broader context of the article, make it evident that this sentiment is directed solely at potential restaurant guests. The general public was met with grace

and patience as they slowly regained confidence in the safety of restaurant dining. Though wage-earning restaurant staff members were not afforded such considerations, this group of individuals was assumed to be comfortable returning to work the moment that restauranteurs were allowed to reopen their establishments. When restaurant owners provided statements such as "*we* can't wait to be able to invite guests back in" (Dawson, 2021, para.21), the use of the personal pronoun '*we'* suggests that the speaker represents the ideological perspective of all members of staff, management, and ownership alike. However, a critical examination of discursive representation requires that one challenges the assumption that the desires and perspective of the speaker and those who are spoken on behalf of are, in fact, synonymous. Failure to challenge assumptions of this nature reinforces hegemony as it allows dominant ideological perspectives to flourish and undermines and discredit the knowledge produced by those at the bottom of the industry hierarchy.

Discussion

In the discursive formulation of the hospitality industry, wage-earning restaurant staff were not afforded the opportunity to formulate their own distinct and nuanced voice. Rather than being provided with the discursive space to speak, this collection of individuals was spoken for. Their discursive representation was primarily constructed by journalists and hospitality executives alike. There is an interesting distinction to be made here between Spivak's theoretical disposition and the findings of this research. Spivak (1988), in her discussion of the 'subaltern' (p.102), describes the totalizing imposition of the colonial voice upon members of a marginalized population. In the context of Spivak's (1988) work, the 'subaltern' (p.102) truly had no voice. Throughout the selected sample, Wage-earning hospitality staff were not the subject of such absolute, totalizing subordination. This research demonstrates that wage-earning hospitality workers were provided with a discursive voice; however, this voice was produced on their behalf by journalists and hospitality industry executives. The silencing of wage-earning hospitality staff is more subtle and manipulative than the silencing of Spivak's (1988) 'subaltern' (p.102). Media consumers are led to believe that the discursive voice of these workers, as found throughout the sample, is, in fact, *theirs.* In reality, as demonstrated throughout this research, the discursive voice of wage-earning hospitality staff is crafted by those atop the hospitality industry hierarchy, and the voice attributed to said staff members is *inauthentic.*

The imposition of this *inauthentic* voice has the potential to detrimentally impact the lived experiences of wage-earning restaurant staff. First, I wish to note that because hospitality executives were provided with the discursive space to impose their ideological perspectives upon the restaurant industry in its entirety, wage-earning restaurant staff who wish to challenge these perspectives could face increased scrutiny from the general public and potentially even their industry colleagues. Wage-earning staff who employ their voice to call into question the ideological dispositions, as discussed throughout this paper, could be perceived as an ideological outlier, when in reality, because these staffs have not been provided with the discursive space to postulate their knowledge and perspectives, we have little understanding of the actual disposition of restaurant staff.

For example, I previously discussed the ways in which the voice of hospitality industry executives fueled the discursive assumption which maintained that wage-earning restaurant staff felt safe and comfortable in the workplace despite the presence of, and risk of contracting, the Coronavirus. Were this assumption to be interpreted as true, any wage-earning restaurant staff who claims to be uncomfortable or unsafe in their work environment could be perceived as a member of a marginal community. To reiterate, we have little understanding of the actual disposition of restaurant staff throughout this period because of their lack of voice. The knowledge that appears to be marginal could be shared by a wide array of wage-earning hospitality staff. However, unless they are provided with the discursive space to share said knowledge, this knowledge will remain alien to media consumers. The only understanding of the hospitality industry provided for Canadian consumers will be directly shaped by the interests of those atop the industry hierarchy.

These processes, in their totality, serve to reinforce hegemonic ideological structures. By failing to provide wage-earning hospitality staff with an adequate opportunity to speak, an array of journalists working for the *Globe and Mail* and Postmedia-owned media sources have afforded restaurant executives the means to define the practices and ideological perspectives of the hospitality industry. This work highlights the notion that as both academics and consumers of media, there is further work to be done in holding mainstream media practitioners accountable for their discursive representation of specific segments of contemporary society. Should mainstream media members wish to avoid promoting the circulation of hegemonic discourse, they should embody the theoretical disposition of standpoint theorists such that they highlight the voices of

those at the bottom of industry hierarchies rather than the industry executives whose voices are continuously prioritized in the formulation of discourse.

Any examination of media should be based on the notion that "the media play an immense role in the education of content consumers and thus, the knowledge produced by media practitioners contributes to the ways in which consumers behave, think, believe, and feel" (Kellner, 2003, p.9). Because of this phenomenon, it is vital that critical scholars continue to examine the media-perpetuated discourse to point out practices that perpetuate hegemonic ideology. The discursive representation of the hospitality industry perpetuated throughout the examined sample ultimately reinforced the age-old ideological practices that have traditionally had a negative impact on wage-earning hospitality staff members. Even with the inclusion of token pieces that directly reflected the perspectives of wage-earning hospitality staff, the discourse in its entirety maintains and justifies the top-down, 'customer is always right' hospitality industry ideals, thus supporting the hierarchical structures of an industry which, as demonstrated in the literature, allows for, and often requires, unsavoury business practices, at the expense of wage-earning staff, because of the industries marginally dismal profit margins (Jones & Comfort, 2022).

One way in which media practitioners could avoid circulating hegemonic discourse would be to embrace the perspectives of a standpoint theorist. From this perspective, the knowledge of those that are the most subjugated in a given hierarchical structure is prioritized. It is thus provided with the necessary discursive space required to accurately comprehend the nuanced experiences of those who find themselves at the bottom of social hierarchies. To construct an accurate discursive representation of the hospitality industry, from the theoretical disposition of a standpoint theorist, we must examine the viewpoints of the line cook, the hostesses, the part-time table bussers, servers, and bartenders. Providing this group of individuals with a distinct and *authentic* voice would serve to formulate a rich discursive representation of the hospitality industry in its entirety. However, this is not to say there is no place for the voice of restaurant owners and executives in the formulation of restaurant industry-related discourse. Still, there is an inherent and imminent need for the voices of a wider array of restaurant industry members to be heard as well.

Conclusion

The nature of this study is limited, such that it cannot be generalized across media publications or genres. However, understanding the mainstream media's discursive representation

of the hospitality industry in its totality is a near impossibility. This does not negate the importance of the findings of this work. The intention of this project was not to arrive at a complete and holistic understanding of the discursive representation of the restaurant industry but rather to highlight the ways in which media practitioners prioritized the knowledge and perspectives of the powerful and privileged members of the restaurant industry and subjugated the knowledge of the wage-earning staff who worked on the front lines, in customer-facing roles, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the findings of this study cannot be generalized further than the examined sample, the practice of holding media practitioners accountable for producing a nuanced discursive representation of wage-earning staff members remains relevant for nearly every Canadian industry. This practice is especially important in Canadian industries, which tend to disproportionately employ members of various minority groups. I also wish to address the fact that this paper is also unable to comment on or generate any knowledge of the lived experiences of restaurant staff who worked throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Outside of the work completed by Lippert et al. (2021), this subject remains a greatly underexamined realm of academic scholarship and requires further attention. Hopefully, this paper draws increased attention to this fact and inspires additional research projects in which greater consideration is taken to examine the nuanced lived experiences of restaurant workers throughout a tumultuous period of Canadian history.

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Kidfluencers and conundrums: the rising need for Internet policy that addresses child labour and safety

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Abstract

As the internet rapidly evolves and its wide influence expands, the Canadian government (as well as many other nations) have struggled to create and enforce policies that protect people online. This has become especially problematic as digital spaces used by children are constantly growing, and even more so as these children become active participants in not only the consumption but also the creation of internet content, leaving them vulnerable to privacy breaches and labour exploitation. Child Internet stars, or kidfluencers, are a vulnerable group that has relatively no legislative protection. Although the United States has laws to protect child actors from financial exploitation, these laws do not address other forms of abuse or the privacy of these children, and no laws exist in Canada or the United States to protect online child performers from the exploitation of their private lives and labour. Instead, the responsibility falls to parents to ensure their kids are safe and protected when producing content online, but when the abuse stems from the family, no one is there to protect children from their parents. In the absence of concrete regulation, the onus falls on the platforms themselves to regulate and remove content that exploits children; however, content regulation has its own drawbacks. The Canadian government has the opportunity to act as an international legislative leader by putting forth legislation that requires platforms to cooperate with a national child digital welfare service to ensure fair treatment and compensation for this new generation of internet stars. This paper outlines various issues in regulating child based content as well as suggests possible policy solutions.

Keywords

Canadian internet policy, influencing, child labour, content regulation, digital policy

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As the internet rapidly evolves and its wide influence expands, the Canadian government (as well as many other nations) has struggled to create and enforce policies that protect people online. This has become especially problematic as digital spaces used by children are constantly growing. As these children become active participants in not only the consumption but also the creation of internet content, they are left vulnerable to privacy breaches and labour exploitation. Child Internet stars, or 'kidfluencers', are a vulnerable group that have relatively no legislative protection. Although the United States of America has laws to protect child actors from financial exploitation, these laws do not address other forms of abuse or the privacy of these children**;** furthermore, no laws exist in Canada or the United States of America to protect online child performers from the exploitation of their private lives and labour (Geider, 2021, p. 29). Instead, the responsibility falls to parents to ensure their kids are safe and protected when producing content online, but when the abuse stems from the family, children severely lack protection from the exploitation of their parents. In the absence of concrete regulation, the onus falls on platforms themselves to regulate and remove content that exploits children; however, platform enforced content regulation has its own drawbacks. Throughout this paper I will discuss the varying issues faced by online child performers and conclude by proposing policy suggestions for the Canadian government to consider. The Canadian government has the opportunity to act as an international legislative leader by putting forth legislation that requires platforms to cooperate with a national child digital welfare service to ensure fair treatment and compensation for this new generation of internet stars.

Article 16 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 states that,

> (1) No child shall be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation; (2) The child has the right to the protection of the law against such (as cited in Nottingham, 2019, p. 5-6).

However, in reality, relatively no enforcement of this Convention takes place. Instead, the internet has opened up new realms for sharing the private information of children with a vast array of people, including strangers. There are two primary ways that children's personal lives are shared online. The first is through what is known as "sharenting" (Nottingham, 2019, p. 2). Sharenting consists of the parent sharing images and videos of their child, often without consent. This poses the obvious risk of exposing a child's information in a scam-filled and data-hungry world, but it can also be more insidious as photos of children can also be used to identify their school or other markers that dangerous individuals could use to determine the location of the child. There is also emotional harm caused by sharing images online, including emotional damage that can occur long after the content is initially posted (Nottingham, 2019, p. 5).

The second form of digital sharing is through children creating and sharing their own content**:** kidfluencing (Maheshwari, 2019). The rise of kidfluencers has been fast and is especially prominent on video sharing sites like YouTube, which have adapted greatly to become both more kid and advertiser-friendly, despite still not allowing children under 13 to create their own accounts (Wong, 2019). The most famous example and YouTube's highest earner of 2019 and 2020 is Ryan Kaji, also known by his YouTube handle, @RyansWorld (Neate, 2020). Ryan's content consists of him unboxing and playing with toys, as well as house tours and videos of him playing in his new mansion. His family runs a total of nine YouTube channels under Ryan's brand and even changed their surname to Kaji to match Ryan's previous YouTube handle (Neate, 2020). Ryan's

channel earned an astounding 29.5 million dollars in revenue in 2020 alone; additionally, his merchandise brings in 200 million for his family each year (Neate, 2020). Ryan is actively advertising for companies and earning his family millions, but how much control does the now 11-year-old actually hold over this money or the way he is represented to his audience? Ryan's mom suggests that it was her son (Ryan), at the tender age of 5, who suggested he start a YouTube channel (Neate, 2020), but now that Ryan has become a multi-million-dollar brand, it is difficult to say how much autonomy he has in terms of brand deals, editing, and personal privacy. Although there is no evidence or claims of abuse occurring in Ryan's family, there are a number of families who pose not just a financial risk to kidfluencer's but also a threat to their emotional privacy and safety. The United States does have the Coogan law, legislation that requires a portion of a child's earned money to be put aside for adulthood; however, this legislation still excludes digital performers (Geider, 2021, p.29).

A dangerous combination of sharenting and kidfluencing can be found in the growing community of YouTube family vloggers. These channels often consist of a mother, father, and their children acting in skits, reviewing toys together, or participating in reality show-style drama and pranks. In these circumstances, it is not the parent alone engaging in influencer behaviour, but they also involve their children's private lives in their content to make money for themselves and to advertise for companies. These children also face risks of being manipulated or forced to act in certain harmful or even degrading ways to ensure views, followers, or good advertiser relations. There is also no limitation to how long child performers for social media are allowed to work; their parents could be filming them for twenty-four hours a day and face no consequences for profiting off of their child's continuous performance (Nottingham, 2019, p. 8).

Unlike the children of mommy bloggers who are discussed primarily in relation to the parent, the children of influencers are valued for what Crystal Abidin (2017) describes as "anchor talents" (p. 2). Anchor talents are performance skills such as acting in skits, singing, dancing or creating tutorials and are valued in a secondary manner for their role in adding authenticity to the domestic content of the family. This becomes especially disturbing when anchor content involves emotional manipulation and creates a sense of distrust between parents and their children. Audiences on the internet are drawn to intense reactions and emotions, which makes children's emotions ripe content farms for parents who seek to maintain their digital relevance. Nottingham (2019) discusses a video by the vlogging family 'The Shaytards', who were YouTube stars circa 2014. In the video, the nine-year-old daughter begs her father to "Cut that part out!" (Nottingham, 2019, p. 8) after sharing information about a private crush. The daughter proceeds to run away crying while her father follows her with the camera refusing to turn it off, and can be heard saying "this is good footage" (Nottingham, 2019, p. 8).

A more insidious example of parents pushing their kids to the emotional edge and using their private emotions for views is the now banned vlogging family "FamilyOFive", also known as "DaddyOFive". The content often consisted of parents, Heather and Mike Martin, playing 'pranks' that included ridiculing or punishing their children to the point of intense emotional distress and recording the reactions. Other videos contained Mike Martin physically abusing his children by shoving them, encouraging them to physically harm each other or verbally abusing them (Sisley, 2020). After being notified by their content moderating system, YouTube reported the couple to Maryland Child Protection Services (Geider, 2021, p. 21). Two of the children were removed from their custody. The Martins were charged with child neglect, and although they refused to admit guilt, they did take a plea and were sentenced to five years of probation as well

as an order to no longer post any videos or photos of their children (Sisley, 2020). However, as their account already had nearly a million followers, the parents were able to continue to live off of the money produced from their previously created content (Geider, 2021, p. 22). This prompted YouTube to adjust its guidelines, completely removing content and banning accounts that featured child abuse or endangerment (Geider, 2021, p. 22) rather than only demonetizing them. As highlighted by Geider (2021), one company amending its policies still does little to address the vast array of online child exploitation. In the FamilyOFive case, YouTube's content regulation policies were effective at flagging and then removing content that depicted abuse. However, it took an extended period of time before the platform recognized and addressed the abuse and exploitation embedded within the family's videos, displaying the cracks in the content regulation system. There are also a variety of other limitations to content regulation as a way to combat online child exploitation.

There are a wide variety of drawbacks to allowing platforms to self-regulate children's content to tackle online child abuse and exploitation. Firstly, content moderation works by screening photos and videos once the media has already been uploaded. The screening process does not often occur before the image or video is posted (Roberts, 2019, p. 35). This means that for many kidfluencers, their privacy has already been breached by the time the content is flagged and removed, doing little to help them. Child-based content is also growing exponentially as children grow up with devices surrounding them from birth. Millions of user-generated posts are created and submitted to social media sites every day (Roberts, 2019, pg. 3). Content moderators are already overworked and underpaid, and with the sheer number of posts it is not possible for individual moderators to examine the details of every child Youtuber's video, especially when abuse may not be obvious. In addition to this, many social media companies do not fully disclose

how their content moderation processes operate, partially due to the idea that internal workings are proprietary information but also because maintaining this privacy allows them to "escape scrutiny and public review of these policies from their users, civil society advocates, and regulators alike" (Roberts, 2019, p. 38). Roberts (2019) also states that sharing the vast inner workings of content moderation practices with the general public would expose just how prevalent inappropriate, disturbing, and harmful imagery is as well as how social media platforms, in many ways, facilitate the distribution of this content, rather than acting as a force to stop its dissemination.

Content moderation policies work within the framework of the corporation's rules and may not immediately flag videos of families as anything in need of a human moderator. As long as the family is presented as safe and fun and there is no obvious on-camera abuse, a content moderator would not flag the video as a potential source of child exploitation. However, this is also due to the fact that, similarly to the audience, the platform only sees a curated image of performers and the family as a whole. In the FamilyOFive case, the abuse was clearly displayed in the videos; however, other kidfluencers, such as Machelle Hackney Hobson's seven adopted kids, are only ever shown smiling and laughing for the camera while secretly being abused behind the scenes. Hobson's channel, @FantasticAdventures, accumulated over 700,800 followers and made Hobson nearly 300 million in 2018 before she was arrested (Wong, 2019). The abuse faced by her children was directly related to content creation. The children stated that Hobson would withhold food, water, and bathroom access, beat, pepper spray, and even molest the children if they forgot their lines, did not act well, or did not want to participate in the videos (Geider, 2021 p. 20). YouTube appeared to be unaware of the abuse and their initial reaction to the arrest was only to demonetize the accounts before later deleting them entirely (Wong, 2019). The very fact YouTube initially tried to leave the uploaded videos from both the FamilyOFive and the FantasticAdventures

channels displays that the privacy and safety of these children is not their main priority. Entrusting companies that have a history of exploiting and hiding information from users to tackle complex societal problems such as child abuse is incredibly dangerous, especially when the public does not fully understand how these companies make their decisions.

One might think that an easy catch-all for this would be to ban the sharing of images and videos of minors as well as the online content produced by minors. While encouraging parents to respect their children's privacy is important, many parents do not post with malicious intent and many kids do create online content as a non-monetized hobby. Simply banning parents from posting their children or allowing their children to create original content is not an adequate solution (Nottingham, 2019, p. 2). However, content regulation by a private platform alone is also inadequate. Removing the content may take the abuse out of the public eye, but it does not help those who are actively harmed by it, leaving the children vulnerable and alone. In both the FamilyOFive and the FantasticAdventures vlogging abuse scandals, both the intervention of the government and the private platform was required to adequately protect children. Although YouTube did not have the capacity to remove the children from the abuse, they were able to remove the incentive, and although the government could not stop the family from earning income from the abuse, they could take the children out of the dangerous home. Tackling child abuse online requires a nuanced and federally regulated approach.

An issue as complex as the abuse and exploitation of children for internet views requires a thorough piece of legislation that touches on all areas of abuse. To become leaders in protecting the privacy and safety of children, I recommend that the Canadian government bring in a comprehensive Kidfluencer bill that enforces a partnership between national child welfare services and major digital platforms. It can be difficult to engage large platforms in this kind of cooperative

effort. However, Veena Dubal, a University of California Hastings law professor who specializes in employment law and the gig economy, claims that platforms like YouTube could be considered joint employers of these children as they control the dissemination of money (Wong, 2019). This would add to their responsibility to reduce exploitative child labour on their platforms and would give the Canadian government some weight in threatening legal action against these companies for being complicit in the abuse if they do not comply.

Canada's child services agencies are currently regionalized by province; however, to adequately address online abuse, I suggest the federal government create a branch designed just for digital child welfare. Once their child-focused accounts reach a monetary threshold (Geider 2021, p. 25), parents should be required to register their child with a digital child welfare agency to obtain a digital work permit. Although critics of the attempt to add this work permit to California child labour laws have stated that the enforcement of work permits would be near impossible as work is done mostly at home where permits cannot be verified, the proposed regulated partnership between platforms and national child welfare services could combat this. Under my proposed Kidfluencer bill, platforms such as YouTube would be required to ensure a permit is submitted to them and restrict channels from producing content if their permit has not been verified by the platform. From this point, it would be the role of a social worker to check in and visit these families to ensure no behind-the-scenes abuse or intimidation is occurring. Simultaneously, the platform can continue to flag obvious displayed abuse and notify the digital child welfare agency of specific violations that need immediate action.

This bill must also delineate a kidfluencer's right to own their own finances, following in a similar vein to California's 1999 child actor labour law overhaul, which maintains that a minimum of 15% of a child's earnings must be kept in an account until they are an adult and the

remaining 85% must be used to take care of the child, even if that includes paying the parent a salary as the child's manager (Wong, 2019). For vlogging families, I suggest that this should be extended to 10% of the family's total earnings being set aside for each child who performs on camera. Geider (2021) states that the proper spending of this 85% can be ensured through disclosure requirements which would force parents

> to disclose where the money is coming from, how much money is being exchanged, and the type and nature of the work that is going on. For example, with YouTube, it would also involve information like the name of the account holder's channel, the dates of recording, and when the video was uploaded (p. 26).

Another aspect of my suggested Kidfluencer bill would be a digital privacy clause that requires a child's written or verbal consent to posted videos, as well as a legal right to have these videos removed at their own discretion. For children who are too young to be considered "Gillick competent" (Nottingham, 2019, p. 3) or who cannot speak or act on behalf of themselves yet, this clause would allow for the removal of content that they were not able to reasonably consent to at the time.

Although it would require a complex and comprehensive piece of legislation, creating a space for children to safely perform and earn fair compensation on the internet is possible. The longer major governments wait to enact legislation to protect these children, the more the abuse will grow and become normalized. The vacuum left in the absence of any government regulation to protect child content creators has left private corporations in charge of content moderation, which presents its own array of dangers, as corporations are not necessarily properly equipped to tackle issues of human rights. Canada is not the only country to have left its most vulnerable at

risk during the tsunamic rise of the internet, but it does have the chance to be the first to put an end to the rampant abuse and exploitation occurring online.

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History of Transnational cinema and feminist film theory: understanding the potential of Transnational women's film

Asha Sara

Abstract

In order to understand the concept of transnational women's film, it is essential to look at both transnational film theory and feminist film theory independently from one another. I seek to deconstruct the two theories, their independent histories, goals, and roles within the field of film theory. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate the similarities of the two independent theories to make sense of how they form the concept of transnational women's film. I provide a close reading and analysis of Higbee and Lim's (2010) Concepts of Transnational Cinema and Patrice Petro's (2016) Classical Feminist Film Theory Then and (mostly) now. By way of this analysis, conclusions can be drawn on how the history of transnational film theory and feminist film theory has grown and evolved into transnational women's film. Analysis of both theories leads to the first discovery of their similarities in their development within academic study. Pointing at how both transnational film theory and feminist film theory found relevance as academic subjects begins the merger of transnational women's film as a relevant scholarly subject of inquiry. I then detail how the independent texts describe how the need for racialized and gendered thought enhanced their respective theories and impacted their development within film theory. By doing so, the authors of interest showcase the rich histories of these theories and how they can be used to understand the diverse and impactful background of transnational women's film. Furthermore, both sets of authors detail suggestions for further scholarship in their respective areas. Pointing to how the independent transnational and feminist film theory evolved into transnational women's film theory. From my critical analysis of the academic work of both Higbee and Lim and Petro on the history of their respective fields of thought, conclusions can be drawn on how transnational film and feminist film theory influenced the development of transnational women's film.

Keywords

transnational women's film, film theory, critical analysis, communications history

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Introduction

Breaking down and examining the history of transnational cinema and feminist film theory provides a more robust understanding of transnational women's films. In *Concepts of Transnational Cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies*, Higbee and Lim (2010), through a critical and engaging discussion of how the national paradigm did not account for the more prominent factors at play in cross-border produced and viewed films, detailing the historical origins of the term 'transnational cinema.' In her foundational text, *Classical Feminist Film Theory Then and (mostly) now*, Patrice Petro (2016) provides readers with an analysis of feminist film theory. Petro (2016) highlights the history of feminist film theory as a once central, influential, and powerful force of the 1970s and 1980s film theory, to one that began to be perceived as self-absorbed, aloof in activism and political engagement, and cliche (p.16).

Similarities can be drawn between both articles. While Petro (2016) details the role feminist film theory had on the field of film scholarship, Higbee and Lim (2010) describe the evolution of transnational cinema as becoming its own distinct area of film study, thus solidifying the status of their perspective theories within the academic domain. The authors also outline the role diversity, and the globalized world plays in their areas of study (Petro, 2016; Higbee & Lim, 2010). Additionally, the authors suggest enhancing scholarship within their respective fields (Petro, 2016; Higbee & Lim, 2010). By outlining the many critical ways of thinking about and understanding both transnational cinema and feminist film theory, the two texts further audiences' spectatorship of transnational women's film by providing a greater cross-understanding of these two foundational concepts.

Rise In Scholarship

Enhancing understanding and spectatorship of transnational women's film can first be done by acknowledging the way transnational cinema and feminist film theory arose, independently of each other, as areas of scholarly study. In their writing, Higbee and Lim (2010) establish how transnational cinema has become an area of study: "Within the discipline of film studies, the concept of transnational cinema is certainly now an established area of inquiry" (p.8). The authors reference the increasing number of academic books and journals that utilize the term transnational cinema within the title (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p.8). The authors further detail, in their introduction,

that there has been a shift within scholars to transition from using 'transnational film,' as a word used to describe cross-border cinematic connections to a concept with dedicated journals that establish transnationalism as understanding the "production, consumption and representation of cultural identity in our interconnected, multicultural world" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 8). Higbee and Lim (2010) also use their introduction to make explicit claims that there has been a momentous shift in the field's understanding and use of the transnational lens. Furthermore, as addressed by Higbee and Lim (2010), the changes made by scholars within the field to address the concept of transnationalism on a larger academic scale are akin to those made in the introduction of Petro's (2016) article.

Petro (2016) details a 2015 interview with Laura Mulvey in which Mulvey is asked what has changed since the publication of her now classical feminist film theory work Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema which was published in 1975 (p. 15). Mulvey responds by saying, "one absolutely crucial change is that feminist film theory is now an academic subject to be studied and taught" (Petro, 2016, p.15). Petro (2016) uses her interview with Mulvey to preface her argument that from the 1970s to the 2010s, feminist film theory arose as an established area of academic study, becoming an increasingly common and ever-growing component of various academic curricula.

Both of the considered texts provide insights into the origins of transnational feminist film theory. Petro (2016) and Higbee and Lim (2010) address the importance of transnational feminist film theory by acknowledging and upholding their respective theories' status as areas of academic scholarship. Both texts set up the idea that these independent fields are relevant, important, and can be backed up by a notable amount of scholarship (Petro, 2016; Higbee & Lim, 2010). Despite the independence of these two works, we, as readers and spectators of transnational women's films, can deepen our understanding of these topics as being rooted in academic theory.

Dissatisfaction & Change

Higbee and Lim (2010) outline a shift in film scholarship from using transnationalism as a term to applying it as a theoretical lens. They locate this shift as a "wider dissatisfaction expressed by scholars working across the humanities" in using a national lens to make sense of film production, consumption, and representation of cultural identity in an expanding interconnected, multicultural world (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p.8). The national paradigm used within the field was

no longer satisfactory in analyzing the role transnational films play in shaping cultural identities and describing the cross-border means of production and consumption of films; therefore, a new way of thinking was needed for scholars to examine and address these concerns adequately. Higbee and Lim (2010) further develop the concept of transnational cinema by moving away from the Eurocentric readings of cross-border films and, instead, engaging in analyses grounded in cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and globalization studies (pp.7–9). Overall, the two authors paint a picture of transnational cinema as being informed by many diverse and inclusive theories and ideologies (Higbee & Lim, 2010). This enhances our understanding of transnational cinema as a concept with many different theoretical influences that further the diverse reading of cross-border films.

The need to apply a diverse lens to transnational film leading to a shift in its perception in the field, is similar to the phenomenon highlighted by Patricia Petro. Petro (2016) explains why a shift occurred in feminist film theory's centrality to film theory in the 1990s. Many criticisms have been leveled against feminist film theory, specifically in the writings of feminist film scholars, who denounce feminist film theory, not on epistemological grounds but because of its opacity and abstraction, its propensity towards jargon and cliche, and its aloofness from activism and political engagement (p.16).

This can be understood as the feminist film theories perceived lack of seriousness and ability to expand on meaningful engagement, impacting women at different socio-economic levels, as well as a lack of engagement with intersectionality. This lack of political engagement and activism led to a renouncing of feminist film theory by feminist film scholars, shifting the theory's centrality to the field of film theory. This phenomenon is similar to the reframing of transnational cinema as a theoretical concept that accounts for the diverse factors of cross-border film. Although Petro (2016) later paints feminist film theory in a positive light, she acknowledges the factors which caused the shift in the perception of feminist film theories and their centrality in film theory.

The similarities found in Higbee and Lim (2010) and Petro's (2016) texts are born out of a dissatisfaction towards the state of national film scholarship and feminist film theory. Both texts also maintain the view that the aforementioned theories could not account for greater social and power structures at play in the formation of films (Higbee & Lim, 2010; Petro, 2016). This helps us understand transnational feminist film theory as ever-changing and needing to continue to

account for new concepts that include more diverse perspectives of the ways in which different people experience the world. We can enhance our spectatorship of transnational women's films by critically engaging with how film depicts diversity, social and economic positions of power, and the real-world effects film has on activism and political engagement.

Newly Imagined Theories

After establishing the changes in perspective that led to their respective fields to account for feminism and transnational film differently, in both aforementioned articles, the authors make suggestions and contributions to the discussion on how to enhance both transnational film theory and feminist film theory (Higbee & Lim, 2010; Petro, 2016). Higbee and Lim (2010) propose the term "critical transnationalism" (p.17) to further evolve the conversations taking place in the field around the difference between the national and transnational paradigm. Critical transnationalism comes after addressing the concern that the term transnational could stand for a "potentially empty, floating signifier" (p.10). However, the authors do not wish to reject the term transnational altogether (Higbee & Lim, 2010). The aim of critical transnationalism is to engage with and challenge the conceptual term 'transnational' to "help us interpret more productively the interface between global and local, national and transnational, as well as moving away from a binary approach to national/transnational and from a Eurocentric tendency of how such films might be read" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p.10). After engaging in conversation on the issues around national cinema and establishing how the concept of transnationalism can provide a better framework for cross-border cinema, Higbee and Lim (2010) take their discussion further by emphasizing that critical transnationalism is different from national cinema and needs to be addressed accordingly.

Petro (2016) makes a similarly styled argument in her text when she suggests a new way in which feminist film theory can be imagined to ensure its perception does not fall back to that of the 1990s, wherein the following phenomenon occurred: "we now have not only feminism without women but women without feminism, or rather, major feminist film theorists who no longer identify as such" (p.20). After detailing how feminist film theory has become de-central to film theory due to its perceived "aloofness" (Petro, 2016, p.16), Petro (2016) makes the argument that film feminism must renew its sense of purpose by forging bridges "between generations and to reclaim their contested history" (p.21). Petro (2016) engages with her review of feminist film theory history by suggesting how the field can grow and evolve. Her suggestions are also in line

with the criticism marked at the beginning of her text by renewing its sense of purpose, as in re-aligning with the political and activist communities it once was engaged with.

Petro's (2016) personal discussion on how film feminism could find itself once again central to film theory is similar to how Higbee and Lim (2010) discuss their tracing of transnational film history and the advancement of critical transnationalism. This connection can enhance our understanding of transnational women's films by showcasing ways we as viewers can critically analyze these theories' histories to engage in increasingly enhanced and nuanced conversation.

Conclusion

Petro (2016) does not shy away from ensuring her readers that "gender discrimination in the [film] industry is still rampant" (p.17) and that "it is important to [emphasize] once again that feminist film history gains nothing from disowning its origins" (p.22). She makes these statements to remind her readers that feminist film theory is a critical area of film theory and scholarship and that it is currently as worthy of our attention and scholarship as it was in the 1970s and 1980s (Petro, 2016). To reclaim its status as central to film theory, Petro (2016) acknowledges and suggests that feminist film theory reinvent itself for a new generation to do away with its previous perceptions, including not accounting for intersectionality. Despite the difference in tone, feminist film theory, as told by Patrice Petro (2016), contains similar themes to that of the evolving field of transnational cinema, told by Higbee and Lim (2010). The theme of being an area of diverse scholarly study is addressed as transnational cinema shifted towards deserving of its own realm of scholarship due to its involvement with diverse stories made up of diverse people. Higbee and Lim (2010) also suggest enhancing and differentiating scholarship in this area by establishing critical transnationalism, which is similar to suggestions made by Petro (2016) to re-establish feminist film theory for new generations. This analysis of Petro, Higbee, and Lim's texts enhances the spectatorship of transnational women's films by providing a breakdown and history of the respective areas of scholarship. This creates a deeper understanding of the rich histories, challenges, and independent topics both areas of study face so that when taken together in transnational women's film, viewers can critically engage with the content on a more meaningful level.

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A visual rhetorical analysis of Queer visibility strategies active in contemporary American television

Madison Daniels

Abstract

Research on queer visibility in media has frequently focused on the content of queer representation (Dhaenens & Bauwel, 2012; Manuel, 2009; McCarthy, 2001). This study challenges this approach by analyzing the strategies of how queer visibility is conveyed in contemporary American television dramas. The analysis focuses on scenes with implicit and explicit queer references from the shows Station 19 and Mr. Robot. Through a visual rhetorical analysis of visual and verbal performance of queerness, this study found four major strategies of queer visibility. Firstly, there is a strategy of heterosexual characterization, meaning queerness is permitted if it has heterosexual attributes, one of the queer persons being masculine and the other feminine. Secondly is the Greek strategy, a historical strategy inspired by ancient Greek times when the significant age gap between two men in a queer relationship was acceptable. Thirdly is the semi-explicit strategy, where the expression of queerness in a relationship is mixed between overtones and undertones of queerness. Finally, there is the implicit strategy where queerness between two characters only exists in the undertones, gestures, and words. These findings highlight the repertoire of queer visibility strategies possibly present in other American television shows

Keywords

queer visibility, queer representation, American television, queerness, visual rhetoric

This submission is a creative webpage. To view the site **Click Here.** The site will prompt for a passcode.

Passcode: queervisibility

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EN-LIGHTEN-ED: The politics of Black hair

Glory Okeleke

Abstract

EN-LIGHTEN-ED: The Politics of Black Hair is a blog post that spotlights issues which primarily affect women in their daily lives with a focus on creating awareness and encouraging fellow young girls like myself, with a platform to use their voices.

For the final media project of my COMS 479 Feminist Media Studies class, I precisely administered the blog post to engage in a conversation on the politics of Black women's hair. Through the medium of my blog, I was opportune to implore a fundamental principle of Feminist Media Studies, that of Representation, with a concentration on the representations of otherness – which in this case were Black women. This blog post took a critical standpoint to dissect and disintegrate the negative portrayals of Black femininity that have slowly become internalized by a majority of society. The topic of hair is downrightly a focus when femininity is the subject of discussion. On this account, and with aid of my media piece, I was then able to propose burdening questions and seek answers as to why Black women were steadily weighed down with the expectancy to live up to the standards of Eurocentrism through the manner in which they decide to wear their hair in.

Keywords

voice, feminist media, Black women, Representation, Black femininity, Eurocentrism, Black hair

This submission is a creative webpage. To view the site **Click Here.**

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Archaic methods, subculture sensibilities, outsider aesthetics & Instagram: A humble cultural artifact attempts to resist the almighty algorithm

Calum Robertson

Abstract

This project grew from an assignment to design a potential cultural artifact that could resist the forces of control (often called "taste", reeking of cultural capital and long-gone scholars with their legacies of gatekeeping) within visual culture. During the idea-generating process, I quickly realized how easy, enjoyable and interesting actually creating such an artifact would be - and that I had the means to. So. I created an Instagram account, both to host the artifact(s) and be the artifact itself; a space online to populate and fill with homemade collages reflecting myself, my life, my "tastes" and, most of all, what sorts of materials cross my desk throughout a day (show flyers, magazines, poems, crumpled paperbacks and family photos, doodles and drawings and all that and more). This paper was written alongside the creation, generation and sharing of the account and collages, meaning that analysis informed experiment shaped analysis, and so on and so forth. This written portion of the project describes my experiences with the various stages of enacting this cultural artifact. Accompanying images were taken during this process. Where it will go next, now created, realized and analyzed, is beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly worth observing.

Keywords

aesthetics, visual culture, subversive art, artifact analysis, social media algorithms

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And you say that anyone could make it, and I guess that's so.
I guess I ain't Walt Whitman, I guess she ain't Van Gogh.
You can't account for taste, but I know my north from south,
And it's a goddamn folk art masterpiece when she opens up her mouth.
"Folk Art Masterpiece" by Willi Carlisle (2016).

Preliminary Notes

While this project was originally intended to be a proposal for a cultural artifact, I quickly realized how easy, enjoyable, and potentially interesting actually creating this could be. Each written portion contains a journal entry, describing my experiences with the various stages of the project and/or other relevant information about creating and enacting the cultural artifact. Accompanying images were taken whilst creating this artifact. Where it will go after this assignment, once created and realized, is beyond the scope of this project, but certainly worth observing.

Artifact Design

First, a definition necessary for this project: Instagram accounts, and by extension any social media platform accounts, are cultural artifacts. Posting content and engaging with the content of others in these spaces constitute popular cultural practices. This is true because, as Raymond Williams wrote in 1958, popular culture is ordinary; in our current, increasingly interconnected and online world, nothing is more ordinary than having and interacting with and through Instagram accounts (p. 53).

As such, the proposed cultural artifact of this project is an Instagram account. One conceptualized and ran to resist the algorithm, which in this context is the embodiment of control by the hegemonic forces at work within society. The account has an innocuous, even strange and absurd, username that is not connected to myself or to the content of the account: *263u594b*. By randomly picking two sets of three numbers and sprinkling in the letters, it appears to have a structure with intended meaning, though it is just a random collection of symbols, more for categorization purposes than accessibility or branding.

The content posted consists of lowbrow, niche, do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic collages, made by me from various sources such as pages of old books, magazines, old poems and artworks I've made over the years, sticky notes, and other materials one accumulates whilst navigating daily life. These collages, as posted to Instagram, are provided at the end of this paper, with screenshots of each post, under the following heading: Chronological Record of Collages. Throughout this project, other relevant images are provided for further context.

Guided by Folk art, the artworks posted have a sense of the ordinary and the excessively imaginative, existing somewhere between "homemade" and heavily "artistic". These collages, the content, the media, adhere to punk ideas and the tenets of Outsider Art, being low budget, brash, handmade, exceedingly creative and very unique. The profile picture, a close-up of a drawing from the margins in the notebook I used for this course's lecture (a winged figure; the coarse lines forming the feathers streaks across the page, becoming familiar-yet-unfamiliar through being zoomed in), integrates the ordinary everyday of popular culture and the 'lowbrow' artistic style most associated with Outsider Art (Williams, 1958, p. 59).

The goal is for the content produced to find its audience: those who subscribe to Folk art and punk ideas and aesthetics, those who will enjoy and resonate with the content without depending on the gatekeeping algorithms and corporations who dictate who sees what and to what degree. Niche art expression connects with like-minded consumers and creators as an act of resisting control of tastes, likes, mainstream and underground movements, of incorporation of subversive elements into mainstream aesthetics (Hebdige, 1979, p. 257-258). If this account introduces Outsider, Folk, lowbrow and DIY art to others for the first time, then that is what the art intended, truly, with minimal manipulation and involvement by algorithms and digital power structures. The spirit of making and being creative to reach others in a communal manner, so central to the movements influencing this project, will be invoked through active and intentional resistance to, and subversion of, the structures established to control and subversion of the structures established to determine tastes: Instagram, specifically.

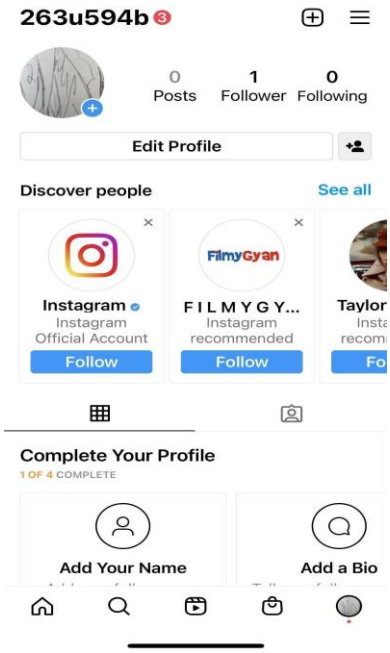
The structure of the account, the parts of the account given to the user to dictate according to their preferences, anything left for me to input and not set by the Instagram app itself, also adheres to the ideas of Outsider Art, punk aesthetics, and the DIY, low-brow, approach to art. There is no bio or name, nor does the account follow any other accounts or like any of the posts

shared by other users. Content is posted without any captions or hashtags. This is all intentional. By not providing identifying information and not interacting with other accounts, the algorithm is only minimally engaged, thus reducing Instagram's control of who sees and interacts with my shared content.

This is counteracted by promoting the account through more archaic, uncontrolled ways. Because popular culture inherently seeks an audience, a consumer, I need to promote this account, to some degree. The first method is through word of mouth. A large portion of the popular culture I like, especially those that were foundational to my identity, I was exposed to by the influence of a friend, telling me about a cool band or showing me an underground movie that they love. I shared the username and mission of the account with the people in my life, close friends, bemused family, interesting strangers who seem to have an artsy, unorthodox vibe to them. Having just begun to do this once setting up the account, it remains to be seen how effective word of mouth might be in sharing my popular culture artifact without depending solely on the algorithm or showing this account directly to the accounts of my friends (data gathered from contact lists elsewhere in my phone). It is worth noting that telling a friend about this gained me my first follower.

Figure 1

Screenshot of the Account Day 1

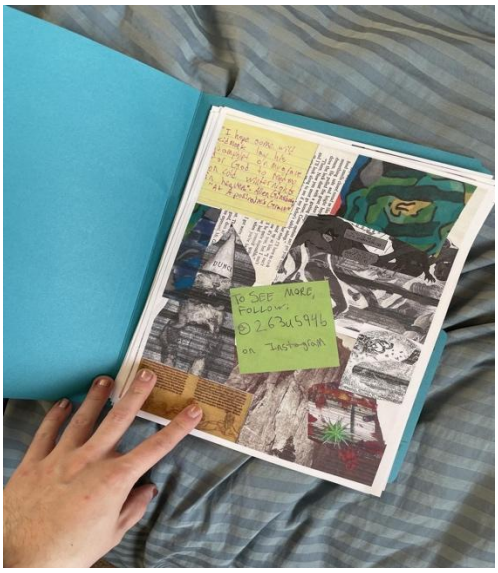


Note. Day one: no posts and one follower.

The second method I employed for the purpose of promoting the account was to make posters. I made a collage (that I also posted to the account) which incorporated a sticky note saying the following: TO SEE MORE FOLLOW: @263u594b on Instagram (Figure 2). Then, I photocopied about twenty copies, some in color, some in black and white, until my cheap printer-copier ran out of ink (and coincidentally seems to have breathed its last, perhaps inflecting a creative spirit of death and rebirth into the project). Each poster is unique, due to the DIY level I am operating at. Because the printer is cheap, because I am doing this myself in my bedroom, the ink bleeds, or certain pigments run out, making each look different in a very distinct, artistic and Outsider/punk style of variations I couldn't make intentionally. It had to be by chance, something that this project has really relied on. A chance conversation with a friend, mentioning this project, who tells their friend they happened to bump into, who saw a poster and wondered what all that was about – therein lies the spirit of community creativity so common in punk 'scenes'.

Figure 2

The Copies of the Collage Poster



Note. Apparent immediately is the variations added by the copier, such as the red smears and the vibrant, almost molecular appearing, green in the bottom right corner. To provide reference for comparison, Figure 2 is the original of the poster.

I did share a picture of the poster to my personal Instagram account. Now, this act still met the project's anti-algorithm tenets because I didn't share a post from the account. There was no

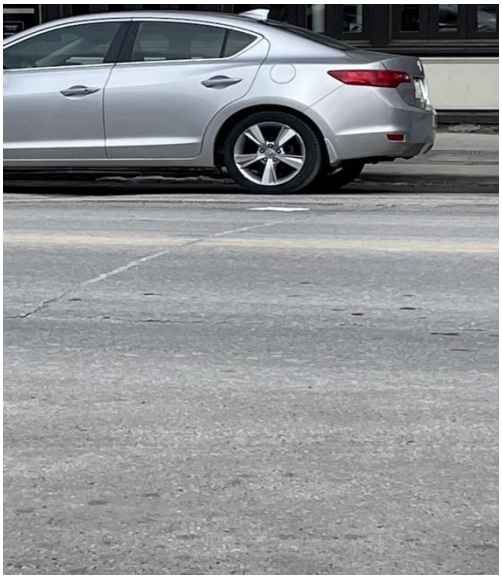
easy link to click. Instead, those interested had to remember the username (or write it down) and then type it in. By having an unclear, seemingly random username (assorted numbers and letters with no easily discernible meaning, because there is none) attached to a strange, handmade, punk-esque collage, those who saw it, including some who knew me personally, had their curiosity piqued. Those I talked to didn't necessarily understand, but were intrigued by this cryptic artifact. In fact, many resonated with the aesthetic, the Outsider, everyday yet hyper-creative feel of the collages and the account, which evokes feelings of belonging with a non-mainstream style. The tiny ripples of noise my posters generated found others who appreciated it and wanted more. On a very small scale, the posters did achieve the desired goal of disrupting the regular mainstream hegemonic content on the feeds of my followers; the account is followed by mostly people I know, though there are several I don't know who found this project through either a poster, word of mouth, or the algorithm.

Figure 3

Kensington Poster A

Figure 4

Kensington Poster B



Note. One of the posters, caught by a sudden gust of wind, flew off the billboard. I saw it cartwheel across the road and it looked quite beautiful, as if it were meant to be free, roaming Kensington. I snapped a picture of it momentarily resting in the middle of the road. Right after this photo was taken, a breeze snapped it up. I watched it soar away into a crowd of pedestrians. I can reasonably hope it landed near someone, who noticed it and had their attention grabbed not

only by the poster itself, but by the manner of its arrival. Free-range advertising: you can't rely more on chance than that.

Figure 6

Kensington Poster C

Figure 7

Kensington Poster D

Figure 8

Kensington Poster E

I put up posters on billboards in Kensington, a trendy neighbourhood in Calgary, Alberta, remaining mindful of what I covered, trying to cover flyers for events passed (Figure 3-8). On the University of Calgary campus, I tacked a few to billboards and also taped a few to random walls. Because the Student Union elections were taking place at the same time, I hoped I could slit my posters in between campaign material, and thus avoid the eyes of any authority who might think I was breaking the rules. In fact, I deliberately didn't look up any rules or regulations surrounding placing material on campus walls and billboards. This was intentional, as an act of resisting the physical control of mine and other students' bodies as we move through campus. Restricting what is seen in a very low level, undramatic, unassuming manner is an example of how corporations (in this case, the University of Calgary, an institution and entity of power and control) "structure and articulate territories and populations"; for this project, the population is the student body and the territory articulated is the University of Calgary campus (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147).

The purpose of this account is threefold. Firstly, the society of control will be analyzed. This determines to what degree the yoke of algorithms, and through these algorithms, corporations, embody hegemony and mainstream tastes can be bucked. This disruption will occur with niche aesthetic content still reaching interested audiences, without self-promotion tactics that depend upon the app, giving in to trends, paying for promotion or changing content to suit what is popular. The project will not use these methods as that would be submitting to social control that modulates

not only who sees what I make but also what I make, to garner those views (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141).

I am not fully rejecting the operations of markets as older, non-technological, methods of spreading information (word of mouth and physical posters) combined with an unwieldy username potential that viewers have to type out (the ease of clicking a link feeds the algorithm, so removing that, adding a level of necessary effort and work to engage could impact the account's following) still do play into the society of control, depending on a continuous network that blurs the online-offline distinction (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141). In addition, I am aware that by creating an account, posting content regularly and having other users follow, like, share and interact with the content posted does still feed the algorithm, contributing to solidifying the individuality of myself and my followers into markets of data, "dividuals" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141). There is no way to truly escape the society of control (Deleuze, 1992, p. 139). However, perhaps by not subscribing to all the norms of Instagram accounts, of succumbing to self-promotion the way Instagram intends within its design (hashtags, sharing posts, follow-for-follow) I can provide a degree of resistance that lessens the control, ever so slightly, loosening the grip of corporations, global capitalism and societal aesthetic norms, through actively choosing not to participate in specific online behaviors (liking, sharing, hashtags, again) and putting effort, work, and devotion into offline methods less common in the hyper-digital world (posters, word of mouth, flyers) (Deleuze, 1992, p. 141).

Secondly, this project will dive into subcultures and, through lived experiences of creation and interaction with users from various backgrounds and identities, examine the tension between the noise of subcultures interrupting the quiet of hegemony and mainstream culture and the incorporation of aesthetics and styles drawing upon specific subcultures (Hebdige, 1979, pp. 257-258). This line of inquiry follows Fredric Jameson's (1979) concept of reification, the dominant absorbing the revolutionary thus nullifying the spark, the disruptive noise of it, in addition to scholarship on the function of subcultures, which inevitably, it seems, ends with incorporation.

The third purpose focuses on the material aspect of this project that unfolded early in the development which laid the necessary groundwork: the posters. Analog technology, such as the printer-copier used to make these posters, the billboards wherein I tacked the posters, to and the physical presence of carrying tape, thumbtacks and a bulging file folder full of posters, took more time than sharing a link on a social media account, yet was much more gratifying on a purely

personal level. When in Kensington, taping one poster to a column billboard right in the midst of hipster cafes, indie bookstores, an old movie theater, and thrift stores, a gust of wind tugged a poster off, out of my hands, sending it spiraling into the street (Figure 3-4).

While a physical space does dictate, to some degree, what can and can't be done, that control is resisted in small, everyday ways. I can't escape systems of control completely, not even by going into the street and tacking up posters. However, I can resist and subvert spaces, both online and offline, in different ways. Offline, that subversion is normalized to a degree (de Certeau, 1980). The physical realm is much more susceptible to chance beyond control than online spaces. A poster tucked in the corner between a cafe and a bank goes unnoticed by either proprietor; a few customers, out for a smoke, spot it, are intrigued, and check out my Instagram account. No algorithms dictated what took place here. Even the control of the city, as laid out by those looking down from above, doesn't extend to every nook and cranny (de Certeau, 1980). There is where resistance to control and subversion of the space unfolds (de Certeau, 1980).

There are spaces designated for posters, downtown and in Kensington, to guide and regulate where they're put up. That is an instance of control, of the "view from above" selecting where art, resistance, and promotional material can be (de Certeau, 1980, p. 264). However, that control is limited to establishing the smaller spaces because within the publicly accessible billboards and pillars there is no regulation. I could have, in theory, plastered my posters over all the others, and thus filled the entire space as many others have done. The fact that there are protocols, at least in my own mind, that prevented me from doing so is more reflective of social norms within the community than of control from above, top-down style. Within the billboard spaces, there is a mixture of regulations and resistance, in small ways, at play. The "view from above" cannot control everything, especially low-level, local environmental factors, such as wind, rain, passing observers who might take a poster for their collection or rip it down in vehement disagreement (de Certeau, 1980, p. 264, 270-273). I experienced this unregulated space within regulated territory in the physical space of Kensington while putting up these posters. This process is detailed below.

The difference between promoting through a poster online and in physical space was made quite clear. A post may be taken down by an algorithm or a governing, regulating, body, or it might glitch and not be posted, but it is easy enough to pull back up. There's an impermanent permanence

to online posts, as it feels of the moment, temporary, yet is there, on the Internet, in my phone's memory and your phone's memory forever, waiting to be accessed. The physical world, paper posters, x, are tokens of a permanent impermanence. They feel like they'll be permanent by being physical, tangible, yet a gust of wind tears a poster away beyond my control with no retrieval of data possible. As impermanent as a breeze or heavy rainfall, smearing the ink or shredding the paper. A poster can last on a billboard for years (at Sunnyside train station I noticed posters for 'upcoming' concerts in 2015 which were weather worn but still quite readable) or for only a second. The uncontrollable nature inherent to outdoor, public spaces inflected this project with a sense of something in the moment, more special, because it could be as impermanent, as temporary and transient, as it is tangible, physical, or permanent. All beyond my control, factors of nature and traffic, that I am subject to and have influence on the reception and promotion of popular culture, of this art I've made, that no individual or collective control. At least, not in the tight-fisted, intentional manner that algorithms are controlled and regulated by. No-one owns the wind. At least not yet.

Figure 9

University of Calgary Campus Poster A

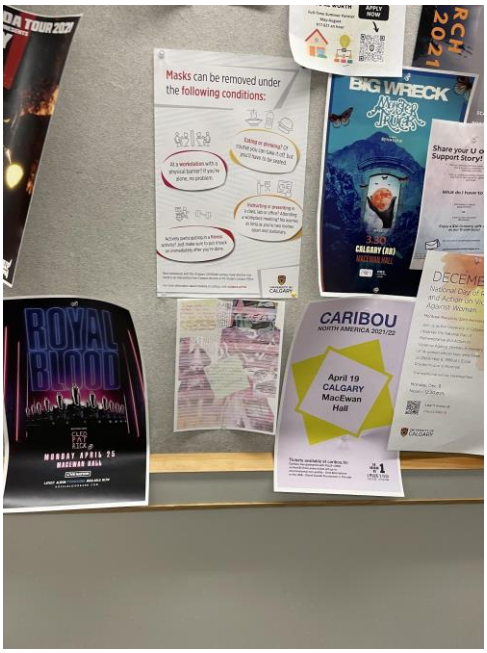


Figure 10

University of Calgary Campus Poster B

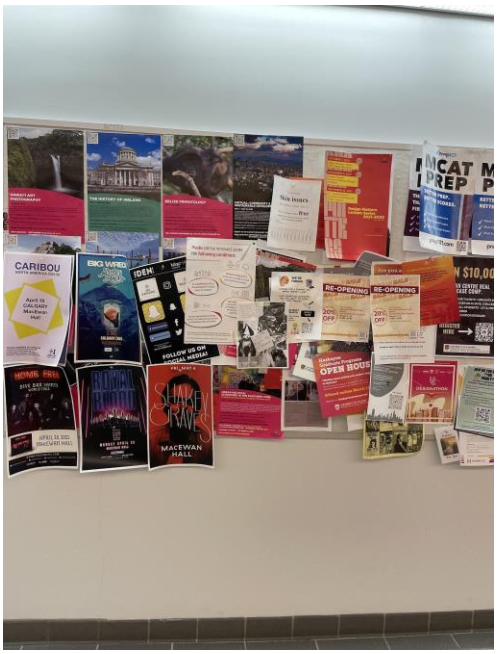


Figure 11

University of Calgary Campus Poster C

Figure 12

University of Calgary Campus Poster D

Figure 13

University of Calgary Poster E

As previously mentioned, the University of Calgary structures and articulates control over the space of campus and the population of students moving through and living within, not only through the physical architecture of the space (for example, where benches are, where students can

go without a keycard) but also through the regulation of posted material. In other words, the University controls where posted material is and how students see it (Hardt & Negri, p. 147). Placing my posters innocuously amongst campaign posters probably helped camouflage them, while hopefully still being distinct enough to catch a roving eye. There was a balance, I realized, between wanting to merely grab attention, but the right kind of attention (i.e., interested students, or faculty, and not someone who might want to enforce rules or exercise their authority).

The University has specific protocols in place for advertisers (with specific areas and billboards); presumably they receive a financial gain from those advertisers, thus capitalism in a very obvious form enters the physical space and forces itself to be seen by me and experienced by my body (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147). But what about 'advertisers' that aren't attempting to solicit money and financial capital gain from students? I thought, at first, that I was innocent in my posters, in just wanting to connect with other like-minded people, perhaps along lines of subcultures as a collective, or at least individuals who enjoy aesthetics of the punk subculture, Outsider Art movement and Folk art styles (Hebdige, 1979).

Here is where Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and his theoretical framework on the forms of capital enters (p. 81). Bourdieu (1986) plays an important role in the rationale section of this project while also being essential to examining the dilemma that emerged while promoting this account. Bourdieu (1986) identifies the main types of capital which are at their core all forms of economic value, even while appearing and exercising power differently. Cultural capital, held by an individual, appears to be beyond economic power and capital, disinterested in material profit and solely focused on art for art's sake, something inherently disconnected from the greedy material world of value and power (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81). The irony here, of course, is that capital is still capital, ideological value is still value; it still constitutes power and is fundamentally connected directly to economic capital by producing power and profit in some form (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81) In the case of the high art world, it is primarily ideological and social status power, though there is an obvious financial connection, too, as art artifacts do have a price for the privilege of owning or viewing (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81).

What I needed to ask myself during this process was why I was doing this. I had to admit that, to some degree, I was doing this to garner some cultural capital by deliberately keeping the account as underground as possible. By not trying to feed the algorithm any more than I have to

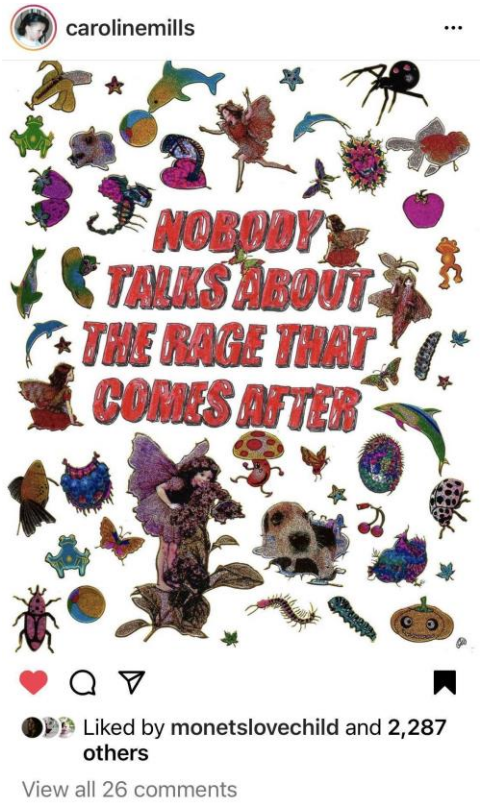
or to make it work for me, I was cultivating a specific type of digital space where those who were like minded would feel welcome but those not interested would feel confused and move on and decide that Outsider Art was simply not for them. But if I really didn't care about views or followers, if I wasn't wanting engagement with my collage content, if I really had no interest in the account's reputation and my association with it, then I wouldn't be posting. I have no obligation to share what is in my sketchbook. I share because I want to share. While there certainly is an element of hoping to collaborate, in a general sense, with other like-minded artists by us all sharing our work and finding each other to foster a subcultural community, I must admit that intertwined with that is a desire for cultural capital, for a reputation as artsy but unexpected, articulate, strange yet charismatic, generated through the collages, through my work. There is a power to be found, however small and everyday, in having artistic merit, off-the-wall aesthetics, and an overall cool and unusual persona, almost, of the account and with myself by proxy.

I am aware of how I, despite my attempts at resistance, still play into hegemonic ideas surrounding art, bourgeois practices and rhetoric, and the capital driven societal reality of the Western world (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81). This does not discredit my artifact as an act of resistance. Resistance implies a rejection to some degree, or at the very least, not a full acceptance of specific culture practices and artifacts. There is no way to fully escape the society of control. But I can subvert the frameworks I must operate within and an awareness of those, of how I play into the worship of capital, pursuit of culture, and acquisition of cultural capital, allows me to more accurately work against those very forces, in whatever small, everyday, ways of resistance that I can (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). Knowing the limits and weaknesses of this project allows me to more effectively support the account's strengths while limiting the impact those shortcomings will have – something only possible due to my awareness of how I, even in resisting, still contribute to and accept elements of the society of control (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81).

Rationale

Figure 14

Instagram Post by carolinemills



Note. Caroline Mills, 2022.

When I sent a friend of mine an Instagram post by Caroline Mills (Figure 14) they responded with the following sentiment: “Like, I don’t get it, but I think it’s just bad art.” The piece truly is odd. Caroline Mills (2022) incorporates found images, such as stickers and drawings from colouring books, with rough sketches and text in a bold letter font. She uses distinctive, bright colours, often deliberately clashing tones and hues. There is an amateurish air to her art, something whimsical and something dark, lowbrow visuals combined with a statement that somehow reads as both intellectual and coarse. Her work fits snugly in the categories of Outsider, lowbrow, and even Folk art – amateurish, excessively creative, drawing on materials and topics everyday, common, yet somehow unexpected.

My friend’s comment regarding “bad art” reflects ideas around what is good art as well as what makes art worth consuming. Another friend suggested this (Figure 14) wasn’t really art

because all the 'artist' did was slap a few dollar store stickers on a page and write a brightly coloured inane sentence. Millions of kids do the same practice every day at thousands of daycares across the world. There's a pervasive idea that Art is something elite, something beyond and above the everyday milieu of culture. This just seems to be refuse collected from mainstream discourse.

This attitude reflects ideas around art and expression that, while seeming to be subversive, are actually quite mainstream and hegemonic in and of themselves. There is a discomfort in viewing works like that of Mills (Figure 14), at least for the first time (likewise with more prominent Outsider and Folk art artists like Daniel Johnson, Bill Traylor, and Mary P. Corbett, who also utilized collages, observational drawing, popular culture references, amateur drawing styles, snappy sentences in block letters and bright colours in a striking visual diorama).

That discomfort I name "noise", the same phenomena of noise that Hebdige (1979) attributes to Britain's punks in the 1970s (p. 261). What is expected and what is normal is shaken up, ironically, through ordinary actions, behaviours and materials defamiliarized to those comfortable in the mainstream where they are cultivated as resistant practices (de Certeau, 1980). Disruption of what is expected and what is normal, in a society rigidly controlled that dictates heavily what popular culture is, does, and originates from – that is "noise", something that challenges the established grip of hegemonic, capital-driven, power-hungry views ingrained in all of us through popular culture (Hebdige, 1979, p. 261; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). I drew upon this type of disruption within consumption and resistance, a paradox balanced, in creating these collages, turning to both academic theories and works of Outsider Art to immerse myself in that headspace, ground myself in the ethos of Folk art, and from there, create my own works.

An antidote to control, or at least a seat of resistance, ironically lies in popular culture as well. Popular culture is ordinary, as are acts of resistance, the everyday converging to accept the way things are while also challenging and subverting those very structures (Williams, 1958, p. 53; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273). This obviously varies based on the media artifact in question and the artifact's cultural lifetime, as there is always the looming, ever-present, threats of incorporation and reification (Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263; Jameson, 1979, p. 60-62).

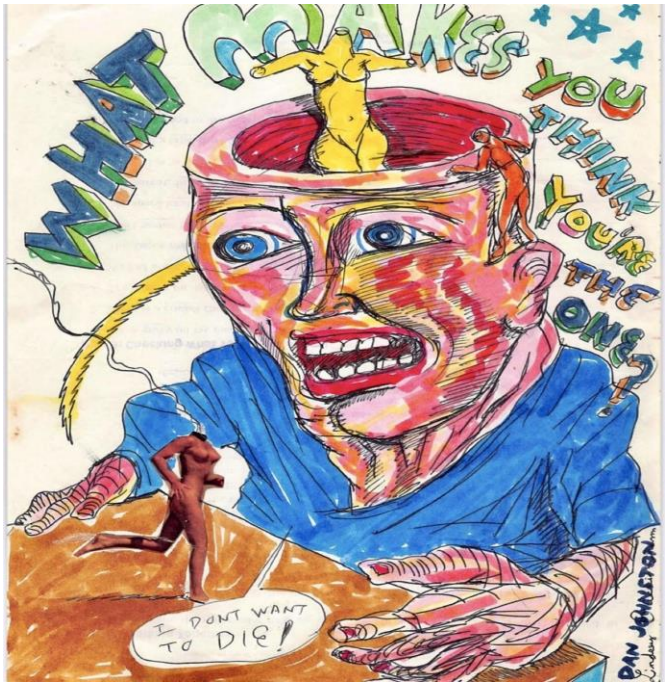
Figure 15

Dotty goes for help because of Addgie…June 18, 1945, Mon. Afternoon.

Note. Mary Corbett, 1945

Figure 16

What Makes You Think You're The One?



Note. Daniel Johnston, 1978.

Figure 17

Blacksmith Shop. Bill Traylor, "Blacksmith Shop," ca. 1939-40 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Note. Bill Traylor, 1939.

Key themes in the pieces themselves and common approaches to making art unite the three artists exemplified above alongside Caroline Mills and the work of this project (Figures 15, 16, & 17). Daniel Johnston (Figure 16) drew on the popular culture he cherished most, such as comic books and the musical group the Beatles, to fuel and inspire both his music and his artworks. Forty years earlier, Bill Traylor (Figure 17) depicted the everyday, ordinary world around him without any formal training or care for the Western highbrow canon, on whatever he could find, often scrap pieces of cardboard. Similarly, Mary P. Corbett's (Figure 15) drawings reflect her surroundings of 1940s/50s America and the popular culture she was consuming, such as Western movies and TV shows, in a brightly coloured style. Like Daniel Johnston and Bill Traylor, her work is intensely creative, ordinary, and refreshingly amateur. The work of Caroline Mills (Figure 14) resonates with the core ethos of the three examples of artists listed above. Her work features characters and references to popular culture, such as comic books, fantasy novels, and celebrities, alongside other symbols of ordinary life. Dynamic sentences, incorporating text into art, distinctive drawings which are not quite cartoons, and an array of vivid colours catch the viewer's attention, garnering an immediate reaction to the semantic disruption inherent to Outsider art (Hedbige, 1979, p. 270-273).

What is intriguing about Outsider and Folk art is how the works and artists take in popular culture, artifacts, and symbols of the culture industry, which supposedly are purely sensory artifacts meant to just satiate the masses, and transform them into "noise", something uncanny, familiar yet defamiliarized, shaking up that "same stamp" of mass culture into unique, eclectic and eccentric art pieces (Hebdige, 1979, pp. 260-263; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, p. 40). Acts of resistance are found in two ordinary behaviours central to Outsider and Folk art, of consuming culture and making art in a casual setting (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

There is a resistance to control in these works. Cowboys and superheroes, tokens of the mainstream in the 1940s, 1970s, and today, take on new forms and meanings in the odd company they find themselves keeping in the collages and drawings of Caroline Mills, Daniel Johnston, and Mary P. Corbett. A deeper meaning, unintended by the culture industry, that stamped short form, pleasure-focused, light-level meanings into these characters, into dollar store sticker sheets, or, in Bill Traylor's case, the material artifacts sold at the general store, is found in each of these works. However, these meanings are dismissed by many upon first viewing, so governed by ideas of "high art" and "art for art's sake" that draw on associations with expensive, incorporated art (such as Wagner's operas or da Vinci's paintings) that they cannot recognize subversion of the very culture industry beast they themselves are, while unaware, feeding into and eating of (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, p. 40; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263).

Control is resisted not by the rejection of hegemonic mainstream culture, but by fully embracing it, taking its symbols on as toys in a toy box to play with, shatter about, attach new narratives, associations and company to, well beyond what the manufacturers (both literal and ideological) ever intended – in a very ordinary, everyday way, part of that amateur appeal so central to the works that become classified as "Outsider" or "Folk" or "Lowbrow" which undermines ideas of social capital associated with "Highbrow" culture, unravelling the supposed tension between high art and popular culture through acts of resistance, noise, that draws on the ordinary popular culture which supposedly nullifies the minds of consumers, thus disproving some strongly held scholarly convictions around art versus popular culture (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944 p. 40; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

Resistance means, in this context, remaining within the established frameworks of control but not submitting quietly and instead creating noise and subversion, seeing how far the leash can

stretch (Hebdige, 1979, p. 261; de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273). Unexpected and unanticipated behaviours and uses of popular culture, like in the work of the artists mentioned above, resist control from within these frameworks, wriggling around in the realm of mainstream culture with such fluidity that, by its inability to be easily tied down, classified, commodified, incorporated and sold, it is a resistance force still healthy alive (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 81; Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263). No matter how many times Daniel Johnson's art is printed on t-shirts, the vast catalogue of his work remains untouched with only the more salient pieces (such as Jeremiah the bullfrog) being made, and even then, these shirts operate as a form of code for like-minded, resistance-inclined individuals to recognize one another, come together, and form a subcultural community right there in plain sight of a chain clothing store (Hebdige, 1979, p. 255-6, 260-263).

Through my collages, I aim to achieve a similar level of disruption. Like the artists above, my collages draw on the everyday and ordinary of life and popular culture, with visuals inspired by and snipped (quite literally) from *Gucci* magazine ads, children's books *(Where the Wild Things Are)*, Alphonse Mucha paintings (advertisements now considered high art, a century later), and many other sources including my own photo albums, journals and sketchbooks (Williams, 1958, p. 53). I use a bold visual palette of contrasting and vivid colours. Text, photographs, illustrations, and my own doodles share space on the page. It flirts with imagery considered childish and textual elements bordering on profound. Hallmarks of popular culture in the West are recognizable, yet carry a new aura, defamiliarized to sing in my choir, taking on different connotations without ever losing their original trappings.

The 'Artifact Design' section outlined how the running of the account resists control, through feeding the algorithm as little as possible. Obviously, I still hope, and even need, my work to be seen in order to have cultural impact on any level. Through word of mouth and the posters, the control of physical spaces, of my body and the bodies of others, specifically engaged in the act of seeing their surroundings, is resisted by my unauthorized placement of posters in innocuous places, where it appears they are meant to be (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147; Deleuze, 1992, p. 141; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). Just an ordinary ad at first glance. It is only by peering deeper into what it is, realizing that connection between offline promotion of online material, that the resistant tactic of homemade posters promoting an Instagram account becomes clear (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 147; Deleuze, 1992, p. 141; de Certeau, 1980, p. 264-273). For those observing above, never

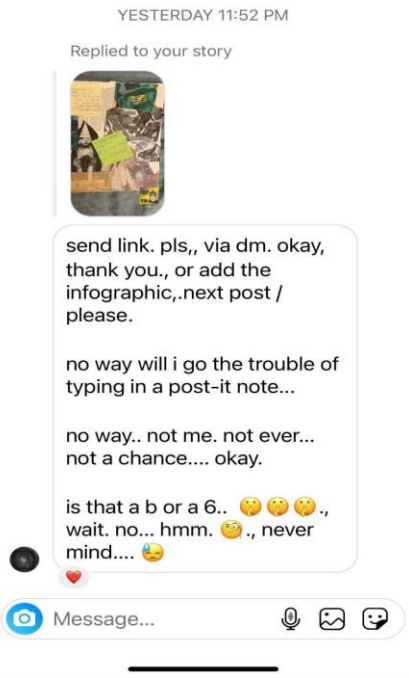
stooping down to view closely, it goes unnoticed, and unchecked (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270). As resistance to control and stifling ideological limitations so often should.

Discussion of Effects

I didn't break any of my self-imposed rules regarding promotion of the account, though I did slightly bend them. I had made the rule that I wouldn't directly share any posts from *@263u594b* to my personal account using Instagram's share feature. However, I did post to my personal account's story a picture of one of the posters I had made. As a result, a few people followed *@263u594b*. What was notable, however, was the reaction of one person I know (not very well) who Direct Messaged me an interesting response (Figure 18).

Figure 18

Screenshot of Instagram Message.



Right away, you can see curiosity mixed with apprehension, confusion, and hesitation at the poster – indicative of the "noise" I had created, in just the poster for the account (Hebdige, 1979, p. 260-263). Already, what users expected on Instagram, what was usually done (shared posts on stories that could be clicked upon, acting as a direct link to the post and/or account shared) was disrupted. It looked familiar enough, but it wasn't a clickable link. There's no rule against

posting a photo of a handwritten note with a physical visual component to promote an account – not officially, at least. Social conventions dictate that this small, everyday behaviour with few consequences on a direct and personal level not be challenged or changed. The immediate reaction, a rather lengthy message response, was very fascinating to me, as another user had embodied the tenets of control, of Instagram's social conventions, of what was "normal". They did follow the *@263u594b* account about ten minutes after sending the aforementioned message. Whether it took them ten minutes to decipher the poster, type it in, and follow the account or if they got tired of waiting for me to reply with a link, I don't know. Both possibilities demonstrate that, despite my bucking convention, the desired impact of my everyday tactic of resistance, posting material to share an account without sharing an Instagram approved and facilitated link, was successful in garnering followers, showing my collages to someone new, and in resisting, in a very small, low-level way, the Instagram's all-powerful control of behaviours, conventions, and content (de Certeau, 1980, p. 270-273).

The main limitation of this project is, ironically, foundational to its existence and inception. That limitation is that I am resisting frameworks of control, algorithms predominantly in the online sphere, which actively work to weed out and neuter resistance. By choosing against utilizing hashtags and other conventional behaviours of promotion on Instagram, I do limit the range this project could have by ensuring less people will see it than if I did give in and try to play the game (though there is no guarantee of success, no certainty of going viral no matter how many accounts I follow or trendy hashtags I use). But in doing so, I wouldn't be doing the work I wanted to do. This project would be something else and all the theorizing and conceptualizing about resisting systems of control, though, and with popular culture, would be just words on a page, not something honestly lived or experienced. Honesty is crucial in Outsider art, that genuine, sometimes vulnerable, depiction of what is ordinary, what is felt, adding to the 'amateur' feel, contributing to the charm and resonance these artworks have and continue to carry. I hope a resonance is found in these collages, a deeper connection by the few who do encounter these works – a benefit of this particular limitation, perhaps.

I am unsure if I will continue to post collages to this account regularly. I will have it as a space to post that style of art when I periodically make it. While the Internet feels temporary, it is in some ways a permanent space. This project's page will remain in place. Hopefully someone will

encounter it, wonder what it is they're seeing, and feel captivated all the same. Maybe they'll make their own art in response. Maybe they'll start to question frameworks of control like "taste" and algorithms. The posters are still up on campus and in Kensington – I visit them sometimes, not deliberately, but I keep an eye out when I'm passing through. If just one person encountered this project and started to think about popular culture and control, about art and amateurism, I would say this project was successful. I have contributed to my own small canon of ordinary people making extraordinary art, subverting norms that maybe aren't all that "normal" in the first place. In the end, I thoroughly enjoyed the process of trying to resist through creative acts. That, I would say, in and of itself is a Folk art masterpiece.

Chronological Record of Collages and Posted Content

Figure 19

Post 1

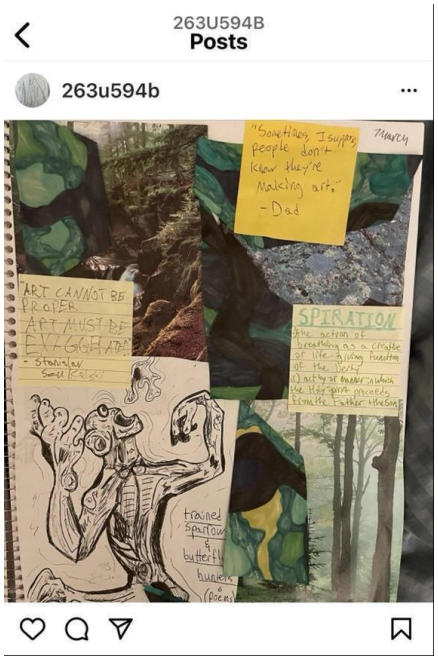


Figure 20

Post 2

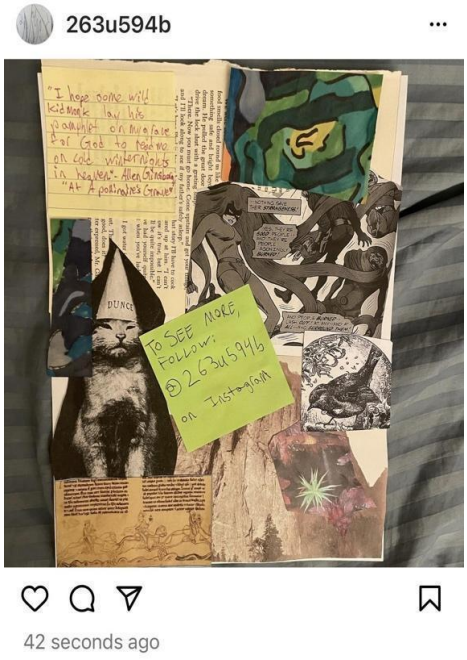


Figure 21

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Figure 22

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Figure 23

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Figure 24

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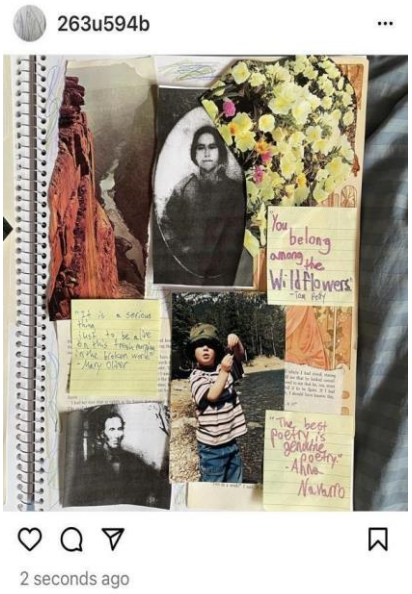

Figure 25

Post 7

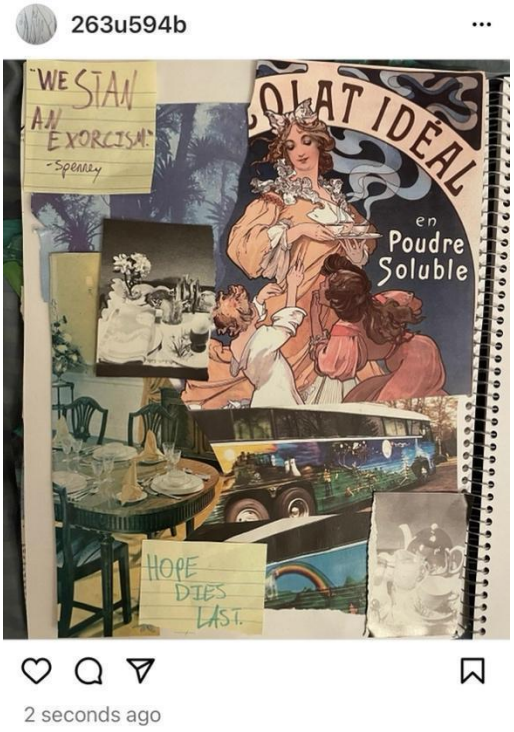

Figure 26

Post 8

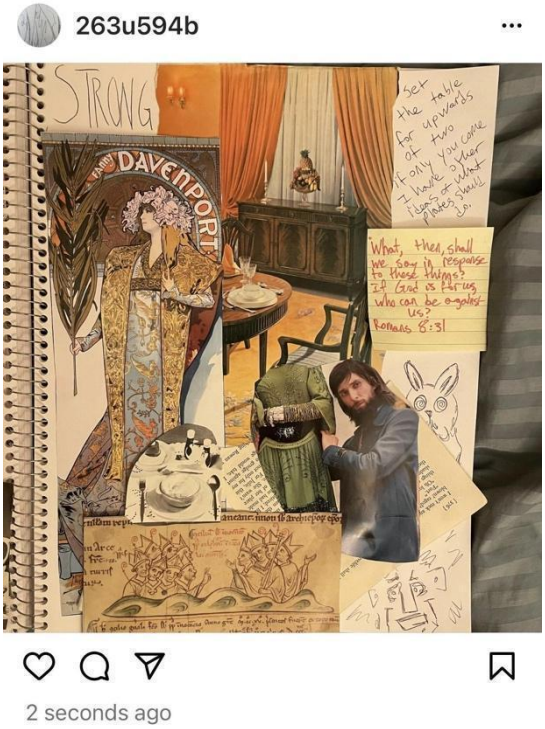

Figure 27

Post 9

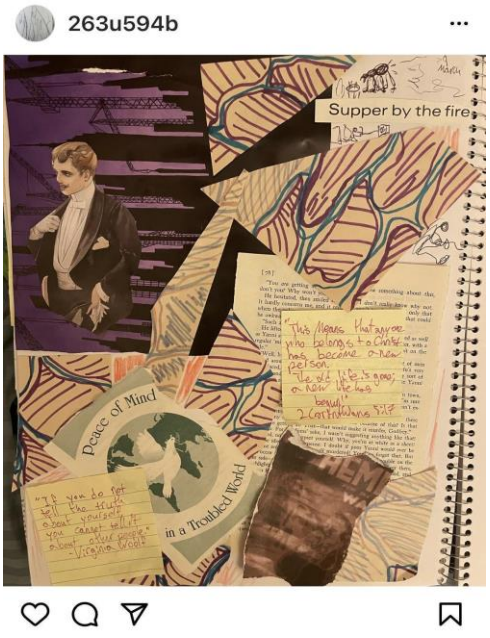

Figure 28

Post 10

Figure 29

Post 11

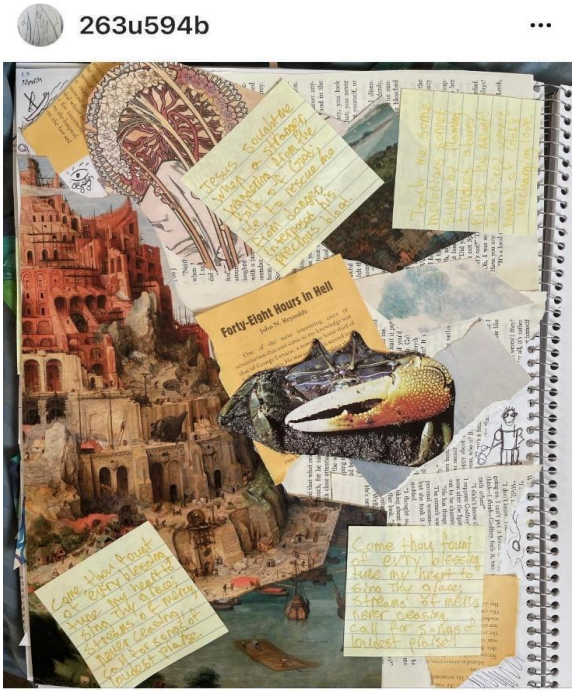

Figure 30

Post 12

Figure 31

Post 13

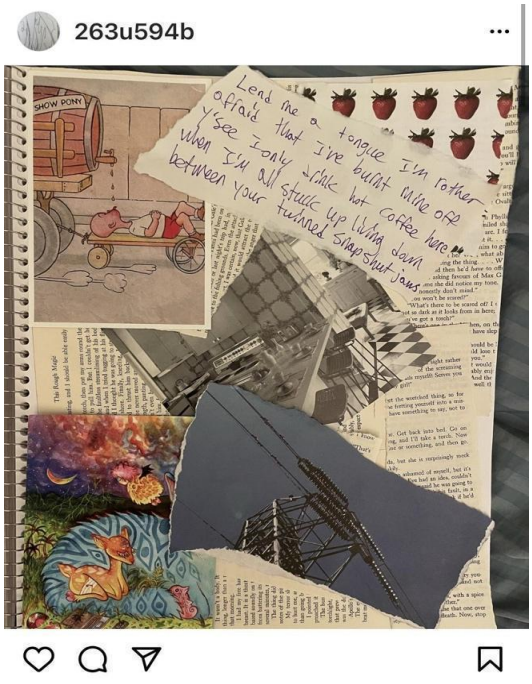

Figure 32

Post 14

Figure 33

Post 15

Figure 34

Post 16

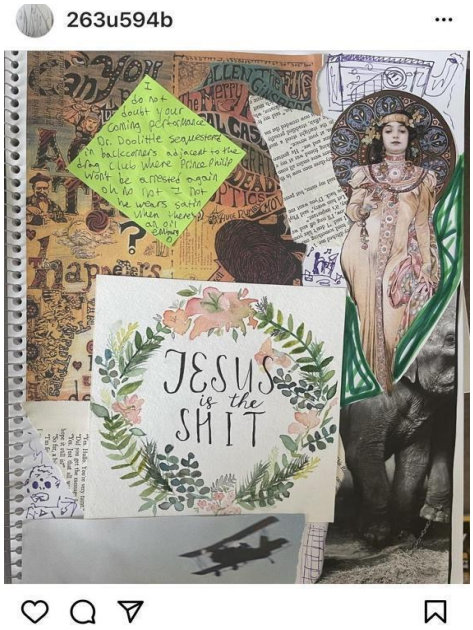

Figure 35

Post 17

Figure 35

Post 18

Figure 36

Post 19

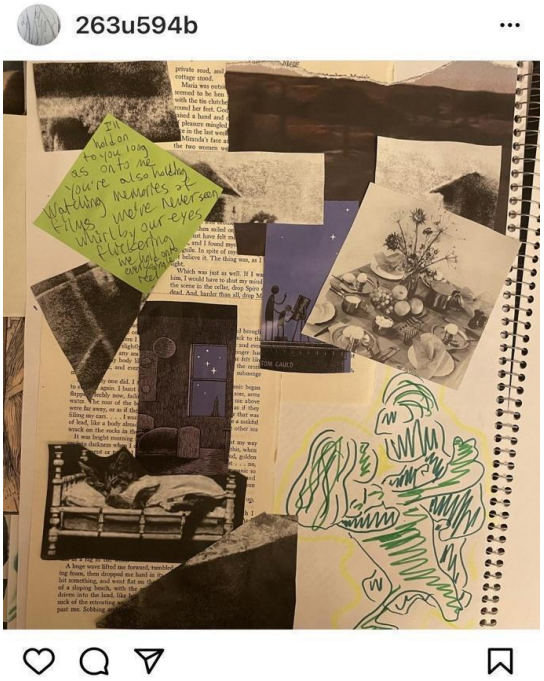

Figure 37

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Figure 38

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Figure 39

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Figure 40

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Figure 41

Post 24

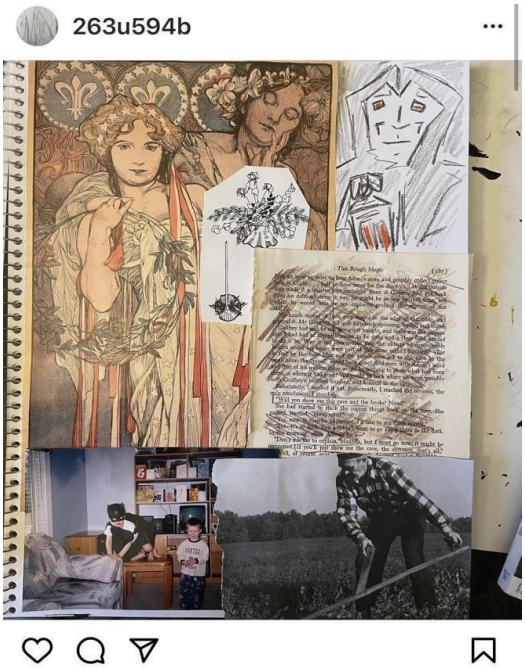

Figure 42

Post 25

Figure 43

Post 26

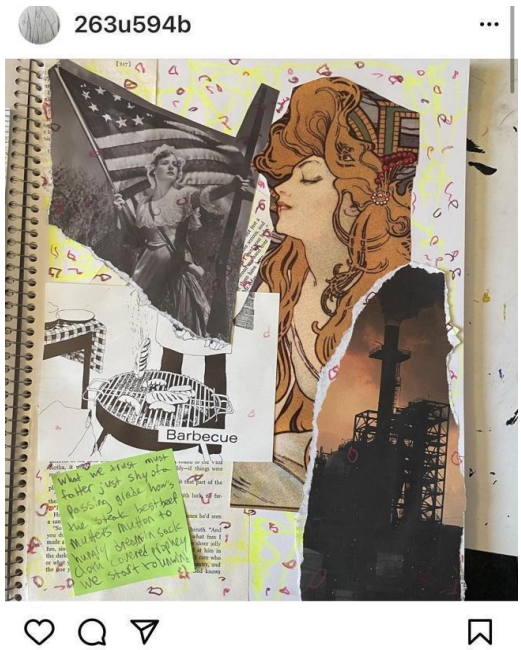

Figure 44

Post 27

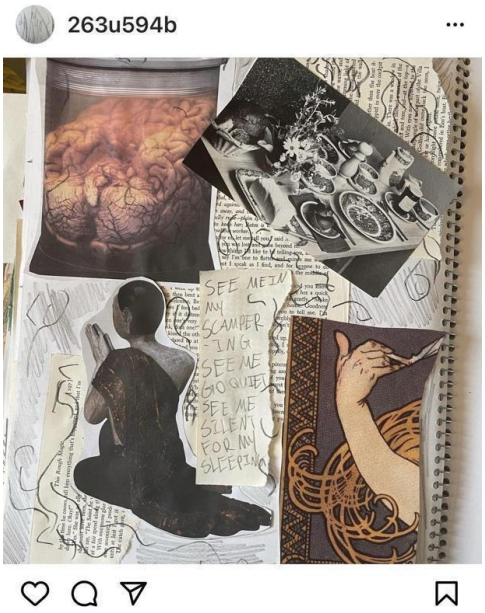

Figure 45

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Figure 46

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Figure 47

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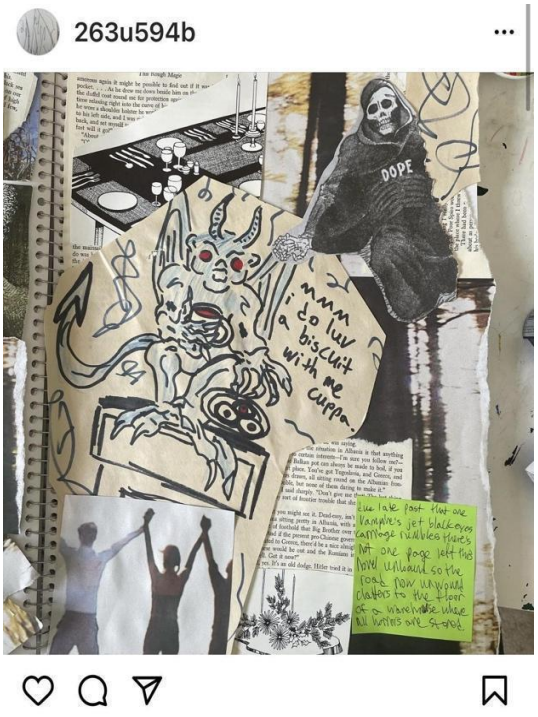

Figure 48

Post 31

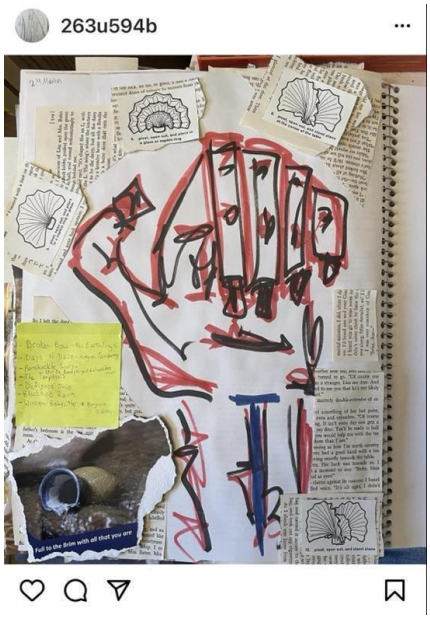

Figure 49

Post 32

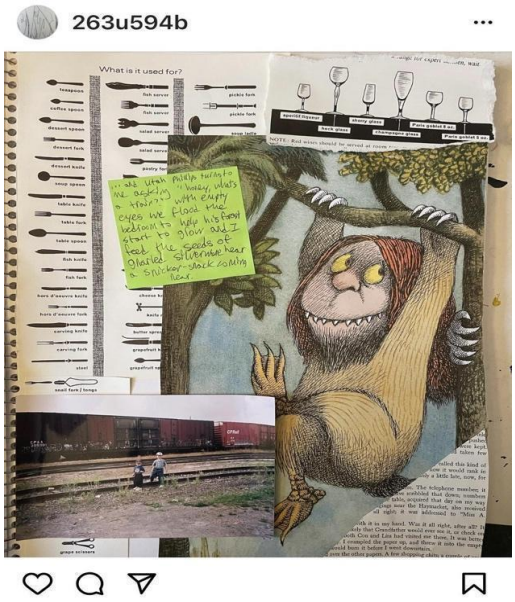

Figure 50

Post 33

Figure 51

Post 34

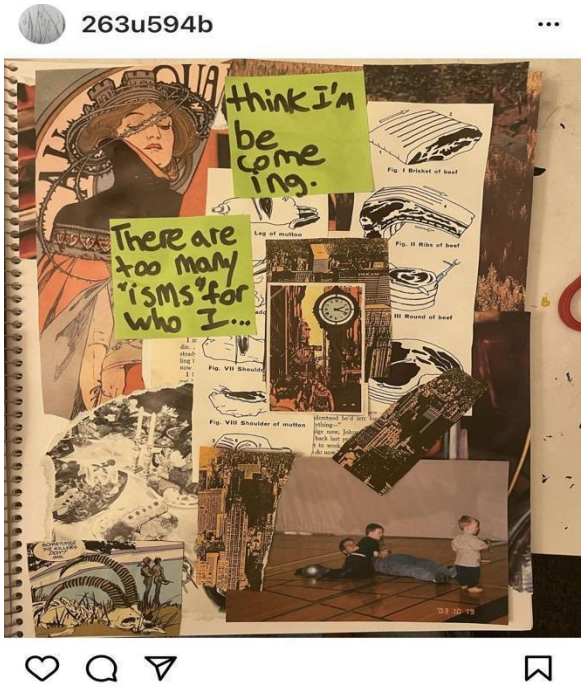

Figure 52

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Figure 52

Post 36

Figure 53

Post 37

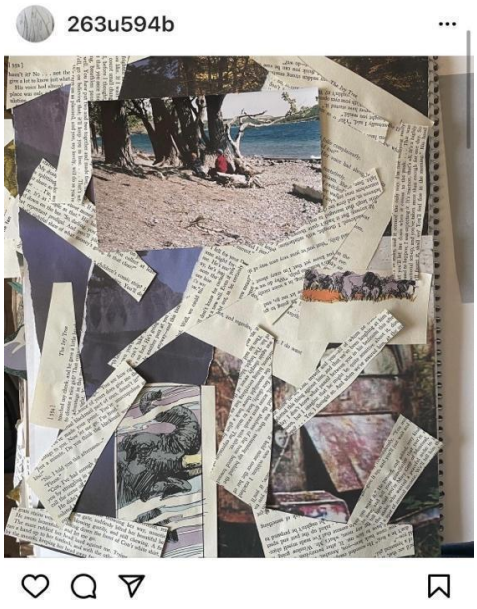


Figure 54

Post 38

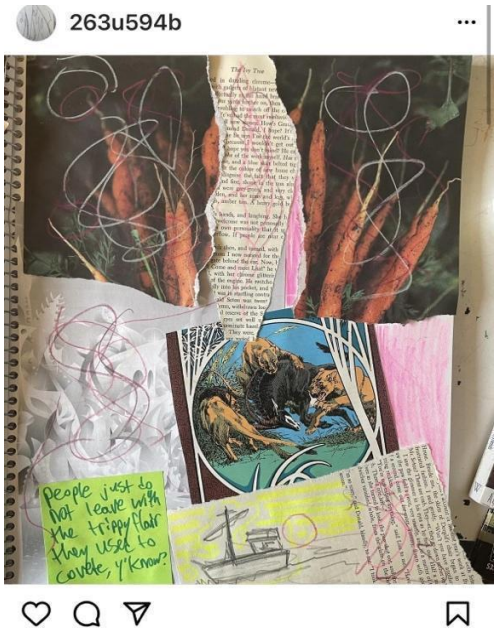
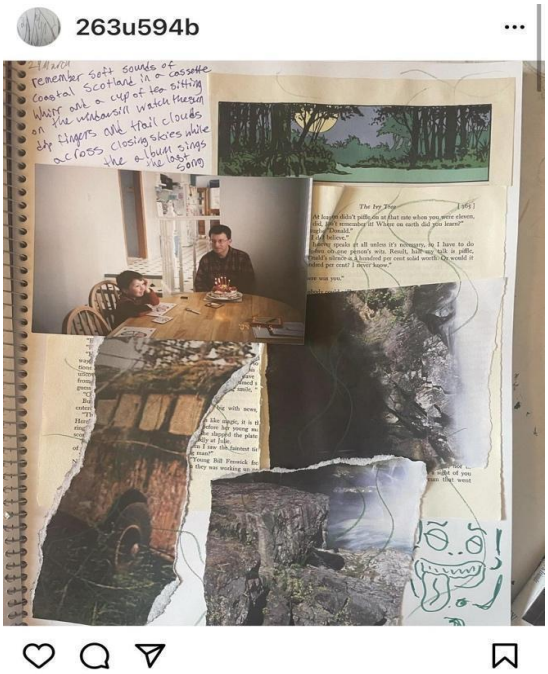


Figure 55

Post 39

Figure 56

Post 40



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