Bad Avatar

Bad Avatar: Mad/Crip Digital Identity Play

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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McMaster University Doctor of Philosophy (2020) Hamilton, Ontario (English
and Cultural Studies)

Title: Bad Avatar: Mad/Crip Digital Identity Play

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Supervisor: Professor Sarah Brophy

Number of Pages: viii, 300

Lay Abstract

This thesis theorizes the digital avatar as an automedial figure, a mode of virtual embodiment and a site of encounter. I use "avatar" to draw a connecting line between widely varied digital identity acts that occur across social media platforms and video games. This thesis examines the "bad avatar," a collection of Mad/crip/disabled faces, bodies, and identity practices that interrupt, disrupt, and transgress the normalizing and normative digital spaces of North American settler capitalist culture. Mad/crip digital identity play offers avenues for enacting modes of resistance through the politics of representation and the processes of identity performance and community-building.

Abstract

This thesis examines the fissures and intersections between feminist digital media, queer theory, and Mad and disability studies. Moving across social media platforms, hashtag data, and digital gaming, this project argues for the subversive and creative potential within Mad/crip/queer digital identity performances. My theorizing of the avatar as an automedial figure in this project is attentive to the politics of the face as a site of encounter, to digital bodies and movement, to identification and community-building, and to embodiment and affects that move between on- and off-screen lives.

This thesis follows the "bad avatar," a collection of Mad digital identity practices that interrupt, disrupt, and transgress normalizing and normative digital spaces of North American settler capitalist culture. Claiming the bad avatar as a deliberate identity position is an act of claiming the label of "bad," which here has multiple meanings: Mad queer bodies—physical and digital—are bad citizens because we break the heteronormative patriarchal rules. We're troublemakers—we make trouble for power systems and those who embody power. We can be bad workers, unproductive and fatigued. We can be bad for capitalism and bad for nationalist morale. We also experience feelings that become pathologized and policed. As despair, panic, melancholy, and angst stick to our bodies our bodies themselves become framed as bad: sick, broken, wrong, a problem in need of fixing or eradication. Reclaiming "bad" is both a celebration of the willful subject (Ahmed 2014) and a challenge to the binary of "good/bad" that is used to oppress Mad and disabled bodies.

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this project without the excellent mentorship and guidance of my supervisory committee members: Sarah Brophy, Christina Baade, and Lorraine York. I particularly want to thank my advisor, Sarah Brophy, for her insight, experience, and thoughtfulness, and for encouraging my professional development. The feedback and support I received from my committee throughout the duration of the Ph.D. were invaluable.

I also want to thank the International Auto/Biography Studies Chapter of the Americas' (IABAA) community and the IABA Students and New Scholars Network. An excerpt of this thesis was presented at the 2019 conference in Kingston, Jamaica, and one of my earliest forays into Mad automedia appeared on the IABA SNS blog. Furthermore, I want to thank Orly Lael Netzer and Julie Rak for organizing and hosting "Virtual Coffee." These monthly virtual gatherings with other life-writing scholars engaged in similar questions of ethics and methodology have made the process of research and writing less isolating. I am grateful for this supportive academic community.

Thank you to the Grad Wellness Network and the Disability & Mad Studies Reading Group at McMaster University. Connecting with other disabled, sick, Mad, and mentally ill graduate students reminds me how many of us there are in academia, and reaffirms the importance of our scholarship, communities, and activism.

Continued gratitude toward and solidarity with the Disability Justice Network of Ontario and Mad Pride Toronto.

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Introduction: Bad Avatar

Love letter to those of us who get triggered: this chapter references difficult and important topics including self-harm, sexual violence, and police violence. However, the chapter does not discuss these topics in-depth. There will be no graphic descriptions of violence in this dissertation.

Keywords: affect; autobiography; automedia; avatar; crip theory; disability; embodiment; feminism; gender; identity; Mad studies; mental illness; play; police violence; power; privilege; psychiatry; racism; research ethics; self-harm; settler colonialism; sexism; sexual violence; social media; video games

Bad Bodies in Virtual Spaces

Nervous systems and sound systems; social networks and networks of veins and arteries and capillaries breathing our bodies into movement. Systems of wires under the ocean, gaming systems, and systemic violence: our networked bodies are on the Net and caught in it. Sometimes, we slip under it. We are syntax and Sertraline, electrical impulses glitching with chronic pain, anonymous posts and named desires. Sometimes these bodies move across broadband connections, as digital localities reimagine geographical distances. Sometimes these connections are tenuous, and your voice wavers, falters, disappears. I hate when you leave me like that. I've been so lonely.

This dissertation examines digital North American (with an emphasis on Canadian) settler culture, which is critically implicated in the structures of settler colonialism, and racial, gender, and dis/ability-based oppressions (Daniels 2016; Noble 2018; Simpson 2017; Tynes, Schuschke, Noble 2016).[1] Contemporary digital culture is characterized by

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[1] As an anglophone, my work fails to attend to the specificities of francophone Canadian culture. Like English-speaking Canada, Franco-Canadian culture is similarly invested in settler power and shares the ideologies of cure and violence that threaten and marginalize Mad/crip bodies. However, there is extensive work to be done specifically on Franco-Canadian nationalism in relation to discourses of disability, digital media, mental illness, race, and gender. This research is needed, particularly in light of Quebec's history and present-day practice of separatist nation-building (on- and offline) through a rhetoric of anti-immigration and Islamophobia. This form of nationalism intersects with disability in many ways: for example, refugees fleeing war may experience PTSD and/or become physically

assemblages and the process of re-assembling: we make, post, share, edit, mix, sample, comment, delete, and start over (Maguire 2018; Munster 2006; Poletti and Whitlock 2008). We leave in our wake a trail of zombie avatars, from the MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online) we stopped playing to the middle-school email address we named after our favourite boy band. The webpage we made about cats, an old Tumblr account, a photo posted by a friend on MySpace. Footprints of our past digital selves linger online, those undead faces and bodies that might one day come back and haunt us. We shed them and find our way into a new skin or a Second Life.

Through this process, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has suggested, constant change creates stasis, a cyclical movement of capitalist production. Late stage capitalism/neoliberalism in this dissertation is understood as a contemporary manifestation of extractivist mentalities, enfolded under the broader power structure of settler colonialism. "Habits are central to understanding neoliberalism" (10), Chun writes, adding that "a focus on habit moves us away from dramatic chartings and maps of 'viral spread' toward questions of infrastructure and justice" (15). Constant change and re-assemblage online exist within planned cycles of production and rendering technologies and platforms obsolete. These processes also exist within the white masculine culture of Silicon Valley coders, and the broader power structures of North American settler colonialism. Settler colonialism may change platforms, faces, and tactics, but its violent ideologies remain embedded in its technologies, reproducing the cornerstones of the settler state: capitalism/neoliberalism, white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, and able-bodiedness. Updating our smartphones and relying more and more on screen technology in our

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disabled, systemic oppression and individual hate acts produce and/or exacerbate mental illness, and Quebec (like English-speaking Canada) has inherited the settler legacy of conflating racial or ethnic difference with disability.

everyday lives, we become tied to the habits of technological capitalism, tricked by the empty promises of digital liberation and equality, and tied to an unjust system that glitters with chrome and iron ore and democratic mythologies.

Our smartphones won't break the system—but that doesn't mean we are powerless. Digital technology and re-assemblage also contain the potential for what Sara Ahmed calls "wiggle room," which offers us "the room to deviate." Ahmed's wiggle room focuses on roominess as enabling a wiggle, "a queer kind of movement" ("Wiggle Room"). We could move away from colonial authority. We could move differently, in ways that destabilize the hegemony of the settler state. In *Girls, Autobiography, Media*, Emma Maguire identifies "auto assemblage" as a potential tactic for girls to assert agency and narrate themselves online. Auto assemblage is "a media practice that, by grouping multiple, often fragmented, textual elements which function as *expressions of identity* together, make a particular identity or life narrative legible" (Maguire 143). Just as girls, who are oppressed through categories of age and gender, make and find room in digital corners for self-expression, cobbling together an identity from bits and bytes, so, too, in this murky, shifting, and strange space can we find the wiggle room to be sad/bad/Mad.

Digital media are typically discussed through metaphors of space, of chat rooms and virtual worlds. To enter we need to assume a form of digital embodiment. We enter digital spaces through the avatar, a term Beth Coleman uses to describe the act of "putting a face to things" online. The term "avatar" comes from the Sanskrit avatāra "descent" and has its origins in Hinduism: an avatar is the worldly incarnation of a god in human form (OED). Coleman picks up the history of "avatar" as emblem and allegorical image in the historical traditions of British literature. She cites emoticons as early examples of digital avatars and moves on to discuss the video game avatar (54-55). In contemporary digital settler contexts, "avatar" is no longer a god made human, but a human made digital/virtual. I use "avatar" to

draw a connecting line between widely varied digital identity acts that require entering digital "space" through digital faces and bodies. Following Coleman's example, I use the term "avatar" to include video game avatars, the faces representing online mental health campaigns, and Twitter accounts. Tracking the avatar across different digital spaces and platforms, I take up Bonnie Ruberg, Jason Boyd, and James Howe's call for "further exploration" into "Two related, emerging areas for research...feminist digital humanities and queer video games" (111). My theorizing of the avatar as an automedial figure in this project is attentive to the politics of the face as a site of encounter, to digital bodies and movement, to identification and community-building, and to embodiment and affects that move between on- and off-screen lives.

Speaking of "the face" in digital spaces, Jennifer González writes that "In the long tradition of portraiture…the face is an object of public encounter" (199). She goes on to claim that "The meaning of the Facebook face is not limited to facial features, to the façade, but extends to other faces to which it is linked. Within multiple trajectories of signification, the face enlivens and mobilizes social connections" (55-56). I apply this theory to my conceptualization and understanding of the avatar. Avatar encounters can involve a digital public, allowing us to enter a space of digital communication and to form and establish publics or counterpublics. Through this process, avatars confront us with cultural ideology and structures of power that operate through the face: for example, the mental health campaigns in Chapter 1 use avatars to invite specific user identification or disidentification, to visually represent an idealized Canadian identity, and to model a practice of citizenship that advertises "the public" as a nationalist caring community. In this case study, the avatar is both a representational object of settler nationalism and a practice of generating an "imagined community" (Anderson). In Chapter 4, when we turn from the promotional material of mental health campaigns to Twitter users' engagement with the hashtag

#BellLetsTalk, the avatar becomes an opportunity for active resistance through the disruption of nationalist online communities and the formation of Mad/crip counterpublics.

As a site of identity play and personal exploration, the avatar can enable an encounter with the self or selves. This personal practice influences our offscreen/offline identities and shapes the way we interact with digital and physical publics (Gray 2014; Rak 2015). The avatar as self-performance is not only representational but operates as an agential figure and is linked to bodies, affects, and movement. Here, I turn to Aubrey Anable's *Playing with Feeling* for guidance, and to her insistence that "Putting theories of affect in direct conversation with video games zeroes in on the contact zones between bodies, platforms, images, and code" (xvii). In Chapters 2 and 3 my automedial video game avatar play is used to explore a queer/crip/Mad embodiment, and this practice generates affect and intimacy between bodies (physical and virtual), technology, and culture. Picking up Coleman's argument that "it is the avatar's role to aid us in expressing…agency" (4), I identify the avatar as a site of cultural struggle and a potential avenue for enacting modes of resistance through the politics of representation and the processes of identity performance and community-building.

In this dissertation I explore the "bad avatar," a collection of Mad faces, bodies, and identity practices that interrupt, disrupt, and transgress normalizing and normative digital spaces. "Mad," from the word "madness," emerges from the Mad Pride movement and performs a rejection of the pathologization of neurodivergence and emotional/mental difference (Lefrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013). In the act of naming myself Mad, I follow in Margaret Price's keystrokes; I believe that "in naming myself a crazy girl, neuroatypical, mentally disabled, psychosocially disabled—in acknowledging that I appear (as a colleague once told me) 'healthy as a horse' yet walk with a mind that whispers in many voices—I am trying to reassign meaning" (20). The Mad/bad avatar in this dissertation

encompasses those of us who continue to have a relationship with psymedicine and those of us who do not, those of us who do or do not have diagnoses, do or do not identify as mentally ill, disordered, Mad, crip, or disabled, and are visibly, invisibly, chronic, intermittent, and/or acutely sick, crazy, depressed, fatigued, and anxious. The bad avatar is evocative of Ahmed's "willful subject" who "shares an affective horizon with the feminist killjoys as the ones who 'ruin the atmosphere'" (*Willful* 152). The bad avatar is willful. She ruins the "positive emotional experiences" (Pybus 237) of social networking sites and game worlds. She embodies panic, anxiety, depression, and "Mad grief" that resists the "minimizing, individualizing, westernizing, professionalizing, categorizing, medicalizing, and sanitizing of grief" (Poole and Ward 99). They trespass on the boundaries of the body through self-harm and disrupt capitalist publics with wheezing, gasping, freezing, and wailing.

Claiming the bad avatar as a deliberate identity position is an act of claiming the label of "bad," which here has multiple meanings: Mad queer bodies—physical and digital—are bad citizens because we break heteronormative patriarchal rules. We're troublemakers—we make trouble for power systems and those who embody power. We can be bad workers, unproductive and fatigued. We can be bad for capitalism and bad for nationalist morale. We also experience bad feelings, feelings that become pathologized and policed. As the feelings of despair, panic, melancholy, and angst stick to our bodies, our bodies themselves become framed as bad: sick, broken, wrong, a problem in need of fixing or eradication through what Eli Clare terms "the ideology of cure" (*Brilliant* 3). As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha explains;

> The "good" survivor is the hypothetical survivor you see on a talk show or a soap opera...They have "moved on." […] In contrast, the "bad" survivor is the one who is still "broken." Still freaking out, still triggered, still grieving, still remembering. [...]They

cry, they have panic attacks, they can't get out of bed, they're not "over it." (229-230) Reclaiming "bad" is both a celebration of the willful, Mad, feminist killjoy, and a challenge to the binary of "good/bad" that is used to oppress Mad and crip bodies.

Following the bad avatar means following the ways in which bad feelings are produced, performed, policed, and circulated in digital spaces. In this process, I bring together queer affect theory's antiracist/anticolonial histories of "feeling bad" (Ahmed 2010; Chen 2014; Cvetkovich 2012; Halberstam 2011; Love 2007) into a dialogue with the deviant affects of Mad/crip bodies (Clare 2017; Curtis, Dellar, Leslie, and Watson 2000; Lefrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013; Morrow and Weisser 2012; Tam 2011; Voronka and Howell 2012). In so doing, this project both broadens the framework for understanding the pathologization and abjection of Mad/crip bodies while illuminating specific embodied experiences of mental illness that cross lines of gender, sexuality, race, and dis/ability. Following the bad avatar means starting to map out "imagined futures" (Kafer 1) for Mad/crip bodies. It means following paths that take us away from the "violence of cure" (Clare, *Brilliant* 21), the eradication of difference, and into a future where *we still exist*, and exist *differently*, in a different constellation of social and cultural networks and relationships. The way bodies are represented and read, claimed or rejected, performed or constrained has a very real impact on the lives of Mad people today and our precarious place in the future—a future that we are told doesn't exist. But we do exist, have always existed, and will continue to imagine and perform and play with the possibilities of Mad/crip lives that resist, refuse, and subvert the coloniality of cure. These bad avatars embody the possibility of "crip futurity" (Kafer 27), a celebration of paths and worlds and identities and futures that are sick, crip, mad, mentally ill, disabled; futures that settler colonialism calls "bad" because in these futures we have destabilized its hegemony.

Throughout this process, I adopt a methodology of closeness and vulnerability,

acknowledging an intimacy between my body, my avatar bodies, and textual bodies as a mode of queering academic labour. This work will be playful and will be attentive to the nuances of play—word play, sexual play, avatar play. "Play" is a fraught and contested term in cultural studies: in *Homo Ludens* (1938), cultural theorist Johan Huizinga insisted that "play is older than culture" (1) and "play is irrational" (4), arguing for the autonomy and freeness of play as a natural activity. Contemporary game scholars have adopted more narrow frameworks of play: Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman define play as "free movement within a more rigid structure," while Mary Flanagan turns to "critical play" in her study of "how play has influenced the history of creative exploration of the social and the political" (2). Other scholars trace the relationship between play and sexuality, a thread I pick up as I follow the intertwining of "play" with "queer" (Brown 2015; Lauteria and Wysocki 2015). This pairing that can be understood through the established relationship between "queer" and "crip" (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006, 2018, 2018). Robert McRuer insists on the intimacy between queer and crip, writing that "Crip theory has emerged over the past few decades as a critical project, closely allied with queer theory, that centers atypical bodies, minds, and behaviors" ("Cripping Cinema" 134). McRuer insists that "'To crip,' like 'to queer,' gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted" (135). My work queers/crips traditional research models by attending to feelings and personal experiences alongside other forms of data analysis. As a disabled nonbinary person operating within a culture of rigid binaries, I am indebted to the queer, crip, and Mad communities and relationships that have supported me throughout this research. My play will be free (within limits), creative (as a mode of political protest), and queer/crip/Mad.

Critical Methodologies

Queer & Mad Archives

Throughout this project I create assemblages of style and text. I move between personal writing, citation, and traditional academic discourse—with its settler colonial, classist, and ableist authority (McRuer 2006; Transken 2005). The process of assembling an archive of research material has been queer, affective, and playful. In a discussion of her "unhappy archives," Ahmed writes: "I cannot give you the story of the arrival of every object. But it matters, how we assemble things, how we put things together. Our archives are assembled out of encounters, taking form as a memory trace of where we have been" (*Promise* 17, 19). My Mad archive, following in the counter-traditions of feminist methodologies, comes into being through personal experiences and feelings, through networks, relationships, memory, and touch (Cvetkovich 2012; Pillow and St. Pierre 2010). We can identity other feminist genealogies in this process of assemblage—from patchwork quilting to cabarets, the open mic bricolages of poets and singers, and the inventiveness and improvisation of the strip tease or pole dance. Sweaty bodies in the presence of other sweaty bodies making, performing, and collecting. Ahmed writes that "Feminism is DIY: a form of self-assembly" (*Living* 27). Ann Cvetkovich's "depression archive" includes lyrics, zine culture, cabaret performers, and crochet installations, while Anable insists that video games are "affective assemblages" (38) and "affective archives" (131). My digital Mad archive is a varied collection of objects, practices, and platforms, and a product of the makeshift and messy process of stitching together a dissertation from scraps.

The archive includes video games that moved me and sparked something in my offscreen body: "Being touched by a video game...is directly related to the affective circuits that touching opens up between representation, screens, code, and bodies" (Anable 37). Some were gifted or recommended by friends and our discussion of the game influenced

my research. They connect me to other bodies and to the difficult and at times painful

process of performing academic labour. The archive includes mental health campaigns that

filled up my personal Twitter and Facebook accounts even as I tried to emotionally distance

myself from them, and the Twitter hashtag #BellLetsTalk, which required me to delve more

deeply into digital humanities tools and methods. This led to a week-long training session at

the University of Guelph[2] where I met other women learning how to code, as well as a

graduate residency as the Ruth and Lewis Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship at

McMaster University. During the residency I met with graduate students from other

disciplines, shared the failures and struggles of our work, and hosted an interdisciplinary

conference entitled "System/Système D: Improvising Digital Scholarship." In the shadow of

the archive are the networks that connect us to each other and the world around us.

Composing a dissertation means collecting objects and sometimes throwing them out,

arranging and rearranging phrases and chapters and ideas; getting lost down a line of

thought that goes nowhere or maybe somewhere entirely unexpected. It means finding

"wiggle room" (Ahmed) in the academy for an interdisciplinary project and carving out space

for myself as a queer/crip/Mad and trans body. It means, at times, assuming the role of the

Mad feminist killjoy and embodying the bad avatar.

Play as Method

      This method of performing research is playful and playfully queer. Play as an

embodied practice that produces affect, and playfulness as an approach to critical research,

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[2] DH@Guelph is an annual summer workshop series in the digital humanities. I attended a course entitled "Get Down with Your Data: Learn to web scrape, clean, visualize and preserve data" in the summer of 2017. This workshop was taught by Adam Doan, Carrie Breton, and Lucia Costanzo.

are modes of queering the traditional objective distance between researcher as subject and research material as object. We see this playfulness animate feminist digital media scholarship, from Joanna Zylinska and Sarah Kember's "rigorous playfulness" (xvi) applied to the "work of participation and invention" (28) in *Life After New Media* to Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson's "passionate encounters with game technologies" (3) through their avatars that enliven "passionate scholarship" (13) in *Passionate Play.* Play has a relationship with the avatar through game play, through reconceptualizing the digital as a field of play, and through play as a practice of identity exploration and community-building: "By playing together, people form close communities and develop a group identity and a sense of belonging. Play can also function as a tool to understand the self" (Flanagan 5). My avatar play animates this dissertation and generates critical thoughts, feelings, and encounters that I treat as sources of knowledge and objects worthy of analysis.

Sundén and Sveningsson write that "queering methodologies" is "To think queer as disturbing, transgressive, or subversive" (158). Play contains this potential to disturb and disrupt: Flanagan argues that "playculture…is one in which participants find a space for permission, experimentation, and subversion" (13). Play can be critical, meaningful, and a mode of feminist resistance. Holding on to the thread of irrationality or Madness in Huizinga's foundational theory of play, a claim that inadvertently echoes Ben Watson's insistence in *Mad Pride* that madness can be "a field of play" (122), alongside contemporary queer feminist game scholarship that insists on play as a subversive practice, this dissertation will worry the limits of playfulness within the "rigid structures" (Salen and Zimmerman) of game rules, social norms, and academic traditions.

An emphasis on "play" is not constructed in opposition to the heavily weighted term "labour," nor does it suggest that play is not work. Mary Gray explicitly uses the term "identity work" (176) to describe digitally enabled or augmented exploration of selfhood,

highlighting the labour behind digital identity performance. Furthermore, while identity play is often a practice and site of pleasure, it can also be painful. As a body living with chronic pain and mental illness, there are different threads of pain and work (and the work of managing pain, and of practicing self-care) that become entangled with my own practices of queer/crip/Mad feminist play. Play can be wielded as a feminist tactic to create "wiggle room" (Ahmed) for radical identity expression and Mad/crip ways of living and being in the world, can make space for a crip breath or a Mad movement—and this room also houses complex layers of pain and sweaty bodies at work.

Centring the Self: Autoethnography, Disclosure, and Self-Performance

I want to return to a word that keeps reappearing in this text, punctuating this dialogue on feminisms, media, and bad feelings: encounter (Ahmed, *Promise*, 19; González 99). I stumbled across the term again in a 2017 special issue of *Feminist Media Studies*, "Affective Encounters: Tools of Interruption for Activist Media Practices" (eds. Zarzycka and Olivieri) and it finds its way into the title of Chapter 4: Crip Encounters in the Corporate Hashtag. *Encounter*: a meeting face to face (OED). A focus on encounter, on personal experience and relationships, is a method of using the self as a pivot point between the singular experiences of a life and the broader trends of a culture and society that shape that life—and are perhaps reshaped by it. My body and my experiences are the only places that I can write from. There is value in this smallness, in anecdote, in the stories of individuals. They are entry-points into a world. In this dissertation, personal and affective encounters through and with avatars are used as hinges between the one and the many, the minute and the impossibly large. I explore this method most thoroughly in Chapter 4, as I excavate a Big Data project for small pockets of resistance in order to draw out dissenting voices, but it shapes the entire dissertation. This dissertation is a personal record of my journey into

Mad digital media identity performance and a record of the culture in which these objects and practices were created and are circulated and interpreted. These avatars offer a set of doorways between the isolated story and the trend. Our encounters with media and bodies and ourselves remind us that we are small, a single data point or a red sleeve in a crowd; but without us there would be no data, no protest—nothing.

Claiming space as a queer Mad enby in a cisheteronormative and sanist masculine culture is important to my research and to honouring my bodymind. In this project, I follow Sundén and Sveningsson's methodology in which "personal experiences, emotion, desire, and embodied ways of knowing games are treated as something with the potential to create important knowledge" (13). Experiential knowledge and personal testimony have a long history of being wielded as tools of feminist activism (Rak 2005; Smith 2014). Life-writing has become a charged arena of political dissent, a formal mode of interrupting traditional patriarchal colonial narratives. Julie Rak, in her brief history of Canadian auto/biography studies, writes that:

> In areas such as women's studies and Aboriginal studies, decisions about what is studied and how scholarship takes place have become part of the deeply political questions that are being asked about the construction of knowledge, and who has access to it. In response, "life writing" in Canada has become a specifically feminist way to find and read texts, such as letters and diaries. (*Auto/biography* 3)

Personal writing has also been identified in Mad studies as a recovery of knowledge and a validation of the experience of Mad persons. We see these voices foregrounded in texts including *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader* (2013), *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture* (2000), *Remembrance of Patients Past: Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940* (2009) and *Self-Harm: Perspectives from Personal Experience* (1994). In writing at times through the lens of my own experience as a queer Mad person working in the context

of Canadian digital life-writing studies and emphasizing the process of researching and writing, I hope this dissertation will embody a spirit of Mad willfulness as I try to make room for myself in academia and between the margins of the page.

In practicing autoethnography, I chafe against the tensions that come with acts of disclosure. Our current disability model requires that individuals disclose their disability, submit to an examination by an authoritative medical professional, and receive accommodation decided by that professional (Price 2011; Price, Salzer, O'Shea, Kershbaum 2017). This is a long and tedious process that not only has many barriers but is a model of providing accommodation and access always too late. In disclosing my identity as a Mad person, I do not want to play into this narrative of disclosure. I am not encouraging any other person to disclose. I also have privilege that many other Mad people do not have that makes it easier for me to disclose and face fewer penalties—I am a white settler, I am middle-class, and I can pass as sane, able-bodied, and cishet (sometimes experienced as a privilege, at other times, a violence; often, a mode of survival).

I have an ambivalent relationship with disclosure that I struggle to navigate throughout this dissertation. I use personal writing to position myself in relation to my research, and to celebrate and insist on the valuable knowledge of personal embodied experience. However, writing while Mad under the surveillance of the sanist institution is difficult, entangled in the institutional gaze and the policing of mental health that is becoming more prevalent within the ableism of higher education (Dolmage 2017; Kerschbaum, Eisenman, Jones 2017; Wood 2011). I also don't believe that disclosure should be necessary for an intersectional feminism that includes Mad and crip identities, for it places the burden of responsibility and risk onto marginalized bodies. Crip feminist Johanna Hedva, the author of "Sick Woman Theory," calls on us "To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it." Can

we acknowledge the invisible protests of vulnerable bodies without opening up the wounded body to the violence of a sanist culture and a sanist academic colonial feminism? Can we respect the invisibility of these protests and not insist on seeing and documenting and unveiling, which have always been ways in which the colonial cis-hetero-patriarchy controls and abuses women of colour (WOC), trans and queer lives, migrants, Indigenous, and Mad and disabled bodies?

In "Overcoming Rhetoric: Forced Disclosure and the Colonizing Ethic of Evaluating Personal Essays," Tara K. Wood discusses the tensions that come with writing practices that encourage personal writing and disclosure. Wood discusses the academy's insistence on overcoming narratives, questions the ethics of grading personal narrative, and notes the problematic positioning of teacher as therapist. Students face implicit or explicit pressure from teachers to "deal" with difficult subjects, and "the pressure to deal connotes treatment, to take action against something in an effort to eradicate it" (43). Our disclosures are welcome only in so far as they reify the normative bodymind and follow a normative narrative of progress. I can discuss self-harm or panic attacks or marrow-deep fatigue only if they are relegated to my girlhood past, only if I have overcome these embodied experiences. I can be Mad but not messy.

And if I *choose* to be visibly, publicly messy, I make myself vulnerable to the sane and patriarchal gaze. I risk being perceived as a freakshow exhibit, and I risk being dismissed as an unstable, unreliable, unprofessional, crazy "woman" (an identity we are encouraged to claim as long as we don't request accommodation or interrupt the capitalist rhythm of the institution). The process of writing to an academic audience is painful and dangerous. Trying to educate through the body's own experience requires a different skill set than trying to survive, and while activism can be a form of self-care, it can also get in the way of the project of survival. In the process of editing this dissertation I have often

sanitized the text by erasing personal or citational moments of extreme vulnerability or discomfort. While I mourn the loss of these powerful words and images, through this process I avoid reproducing the spectacle of Mad bodies and avoid opening myself and others up to the scrutiny and entertainment of the academic-psychiatric complex.

The academy relies on forced disclosure, which can make a body visible as in crisis. Crisis then allows agents of power to act without consent. That word, *crisis*, will appear throughout this dissertation, and is always a touchstone of settler capitalist power. What creates a crisis, and what does it mean to label an event or body in crisis? What gets effaced in the naming of crisis? How is crisis used to justify extreme measures? As Eric Cazdyn reminds us, capitalism/neoliberalism relies on cycles of boom and bust, irrevocably built around manufactured crisis: "crisis is built right into the system of capitalism— not only when it bursts, but when it booms" (2). Cazdyn is particularly concerned with the "new chronic" (13), in which the capitalist medical industry manages and controls disabled and sick bodies through cycles of crisis. In a mental health context, crisis is written onto a body or event by way of reading its impact *not on the body but on the community* that registers the event as a crisis. Is a panic attack a crisis? Suicide ideation? A suicide attempt? Several attempts? Louise Tam notes that "the term suicide is invoked by the viewer rather than the subject." We rarely get to name our own crises but rather have the term assigned to us when our bodyminds become legible as disruptive. The temporality of crisis, which implies immediacy and a temporary extreme deviation from the norm, ignores the embodied reality of living with mental illness and the long histories of violence and oppression that cultivate a crisis or a cycle of crises. Furthermore, becoming legible as a Mad/crip bodymind in crisis can be deadly, like it was for Andrew Loku, a mentally ill Black man who was shot and killed by police in the summer of 2015 in Toronto while having a traumatic episode. And there are many of these deaths to mourn.

As a Mad feminist media scholar performing autoethnography in this dissertation, and at times brushing up against the institutional definition of "disclosure," it's important for me to emphasize the harm of forced disclosure, to encourage educators to approach Mad/crip students with an ethics of care, and to encourage all readers to remain attentive to the ways in which risk falls unevenly on marginalized bodies. In an eloquent Twitter thread, Nancy Lee writes:

> We ask our students to write with emotional depth and psychological realism, to open themselves and find an authentic place of truth. We ask them to risk, to experiment, to move beyond comfort and what they already know. /1
>
> We ask them to spend it all, leave blood on the floor, burn the boats. Then we ask them to listen to a dozen or so critiques of their best efforts, to weigh those outside opinions and dissect every choice they've made, then find a way to make better choices /2
>
> or perhaps start all over again. Some students come to us precisely because they want to write about past trauma and abuse. What should our students ask of us?
>
> What should they expect from us? Surely, at the very, very least, to do no harm. /3

To "do no harm" would mean moving away from forced disclosure, and critically examining both our positioning within the academy and our gut reactions to Mad testimony and bodies, bodies which are sometimes tidy and neat and clean and smooth, and therefore get accused of exaggeration or telling falsehoods, while at other times are unwashed and dirty, with scars or cuts, too thin, with monotone voices and bags under our eyes, and are read as "attention-seeking" or "unprofessional" or "at risk" or "in crisis." We can turn away from surveilling and reporting students who become culturally legible as at risk/disruptive. We can make space for Mad/crip learners in our education practices, spaces, and communities. We can learn to listen. We can understand that learning how to support Mad/crip students a

never-ending process, and that it's worth doing anyway.

Some details on the context in which I am writing: I am writing this dissertation during what would be the 23rd birthday of Trayvon Martin. I am writing while pipelines are being forced through Indigenous lands. I am writing during the public exposure of rape culture in CanLit, and during the #MeToo hashtag. I'm writing when Jordan Peterson is invited to speak at McMaster University. Over Christmas, I argue with a family member about pronoun usage (Ahmed: "My own experience of bringing up racism and sexism within the academy...replicated some of my earlier experiences of bringing up racism and sexism at the family table" [*Living* 9]). I am writing as my roommate comes to terms with the loss of his "heroes" who turned out to be sexual predators (I am angry at him and I can't articulate why). I am writing while struggling with depression, anxiety, insomnia, chronic pain, and PMDD. I am falling in love (again). I am heartbroken (again). I am getting catcalled and followed. I flinch at loud noises, haunted by an abusive relationship that ended years ago. I am writing when *Wonder Woman* comes out and am disappointed and angry when the white, thin, Israeli settler actress/heroine is celebrated uncritically by my Facebook network (and I remember reading at least one web article that fetishized Gal Gadot's mandatory military service in the Israel Defense Forces, a deeply disturbing reframing of the Wonder Woman character as militant nationalist settler). I am writing when *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* comes out and I tear up at the theatre when I see crowd scenes that are filled with women, including several WOC. I am writing when I come out as a bisexual woman and later as pansexual and complete this dissertation as a queer nonbinary person.

Sometimes I'm not writing.

Sometimes I'm just surviving.

I try not to feel guilty about it.

Decentring the Self: Trying to Create an Anti-Oppression Text

I am a middle-class white settler nonbinary (often feminine-coded) person. Following Erin Wunker's example in *Notes From a Feminist Killjoy*, I situate myself. I acknowledge my privilege. I acknowledge that there are experiences outside my own that do not share my privilege, and that these bodies matter. Following Eli Clare's example in *Exile and Pride*, I acknowledge and honour my history as a queer woman. Following Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon's example in *Gender Failure*, my pronoun use throughout this dissertation is not static, singular, to put in a third box to check off. It shifts based on context, memory, audience, feelings. I was using "she" when I began this project and "they" when I ended.

As a Mad person, I am high-functioning. The downsides include: invisibility, lack of access to mental health care, and lack of support. The upsides include: not having to encounter many of the barriers that Mad and disabled folx experience in academia (trying to extend deadlines, seeking funds for additional semesters, getting an accommodation from Accessibility Services), and not experiencing psychiatric violence, incarceration, and everyday prejudice (or not experiencing stigma as often or as severely). In Chapter 3, "Blood Magic and Self-Harm: Confronting Settler Affect in *Dragon Age 2*," when I talk about my personal experience with scratching and cutting, I situate this knowledge within the broader context of self-harm by including the voices of women who have permanent scars, have feared for their life due to self-harm, and have faced a range of violences at the hands of doctors in the emergency room.

My committee members are all women. We're also all white, which may speak poorly of the University/department's hiring practices but might also be preferable to having a POC (person of colour) available for performing the racialized labour of educating white folx about racism, particularly when there are so many texts written on the subject that we can turn to in order to educate ourselves and each other and learn how to be better allies. I

am indebted to these texts that taught me about the world outside my own experience and will continue to name them and encourage others to read them. I try to honour these lessons by centring the voices of BIPOC (Black and Indigenous people of colour), QOC (queer of colour), and WOC writers in this dissertation. I follow a citational practice of refusing to cite or use the work of Nazis. Although I have not been able to follow Ahmed's citational practices of not citing any white men (*Living*) (disability and Mad studies are not as diverse or intersectional as they need to be), I do try to "cite those who have contributed to the genealogy of feminism and antiracism" (15). My methodology and pedagogy as a disabled feminist are based on the understanding that "Citation is feminist memory" (15) and, following Ahmed's example, "I cite feminists of color who have contributed to the project of naming and dismantling the institutions of patriarchal whiteness" (16). I try to cite more women than men. I try to engage with more WOC than white women. I learn from nonbinary, genderqueer, and trans voices. Most of the white men I cite are trans, queer, disabled, and/or psychiatric survivors. I try to acknowledge and be critical of their positions of privilege, just as I acknowledge and am critical of my own.

I have also been inspired by Clare Hemmings's call for "feminist recitation, in which some of the hauntings of Western feminist stories that matter to me are folded back into the textual heart of narratives of progress, loss, and return" (165). However, I veer away from her method of "foregrounding knowledge practices as shared rather than individual" (21). Wanting to look at broader trends in academic feminism rather than call out individuals, Hemmings cites journal and year instead of author's last name. While I understand and appreciate the emphasis on larger patterns rather than individual opinions, I am concerned that this approach ignores the way that power is embodied, and the reality that white male citational practices and politics can be perpetuated by feminists—often white able-bodied middle-class cishet feminists. The alternative or "corrective" histories Hemmings discusses

in her book come from the work of QOC writers like Sara Ahmed and Mel Y. Chen, and I am not comfortable taking the onus off white women and nonbinary people like myself for reproducing violent power hierarchies. Power structures are upheld by individuals, and we need to be held accountable for our actions and words. The bodies that benefit from institutional power are complicit in reproducing institutional violence. That is why I refuse to attempt to recover or recuperate the work of clearly transphobic or racist white feminists, and I hold established and authoritative theorists and their theories accountable for reproducing sanism, cissexism, or any element of settler colonialism. I hope, in turn, anyone writing to and of my work will hold me accountable for any oppressive elements. I hope that I will listen, and learn, and do better.

I've started to keep track of these moments and names that have become dangerously ubiquitous in cultural studies. I try to notice them in others' work and words so I can notice them in my own. And they are there, always on the tip of my tongue, punctuating my thoughts, interrupting my feminist citation. I could make a found poem out of these names for you: Foucault. Deleuze. Jameson. Debord. Barthes. McLuhan. These names punctuate our theory and sometimes puncture the breath of an anxious feminist learning to exhale. Unlearning the habits of patriarchal recitation is a difficult task for feminists in and outside the academy.

The hard part isn't finding other excellent voices and theories. There are many BIPOC and WOC scholars and there always have been. The hard part is finding the time and energy to follow these other pathways, to change the syllabus and the lecture slides as a graduate student or adjunct professor. We're underpaid and overworked. So, okay, we'll stick to the lesson on Althusser, we'll stick to the texts and theories and bodies that stick to our work, have been affixed in a grammar of recitation, a politics of white supremacy. A rhythm of colonialism. I know this rhythm, I learned it in the dusty classroom with the broken

a/c where the professor scribbled down notes every time we spoke. We were graded on the quality of our participation. It took me years to realize that "quality" meant proximity to whiteness and settler colonial authority. Pen and paper as mechanisms of policing unruly bodies, of reproducing normate professional academic thinkers.

I am struggling to give up my attachment to this authority.

I don't always succeed.

Research Ethics

All researchers need to perform their research in an ethical manner. Sometimes, this means deciding not to do the research at all. In this dissertation, I grapple with the ethical implications of writing about pain, referencing experiential knowledge that is not my own, and collecting Twitter data. I am deeply invested in making my work as accessible as possible—for example, I use a sans serif font in order to make the text more accessible for persons with visual impairments.

I write about many difficult topics. When I started this project I wrote openly, honestly, even brutally, about these topics. I railed against censorship and flaunted the hurt. But the more I spoke to other people, and learned, and had panic attacks at public readings, the more I wanted to make sure that this work was an act of care all the way through. All academic research should be acts of care, and as writers we need to understand how our words can cause harm, even as they are intended to shed light on injustice and inspire social change. The more I wrote, thought, healed, and hurt, the more I realized I wasn't writing just for the sane and able-bodied reader looking to dip their toes into crip studies, or for my committee members and external examiner, but for a community of Mad/crip/queer folx—many of whom I know and love, and others I may never get to meet but who matter just as much. I asked myself: how I can make this reading experience less harmful for those

of us living in pain?

Roxanne Gay doesn't believe in trigger warnings. In "The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion," she explains that anything can be a trigger, and that trigger warnings can't save us from the harm we have already experienced, "will not staunch the bleeding" (152). Gay argues that trigger warnings create a false illusion of safety, whereas many survivors, herself included, understand that there are no safe spaces: "Trigger warnings are designed for the people who need and believe in that safety" (153). Gay is right—anything can trigger us, and trigger warnings will not "harden the scabs over your wounds" (152). But I don't agree that trigger warnings signal a safe space. I believe that they signal a *kinder* space, a space in which a student or reader's wellbeing is at least as important as their use of semi-colons. I think trigger warnings acknowledge those of us who live with and in pain when we are so rarely positioned as the intended audience. I think they can make us and our messy feelings and bodies feel a little more welcome. So I use trigger warnings, knowing they will always be incomplete and imperfect, knowing that they are not tools of healing, but are (hopefully) acts of care.

Since single chapters may be read out of context, I decided to include a trigger warning for each individual chapter, which I frame as a "Love letter to those of us who get triggered." Clare writes that "Trigger warnings are in essence tools for self— care and collective care," and I want to follow his example and "remind readers that you can stop listening to or reading this book" (*Brilliant* xx). I do not want audience members to be surprised by encounters with self-harm or colonial violence or forced to read something that will harm them. The relationship between the text and the reader should always be consensual. Furthermore, I use the "love letter" section to tell the reader whether the topic is mentioned only briefly or explored in-depth. In Chapter 4: Crip Encounters in the Corporate Hashtag, the discussion of suicide is communicated to the reader (including page numbers)

1) in the love letter and 2) with centred and italicized text visually bracketing the section from the rest of the chapter. Finally, recognizing that any topic can be triggering, I include a keyword section underneath each love letter that introduces a broad range of the topics mentioned in the chapter. While more comprehensive, these lists will always be partial and incomplete, and readers may still be triggered by content I did not think to flag. Any reader interested in engaging with my work who is concerned about specific topics in the text is welcome to get in contact with me through Twitter (@AdanJerreat).

When employing experiential knowledge, I cite published books or accounts in books. Elsewhere, I refer obliquely to the experiences of bodies I know personally and intimately, yet I keep these sources anonymous in order to respect their privacy. Sometimes I use pronouns to remind the reader that these anecdotes belong to specific bodies that are gendered, but they are not necessarily attached to the original gendered body who was the source. I do not "out" anyone I have met in the past several years. I respect their anonymity, and I acknowledge that many are unable to speak openly about their own experiences with mental illness because of their social/cultural positioning, and that being named would open them up to harm.

My work with quantitative research and data collection shares the concerns of the authors in the edited collection *Good Data*.[3] These researchers are invested in "articulating a more optimistic vision of the datafied future" by generating, discussing, and promoting "ethical data practices" (8). I am particularly indebted to Andrea Zeffiro's work on social media ethics, and I take seriously her argument that "researchers are responsible for protecting the privacy and anonymity of unknowing participants" (225). When I decided I wanted to scrape Twitter data to study the hashtag #BellLetsTalk, I approached the

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[3] Of course, in a dissertation entitled *Bad Avatar* that is politically invested in "bad" bodies I am interested in *ethical* data practices rather than inherently "good" ones.

McMaster Research Ethics Board. I was told that because Twitter is a public platform, and hashtagging is a public action, there would not be an expectation of privacy from the users of the hashtag. I did not need to complete an ethics review. However, we did discuss the importance of performing ethical research beyond the niche function of an ethics review board. As Zeffiro reminds us, "simply because information is stipulated as 'public' does not absolve researchers of ethical concerns" (231). I wanted to anonymize the users as much as possible in my paper, which includes 1) not using their username and 2) not quoting their tweets verbatim, due to the searchability of tweets on Google and other search engines. Instead, I decided to look for patterns and trends, perform textual analysis on the collection of tweets as a single corpus, and look for other hashtags being used. Looking for patterns of critique and popular words and sentiments protect individual users from being identified as the author.

Data storage was also a concern: the data I collected using Python[4] included sensitive personal metadata such as the user's location. I saved this data on a password protected terminal at the Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Media. The data was only available to me. I also followed Twitter's Terms of Use, which requires that researchers only share dehydrated datasets with other academics. Dehydrated datasets allow users to delete their tweets from the archive. I hope that through these steps I have enacted an ethics of care toward the many users whose tweets were vital to my research.

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[4] Python is a computer programming language.

Theoretical Frameworks & Interventions

I Did Not Pay For The Knowledge of Settler Colonialism With My Own Blood

Thank you to Alicia Elliott for her work on cultural appropriation in literature ("On Seeing and Being Seen: The Difference Between Writing With Empathy and Writing With Love"), her engagement with mental illness ("On Being an Ill Writer"), and her stunning collection on mental health and colonialism, *A Mind Spread Out On The Ground*. Thank you to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson for exploding my settler colonial understanding of North American power systems in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance.* Thank you to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang ("Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"), Dawn Dumont (*Glass Beads*), Lee Maracle (*I Am Woman*), Glen Coulthard (*Red Skin, White Masks*), Therese Marie Mailhot ("I Used to Give Men Mercy"), Billy-Ray Belcourt (*This Wound is a World*), Tracey Lindberg (*Birdie*), Joshua Whitehead (*Jonny Appleseed*), and Cherie Dimaline (*The Marrow Thieves*).[5] Their words are gifts. Their words demand accountability. Their knowledge incites action and change. Although not all of these texts appear in this dissertation, they formed the skeleton of my still-developing understanding of the continued violences of settler colonialism.

One of the themes throughout this text is naming. Names have power, histories, ideologies, memories. Names carve out spaces for belonging and unbelonging and mark out community and national membership. Names can be acts of violence and dehumanization, or assertions of pride. Name carry meaning. The names we use to describe our contemporary culture of Western—here, slanted towards Canadian—cultural studies have implications on what cultural studies does and can do. Following Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, among other Indigenous writers, I name the culture of oppression

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[5] And so many more

and violence in contemporary North America "settler colonialism." Settler colonialism harms digital and physical Mad and disabled bodies, women, nonbinary, queer, trans, WOC, QOC, POC, and BIPOC bodies and identities. Settler colonialism and land dispossession are gendered, racialized, and neoliberal (Coulthard 2014; Maracle 1996; Simpson 2017). I use the term "settler colonialism" as an umbrella term for the policies and practices that perpetuate the cis-hetero-patriarchy, systemic/institutionalized racism, ableism, sanism, capitalism/neoliberalism, and ongoing strategies of land dispossession and genocide.

Michel Foucault's theory of power is dominant in cultural studies. I have read Foucault in several graduate courses. I have taught Foucault in "Introduction to Cultural Studies" courses that ignored the voices of Indigenous women and two-spirit people. I have used the terms "biopower" and "biopolitics" in many academic papers. I have also learned that these terms, alongside "state apparatus" and "control society," are insufficient. At its heart, much of Foucault's theory is a critique of capitalist and neoliberal modes of governance, and yet his work fails to attend to the specific histories of settler colonialism that have informed the systems of power and governance in North America and many other parts of the world. In *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness,* Simone Browne critiques Foucault's theory of power for its emphasis on the white body. In response to *Discipline and Punish*, Browne argues that when it comes to black bodies, spectacular punishment and visible violence are still used as methods of control. She also insists that the original Panopticon was the slave ship (24). The victimized body foregrounded in Foucault's work, whether mad, sick, criminal, or poor, is the default ideal white masculine body, and the resulting theory ignores the specificities of gender, race, and disability. Furthermore, Foucault's control apparatus is strangely devoid of perpetrators—the violence is an impersonal violence. Throughout Foucault's extensive writings, no one seems to benefit from the control apparatus. And how do we dismantle something we cannot name,

upheld by shadowy figures we cannot identify?[6]

Settler colonialism impacts us all: LGBT2SQIA+[7], crip, Mad, disabled, old, young, sick, feminine, genderqueer. Yet settler colonialism does not impact all marginalized bodies equally. Here, Jasbir Puar's theory of "homonationalism" outlined in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, alongside Imogen Tyler's discussion of "social abjection" in *Revolting Bodies: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* will be instrumental. Puar describes the process whereby queer white bodies are tentatively and conditionally accepted into the national fold in order to reaffirm the white supremacist state, explaining that "National recognition and inclusion...is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary" (2). Meanwhile, Tyler discusses the state's use of "figurative scapegoats" as "national abjects" that include "'the bogus asylum seeker', 'the illegal immigrant', 'the chav', 'the underclass' and 'the G—'" (9). These racialized and classed subjects are characterized by discourses of uncleanliness, pollution, and waste. The community-building process of white nationalism requires a scapegoat, an outsider, a "them" to cement the unity of "us." White disability scholars and disabled folx need to be aware of these processes of othering and exclusion as we become offered tentative, partial inclusion in the violent nation-building process of Canada. Indeed, a 2017 **"**open letter to White disability studies and ableist institutions of higher education" published in *Disability Studies Quarterly* called for a

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[6] This is not to say that Foucault's work hasn't been used by contemporary theorists in critical and important ways. Shelley Tremain's edited collected *Foucault and the Government of Disability,* for example, productively grounds biopolitics in the lived reality of disabled people in North America, while Jasbir Puar turns biopolitics into "necropolitics" in her discussion of homonationalism in *Terrorist Assemblages.* However, in this dissertation, in light of my commitment to feminist citational practices and the abundance of thoughtful and critical Mad/crip scholarship that explores power and agency through the interstices of North American settler colonialism, I do not employ a Foucauldian framework.
[7] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, queer, intersex, asexual

"critical *intersectional* disability studies" that centres the experiences of disabled POC, especially WOC, in recognition of the dominance of whiteness in the field.

Turning toward feminist writers of colour including Simpson, Puar, Elliott, Theri A. Pickens, and the extensive work of feminist killjoy Sara Ahmed, this dissertation tries to be specific in the way it names and defines the power dynamics of Canadian settler culture and attends to the different experiences of white Mad bodies and BIPOC Mad bodies. These specificities matter. These differences matter. I hope in this dissertation that by continuing to acknowledge the ways in which white feminists and activists are complicit in multiple forms of colonial domination, I encourage white readers, writers, and activists to reconsider our relationship to anti-oppression work and to become better allies. These texts form the theoretical backbone of this project.

Woven throughout this dissertation is a critique of the historical and contemporary relationship between cure and colonial violence in the psymedical industries. Medical/psychiatric institutions and their models of disability and mental illness have ongoing relationships with settler colonialism: historically, they were wielded as tools of the settler state and used to justify slavery and colonialism through the scientific racism of "defect" (Clare, *Brilliant* 23), naming bodies of colour "subhuman" (Wynter 264), and "irrational/subrational" (Wynter 266). The "natural" superiority of the white man hinged upon the "natural" disability and mental inferiority of people of colour (Clare 2017; Noble 2018; Pickens 2019) and the hysterical "nature" and mental inferiority of white women (Foucault 2009; Stewart 2007; Watters 2010). The history of disability in Canada is deeply enmeshed in racialized and gendered violence that disqualified bodies from knowledge, agency, and citizenship. These trends continue today, as Black men are over-diagnosed with schizophrenia (Fennell 2002; Metzl 2010; Schwartz and Blankenship 2014) and women are identified as being at "greater risk" of depression and anxiety (Gardner 2007). "Naturally"

disabled has turned into "naturally" at risk of disability, concealing the systemic violence that engenders and exacerbates trauma, pain, and disability unevenly across marginalized bodies (Erevelles 2011; Puar 2017). Furthermore, as Clare reminds us, cure has a troubling relationship with violence: cure—in the forms of electroshock therapy, institutionalization, experimental surgeries, and sometimes even medication—can be modes through which the settler state punishes, controls, and neutralizes unruly or unwanted bodies (*Brilliant* 23).

In the current stage of Canada's colonial process, the settler state uses the narrative of populations at risk to claim the position of white saviour in its relationship with Indigenous bodies. Indigenous bodies are framed as always at risk and therefore in need of intervention/salvation by the settler state. This rhetorical gesture reinforces Canada's paternalistic, unequal relationship with Indigenous nations, and can be used to justify nonconsensual intervention. On a more individual/community level, colonial psymedical and wellness interventions in Indigenous communities can function as extensions of assimilation policies and practices, erasing Indigenous methods of healing and/or living with trauma and replacing them with settler ones (Elliott 2019; Senier and Barker 2013). This dissertation is deeply invested in critiquing and unravelling the hegemony of settler psychiatry by drawing attention to the uneven harm it distributes on Mad bodies bodies of colour (Pickens 2019; Tam 2011).

In this dissertation, I will complicate an understanding of state power as pervasive and dynamic with Ahmed's insistence that "If the attribution of willfulness sticks, something becomes a willful thing, what prevents a will from being completed. There is agency in this becoming; *there is life*" (*Willful* 47) (emphasis in original). We can identity tactics of control and we can explore the limitations of those tactics, the way in which affects and bodies exceed or evade control. Bad avatars are willful. Bad avatars embody and enact survival, and this is radical. *There is life*. An emphasis on play interrogates and intervenes in

deterministic readings of media platforms by centring the lived experience of disabled and Mad bodies who assert agency through passivity, exhaustion, panic, pain, depression, anxiety, and willfulness.

The bad avatars in this chapter are bad because they fail to reproduce the neoliberal patriarchal colonial system, because they break rules and talk back to power, and because they are marked as bad by the settler state. An understanding of the broad systems of power at work in the land my map identifies as Canada is central to understanding how this project is situated in relation to power, bodies, history, violence, and resistance. This dissertation emerged from a place of privilege (the academy; the white settler author) and oppression (as a feminized and queer disabled body). It is an attempt to make visible how power operates on and through Mad bodies, and an attempt to work around and through and with these barriers and hegemonic structures to make visible the resistance that is possible and is happening every single day. I hope, in some small way, that this dissertation is itself an act of resistance.

What is 'Mad/Crip Studies'?

When I started research for this project in 2015, the most important text for Canadian Mad studies was the ground-breaking collection *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (2013). This essay collection followed the rise of Mad studies coming out of the Mad Pride movement in Toronto and its tentative crawl into academia, particularly at Ryerson University and York University (Church 2013; Gillis 2015; Reville 2013). Toronto Mad Pride emerged from psychiatric survivor advocacy, and the group crystallized around the first Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day in 1993 (Reaume 2008). The name later changed to Mad Pride in 2002 (Reaume 2008). I read *Mad Matters* alongside the earlier collection *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture* (2000), which follows a similar Mad activist movement

in the UK. Like *Mad Matters*, *Mad Pride* critiqued the psychiatric industry, discussed systemic discrimination and structures of violence that harm Mad/mentally ill people, and celebrated mental, neural, and emotional difference. My understanding of Mad studies was thus initially formed through an engagement with urban psychiatric survivor advocacy and activism, and I attended Toronto Mad Pride in 2017.

Despite important interventions and critiques by scholars like Rachel da Silveira Gorman, Andrea Daley, and Louise Tam, this map of a relatively new and emerging field of study was overwhelmingly white, masculine, and heteronormative (much like Toronto Mad Pride in 2017, and a Mad Studies panel I attended at the *Canadian Disability Studies Association* conference, also in 2017, also in Toronto). Geoffrey Reaume writes that part of the history of Toronto Mad Pride has been grappling with "racism and homophobia, from within our own community," and notes that there was push-back against using the word "Pride" because of its association with queerness ("A History"). Furthermore, the Toronto Mad Pride logo still features a black body against a white background. The figure is depicted with clenched fists breaking chains on both arms. Whether deliberate or not, this image evokes Black resistance (the black fist) and the history of slavery (the chains). The slogan "The right to be free...the right to be me" ("History") explicitly links the image of emancipation from slavery to the freedom of Mad bodies and consumers/survivors of the psy-industries. While ableism/sanism and racism have intertwined histories in North America, and both Black abled bodies and white Mad bodies have been and continue to be subject to violence and dehumanization, it is important to recognize the distinct forms of harm that different bodies suffer under settler colonialism and white supremacy. The violence of institutionalization is not an equivalent harm to slavery or colonialism, even as, under white supremacy, people of colour are more at risk of encountering psychiatric violence. Slavery is not a metaphor: it is an historical reality attached to contemporary harm

and oppression (Cole 2020; Maynard 2017). Conflating modes of oppression erases important differences and risks reproducing whiteness as the norm; masculinity as the norm; cisheteronormativity as the norm.

In *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha offers a different genealogy of Toronto Mad Pride, celebrating the advocacy work of Lilith Finkler, a working-class Jewish psychiatric survivor, and acknowledging the labour of queer women of colour in the movement's origins (84-87). I was not present in the early days of Toronto Mad Pride, but I think as readers and activists we can both celebrate the important (and often invisibilized) labour that has and continued to be performed by Mad persons of colour while simultaneously acknowledging that Mad Pride and Mad studies continues to overrepresent white voices and experiences. I am particularly concerned with the erasure of Black and Indigenous people of colour in Mad and disability activism and scholarship. I continue to be troubled by the Mad Pride logo and by the tendency of disability studies scholars to use colonialism as a metaphor (i.e. psychiatric institutions "colonize" the mind), which conflates the systemic genocide of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and nations with psychiatric violence. I encourage all readers, thinkers, and writers to be mindful of our use of metaphor when attending to the specific material realities of marginalized persons.

I noted that *Mad Matters* came out in 2013. In the same year, two other critical texts were published, but they weren't brought to my attention by any keyword search for "Mad": Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's book of short stories *Islands of Decolonial Love* and Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million's book of theory *Therapeutic Nations.* While not explicitly aligned with Mad Pride, both books are deeply concerned with mental health, the violence of psychiatrization, and with state power, oppression, and resistance. The small set of scholars working explicitly within Mad studies required me to broaden my research parameters, particularly in light of the important work

being done by BIPOC scholars in other home fields. Since Mad Pride/Mad studies has tended to be specific to urban environments and focalized around survivors of psychiatric institutionalization, it understandably is not accessible to all bodies and identities that are impacted by settler frameworks of madness, trauma, and mental health. Therefore, I have turned to Indigenous theory to consider the relationship between settler colonialism and mental health (Belcourt 2017; Elliott 2019; Million 2013; Simpson 2013) alongside Black feminist disability and Mad theory (Bailey 2019; Gay 2017; Pickens 2019; Wynter 2004). My use of the term "Mad studies" in 2020 is intended to encompass both the psychiatric survivor activism and theory coming out of Toronto and other urban centres, as well as broader discussions of mental health and illness emerging from BIPOC, WOC, and POC theorists, writers, poets, and essayists (who are all, in their own right, theorists, if not all located within academia).

In the title of this dissertation I use a backslash to divide and bring together the key words "Mad" and "crip." In part, I made this decision because "crip" is more commonly recognized as having a relationship with disability than "Mad," which is often misunderstood for the lower-case "mad" of anger. Furthermore, "crip" productively sparks with "Mad" in discussions of the tandem normalizing practices of ableism and sanism. Many people with mental illnesses identify as crip or disabled instead of (or alongside) Mad or mentally ill, and in North America mentally ill bodies have become enfolded under legal and medical definitions of disability. Furthermore, people with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses often experience psychic distress and emotional pain (for example, my experience of depression has a mutually reinforcing relationship with my experience of chronic pain).

I employ frameworks from crip theory and disability justice in my study of Madness. For example, critiques of the production of disability among marginalized populations in the Global South and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are central to my

understanding of the production and/or exacerbation of mental illness among oppressed bodies within Canada (Erevelles 2011; Gill and Schlund-Vials 2014; Puar 2017). This process, which Puar calls the "biopolitics of debilitation" (*The Right to Maim* xxiii) in her study of the OPT, will be brought into conversation with the practice of reading disability outside the medical narrative of "defect" or "tragedy," moving instead toward discussions of access, interdependency, and justice (Clare 2017; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Siebers 2010; Titchkosky 2007; Wendell 1996). The backslash acknowledges that while "Mad" is not necessarily synonymous with "crip," our experiences can move across and between these terms, and that Mad and crip affinities have the potential to generate alternative forms of knowing and to create alliances across identity positions. Indeed, many crip writers (including Piepzna-Samarinsha and Hedva) bring together Mad/sick/crip/disabled identities in their discussions of disability justice. "Mad/crip studies," in this dissertation, is inherently interdisciplinary, and makes room for broad perspectives on and experiences of mental health/illness and the psychiatric-medical complex.

Between 2015 and 2020 the shape of Mad studies has changed, and my research turns toward the interdisciplinary promise of a field that explores emotion, pain, illness, bodies, culture, and politics. I am hopeful about the future of Mad/crip studies as I pick up Therí A. Pickens's 2019 book *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* for a second read*, as I scroll through Mia Mingus's Twitter posts, and as I watch the word "Mad" shift across social media platforms and discussions of access, justice, culture, politics, and vulnerability, collecting meaning and nuance.

Queer Affect Theory and Mad Studies: A Love/Hate Story

Feeling bad has never been solely the domain of the clinically depressed: as the work of the POC theorists mentioned above demonstrates, oppression generates a web of

difficult feelings that impact our individual and collective identities and our relationships to

our bodies, our communities, and the world around us. My meditations on feelings, power,

and digital identity in this dissertation are indebted to the thoughtful conversations within

queer affect studies, and one of the goals of this project is to bring together the theoretical

traditions of queer affect theory and Mad studies. Like Pickens' work in drawing together

Black studies and Mad studies, in this endeavor "my aim is not to trace an idea or prove an

argument, but rather to open up two fields to each other" (x).

Queer affect theory has a long history of grappling with bad feelings: Jack

Halberstam writes that "radical histories must contend with a less tidy past, one that passes

on legacies of failure and loneliness as the consequences of homophobia and racism and

xenophobia" (98-99). Bad feelings are produced by racism and settler colonialism, sexism,

homophobia, ableism/sanism, and capitalism. "Feeling bad" encompasses Halberstam's

"queer art of failure," Cvetkovich's "political depression," Ahmed's "affect aliens" (*Promise*),

and Heather Love's "feeling backward," which includes "nostalgia, regret, shame, despair"

(4). Those of us living with depression, anxiety, pain, and trauma have often been told that

we feel too much. We rate our feelings on a scale of 1-10 and have this quantified

emotional archive assessed by medical professionals who pronounce us crazy, clinical,

chronic. The assertion that feelings are political, and particularly Ahmed's critique of

happiness "as a disciplinary technique" (*Promise* 8), have shaped my understanding of how

depression signifies and circulates in contemporary society. Queer affect theory's scalpel-

sharp critique of the relationship between emotion, culture, and power complemented my

Mad studies research.

As valuable as these works are, they do not engage with Mad bodies or the

testimony of psychiatric survivors, who have their own theoretical and activist traditions

around bad feelings. The bodies centred by queer affect theory may encounter the

psychiatric industry framed through the wrongful pathologization of queer- or trans-ness, or an experience of depression caused by homophobia, capitalism/neoliberalism, and/or racism, but the bodies in these texts remain distinct from the psychiatric survivors/consumers/ex-patients who are neurodiverse, Mad, disabled, or mentally ill. Barriers have been erected between Mad studies and queer affect theory: Halberstam's attempt at a feminist theory of self-harm, for example, ignores the testimony of women who self-harm (*Queer Art*), and in 2014 he wrote a controversial (and brutal) blog post criticizing trigger warnings and other access needs: "People with various kinds of fatigue, easily activated allergies, poorly managed trauma were constantly holding up proceedings to shout in loud voices about how bad they felt" ("You are Triggering Me!"). Even Cvetkovich's theory-cum-memoir *Depression: A Public Feeling* turns away from connections with other Mad/mentally ill bodies, instead deliberately positioning her book as a critique of popular depression memoirs like *Prozac Diary* (23)*.* Unlike Lauren Slater, who Cvetkovich regards with suspicion as a Big Pharma sell-out, Cvetkovich writes about queer creative practice as a mode of living with and even recovering from depression, and notes that great novelists like David Foster Wallace have been significantly better for her mental health than "any pill or theory" (26). (The disdain that Cvetkovich holds for mentally ill people who turn to medication for support in this book is truly remarkable).

We see a marked absence of Mad or mentally ill bodies in these texts, a shying away from neurodiversity and mental difference (or a dismissal of disability and Madness) in affect theory: these bodies are explicitly *queer not crazy.* They may be sad, lonely, fatigued, and melancholy–but they're not crazy. These affects *make sense* in the context of oppression and violence and overwork and isolation. The bodies of queer affect theory aren't bipolar. They don't have PTSD or borderline personality disorder. Their sadness— even their depression—is justified. They remain stubbornly aligned with rationalism and

logic. This division is perhaps best articulated by the term "political depression," a concept credited to Feel Tank Chicago which appears in both Cvetkovich (1) and Love (159). This term creates a division between people who are depressed because of oppression, whose feelings and bodies are *political*, and those depressed bodies who are *apolitical* (a depression situated in biochemical and/or genetic narratives). Perhaps ironically, this bifurcation echoes psychiatry's authoritative text, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (*DSM-5*), which offers several different types of depression based on a specific, distinct cause–as if depression were ever this simple or easy to comprehend, as if we could divide our brains from our bodies, our genes and cells from our broader sociocultural context, as if we could take our experiences out of the discussion and leave a smooth, untouched body pulsing the purest of pain.

Bodies are never apolitical. Like all feelings, depression emerges within a cultural context, is shaped by that context, and is therefore always political, whether or not it can be directly linked to other forms of systemic oppression or culturally recognized modes of resistance. Here we can invite Hedva back into the conversation: Hedva critiques Hannah Arendt's theory of the political as public action and insists "that most modes of political protest are internalized, lived, embodied, suffering, and no doubt invisible." A Mad intersectional feminist approach to affect requires that we destabilize the categories of good/bad, positive/negative, and put pressure on what a "productive" or resisting body looks like. Cordoning off the sad from the Mad misses an opportunity to unfold the social/political production of and potential within madness.

There are pathways between these traditions, if only we could follow the signs. Mel Y. Chen offers a sliver of light through a door that's been left ajar. Working across queer of colour affect and disability theory, Chen's work makes room for sick bodies and more complex encounters with biomedical industries in queer theory and life (i.e. consensual,

wanted, needed, sometimes ambivalent interactions with medical—and alt medicine—

professions). "Brain Fog: The Race for Cripistemology" is a particularly resonant piece for

thinking through the harmonies between queer affect and madness: brain fog, struggling to

think, getting high as healing—the crip embodiments explored in this article strum the

chords of depression brain and anxiety short-circuiting, speak to self-medicating with

marijuana, and perhaps even gesture to the relationship between desirable drug-altered

mind states and neurodiverse minds (Simon Morris in *Mad Pride*, for example, writes about

how hallucinations can be fun, like an LSD trip—a sentiment that I've also heard from

people who have been institutionalized for psychosis). There are other bridges as well, if in

need of repair, such as Love's insistence that "it is difficult to distinguish between "good"

and "bad" melancholy; melancholia itself cannot be sealed off from more problematic

feelings and attitudes such as nostalgia, depression, and despair" (150). While I am

troubled by the qualifier "problematic" here, Love points to the impossibility (and perhaps

undesirability) of qualifying and quantifying bad feelings, and she welcomes the Mad affects

of depression and despair into queer conversations. The 2014 controversy over

Halberstam's attack on trigger warnings broke open the shared wound of trauma, revealing

the permeability between queer and Mad affects. Furthermore, there is the overarching

concern of both traditions with the pathologization of affect, the neoliberal responsibilization

of feeling bad, and the violence of the psy-medical industries that disproportionately impacts

marginalized bodies.

As a queer and Mad writer, I am interested in both the queerness and madness of

my bodymind. I want to explore the relationship between emotion and heteronormativity

without setting myself apart—and above—other Mad and mentally ill people. I want to make

room in queer life for medication and marijuana, for insomnia, trigger warnings, panic

attacks, anhedonia, self-harm, angry protests, silent protests, therapy, refusing therapy, and

an entire orchestra of feelings. I want queer theory to embrace "a politic of ugly and magnificence," a politic "that moves us closer to bodies and movements that disrupt, dismantle, disturb. Bodies and movements ready to throw down and create a different way *for all of us, not just some of* us" (Mingus "Moving Toward the Ugly," emphasis in the original). I want to argue that queer and trans bodies are not the only bodies harmed by categories of diagnosis, by treatment, and by institutionalization. I want to move queer affect theory from the safe island of sadness to the ocean of depression, and from the tremor of melancholy to the earthquake of "Mad grief" (Poole and Ward 2013). I want queer feelings to get unapologetically crazy, and then see what new coalitions, embodiments, and feminisms emerge.

Psychiatric Screens and Pathological Youths

The study of digital media has become a burgeoning arena for exploring embodiment, affect, and activism. Feminist media scholars critique, embrace, and explore the possibilities and limitations of digital media as sites of cultural struggle and transformation. Yet the use of screen technology is deeply entangled with generational and societal anxiety rooted in discourses of madness, psychiatry, and youth, discourses that tend to be gendered and racialized. Queer potentiality becomes entangled with queer Mad pathology. From the 2017 blacklisting of Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* in high schools to *NY Magazine*'s prediction that "2018 Will Be the Year of the YouTube Moral Panic," teenagers or young adults are predominantly featured as the most vulnerable and at risk population likely to be impacted by screen media. The figure of the pathological youth, and the dual nature of screens as both cause and cure, haunt the chapters of this dissertation that revolve around the angsty teen, the cutter, and the social media user.

*Cinema Journal'*s Fall 2017 *In Focus* section "Youth Culture" calls for more nuanced research into the relationship between young users and digital media. Remarking on the current "increased attention to youth digital cultures" ("Introduction" 117), Timothy Shary and Louisa Stein complicate the good/bad media debate by pointing to the potential for youth media practice to enact political engagement, agency, and self-exploration (118). Contributions to this collection posit an intersectional framework for performing digital media scholarship, including Mary Celeste Kearney's study of Black digital girlhood in television and Andrew Scahill's discussion of queer film festivals. Taking my cue from Shary and Stein's call for "the evolution of youth media studies" (118), I seek to contribute a nuanced reflection on the relationship between youth, youthfulness, technology, and madness, and move beyond the good/bad media debate into questions of agency, resistance, power, identity expression, and embodiment. Through this process, I will put pressure on age as a sociocultural category, and discuss the relationship between (perceived) age, citizenship, and personhood, and how categories of age and citizenship intersect with other identity axes such as gender and race.

The figure of the youth is central to popular discourses of new media. In this paper I broaden "youth" in this book to include adults who are folded into the weighted term "millennial." Often applied broadly to anyone under the age of 35, "millennial" carries connotations of a belated teenage-ness, including excess affect, a narcissistic use of social media, and a childish penchant for games and play (Agger 2012; boyd 2014). Back in 2000, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett discussed the "emerging adulthood" of youths in their mid-20s and the creation of a distinct social demographic between teenager and adult. In 2020, we see emerging adulthood extending to include persons in their mid-30s. The term "millennial," often laden with stigma and criticism, typically refers to these old youths not based on their birth date but based on their inability to achieve or perform the cultural markers of

adulthood. Sherry Turkle insists that "Teenagers...would rather text than talk" (2011), an assessment that is often applied liberally to millennials. A brief Google search of "millennials" + "social media" brings up a YouTube video on social media addiction, several articles on how companies can market to millennials online, and a front-cover Time article from 2013 entitled "The ME ME ME Generation" (23 April 2017).

Millennials are the lost boys—and girls, and nonbinary, and genderqueer persons—who forgot to grow up, and I refer here to the specific failure to grow up according to dominant cultural norms, what Elizabeth Freeman identifies as "chrononormativity," a form of "temporal regulation" (2):

> In a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals (4)

It is important to understand that the category of "youth" in these narratives and debates is situated firmly within the culture of settler colonialism: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson teaches us that in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg society, prior to colonialism, "Children were full citizens with the same rights and responsibilities as adults" (3). The treatment of children and teenagers, the very way these categories of identity are constructed, is cultural, and specific to a particular time, place, and set of ideologies. Emma Maguire reminds us that "These two ideas–youth and femininity–are culturally and historically located rather than essential or monolithic, and so their meanings shift according to the context in which they appear" (6). This dissertation critically examines the culture of Canadian settler colonialism in online contexts, and within this culture, children—like women, and mad folx—are not perceived to be sources of knowledge, but empty vessels to be filled by the colonial

education system. We are liars, fantasists, untrustworthy, naughty, foolish. The testimony of children is not believed, just as the testimony of women is disregarded as false or attention seeking (Gilmore 2017), and the testimony of psychiatrized persons is dismissed as symptomatic of pathology (Leigghio 2013; Warme 2013). Hemmings argues that in academia, too, within feminist theory, there is a dismissal of young folks and their potential contributions to feminism; that there exists a misconception that "youth in general has no awareness of history, is apolitical, bored, or self-interested" (6) in the way they are represented and interpreted by academics. Recalling Maguire's reminder that "Accurately designating the age at which some people cease to be "girls" and instead become "women"... is a slippery and ultimately futile project" (6), I complicate the categories of "youth" and "adult" with an understanding that these categories are neither universal nor essential states of being.

Discourses of digital media and youth are irrevocably entangled in narratives of white supremacy and patriarchy. Mary Celeste Kearney draws attention to the centring of white youth in media discussions and calls for scholars "to pay more attention to the margins" (119). We see this obsession with whiteness reflected in the moral panics surrounding shows like Netflix's *13 Reasons Why,* which featured a white teenage girl who commits suicide after experiencing bullying and sexual violence. While the show itself represented cyberbullying as one potential threat to the middle-class white teenage girl, the moral panic that arose in response to the show (crystallizing around the fear of copycat suicides) indicates a societal impulse to protect children from media, particularly vulnerable white girls. The centring of white girlhood in media morality discussions is an extension of the white supremacist state's idealization of white femininity. Since the Victorian era, physically and mentally fragile white girls and woman have been represented as desirable and upper-class, a racist and sexist construction of mad femininity that persists today

(Brumberg 1988; Jamison 2014).

The contemporary phenomenon of pathologizing digital media has a history in the relationship between psychiatry and screen media established in the 20th century: Olivia Banner argues that screen media was framed as both deleterious to mental health and a potential tool for diagnosis and cure in the 1960s ("Gendering and Racializing the Cybernetic Gaze"). Banner discusses psychotherapist Harry Wilmer's film *Youth Drug Ward* and Wilmer's claims that television caused youth deviancy while videotaping psychotherapy sessions could improve healing. In *Chronic Youth,* Julie Elman argues that television was accused of causing youth deviancy in the 1970s, and that television had to self-discipline through After School Specials in order to combat this spread of deviancy. Cause and cure, problem and solution: Kember and Zylinska use the term *pharmakon* (poison and cure) in reference to these moral panics surrounding social media (165).

The inclusion of video game addiction in the DSM in 2018 and the pop culture phenomenon of "Phantom Vibration Syndrome" (which implies cell phone addiction) are the inheritance of early screen pathology. Jodi Dean's work on anxiety over the amount of time spent on social media sites can be connected to the plethora of news articles linking technology use (as a practice and process of isolation) to the proliferation of anxiety and depression in the young. Turning to the gendering of screen pathology, we see selfie-taking circulating as a narcissistic girlhood practice, while video gaming is discussed as an unhealthy and antisocial boyhood practice. As Maguire states, "nowhere is anxiety about cultural narcissism more pronounced than in conversations about contemporary media" (189-190). Fangirls online are similarly pathologized as narcissistic, their engagement with media framed as "beyond the boundaries of normal or healthy" (Maguire 114). Nude pictures are discussed as a naive or "stupid" girlhood practice (perpetuating the victim blaming of survivors of sexual violence, as well as touching on discourses of mental

disability), even as revenge porn has been linked to teen suicide (Chun 2016). Meanwhile, toxic masculine gamer groups like GamerGate use disability and Mad slurs against female and queer players, while many of the same slurs are levelled at GamerGaters by feminists: crazy, brain-damaged, psycho, retard. Even neurodiverse terms like "autistic" get wielded as slurs in these toxic web discourses, and often go unnoticed in critical discussions of gender and digital media.[8] The question of whether or not video games cause violence re-emerges after every shooting in the United States, and players and writers rush to defend video games by turning to the equally worn-out blaming of mental illness and disability as the "real" threat.

However, the parallel thread of technology as diagnosis and treatment also persists today. Reem Hilu discusses the use of therapeutic games in the 1960s, citing examples like The Ravich Interpersonal Game/Test, a tool used in couples' therapy. We see this trend continue in games for mental health, from websites like *Luminosity* (created in 2015) that claim to sharpen and improve brain function, to the sweeping promises of overcoming disability made by games like *SuperBetter* (created in 2009): "Playing SuperBetter for 30 days improves mood, reduces symptoms of anxiety & depression and increases belief in the ability to successfully achieve goals." The value of screen technology in the psychiatric machine is touted through online screening tools and quizzes that offer to diagnose a range of mental disorders, the use of videoconferencing technology to enable therapy sessions over long distance, and mental health chatbots. Screens are both cause and cure, problem and solution, and the unwitting Mad youths (or childish adults) are at once the deviant victims of digital media (who spread the virus they are infected with), and patients saved by

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[8] Please note that I do not cite the specific toxic discussion boards in my bibliography, nor do I use citation to call out media scholars who uncritically reproduced ableist slurs in their research.

this technology—if wielded correctly in the hands of professionals.

Moral panics over media uncover the settler state's anxiety about the reproduction of docile chrononormative and heteronormative citizens and workers. The young hippies of the 1960s are pathologized for their drug use, but also for their re-assemblage of sexual relationships and their anti-government rhetoric and activism. Video games, once the domain of the socially constructed category of "childhood," are now popular among older age groups, dismantling the mark of a linear progression from child/potential citizen to adult/full citizen. Narratives of video game addiction are placed alongside narratives of unemployment and unproductivity—players waste time and resources rather than contribute to the heteronormative capitalist system. Moral panics over the representation of mental illness in pop culture are paralleled by panics over parents' inability to limit access to queer and/or sexual content online (and the idea of children having sexualities is queer and presented as threatening to the nuclear family). Perhaps a key nation/state anxiety about digital media is that social isolation (allegedly caused by screens) may erode the institution of marriage and the (re)production of the settler colonial state. Giving youths access to a public platform is dangerous because it makes them more vulnerable to sexual predation, because it allows them to access information about alternative ways of living/being, and because it allows them to organize school walkouts and act as political agents before they can vote. Complicating the chrononormative life progression into good adult citizens, Mad/queer technology and media become woven into narratives of pathology and subject to psychiatric-state control.

Our digital networks and communities are shaped and understood through language. Ken Hillis reminds us, for example, that the idea of virtual "space" in cyberspace is purely metaphorical. Other dominant metaphors in media studies merit critical attention here: networks are frequently discussed by media scholars through the disability metaphor of viral

or retroviral contagion. In this metaphor, spam and trolls embody an inherent "sickness" within network processes and often allude to the dangerous spread of information. We can see this metaphor pathologize media users, particularly the "Young-Girl," who Chun notes is blamed "for spreading the Spectacle everywhere" (149). Banner explicitly explores the metaphor of "emotional contagion" ("Immunizing" 97) in discourses of social media, and the presumed need for "immunizing the social network" (95). Networks—and their accompanying anxiety and depression (often situated within unhealthy bodies)—are framed as contagious, and youths and youthful Mad adults are both the victims of digital networks and Patients Zero spreading the disease and its accompanying pathological behaviour. Meanwhile, in discussions of media consumption a similar pattern of language has emerged around "media diets" curated by Google and other websites. The metaphor—already saturated by the cultural ideologies surrounding food production and consumption—slips into ableism and body policing wherein the media consumer is depicted as a mindless "couch potato" and fast-food consumer, sitting on the sofa and ingesting both media junkfood and literal junkfood at the same time. A media diet becomes directly associated with the prescriptive act of dieting. The body that overindulges in social media or gaming is also coded as an obese or unhealthy body, reproducing the fatphobia and ableism. These metaphors have very real consequences on the lives of sick, disabled, and mentally ill users, rendering our lives less valuable, and our bodies more wrong, dangerous, and in need of cure or quarantine.

Delving into these discussions, I continually return to the body of the queer Mad girl, woman, nonbinary or genderqueer person, and am guided by Johanna Hedva's focus on the sick woman of colour. Hedva reminds us to centre the margins, rather than cropping out the marginalized bodies on whose backs theory gets built—and on whose non-consenting bodies psychiatric and medical "advances" are made. Following Hedva's provocative

question "what happens to the sad girl when, if, she grows up?" I question the prescriptive need to grow up and explore the inability of Mad folx to "achieve" adulthood under settler colonialism. The figures of each chapter—the girl-woman who self-harms, the angsty queer teen, the fresh faces of newly saved youths in mental health campaigns, and Twitter users—are dogged by these discourses of pathological youth and psychiatric screens. This dissertation does not propose to untangle these conflicting and competing discourses of sickness and cure that run parallel and perpendicular to each other across narratives of digital media. However, I do draw out the figure of the teenager, and the way in which youthfulness or childishness is wielded as a disciplinary mechanism across discussions of gaming, social media, and Madness. We play video games and tweet because we are young. We are driven mad by these media. We are crazy, and thus we are also immature, underdeveloped, in need of intervention or a caregiver, and not fit to be full citizens. Our Madness, like our memes, is viral—contagious. We generate queer/crip/Mad family and community through this contagion. We are dangerous.

Feminist Automedia

In this dissertation I draw on the substantial existing scholarship on feminist digital media, digital life-writing, and video gaming to study the Mad avatar across different platforms and dialogues. One of the key terms that draws these sub-fields together is "automedia," which has been taken up and explored by a 2010 special issue of *R.E.C.E.L Revue D'etudes Culturelles En Ligne*, "Automédialité,"[9] Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson

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[9] Smith and Watson and Maguire credit *R.E.C.E.L* European life writing scholars with the development of the term "automediality" and cite a 2008 article by Jőrg Dűnne and Christian Moser in their work; however, I was unable to locate this original article. Both the article that is cited by Smith and Watson and Maguire and the special issue I cite here are published in French.

(2010), and Julie Rak (2015). Emma Maguire uses "automedia" to "denote diverse forms of media that present autobiographical performance(s) and which require close attention to the facts of mediation" (21). She goes on to explain that

> I use "automediality" and "automedial reading" as appropriate terms to signify a conceptual tool and approach to analysing autobiographical texts of a range of forms...that foregrounds the conditions, contexts, tools, and processes of mediation of auto/biographical selves" (21)

Building on this definition from Maguire, I use automediality to explore a range of avatar embodiments through which identity is performed, practiced, and played with.

Life-writing, digital media, and gaming overlap and intersect, as feminist automedia studies move into digital games (Poletti and Rak 2014; Rak 2015) and gameplay extends into chat rooms and social media (Sundén and Sveningsson 2012). Through automedia, players and users engage in "identity work" (Gray 176), re-thinking selfhood beyond the terms of the dominant cultural narrative. This is not simply to create a representation of a life but is itself a way of living: Rak writes that "It is time not only to rename the practices we study, but also to think critically about online life as life, and not as the texts which are meant to represent a life" ("Life Writing Versus Automedia" 156). This provocative claim sheds light on the processes we are already embedded in, in the sometimes smooth and sometimes rough pairing of technology and organic, of digital and physical—in short, in the way our everyday lives are lived. Technology is no longer a mere extension or representation of the self, but closely tied to who we are, how we construct our lives, and what lives are viewed as meaningful and worth living. Similarly, gaming has become ubiquitous in our society, from mobile gaming on tablets and smartphones to the use of games as training, educational, and even therapeutic/medical tools. Whether or not we take on the (often toxic masculine) identity of a "gamer," we have all become players.

Many feminist media scholars are exploring the ways in which marginalized bodies use digital media to establish communities and perform critical identities online. Edited collections including *The Intersectional Internet*, *Identity Technologies*, *Networked Affect,* and *Bodies of Information* explore the possibilities–and limitations–of centring the margins through digital identity work. Life writing scholars refer to digital life writing as "Online Life 2.0" (McNeill and Zuern 2015) and the "memoir boom 2.0" (McNeill, "Life Bytes" 161) while the platforms for digital life writing have been termed "identity technologies" (Poletti and Rak 2014). Writers explore as widely varied platforms as Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms, YouTube, and blogs as meaningful forms of automedia and autobiography (Hui Kyong Chun 2017; Noble and Tynes 2016; Poletti and Rak 2014; Maguire 2018). Identity, technology, and feminist activism come together in these studies of life in the digital age.

My dissertation brings together *Identity Technologies'* "interdisciplinary dialogue" that constructs a "bridge between auto/biography studies and media studies" (3) with Mary Flanagan's influential investigation of the "artistic, political, and social critique or intervention" (2) of gaming outlined in *Critical Play*. Like both theoretical interventions, my dissertation is invested in the relationship between identity performance, culture, politics, activism, and screen technology. Video games are emerging as a medium of identity play, often–although not always–distinct from discussions of social media. Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont write that "Feminist digital humanities and feminist game studies might seem like fundamentally different approaches to structuring digital content creation…[.] Nonetheless, game studies has become an increasingly important reference point for digital humanists working to challenge norms in the field" (xxi). More interactive than other entertainment forms, video games typically require choice, so the process of narrative construction is always a collaboration between the game designer and player. Depending on the options afforded to the player and their avatar by the game design,

identity performance may emerge. For example, Rak ("Life Writing Versus Automedia") discusses the experience of a player who practiced her queerness first in *The Sims* before taking that identity into the offscreen world, while I have written elsewhere about performing a Mad or depressed identity through digital games (Jerreat-Poole, "Playing Autobiographically"). As media that allow players to make a limited number of choices within a constructed world, games showcase the limitations of all mediated identity performances, as we work with and through the constraints and affordances of the medium, site, format, hardware, software, and social/community conventions and expectations (McNeill and Zuern 2015; Morrison 2015).

My study of Mad/crip avatars is indebted to the work of feminist automedia and game scholars whose work acknowledges both the limitations and the possibilities of feminist performance and resistance through corporate and nationalist communications technology. Emerging from a Mad/crip feminist politics, my analysis also draws self- and collective- care (as an intrinsic part of identity construction, community-building, and activism) into a dialogue with these pre-existing feminist frameworks. My contribution to these fields is offering a space for cross-pollination between feminist video game and digital media scholarship as well as cripping feminist media discussions, which tend to foreground the able-bodied and sane user and avatar.

Mad Movements through Critical Case Studies

Chapter 1: "Fighting for Futurity: the Coloniality of Cure in Online Mental Health Campaigns" introduces the fictional and aspirational "good" Mad/crip avatar: the white, docile, mentally ill citizen centred by the charity fundraising campaigns *Bell Let's Talk*, *One Brave Night for Mental Health*, and *Get Loud.* Employing Alison Kafer's theory of "crip futurity" to stake a claim on the significance of imagined communities and futures on actual

bodies, I examine how neoliberal "wellness" is leveraged in these campaigns to reproduce the settler colonial imaginary. Able-bodiedness is central to the settler neoliberal project, and these charity campaigns and their idealized avatars obscure what Eli Clare describes as "pity curling into violence, charity laced with the impulse to do away with disability" (*Brilliant* 13). Guided by Clare's insightful argument that "cure always operates in a relationship to violence" (28), I turn these mental health campaigns around in my hand, light playing with shadow, revealing the ways in which healing slips into violence, and cure turns to eradication. Help becomes harm. Smiles and silencing, inclusion through incarceration.

Kafer invites us to imagine "feminist futures" (152) and "accessible futures" (169) that refuse to erase disability and Madness, a call echoed by Piepzna-Samarasinha's insistence that "I want us to keep dreaming and experimenting with all these big, ambitious ways we dream care for each other into being" (65). Turning away from the hegemonic power of "wellness," Chapter 2: "Angsty Teens and Bad Players: Cripping Digital Dollhouse Play" identifies the "bad" affect of "angst" as a productive fissure through which to encounter madness, queerness, age, and digital media and put pressure on settler categories of identity. Moving between the keywords "angst" and "nostalgia" in popular discourse, this chapter interrogates the different politics these affects embody and their conflicting and competing modes of feminism. This chapter is theorized through two queer video games: *Life is Strange* (2015) and *Gone Home* (2012). Mapping my playthrough of these games, I identify a range of Mad critical play tactics that use domestic simulations (sims) as automedial platforms to challenge the dominant structures that shape the capitalist settler family home both on and off-screen. My analysis focalizes around three tactics of bad/Mad avatar play: crip negotiation/ counter-reading, asserting player agency through bad movements and bad choices, and affect mapping/generating a counter-archive of angst.

Continuing to explore Mad identity play through video game avatars, Chapter 3:

"Blood Magic and Self-Harm: Confronting Settler Affect in *Dragon Age 2*" delves into the double-edged affect sword of empathy-horror, and the way in which the settler state uses these affects to justify both rejection and control as modes of neutralizing the Mad body. Moving through and with an avatar/character whom I read as a self-harming Indigenous woman, and a white queer player with a history of self-harm (myself), this chapter analyzes the ways in which the assumed natural feeling of "Western [settler] feminist horror" (Hemmings 217) works in tandem with the performance of an oppressive empathy to reject the cutter from a community and even to revoke her personhood. However, the relationship between the player, the avatar, and the digital re-enactment of self-harm offers avenues for recuperative Mad/crip/queer play that celebrates madness and queerness, rejects cure, and embodies a complicated resistance against settler colonial violence. Concluding with a performance of Mad love and desire, this chapter makes a Muñozian turn towards queer ecstasy and utopia. In this chapter I adopt Alexandra Juhasz's methodology of "cut/paste+bleed": I work with digital, metaphorical self-harm "While ever attending to the bleed: where it hurt, where we helped, how we felt and knew and learned" (Juhasz, Getnick, Sakr 225). The "meat of our encounter," the encounter between myself and the video game avatar, emerges "as care, as fragility, proximity, shadow, and touch."

Returning to the Canadian corporate charity campaign *Bell Let's Talk*, Chapter 4: "Crip Encounters in the Corporate Hashtag" turns from the video game avatar to the networked identity performance of the social media avatar. In Chapter 1 I explored the hegemony of the corporate and medical model of disability in online mental health campaigns and their complicity in nation-building and settler colonial agendas. Turning the campaign around to examine it from all angles, in Chapter 4 we can see the powerful resistance emerging from Twitter avatars who use the corporate hashtag to fracture the image of the "good avatar," stake a claim to crip identity, occupy the digital corporate space

in disruptive ways, and build alternative Mad/crip communities. Using digital humanities tools in conjunction with traditional literary and rhetorical analysis, this chapter engages with what Nathan Rambukkana terms "hashtag publics" (29), uncovering the Mad/crip bodies and affects circulating through the corporate hashtag #BellLetsTalk. Despite the hegemonic good citizen foregrounded by Bell, resistant and radical collaborative and collective identity performances emerged through the hashtag. This chapter outlines a crip feminist methodology for working with Big Data that generates a collaborative, multi-authored text and moves between quantitative analysis and close reading.

In the Coda to this project, "Murmurations," I return to the body of the researcher and situate myself in a network of relationships based on mutual care. This poetic denouement enacts a gentle tonal oscillation between the intermingled and entangled affects of depression, joy, anxiety, calm, pain, and hope. The scene is animated by intimacy, slowness, and reflection. The embodied affects performed in this final movement will shape my future research in the field of Mad/crip digital feminisms and identity performance.

Start / Play

Chapter 1 | Fighting for Futurity: the Coloniality of Cure in Online Mental Health Campaigns

Love letter to those of us who get triggered: this chapter references electroshock therapy and self-harm (specifically cutting) but does not explore these topics in-depth. There will be no graphic descriptions of violence in this dissertation.

Keywords: Canada; charity; citizenship; colonialism; corporate activism; electroshock therapy; futurity; mental health; mental illness; nationalism; neoliberalism; policing; power; privilege; psychiatry; racism; self-harm; sexism; social media; wellness

"So keep talking, keep posting, and let's make a difference," announces Canadian

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a video featured on Bell Canada's *Bell Let's Talk*'s 2018

homepage. Screen printed on t-shirts, filtered on Instagram selfies, and now smiling in

mental health campaigns: the face of a handsome white man who was—and perhaps for

many still is—the darling of Canadian liberalism, the anti-Trump. When he isn't doing yoga

or photobombing beach weddings, Trudeau seeks to unify the nation with the rallying cry of

capital, calling for oil pipelines to be forced through unceded Indigenous territory,

reminiscent of the bloody nationalism of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late nineteenth

century that brutalized cultures and bodies and histories.

But just look at that smile—here is a politician who cares.

The rhetoric of Canadian nationalism is prevalent across the three online mental

health campaigns discussed in this chapter: Bell Canada (formerly Bell Communications)'s

Bell Let's Talk,[10] the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)'s *Get Loud*,[11] and the

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[10] *Bell Let's Talk* is an annual mental health awareness campaign run by Bell Communications Company. This campaign is cross-platform: for each tweet that uses the hashtag #BellLetsTalk, for every *Bell Bet's Talk* video watched on Instagram or Facebook, for every text sent on a Bell Canada phone ("turn off imessage!"), Bell will donate five cents to "mental health initiatives." Bell has developed Instagram filters and Facebook profile picture frames for this initiative.
[11] CMHA is a national charity with ties to the Canadian federal and provincial governments. *Get Loud* is an awareness campaign run by CMHA that intends to combat the stigma surrounding mental illness, mainly through the use of the hashtag #GetLoud on Twitter, and by soliciting donations. While the campaign is written in all capitals: GET LOUD, I use lower

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)'s *One Brave Night for Mental Health* (*One Brave Night*).[12] This analysis is based on the 2018 campaigns, although materials from previous campaigns are occasionally brought into the discussion.

Trudeau is a recurring figure in these campaigns: not only was he featured prominently on the 2018 *Bell Let's Talk* homepage, but he also appeared on CAMH's 2018 homepage, while CMHA's 2016 *Get Loud* campaign boasted Trudeau's statement on Mental Health Week ("It's Mental Health Week!"). Employing the head of Canadian government to promote a charity campaign brushes against the currents of power and hegemony prevalent in what Eli Clare calls the "ideology of cure" (*Brilliant* 3). These campaigns use Trudeau as a symbol of aspirational national identity, a position we are told that we, too, can earn, if only we take our medication and accept the painful and demanding love of the settler state. Sara Ahmed reminds us that "What is at stake in citizenship is the differentiation between those who *are* and who are *not yet* citizens (what I could call "would-be citizens"), where the 'not yet' is offered as promise of what is to come...you have to demonstrate that you are a worthy recipient of its promise" (*Promise* 133). We demonstrate our worthiness through obedience and the acceptance of cure. Emphasizing cure and overcoming rather than social justice and interdependency, these campaigns stake a claim not only on the good Mad body deserving of citizenship and rights, but on the future of mentally ill bodies within a settler framework that seeks to "make a difference" by eradicating difference.

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case in this chapter, recognizing that words written in all caps can be difficult for readers with vision impairments.

[12] CAMH is "Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital" ("About CMHA"). CAMH's *One Brave Night* is an awareness campaign that intends to combat the stigma of mental illness with a challenge to stay up all night or part of the night. This event uses the hashtags #OneBraveNight (targeted at Twitter) and #OneBraveSelfie (targeted at Instagram). This campaign also solicits donations.

In 1986, Maurice Charland wrote that the "image of a railroad as the 'national dream' heroically spanning the wilderness to fashion a state reveals in a condensed narrative the manifold relations between technology and a Canada which can imagine" (196). In the bloody origin-story of the nation-state of Canada, technology (the railroad) was used a tool to both unify the state and to conquer the land. The use of communications technology has a similar history, for "communication…occupies a crucial position in the organization and administration of government, and, in turn, of empires" (Innis 3). For example, the telephone system developed in ways that spanned the expanse of the nation and contributed to nation-building in Canada (MacDougall 2014). It also developed along lines that were raced and classed, reminding us that communication technologies have always been invested in ideology and power structures (Martin 1991). Furthermore, nation-building projects like the railroad and the telephone were built through corporate connections intertwined with government interests. These projects were and continue to be essential to the process of colonialism and national unification. National identity and citizenship in Canada, therefore, are irrevocably entangled with the use of corporate communications technology to tame the land—and the Indigenous nations that live on and with the land.

In Robert MacDougall's comparative study of the development of telephone systems in the United States and Canada, he writes that in Canada, the Bell Telephone Company became "to some extent...an agent of national unity" (16). I want to connect this historical thread of nationalism in the development of communication technologies to Bell Canada and other entities' contemporary use of digital and social media to reinforce a particular image of national identity and belonging: one that is predominantly colonial, able-bodied, and cis-hetero-normative. This chapter interrogates the discourse of cure in online mental health campaigns by uncovering its relationship to violence, particularly the violences of colonialism and white supremacy on which the "imagined community" (Anderson) and

nation-state of Canada was founded, and through which it continues to develop. Writing within the contexts of global capitalism and settler United States, Alison Kafer reminds us that "In this framework, a future with disability is a future no one wants" (2). In order to imagine futures for Mad bodies, we first need to understand the dominant settler discourse of wellness that emphasizes "correcting, normalizing, or eliminating the pathological individual" (5).

Citizenship, Borders, and the Nation

While situated primarily within a Canadian context, this research stretches beyond national borders into the United States, and crosses oceans to touch the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel, as histories and futures span the distance between them, and the migration of ideology and bodies and colonial violence blurs the lines between national and international. I want to hold onto the tension and possibility for connection found in the naming of cultural ideology as, at different moments, Canadian, American, North American, Western, the Global North, colonial, settler. In so doing, I put pressure on what "citizenship" means within an overlapping of national, global, and digital contexts.

Citizenship for Mad/crip bodies has always been tenuous, uncertain, unstable. Our rights have been signed away by husbands, doctors, and psychiatrists, our erratic behaviour used to justify police brutality and murder. Cure has been, at different moments and through encounters with different bodies, offered, cajoled, coerced, and forced, with words and arms and straps and needles. The words "citizen" and "rights" ring hollow for an institutionalized body. I am acutely aware of how the threat of institutionalization hovers around my every encounter with the biomedical and wellness industries. The Mad body— particularly when queer, feminized, and/or of colour—is always at risk of losing citizenship

and personhood through dehumanization and psychiatric violence (Clare 2017; Tyler 2013).

The Mad body is one of Imogen Tyler's "national abjects" (9), framed by discourses of

waste and disgust, and deeply embedded in the national fear of the foreigner/ foreign body.

The Mad body is always an outsider or a foreigner, and the image of the foreigner is

wielded as means of community-building by the white supremacist state. While Tyler

discusses the process by which bodies of colour and working class/poor bodies are rejected

from national identity, Jasbir Puar explains that previously abjected and rejected bodies are

beginning to be accepted into the national imaginary in order to strengthen the white

supremacist state. Just as "some homosexual subjects are complicit with heterosexual

nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to

them" (*Terrorist* 4), some mentally ill bodies are tentatively accepted into national identity in

order to bolster the ideology of cure and support the colonialism of Western psychiatry.

Indeed, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder extend Puar's argument into the realm of

disability, acknowledging the ways in which exceptional disabled subjects are employed by

the state in order to marginalize the unexceptional disabled body: "in bestowing these forms

of grudging recognition, neoliberal inclusionism tends to reify the value of normative modes

of being developed with respect to ablebodiedness, rationality, and heteronormativity" (2).

We can intertwine these arguments to understand the ways in which

disabled/mentally ill exceptionalism becomes a form of imperial and colonial propaganda.

The creation of a Mad citizen is used to create the "human waste" (Tyler 192) of Mad bodies

of colour, and to enforce the hierarchizing of good and bad, the becoming-better or

becoming-worse sick bodies. The removal of citizenship and personhood from specific

bodies always belies a (conditional) acceptance of other bodies. Seyla Benhabib writes that

"Political boundaries define some as members, others as aliens" (1). The promise of

inclusion is wielded in tandem with the violence of exclusion. To establish group

membership is to draw a circle around an imaginary "us" in relationship to an imaginary "them." Able-bodied exceptionalism invites the Mad/crip body into the national imaginary in order to justify the rejection of other bodies, to create the "aliens" of asylum seekers, migrants, and citizens of colour. Consider, for example, how difficult it is for migrants with disabilities to become citizens in Canada. Meanwhile, poor, of colour, queer, and trans Mad/crip Canadian citizens are at higher risk of violence and institutionalization than their white middle-class counterparts. *Get Loud*, *Bell Let's Talk*, and *One Brave Night* stake a claim on the Mad citizen and reproduce conceptualizations of the good mentally ill body and patient. In so doing, they include select bodies at the expense of—sometimes, with the direct goal of—excluding others. This chapter explores which bodies are enfolded into the national imaginary, and which bodies are relegated to the dangerous position of "scapegoat" (Tyler) or "terrorist" (Puar, *Terrorist*) in the pursuit of "the project of whiteness" (31) and the "colonial project of Canada" (McGregor, Rak, and Wunker 19).

By accepting select bodies into a unified and unifying national identity, the nation-state and settler culture more broadly assume power over those bodies who are now part of the totalizing "us." Snyder and Mitchell write that "inclusionism has come to mean an embrace of diversity-based practices by which we include those who look, act, function, and feel different" (4); however, ultimately "*Inclusionism requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not demand an excessive degree of change from relatively inflexible institutions, environments, and norms of belonging.* In particular, the degree to which disability does not significantly challenge the aesthetic ideals of a national imaginary dependent upon fantasies of bodily wholeness and, if not perfection, at least a narrow range of normalcy" (14). Disability inclusionism in Canada is deeply embedded in neoliberal policies and practices: we are accepted in order to be cured; we are cured in order to become more productive workers; we are always in the process of being cured because

there are always more cures to buy, more ways to improve our bodies, minds, and, of course, our productivity; we are only accepted if our deviations from the presumed able-bodied norm are slight, correctable, and profitable. Our inclusion is dependent on our dual position as both labourer and consumer, thus producing the "waste" of poor bodies of colour who do not have the financial capital to be ideal consumers and whose uncured bodies render them unproductive workers (even as exploitative working conditions and work with toxic materials render bodies of colour—in the Global South and in Silicon Valley—more likely to become disabled [Miller 2017; Noble 2018; Pellow and Park 2002]). Since disability is now a profitable arena for big business, and "supercrip" stories of "disabled people 'overcoming' our disabilities" (Clare, *Exile* 2) circulate through our society, we need to pay attention to the sleight of hand through which charity campaigns make disability—and disabled futures—disappear.

Moving from the messiness of national belonging that is contingent to some degree on a connection to the colonial body of land that is occupied by what we call Canada to the more permeable and less visibly demarcated realm of the digital, the question of digital citizenship hangs around the hypervisible charity avatars and the calls to Internet users and social media avatars. Speaking of citizenship in the twenty-first century, Benhabib writes that "New modalities of membership have emerged with the result that the boundaries of the political community, as defined by the nation-state system, are no longer adequate to regulate membership" (1). She goes on to argue that traditional political boundaries are under pressure from, among other agents, "communication, and information technologies" (4). Thus, we see the emergence of what Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert term the "digital citizen" (19), who both is and is not constrained by the body politic of the nation, who exceeds political citizenship and makes visible the permeability of but is not entirely liberated from the borders of nationhood. If "digital citizens come into being through the

meshing of their online and offline lives" (Isin and Ruppert 19), we need to attend to the complicated relationships between state, corporation (Twitter, Facebook, Internet providers, etc.), and international/global communication and community-building that shape contemporary citizenship.

Belonging to digital communities carries histories and preconceptions of the meaning of offline citizenship. In order for citizenship to exist, "there has to be an imaginary of citizenship produced through thought, symbols, images, ideas, and ideals of the democratic citizen" (Isin and Ruppert 26). If we understand the Internet as a series of communities and networks, we can imagine how belonging might depend on shared norms, values, and behaviours, and how citizenship within digital communities might operate in relation to—and often working through the legal restrictions of—national citizenship. While national policies and practices can restrict or limit internet access and therefore play an important role in restricting our belonging to digital communities, state control is imperfect and complicated. Consider, for example, Twitter's long court battles with Turkey as one example of the ongoing struggles between state and corporate control (Bulut 2016). It's also important to acknowledge the "digital divide" (Jenkins 2006; Noble 2018) that falls along lines of power and privilege to restrict access for those who can't afford the newest technology or who are geographically isolated from reliable Internet connections. When access is available, however, digital citizenship offers a mode of belonging that crosses national borders and allows users to form communities outside their immediate geography. The Canadian mental health campaigns that I analyze in this chapter speak specifically to users and avatars within Canada; however, users do not need to be physically located in Canada to access these campaigns, and our use of the Internet more broadly breaks down the imagined borders between Canadian-ness and other forms of identity and belonging. Digital citizenship can thus both reproduce national citizenship while simultaneously putting

pressure on it by offering other ways of belonging within international and deterritorialized communities that exist in cyberspace.

From a Mad/crip perspective, access to digital publics and citizenship is just as complicated. Elizabeth Ellcessor reminds us that computer interfaces and apps are not accessible to many disabled bodyminds. However, participation has fewer barriers for other Mad/crip bodies by creating a different mode of presence when we cannot physically be present. Digital presence offers a partial, conditional answer to Johanna Hedva's articulation of "The *trauma of not being seen*" and the questions "*who is allowed in* to the public sphere? Who is allowed to be visible?" (emphasis in original). Through digital media some—but never all—of us are able to make ourselves visible, to engage in a public or publics, and these publics rarely map onto the same geographical space that our bodies inhabit. We move within communities that are always at risk of being enfolded under stricter state or corporate control—or overtaken by the dominant white male publics that often get reproduced in digital spaces (Graham 2015; Noble 2018; Taylor 2014). We work with and through communication technologies and networks that have always been classed, gendered, and racialized, and used to mark out citizenship and the borders of nation (Martin 1991; MacDougall 2013).

In *Bell Let's Talk, Get Loud*, and *One Brave Night*, national identity and offline/online citizenship can be read as both aspirational and threatening, offering rewards or punishments for Mad bodies who do or do not adhere to the ideology of cure. And behind Justin's white smile, the genocidal project of settler colonialism is carried out; we kill land, language, and lives; encourage the harmed to speak their pain so that we might listen, and then celebrate ourselves for the goodness of saving small pieces of dirt. Discourses of digital freedom unfold alongside hegemonic communication systems that reinforce national boundaries and ideologies. Cured Canadians smile from my screen in the service of

celebrating the erasure of difference. The British Empire was built with guns and railroads and words like "civilization" and "savage." Canada is upheld through RCMP raids and psychiatric facilities and the marketing of harm as cure.

Figure 1: *Bell Let's Talk* "Key moments and conversations" features a tweet by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, to the backdrop of two Canadian flags. Video still is captioned "So keep talking, keep posting, and let's make a difference."
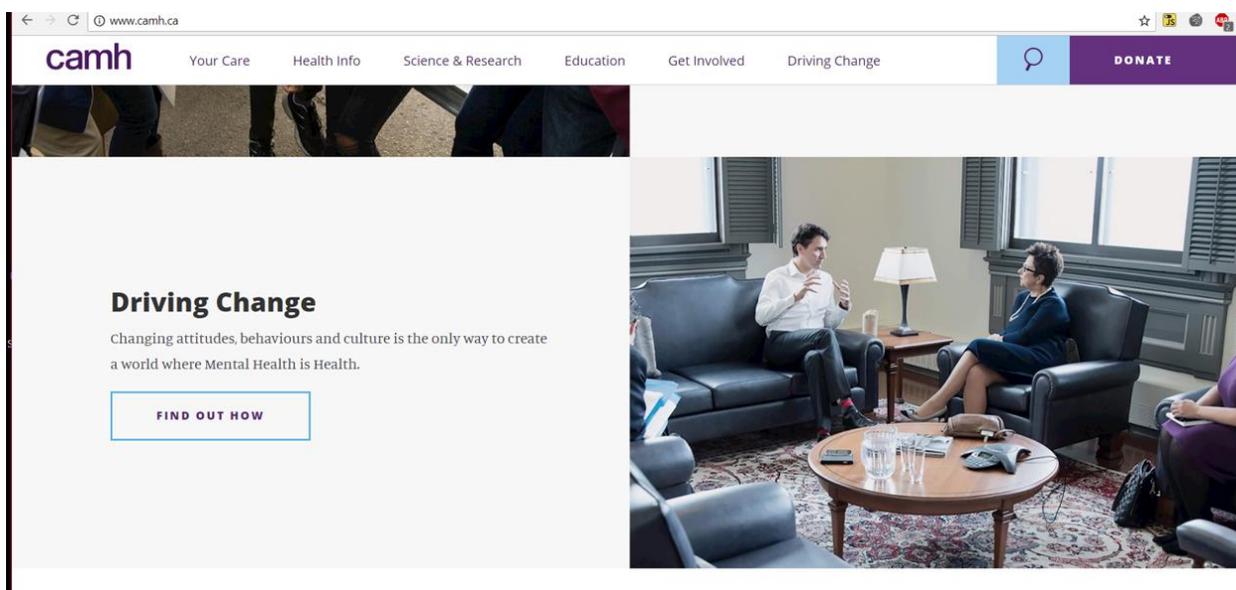
Figure 2: CAMH 2018 homepage features Justin Trudeau in dialogue with other people next to a headline entitled "Driving Change."

Naming "Defect": The Coloniality of Cure

Slavery and colonialism in North America were historically justified through discourses of disability; through the narrative of "defect" (Clare, *Brilliant* 23) and the naming of racial difference as "subhuman" (Wynter 264) and "irrational/subrational" (266). In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter,* Daniel Heath Justice describes the toxic settler narratives used to justify colonialism and racism, such as Indigenous peoples' presumed "lack of mental fitness" (3). These claims of mental difference developed alongside parallel claims of physical difference as signifiers of mental delinquency with scientific racism and racial classification systems (Clare 2017; Noble 2018). Our history of disability is a history of racialized and gendered violence that disqualified bodies from knowledge, agency, and citizenship. These trends continue today, rejecting both unruly and inconvenient disabled bodies *and* unruly and inconvenient non-disabled feminized, queer, and of colour bodies from the body politic of the nation.

Contemporary psychiatry continues to be enmeshed in the ongoing processes of colonialism and Western imperialism. Dian Million explores the process through which "the colonized subject became the trauma victim" (6) and explains that "liberal western politics and capitalist economies moved from a disciplinary colonialism to a normative welfare-state 'caring capitalism'" (8). Indigenous bodies are first harmed by the state and then "rescued" by the state and subjected to the violence of cure, even as "Indigenous forms of mental illness and healing are being bulldozed by disease categories and treatments made in the USA" (Watters 3). Siobhan Senier and Clare Barker argue that Indigenous illnesses that exist outside the colonial psychiatric industry are termed "superstitions" (124), and discuss the violence of imposing white models of wellness and health on indigenous communities:

> the criminalization of traditional indigenous healing methods…Like the suppression
> of indigenous subsistence needs, the suppression of cultural practices like traditional

medicine, ceremony, and even language has been shown to have devastating

effects on indigenous health and indigenous bodies. (129)[13]

Furthermore, Ethan Watters shows how the West has been exporting mental illness—and, alongside it, Western medicine and psychiatry—around the world. Watters writes that we are witnessing the "Americanizing" (1) of the global psyche, which I argue is part of the larger project of white imperialism and white supremacy. China Mills grapples with this process in *Decolonizing Global Mental Health*, mapping the movement of psychiatry from the global North to the global South through NGOs, tracking the "globalization of psychiatry and how psychiatric ways of understanding distress, health, illness, and ultimately what it means to be a person, 'travel' across the globe" (2). Alongside exporting mental illness, we export Western mental health care professionals and advisors to teach, medicate, control, and shape other peoples and cultures.

The violence of cure that Clare describes requires the initial violence of naming defect, of situating a disorder or problem within a specific body—of identifying a body as wrong (*Brilliant*). While the biomedical industry treats mental illnesses as analogous to physical illnesses, they are never neutral, universal, or separate from culture, time, and place. Indeed, in his global study of mental illness, Watters concludes that "It turns out that how a people in a culture think about mental illnesses—how they categorize and prioritize the symptoms, attempt to heal them, and set expectations for their course and outcome— influences the diseases themselves" (2). Watters points to the feedback loop between culture and symptom and explains how cultures curate the ways bad feelings and emotional/mental distress can be expressed and understood. Similarly, in her historical

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[13] In their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, "Disability and Indigenous Studies," Barker and Senier draw together the colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples in North America, New Zealand, and Australia.

study of fasting girls, Joan Jacobs Brumberg insists that "Expressions of physical anguish and mental stress are selected quite unconsciously from a repertoire of symptoms that we learn simply by being part of a culture. Put another way, even when an illness is organic, being sick is a social act" (6).

Unlike depression, "illnesses found only in other cultures are often treated like carnival sideshows. Koro and amok and the like can be found far back in the American diagnostic manual...under the heading "Culture-Bound Syndromes". They might as well be labeled "Psychiatric Exotica: Two Bits a Gander" (Watters 5). Whereas koro and amok are explicitly "cultural" syndromes, depression and anxiety disorders appear in the *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness* (*DSM-5*) as objective and universal experiences. The use of the term "culture" here is used to differentiate a racial other from the default white body. Ultimately, white settler mental illness is being used to shape the affective expressions of cultures around the world. The process of diagnosis, far from being a neutral and disinterested act, in fact helps to create the embodied experience of a mental illness. And once named and categorized and known, then it can be cured.

The naming of mental illness, madness, neurodiversity, and disability is thus a significant part of the creation of mental illness and central to understanding and navigating the psy-medical complex—whether by claiming a medicalized identity in order to access treatment and/or accommodation (often necessary for survival), or a rejection of these terms in the tradition of Mad Pride. Here it is useful to turn to the sacred text of Western/colonial psychiatry, currently in its fifth iteration: the *DSM-5*. Part of the mythos of the *DSM* is the obscurity of its origin; the text is composed by the "American Psychiatric Association" rather than named individuals, and academic citation styles situate the *DSM* under the title rather than the authors. The text comes to function as its own author, backed by the authority of the APA and the reverence that accompanies the scientific/medical field.

I focus my discussion on the definition of depression found in the *DSM-5* and repeated by *Bell Let's Talk*, *Get Loud*, and *One Brave Night*.

The *DSM-5* lists eight different kinds of depressive disorders based on categories varying from an assumed single cause (substance use, "another medical condition," family member death), the length of depression (persistent/chronic vs episodic), and even the age of the person feeling bad; for example, "disruptive mood dysregulation disorder" has been "added to the depressive disorders for children up to 12 years of age" (155). When you look at the anxiety disorders and personality disorders, the lists of symptoms start to blur together. They all seem suspiciously similar. The length to which specific experiences of feeling bad are being qualified and quantified by the psychiatry industry into very specific categories is almost comical. There is a strange elasticity to these diagnoses: for Major Depressive Disorder, the patient must report "Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day," yet "In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood" (160). Within the symptomatology of this excruciatingly specific culturally constructed illness, the subjective experience of feeling shifts from "depressed" to "irritable" based on the age of the patient. It's difficult to imagine anyone not being enfolded into these categories of disorders, illnesses, and defects. I think Mills says it best when she writes: "to those not (yet) psychiatrized — beware" ("Dedication"). The proliferation of diagnoses and symptoms in the *DSM-5* surely touches on experiences and feelings we all have or will encounter.

The *DSM-5* is a living document, a series of discussions and questions and changes made by a collective of (privileged) psychiatrists, who inherently view neurodiversity as an illness or disorder, a conversation that becomes encoded in the printed text. Yet the text itself does not admit fault, does not acknowledge the boundaries of its own generation within a specific time and place. Nor does the *DSM-5* acknowledge the deeply ideological framework of its production and widespread application, which does not stay within the

psychiatric field but permeates our entire society, from the proliferation of pop psychology and self-care manuals (i.e. *The Happiness Project, How We Choose To Be Happy, The Happiness Equation, Hardwiring Happiness*) to Mental Health First Aid courses and a booming wellness industry (white yoga under a dreamcatcher, anyone?), and, of course, to online mental health campaigns rooted in a narrative of defect and cure.

The Western colonial model of mental illness is reproduced by all three mental health campaigns in their definitions and language use, as well as their uncritically positive representations of the mental health industries. These campaigns collect and simplify the exhaustive and repetitive lists of symptoms found in the *DSM-5* ("Markedly diminished interest in all, or almost all, activities most of the day" [160] "Insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day" (night?) "Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day" [161]), translating the *DSM-5* for a lay readership.

CAMH (*One Brave Night*):

Clinical depression is a complex mood disorder caused by various factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress and brain chemistry. Treatments include psychoeducation, psychotherapy, pharmacotherapy and brain stimulation therapies (electroconvulsive therapy, transcranial magnetic stimulation and magnetic seizure therapy). ("Depression")

CAMH goes on to discuss the difference between seasonal affective disorder (SAD), post-partum depression, psychosis, and dysthymia. Following these categories, CAMH explains the impact of gender and age on depression, and lists common signs, symptoms and risk factors for depression.

CMHA (*Get Loud)*:

Depression is a mental illness that affects a person's mood—the way a person feels. Mood impacts the way people think about themselves, relate to others, and interact

> with the world around them. This is more than a 'bad day' or 'feeling blue.' Without
>
> supports like treatment, depression can last for a long time.
>
> Signs of depression include feeling sad, worthless, hopeless, guilty, or anxious a lot
>
> of the time. Some feel irritable or angry. People lose interest in things they used to
>
> enjoy and may withdraw from others…[.]
>
> ("Depression and Bipolar Disorder")

Bell Let's Talk insists that "our words matter." [14] They do—words carry histories, feelings,

and ideologies. Bell insists that the correct language use for mental illness is to distance a

person from their mental illness—i.e. "person with schizophrenia" or "person with a mental

illness" is preferred over the assumed slurs of "schizo" or "crazy." This, of course, falls in

line with provincial legislation (in my home province, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with*

Disabilities Act, 2005 [AODA]). Similarly, CMHA and CAMH use "mental illness"

interchangeably with "psychiatric disorder," asserting their allegiance to the psychiatric

industry. This is compounded by CMHA's insistence that "Mental illnesses can take many

forms, just as physical illnesses do," and the *Get Loud* 2018 article "How is mental health

like physical health?" making an explicit comparison between physical and mental illness.

The words used in these campaigns frame neurodiversity as a "disorder" or "illness" to be

cured, and carefully separate the mentally ill person from their sick body. While making an

analogy between mental illness and physical illness is an attempt to destigmatize mental

illness (and certainly seems less negative than blaming Mad persons for being lazy and

crazy), this conflation pathologizes emotions and bodies and puts medical/psychiatric

professionals in positions of extreme power over us.

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[14] *Bell Let's Talk* does not explicitly define mental illness; however, the Bell "Toolkit" was provided by CAMH, while CMHA features prominently on Bell's resource list under "Get Help."

Having safely secured emotional/mental difference as an individual defect, we can now turn to cure. Clare reminds us that "*Defect* and *defective* explode with hate, power, and control" (*Brilliant* 25). Importantly, the ideology of cure does not stay within the confines of the biomedical industry but permeates other institutions that assert power over bodies. For example, Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear discuss the ways in which special education programs in the United States are used to remove Black children from the classroom by combining psychiatry with a white supremacist education system (131). Similarly, Louise Tam notes that "By equating mental health records with violence and criminality, border control has prevented people from traveling and immigrating" ("From Risk to Harm"), pointing to the relationship between the policing of mental health and the policing of national borders. Here, we can recall Tyler's discussion of the fear of the foreigner, the production of waste/d bodies, and the violent rejection of bodies from nation and citizenship.

Online mental health campaigns uncritically celebrate the ideology of cure, and I am hyper-aware of the threat of electroconvulsive/electroshock therapy (ECT), institutionalization, and treatment without consent pulsing behind the caring professions on the page. Of the 46 personal stories that feature prominently on the *Bell Let's Talk* homepage, 23 (50%) include a positive experience with the psy-medical complex, citing the value of therapy, medication, hospitalization, psychiatry, psychology, or a combination of these treatments. Meanwhile, CMHA recommends counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (which is designed to help a person manage their feelings), as well as exercise, self-care, and medication ("Depression and Bipolar Disorder"). Under "other options" CMHA includes ECT, which was also cited by CAMH as a possible treatment. Medical research has shown that ECT causes severe memory loss ("Electroconvulsive Therapy," Martin, Gálvez and Loo 2015; Sackeim 2014), and many survivors refer to electroshock as "torture" (Weitz 2013). CAMH's *One Brave Night* invites us to "defeat

mental illness" and emphasizes medical research and access to psy-medical treatment ("What is CAMH One Brave Night?"). In these lists of treatment options, there is little to no acknowledgement of the relationship between culture, society, and depression. Depression is positioned primarily as a biochemical and genetic illness that is situated within an individual body, and it is the individual's responsibility to learn better coping mechanisms or seek treatment in order to integrate more fully and more normatively into able-bodied society.

One of the *Bell Let's Talk* spokespeople is identified as Indigenous while another is Inuit. Their presence is a site of tension in the Bell text. These inclusions situate Indigeneity firmly within the "us" of Canada, and perhaps are used to distract viewers from the ongoing violent processes of colonialism that harm Indigenous communities. At the very least, the diversity of representation in this campaign is a deliberate nod to the multicultural identity of Canada, positioning the settler state as inclusive and caring. Yet these speakers are deliberately using the Bell platform to raise awareness of, for example, high suicide rates among Inuit and Indigenous youth. The Indigenous narrative (which is perhaps a form of tokenism, but also an individual's complex negotiation with settler and capitalist wellness narratives in order to get their message heard) notes the "spate of suicides" among Indigenous communities, yet stops short from naming suicidality generated by settler colonialism as a tool of genocide. Suicidality here appears to be a racial trait rather than a product of the settler colonial state. In these testimonials, we see the settler story of "Indigenous deficiency" (Justice 4) clashing with the bold stare of Indigenous survivors. Although explicit critiques of settler colonialism are absent, the bloody history behind these statistic makes for a jarring tension between their (not smiling) faces and Justin's wide grin.

Other references to Indigeneity in this campaign include positioning white settler celebrity Mary Walsh as a benefactress of the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in

Ottawa, and white settler celebrity Clara Hughes's claim to fame as "an Honourary Witness for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is part of a national, comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy." While they may have good intentions, Walsh and Hughes gain social capital as white saviours and benefactors in this campaign, reproducing the problematic history of positioning white women as "allies" to Indigenous women, when in fact we are and have always been complicit in the violences that are committed against Indigenous women.[15]

The recurring image of Trudeau in these campaigns places the body of a powerful white cishet male "ally" as the authoritative voice on mental illness and symbol of national identity. The aggressively sunny and sensitive politician (or corporation) that "cares" is used to reinforce the misconception that stigma and prejudice (much like mental illnesses and bad feelings) are attached to individuals, rather than circulating through institutions and cultures. Sanism and ableism (words that do not appear in these campaigns) are reduced to a quality of bad (or misinformed) individuals, not part of an active strategy for land dispossession. Reducing systemic violence to individual responsibility minimizes the harm that Mad persons experience, and vastly limits our ability to engender social change. Making individuals aware of mental illness will not create support for Mad persons. Reducing stigma will not alter the fabric of a society that is built to exclude and harm Mad bodies, particularly Mad BIPOC. As promoters of assimilation, positioning themselves as a part of the white saviour trope, online mental health campaigns ultimately function as tools of settler colonialism. The good avatar, the sick citizen, the becoming-healthy body, is an ally of the colonial state. The use of BIPOC bodies and faces in these campaigns is a form

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[15] In *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker write that "White women have often been in the vanguard of this kind of moral authority and cultural accommodation in Canada...White women like this get to weigh in on social issues and, in special cases, they get to say who is in or out of the formation" (21)

of erasure used to venerate the "allyship" of white cishet healthy citizens—a position we are told that we too might occupy, if we submit to the ideology of cure.

Very few of us can occupy that position.

Building a Sick Nation, Healthy Future

"It Takes a Nation"—CMHA, *Mental Health for All,* 2017

A woman in a hijab; a young man with an afro; a young woman with an afro; an East Asian woman; a young white man; an Indigenous youth; a white woman; an elderly Black man; an elderly white man; an elderly white woman; LGBQ bodies. Diversity shimmers across webpages in rainbow technicolour and muted grey-tones and glossy high-resolution images. Community, nationality, family: these concepts, wrapped up in corporate and state interests, are shot through with the glittering thread of the promise of inclusion. We are the bodies of mental health and illness in Canada. We are Canada. We are thin; we are becoming healthy; we are binary gendered; we are able-bodied; we are becoming healthy; we are capitalist; we are good workers; we are becoming healthy; we are happy, or else, we are becoming happy; we are, at least, happy to be Canadian.

Nationalist discourse permeates Canadian mental health campaigns, enfolding sick bodies into a national identity that is managed and controlled by the state, its charity affiliates, and its corporate partners. Building on Canada's international reputation as a place of diversity and equality, often constructed in opposition to the United States, the myths of multiculturalism and gender equality are routinely invoked to create the illusion of a united and soon-to-be happy and healthy nation, community, and family.[16] Difference is

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[16] Haudenosaunee writer Alicia Elliot argues in "CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire" that "Canada continues to pride itself on, essentially, not being as bad as America—more polite, more tolerant" (96).

alluded to in order to dispel the idea that we are different. In these campaigns, as in Canadian propaganda more broadly, "Diversity becomes about changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations" (Ahmed, *Living* 105). Constructing a digital sick citizen and an imaginary sick nation always on the cusp of cure is a rhetorical gesture that envisions a future in which not only is mental illness eradicated, but also the ailments of racial and gender differences between citizens. CMHA's 2018 slogan is "100 years of community." We are called to identify or disidentify with this community. Who is welcome, and who is othered? Who is palatable to the colonial nation as a mentally ill body, and who remains invisible and unwanted?

Race intersects with gender and age in these campaigns, creating competing narratives of wellness/illness that reproduce settler ideology. Hysteria in the nineteenth century had a gender and it was cis-female. Indeed, Joan Jacobs Brumberg reminds us that the word "hysteria" came from "the Greek *hysteros*, meaning uterus" (119). Today, depression is a feminized mental illness that the medical industry situates within cis-female organs and bodies through narratives of hormonal fluctuations. We are always premenstrual, menstrual, menopausal, perimenopausal, post-partum, or have "pregnancy brain." In recent years, however, the flood of information about mental health has seen the emergence of campaigns discussing the impact of depression on both women *and* men (Gardner 2007). These discussions continue to be aggressively cisgendered and reinforce the gender binary and its accompanying norms and stereotypes. CMHA (*Get Loud*)'s discussion of depression reproduces this binary:

> Age and sex can also impact how people experience depression. Males often
>
> experience anger or irritability rather than sadness, which can make depression
>
> harder for others to see. Young people and older adults may experience lasting
>
> changes in mood that are mistakenly dismissed as a normal part of growing up or of

aging. ("Depression and Bipolar Disorder")

Paula Gardner discusses the recent history of pharmaceutical companies advertising antidepressants differently to women and men. In pharmaceutical campaigns aimed at female consumers, depression appears to be a cisgendered trait based on female hormone production. For example, simply being female makes one "at risk" of developing mental illness. In campaigns for men, masculine words like "courage" and visibly hypermasculine bodies reaffirm gender roles, even as the experience of depression is here explicitly de-gendered, not a product of hormones but "a chemical imbalance in the brain." Gardner notes that male depression symptoms are distinct from female symptoms. (Our colonial healthcare system generally ignores the existence of trans and non-binary gender expressions.)

We see these representations of gender reproduced across mental health campaigns, often in conjunction with race (i.e. women of colour are the most "at risk," while white men have the strongest mental fortitude, etc.). Of the eight cartoon bodies used in the promotional material for *Get Loud*, four are men and four are women, suggesting that the distribution of mental illness across binary cisgenders is roughly equivalent. Similarly, 22 of Bell's spokespeople use she/her pronouns while 24 use he/him, and of the four models on *One Brave Night*'s homepage, two are men and two are women. In 2018, depression is no longer simply women's problem. However, far from moving toward gender parity and deconstructing the legacy of sexism in the psychiatric industry, this shift reinforces the male body as the nongendered default body (i.e. he has a chemical imbalance in the brain, a nongendered organ, while she experiences the natural mood fluctuations that come with having ovaries, a feminized organ). The gendered division of symptomology also reinforces stereotypes of women's alleged natural tendency toward sadness and men's alleged natural tendency toward anger. (Please note that arguments linking testosterone to anger and

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aggression in men are often used to excuse and justify men's behaviour, whereas arguments linking estrogen to sadness are often used to condemn and criticize women's behaviour—or to prove our unsuitability for positions of power[17]).

"Diversity and inclusion" are key "Values" according to CMHA Ontario (*Get Loud*), which we see visually represented by the good avatar-citizens on-screen. Multiculturalism and racial diversity are foregrounded, from the woman of colour figurehead on the Vision Statement, to the diverse skin colours of the bodies composing the Canadian flag in the "Not Today Myself Campaign," to the 2017 Mental Health for All conference poster (which featured a range of skin colours all muted to the same grey tones). Whether using black and white or rainbow hues, CMHA visually affirms a "colour blind" policy of mental health treatment. This colour-blindness that reproduces white as default may explain why the page discussing "Justice and Mental Health," a shockingly brief 380 word analysis of the relationship between mental health care and the criminal justice system, says nothing about the treatment of Black bodies: their overrepresentation in prisons, racial profiling by the police, their deaths at the hands of police, and the danger of living at the intersection of Black and Mad in a state that polices both Blackness and Madness to death (Cole 2020; Maynard 2017). We cannot admit these realities: they are not nice, and Canadians are nice—admitting the institutional violence at the heart of Canada would disrupt "the image of Canada as a place without racism, where tolerance and diversity mark our national character" (Elliott 22).

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[17] The American 2016 federal election, for example, inspired debate about whether or not Hilary Clinton was a suitable presidential candidate because of menstruation and hormonal fluctuations. In a strange defense of Clinton (that reaffirms the natural instability of premenopausal bodies), a *Time* magazine article published in April 3, 2015, insisted that "Biologically speaking, postmenopausal women are ideal candidates for leadership" (Holland).

Promotional material for *Get Loud* 2018 featured a rotating banner on the CMHA homepage offering cartoonish images of an array of bodies in rainbow colours: an orange outline of a man with a beard and a baseball cap; a green-outlined woman with glasses and freckles; an orange-faced woman wearing a hijab; a blue-faced boy with an afro; and a blue elderly woman. Looking more closely at the distribution of mental health traits in these campaigns reveals a gender bias: *Get Loud* uses masculine figures to represent resilience ("knock me down and I'll get back up again), social change ("I make the world a better place"), and belonging ("I feel like I belong"), while feminine bodies are associated with enjoyment ("I enjoy my life"), worry ("I don't worry too much about what others think of me"), and self-improvement ("I feel like I'm reaching my potential"). The physicality of the "knock me down" cliché creates an image of masculine toughness and suggests a parallel between physical strength and mental fortitude, wherein masculinity is redefined as mental strength. Similarly, the masculinity of social change reproduces the old division of labour between the private/home sphere and public/political sphere. While "belonging" is not explicitly a masculine trait, it's certainly easy to belong in Canada as a white man. In contrast, the more affective traits ("enjoyment" and "worry") are firmly situated in the realm of ever-emotional femininity. It's also noteworthy to compare the types of words aligned with gendered bodies: the verbs "make" and "get back up" are more active than the passivity of "enjoy" and "don't worry."

Brown womanhood and migrant identity are embodied by the avatar on the banner that reads "reaching my potential." Note the implication underlying this claim: she is able to reach her potential *in Canada*. Ahmed writes that "migrant culture appears as culture...through being contrasted with the individualism of the West, where you are free to do and be "whoever" you want to be" (*Promise* 134), adding that "Freedom takes form as proximity to whiteness" (135). Just as the British nationalism Ahmed critiques stakes a claim

on autonomy and liberation (as an extension of the "good" of the colonial project of empire more broadly), Canadian nationalism positions Canada as a place of equality and freedom for oppressed women of colour. In this campaign, we see the hegemonic representations of Canada and Canadian-ness that Alicia Elliott critiques: "*Polite. Liberal. Progressive. Welcoming*" (96). The implication that a migrant woman could only reach her potential in Canada reinforces a settler colonial view of other cultures as "barbaric," and undermines the nation's claim to welcome and celebrate diversity. We are all welcome, and we all welcome to be diverse—as long as we assimilate, as long as we don't critique, complain, question, or refuse. As long as we are grateful that the white settler state has saved us from our barbaric homelands, from our fathers, and most importantly, from ourselves. These representations of gender and race reproduce the narrative of colonial goodness that Gayatri Spivak critiques, particularly the racist myth that "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (92).

CAMH's *One Brave Night* claims that "one in five Canadians experience mental illness a year," a sweeping and generic claim that fails to address the unequal distribution of pain and suffering across lines of race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and disability. Furthermore, the rallying cry of "Canadian" as a community-building tactic likely excludes undocumented migrants even as it includes Indigenous bodies who may or may not want to be identified as Canadian. While the home page for *One Brave Night* featured a group of laughing and smiling young adults who are predominantly white, there is a (token) Black woman in almost every group shot—although again, I want to complicate the tokenism with the ways in which individuals struggle to navigate racist systems and make themselves visible and legible under white supremacy. For example, the Black model's hair is natural rather than straightened to look more Eurocentric, which may point to a moment of resistance behind the camera, and her appearance, like the Indigenous youth

featured on *Bell Let's Talk*, is another possible moment of tension and conflict in the campaign. In any case, my aim is not to criticize the individuals featured in the campaign, but to be critical of the charity, government, and corporate campaigns that use images of diversity to create an idealized image of Canada. We find these same youths in banners and images across the website. In this campaign the figure of the youth is more explicitly leveraged to construct an imagined future for Canada as healthy, happy, cured.

The *Bell Let's Talk* homepage featured an elderly Black man (January 16, 2018), alongside the announcement that "Mental health affects us all." When I refresh the webpage, I encounter the sad gaze of a South Asian woman. Underneath the header is a series of video testimonials by people of a range of age, (binary) gender, and race. One of Bell's spokespeople, a Black woman, has a troubling story. She is a trauma survivor, which lead to addiction, which lead to an arrest (racial profiling and the Drug War waged on Black communities is not a part of this linear, individual-focused narrative). In this story, she is rescued by a caring judge who sends her to an addiction recovery program which helped her get "back on her feet" and taught her to "make the right choices." Through hard work and the help of the criminal justice and medical systems, she is able to take control of her life and integrate into society as an acceptable citizen—an acceptable member of "us", now that she has "overcome" her addiction.

This story is troubling for a number of reasons: its insistence on overcoming trauma, its refusal to acknowledge the violences that WOC face in Canada that can be traumatic, instead focusing on making "good choices" as an individual, and its celebration of a deeply racist, sexist, and violent criminal justice system as successfully "saving" Black women from addiction and "suffering." Here we can recall Clare's critique of the overcoming narrative (many of us cannot overcome our embodiments, nor should we be required to in order to participate in society and have value as people) (*Exile* 1). This story also reproduces the

white saviour trope, in which benevolent police officers, judges, and psychiatrists "save" the poor Black woman. Maria Berghs, speaking of international humanitarianism, calls our attention to charities' practice of exploiting images of vulnerable bodies—often disabled children—in order to generate pity in the Western white donor/saviour (34). The faces and bodies selected to promote *Bell Let's Talk* similarly employ images of POC in a deliberate orientation toward a benevolent White donor.

While many of the Bell stories discuss trauma, loss, and isolation, as well as harassment, discrimination and bullying (particularly people of colour and queer people), these narratives turn away from a cultural critique, instead venerating individuals for their "ironclad discipline," and "inner strength," for "taking responsibility" and "being an active participant in managing [their] mental health." None of the testimonials critique the psychiatric industry, the criminal justice or police system, or discuss systemic discrimination and violence. We can read this depiction of mental illness as deeply neoliberal and individualistic, detached from the culture that produces, exacerbates, and polices Madness, Mad, queer, and feminized bodies, and Black and Indigenous people of colour.

On the surface, Bell's statement "Mental health affects us all" appears to be true and even innocuous—mental health does affect us all. This claim niggles, however, causing jolts of tension in my upper back and neck and shoulders, because mental health does not affect us all equally, or affect us all in the same way. Attending to the differences is much more critical than attending to the sameness. Insisting that we are all the "same" erases important differences and makes difference intolerable. Other activists agree—indeed, critical discussions of *Bell Let's Talk* emerge online every year, Mad counterpublics that push back on the colonial neoliberal wellness model. In 2017, Black Mad activist and artist Gloria Swain launched a counter-campaign and accompanying hashtag, *Let's Actually Talk,* positioning herself as its spokeswoman with the quotation "My name is Gloria and my

depression is political," reframing the corporate model of disembodied apolitical illness within the politicized body of Black womanhood.

The narrative of sameness harms bodies of difference. Mitchell and Snyder write that "The process of the normalization of disability developing as a presumed result of an increasing recognition among normate bodies that 'we are all disabled' potentially precipitates a disastrous fall into meaningless homogenization as an antidote for bodily stigmas" (29). The homogenization of disability or mental illness erases the meaning of these terms, collapsing them into a vague and generic sense of sameness. Lee Maracle of Sto:Loh nation, talking back to Canada's Eurocentric school system, reminds us that "sameness amounts to everyone's obliteration but your own" (81). Membership in mental health campaign communities is based on sameness. Unity by similarity. And here we see the invisible lines being drawn: *Bell Let's Talk*, *Get Loud*, and *One Brave Night* may include a range of bodies in a superficial gesture towards diversity, but the emphasis on sameness requires an erasure of those very differences. Bodies that claim those different identities—particularly identities that put pressure on the neoliberal colonial heteropatriarchy—would not fall into the community of "us" that is being invoked.

The creation of an imagined community of sick citizens functions not only to generate healthy/cured futures, but to bolster the power of the Canadian government through the paternalistic metaphor of family. The caring expression and words of Prime Minister Trudeau conflates national citizenship with family membership. The state and the corporation are framed as benevolent caregivers or parents seeking to help their wounded children. Ahmed: "The nation becomes the good family who can give the children the freedom to be happy in their own way" (*Promise* 148). Trudeau's position as a good son to a bipolar mother, Margaret Trudeau, not only grants authority to his claim of care but reinforces his position as a caregiver of the sick citizen. The sick citizen, importantly, is

never the head of the family or state. This metaphor (head of state as parent, citizens as children) is not new, but is particularly troubling when read in relation to the history of Madness and mental illness in Canada, a history in which institutions under the pretense of care abused vulnerable bodies with "head cages and straitjackets" (Clare, *Brilliant* 47) and a present in which parents, doctors, teachers, and government officials assume they know what's best for the disabled person, and would never deign to consult the individual. The overlapping of community with family symbolically reinforces national cohesion. Positioning the healthy white masculine body as the ideal citizen, father/son, and ruler, reminds us of the goal of this community building: the erasure and eradication of disability and other forms of meaningful difference. Online mental health campaigns take part in the nation-building project of Canada; here, envisioned as a sick Canada waiting—and wanting—to be cured by caring politicians, fathers, psychiatrists, and employers. The construction of a sick nation places mentally ill bodies under the loving control of the state and positions the future of Canada and Canadians as cured. This imagined cure is deeply embedded in neoliberal discourses and practices of colonial wellness, self-care, and resilience.
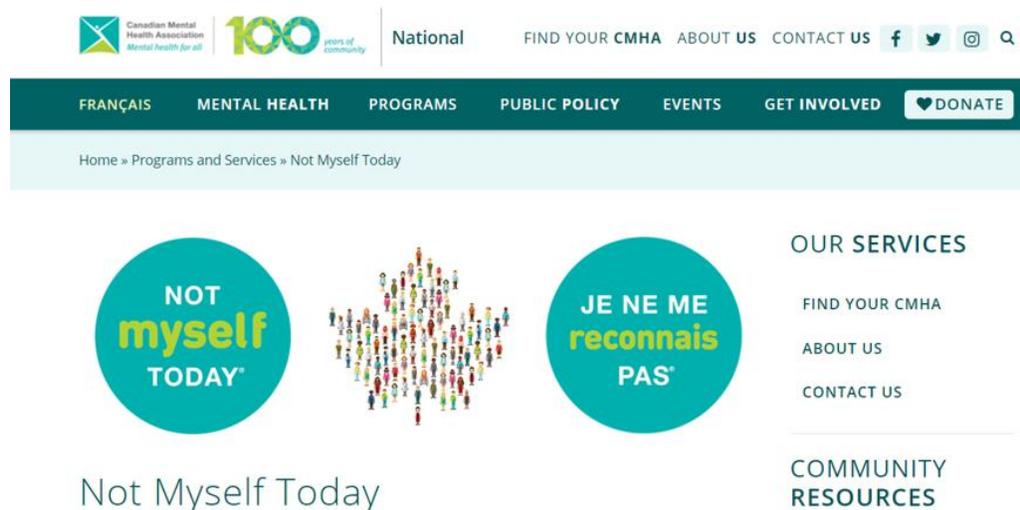
Figure 3: The CMHA "Not Myself Today" program poster featured a Canadian flag, with the maple leap composed of many different bodies of different colours.

Figure 4: The CMHA "Mental Health For All" 2017 conference poster features the slogan "It Takes A Nation" next to the grey-tone faces of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 5: CMHA's *Get Loud* 2018 featured cartoon bodies in bright colours signifying different races, religions, and ethnicities. Here we see an orange woman wearing a hijab and a blue boy with an afro.

Figure 6: CAMH's *One Brave Night* 2018 campaign featured five youths: two white women, two white men, and one Black woman.

Wellness and Other Wounds

In the project of making happy, healthy, and docile subject-citizens, nationalist mental health campaigns emphasize two key neoliberal terms: wellness and resilience. We are only allowed to be sick now if in the future we will be healthy again; sick citizenship is contingent on future health, and the health of the individual body is intrinsically connected to the health of the neoliberal nation-family. Caring communities are structured around this future wellness, and the good citizen/subject/avatar is always already committed to the pursuit of wellness, health, and improvement. While these campaigns focus on the shortcomings of the mentally ill body, often explicitly as an absent or unproductive worker, wellness and resilience are prescribed for *all* neoliberal bodies. Snyder and Mitchell: "Within neoliberalism nearly all bodies are referenced as debilitated and in need of market commodities to shore up their beleaguered cognitive, physical, affective, and aesthetic shortcomings" (12). Thus, we see expanding categories of mental illness and an increasing public attention to mental health that seek to improve all members of the workforce even as they particularly disenfranchise the Mad and mentally ill.

One of the key terms for *Get Loud* is "resilience": it's featured on the mental health checklist offered by the website ("Check in"), while "Knock Me Down and I'll Get Back Up Again" is one of the six promotional posters shared across social media platforms, and one of the "6 signs of good mental health." In a special issue of *Studies in Social Justice*, "The Politics of Resilience and Recovery in Mental Health Care," scholars explore the neoliberal discourse of resilience and wellness and its dominance in contemporary Western mental health care frameworks. Katie Aubrecht explains that "Wellness services implicitly view disability negatively, as something that must be prevented through resilience programming" (69). Resilience, often defined as personal strength, allows an individual to weather trauma and sociocultural violence and inequality without becoming depressed. Personal strength

allegedly allows an individual to overcome their biochemical or genetic-informed mental illness, their neurodiversity, their perhaps celebrated Mad difference. The emphasis on resilience or personal/mental fortitude in these campaigns implies a need to "toughen up" sensitive and emotional bodyminds rather than reshape society around these bodies' needs.

Resilience in these campaigns is often signaled by the term "wellness," and is used in tandem with discourses of neoliberal self-care. In other contexts, self-care has been claimed as a radical political act, particularly by Black feminist and womanist activists (Lorde 1988; Tynes, Schuschke, and Noble 2016). However, when promoted by neoliberal institutions and governments, self-care takes on a more insidious meaning. Like neoliberal resilience, self-care shifts the responsibility (and time, energy, and financial costs) for care from communities and governments and onto individuals. Self-care rhetoric tells us that it is the responsibility of individual bodies to learn to manage or overcome their mental illness, while illness is always positioned as a problem or a burden on society.

Prescriptive self-care often takes the form of "exercise and eating, self-discovery and positive thinking" (Gardner), among other trends that privilege middle-class bodies with spare income and time. Those who fail to get healthy are consequently positioned as lazy or bad, refusing to self-care, or just not *wanting* to get better. While the rhetoric of neoliberal self-care disproportionately impacts poor, of colour, queer, and Mad/crip bodies, Miya Tokumitsu argues that this turn towards prescriptive self-care is applied to all workers as a response to increased workload and decreased stability:

> Over the last few decades, workplaces have become ever more oppressive,
> intensely tracking workers' bodies, demanding longer hours, and weakening
> workers' bargaining rights while also instituting wellness and mentoring programs on
> an ever greater scale.

We might consider mindfulness apps and team-building yoga to be the new opium of the masses: we are taught to trade resistance for resilience, and communal care for self-care. In this framework Madness and disability are erased, something we can think or breathe our way out of, rather than embodiments that demand a reconfiguration of social relationships and physical spaces.

Get Loud is not the only campaign to promote neoliberal resilience: Bell Let's Talk's Facebook page featured three-time Olympian Leah Pells, who is "bravely sharing her story of overcoming mental illness and abuse." I read 13 (28%) of the Bell Let's Talk testimonials as "overcoming" narratives, which I identified as either 1) using a variation of the word "overcome," 2) a story that concludes with the individual finding peace and feeling significantly better than at the beginning of the narrative, or 3) a story that concludes with the individual winning a scholarship, getting a degree, or some other conventional capitalist form of success. Individuals still struggling with relapses or the day-to-day work of managing mental illness were not included in my definition of "overcoming" narratives. Furthermore, 9 testimonials (19%) feature celebrities, and list the awards and successes of the individuals with little or no reference to mental illness (they read like Wikipedia pages). We could read these testimonials as implied overcoming narratives, bringing the total number of overcoming stories from 13 (28%) to 22 (48%).

Overcoming is explicitly situated within a corporate, capitalist context: as Bell Let's Talk is eager to inform us, "70% of disability costs are attributed to mental illness" ("National Standards"). Focusing on employers, and as a corporate entity itself, Bell talks extensively about the financial costs of having mentally ill employees. Resilience and talking—which cost the company nothing—are pitched as the best ways to limit costs and prevent absenteeism. One Brave Night similarly conflates national belonging with corporate belonging. The campaign encourages "Team Captains" (likely of corporate groups) to put

together a team of allies/fundraisers and create community through the acts of asking for donations, donating, posting on social media, liking, retweeting, and posting selfies with the hashtag #OneBraveSelfie. Here, national community overlaps with corporate community, reinforces the way Canadian nationalism is deeply embedded in corporatization and neoliberalism. The campaign's continued emphasis on independence and self-management reinforces neoliberal ideology and puts pressure on sick unproductive bodies to become healthy productive capitalist bodies. Talking to your boss or coworker costs the employer nothing and requires no institutional changes, while the emphasis on "silence" and "stigma" (as a function of not being educated due to Mad silence) allows these campaigns to skirt around a more powerful and dangerous term: discrimination.

The word "brave" in *One Brave Night*, matched by visibly happy—or performing happy—faces suggests that what makes one brave is in the act of smiling: the process of trying to get to happy, which is positioned as always (and perhaps even easily) attainable. Indeed, across campaigns, there is a troubling incongruence between the smiling/laughing models and those of us living with depression, anxiety, bipolar, and madness that the models claim to represent. In many ways, digital mental health campaigns are never about mental illness: the term "mental health" appears far more frequently, "the term of choice for the medical community as well as insurance companies and social support services" (Price 12). Emotionally and psychically distressed bodies are always offscreen, hidden behind the shining faces of the mentally and physically healthy ideal. Even the testimonies of Bell's spokespeople, who self-identify as having personal experience with mental illness, are softened by the smiling faces and narratives of improvement or overcoming.

The phrase "get loud" aligns CMHA with a protest style in which resistance is measured by volume—whether number of bodies or amount of noise. Like Bell, the emphasis is on talking: "It means speaking up for those around you – and for yourself"

("CMHA Mental Health Week 2017 is here!"). In these mental health campaigns, the image of the physically able-bodied activist standing up and speaking up is often equated with sane and mentally healthy bodies speaking up *on behalf of* vulnerable mentally ill bodies. Exceptional able-bodies are celebrated, and disabled bodies are invisibilized, hovering on the edges of the campaign as signifiers of tragedy or pity; the "before" picture along a trajectory to a cured "after." (After we are cured, well, healthy, happy, *good*). Disability and mental illness continue to be disappeared in these campaigns, even as the discourse of sickness/wellness appears to render us hypervisible.

One Brave Night includes a list of "Wellness tips" that reminds readers to "Congratulate and reward yourself for good work," seek help from parents and professionals, and, in a self-serving turn that lacks nuance, "use social media as a tool to spread mental health and anti-stigma awareness." The *Bell Let's Talk* facilitator guide emphasizes the importance of "adapting and coping with difficult situations" and asks participants "How do you find balance in your life?" ("Toolkit"). *Get Loud* includes a page entitled "Strategies for Well-being" that reads like a Buzzfeed list of hot self-care tips including "let grudges go" and "stretch." Each of these campaigns emphasizes the maintenance of mental health and wellness or a return to a state of wellness through reponsibilizing individuals and encouraging Mad bodies to perform the labour of neoliberal self-care.

Figure 7: *Bell Let's Talk'*s 2018 Facebook page featured Olympian Leah Wells who "is also bravely sharing her story of overcoming mental illness and abuse."

Confess, Don't Complain: Avatars Against Social Justice

Talk therapy, journaling, wellness blogging, patient histories, medical records, the first step of a 12 step program, personal essays, accommodation requests, group therapy, Let's Talk, get loud, speak up, share, retweet, post. We are told to use our voices and to tell our stories. We are coaxed and encouraged and badgered and ordered and forced to confess.

Forgive me Father for I have sinned

The intake counsellor is making notes on my history of self-harm

If I told you what I did to myself, would you forgive me?

You were never taught how to grant absolution

 Maybe my body should come with a trigger warning

Should I apologize for it? I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry

Thank you for your help Thank you for loving me

Thank you for not leaving me

I am grateful I am grateful I am grateful

Confess (OED): To declare or disclose (something which one has kept or allowed to remain secret as being prejudicial or inconvenient to oneself); to acknowledge, own, or admit (a crime, charge, fault, weakness, or the like).

The imperative to "talk" or "get loud" in these campaigns belies a bias towards confession and disclosure; two different words and perhaps practices that I am drawing together here in order to trouble to idea of disclosure as neutral. I am not the first to do so— Danielle Peers, for example, draws together medical diagnosis and confession, writing "Forgive me doctor, for I have sinned" (7). Histories of judgment, power, shame, and punishment that haunt the act of disclosure. Confession has long been a part of the judicial system that relies on criminals condemning themselves (Foucault, *Discipline,* 38). Despite coercion, torture, and false confessions, "Through the confession, the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing penal truth" (38). Truth through confession. Knowledge through self-narrative. Elements of this mode of confession persist in contemporary psy-medicine, which has an intimate relationship with the penal system (mental institutions are a different kind of prison, after all). Peers (2012) discusses the practice of medical interrogation in relation to physical disability and illness, yet it remains relevant to Madness and mental illness. One "admits" they have a problem, "admits" the need for help and the

interventions of control that accompany that "help."

We are required to confess in order to access treatment or accommodation. We are required to confess and even then, might have access denied or only partially offered. We are required to confess in order to be punished. We are required to confess as if talking and writing are themselves curative. While I am not claiming here that there is no therapeutic value in speaking or writing about difficult feelings and experiences, I am uncomfortable with the uncritical celebration of confession as healing for all bodies under all circumstances, and I am certainly uncomfortable with the prescriptive rhetoric of cure. For many of us who do or have harnessed tools like talk therapy (which is a very different mode of speaking from giving a patient history or writing a personal essay for an instructor), we understand these tools to be part of a process of living *with* rather than overcoming madness/mental illness. These tools continue to be part of a colonial wellness kit which offers few other options.

On a scale of 1-10 how anxious have you been feeling?

One a scale of 1-10 how depressed have you been feeling?

Have you ever had suicidal thoughts? Have you ever self-harmed?

In order to access care, support, and accommodations, we are encouraged to "come out" as Mad or crip or depressed or mentally ill. The context in which disclosure happens varies across campaign (to a friend, family member, coworker, boss; in all cases, on the Twittersphere), but the ultimate barrier to healing or access, according to these campaigns, is silence. This, of course, is another way of placing the blame and burden on disabled and Mad bodies and taking the onus of responsibility off societal institutions. It's important to recognize that Bell's claim that "Most people with mental health issues can and do recover, just by talking about it" seems to conflate disclosure with talk therapy and, I have to point out, is blatantly false. Talking to your friend or your boss is not equivalent to talking to a

therapist, therapy does not "cure" trauma, and it is incredibly harmful to suggest that a person with a mental illness take on the risk of disclosure and make themselves vulnerable in a context that has never been safe for the mentally ill.

While *Get Loud* and *One Brave Night* promote disclosure in general, *Bell Let's Talk* has a more specific goal: disclosure in the workplace. Workplace Health is one of the four pillars of *Bell Let's Talk,* and the campaign tells us "that mental health is the leading cause of workplace disability in Canada and represents 15% of Canada's burden of disease." Recall that "language matters," according to Bell, and the language use here—burden— makes clear the emphasis on prevention, cure, and neoliberal self-management rather than improving access and accommodation. *Bell Let's Talk* offers employers a PowerPoint presentation on mental illness to educate and facilitate discussion, as well as a handy one-page PDF cheat sheet on the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, presumably to add to any workplace's legally-mandated health and safety board.[18] This infographic cites the financial downsides of not addressing mental health in the workplace, from absenteeism to disability claims, complaints (human rights complaints, perhaps?) to lost productivity. According to this sheet, and to Bell, disability and mental illness have no place in a working environment and will only lead to financial loss for employers. Mental health is represented as a resource to be protected, part of the "resources" of "human resources," while illness, and the ill body, are always liabilities. Accommodation, access, and workplace legislation related to disability are absent from this document. If we are encouraged to disclose in the workplace in order to decrease absenteeism and increase productivity, what exactly is the employer prepared to offer struggling employees? And how will this surveillance of mental health/illness (with the

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[18] The PDF is borrowed from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, a non-profit organization with government funding, not a government body.

employer's bottom line always at the forefront of the conversation) affect workers living with mental illness?

Have you ever taken medication? Are you currently on medication? Why or why not?

Have you experienced trauma? What trauma did you experience?

How are you dealing with it?

#Let'sTalk a little more about disclosure in the workplace. I recently attended a meeting for graduate students with disabilities and heard many stories about students being instructed by their advisors to keep quiet about their disabilities because of discrimination in the department or the field more broadly. I later attended a meeting for University employees with disabilities and heard similar stories: that accommodation is difficult to access, that discrimination is rampant from the hiring process through to promotion and retention, and that pressing human rights charges against employers that are legally required to provide accommodation under the *AODA* is a long, exhausting, process and can lead to the employee being blacklisted by other employers (anonymity is never extended to the oppressed. Extreme vulnerability is the price we are forced to pay for making oppression visible).

Disclosure often does not lead to access (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, Jones 2017; Salzer, O'Shea, Kerschbaum 2017). Instead, employees and students are instructed to request accommodation, jumping through paperwork and appointment hoops, often paying to be assessed by a rotating wheel of medical practitioners. If your health card is out of province, or you are an international student or employee, the challenges only multiply. And often the only accommodation that the school will provide—always, as an afterthought, and always, too late—is a paint-by-numbers one-size-fits-all accommodation that is implemented without the input of the disabled employee, only their doctor. As many academics have noted, disclosure often leads to implicit or explicit discrimination, as

disabled professors are overlooked for promotions and rarely gain tenure (Price 2011; Price et al 2017).

Does your family have a history of mental illness?

What's wrong? What's wrong with you?

Are you OK? (Tell me you're OK).

In non-academic settings, I know people who have been fired for asking for accommodations. Perhaps most frustrating was an individual fired from their part-time job because the business owner didn't want to schedule their shifts around the employee's eating disorder clinic outpatient meetings. The employee claimed this was an unreasonable burden for an independent business to bear. In my role as an administrative assistant for the Downtown Collingwood BIA during the time the *AODA* was being implemented, I was involved in advertising and organizing a workshop to educate small business owners about the new legislation and legal accessibility requirements. Of the many, many storeowners in the downtown, only a couple showed up for the meeting. I expect the rest will claim ignorance or again, "unreasonable burden," when they are criticized for their inaccessibility. And what part-time minimum wage worker is going to press human rights charges, particularly in a small town where reputation is everything and everyone knows everyone? (Academia too, feels like a small town sometimes.)

Bell's claim that disclosure at work leads to access is contested by the personal testimony of Bell employees. Employees or former employees describe the high-stress job environment, overwork, and the pressure to meet targets; employees describe panic attacks, stress leaves, lack of benefits, and, in one case, job termination after requesting a leave of absence for mental illness (Ho 2016; Johnson 2017 "Bell customers", 2017 "Bell 'Let's Talk'"; McLean 2017). It appears that in the Bell workplace—much like in the academic or small business workplaces I am more familiar with—disclosure can lead to

harm.

The encouragement for Mad bodies to disclose/confess in these campaigns, and the framing of these acts as curative, are irrevocably married to a deliberately cultivated silence about colonial/government/corporate complicity in the generation and exacerbation of mental illness. Recall the celebration of the criminal justice and psychiatric systems as caring institutions in these campaigns; the representation of Indigeneity and youth as "at risk" with no whisper of colonial violence. The smiling avatars who never complain, who take their medication, who want to fit in to settler culture rather than break and re-make it. By bringing crip bodies into a nationalist/neoliberal community these campaigns silence dissent, discourage critical thought or discussion, and wield the threat of exclusion as a way of keeping unruly bodies in line.

Conclusion: Fighting for Futurity

"I imagine futures otherwise, arguing for a cripped politics of access and engagement based on the work of disability activists and theorists"—Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* pg. 3

The promise of cure; the promise of inclusion; the promise of belonging. These promises are compelling, magical, devastating. Clare, using the metaphor of a mountain to symbolize the limits our bodies have, as well as inaccessibility and unjust and violent structures and system, asks: "How many of us have struggled up the mountain, measured ourselves against it, failed up there, lived in its shadow?" (*Exile* 1). These promises wind together to create a thick rope dragging us into a bleak future, strengthened by the intertwining threads of psychiatry, nationalism, neoliberalism, and colonialism. They tie us down, strangle us, constrain our bodies and our imagination and turn us away from the powerful possibility that resides in each of our bodies to make something new, to create, and to change a world.

We are bought out with promises of fitting in; promises of an easier future; or perhaps of having a future at all. There is nothing so seductive as being told you might have a future.

The magical utopian/dystopian future of cure always hangs just of out of reach.

While "overcoming has a powerful grip" (Clare, *Exile* 9), we could turn away from the promise, from the mountain; we could say "'You made the right choice when you turned around'" (10). We could walk away from the mountain and build something else instead. There are other ways to belong. There are crip communities and spaces and families and futures if we dare to imagine difference. There are ways of healing that exist outside Western psychiatry, ways of healing and living with our bodies that have yet to be imagined. We could start moving toward those futures and leave the mountain and the straitjackets behind.

This chapter explored the dominant discourses of mental health and neoliberal wellness prevalent in Western culture and their relationship to the historical and current processes of colonialism and racialized and gendered violence in Canada. By staking a claim on the ideal mentally ill citizen, nationalist online mental health campaigns project an idealized future that erases Mad/crip bodies from existence and denies the deep possibilities for creativity, connection, and alternative community found in and between our (neuro)diverse bodies. As Kafer tell us, "How one understands disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future" (2). Turning away from the violent ideology of cure and the coloniality of "good" citizenship, the subsequent chapters turn towards the "bad" avatar, the madly misbehaving physical and digital Mad/crip bodies who dare to imagine a future—even many futures—for us that reside outside the limitations of neoliberal exceptionalism and compulsory able-bodiedness. Following Kafer's call to action to "imagine crip futures" (46), Chapters 2, 3, and 4 play with the possibilities for Mad

resistance, existence, and futurity through a range of radical digital identity performances. In Chapter 4: Crip Encounters in the Corporate Hashtag, I will return to the *Bell Let's Talk* archive in order to dissect the hegemonic narrative of the good Mad citizen and look instead for moments of rupture and dissent in the hashtag #BellLetsTalk.

You with the bags under your eyes and the voices in your head; you, under the covers with pain twitching behind your eyelids; you with the visions that dance across the world and make it bright with wonder, you with feelings sparking through each limb like lightning too much to hold in one body you were always sensitive to the touch of the world on your skin and the closeness of other bodies, feeling each presence as if a hand gripping your wrist, tears blood tired joy 3 a.m. ecstasy pajama pants new side effects no windows in the psych ward crossword puzzle waiting for your appointment recklessness withdrawal and love

You have a future.

Chapter 2 | Angsty Teens and Bad Players: Cripping Digital Dollhouse Play

Keywords: aesthetics; affect; angst; archives; automedia; counter-reading; crip theory; disability; dollhouse play; domestic simulations; fascism; feminism; Mad studies; mapping; mental illness; movement; nostalgia; play; queer theory; racism; settler colonialism; video games

Cripping Dollhouse Play

She had a wall covered with magazine cut-outs of Jesse McCartney. I wore too much eyeliner and knew all the lyrics to Blink-182. We skipped grade 12 English class and stole our parents' whiskey. We cried alone in our parents' minivans. We played *The Sims.*

The Sims (Maxis) is a computer game series launched in 2000, now in its fourth edition. *Sims* players control a virtual person, couple, or family, build and decorate a house, get their Sims a job, help them climb the career ladder, get married, have kids, watch them grow up, and then die. Expansion packs allow players to design clothing, go to the mall, garden, have pets, and, in keeping with contemporary young adult (YA) trends, date vampires.

We played *The Sims* because it was a "girl game," what Mary Flanagan identifies as "'dollhouse' play" (48) and "domestic play" (49): modes of play targeted at girls and young women, digital extensions of traditional feminized play with dolls and dollhouses. While analysing and critiquing the patriarchal and capitalist structures of the game, Flanagan writes that players can assert agency and subvert these ideologies through what she terms "critical play." Her engagement with *The Sims* is a part of her broader argument in which "this culture of play…is one in which participants find a space for permission, experimentation, and subversion" (13). Flanagan is not the only scholar to focus on the sociopolitical potential of digital dollhouse play: Julie Rak identities *The Sims 3* as a form of automedia, a platform through which girls explore and express identity, citing an example of a player who used the game to explore her queerness ("Life Writing Versus Automedia"

166). Dollhouse play, while infused with the oppressive and normative ideologies of cisheteropatriarchal capitalist culture, can offer opportunities for challenging, revising, and rewriting these cultural codes. In this chapter I explore cripped digital dollhouse play—a video game genre known as "domestic simulations" or "domestic sims"—as a mode of both challenging settler capitalist culture and expressing and exploring Mad/crip/queer feminist identities.

Playing *The Sims* as a young adult was automedial for me, not because I could envision becoming a CEO and falling in love with a vampire, but because it let me explore the intense emotions I was experiencing at the time. I could be angry, could get in word- and fistfights with other characters, could be unapologetically romantic and adoring, could have temper tantrums or fits of crying. My play, in short, was angsty. This is not to suggest an unproblematic relationship between domestic sims and madness/mental illness: Ingrid Doell, writing on *The Sims 4*, critiques the harmful stereotypes embodied by "Insane" and "Gloomy" sims (traits you can choose for your avatar). However, the affordances that reproduce these stereotypes also allow for a range of emotional expressions and give players (limited) freedom of choice to explore angry, melancholic, and angsty emotions that are typically policed or pathologized off-screen. This chapter isn't about *The Sims*, but I start here for a few reasons: 1) *The Sims 2* was the first game I was obsessed with, and the only game I played as an angsty teen, 2) *The Sims* popularized the genre of domestic/virtual dollhouse play, and the queer indie video games I discuss in this chapter employ and at times subvert the genre conventions of domestic sims, and 3) my critical Bad avatar play in this chapter crips the genre of domestic sims while simultaneously making visible the violent settler ideology underscoring these games—even the white queer outliers in the genre.

This chapter follows my playthroughs of two queer indie domestic/dollhouse video

games, *Gone Home* (Gaynor 2013)[19] and *Life is Strange (LiS)* (Dontnod Entertainment 2015).[20] I identify a range of Mad critical play tactics that use domestic sims as automedial platforms and challenge the dominant structures that shape the capitalist settler family home both on and off-screen. The tactics I will discuss are as follows:

1. Crip negotiation

   ➢ Counter-reading the haunted house

   ➢ Counter-reading the apocalypse

2. Asserting player agency

   ➢ Wrong movements in virtual spaces

   ➢ Making bad choices

3. Affect mapping: generating an archive of angst

I chose these games as case studies because of the way that sticky word "angst" followed their public reception and persists in reviews and online discussions by fans and critics. I trace a line between teen angst and adult feminized and queer madness and uncover the potential for angsty avatar play as a mode of crip identity performance. In each playthrough, I employ "cripping strategies" (Sandahl 149) to "crip" the game narrative and the genre of domestic sim. Through this process, I embody the "bad avatar," and in so doing, reinforce my allegiance to feminist badness by playing "badly" or "wrongly." In these

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[19] *Gone Home* is a first-person point of view game in which the player/character explores an empty home, discovering a series of audio tape journals that tell the younger sister's coming out story. Unlike in *The Sims*, we do not purchase items to decorate our home, but rather move through the space and explore it, picking up books, mugs, and hand-written notes. However, we are able to move/rearrange and throw objects. I claim *Gone Home* as a queer domestic sim because of its setting—the family home—and because our ability to move objects mimics dollhouse play.
[20] *Life is Strange* is an episodic narrative game. The game moves beyond the space of the home and into the school and the neighbourhood. While there are mini puzzle/problem solving games in the story, and the player makes choices that impact the narrative, the primary mechanics of the game are similar to *Gone Home*: exploring and looking at things/picking up objects.

case studies, I am a bad avatar, bad player, and Mad/crip "feminist killjoy" (to use Ahmed's now-famous term for feminists who disrupt the good feelings or good times that circulate through sexist practices). My intervention in the games is a form of Flanagan's "critical play."

I played both *LiS* and *Gone Home* in the same year that I came out as queer, and my experience playing was personal, affective, messy, and exploratory. Turning toward autobiographical/automedial play, this chapter identifies personal experience and feeling as sites of knowledge and productive starting points for exploring culture, disability, and media. Aubrey Anable writes that "This screen is not actually a firm boundary between two different modes of meaning making; rather, it is a sensual surface that functions within a larger affective system" (69). Taking this claim seriously, I trace the affective experience of play enabled by screen technology. This chapter explores my "affective encounters" (Zarzycka and Olivieri) with avatars and queer narratives enabled by screen technology as a form of interruption to hegemonic settler stories. In these case studies, I make visible the Mad/crip bodies that resist and dissent settler narratives of curative violence, capitalist violence, and heteronormativity. This chapter takes up Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson's insistence on the "embodied nature of play" (9) by taking as its starting point the bodies of the queer disabled writer and the queer Mad avatar. Using an autoethnographic lens to compliment my research and analysis is in allegiance with the goals I set out for this dissertation in my introduction.

Both *LiS* and *Gone Home* emerge from a tradition of domestic sims and from a history of dollhouse play (extending into suburban play, as we collect dollhouses and expand our *Sims* neighbourhood). *Gone Home* revolves around the singular family home: a cisheteronormative, middle-class, white, able-bodied family in a wealthy suburban home. In contrast, *LiS* broadens the focus of the domestic sim from the house to the school to the

entire (small) town. As I've discussed in previous work, the ubiquity of the suburbs in media is used as a shorthand for the white middle-class experience and used as a bland and familiar (to the presumed white middle-class viewers) background to the narrative. However, suburban neighbourhoods in North America are anything but benign and banal— instead they are records of historical and ongoing racial and class violence, from gentrification to gated and policed communities, and legacies of 'white flight' from urban centres (Jerreat-Poole 2020). While *The Sims* encourages players to race up the career ladder and have children in a safe and boring suburb, *LiS* and *Gone Home* can be read as subverting the ideologies underpinning domestic sims and suburban storytelling: belonging, safety, and heteronormativity are queered by the games in order to critique both the game genre and its real-world counterparts (the home and the family).

While these games are not entirely successful in creating alternative queer utopias or futures, the Mad feminist player can read moments of dissent as disruptions to settler suburbia and the powerful policing mechanism of the happy family. Ahmed:

> Happy families: a card game, a title of a children's book, a government discourse, a promise, a hope, a dream, an aspiration. The happy family is a myth of happiness, of where and how happiness takes place, and a powerful legislative device, a way of distributing time, energy, and resources. The family is also an inheritance, to inherit the family can be to acquire an orientation toward some things and not others as the cause of happiness...we are asked to reproduce what we inherit (*Promise,* 45).

In contrast to the policing mechanism of the "happy family," *LiS* and *Gone Home* deliberately offer unhappy families, torn apart by grief, anger, poverty, and homophobia. In so doing, the game narratives and avatars uncover the dormant (at times becoming active) violence of the settler state that polices young women and queer bodies to death, as well as offer opportunities for player to challenge these violent structures.

Turning away from a *bildungsroman* in which emotional kids learn their place in the heteronormative capitalist settler system, my playthrough of both games refuses to cure or quiet the youthful protagonists, instead validating their experiences of anxiety and alienation in an oppressive and violent society. Through this process, my play draws attention to the "ideology of cure" (Clare, *Brilliant* xvi) and the normalizing practices under settler capitalism that police the expression of bad feelings and encourage a linear progress from sick, sad, and damaged to cured, healthy, and happy that is mapped onto a story of growing up and moving from angsty teen to contented adult. But my avatars refuse to be cheered up, refused to be comforted, and ultimately uncover spectrums of gendered violence in the home and the suburb—from bullying and structural homophobia (*Gone Home*) to assault and murder (*LiS*). My negotiation of *LiS* and *Gone Home* crips the home and the suburb, mapping Mad affects over the heternormative blueprint of the happy family and the settler neighbourhood, showcasing both the violent foundation underneath the wallpaper and offering opportunities for resistant Mad identity play.

Angst, Adolescence, and Automedia

The story of a teenage girl navigating her sexual identity, tracking down a serial killer, and texting her parents, all the while with the ability to rewind time, *Life is Strange* (*LiS*) was criticized, celebrated, and uncritically labelled as "angsty" by reviewers and players alike. Review headlines read "Life Is Strange' Blends Teen Angst And Time Travel" (Forbes) and "Life is Strange releases its pent up teenage angst next month" (Destructoid), while numerous YouTube playthroughs boasted titles like "Life is Strange 01: Angst!", "Life is Strange: TEEN ANGST! - PART 1" and "Let's Play LIFE IS STRANGE Part 1 The Halls of Teen Angst," and a Steam discussion board asked: "Is this game going to be this angsty the

whole time?" (Spoiler: yes).[21]

In the trailer, *LiS* referenced an earlier game, *Gone Home*: "When Gone Home meets the Walking Dead... with time travel," insisted IGN, while Games™ wrote that it was "Like a Stephen King novel mixed with...Gone Home." Perhaps *Gone Home* was so frequently cited because both games feature queer feminist characters, or because they are both set in Oregon. Another similarity between these games, however, was their reception by audiences. Reviews from 2013 claimed that *Gone Home* embodied the "lonely voices of teenage angst" (The Guardian), and that "the bedroom of an angsty teenager feels like the bedroom of an angsty teenager" (IGN), while a YouTube playthrough announced "Gone Home: Let's Snoop on Our Angsty Family!" While the games differ in terms of mechanics and narrative, their shared emphases on affect and adolescence brought them together explicitly in the *LiS* trailer, and in discussion board posts, reviews, and recommendations.

Of German etymology, "angst" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as "Anxiety, anguish, neurotic fear; guilt, remorse."[22] Both Sigmund Freud and Søren Kierkegaard used the term in their practices of psychology and psychoanalysis. Google Scholar searches for "angst" turn up many German papers on Kierkegaard—and when I click translate, Google turns "angst" into, most often, "fear," but also "anxiety," while select appearances of "angst" remain unchanged in the English translations. Here, Google unintentionally reproduces the history of fraught translations and meanings in the origins of

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[21] YouTube videos play an important role in video game culture and communities. Sharing playthroughs—often with live commentary—are part of engaging with the broader community, while many players watch these videos rather than playing the game, as another way of participating in the community. Some YouTubers run professional channels of video game playthroughs as a form of paid labour, while others do so casually as a hobby.

[22] In 2019 the OED updated this definition (which was from the second edition in 1989) to "a feeling of anxiety, dread, and unease," more closely aligning "angst" with a contemporary understanding of "anxiety" and moving further away from those other messy affects of "anguish" and "fear."

the term: Fernando Castrillón argues that "angst" was mis-translated, or simplified, in English, losing its original nuance. Castrillón writes that

> The translation of *Angst* into *anxiety* is a sort of stripping or negating of certain aspects of Freud's understanding of *Angst*, thereby making the remainder, understood in all its psychiatric glory, into an isolable problem worthy of being excised or medicated. This psychiatric resonance of the term *anxiety* has permeated Anglo-American psychoanalysis, even in its post-psychiatric articulation (5)

This history of mistranslations, neurosis, pathologization, medicalization, and "serious" bad feelings haunts the contemporary use of the word in popular discourse. "Angst" currently hovers at a site of overlapping and competing cultural narratives of aging, development, and wellness: the emotional experiences and expressions of angsty teens are rendered banal (i.e. this is a "natural" phase brought about by hormonal changes) as well as both threat and crisis (i.e. this is an "illness" or "defect" that needs to be corrected through medication and other psychiatric and medical interventions). These feelings are serious and not serious. They are symptoms of a chronic illness but also "just a phase." They are symptoms of an anxiety disorder. Everyone experiences anxiety. The terms "angst" and the related "anxiety" slip in and out of the psymedical register in contemporary popular discourse, leaving the footprints of diagnosis in their path. In this chapter I identify "angst" and the "angsty teen" as sites in which hegemonic narratives of development and well-being break down, opening up the possibility of resistance to psymedicine and gesturing towards Mad community-building across constructed categories of age or generation. Reclaiming "angst" also means recovering some of the nuance of the original term and folding a range of affects—from anxiety to fear to anguish—back into the conversation.

I argue that "angst" at our present cultural moment is applied liberally to bad feelings that stick to adolescent bodies. Ahmed notes that "Feelings may stick to some objects, and

slide over others" (*The Cultural* 8), considering how "Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (11). Angst has become stuck to adolescence, to the sweaty, hormonal, hairy bodies of young adults, and this stickiness reveals the teenage body to be a site of tension, resistance, and power struggle. "Angst" carries connotations of inauthenticity or exaggeration, of wild hormones, the kind of feelings that are both immature and out of control. Urban Dictionary's top definition perfectly captures the tension between angst as the performance of false affect and the potential for angst to contain shades of depression, grief, anxiety, Madness:

> When teenagers, for any number of reasons combined with their hormones and stress from school, get depressed. Contrary to popular belief [sic], some teenagers actually do have it rough and have to deal with shit most adults don't have to. Other teens don't and just like to pretend they do. Either way, everyone has a right to be pissed off.

Another user writes that teen angst is a:

> Bullshit term coined by those who don't know the effects and feelings brought on by depression. While there ARE those who don't know the full effects and are, in fact, just whiny, the term teen angst is highly offensive to those who are in fact depressed, clinically or not, and the dumbasses who apply the term to general teen culture ought to spend one week in the shoes of those who they criticize.

Contrast these definitions to the OED's insistence on "neurotic fear" turning to "anxiety" as the trace residue of psychoanalytic diagnosis. What we see in contemporary definitions is that "angst" has shifted away from the psy-medical register and into the register of popular discourse. However, rather than liberating affect from the confines of the psy-disciplines, "angst" has turned into a public dismissal—and policing—of affect, a minimization or mockery of what might have once signaled "anguish." Furthermore, these definitions identify

the relationship between bad feelings and youth and recognize the potentially destructive impact of the term. I extend these critiques to argue that "angst" is used to police and discipline young Mad bodies in order to recreate a normate white middle-class.

Teen angst is irrevocably entangled with screen technology and the pathologizing of youth media use. The policing of affect is mirrored by the policing of media use (what if, for example, I decided to take my sim's melancholy off-screen, and imitated my avatar's emotional outbursts?). Morality debates rage over children and teenager's access to digital media, their use of screen technology, and the amount of time they spend watching TV or playing video games. This anxiety over media harming the young and generating Madness and disability (videogames make us crazy, unhealthy, obese,[23] addicted, isolated, depressed, anxious, etc.) mirrors the settler state's anxiety over the reproduction of heteronormative citizens and workers. Games, once the domain of the socially constructed category of "childhood," are now popular among older age groups, dismantling the mark of a linear progression from child/potential citizen to adult/full citizen. Narratives of video game addiction are placed alongside narratives of unemployment and unproductivity—players waste time and resources rather than contribute to the capitalist system. Moral panics over suicide on Netflix are paralleled by panics over parents' inability to limit access to queer and/or sexual content online. Perhaps a critical nation/state anxiety over digital media is that social isolation (again allegedly caused by screens) may erode the institution of marriage and the (re)production of the settler state. Giving youths access to a public platform is dangerous because allows them to organize school walkouts and act as political agents before they can vote. Complicating the conventional, heteronormative, capitalist life progression, youth technology and media use become woven into narratives of pathology

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[23] Note the relationship with fatphobia and disability in these public conversations

and subject to psychiatric-state control.

The dominant cultural narrative of emotion is that adults, unlike angsty teens, have learned to control themselves, to corset their feelings into an appropriate expression of emotion (which reflects and reproduces the settler ableist/sanist heteropatriarchy). Ahmed explains "how happiness becomes a disciplinary technique" (*Promise* 8), noting that "Happiness is often described as a path, as being what you get if you follow the right path" (9), and this path aligns good bodies and good citizens with heteronormative capitalist aspirations. We need to be happy and to be made happy by the right objects and events. Adolescents have not yet learned to be happy and what they should be happy about—we can connect the angsty teen who should be happy but is broody, moody, and sour, with the teen who obsesses over a song, a band, a web comic, Instagram, selfies, or videogames. They are made happy by the wrong things (they love Justin Bieber too much) and dare to be unhappy in the face of a society that pushes the myth of capitalist success. Arguably, angsty teens reject what Lauren Berlant terms "cruel optimism" by their failure to attach themselves to capitalist narratives of success and happiness.

Just as happiness is a disciplinary technique, so, too, is angst. Angst is employed in the dismissal of bad feelings as temporary, inauthentic, and rooted in an individual's failure to conform to the affective expectations of the happy family. Angst is also deliberately associated with hormonal and psychosexual development, part of "the cultural narrative of the teenager as troubled youth" ("Immunizing" Banner 96). Here, bad feelings are not only curbed but curated, encouraged in very specific ways that can be contained and controlled. Bad feelings are allowed to exist in society and in the family home as long as they can be limited to specific bodies, times, and places. Furthermore, the way in which these feelings are expressed must fall within a specific range of acceptable bodily and affective actions. For example, an angsty teen might lock themselves in their room and play death metal

music for hours or write passionately in a diary. An angsty teen may not cry openly in public (particularly if read as a masculine body), self-harm, or stay in bed all day—these actions move toward societally identified madness/mental illness and would result in psymedical intervention to "correct" the behaviour. Of course, recent years have seen increase in the diagnosis and pharmaceutical treatment of mental "disorders" among teens and children, so currently tolerated expressions of feeling bad may well find their way into future iterations of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* Fifth Edition *(DSM-5)* (Lefrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 7). Consider, for example, the inclusion of video game addiction in the *DSM-5* in 2018; will selfie obsession be used to diagnose borderline personality disorder, or will "Bieber fever" become a recognized diagnosis for pathological fangirling? Banner, citing Julie Passanante Elman's *Chronic Youth*, writes that in the 1970s and 1980s the "figure of youth in rebellion morphed into the teenager in need of cure, rehabilitation, and intervention" (97), and notes an increase in the medicalization of youth in the 1990s (98). As I have attempted to illuminate, and the authors of *Mad Matters* demonstrate, this trend has continued into 2020.

LiS* and *Gone Home* are deeply invested in the treatment of young women in settler North American culture, exploring the way their feelings and testimony are disregarded and belittled as fantasies, lies, and inventions. We can draw connecting lines here between the dismissal of youth (as not yet full citizens and not yet adults, and therefore unwelcome to participate in the political project of the nation), the dismissal of woman and femmes, and the dismissal of Mad bodies. The delegitimization of Mad knowledge has been widely discussed and written about (Foucault 2009; Leigghio 2013; Tesla 2000; Warme 2013). This dismissal of Mad testimony, replaced with medical records and pharmaceutical prescriptions, resonates with the dismissal of female testimony, the process wherein a woman is transformed into what Leigh Gilmore terms a "tainted witness." Gilmore argues

that women are associated with lying, and that "women's witness is discredited by a host of means meant to taint it: to contaminate by doubt, stigmatize association with gender and race, and dishonor through shame, such that not only testimony but the person herself is smeared" (2), and this tainting perpetuates rape culture. The female body is always already hysterical, and the Mad woman even more so. Here, we can recognize the infantilization of Mad and female/feminized bodies, and the feedback loops produced through the entanglement of irrationality, hysteria, youth, and womanhood. We see this narrative explored in both *LiS* and *Gone Home*, in which the testimony of young women is dismissed as hysterical, an overreaction, or malicious gossip and rumour-mongering. Both games stake a claim on the value of listening to women and believing women, particularly in contexts of gendered violence and sexual violence.

These games revolve around disobedient girls growing into disobedient women; furious, fierce and passionate queer youth who disrupt the dangerous peace and quiet of their small towns and suburban homes. "Angst" in these case studies is recovered as a queer feminist affect and a Mad/crip affect. Claiming kinship with these baby queers and developing feminist killjoys, my playthroughs situate feminist killjoys as bad avatars, turning towards expressions of Madness. In the games discussed in this chapter, angsty teenage girls explore queer feminist identities, disrupting their happy family and heteronormative communities, typically by exposing the control mechanisms of that community, and making the violence against women and queer bodies legible. Playing as a feminist killjoy I bring my own history of bodily disruption and dissention to the narrative, and together my avatar and I kill joy and embrace our crazy. As a woman with depression and anxiety, my experiences of embodiment and everyday sexism are irrevocably entangled with sanism/ableism, psychiatrization, and competing discourses of madness. In these games I take up the position of a killjoy that is always already a Mad killjoy, an identity that porously moves into

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the on-screen bodies of these teenage girls whom I read as developing killjoys in their own right. I resituate teenage angst in the web of bad feelings, draw connecting lines between angsty queer affects and female/feminized madness, and recover unapologetically angsty videogame play as a mode of resistance to narratives of pathological screen use.

Crip Negotiation

My engagement with *Gone Home* and *LiS* employs what Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick call "negotiation," a process through which as readers (viewers, listeners, etc.), we 'negotiate' with the text, situationally adapting our reading to our specific contexts, needs, or pleasures" (*Disability Media Studies* 12). Following their approach I adopt "a disability perspective" which "is about decentering the physically and cognitively 'normal' character, the 'normal' viewer" ("Studying Disability" 140). I centre Mad bodies, affects, and experiences in my counter-reading of both game texts. My crip negotiation of queer domestic sims opens up opportunities for imagining alternative forms of living and being in the world by centring Mad bodies and experiences.

Counter-reading the Haunted House

We start in a rainstorm at 1:15 am. We are standing outside a house that, according the title, must be our home. But we've never been here before—not the player, or my avatar in game, Kate. The title *Gone Home* takes on multiple meanings: it refers to Kate's prodigal return after a conventional middle-class backpacking trip around Europe. But it also refers to the fact that when she returns, her home is gone—her parents have moved to a new house, which is unfamiliar to her. Drawing homecoming into a dialogue with the loss of a home introduces the player to the affective space we are apart to enter: one of familiarity and alienation.

The domestic sim and the family home have been infiltrated by elements of the horror genre, from squeaking stairs to ominous music to lights that suddenly go out. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a ghost story. I get jumpy. But there are no murderers in the closet (just a girl who came out of one), and no monsters under the bed (just the ephemera of a queer life, hidden in the intimate space of a teenager's bedroom). *Gone Home* is a 2013 reconstruction of a 1995 white middle-class religious family faced with the horror of having produced a lesbian daughter, Sam. We play her older sister, wandering through a strange new 'home' and discovering the clues to our sister's queerness and absence (and eventually discover that she ran away with her girlfriend Lonnie). Red liquid like blood in the bathtub is revealed to be hair dye from when Sam dyed Lonnie's hair. The game narrative uses the horror genre to prime us for trauma, only to respond to that expectation with queer love and hope. Yet I remain unsettled, unsure of my own position in the house and the family, unsure if I should celebrate Sam's self-imposed exile from the suburb. Which leads me to ask: whose horror is it anyway?

I read *Gone Home* as cripping/queering the home through an engagement with horror conventions, while simultaneously cripping the horror genre by subverting harmful stereotypes of Mad/mentally ill bodies. The horror genre is often one of the worst offenders when it comes to the pathologization and abjection of madness and mental illness: psycho murderers are rampant across the genre, while mental institutions or hospitals are popular settings to inspire fear in the viewer/player (Sandahl 2019; Jerreat-Poole 2018). Yet the alienated and angsty queer body in *Gone Home* is neither victim (in a traditional horror sense) nor monster, and the game refuses to pathologize or criminalize the queer Mad character (and player). Furthermore, by subverting player expectations (i.e. what looks like blood is actually hair dye) the game mocks the heteronormative family that considers queerness to be the height of horror.

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Yet the continued presence of fear and anxiety that I experience as I explore the space offers an additional cripping of the domestic sim and the haunted house: the horror of the house is not its haunting by literal ghosts but by the ghost of the absent girl who was neither welcome nor safe in the family home. As a reskinning of the conventional family home and a form of digital dollhouse play, *Gone Home* engages with the domestic space of "economic, political, and ideological norms" (Flanagan 55). The elements of horror that are added to the seemingly benign and banal suburban home ultimately function as a critique of the happy family and the oppressive ideological norms that dictate the organization of bodies in that space. The use of horror tropes and conventions renders the home unsafe and threatening—as it is for many women, crip/Mad and queer bodies. The "disciplinary space of the able-bodied home" (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 91) is here made visible as a source of fear and anxiety, perhaps positioning the player herself as one of those other and othered identities that are corseted into the shape of a normate citizen through coercion and expectation, guilt and pressure, "family values," and violence of all kinds. Through this process of alienation, signaled through an engagement with horror tropes, *Gone Home* makes visible the latent violence in the middle-class McMansion.

As we move through this space, we find evidences of harm and homophobia that create a crime scene of the home that was never safe for Sam and might not be safe for us. For example, we find evidence of parental attempts to keep Sam away from her girlfriend, including a refusal to allow her to attend out of town events (like Riot Grrrl concerts). Furthermore, while the game doesn't take us outside the walls of the home, other institutions of power are brought into the home and shown to be working in collaboration and corroboration with the policing mechanism of the family. Sam has a locker in her bedroom, and the player finds notes written during class, college pamphlets, backpacks, and suspension notes throughout the space. One suspension notice is accompanied by an

angry note written by the father, the domestic disciplinarian and parallel figure to the school's authority figure, the principal. The discovery of school objects throughout the house uncovers the way in which both the family home and the school are tasked with the production of heterosexual sane middle-class subjects. Snyder and Mitchell discuss "the academy's longstanding emphasis on producing members of a professional normative class as one key rite of passage in bourgeois (i.e. middle class managerial) lifestyle" (67), while Margaret Price argues that "both psychiatrists and teachers are interested in governing the mad subject in academic discourse, and the two groups' efforts feed each other" (34). Louis Althusser wrote of our "capitalist education system" (88), and Michel Foucault identified the school as a site of biopower that generates docile bodies (*Discipline & Punish*). The school—whether the university academy or a high school—is implicated in the production of normalization and the erasure of queerness and Madness. By situating the disciplinary framework of the school within the family home, *Gone Home* critiques the family as a social policing device and makes this power visible and tangible. Power manifests in everyday objects, in handwritten notes, in discourse and material things; "Power snaps into place...it's the ordinary affects that give things the quality of a something to inhabit and animate" (Stewart 15). Although less central to the story, the discovery of bibles throughout the house also associates the family home with the institution of the Church and its legacy of homophobia, and brings the triad of Church/school/home into focus as a joint project of normalization, oppression, and harm.

Counter-reading the Apocalypse

  Life is Strange positions itself as a coming-of-age story, signalled early on in the game by its primary setting: the high school. The school is a liminal space in young adult stories; a place to enter as children and leave as adults; the chrysalis for the transformation

into full citizens; the perfect setting for a *bildungsroman*. *LiS* complicates this linear journey from child to adult, yet simultaneously encourages players to follow a conventional, normative narrative of growing up and moving on—and moving on, in my crip/Mad negotiation of the text, is connected to leaving behind teen angst and its networked identities: queerness, madness, and feminism.

     LiS uses the setting of the school to play with the coming-of-age genre and to complicate the divisions of age and life-stage that are tied to myths of security and safety. *LiS* accomplishes this disruption primarily through a time-rewind mechanic, an ability the teen girl protagonist Max gains in the beginning of the game. Ahmed writes that our society/culture orients us along a path, and "a path gives life a certain shape, a direction, a sequence (birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, reproduction, death)" (*Living* 45). I read this moving backward and forward in time as a practice queering timelines and heteronormative pathways. Through this disorientation, the game makes visible the harm underscoring the binaries of child/adult and innocence/experience and leads the player to the understanding that young people experience violence and that young women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence under North American settler capitalist culture.

     Playing as Max, riding shotgun in bff Chloe's truck, we go on an angsty adventure scouring through the public secrets of prominent townsfolk as we search to uncover the mystery of Rachel Amber's disappearance (Chloe's friend? Chloe's ex-girlfriend? Maybe). The popular town narrative is that Rachel Amber ran away to Los Angeles; however, the benevolent mentor-figure, Max's celebrity photography teacher Mr. Jefferson, is revealed to be a predator assaulting and murdering his female students. The real mentee is not aspiring photographer Max, but a young white man raised into privilege, power, and violence. Nathan is teased for being geeky, weird, and slight of frame, but reclaims hegemonic

masculinity in two ways: 1) through the capitalist value of accumulating financial wealth, and 2) by following in his charismatic teacher's footprints and asserting physical power over the bodies of young women. Nathan is, as so many young wealthy white men are, untouchable.

The female characters we play as and with: Max, Chloe, and Rachel Amber, are not.

In the cat-and-mouse game that follows, the only thing keeping fear at bay—and keeping the game from slipping into the horror genre, also littered with the bodies of dead teenage girls—is the intense rage that burns in feminist killjoy Chloe. She is sick of being told what to do by domineering men. She is sick of *not being believed.* She has learned to not trust authority figures: teachers, cops, fathers. And she passes on this hard-earned knowledge to us, the protagonist/player, and our avatar in the game, Max. In my reading of the text, the player/avatar can choose to follow Chloe and learn from her example. To become a feminist killjoy and to reject the violent capitalist heteropatriarchy that structures the seemingly boring and peaceful suburb. While the game offers a microdrama and a singular villain, my reading situates this villainy within the banal evil of a corrupt and violent system.

This peeling back the layers of politeness to the violence at the centre of the school and the town reaches a climax at one of the staples of the teen drama genre: the party. The End of the World Party. Teenagers everywhere are mocked for thinking everything is the end of the world—a pimple or a low grade on a quiz—and in true pop culture teen fashion, the popular kids at Blackwell Academy throw a wild party to celebrate the apocalypse.

Are we supposed to encounter this party with eye rolls, sighs, disappointed head shakes? Are these kids foolish, reckless, insensitive, ignorant? Possibly.

Disrespectful? Almost certainly.

But you know by now that this project is hungry for disrespect.

One of the background framings of the game narrative is global warming and environmental degradation. Climate change has decimated the fishing industry in the fictional (but all too real) town of Arcadia Bay, and poverty is pervasive when you leave the sheltered grounds of the academy. While "kids" are made fun of for thinking that an unrequited crush is the worst possible experience, this high school drama is explicitly set in an uncertain world that echoes our own, where sea levels are rising, the ozone layer is being depleted, and the economy is crashing. Within the wealthy suburban school, the Blackwell students are nowhere near safe. From pregnancy to bullying, from suicide to sexual assault and drug addiction, these teens deal with real-world trauma and harm in a violent settler capitalist heteropatriarchy that has never spared the young. The End of the World party concludes with photography teacher Mr. Jefferson himself taking the stage and the attention of the crowd. At the centre of the revelry is a white male adult who signifies one of the harshest realities of life in our culture: the man you know, the man who masquerades as a mentor or caregiver. The man who abuses. The white man who wields social, political, and physical power over the body of these young women.

Are we still laughing at the teens who think the end of the world is coming?

The celebration of apocalypse has distinctly queer undertones. In *No Future*, Lee Edelman argues that time is focalized around "the pervasive trope of the child as figure for the universal value attributed to political futurity" (19). Here, the party seems to implicate the player in jettisoning futurity as a means of reclaiming queer time. We celebrate the bodies that are framed as having no future (because there is no future imagined possible for them under the heteropatriarchy). Somewhere in the booze-drenched YOLO of an apocalypse party is the rejection of heteronormative futurity that marks not only the conventional generational break (only to be later mended as youths become adults and turn into their

parents) but a queer uncertainty that spirals out (of control) across the time-jumping, time-bending, time-bent narrative. In this scene we are ultimately confronted with both the violent reality of the world, and, in my counter-reading of the apocalypse, a generation of young people who are celebrating *the end of that world*.

Asserting Player Agency

Shifting away from crip negotiation/counter-reading, this section focuses on counter-playing and asserting player agency through in-game actions. Flanagan reminds us that "by pushing the boundaries of the permissible, these acts of critical play are linked to historical models of play in domestic space. Agency is thus a central factor in the construction of doll play, whether virtual or physical" (35). Folding traditional dollplay back into the conversation, we can look to Ahmed's discussion of destructive play in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*:

> Claudia encounters the doll she is supposed to wish for, that she is supposed to love, as an unlovable thing. Her misattunement is expressed in how she handles the thing (she pokes and twists the doll rather than clucks), a handling that would, no doubt, be registered by others as violence and aggression, or as disaffection ("Not in the Mood" 20)

This kind of destructive dollplay signals a rejection of white supremacy and as in as act of willfulness by the black child. Destructive dollplay—a tactic which Flanagan terms "unplaying" (33)—is a practice we can attach to the bad avatar, a "wrong" way of playing, which makes it visible as resistance and a form of agency. Unplaying, playing wrongly, badly, even destructively, is central to how I negotiate the game space and narrative in *Gone Home* and *LiS* as a bad/Mad avatar.

Wrong Movements in Virtual Spaces

Spatiality in domestic sims is a contested site of ideology and struggle. Flanagan discusses the relationship between gender and spatiality in virtual worlds, writing that "While virtual space may inscribe gender norms, performance through navigation may be the way to challenge or subvert these norms" (81). How I the navigate this virtual space can be a form of identity performance, for "as we move about a virtual space, our avatars or our perspectives become sites for performativity when we are using them in spatialized interactive texts" (80-81). We could follow the clues and solve the mystery, follow the narrative along a linear thread to its conclusion. Or we would get stuck somewhere in the middle. We could embody dissent. We could move against the flow of a story that offers queer absence as a happy ending. Ahmed reminds us that "You become an obstacle; an inconvenience. And you would then experience that flow as a tangible thing: what stops you from stopping; what slows you down" (*Living* 45). When you move against the current you recognize the current was there; you recognize the way the game-design orients you to move in certain ways. And then we can disorient ourselves. We can move wrongly. In a game where the story is based on movement in space and interacting with objects, there is room for Mad agency in the ways I choose to move and interact (or not interact) with the objects laid out for me.

Through this process, I engage in a history of subversive play and Mad playfulness. In "Turning the Asylum into a Playground," Robert Deller records a legacy of subversive play in the space of the psychiatric institution, including fireworks, parties, drinking and smoking; he writes that "the institutional gaze has its blind spots" (89). Spaces can be reappropriated, reclaimed, and transformed. A disciplinary setting can become a game of Mad resistance. In *Gone Home*, the disciplinary gaze of the parents is absent. I reclaim the space, and I make it my Mad playground. In *Gone Home*, I move in ways that are Mad by rejecting linearity and logic. There is no pattern or reason in my movements, which are

instinctual, driven by curiosity, fear, and random luck. Above all, these moments are non-linear, repetitive, and shaped by affect rather than a pathway with a set of clearly defined ludic goals.

I turn off the map that appears in my inventory, marking out the sacred spaces of the family (living room, sewing room, etc.). I deliberately disorient myself and reject the family map. I hold onto that initial feeling of alienation and discomfort.

The player is encouraged to turn on the lights in each room to increase visibility and make navigation easier. Instead, I leave the house in darkness.

The ability to crouch to look for clues or read the titles of books on the lowest shelf also allows me to imitate crawling, and for a while I sneak through the space, performing the role of an unwelcome outsider, and moving non-normatively, seeing only the lowest parts of the room.

I leave doors and cupboards open, disrupting the order and organization of the home. I line up all the toothbrushes on one table, I move all the bedroom ephemera to the kitchen and vice versa. I can *change* the space. I can stage scenes of resistance and revel in my Mad creations.

I can race for the attic, speedrunning[24] the game.

I can linger in the rooms and ignore the narratives that develop around me.

In one of the bedrooms, I pick up every object I can and throw them—and in so doing, I perform anger and fear and despair with these actions. This kind of play is willful. If "Mad Pride empowers us to rave in space" (Morris 208), movement in this dark, Mad home can be an act of agency and resistance. In the case of destruction and vandalism, trashing each room, throwing around the sacred symbols of suburban life (mugs, toothbrushes,

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[24] Speedrunning is a video game practice where the goal is to complete the game as quickly as possible

plates), this performance also embodies a literal and symbolic demolition of the family home.

Making Bad Choices

The end of the world—or at least the end of Arcadia Bay—comes in the shape of a tornado that will decimate the small-town setting of *LiS*. And here, at the top of a mountain, at the apex and the climax of the narrative, the player is faced with the ultimate decision of the narrative, a final, critical choice.

The culminating decision in *Life is Strange* is whether to save the town from a tornado, and let Chloe die, or save Chloe, and let the town be destroyed.

No, before this, Chloe's grief. Her world-changing, angry, crazy grief. Let's rewind.

Chloe's father died five years ago. And she never got over it. Instead she climbed inside it and made a life there. Sometimes she drives it around like a bulldozer, breaking things and breaking into things. Being bad.

He died in a car accident.

Poole and Ward remind us that:

good grief is quiet, tame, dry, and controlled...It has a time limit and a limit on the range and intensity of moods, behaviours, and emotions that may be displayed. Good grief is gendered, staged, linear, white, and bound by privilege and reason. Good grief is productive. (95)

In contrast, "Mad grief" is "a resistance practice that allows, speaks, names, affords, welcomes, and stories the subjugated sense of loss that comes to us all" (Poole and Ward 95). Chloe's reaction to grief has largely been anger, and she refuses to get over it and move on. Max (without player input) tells Chloe that "you can't keep blaming me and everybody for everything that's wrong in your life," trying to get Chloe to assume neoliberal

responsibility for her feelings. Chloe resists. Chloe doesn't get over her grief, tame it, control it, or mould it into the shape of a productive citizen. Instead she gets angry, weepy, and messy, years later, and refuses to apologize. Max tries to comfort Chloe, to get her to look on the bright side: "You're still here. With me," and Chloe responds with "I don't want to hear this." She isn't performing the good client to the sympathetic therapist. She is unapologetically furious, hurt, and grieving. Max also finds antidepressants in the bathroom at Chloe's house and speculates that they might be Chloe's, suggesting that Chloe's Mad/bad grief has had a run-in with the psychiatric industry.

One of Max's character arcs in my negotiation of the game as a Mad player is learning from Chloe how to inhabit Mad grief.

In the opening scene, Chloe is shot in the bathroom of the private school academy and dies. This triggers Max's rewind powers, and she turns back time to save Chloe.

Chloe dies again and again and again throughout the game.

Each time, we save her.

Like Chloe, Max doesn't get over her grief or let the dead rest. Quite literally she resurrects her dead friend/lover. She holds onto her grief and turns it into a sci-fi power.

There, that's better.

Now—

The culminating decision in *Life is Strange* is whether to save the town from a tornado, and let Chloe die, or save Chloe, and let the town be destroyed. The final scene on the mountaintop, in my crip negotiation of the text, pits Mad grief against society's normalizing, medicalizing, and sanitizing narrative of moving on. Max could finally let go of Chloe, and return to everyday life as a good student, a good (read: heterosexual) girl, and a good daughter and friend.

There are additional layers to this narrative of moving on and growing up (and

leaving teenage angst behind): it means agreeing to be "straightened out" in the arms of the male love interest, Warren, and letting the dissenting voice of queer Mad feminism die. It means shedding the queerness and Mad grief I identity under the umbrella term of "angst."

Finally, it means complicity. It means accepting the everyday violence of the heterosexist community. It means accepting the assault and death of young women.

Do we sacrifice Chloe for the facade of stability and safety, trading her life for the double garage doors and security cameras?

Do we allow ourselves to become complicit in a town that is willing to let young women suffer harm in order to protect the reputation of men?

Max is a photographer, and different sets of photographs structure the narrative with competing ideologies. The ones the player takes are permanent, and although the player does not have the freedom to photograph any object in the game (the photographs are essentially a fetch quest[25]), they are seemingly random: a squirrel, a bird, a soda can, graffiti. This photo album is contrasted to the set of family album images that *do* change based on the decisions the character makes when jumping around in time. We can save the random pictures as a record of this one week, essentially a memento mori, while the other photos—the family photos, with all their heteronormative capitalist ideological weight—will change to reflect the "real" or dominant timeline. The game seems to suggest the queer Mad love has to exist in some other time/line, some other dimension, some alternative past, present and future—but not this one.

The choice is between the happy family narrative or the sad/Mad queer family.

In this final decision, we are asked to accept nostalgia for the past over an uncertain Mad future. We are forced to retrace our past memories with Chloe in a dream sequence

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[25] "fetch quest" is a video game term for a quest wherein the player is asked to collect or pick up items.

through a series of tableaux—already, our relationship is a thing of the past, something to be mourned and moved on from. Static, frozen, dead.

Chloe encourages us to kill her. She offers to sacrifice herself for the town. In this moment, the game undoes its own important queering work by encouraging us to do the same, by coaxing us to reject the messy, queer, Mad timeline(s) we've created.

I've watched playthroughs on YouTube, so I know how these endings play out: if we kill Chloe we are rewarded with the only explicit queer content in the game, a kiss between Chloe and Max. We are given a nine-and-a-half-minute cut-scene and a new song (which is included on the official soundtrack, making that version of the game, in a sense, canon). In contrast, in my playthrough, there is no explicit queer content. I am offered a three-and-a-half-minute cut scene and reprisal of an earlier song (which does not make it on the official soundtrack, although convention would require it to be included as a reprisal).

Everything about this scene is telling me to let the Mad/bad girl die. To grow up. To move on.

I snapped.

"Snap: when she can't take it anymore; when she just can't take it anymore" (Ahmed *Living* 190).

I let the town burn.

I make the bad choice, the destructive choice, the one framed as selfish, and the one that won't reward me with extra content. Like Chloe and Max, I choose to be a bad girl, bad student, bad citizen, and bad player.

I don't feel bad about it.

Affect Mapping: An Archive of Angst

Maps: a way forward, a direction towards a future, a path to follow, a way to move.

Maps: a goal, a destination, X marks the spot.

Mapping: drawing lines of empire, capitalist lines, splitting up countries and country clubs from the alien immigrant or the abjected poor. Lines that are scars over the land, that hurt and burn, that distort, that make Europe and North America big and Africa small, that put up borders and border controls with dogs and guns and threats of violence.

Mapmaking: who gets to make these maps that we are taught in school and in the home? Who teaches us to follow them, to obey the rules, the law, the lines and signs? When you go off map you break the law, you are bad, you are trespassing, you are dangerous, you are in the unknown; you might even be lost.

What would it mean to get lost in a space so mapped out as the family home?

What would it mean to create counter-maps that cross borders and boundaries?

What would happen if we made queer and Mad maps?

Queerness and Madness hover around the edges of the domestic sims discussed in this chapter. Doreen Massey writes that "there is no getting away from the fact that the social is inexorably also spatial" (80). The space that we take up, the spaces we are relegated to, the spaces between and within bodies: these are politically and affectively charged areas and arenas. As you explore the house in *Gone Home*, a map emerges in your inventory, helpfully marking out the space of the middle-class family: TV room, Sam's bedroom, sewing room, etc. The family map makes the space familiar, comforting, and normalized, and is at times accompanied by ordinary (and disciplinary) family objects: *Kate's* trophies, *Mom's* old work mug, *Dad's* book. These objects take on meaning only within the family and they tie its members to the family map, a map which is also a pathway to the reproduction of the heteronormative middle/upper-class household. Sam's childhood drawings are accepted as part of the dominant family narrative. Sam's angry/angsty feminist zine and her motorcycle sketches with Lonnie are put aside and have no family label or

mark.

Some objects belong, and some are exiled.

Queer desire is not made explicit in *Life is Strange* game until episode three, when Chloe dares Max to kiss her. Even then, the player has the option to reject that narrative, pursue a heteronormative relationship, ignore the implicit signs of Chloe's previous lesbian relationship, and become complicit in the erasure of queerness.

Some desires are visible, and others are hidden.

As we encounter and explore digital space in *Gone Home* and *Life is Strange*, we can map out the conflicting affects and the way that non-normative bodies are relegated to the margins—*and yet they exist*. We can notice these traces, we can curate a digital archive of everyday queer/crip life, we can feel these absences, and we can recover queer and Mad affects and bodies in our identity play/throughs. Through this form of affect counter-mapping, I curate a collection of queer and Mad objects and affects, evidence of our (tenuous, invisible) existence, bringing both games together in my practice of digital archival labour.

My archive of angst, drawing on objects and moments from both texts, is inspired by other feminist archival practices, which are always also creative and self-care practices. These include Cvetkovich's creation of a "depression archive" (161) that draws together zine making, cabaret, and song lyrics, and Ahmed's piecing together a "killjoy survival kit" (*Living* 17) that incorporates "different kinds of feminist materials that have been my companions as a feminist and diversity worker, from feminist philosophy to feminist literature and film" (16). In my Mad feminist archival practices, I've also been influenced by the resurgence of zine-making culture and DIY feminism, and *Dear Freaks*, an event I attended in Ottawa in 2019 where angsty adults (myself included) told stories about our emotional teen years and read from old diaries and journals. At my 30th birthday this past

week, a friend brought an old journal at my request and we shared teen and pre-teen stories of friend break-ups and periods. I've had different journaling practices over the years, from a traditional "Dear Diary" model to list-making, scrapbooking, and making photo-albums. I've always had a soft spot for collage, for cutting and pasting. I squirrel away torn jeans and scraps of fabrics left over from crafting projects. You never know when you might need a single button or a stub of wax. These archival practices have been emotional, personal, queer, disabled, feminist, and at times, collaborative. *Gone Home* and *Life is Strange* have become a part of my Mad feminist killjoy survival kit, and as I play through the angsty queer narratives and spaces, I collect things. I take screen-caps. I make notes. I remember. I offer this archive as evidence of affect mapping, counter-playing, and locating Madness and badness in feminist media.

1. Goodfellow High School Disciplinary Referral

The happy family is interrupted by objects of defiance, evidence of bad feelings and bad girls. Sam's bedroom is explicitly a queer space within the heteropatriarchal home: the suspension notice crumpled in the garbage; the notes illicitly written during class; the copy of *Gentleman's Magazine* and posters advertising punk and indie rock bands; the photograph of Lonnie; Lonnie's metalworking assignment; sketches of motorcycles (the player gets the sense that Lonnie at times adopts a butch identity). There is also sadness/madness here: a memorial magazine issue for Kurt Cobain, who died from suicide; a record of Sam and Lonnie's first kiss that is tinged with sadness and guilt (the tape is called "There was Nothing Wrong"). This room is filled with the ephemera of everyday queer/Mad life. Cvetkovich insists that "Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism— all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive" (*An Archive* 241). These archives of the everyday include "nostalgia,

personal memory, fantasy, and trauma" (243), pointing to that entangling of good and bad feelings in queer histories and experiences.

Crip/queer affect doesn't stay within the confines of the rebellious teen's bedroom: they spill out into the hallway and spread through the home, challenging the domestic shape of things, competing for space and attention with more mundane, normative objects. I discover parts of Sam's audio journal in the basement, a closet, the front hall, the living room (this one was accompanied by a "How To Make Friends" book from Sam's Dad, and the contrast between the heteronormative expectations of the father clash starkly with the willful lesbian daughter). I notice a button for a punk rock band and start collecting them: The Gits in the dining room, the Slits beside the washing machine, Bratmobile under a coffee table in the living room. In several rooms there are Riot Grrrl tapes and cassette players in which to play them. I remap the space queerly to the sounds of feminist rebellion. I find Sam and Lonnie's zine "Grrrl Justice Now: Kicking Against the Patriarchy" and the notes they wrote each other in school. Queerness is hidden in the walls and lying open on the kitchen table. It's a new kind of treasure hunt.

Through this counter-mapping, the entire house becomes an "archive of lesbian feeling" (Cvetkovich). And who am I, the mapmaker, the archivist? Where am I situated in this fraught narrative and space? I return the upstairs hallway, where an angry Sam has posted a defiant note criticizing her parents' refusal to let her travel out of town with Lonnie. Beside it, related only by proximity, is a parent-to-Sam note reminding her to turn the lights off, ending with "you're just as a bad as your sister." In a game that tells narrative through space and ephemera, these proximities matter. I hold on to this label: like Sam, in this moment I am explicitly marked as "bad."

2. RACHEL AMBER ❤️ 4 EVER

The first optional photograph you can take in *LiS* is of graffiti carved into a desk:

"RACHEL AMBER ❤️ 4 EVER". We can assume that Chloe has carved this into the desk during their relationship, although both girls are absent from the school and their relationship is not present in the game. This is a subtle signposting of lesbian desire found in the opening frames of the narrative. Other traces of queerness are found in posters and flyers around the campus, including an HIV and AIDS awareness poster and a "bi-monthly & bi-friendly" party invitation. Furthermore, images of Rachel Amber's face on missing person posters are found throughout the school and the town: she haunts the town with her hypervisible absence, and her absent queerness. I look at each one. While the game is devoid of Mad Pride posters or hospital bed parades, bad feelings also permeate the narrative and the virtual space. Ads for depression helplines and religious/spiritual meetings for dealing with stress adorn the halls of the school and residence buildings. One character, Kate, is explicitly coded as depressed due to bullying and abuse, and attempts suicide in episode two, an act the player can prevent. I am uncomfortable with the way suicide was handled as a minor drama in the narrative and will not be focusing on that character who is neither playable nor plays a major role in the game. Still, the presence of suicide and the ghost or potential ghost of a girl also casts a distinctly feminized madness over the narrative and draws angst into a dialogue with the more pathologized or Mad experience of suicidality. Following these signs of queer love, loss, grief, and depression in my playthrough I generate a map of feminist angst that papers over the disciplinary affect suburb.

3. Ouiji Board

Fumbling in the dark, ignoring the professional photograph of a smiling family that looms over the entranceway like a warning, I stumble my way into ghost hunt: it turns out Sam and Lonnie were looking for traces of a mysterious great-uncle who was shunned and ostracized from the family and the community. While some discussion board theorists insist that Oscar was a pedophile and abused the protagonist's father, I find it much more likely that he was gay, and

treated as a combination of sinner, patient, and potential predator, ways in which gay men have been framed in the past (and sometimes in the present). His taboo queerness and Madness haunt the house, from the traces of his existence to the proof of his exile, and most eerily in a secret room where he has covered the walls with fashion magazines and a homemade cross (possibly to try and pray the gay away?).

Sam and Lonnie's fascination with Oscar can be read as affect archeology, trying to uncover or recover a queer mad ancestry. Neither Sam nor Lonnie are frightened of Oscar. Instead, they try to contact his ghost with a Ouija board and by holding a séance. They write notes as if the house is haunted by him; this haunting should strike a chord in the reader, as we follow the ways in which Madness is both exiled and continues to have a presence in absence in these angsty queer teen narratives. In this case, the haunting of the "psycho" relative is not something Sam is afraid of, but traces of an ancestor she wants and needs. Rejected by her religious parents, she is looking for some other mentor, some other family history, and the alternate parent she finds is the absent Oscar. Similarly, the "psychohouse" that is legendary among local residents is revealed to be a site of forbidden queer desire and secret Madness. Their remapping is a recovery of queer Mad ancestry, and as the player follows this map, we participate in tracing those bloodlines and reaffirming this alternative family history. The heteronormative family photograph on your parent's bedside table—the same photograph that is blown up and framed in the front hall—is replaced with the photograph of Oscar in Sam and Lonnie's secret hideout. The séance itself is a site of Mad play, the Ouija board an homage to the superstitions of children, their imagination, and their willingness to believe in magic—to believe in what is not rational.

4. Bathroom

I read Max as a potentially Mad body. She is an introvert with high anxiety who constantly worries that other people hate her or are talking about her behind her back. Needing

to take a time-out from socializing, Max goes into the bathroom, thinking to herself "Good, nobody can see my meltdown—except me." I had a panic attack in a bathroom in the summer of 2019, right before presenting an excerpt of my dissertation research at an international conference. Later, I was chatting about it to another conference goer who also has anxiety. "That's what bathrooms are for: they're panic rooms!" she said. We'd both had panic attacks in lots of bathrooms over the years. They are pseudo-private spaces, sometimes with the luxury of a lock. Places to hide. Places to fall apart without being turned into a spectacle. When Max hides in the bathroom, I map my own experiences of anxiety onto her movement and claim the space as a Panic Room. But Max's madness doesn't stay inside the bathroom (neither does mine). One of her friends jokingly refers to her as "Mad Max" in reference in the dystopian action movie hero. While this playful pop culture reference is likely intended to tell the player more about Warren (geek culture fanboy) than Max, the referent is a character with severe PTSD—a detail that can help to construct a more meaningful Mad avatar/character/player identity performance. Max constantly worries if she is "going crazy" throughout the game, and I/we wholeheartedly follow Chloe into madness. Together, Max and I make visible our anxiety, our grief/depression, and, as Max notes in her journal, again invoking a discourse of madness, our "crazy rewind power" to turn back time.

5. Swing set

Life is Strange has many places for the player to pause and chill, disrupting the linearity of the narrative and creating a productive tension between the artificial excitement and drama that games produce in order to motivate the player to keep player, and the reality of living as a Mad body who can't always keep up or keep pace. By the school fountain, under a tree, on a swing set in Chloe's backyard, in your dorm room, the player can select "sit" and wait indefinitely while gentle indie music plays and the camera slowly pans to the volumetric lighting and dwells on the quiet, lovely, contained space. These segments don't end until the player

chooses to end them. There is no time limit on your quiet time out.

I found these pauses therapeutic. Although my experience will certainly not mirror the experience of every person playing with anxiety or depression, these quiet spaces felt like an example of what Mia Mingus calls "access intimacy," "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs" ("Access Intimacy"). I have high anxiety, even when—sometimes particularly when—playing games. In *LiS*, I don't have to pull up a menu, exit the game, or make some other external, out-of-game action to take a moment and breathe. The game builds these breaths in. Sometimes, I load a particular episode just to wander the school grounds and sit, listen to the music, and breathe—in and out of game. Just as the discovery of a bi-friendly club changes the sexual dynamics of the all-girls dorm (and the exploitative male gaze of a presumed male player is transformed into a queer feminist gaze of reciprocal pleasure), a political remapping takes place in these moments of stillness. Tobin Siebers writes that "modern architectural theories define the form and function of buildings with explicit reference to the politics of the body" (72). Just as physical spaces and structures articulate a particular kind of bodily subject (usually able-bodied), digital spaces shape a particular kind of avatar subject. While the school is experienced by the character and player as a crowded, noisy space that exacerbates anxiety, these pause moments create spaces for anxious avatars and tired digital bodies that need to rest. I identify these pauses as further evidence of Mad bodies, affects, and experiences, and incorporate them into my digital identity performance. The swing set specifically is a site of rest, grief, and angst, as Max reminisces on her childhood with Chloe and grieves the loss of their closeness alongside the loss of Chloe's father.

6. DANGER

What if chronic anxiety had an aesthetic? What would that artwork look, sound, feel like? Siebers writes that "Aesthetics tracks the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies" (1). While "Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of

the healthy body—and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic" (3), I build on this concept to forward a theory of Mad aesthetics that rejects the reject idea of an ordered/organized and rational mind as a determination of the aesthetic. In my Mad/crip negotiation of the game, I argue that the feelings of anxiety and fear evoked by the dark and unfamiliar home are Mad sensations that persist even when we discover that the lighting flickers due to electrical problems. Our chronic anxiety persists. Sam and Lonnie make their hideouts in these spaces that are most affective and affecting: the basement and the attic, marking these spaces with DANGER signs and red lights. The moodiness of the scenes, generated by a slow, melancholy soundtrack and shadows competing the thin light of naked lightbulbs, is an experience of Mad beauty. These objects and spaces evoke feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and sadness: Mad/bad affects.

The Limits of Crip Play: On Nostalgia & White Supremacy

While "angst" is the affect that I've been exploring for queer Mad feminist potential in my crip negotiation of domestic sims, "nostalgia" is the other dominant affect that circulates through discussions of these cultural artifacts. Nostalgia in these games is an un-crip and un-queer affect, an instructive manual that directs players towards certain values (whiteness, wealth, a nuclear family) and aims to influence how we make choices both inside and outside the game world. Employing nostalgia as a gentle form of colonialism, queer indie domestic sims reproduce the normative values of mainstream domestic sims and other forms of dollhouse play. Recall Flanagan and Doell's critiques of *The Sims* franchise as capitalist, ableist, and heteronormative. Like *The Sims*, both *LiS* and *Gone Home* need to be subject to these rigorous critiques.

Nostalgia is an affect that appears across queer affect theory: Heather Love

identifies nostalgia as a queer affect and a resource for queer politics, while Ann Cvetkovich includes nostalgia in her queer "archive of feeling" (*An Archive).* Nostalgia, however, can also be made to work in the service of the oppressor. If angst is one of the core feelings of these queer games, nostalgia is its counterpart—a nostalgia that is insidious, troubling, and dangerously compelling. Here, Svetlana Boym's work is useful for teasing out the different modes of nostalgia. Boym differentiates between "reflective" and "restorative" nostalgia: "Restorative nostalgia stresses *nóstos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately…Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt." While queer affect theorists like Love and Cvetkovich recuperate reflective nostalgia, in the understanding "that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another," restorative nostalgia "rebuilds one's homeland with paranoid determination." While I am made uneasy by the psychiatric resonances of the term "paranoid" that Boym employs here, I find the distinction between types of nostalgia useful. *Life is Strange* and *Gone Home* offer a restorative nostalgia, one that stakes a claim on the past, and one that reaffirms a violent ideology of exclusion that is presented as an "absolute truth*"* (Boym). Both games invite players to be uncritically homesick for a fantastical white feminist culture, and, in so doing, hail a particular kind of player, positioning the white normate queer body as the "ideal" and intended player.

The trailer for *Life is Strange* quotes a Kotaku review that describes the game as "a nostalgic and intriguing adventure." Who exactly is the intended audience and what are we nostalgic for? The word "nostalgia" stands out to me because the game did evoke a sense of bittersweet longing for me—although not for private schools or drugged-out raves, neither of which resonated with my biopolitically shaped suburban middle-class teenagehood. Playing through the game felt like playing back in time, much in the way that *Gone Home,*

set in 1995, makes me nostalgic for a particular kind of punk zine dyke feminism that, as a kid, I was too young to experience at the time. It's yearning for a past that never quite existed. Still, when I'm lonely and invisibly bi in a group of straight young professionals, I want that mosh pit angry feminist scene. I want it so much it hurts. I remember that the origins of nostalgia come from homesickness and I am homesick for a utopia that never existed. Recall Boym's restorative nostalgia that "ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and specialize time." I am filled with longing for an imagined queer feminist past, for the reconstruction of a homeland. And yet, when I checked the actual setting of *LiS*, it was 2013. What, then, makes this game feel so out of time? And what are the ideological implications of this out-of-time-ness that seem to bring together feeling good with feeling bad?

  LiS is brimming with anachronistic objects and desires, from protagonist Max's proclamation that "I love my analog camera," to porno magazines, to the disco ball at the End of the World party. It's a mash-up of '70s, '80s, and '90s pop culture (as they are imagined and reimagined in the 2010s). One of Chloe's signature words is "hella," which always sounded out of place, and is frequently mocked on discussion boards (Farokhmanesh 2016). Following this unfamiliar and vaguely out-of-date sounding word, I looked into the history of the 1970s California English slang (since *Life is Strange* is set in Oregon). According to Wikipedia, in the late 90s-early 2000s, the word spread through youth culture from California, appearing in pop songs like No Doubt's "Hella Good" (2001) and a 1998 episode of South Park ("Spookyfish"). While the word appears to have faded in popular use, Chloe at times embodies a deliberate performance of a (stereotyped) '90s feminism, and she may be deliberately resurrecting an older piece of slang.

  Elizabeth Freeman argues that sexual dissidents have always been "trafficked in signs of fractured time," and "thus, gay men, lesbians, and other "perverts" have also served

as figures for history, either for civilization's decline or a sublimely futuristic release from nature, or both…Sexual dissidents become figures for an bearers of new corporeal sensations, including those of a certain counterpart between now and then, and the occasional disruptions to the sped-up and hyperregulated time of industry" (7). If chrononormative time is heteronormative, and disrupting time is distinctly queer, Chloe and Max's out-of-timeness aligns them with those "other perverts" whose life narrative is queerly unconventional.

Nostalgia is tricking you, the way it tricked me. I want to read Chloe and Max as time perverts, as queer feminists fucking with timelines and chrononormative time. Maybe fucking each other. These rebel girls who bring a sexual predator to justice and have moments of queer desire that evoke a very embodied feeling of longing in me are also symbols and agents of a deeply violent white feminist past that gets idealized—even fetishized—in and outside the game. And recall that nostalgia was a selling point for the game: the developers are packaging nostalgia for a false utopian feminist past and selling it to us—alongside white supremacy and settler colonialism. Nostalgia, here, ultimately functions not only to sanitize the violence of mainstream white feminist history, but as a means of reproducing and justifying the violence that we continue to inflict on Black and Indigenous women.

Most of the characters in *LiS* are white, with the exception of a few peripheral characters. Game bloggers have critiqued the problem of whiteness in *LiS*: Sheva explains that the game employs racial tokenism, describing these characters as "fun little extras that Max can choose to interact with or not—and that's where they stay." Shante Daniels writes that "It's a fairly convincing game about high school life—unless you're a student of color, in which case it completely ignores your experience." She goes on to explain that all the students of colour in the game exist purely to forward the narrative of the white heroes and

villains and have no stories or agency of their own. The queer feminist relationships that develop throughout the narrative are completely white-washed, as if women of colour cannot be queer (or Mad), or would not be desirable to the white protagonists.

Furthermore, in the context of environmental degradation and global warming, the backdrop of the game narrative, one of the teachers gives Max a speech about how Arcadia Bay was founded by friendly pioneers and Native Americans working together—a violent erasure of the truth of colonialism, and a failure to acknowledge link between indigeneity and the land/environment that has been destroyed by the white settlers. Writing and rewriting this chapter between 2017-2020, in the midst of oil pipelines being forced through Indigenous nations, the settler abuse of land as an abuse of Indigenous cultures is very much on my mind. It is telling that there are no Indigenous characters in the game. In a game that tackles suicide, drugs, death, and assault, shying away from the past and present of settler colonialism functions as a reaffirmation of white colonial supremacy.

Gone Home is similarly an archive of white lesbian feeling. You carry a passport featuring a smiling white blonde girl, while family pictures and photographs of Lonnie reveal an all-white cast. Again, the queer narrative is only allowed to exist between queer white girls.[26] The cover of Sam and Lonnie's feminist zine features a white blonde heroine from a comic entitled "Women Outlaws." Again, only white women can be outlaws; the feminism here is white feminism and ignores the important intersectional experiences of women of colour. In the wonderfully titled post "Gone Home: Finally, a story about an upper-middle-class white family with angst!" blogger kukkurovaca critiques the game's reception by critics who claim that it represents a universal and relatable '90s experience. Blogger kukkorovaca

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[26] The Wiki for *Gone Home* gives Lonnie the full name of Yolanda DeSoto and notes that her family is from Mexico; however, there is nothing in game to suggest that Lonnie is a woman of colour and Sam's white family dominates the narrative.

asserts that "This is not a story set in the 90's. It's a story set in the white 90's." The lack of diversity—and playable characters of colour—in these games leads to a watered-down politics of white Madness and queerness that function as a Trojan horse for white imperialism.

There are also troubling undertones of queer fascism and American imperialism in *Gone Home.* Sam's girlfriend Lonnie is from a military family. She is in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JRTC) and expresses a desire to join the army. In the only photograph we have of Lonnie, she is wearing her JRTC uniform. While Sam's audio journal expresses ambivalence about the military—framed through a critique of "Don't Ask Don't Tell"—there is no sustained engagement with the implication of centring the military in a queer lesbian love story, or of conflating butch identity with a militarized—and by extension, nationalist—identity. The presence of a pro-military lesbian in the narrative troubles a feminist reading of the text, instead making the player complicit in white supremacy, imperialism, and colonialism. Particularly in an American context, this militarism cannot be encountered without thinking about the devastating wars the US has waged in the Middle East and many other parts of the world, as well as the US's ongoing relationship with the settler state of Israel (for example, supplying weapons to support the occupation).

Gone Home celebrates white queer feminists who are invested in the military-industrial complex and the war machine that harms and disables bodies of colour in the Global South (Erevelles 2011; Puar 2017). While it's unclear whether Sam and Lonnie's departure from the family home also signals a rejection of the military, it is clear that Sam's problem with the army is homophobia, not the terrorizing, maiming, and killing of people of colour overseas. The critique of the family does not move into a critique of nationalism or the nation-building projects of exclusion and violence. While I continue to believe that there is crip feminist value in staging acts of madness in these virtual domestic spaces, I remain

troubled by the militarism that runs through the lesbian romance, and I recognize that this thread of violence imposes hard limits on the potential for feminist imagining and agency in domestic sims.

Chapter 3 | Blood Magic and Self-Harm: Confronting Settler Affect in *Dragon Age 2*

Love letter to those of us who get triggered: this chapter discusses self-harm in-depth with a focus on cutting and scratching. There are references to other forms of self-harm in this chapter. There are no graphic descriptions of cutting, but there are descriptions of bleeding and scars.

Keywords: abjection; affect; blood magic; cutting; dehumanization; disability; disgust; ecstasy; empathy; erotic; fantasy; identity; Mad studies; play; queer theory; racism; resistance; revulsion; romance; scratching; self-care; self-harm; settler colonialism; sexism; trauma; violence; video games

Cutters & Colonizers

I am a cutter and a colonizer.[27] This chapter is about me. It's also not just about me: it's about the harm that settler affects engender against white Mad bodies, and the harm committed against Mad and sane Black and Indigenous people of colour (BIPOC) particularly, although of course other people of colour (POC) as well. I interrogate affective responses to self-harm—settler revulsion and empathy—as tools of the state and turn towards ways of being *with* rather than positioning ourselves *against* or *opposite* wounded bodies. This chapter is about digital self-harm as a form of identity performance. It's about the relationship between a human and an avatar. It's about falling in love with a video game character who is coded as an Indigenous woman. It's about blood magic and the magic of queer/crip love and acceptance. It's about high fantasy and fantasies of connecting to each other outside the violence of the settler capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. This chapter is about the strange intimacies between scars, screens, technology, and bodies. We start and end with cuts on bodies in the physical world, but in between, turning to José Esteban Muñoz's

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[27] I use the term "cutter" to identify myself as someone who has a history of self-harm. I use "cutter" to resist the compelling and coerced narrative of overcoming or cure; of drawing a line between girlhood Madness and adult sanity. I am not currently self-harming, but I am not interested in offering up a narrative in which cutting is only ever a girlhood practice that we outgrow; nor do I intend to raise alarm by suggesting that I am currently "in crisis." I use the term "colonizer" to identify myself as a white settler in Canada, and to situate myself in relation to the topics in this chapter.

call for critical queer utopia, we will be "carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound" (18) in digital avatar play, and will find our actions and affects interwoven with agency, resistance, passion, love, and willfulness of all kinds.

Blood magic. Demons. Witches. Needles in our skin, looking for that numb spot (there are no numb spots). Self-harm circulates through our social imaginary as at once mysterious and hypervisible, a girlish practice and a signifier of teen angst, marked by the twinned pathologization and infantilization of feminized pain. In this chapter, I explore digital cutting as a form of Mad identity play that is intertwined with real-world gendered violence and settler colonialism, and as a potential mode of resistance, survival, care, and embodied agency. Practices of self-harm carry the legacies of gendered, racialized, and settler violence. Alicia Elliot considers the psymedical settler term "depression" alongside the history of colonialism to think through the relationship between bad feelings, violence, history, culture, cure, and healing (*A Mind Spread*). There are no easy answers. But there are relationships: between oppression and madness, between psymedicine and settler colonialism, and between wounds of all kinds. Histories of self-harm and madness are also irrevocably histories of oppression informed by race, gender, sex, disability, and class (Clare 2017; Elliott 2019; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

This chapter is indebted to the writing of people who self-harm: the many voices of women and men who contributed to *Self-Harm: Perspectives from Personal Experience*, Leslie Jamison for "Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain" in *The Empathy Exams*, Kathleen Glasgow for *Girl in Pieces* and for speaking openly about self-harm in interviews and on social media, Amanda Lovelace for *the princess saves herself in this one*, Erin Wunker for *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy*, and Kaitlin Tremblay for *Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before* and *There Are Monsters Under Your Bed*. This paper is also indebted to the people who have shared their experiences and scars with me in real life, and whose names will not

be shared.

The term "self-harm" covers a range of practices, including—but not limited to—scratching, cutting, burning, and swallowing sharp objects or poisonous substances. Self-harm may include substance abuse and unhealthy sexual activity and relationships. The definition is amorphous, shifting, or perhaps shifty. What gets labelled pathological, and what behaviour is deemed "normal" or "healthy" or appropriately "feminine"? As Louise Roxanne Pembroke articulates, "Socially acceptable forms of self-harm include; excessive smoking, drinking, exercise, liposuction, bikini-line waxing, high heels and body piercing" (6). I've often cut myself shaving or chopping vegetables, but these domestic wounds are excused. What does and does not get labelled "self-harm" is saturated with power and ideology. Of the broad and blurred category of self-harm, cutting appears to generate the most critical attention, and is most often featured in settler popular media. Perhaps the drama of blood pumping onto a kitchen floor makes it more exploitable for a sensationalist TV program than swallowing poison. Perhaps the evidence in the scarring makes it cling to bodies even after the practices have stopped or mitigated, or simply marks its practitioners in a more visible way than other modes of self-harm. My case study and my personal experience also revolve around cutting, but I want to remind the reader that it is only one of a much larger set of embodiments that are feminized and pathologized and enact a complicated agency.

Self-harm is an embodied set of practices, and yet too often references to symbolic cutting is harnessed in service to sane and able-bodied feminist theory. For example, Jack Halberstam attempts to reconcile self-harm with white feminism in his chapter "Shadow Feminisms," insisting on "a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence" (124). Unfortunately, the psychoanalytic framework he applies to cutting privileges Sigmund Freud's rather odd claim that "masochism is a form of femininity" (136) over the

voices of women who self-harm. Halberstam makes sweeping claims about cutting as an expression of "self-loathing" (135) and "an anarchic refusal of coherence" (136), failing to attend to the complicated ways in which cutting is produced and policed in settler capitalist culture, and the complex and diverse relationships between cutters, the act of cutting, and the cuts themselves—which are then read as symptoms and texts by the broader culture. Moving from a self-mutilating fictional character to the artistic practice of collage as symbolic cutting in "Shadow Feminisms," Halberstam moves deeper and deeper into abstraction and further away from the actual bodyminds of people who self-harm. Indeed, these bodies appear significant only insofar as they support his theory of "antisocial feminism" as "the destruction of self and other" (138), a claim that disregards Mad testimony and researchers who attend to the experiences of those who self-harm—all of which overwhelmingly suggest that cutting is more often an act of survival rather than destruction (Browne 2015; Garcia-Rojas 2016; Glasgow 2016; Martínez 2014; Pembroke 1994; Tam 2011 "From Risk"). Halberstam may be one of few canonized gender theorists engaging with self-harm, but the practice of turning madness into metaphor has a long tradition in feminist theory. Indeed, Elizabeth Donaldson critiques this tendency in feminist literary theory from the 1970s onward (emerging from an engagement with the madwoman in the attic in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*) arguing that "when madness is used as a metaphor for feminist rebellion, mental illness itself is erased" (94).

I am also troubled by the tendency to read self-harm through the confessional mode, as Jane Kilby does in her contribution to the edited collection *Thinking Through the Skin,* identifying self-injury as "a naked appeal" and a "deeply eloquent form of testimony" (124). While I am interested in Kilby's call for an ethical reading of self-harm marks, this project risks reducing the cutter to the position of a text for the able-bodied reader to consume. I want to offer a few questions that complicate the assumption that we can read cuts as if

they are a form of writing, and can do so as ethical feminists:

- If we haven't consented to having our skin read, is it possible for you to be an ethical reader?

- If we are not visibly scarred, does that render our (temporary) cuts meaningless?

- If you don't see my cuts, do they still matter?

- When we focus on self-harm as communication, what other purposes, impulses, gratifications, meanings, and practices are we erasing?

A theory of ethical reading continues to centre the presumed sane/able-bodied viewer/reader and places the Mad body in the position of object or other, which brushes dangerously close to the fetishization of bodies that the collection grapples with and seeks to work against (Ahmed and Stacey). Rejecting a theory of ethical reading, I want to turn instead to a theory of ethical encountering. "Encounter" is one of the touchstones of this dissertation, framed through "affective encounters" as a feminist media practice (Zarzycka & Olivieri 2017). "Encountering" points towards mutually constitutive relationships rather than a power dynamic in which one body affects another, or one body reads/interprets/analyzes another as object. In this chapter, my analysis of a self-harming video game character ultimately implicates myself in practices of self-harm, resistance, survival, and love. I make choices that affect her and am myself affected by our relationship. I want to encourage readers of this dissertation to resist the urge to read scars as confessions or cries for help. The refusal to read and assign meaning without collaboration is a practice of ethical encountering.

These troubling engagements with Mad/crip bodies by and for able-bodied and sane feminists and feminist theorists ultimate relegate actual Mad/crip body to the margins of feminist theory and praxis, and reproduce the violence of silencing and speaking for

marginalized bodies. Centring my analysis on a self-harming digital avatar risks reproducing this abstraction and reducing the bodies of women who cut to symbols or martyrs of feminist struggle, or, worse, dehumanized datasets composed simply of binary code. However, throughout this process I follow Alexandra Juhasz's theory of "cut/paste+bleed": "At its most basic it signals that our engagements with digital material (cut/paste), hardwired into our machines, hands, and minds, carry hidden consequences (the bleed)" ("Ev-Ent-Anglement" 206). Following the bleed is form of ethical encountering. Following the bleed means attending to the ethics of research and writing and acknowledging the bodies and feelings that are impacted by the cut/paste of my paper and the code behind the game. Attending to the bleed is central to this project as I continue to queer/crip the divide between digital/physical and onscreen/offscreen, moving fluidly between the two spaces that inform and interact with one another. From my hand on the controller to her hand raised in protest. Our pain and our bodies.

Part of attending to the bleed is looking for "where it hurt" (225). Hurt runs across this chapter like fault lines in the earth.

This was the most difficult chapter to write.

I stopped writing when it got too hard.

I'm not going to apologize for that.

Magic & Madness

This project focalizes around the 2011 video game *Dragon Age 2* (*DA*2) created by the Canadian developer BioWare. *DA2* is a fantasy role-playing adventure filled with enemies to slay, magical spells to learn, and gear upgrades. *DA2* tells the story of a poor refugee, Hawke, rising to power and privilege in the city-state of Kirkwall and ultimately choosing a side in a magical civil war. Along the way we complete side quests, level up, and

meet interesting characters who join our party and fight with us. *DA2* is not just a fighting game, but a role-playing and relationship-building game: we can become friends, rivals, or sexual and romantic partners to our companions. The game narrative is not revolutionary or inherently feminist: *DA2* is a basic power fantasy, and retells the popular story of a single, exceptional personal overcoming hardship to become a member of the political and financial elite. However, rejecting narratives of overcoming and exceptionalism in my playthrough, I turn instead towards Mad community and love, embody the uncomfortable relationship between self-harm and self-care, and assume the role of the bad avatar and crip killjoy. Like the previous chapter, through this process I enact a crip/Mad negotiation of a hegemonic text by employing play strategies that resist narratives of overcoming and settler violence. While much critical attention has been paid to racism, colonialism, and imperialism in the *Dragon Age* franchise (Fuchs, Erat, Rabitsch 2018; Lacina 2017; Young 2015) as well as queerness, gender, and sexuality (Chang 2017; Glassie 2015; Greer 2013; Lauteria and Wysocki 2015; Pelurson 2018), little has been written on Madness in *Dragon Age* and the intersections between madness, gender, and race. However, my analysis will be guided by this extensive archive of video game scholarship that trouble a Mad/crip feminist negotiation of the text in important and meaningful ways.

In the previous chapter, "Angsty Teens and Bad Players," I discussed virtual dollhouse play as a site for identity exploration and expression (Flanagan 2009; Jerreat-Poole 2020; Rak 2015). In this chapter I claim role-playing games as automedial platforms and argue that fantasy can be a genre for identity performance. For example, Anna Poletti and Julie Rak, the editors of the collection *Identity Technologies,* discuss Micha Cárdenas's project "Becoming Dragon." Cárdenas "spent 365 consecutive hours in the online world….as her avatar, a dragon named Azdel Slade. She chose this time period because one hour represents each day that a transgender person has to live in the offline world as

their chosen gender in order to qualify for gender confirmation/sex reassignment surgery (365)" (19). Playing with gender, species, fantasy, reality, and the relationship between online and offline life, Cárdenas's project "provides new avenues for thinking about what "counts" as identity activity" (18). We see the relationship between speculative fiction and automedia emerging in other forms of avatar play; Kaitlin Tremblay, for example, identifies her choose-your-adventure game *Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before* as an "interactive horror story and mostly true memoir." Tremblay uses the horror genre and the video game platform as automedial memoir. There is a long tradition of role-play (online and offline) being harnessed for identity work: Sarah Stang reflects on exploring her queerness through play-by-post-roleplay, Elise Vist explores "reparative play" in queer revisions of the tabletop fantasy game *Dungeons & Dragons (D&D)*, and Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson discuss the powerful affective experience of playing *World of Warcraft (WoW)*. While the settings may be fantastical and unreal, the role-play and relationship-building that occur in *Second Life, WoW, D&D*, and *DA2*, are not only used to represent life, but require us to "think critically about online life as life" (Rak, "Life Writing versus Automedia" 156). Fantasy role-play emphasizes the truth of emotional life rather than on the "realism" of the everyday world (although really, is the aspirational play of magical heroism more fantastical than playing as a multibillionaire in *The Sims*?).

Across the fantastical realm of Thedas, blood magic is forbidden. Blood magic employs self-mutilation and renders the mage more vulnerable to demonic possession and madness. In a setting where a criminalized and pathologized magic presents as a form of self-harm, one character emerges that complicates these practices: Merrill, a female companion in *DA2*. Merrill's use of blood magic disqualifies her from both citizenship and personhood in the eyes of the other characters. What I term a "horror-rejection" reaction to Merrill's self-harm is mirrored and complemented by an "empathy-control" response, in

which Merrill is simultaneously rejected from the social imaginary and reclaimed under the biomedical settler capitalist state's triangulation of victim-child-patient. The affect pairing that I identify as "revulsion-empathy" resonates with Eli Clare's recognition of "pity curling into violence" (*Brilliant* 13) in the treatment of disabled bodies. However, Merrill embodies a complicated agency with these visible marks and the act of marking, and in this chapter I reposition her feminized and racialized Madness as a "reclaiming of that which has been traditionally used to other, pathologize, and ostracize" (Poole and Ward, 102).

I read Merrill as a cutter: Merrill's acquisition quest, "Long Way Home," includes a cutscene in which she slices her wrist open in order to perform magic.[28] My companions react with shock and disgust to this action. If the player (me, in this scenario) responds positively to this scene, I lose approval points from four out of six companion characters. No companions approve. In battle, Merrill's blood magic spells are visually represented by a halo of blood around her body. Merrill also wears arm guards that keeps her skin hidden from view. Later in the game, another character explicitly describes her blood magic through a reference to self-harm: "I'll give you a hint. It involves demons and slitting your wrists" (Anders, "Mirror Image"). The discourse of madness is frequently evoked in reference to her character: for example; "there's a whole lot of crazy in that package" (Varric, "Friendly Concern"), and "no sane person would touch what she's taken up" (Dalish elf). Merrill's character is visually and vocally marked as Mad, and this madness has a relationship to self-mutilation. Taking Merrill seriously as a Mad racialized woman requires us to confront settler revulsion and pity and recover digital self-harming bodies as potential sites of resistance.

In the fantastical *Dragon Age* setting of Thedas, humans committed genocide

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[28] A cutscene! Incidental self-harm pun!

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against the elves, who were indigenous to the land. Following this initial widespread violence, elves were enslaved. After slavery was abolished, elves in the present either live a nomadic life (the Dalish) that pulls from pop culture stereotypes of indigeneity, or dwell in designated areas in human cities called "alienages" that are suggestive of black ghettos and racial segregation policies. City elves can only enter human parts of the city to work as maids and cooks and labourers. Alienage elves have curfews. The elves visibly present as white (and Merrill's voice actor is a white Welsh woman), and yet are racially othered, as the game riffs off real-world histories of colonialism, slavery, and racial segregation—often only to reaffirm a fantastical white supremacist manifest destiny. Dia Lacina writes that "BioWare takes these real historical and contemporary traumas and makes them set-dressing and background story" and "even goes so far as to suggest that elves are responsible for their own oppression," an appropriate and accurate critique of the *DA* franchise. The Dalish are an Indigen-*ish* group that represent racist settler narratives and stereotypes about Indigenous and Black bodies. I will engage with Merrill's racialization and the way it intersects with her Madness and femininity, but we still need to acknowledge that the developers did not represent these marginalized populations with respect and care, and that this representation is a mirror of settler culture.[29]

    DA2 also allows the player's avatar to perform blood magic, and this is the only game I have encountered to date that has allowed me to perform my identity as a person who self-harms through a digital avatar. The implications of play and performance change when the avatar's feelings and experiences of stigma mirror that of the player/researcher

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[29] For examples of better representations of Indigenous cultures in games, please see the work of Anishinaabe scholar and game maker Elizabeth LaPensée (*Thunderbird Strike*, *When Rivers Were Trails*, *Mikan*, *Honour Water*), the collaborative settler-Iñupiaq created game *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* (*Never Alone*), and Métis game designer Meagan Byrne and Maliseet artist/animator Tara Miller's *Hill Agency: Purity/Decay* (forthcoming).

off-screen. Playing as a blood mage and engaging in a queer, Mad romance with Merrill has been an exploratory and affective mode of performing academic research. This experience raised questions about the ethics of play, the relationship between my body and my avatar's body, and about the broader culture of settler feminist scholarship and my position within the field of research. In this chapter I continue to probe the Mad/sane division, to complicate queer affect theory with Mad testimony, and to follow Sundén and Sveningsson's methodology in which "personal experiences, emotion, desire, and embodied ways of knowing games are treated as something with the potential to create important knowledge" (13). This chapter continues to be invested in personal experience and the relationships that screen technology can generate between bodies, avatars, and disability as sites of critical learning and knowing (Anable 2018; Zarzycka and Olivieri 2017).

Combating Settler Revulsion

"And if colonialism is like depression, and the Onkewehon:we suffering from it are witches, then I guess it shouldn't surprise anyone that our treatment has always been the same: to light us on fire and let us burn" – Alicia Elliot, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*, p. 11

Revulsion is a politically charged and culturally curated affect used to uphold systems of power and oppression. Clare Hemmings identifies "Western feminist horror" (217) as an affective response to female genital mutilation and transsexual surgery. This "gut reaction" is "where empathy fails" (217), for "her revulsion, then, precipitates a hierarchical and temporal ordering...so that she can be clear about which practices are acceptable or unacceptable for feminism" (220). Hemmings uses the term "Western feminism" to describe the kind of limited feminism that resists a more inclusive and intersectional politics, gesturing towards a Western/Global North/white feminism.[30] I use the

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[30] The valences and significance of these terms shift based on the context and rhetorical strategy of the speaker/writer/thinker. For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in

term "settler feminism" in place of "Western." Settler feminisms are white-centred, able-bodied, and heteronormative. Settler feminisms benefit from settler colonialism and are invested in propping up the settler neoliberal patriarchy. **Settler feminist affect is settler affect.** In Hemming's examples, we can see how the feelings of horror and revulsion, which may appear to be natural and neutral, are used to abject trans bodies and women of colour. Settler affect plays a role in the process that Imogen Tyler calls "social abjection." As discussed in a previous chapter, Tyler argues that "disgust is political" (24), and explores the discourses of waste, pollution, and uncleanliness that are applied to racialized and working class/poor bodies as a form of neoliberal scapegoating. Scapegoating is a process of community-building, a way of assigning membership by exclusion (Benhabib 2004; Puar 2007). Which bodies are available to empathy, and which bodies spark other reactions: disgust, horror, rejection, violence? Empathy has edges and locks and surveillance cameras. The limits of empathy are the fault lines in the benevolent nation, cracks in the veneer of Canadian politeness, revealing the violent foundation of the settler state. Sometimes the line between inclusion and exclusion can be as thin and sharp as a cut.

The history of racialized revulsion as a practice of othering is entangled with the history of bodily markings. Craig Koslofsky, exploring the rise of "scientific racism" in the early modern world, looks at the skin as a site at which othering occurred, citing, for example, "European penal branding and West African scarification" (795). Simone Browne discusses the surveillance of black bodies and the significance of skin in the role of the slave-trade, writing of the process of branding that "It is at the border—territorial, epidermal, and digital—a site where certain bodies are cast out and made out of place" (129). In "Not

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interrogating settler affects, recognizing that many non-settlers live in the Global North or "the West." I am interested in complicating the binary of East/West and North/South by looking at the internal heterogeneity of bodies and positionalities within shared spaces.

Your Exotic Fantasy," Anita Sarkeesian critiques racialized videogame tropes including "tribal" tattoos that exotify and other female characters of colour and are often used to signify a "primitive" culture. Throughout the history of settler colonialism, scarification, tattooing, and other visible markers on the skin have been interpreted as signs of barbarism in order to justify slavery, conquest, and genocide.

In *DA2*, Merrill is marked with facial tattoos called "vallaslin," meaning "blood writing," blood art that seems to both reveal and conceal the self-harming marks. Within the clan, these tattoos are applied as part of a coming-of-age ceremony, a visible marker of adulthood, in which the child assumes full membership in the clan. These marks are used to other Merrill, following the shorthand settler visual logic of *tribal tattoos = exotic*, and to index the physical cuts as a record of blood magic and a bloody history of struggle and pain that the inked marks only imitate. Both blood art and blood magic become markers of barbarism. While the tattoos signify exotification and primitivism to players out of game, Merrill's use of blood magic is read as a sign of racial inferiority in game: "In my experience, all Dalish women are crazy" (Anders); "What is it with elves and blood magic?" (Anders "On the Loose"). Here, race is pathologized and madness becomes a racial trait read through visible markings on the skin.

In contemporary North American settler culture, self-harm continues to generate revulsion and disgust as a practice of citizenship and community-building. Leslie Jamison explores the slippage between disgust and hate that becomes attached to self-harming practices, noting that "A Google search for the phrase 'I hate cutters' yields hundreds of results, most of them from informal chat boards…There's even a facebook group called 'I hate cutters'" (190). Jamison explains that:

> Hating on cutters—or at least those cutter-performers—tries to draw a boundary
>
> between authentic and fabricated pain, as if we weren't all some complicated mix of

wounds we can't let go of and wounds we can't help; as if choice itself weren't

always some blend of character and agency. (191)

Hating on cutters is a form of community building, a practice of exclusion that separates "us"

from "them." Group membership is constructed around the division between which bodies,

behaviours, and identities "are acceptable or unacceptable for [settler] feminism"

(Hemmings 220). As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, speaking of online bullying and revenge

porn, writes: "Those who hate excessively need their objects, because they become part of

a community through this attachment" (157). Hatred can generate a sense of belonging;

hatred can be a practice of citizenship—and these practices rely on an abject other, a

scapegoat, a girl whose body becomes a source of fear, a body that becomes relegated to

what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun calls a "teachable moment." Where the slut-shaming of

(young) female internet users blames the user for shamelessly making her skin visible to an

Internet public, the (young) female-coded cutter is shamed and blamed for making her pain

visible, for flaunting the naked veins underneath the skin, for shamelessly showing off the

marks on her bared skin.

Like the violent logic of "consent once, circulate forever" (Chun 96) that follows

images of nude women online, a cutter is denigrated for consenting to physical violence and

harm. Just as a girl who shared naked photos online is treated as no longer deserving of

protection and privacy (146), the cutter is treated as a body that can no longer be harmed:

many cutters describe the physical pain they are subjected to by doctors in the ER,

including lack of anesthesia when being stitched up or being refused medical attention

altogether (*Self-Harm: Stories*). The cut becomes evidence of consent; the cut marks the

body as uncuttable. And while all women and genderqueer folx under the

cisheteropatriarchy experience forms of bodily censorship, the self-harming woman is

understood as always already consenting, and therefore blamed for the violence she

experiences. These blaming/shaming "teachable moments" are used to differentiate the good girls from the bad; the girls deserving of privacy and protection from the ones who are not deserving; the good feminists from the bad. At times pivoting between settler affect and settler feminisms, I demonstrate how by reproducing disgust and hatred as a shared cultural object, settler feminisms become tools of the state and used to abject Mad, crip, queer bodies of colour under the guise of progressive politics and narratives of inclusion.

This hate follows us into the game world, tracking Merrill's steps, following her wounded body. I have heard the sometimes angry and sometimes well-meaning advice that she is given. I find myself imagining what is not shown on screen—the scars beneath her arm guards, the private conversations where lovers reject her marked body. Moments where lovers touch her scars softly, tenderly. In *DA2*, hating Merrill is offered as a form of community building. We can gain approval points from our companions and can form a better relationship with the other Dalish elves if we, too, punish Merrill for being Mad/bad/sad. In my playthrough, I draw attention to this violence and draw out moments of resistance and refusal in which Merrill embodies the crip killjoy/bad avatar. Playing as a Mad/self-harming character, I also shift the narrative away from surveillance, violence, and cure and toward one of mutual care and support.

As discussed earlier, Merrill is coded as an Indigenous body in a setting that replicates (but not always critically interrogates) the settler colonial and racialized violence of North America and many other parts of the world. I read this legacy of colonization and racial violence as explicitly entangled with Merrill's practices of self-harm. When I select spells for my avatar, and have the option of choosing blood magic spells, they are devoid of any cultural or social heritage, with generic names like "blood magic," "sacrifice," and "hemorrhage." In contrast, Merrill's spells—which have similar effects in battle—are explicitly situated within a cultural and postcolonial narrative, with names like "Blood of the

First," referencing her position with the clan as the First to the Keeper, an apprentice to the leader of the Dalish, "Wounds of the Past" (and the upgrade "Deep Wounds"), and "Loss of the Dales" (the homeland of the Dalish elves). Merrill's blood magic spells in the skill tree are green and are accompanied by images of trees, unlike the red of the non-racialized blood mage. Negotiating this troubled text for moments of productive tension or discomfort, I interpret this nomenclature and symbolism through Siobhan Senier and Clare Barker's argument that "settler colonialism is implicated in the production of indigenous disability, discursively and materially" (124). Merrill's self-harm is situated within the violence of settler colonialism.

Merrill's decision to leave her clan and move to the city is not simply a sign of adolescent independence (the teenage girl fights with the mother as a "natural" stage of development) and willful agency (although it carries this feeling), but a mark of the continued wounds of colonialism that divides families and shatters communities as tools of genocide. It's important to remember that the Dalish culture is settler-imagined and constructed. The Indigen-ish Dalish replicate the cisheteropatriarchy of the settler state of Canada in which the game was developed. However, this portrayal unwittingly reproduces the patriarchal structure of many Indigenous communities today—a gendered violence that Leanne Betasamosake Simpson reminds us was "introduced and reinforced through residential schools, the church, and the Indian Act (*As We Have* 88-89), noting that "2SQ people are disappeared" (89) under colonial governance. Many Indigenous communities in Canada were forced to adopt the patriarchal gender binary and its accompanying violences. Throughout the game, Merrill expresses doubt regarding her move to a city, experiences sadness, loneliness, and homesickness, and mourns her severed family ties. While it's made clear that Merrill is not welcome in the clan until she is "cured" and becomes a docile and obedient girl, I read this rejection by her clan as a symptom and product of colonial

violence. Again, I do not want to celebrate the developer here, as one decision the game allows is for the protagonist to systematically murder the entire clan, a horrifying re-enactment of genocide that *has no consequences in game.* Yet it's worth ruminating on the tense relationship between Merrill, positioned as apprentice and disobedient daughter, and the Keeper, who is positioned as both leader and mother. Their relationship is electric with intergenerational trauma.

Merrill can be understood as one of Tyler's national/social abjects: she is termed a "pariah" among the Dalish and treated as an outcast; later in the game, the elves refuse to respond when she attempts to hail them as kin. In the human city, Merrill continues to be abjected by her race, forced to live in an alienage, and must hide her practices of magic, particularly blood magic. If blood magic is considered evil and dangerous by the Dalish, it is outlawed in the human city, and tied to narratives of feminized mental weakness, insanity, and demonic possession. Merrill is told "you didn't have the strength to resist the demon. That's why it picked you" (Anders, "A New Path"). Blood mages throughout the game turn into "abominations," bodies possessed by demons that present as physically disabled with humps, extraneous flesh, visible inner organs, and deformed faces (playing on the culturally cultivated horrors of the disabled and/or fat body as an abject body). Merrill is constantly being treated as if she is always about to become an abomination; in some cases, she is treated as if she is currently an abomination. The word itself, "abomination," signifies disgust and horror.

Merrill is not only cast out of the national fold and her citizenship revoked: her use of blood magic is ultimately used to render her personhood ambivalent. By trespassing on the boundaries of her own skin, the boundaries of Dalish/alienage culture, and elven/human society, Merrill is recast as non-person. This follows Tyler's argument that abjected bodies become subject to dehumanization and violence (26), a claim that echoes Judith Butler's

insistence that violence occurs in the place where one is made "unreal" (33); violence happens to "lives [that] are already negated," that are not considered human, and not valued as having life. Merrill's clan reject her on the basis of her use of blood magic, and she faces animosity from the other companion characters. The player/protagonist also has dialogue options that criticize her practices. Furthermore, she is dehumanized in the language used to describe her and mages more broadly (and mages are treated as always already potential blood mages). For example:

"I imagine it's difficult to give away something nobody wants" — Fenris, "Long Way Home" (note the use of "thing" as a form of dehumanization and objectification; Merrill is no longer a person, but a "thing")

"We cannot be rid of this one too soon" — Dalish hunter "Long Way Home" (note the deliberate stripping away of Merrill's name as a tactic of dehumanization)

"You are a monster" — Fenris, "Mirror Image"

"You'll only betray her. That's all your kind can do" —Anders, comment

"At any time, any mage can become a monster...Mages cannot be treated like people" — Cullen, "Enemies Among Us"

In this playthrough, I both identity Merrill's actions as modes of resistance and choose options that allow my character to identify *with* rather than *against* Merrill, thereby rejecting the dominant narrative of revulsion, dehumanization, and "justified" or "curative" violence against Mad and racialized self-harming bodies. Merrill continued to embody willfulness and Mad resistance, using tone of voice as well as action to resist settler affect and ideology. During her acquisition quest, "Long Way Home," the player is encouraged by the game to interrogate Merrill about her use of magic with probing questions like "Why are you leaving the Dalish for Kirkwall?" and "I get the feeling that you're in trouble." Merrill evades the questions and subverts the attempted surveillance of the colonial state that the player in this

moment embodies.

An interesting dynamic of Merrill's blood magic is its association with bloodlines: Merrill is an historian, a keeper of the past, and began using blood magic in an attempt to restore an ancient Dalish artifact. If her blood is a source of anxiety for other characters, Merrill identifies it not only as a source of power, but also of history and memory. Bringing her blood to the surface of her body ultimately uncovers an ancestral past and connects Merrill with her heritage. Merrill's excavation of her own body is also an excavation of a familial and cultural past, a past which comes into being through the marks on her body, a history written in and with the blood. This lineage has resonances with the histories of real-world women and feminism, particularly Indigenous women and Black womanist traditions, histories that are often as violent and bloody as Merrill's wounded body. Reading Merrill's use of self-harm metaphorically, her actions become a form of Juhasz' "attending to the bleed." Literally attending to the bleeding body of the Indigenous woman, Merrill is also figuratively attending to the violent history of settler colonialism and wading backwards through this trauma to remember and recover parts of her culture that were buried. "It's a Keeper's job to remember, to restore what we can" (Merrill, "Long Way Home").

As an historian, Merrill joins "those marked as temporally backward" (Love 6). Recall the loose links between Dalish history and North American colonialism—we can imagine similar tools of dispossession and genocide were wielded against the Dalish, who have lost not only the land, but much of their history and culture that is rooted in the land. If Merrill's blood magic is a mark of feminine disobedience, it is also a refusal to let go of the past and to move on. In this way, she takes her place among Heather Love's queers in *Feeling Backward* (2007); yet this turn to the past is not in opposition to futurity; instead, the recovery of the past and keeping faith with the dead function as mode of surviving the present and moving into the future—importantly, a future other than the one mapped out by

the settler state. A future shaped, perhaps, by restorative justice, resurgence of culture, and new forms of ethical relationships between peoples and lands.

Another companion character, Aveline, tells Merrill "Don't you think it would be better to work on where you are now, instead of recreating old glory?" and calls her "stupid," trying to orient Merrill in a colonized present and future, trying to get her to accept the world as it is. Merrill snaps back: "No. No, that's kind of the opposite of what I've been saying. I'm the stupid one? Whatever." When Merrill snaps, I think of Sara Ahmed and feminist snap (*Living* 199). I listen for those moments of sharpness, of breakage, when a girl's voice is a blade and the bleed is a relationship that has to be broken, or a conversation that needs to be cut short; snap as a signal of "ethical cuts" (Juhasz, "Affect bleeds" 662). When Merrill uses blood magic, she is worldmaking through wounds: Merrill's wounds are not only proof of her survival under the violent settler state but have the potential to remake that world. She is holding onto the past, following the pain, to imagine and create a different future. Characters like Aveline try to orient Merrill in a present that emphasizes *only* futurity and forward-thinking, which is also evident in the genealogy of settler feminist traditions that always require a myth of progress. In contrast, Merrill is always looking both forward *and* backwards, and writing this attempt to recover the past in blood, a form of visceral storytelling. Merrill insists that "It's a Keeper's place to remember. Even the dangerous things." The past, she understands, is dangerous, difficult, and painful—but meaningful and necessary to create futures that are different from the ones imagined by the heteropatriarchal settler colonial state. Merrill embodies backwardness as "a queer historical structure of feeling" (Love 146). If "grief is politics" (Love 128), Merrill embodies the queer and Mad politics of grief by moving from queer despair to a pathologized Madness, and from grief to Mad grief. Merrill uses self-harm to touch a past she cannot access in any other way; self-harm acts as a mode of recovery, a method of holding onto

past wounds, of acknowledging and living with pain and loss, of honouring and holding onto the dead. In refusing to ignore or get over her pain, Merrill attempts "to forge a politics that keeps faith with those who drew back and those whose names were forgotten" (Love 70).

Merrill's relationship to sadness/Madness evokes an understanding of bad feelings as what Billy-Ray Belcourt identifies as an "affective commons." Noting that loneliness and bad feelings are "endemic to the affective life of settler colonialism," Belcourt insists that this commons "demonstrates that there is something about this world that isn't quite right, that loneliness in fact evinces a new world on the horizon (59). Merrill and Belcourt draw out the world-building potential of sadness, the recognition that there is something wrong *not with the body but with the world*. In this way, feeling bad or bad feelings can be world-making. This reading of sadness rejects the settler state's insistence on the need to hide or end pain but rather calls for bodies to listen to their pain and follow it: to "account for the bleed" (Juhasz, "Affect bleeds" 662). The word "commons" also shifts the settler narrative of hyper individualism and self-responsibilizing toward collective care and community; to shared space; to affect as a shared experience and a shared resource.

Merrill argues that blood magic was the only tool she had available, claiming that "If I had buckets of lyrium[31] lying around I would've used that." Insisting that blood magic or self-harm is a tool for recovery, survival, and even healing, raises questions about agency, embodiment, and anticolonial resistance. Outside the game world, my research suggests that self-harm is often used as a survival tactic, as a way of coping with extreme stress or trauma. For example, "[Natalie A.] Martinez offers Latinas who engage in acts of self-injury as an example of subjects in conflict. Martinez details that these acts are reflections of how Latinas are 'coping with the complexity of societal violence' that results from sexual, gender,

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[31] A magic-enhancing drug owned and controlled by the city-state of Kirkwall that is used by the state's military police.

and racial discrimination" (11 in Garcia-Rojas). Martinez and Garcia-Rojas identify the roots of self-harm in systemic discrimination and violence and explore self-injury as a coping or survival mechanism. Simone Browne, in her study of the surveillance of blackness, writes that women in prison use self-harm as a mode of resistance (40). Many of the contributors in *Self-Harm: Perspectives from Personal Experience* identify as survivors of sexual violence, incest, physical, mental and emotional abuse, and psychiatric violence, and discuss using self-harm as a form of survival, resistance, and control. Rosalind Caplin, in her contribution to the collection, writes that in the psychiatric institution she "felt more and more like a caged animal" (24), and that "each scraping…was much an acknowledgement of survival – of Life – as it was a ritualistic act of revenge" (26).Women in situations of powerlessness may turn to self-harm as an act of willfulness and a form of asserting power over their own bodies. We could take Merrill at face value and consider self-harm as a tool when we don't have anything else at hand. Merrill's use of self-harm is also a practice of survival—granting her to the power to survive in battle, to survive in the alienage, and to survive in the world as a racialized, abjected Mad woman. Action and inaction, refusal and disobedience. Breaking the rules, breaking the skin on the body, breaking taboos. Acknowledging and accepting our wounds and our woundedness. Ahmed: "We make a world out of the shattered pieces even when we shatter the pieces or even when we are the shattered pieces" (*Living* 261).

In "Long Way Home," when Merrill first performs blood magic, my avatar's eyes widen. I think about this moment, the cinematic cutscene highlighting an ambiguous emotional reaction in an avatar who is both my proxy in the game and a character with a backstory and history of their own. Eyes widening can be used to signal shock, fear, or surprise. It can also be used to signal admiration, a character marveling at something incredible.

I read my avatar's reaction as a signal of recognition.

"That was not normal," says Carver, a companion character.

"That was blood magic," my avatar tells him.

"Yes, it was blood magic, but I know what I'm doing," Merrill snaps, her words laced with anger and defensiveness. "The spirit helped us, didn't it?"

She is used to this kind of surveillance, to these kinds of accusation. But my statement was a fact, not a judgement.

"It did help us," I tell her. My companions disapprove; I lose friendship points from them. They like me a little bit less now. They wanted to see me reject her, condemn her, criticize. But I can't. I won't.

Offscreen, my eyes are also wide. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha calls this experience "the lust of recognition" (117).

Throughout the game, I refuse to criticize Merrill, although many dialogue options encourage me to. I make a point of vocally supporting her when I am able. When she fails to restore the Dalish artefact and is discouraged, wondering if she should give up, I encourage her to keep going. Through this process I align myself with the Mad racialized woman rather than against her, and thus generate a form of queer/crip kinship.

Resisting Settler Empathy

"Writing with empathy is not enough. It never has been" –Alicia Elliott, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground,* p. 29

While self-harm frequently encounters horror and disgust, the figure of the frail teenage girl with cuts on her arms and wide, sad eyes can inspire other feelings: protectiveness, pity, sympathy. I call this treatment of self-harm "empathy porn." Importantly, these feelings *complement* rather than *compete with* revulsion. Benevolent

white saviours assume the role of parent/protector/guardian and gain social capital through their charity and emotional generosity by responding to self-harm with a performance of empathy. This social capital is frequently collected by privileged white women who benefit from settler colonialism and institutional ableism/sanism. These saviour figures offer up the models of Western wellness to save their infantilized charges: therapy, medication, and psychiatry—and all of the violences that accompany these practices (Clare 2017). I use the term "empathy porn" to name a relationship that is not equal in power or respect, a relationship in which the Mad body becomes merely a form of gratification for the sane/able-bodied person. We see this dynamic entrenched in society's treatment and framing of mental illness and disability more broadly: disability rights activist Stella Young uses the term "inspiration porn" to describe the exploitation of disabled bodies that are used to sell a narrative of overcoming hardship through hard work to and for able-bodied viewers. Young explains that:

> Inspiration porn is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary—like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball—carrying a caption like "your excuse is invalid" or "before you quit, try."

Young demonstrates how images of disabled bodies are objectified and exceptionalized in the service of able-bodied culture. These images also perpetuate an overcoming narrative that situate disability or mental illness within a body rather than a disabling culture and environment. The feelings evoked by these advertisements are intended to be positive rather than pathological, but they not only continue to relegate the disabled body to the position of an exceptionality but place the body under a fetishizing able-bodied gaze.

Empathy and its emotional accoutrements—pity and sympathy—are similarly produced by charity campaigns that exploit images of disability. In the edited collection

Disability, Human Rights and the Limits of Humanitarianism, scholars discuss international

charity campaigns in which the bodies of disabled children (often girls) of colour in the

Global South are used to provoke pity among Global North white benefactors (Berghs 2014;

Kim 2014). These disabled bodies of colour are presented as passive, weak, and

vulnerable. Berghs writes that

> images that are accessible, like children, need to be used to sell a 'distant
>
> other'…These images often touch on tropes of suffering, death and lack of dignity
>
> but in a decontextualized, neo-colonial, paternalistic and ethically problematic way,
>
> especially if they are connected to disability. (34)

She goes on to note that "the unhealthy or disabled body represents disorder and deviance

from normality which must be prevented" (37). In these campaigns, disabled bodies of

colour are used to justify Western imperialism (we're saving the children), and disability is

represented as always and only tragedy, weakness, and lack of agency. Importantly, these

campaigns do not connect the production of disability in the Global South to neoliberal

violence, war, and colonialism enacted by the Global North, a connection both Anna May

Duane and Nirmala Erevelles interrogate in their chapters. Eunjung Kim also discusses the

exploitation of vulnerable images of racialized and gendered bodies, and notes that bodies

rendered vulnerable by the state find this vulnerability used to justify their (mis)treatment.

Kim quotes Susanna Kaysen (1993) on her personal experience in a mental institution:

"Naked, we needed protection, and the hospital protected us. Of course, the hospital had

stripped us naked in the first place" (141).

Shifting from the geopolitical framework of North/South to an Indigenous/settler

dynamic, we can see this link between the production of vulnerability and colonial/imperial

intervention in the treatment of Indigenous nations in Canada (and other Indigenous/settler

relationships in other parts of the world) As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation,

the narrative of Indigenous populations as at risk unfolds alongside the "stories that wound,"

settler stories of "Indigenous deficiency" (Justice 1). These strands of empathetic racism

have been used to justify the continued violence against Indigenous bodies and

communities—often under the guise of "saving the children." "Empathy has its limits," writes

Elliott, "it is possible to both have empathy for a person and still hold inherited,

unacknowledged racist views about them. How else do you explain the Canadian

government's apology for residential schools and pleas for reconciliation co-existing with its

continued, purposeful underfunding of Indigenous children?" (29-30). Residential schools.

The Sixties Scoop. The overrepresentation of Indigenous kids in foster care. See how the

benevolent settler state "saves" Indigenous children from their families, communities,

culture, and most importantly, themselves?

Merrill's experience of rejection and violence in *DA2* is complemented by the

experience of infantilization as players are invited, and even encouraged, to act out the

white saviour trope and "rescue" Merrill from herself. Hero fantasies are common in

videogames: we can play a superhero saving New York City, a fantasy hero with a magic

sword saving the realm, a sci fi hero with a smoking blaster saving the galaxy. In *DA2*, we

become heralded as The Champion and are positioned unequivocally as the hero. We

started the game with a saviour complex. As virtual worlds for the assumed white player to

explore, collecting objects, peoples, and experiences, video games can also be sites of

virtual tourism, and risk reproducing empathy tourism as empathy porn.[32]

Digital tourism in colonial Thedas resonates with the offscreen practice of "slum

tourism." Structured around a Global North traveler's visit to the Global South, Brian Ekdale

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[32] For example, Lisa Nakamura importantly critiqued identity tourism and digital blackface in her ground-breaking essay "Cyberrace," while I have written elsewhere about how Mad/crip identities are used as "dress-up" in games for able-bodied players (Jerreat-Poole 2018)

and David Tuwei note that slum tourists "construct a humanitarian Self through their firsthand encounters with suffering" (50). Ekdale and Tuwei explain that "the traveler constitutes both voyeur and a moralizer" (52). Ultimately, the traveler is the primary beneficiary of the trip, having extracted the precious subjective experience of suffering in exchange for "encouragement and enlightenment for locals" (53). In *DA2*, the player is similarly positioned as voyeur and moralizer. The player is encouraged to empathize with other characters and their plights, to help them, and to save them. This positioning is perhaps the most visible and visceral in our relationship with Merrill: we are a settler body interrogating the Indigenous woman, and this interrogation is framed as a humanitarian act. We claim moral superiority over Merrill and stake a claim to knowledge of salvation and healing. While slum tourists choose to centre themselves in their accounts of other people's suffering, in *DA*2 the player/protagonist is always the centre of the game and cannot be de-centred. We have to embody the logic of the settler state. We have to perform, in some degree, extractivism. As players, we likely view the game as created for our own enjoyment, and every decision and action we make in game is designed for the selfish goal of our own offscreen pleasure. This is to say—it was never about Merrill, and always about aggrandizing the (assumed) settler player.

Merrill is physically slight, represented as naive and childish, and frequently infantilized and patronized by other characters (e.g. "Don't worry your pretty little head about it" - Isabella, party banter). She is given the nicknames "Daisy" and "Kitten." Her lack of knowledge of the human city is treated as childish, cute, and funny. This ditziness is typically used for comic relief, as she often misunderstands sexual references and innuendos, asking, for example, "Why do they call this a brothel? Does it have something to do with broth?" The companion Varric often hints that he has people watching Merrill to make sure she doesn't get into trouble while she wanders around Kirkwall (it is implied that

her free movement through the city, as an elf and as woman, is foolish and invites danger). This representation of Merrill blends racial stereotypes with gendered Mad tropes. Merrill is represented as an angsty teen whose naivete leads her to self-harm, a girl-child in need of a caregiver and protector. As a migrant to the city, she is also the fish-out-of-water comedy, an opportunity for white folks to laugh at her overplayed and exaggerated ignorance of a new culture.

In this playthrough I am romancing Merrill, trying to create a Mad queer union that embodies Audre Lorde's "power of the erotic"(88). Yet discomfort dogs my avatar's steps, lingers in the curve of her hand on Merrill's waist. Offscreen, I am uncomfortable. My avatar is white. I am wary of performing digital blackface or engaging in identity tourism (Nakamura 2014; Jackson 2017). I may be a refugee in game, but I am not one out of game. In game I have recovered my aristocratic family's lost fortune, estate, and titles. I have privilege Merrill does not and will never have. When I ask her to move in with me, I risk performing the white saviour trope, of making Merrill a racialized Cinderella, of engaging in empathy porn. Elliot reminds us that:

1. No one can fuck their way to tolerance

2. No one can marry into tolerance

3. No one can carry for nine months and give birth to tolerance (119)

Romancing Merrill as a Mad queer white avatar contains the potential to create settler empathy porn, to use sex and romance as a power fantasy, as coercive, as an empathy-control response that requires first a horror-rejection response (you've been rejected and harmed? Now you need me. Now I will save you. Now you will thank me for saving you—never mind that either "I" as the settler avatar or "I" as an embodiment of the power of the settler state was the source of both harm and then protection).

I am role-playing as a queer Mad self-harming avatar. But I have played this game

before, I have watched YouTube videos of other playthroughs, watched and made other choices, seen other versions of this romance. "You can't save me," says Merrill in one. "It's not worth trying." I am angry at the writers, at the square-jawed, muscular masculine protagonist in the video, a stark contrast to slight, anxious Merrill. "Don't save me," she repeats, voice wavering, "Please, just...don't."

I once wrote to my partner: "I feel vulnerable and messy and I don't want this type of vulnerable messy to be attractive to someone."

"Don't save me" can mean: I am in need of saving, or maybe, I am not worth saving.

"Don't save me" can mean: I don't need or want your brand of disciplinary "salvation."

"Don't save me" can mean: my madness is a part of me, and it is mine, and it is complicated.

A couple years ago I read Tracey Lindberg's incredible novel *Birdie*. It's about Cree womanhood. It's about sexual trauma, the trauma of colonialism, and the trauma of psychiatric institutionalization. Above all, it's about healing—healing through family and Cree culture, not through settler intervention.

There's a white woman in the novel. Sometimes, I identified with her: "She doesn't quite understand the offering, and the feast even less, but Lola sparkles with richness from being a part of it all" (250). Sometimes I found myself identifying with Birdie. I'm scared of being institutionalized. I know it's a possibility. I know psych wards are not a place of healing. I know my country and my culture cause pain and then bury it. I know these things intimately.

I think about Merrill's "don't save me." I want to read this statement as a sign of familiarity with the ideology of cure, rather than self-flagellation. As a rejection of the muscular hero. As a rejection of settler models of wellness.

Critiquing and complicating the therapist/patient relationship, with its implied foci of

healing and care, Elliot writes:

> When I think of that man sitting across from me, chastising me for not saying the
>
> right words, the words that made it easy for him to understand me and cure me, I
>
> think of how my great-grandparents felt when priests and nuns did the same to
>
> them. (11)

Elliot draws the settler therapist into an associational proximity with the priests and nuns in

Residential schools, subtly gesturing toward the intertwined threads of settler violence and

settler cure or care. We should let ourselves feel the discomfort of these connections,

should be troubled by the tapestry of nationhood woven through with blood and

benevolence. In the title chapter of her book *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*, Elliot

suggests turning away from the neoliberal individual narrative of self-care and towards

collective care, and away from settler cure and towards Indigenous healing.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson also captures the latent violence inherent in settler

models of wellness and treatment in *Islands of Decolonial Love*:

> i change the subject to anxiety. therapy-lady loves talking about anxiety. me the poor
>
> depressed indian. her the white fucking pathologizing saviour. i tell her my anxiety
>
> and i are co-dependent, but in a lovely way. she tries to convince me the world is a
>
> safe place, and that i'm not a little kid anymore and that it's possible that no one will
>
> ever hit me again. (83)

In this image, the power dynamic between the Indigenous patient and the white mental

health care professional is laid bare: the white saviour who knows best, who comes from

and is invested in the settler state that has and continues to commit violence against

Indigenous cultures and bodies, trying to convince the Indigenous woman that it's all in her

head, that "no one will ever hit me again." Because only kids get hit. Only kids are made to

feel powerless. Only youths get angsty and angry and this anger is misplaced (or placed in the cis-female organs). Thinking you might get hit again is framed here as immature and childish. The world is a safe place. This is the myth of the white middle-class able-bodied patriarchy. This is a myth of the settler state: that we are safe.

Safety is a privilege.

The world is not a safe place.

"*I tell her my anxiety and I are co-dependent, but in a lovely way.*" There's something about this phrasing that resonates in my body, like the ringing of a bell. Sometimes our feelings trick us, lie to us, hurt us. Sometimes they protect us. Between a body's learned anxiety and a white therapist, which one has the potential to save, and which one the power to harm?

"Don't save me," says Merrill.

Understand that "saving" Merrill in this context means getting her to stop self-harming—as if the problem is the act of cutting or even the cuts themselves, as if there are no deeper metaphorical cuts, as if a literal band-aid will figuratively plaster over wounds that require restorative justice. Understand that it means forcing her to lose her culture. Understand it means pathologizing gender, race, and non-settler cultures. Understand it means stripping her of agency. Understand it means stripping yourself of agency. Understand that it means viewing your own history as one of weakness, lack of restraint, and failure. Understand it means positioning Mad femmes like her, like you, as always in need of rescue.

There's a reason that Lovelace's fierce poetry collection, which addresses self-harm and trauma, is called *the princess saves herself in this one.* We are right to be suspicious of the kind of rescue that white knights offer us.

I'm not going to save Merrill.

I'm going to be Mad with her. The love between two Mad femmes contains a multitude of potentialities, possibilities, futures, horizons. Identifying *with* or *alongside* rather than *against* Merrill and using queer Mad love as a site of convergence and connection allows me, in Muñoz's words, "to desire differently, to desire more, to desire better" (189). To desire mutuality rather than control, to fantasize about nonhierarchical relationships rather than ones shaped by power, as they so often are in a cisheteropatriarchal settler culture. We could reject these hierarchies. We could follow a different path. We could get lost. We could share an "affective commons" (Belcourt 59), and identify Madness, grief, and pain as a resource, a shared pool of experience and meaning that moves between us, that draws us together. We could recognize these feelings as moving *between* rather than affixed *to* specific bodies. Returning to Sundén and Sveningsson's "queer, feminist ethics of closeness, involvement and vulnerability, acknowledging that ethnographies are based on affective attachments and embodied experiences" (201), I follow the currents of feeling and touch into the realm of erotic play and desire, guided by these critical questions:

- What does it mean to fall in love with an avatar?
- Can erotic desire exist between physical and digital bodies?
- What are the political and ideological implications of taking a programmed romance seriously as a site of radical queer Mad desire and agency?

I want to explore the relationship between the concept of "play" and Lorde's "erotic" as "a resource within each of us…firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (87). I want to suggest that falling in love with an avatar and taking that relationship seriously as a process of ethics and as political action positions this digital love as a form of Muñoz's "queer ecstasy": Munoz writes that "taking ecstasy with one another is an invitation, a call, to a then-and-there, a not-yet-here" (187). A movement towards utopia.

"Play" already has a relationship with sex, romance, relationship-building, and love, although this relationship is not inherently liberatory. We map out our early friendships through playgrounds, playmates, and play dates. We play with ourselves. We play doctor, play hard to get, play the field. From foreplay to sexual roleplay, online dating sites to dating simulations (sims), play and desire cross the borders of real/imaginary and span age categories from childhood to adulthood. While much of this play is a ritualized performance of patriarchal norms and values, the flexibility and fluidity of play as a concept, the inventiveness and electricity of playfulness allows for more deviant, non-normative practices and experiences. For example, Ashley Brown argues that erotic digital role-play can "redefine embodied sexuality and upset binary assumptions of what constitutes 'real' and 'virtual' sexuality and the differences between online and offline interactions" (8). Digital erotic play destabilizes settler normativity by putting pressure on the binaries of offline/online and virtual/real, allowing the player to explore non-normative or deviant desires in a virtual space.

Sundén muses on her relationship with a woman she met through *WoW*, wondering "Who or what was it really that she was in love with? Was it the player she had met offline, now being mediated through the game and the meetings? Or was it the character itself— who at the time was much stronger and powerful than herself, a figure to look up to and admire?" (66). Here, Sundén moves away from the comfortable realm of conventional human romantic relationships and suggests that desire and affect exist between humans and avatars, enabled through screens and technology (and perhaps the interface itself is a source of desire, the act of interfacing sexually gratifying). Melissa Broder also explores the ability of the avatar to generate embodied desire, discussing a passionate affair she had with an avatar on Twitter: "When the avatar faved two of my tweets in a row, it felt like fucking" (141). When she meets the man behind the avatar, she is not interested in him—

but still feels something for the avatar (141-142). Affect moves between and across digital and physical worlds, making visible the permeability of screens and desires, reminding us that love and sex are fluid categories that circulate through numerous objects, bodies, and practices.

Avatars can spark affect, can mean something, can make us feel connected to other bodies. Desire moves permeability between offscreen and onscreen life, complicating and contradicting the programmed heteronormative relationship narratives. And the programmed narrative in *DA2 is* heteronormative: it is always monogamous, it is linear, it follows a traditional course to cohabitation and/or engagement, and it is limited to straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity play, ignoring trans and nonbinary gender expressions entirely. However, the experience of following this path is anything but simple. Playing as a queer Mad feminine avatar—with a shaved head like my own offscreen, in honour of my enby identity offscreen—and romancing Merrill in this playthrough lead to moments of embodied desire, longing, loss, and discomfort.

Engaging in erotic play in *DA2* creates a Mad queer relationship that has implications for the Mad queer player beyond the ideological prescriptions of a heteropatriarchal neoliberal society.

"Are you sure about Merrill?" Anders asks me. "She acts sweet, but she'll never pick you over her demon."

"Merrill loves me," I tell him. He doesn't understand how hard it is to be loved when you're Mad.

"What right do you have to question us?" asks Merrill.

She's angry, now, and that anger is electric, is sparks through the onscreen bodies and touches me offscreen, holding the controller gently, tenderly in my hand. It feels revelatory, this anger. What right does anyone have to question us?

I name that feeling—*ecstasy.*

Merrill: "No one ever understood. Not the Keeper, not my clan...just you." How powerful is this utterance, that merges love and understanding with loss and mourning, seamlessly drawing together the celebration of Mad romance with the memorialization of lost family and broken community? In these moments of intense feeling, erotic desire is interrupted by grief, longing, and regret, articulating the complex feelings of queer bodies who continue to love forward into the future even as they refuse to forget the past.

Love and desire can be central to Mad agency. In her article "On Loving A Person With Mental Illness," Joni Edelman talks about dating and having relationships as a woman with bipolar, starting with the evocative first line of "I am hard to love." I have had friends with depression or anxiety tell me they feel—or have been explicitly told—that they are "hard to love." This is also a phrase I have repeated—to myself, my partner, and my therapists—hundreds of times. Edelman articulates these fears and sense of desperation when she writes "imagine if your starting block is 'hard to love' or 'fortunate to be loved.' How far would you have to go to be deserving of affection?" This theme of being unloved or of craving love and affection also emerges in *Mad Pride: A Celebration of Mad Culture:* Nick Blinko writes that we are "mad in the head - mad in the heart" (205.17-18), while Chris P. writes of his experience in a psychiatric institution that: "I felt very alone. Mental tendrils of sympathy can be soothing, but I couldn't even remember the last time I was hugged. I cracked and cried myself into something that sometimes seemed like sleep" (141). Touch. Connection. Bodies loving bodies. Mad bodies are punished and part of this punishment can be a withholding. We don't get enough love.

I ask Merrill to move in with me.

"You really are crazy, aren't you?" she asks.

Yes I am. This moment feels validating. I am crazy. We're crazy together. *Ecstasy*.

We love the unloved bodies. I lead her to my bed and we touch each other. We wake up holding each other. There is tenderness. We confess our feelings for each other. We are in love. We want everyone to know. She moves in with me. *Ecstasy*. I want this in real life. I want this in game. There is a lot of wanting. Loving a woman as a woman or enby is a radical act. Loving a Mad woman as a Mad woman is also a radical, willful, powerful act. It acknowledges "the need for sharing deep feeling" (Lorde 90) and refuses to dismiss these affective bonds as "a sign of female inferiority" (88).

In my home which is now our home, my avatar tells me that Merrill has been jumping on the bed, playing in the main foyer. My avatar says "Handprints? Has someone been swinging from the chandelier? Merrill..."

Maybe she plays this way or maybe she doesn't. Maybe we play together.

Inviting Merrill to move in with me, I break the racialized class norms of the city. I flaunt our relationship publicly. When Merrill swings from the chandelier of our home, she demonstrates a destructive creativity that physically disrupts or even damages the upper-class mansion that symbolizes the financial elite and the settler state. This wild playfulness that trespasses on the norms of upper-class white behaviour suggests that Merrill will not be remade into an Eliza Doolittle; instead, this piece of the white supremacist state will become her playground. The "handprints" she leaves on the railing, reminiscent of a crime scene, are the record of a body moving through a space that should be inaccessible to it, and proof of our deviant, resistant relationship. *Ecstasy.*

When Merrill moves in with me, her default attire becomes bridal white, an uncomfortably heteronormative visual cue. In literally becoming whiter, there is also the suggestion that through our union she has become more aligned with the white supremacist settler state. Yet she continues to spend most of her days in the Elven alienage, and only moves a single flower into our home (Merrill's movement into the future does not include a

rejection of the past). Her existence in High Town, the heart of settler capitalist power and privilege, makes visible the threads of power that are gendered and racialized. Her body troubles the smooth spaces of colonialism. I give her a syvlanwood ring, a symbolic gesture that appears to connote an engagement, another heteronormative action. Merrill informs me that this is a Keeper's ring, a symbol of Dalish culture and community ("Sylvanwood Ring (gift)"). This moment of misunderstanding feels productive, heavy with the weight of assumption, the legacy of loss, and makes my avatar complicit in Merrill's personal and communal histories of pain.

In these moments of intimacy between Merrill and my avatar, by invoking the ghosts of the dead, the lost, and the divided, Merrill keeps faith with the past even as she moves forward into an uncertain future, risking love and forging new relationships. In contrast to traditional settler heteronormative relationship structures, Merrill's romance reminds the player that all bodies and couples already exist in other relational configurations, in other histories and communities and inherited affects that influence the present and future.

I don't want to be a nonbinary person who is attractive for their weakness—who is read as weak—to be used as a prop in a toxic masculinity drama. I'm not interested in generating social capital for sane/able-bodied settler feminists. I don't want to use the self-harming Indigenous body for my own gratification. I don't try to save Merrill, although love and acceptance are their own forms of saving. We save each other from the sanist world.

We run away together.

Where are we going? What are we mapping out with our rejection of norms rooted in class violence, racial segregation, sanism/ableism, and sexism? What is our "flight plan" (Muñoz 189)? Where are we always running to?

"Something fuller, vaster, more sensual, and brighter" (Muñoz 189).

Something cripped, crazier, and queerer.

Something like utopia.

Complicating Self-Harm and Self-Care

In her conclusion to *Willful Subjects,* "A Call to Arms," Ahmed writes that "The arm can be the fleshy site of a disagreement" (198), insisting that "a queer arm extends the very expectation of what an arm can do or can be" (199). Butch lesbian arms and clenched fists: symbols of feminist revolt, tools of feminist willfulness. Arms are weapons and body parts and sites of creative labor. The willful child in Ahmed's introduction is willful because she continues to raise her arm, even in death. Raising your hand—to answer a question, or, even more daring, to ask one. To volunteer. Can the arm of a cutter also be a "fleshy site of disagreement"? Is this arm, too, marked with cuts and scratches and scars, a queer and willful arm? And what do we do with the hand that cuts, the hand that wields the weapon against the arm and renders both ambivalent signifiers of violence and agency? And what about the hand on the controller that presses X, that makes the avatar self-harm, my arm that is so different and yet similar to the self-harming avatar on-screen? As Aubrey Anable asks: "To touch and to be touched is the capacity that affect describes. What kind of encounter is it when we touch the screen of a digital device?" (38).

Can we imagine an ethical, passionate encounter?

In *DA2* I can play as Merrill only during the battle sequences, selecting her blood magic spells and knowing what that means, owning what that means for both of us. However, the game also allows the player's primary avatar—the story's protagonist—to select a blood magic build. There are no narrative or relationship consequences to playing as a blood mage, but the significance of that choice within the game world was clear to me: like Merrill, I would be pathologized and abjected, hunted and rejected. You are Mad, you are other, and you are always a threat to the security of the nation-state. As a mage, the

game asserts that your citizenship is tenuous, constantly reminding you that only your wealth and your willingness to work for the Knight-Commander keep you from imprisonment, exile, or death. When you fall outside her control, your citizenship—and personhood—will be revoked. You are also a refugee, and marked as an unwanted foreigner, sometimes through the language of waste: "refuse," "filth," "rabble," "street rat" "midden heap" (recall Tyler's discussion of the discourse of waste as a biopolitical tool that produces national abjects and her explicit engagement with the fear of the "foreigner"). While mages in the game world are prevented from reproducing—reflecting the colonial fear of women birthing bodies of colour, and eugenic policies forced on Indigenous and disabled bodies—my mother ran away with my mage father and birthed a mage in hiding, a secret transgression. My birth was illegal. As a player, my experience of the game world is framed through this othering.

The ethics of playing as a self-harming avatar change when you carry the memory in your body, in the roughness of your discoloured flesh or the feeling of the tool in your hand. The experience shifts. We use the tools we have, but this isn't just a battle mechanic in a fantasy game, not to me. It's an identity, maybe something nearing mine. You don't get to play Mad femmes in games—-you kill them, or, maybe, cure them. Sometimes you cure them by killing them (Under "Beliefs about Disability," Clare includes the popular sentiment that "We are better off dead" (*Brilliant* 7), which Kafer also discusses (1)). You don't get to *be* them. My avatar is not me, and digital self-harm is nothing like physical self-harm (just as tearing paper or drawing on your body is not like physical self-harm). But playing with the identity of the avatar who cuts, when you are a cutter...this is something else. There is affect, moving between our bodies. There is connection. There are hands and arms that hold a secret knowledge.

Body memories of pain and pleasure.

One of the first spells I selected as a mage was "heal." I wanted to enact the self-care that accompanies self-harm (we attend to our own bleeding). Andy Smith:

> an integral part of the damage was the vilification by the Accident & Emergency staff, so I would carry a safety kit consisting of; a clean sterile blade with which to cut myself, a tube of antiseptic cream, cotton wool, Butterfly steri-strips, plasters and a crepe bandage. (18)

At times, this playthrough was an act of self-care. Johanna Hedva writes that "The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself." I smooth the band-aid gently, tenderly, over my forearm. Later, my partner will kiss it, deliberately, slowly.

"I love you. Whatever happens, remember that," I tell Merrill. There are many ways to self-care, and they can be strange, counterintuitive, and reside outside the limits of our culturally conditioned empathy. Too often we forget the caring elements of self-harm. Kathleen Glasgow, through the voice of her protagonist in *Girl in Piece*s, writes "The first time I ever cut myself, the best part was after: swabbing the wound with a cotton ball, carefully drying it, inspecting it, this way and that, cradling my arm protectively against my stomach. There, there." (42). Self-harm hovers uncomfortably alongside self-care, and I want to trouble this divide—to suggest that self-harm may be a form of self-care, or at least has a very complicated relationship to self-care.

In game: I cut, and I heal. I survive battles and the aftermath of battles. I survive as a woman in a patriarchal world that feels at times very close to my own world (Merrill tells me in different ways and in different locations that she's anxious about going out at night; that there are "big scary men." I understand this fear).

Out of game: I practice self-advocacy within a colonial institution that pushes Mad and disabled bodies out of the classroom (Dolmage 2017; Price 2011). I remain in the classroom. I'm not always collegial, I don't have the energy or enthusiasm we are supposed

to perform to be a "good" student (badness follows me through digital and physical landscapes). I don't leave and get better and then come back, refreshed and new. There is no better. There's just me, and I'm here, and I keep talking about barriers and policing and silencing. I remind myself of Erick Fabris' words in *Mad Matters*: "I consider my refusal to shut up about it a success, emotionally and professionally" (133).

In game: I use magic, and am surveilled by my companions, by the templars, by passersby. My uncle tells me, "You would've been better off if you were normal." I defend Merrill's blood magic, and in doing so, I am defending myself. When I ask, "Are all apostates blood mages?" ("On the Loose") as a blood mage, the significance of the dialogue changes. I am not a blood mage hunter. I am not participating in the division between the good obedient mage and the willful bad mage; or, if I am, I fall on the side of crazy. I am looking for people like me. I am looking for recognition. I practice self-care through self-advocacy, through an insistence on Mad pride, by refusing to give an account of myself, by refusing to apologize for my Madness.

Out of game: I hold my wrist against my chest, stroking it, soothing, mothering my frantic furious fierce body. *There, there.*

This chapter was inspired by love. I know bodies with scars that are hidden under long sleeves or pants. There are scars I have touched, kissed, licked. There are scars I have never seen. Once I started talking about self-harm I couldn't stop, and I learned how many people do this, or did, or might. It's not my place to tell their stories, but they help me remember the differences between my invisible marks and being visibly marked as Mad; the itchiness of scabbing skin and the pain of a doctor refusing to numb the area when he stitches you up. The fear of being found out and the fear of death. They said they wondered if they should call an ambulance. Evidence in the sheets. So much to clean. He spent a month in the psych ward. There was a single hallway windows and he would sit on the floor

and do crossword puzzles and try to feel the sunlight on his face.

Pivoting between solidarity, friendship, identification, and love, a Merrill/Hawke blood magic romance pairing imagines one mode of ecstatic "collective political becoming" (Muñoz 189). As a case study, my playthrough uncovers the dual settler affective responses of horror-rejection and empathy-control that are used to oppress Mad, feminized, and racialized bodies, and offers new modes of reading, interpreting, and engaging with practices of digital and physical self-harm. In her brilliant work of fiction, *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars,* Kai Cheng Thom writes "I don't believe in safe spaces. They don't exist. I do, however, believe in dangerous stories" (1). Self-harming bodies—physical and digital—make the comfortable spaces of settler feminism and "benevolent" colonialism uncomfortable; they showcase the violence in the foundation of our streets and buildings, in the shape of the chairs and the quality of sunlight through the windows. We write histories of pain into the body. We hurt, and this hurt is neither sanitized nor safe. Trespassing on the borders of the skin, on the boundaries between digital and physical desire, and on the limits of "good" identity play, the self-harming bad avatar invites us to dirty up the white(washed) feminism of the settler state, to "allow for friction, cuts, pain, *and pleasure*" (Juhasz, "Affect bleeds" 668) (my emphasis), and to attend to bleeds of all kinds.

Chapter 4 | Crip Encounters in the Corporate Hashtag

Love letter to those of us who get triggered: This chapter references important and difficult topics including domestic violence, abuse, sexual violence, bullying, and self-harm. However, the chapter does not discuss these topics in-depth. One sub-section of this chapter discusses suicide at length (pages 207-212). This section is bookended by text in italics both introducing and appending the topic.

Keywords: abuse; Bell Let's Talk; bipolar; bullying; community; digital humanities; ethics; feminism; grief; identity; Mad studies; memory; mental health; mental illness; methodologies; nationalism; pride; PTSD; racism; self-harm; settler colonialism; sexism; sexual violence; shame; social media; suicide; Twitter; wellness

Hashtags and Heart Emojis

I'm staring at an Excel sheet that holds 5000 tweets. They're not all unique tweets; sometimes I scroll through several cells of "Today, for every tweet and retweet using #BellLetsTalk, Bell will donate 5¢ to #mentalhealth initiatives in Canada. Join!" Other times my eye catches on a word like "suicide" or "fucking" and the scrolling stutters or stops. I'm pulled into the tweets that use all caps or too many exclamation marks: the people yelling into the vacuum of cyberspace. When I read more carefully, I stumble over moments of sarcasm puckering the smooth skin of a corporate hashtag. This is the collective and collaborative digital life-writing text I have created, pieced together using Python and Excel and OpenRefine, a communications corporation (Bell Canada), a social networking site (Twitter), and the hundreds of (here, anonymous) authors that Tweeted, Retweeted, and Favourited #BellLetsTalk on Wednesday, January 31st, 2018.

It's an interesting and incredibly complicated archive. The peppy energy of a car-wash fundraiser and saccharine clichés about love and healing crash painfully into tweets about exhaustion, insomnia, forgetting to take your medication, financial struggles, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. I often feel that I don't have to see who's posting to know who's speaking from personal experience and who isn't. Maybe it's dangerous to make those assumptions, but there are very real tensions created by the proximity of these different

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utterances, both in tone and content, intention and execution. Generic claims about how mental illness "doesn't discriminate" sit uncomfortably beside tweets about gendered violence. Hearts and smiley faces punctuate the text, trying—and often failing—to make the overarching story uplifting and heartwarming. Instead, it's heart*worm*ing, burrowing into my body. I am relieved that none of the tweets I collected were authored by people I know. Still, their presence hovering around the archive—some brutally, vulnerably personal, others in the careless vein of happy well-meaning tourists—is a bruise. When I press on it, it hurts.

Cripping Auto/Tweetography

Tweeting, or the production of what Laurie McNeill terms "auto/tweetographies" ("Life Bytes" 144), is a form of digital life writing. Just as the video game avatar explored in Chapters 2 and 3 offers a mode of digital embodiment through which to perform, practice, and play with identity, the Twitter avatar enables a different set of digital automedial acts through networked identity performances. The Twitter avatar engages with multiple networks that collaboratively and co-constitutively produce affect, embodiment, and identity, and includes both offline networks that are reproduced online, and online networks of followers that have no offline counterparts.

Hashtagging offers an additional layer of sociality, a "theme" group that forms around a particular topic or event; in this case, the #BellLetsTalk project of mental health. Nathan Rambukkana terms these networks "hashtag publics" (29), and while he focuses on the publics of race activism, the tensions brewing around #BellLetsTalk can also be suggestive of "the kinds of publics that do politics in a way that is rough and emergent, flawed, and messy" (29). It is important to keep in mind the different types of networks that are at play in these identity acts, some less visible (reading without responding; favouriting; retweeting) some more visible (responding, tweeting using the same hashtag), that are engaged in the

"networked affect" (Hillis, Paasonen, Petit 2015) that is vital to the production of an online identity. Like affect, digital identities are assemblages generated between rather than within bodies (McNeill and Zuern 2015; Paasonen, Hillis, and Petit 2015; Rambukkana 2015). As collaborations that rely on constant performance and that are always in flux, networked Twitter avatars thus embody a "slippage between identity as process and as product" (Poletti and Rak 9).

While the corpus of #BellLetsTalk tweets reproduces the oppressive hegemony of the communications corporations (Twitter; Bell Canada), promoting the narratives of overcoming, self-management, and hyperindividualism that I examined in Chapter 1, the messiness and discomfort of Mad/crip bodies emerge from under the glossy veneer of prescriptive wellness.[33] While these feelings and identities are not foregrounded, and are, in fact, discouraged by the hashtag, their presence in the archive can be felt as a disruption to the pretty white propaganda of colonial health. Sifting through the dataset uncovers Mad/crip testimony and kinship—a cripped auto/tweetography.

However, while some of these networks queer/crip the hashtag in disruptive ways, other performances of bad/Mad/sad re-enact troubling attachments to markers of the settler colonial project: whiteness, toxic masculinity, and nationalism. This chapter moves through these networks affectively from feelings of belonging along multiple axes of kinship, to feelings of isolation and the avatars that struggle to disidentify with the networks that seek to claim them. This process can also be read as peeling back the layers of the hashtag,

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[33] Michèle Martin's study of Bell telephone networks in Canada from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and the subsequent development of social networks is relevant here. In "*Hello Central?*" Martin traces the gendered and classed development of telephone networks and the ways women claimed access to communication technologies. Bell's contemporary use of social media networks is an extension of their hegemonic communication technologies that have historically privilege the ruling class; yet, just as Martin notes the resistances and challenges made to the telephone system, so, too, do Twitter avatars resist by claiming online space and access to communication.

from the more easily accessible (and shareable, likeable) performances to the more

submerged (and less shareable, likeable) performances within these networked publics.

These co-constituted identity performances are always working with, through, and

against the affordances and constraints of the social media platform as well as social

policing (i.e. some identity performances are rewarded while others are ignored or even

punished by other users) (Morrison 2014; Paasonen, Hillis, Petit 2015). In order to locate

the generation and circulation of Mad/crip affects, then, we must look beyond the most

popular "Trending" identities and into the less shared (and shareable), the less liked (and

likeable) utterances. This project, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary methodology

harnessing digital humanities tools for data collection and management alongside tactics of

close reading, critical analysis, and the feminist and autobiographical practices of following

affect and intuition (Ahmed 2017; Cvetkovich 2012; Pillow and St. Pierre 2010).

Methodology: Ethics in Data Collection and Management

This chapter turns away from traditional Humanities research and into the field of the

Digital Humanities (DH), in which algorithms are employed in tandem with close-reading,

and computer processes collect datasets that we analyze through a variety of tactics, trying

to glean meaning through different lenses and approaches. DH tools enabled me to collect

Twitter data and to clean and assemble the text that I identify as collective automedia. With

the help of Digital Scholarship Librarian John Fink, using Python and Twitter APIs, between

January 26 and January 31, we collected several gigabytes of tweets using the hashtag

#BellLetsTalk. We collected the data directly to one of the PCs at the Sherman Centre for

Digital Scholarship. Understandably, the file wouldn't fit on my thumb drive and could not be

easily transferred to my personal PC. Working from the Sherman Centre, I attempted to

open the document in OpenRefine[34] in order to move to the first stage of cleaning (translating JSON to CSV). However, the file was so large that the browser kept crashing (often after attempting to load for 20 minutes). Nor would the file fit in a single Excel sheet or Google Sheet. For the first time since wading into the arena of digital scholarship, I was faced with the hard limit of programs that can only handle so much data at any one time, and the reality that collecting tweets also involves collecting far more metadata about the tweets and the user than I needed or wanted.

I took a manual approach to narrowing down the scope of the project, an approach that allowed me to understand how the data were being changed, cleaned, lost, and transformed through machinic processes and human labour. At the suggestion of Dr. Matthew Davis, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Sherman Centre, I was able to successfully open the JSON file in Atom[35]. From there, I was able to copy and paste a selection of the data into a Google Sheets file (5000 tweets). Based on the size of the file and my own limitations for this project, I focused on tweets posted between January 30-31. Switching to my own PC I translated 50 rows (tweets) at a time using a JSON → CSV converter online[36], saving the data in folders as sets of 1000. I then worked on one file at a time, copying and pasting the metadata I wanted (from the columns and columns of metadata that the API collected) into a single Google Sheet. The metadata I saved included location, when the tweet was created (or retweeted), and the number of favourites, retweets and replies at the moment of collection. Finally, I created a separate document for the tweet corpus itself. I opened this sheet in OpenRefine and deleted the duplicate tweets. From the original 5000 tweets I collected, I was left with 2093 unique tweets. Although I primarily worked with the unique

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[34] A tool for cleaning messy data.
[35] An open source code editor, although I did not use it to edit code.
[36] https://konklone.io/json/

tweet content, this chapter is informed by both datasets.

When collecting data from hundreds of digital bodies, it's impossible to obtain consent from each user. However, it is possible—and necessary—to undertake this research in an ethical and non-exploitative manner. My approach, constructed through research, discussion, and continuous self-reflection, is my contribution to the contemporary dialogue about social media research, a project articulated by the edited collection *Good Data*:

> The objective of the Good Data project is to start a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder conversation around promoting good and ethical data practices and initiatives, towards a fair and just digital economy and society. (Daly, Mann, and Devitt 8)

Before collecting the data, I spoke with the McMaster Research Ethics Board, and was informed that due to the public-facing nature of Twitter, and a general understanding of hashtagging as a public event, an ethics application would not be required. However, we discussed best practices for collecting, using, and saving the data, for, as Andrea Zeffiro reminds us, "simply because information is stipulated as 'public' does not absolve researchers of ethical concerns" (231).

I was primarily concerned with protecting the anonymity of the users—my goal was to uncover patterns of feeling and Mad/crip networks, not to "out" a single user. Due to the searchability of tweets, this chapter will not reproduce tweets verbatim, but will focus on recurring words and, when necessary, explain the context that provides meaning to these words. The data have been saved on a computer at the Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship behind two sets of passwords, and a copy of the data has been saved on my PC, which is also password protected. The metadata, which contains sensitive information, will not be made public. In line with Twitter's terms of use, only the dehydrated data will be

appended to this dissertation.

Despite the many tools now available for performing digital scholarship, the consequences of using these tools are unknown. The algorithm, the computer, the researcher, the corporation—there are many layers of transition, transformation, and curation that shape the final working archive, which is never complete nor neutral. In this overview of the dataset I worked with for this chapter, I hope to illuminate the messiness and complexity of working with algorithms and machines whose processes are not transparent. Of the 5000 tweets I initially chose, selected based on date and time (which translates into proximity in the dataset), 3641 were retweets, while 220 simply stated "#BellLetsTalk." The presence of original tweets and retweets, as well as the range of tweets (from just the hashtag to a long narrative thread) point to the different forms and levels of engagement with the hashtag that inform this study. It's important to recognize that even within the "unique" tweets dataset of 2093 there is repetition, as I have frequently collected the original tweet as well as a single retweet, and/or a retweet with slight additions or alterations. The dataset is imperfect, incomplete, and very much curated.

Looking briefly at the date and location of tweets/users also reveals biases in the dataset. All of the tweets in the dataset were posted the evening of January 30 or on January 31st, Bell Let's Talk Day. The majority were posted on January 31st. While most users are located in Canada (according to their Twitter accounts), several hail from the United States (possibly Canadian expatriates), including Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and a few were located in the United Kingdom. Tweets clustered around urban centres like Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Montreal, although smaller towns also appeared under the list of user locations. The tweets spanned coast (BC) to coast (Newfoundland and Nova Scotia). Users ranged from verified celebrity accounts like Clara Hughes with thousands of followers to non-verified accounts with only a handful of

followers; from users with thousands of tweets to users with less than a hundred; and from established accounts to new accounts. Looking at the metadata collected for this project, we can conclude that Bell's national campaign sparked minimal international engagement and significant intranational engagement. A diverse range of users/avatars participated in the hashtag, although the views of urban users will be more visible.

The analysis I provide in this chapter focuses on the unique tweet corpus, using Voyant[37] to perform text analysis alongside close reading to establish patterns and relationships. In some cases, I revisited the username or avatar in order to tentatively make claims about the types of communities forming around the hashtag (i.e. masculine versus feminine publics) and used this imperfect knowledge in conjunction with tweet content and affect mapping. Visual analysis was also used to interrogate images of select bodies that were circulated through the hashtag as idealized crip citizens.

Methodology: Generating a Collaborative Crip Automedial Text

Generating a collective digital life-writing text from the #BellLetsTalk tweets is an act of assembling collective auto/biography that puts pressure on the hyperindividualism of traditional colonial life-writing. In this way, the text I have assembled enacts Leigh Gilmore's concept of "limit-cases" which "produce an alternative jurisprudence within which to understand kinship, violence, and self-representation" (134). While, as Gilmore notes, "memoirs and autobiographies struggle with the persistent legacy of confession that institutionalizes penance and penalty as self-expression" (137), my project resists the limitations and violence of these traditions by taking the confessional tweets encouraged by

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[37] An open-source tool for performing textual analysis, Voyant provides data on text content: i.e. number of times a word occurs in the text, average sentence length, etc. Voyant also offers simple visualizations like Wordles to demonstrate more and less commonly occurring terms.

#BellLetsTalk and reframing them as networks and affects rather than singular avatars or authors. By refusing to make the Mad/crip avatar hypervisible by reproducing their words verbatim, I intend to put pressure on the confessional mode that demands total access to the speaker. Instead, these utterances—many of them traumatic—are "testimonial projects, but they do not bring forward cases within the protocols of legal testimony" (134).

In bearing witness to the multiple voices engaged in the project of #BellLetsTalk, my methodology brushes up against Bronwyn Davies's concept of a "collective biography" that is "open, rhizomatic, and transformative (Masschelein and Roach 257). Davies writes that:

> In relation to your question as to whether interviewing is still relevant in the face of "big data," I can't imagine that it would ever be irrelevant to listen to people. What format that listening takes, and what interpretive work is done with what they have to say is, to me anyway, endlessly fascinating (262)

In assembling this life-writing text I have tried to listen, honour, and respect avatars, their real-world counterparts, and their hashtagged affect and bodies. While I do not use interviews in this dissertation, my use of Voyant to uncover less popular—but still present—feelings and critiques enacts a form of ethical encountering that recovers voices of speakers whose words could easily be lost in a sea of data, drowned by quantitative approaches that equate "most popular" or "most common" with "most significant" and "most meaningful." Instead, I pivot between popular and less popular, common and uncommon, sifting through the multi-authored collaborative #BellLetsTalk text for Mad/crip feeling and expression.

Voyant allows the user to view the word list either alphabetically or by most commonly occurring word. By selecting the most commonly occurring words, we are confronted with the hegemony of the Bell message which drowns out other voices and erases critical madness from the corpus. However, if we look at the word list alphabetically, smaller clusters and outliers are granted the same visibility as Clara Hughes or Michael

Landsberg. This is one tactic through which researchers can unearth those dissenting voices and collectives in big data projects whose social and social media hegemonies seem unshakeable. Dorothy Kim writes that "What critical discussions about the digital humanities seem to forget are the possibilities of examining and working with minute granularity—the practice of extreme close reading" (234). By looking at alphabetical word lists in Voyant, researchers can navigate between the quantitative tools of big data analysis and the "minute granularity" of "extreme close reading," uncovering those grains of difference in the texture of the corpus. This approach is part of my broader methodology of oscillating between micro and macro analysis, between individual experiences and broader societal trends, in order to situate identity construction within a cultural and political context and to make visible the often "invisible bodies, with their fists up, tucked away and out of sight" (Hedva). If users are turning to hashtags and digital spaces to form temporary micro-communities that push back against totalizing narratives of neoliberal settler mental health, digital humanities researchers have a responsibility to find and examine these moments of performed and embodied resistance.

By looking at word lists rather than individual tweets (except to confirm word usage, and estimate tone and intention), I not only uncover critically crip networks in the corporate hashtag, but I construct a collectively authored automedial text that turns away from single authorship or identity and towards community and relationships. This process not only subverts the confessional mode through which mentally ill identity performances are often read, but perhaps also subverts the hegemonic violence of traditional autobiography. Smith and Watson remind us that, "because the term privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing, it has been vigorously challenged in the wake of postmodern and postcolonial critiques of the Enlightenment subject" (3). The crip feminist DH scholar turns away from reading tweets as individual self-

performances, and towards the tools of assemblage and reading across a diverse and multi-authored text; the DH crip feminist scholar uses programs like Voyant not to conflate "most popular" with "most significant" but to identify those resisting and dissenting voices that trouble corporate identity and imagined national unity. For this chapter, I employed tools and methods that queer/crip the dataset and constructed an automedial text that embodies crip interdependency and feminist community-building practices.

Coaxed Automedia

Of the 5000 tweets, 912 were retweets (RTs) of Bell's official Twitter account, @Bell_LetsTalk, and 60 were RTs of celebrity spokeswoman Clara Hughes. RTs are an important function of Twitter: not only do they denote another level and kind of participation, but popular tweets rise to the top of the page and are promoted as the "Top" tweets. With almost 20% of the tweets dominated by Bell's official tagline, the ideologies of the "good" (white) docile mentally ill citizen and the benevolent corporate body are grossly overrepresented in the corpus. Within the set of 2093 unique tweets, however, only 13 were RTs of Bell and 2 were RTs of Clara Hughes, so the Bell avatar and spokesperson takes up less than 1% of the dialogue. Yet within the unique tweet set the corporate tagline remains dominant, as avatars tweet about fundraising and generating awareness. Many users only tweeted #BellLetsTalk without any additional writing. Of the users who did append sentences and thoughts and feelings to the hashtag, the most recurring words included "rt" (1010), sometimes because I have captured a retweet; in other cases, users encouraging each other to retweet, "mental" (308), "day" (256), "health" (195), "people" (131), "today" (124), and the self-reflexive "tweet" (111). In the hashtag, the "good" avatar of benevolent corporate charity dominates, and Bell remains the firm master of its creation.

Between the affordances and constraints of the social media platform, and the

ideological framework of Bell's campaign (granted authority through associations with a range of cultural touchstones of power, from CMHA and CAMH to celebrities), the corporate hashtag encourages certain types of tweets while discouraging others. In #BellLetsTalk we see the curation not only of coaxed confessions, but the very wording of these confessions: "#BellLetsTalk about" was the most common sentence structure in the dataset with 346 occurrences. Aimée Morrison argues that Facebook employs tactics such as prompts to coax autobiographical acts online, and that as these prompts shift over time (from "Adan is ___" to "What's on your mind?"), the resulting posts will also shift. Similarly, Twitter coaxes autobiographical acts from users with the prompt "What's happening?" Twitter allows for textual utterances of 280 characters (a 100% increase in 2017 from the 140 it allowed initially), as well as media, often images or gifs, to be posted and shared. Twitter communication occurs through replies, retweets, and favourites. The most favourited and retweeted posts appear higher on the page and are more likely to be encountered by casual scrollers. When looking at a specific hashtag, the user can select "Most Recent" as an organizing principle; however, the default is "Top" (i.e. most popular).

The pressure to be "trending," to garner likes and retweets, and to compete for visibility encourages autobiographical acts that reflect dominant ideological frameworks and often tend towards spectacle. Events that are trending one day are frequently buried the next. The liveliness of political scandal and celebrity gossip delivered to your smartphone in real time can be overwhelming and discourage a sustained engagement with difficult topics that cannot be reduced to a catchy headline. This is not to say that users are not creating "wiggle room," to invite Ahmed's evocative concept of queer movement and space back into our conversation, only that corporate social media platforms' emphasis on "competition and hierarchizing" (McNeill, "Life Bytes" 153) discourages sustained critical and collaborative conversations.

Like other social media platforms, Twitter's promotion of popular tweets emphasizes and produces self-made celebrity or "microcelebrity" (Warwick 138) and encourages users to attempt to attain large numbers of followers and to produce viral (i.e. lucrative) content. One of the ways Twitter encourages self-branding and self-promotion is through verification. Twitter explains that "The blue verified badge PIC on Twitter lets people know that an account of public interest is authentic" ("About verified accounts"). "People of interest" include politicians, movie stars, and Olympic athletes. While initially this checkmark was gifted by the Gods of Twitter, later, users were able to request verification. However, in November of 2017 Twitter halted its verification program after the revelation that they had verified the organizer of the Charlottesville, Virginia white supremacist rally (Lecher 2017). These changes over time suggest that verification is a living rather than static process. Throughout the shifting faces of verification, the process has remained unclear, shrouded in Masonic secrecy and invisible workers making decisions behind closed doors and glass ceilings. Some users, like Bell spokesperson Clara Hughes, are Verified because of their preexisting celebrity status. Other users become Verified after gaining Twitter celebrity. Alison Hearn notes that, alongside a stamp of authenticity, "the verification checkmark is considered a status symbol" (68). This cultural capital, importantly, is often leveraged for financial capital. Hearn situates the verified checkmark within the economization of selfhood:

> "Verified"...by privately owned telecom and technology industries and financial
> institutions, spurred on to assiduously self-present by the hyperpersonalized
> affective lures and bribes like the Twitter checkmark, we are inserted into the global
> flows of capital in all our specificity and yet simultaneously stripped of our meaningful
> identities, reduced to our SIM card (74)

We already know that Twitter and other social media platforms seek to profit from user

activity and identity performance (Fuchs 2014; Pybus 2015). Hearn follows the twinned

flows of affect and money that pool in verified accounts, strengthening the network and

raising Twitter's financial value. We are encouraged to produce viral, visible, saleable

selves.

@Bell_LetsTalk, the official Twitter account for Bell Let's Talk Day, is verified. Bell

Lets Talk: a campaign, a hashtag, a virtual entity. If the role of verification is to authenticate

users, what does it mean to authenticate a corporate campaign? Is this part of the

movement that sees our society assigning rights and personhood to corporations? And how

is corporate identity here colliding with other forms of digital identity play? I argue that one

of the goals of Bell Let's Talk Day is the humanization of the corporation. Positioning Bell as

caring and sympathetic, the charity campaign not only gains free advertising through users

sharing their logo across platforms ("remember to turn off imessage!"), but also functions as

a successful PR campaign. The feelings we have for Bell, here shaped through carefully

curated posts about wellness and support, will influence our engagement as consumers.

We may use the hashtag #BellLetsTalk to connect with other people around the world, but

we are simultaneously dissolved into the global flows of capital: "Every keystroke, every

link, every comment that people generate can be extrapolated for surplus value" (Pybus

238). In this way, we can read Bell (and it's Twitter avatar, @Bell_LetsTalk) as the model

Twitter user: the corporate entity collecting followers, favourites, and retweets, creating

shareable content and successfully generating revenue for both itself and Twitter. So what if

it means reducing the complexity of mental illness to snappy one-liners?

These easily consumable forms of digital identity lend themselves to the

confessional mode of life writing. Laurie McNeill writes that "auto/tweetography participates

in a larger culture of digital self-help and normalizing that continue offline traditions of

autobiography" ("Life Bytes" 152), noting that the "design and contest framework ensure

that particular kinds of self-revelation take place that reflect popular understandings of memoir, particularly those that associate self-reflection with self-help, informed by therapeutic culture" (153). While McNeill focuses her analysis on the Six-Word Memoir, she extends her theorizing of social media to other platforms including PostSecret and Facebook, exploring the "exigencies of confession and therapy in microblogging genres" (157). It's worth teasing out what we mean here by "therapy" and "self-help": PostSecret users operate within the genre of therapeutic confession (in which speaking or disclosing is understood as inherently curative) which is embedded within a framework of capitalist self-help (in which we are tasked with managing our own bad feelings in order not to disrupt work flows). It's worth noting that this framework is not synonymous with all models of therapy and counselling (although, as noted in Chapter 3, there can be elements of the capitalist confessional as curative model in these practices of settler wellness). In Chapter 1, I discussed the way mental health campaigns like Bell Let's Talk conflate confession with cure, and the management or amelioration of pain with cure, and collapse the differences between speaking to a counsellor, friend, stranger, or employer in troubling ways. Presenting Twitter, a public-facing platform with little to no accountability, as a therapeutic space, makes me very uneasy.

Like PostSecret and the Six-Word memoir, the 280-character count of Twitter encourages revelation and confession that can limit identity exploration and self-expression, reducing complex experiences to simpler and more easily consumable identifies. This reduction of selfhood and simplification of mental health/illness is dangerous and can reinforce the dominant neoliberal models of self-management and hyperindividualism. McNeill's connection between microblogging and self-help culture is particularly relevant for a hashtag like #BellLetsTalk, which actively encourages users to be vulnerable publicly, to share their feelings, and to speak openly about personal experiences. #BellLetsTalk

ultimately claims Twitter as a therapeutic space for users with mental illnesses. It's important to remember that the prevalence of online harassment and violence directed at feminized avatars and avatars of colour proves that Twitter has never been a safe space, let alone an unproblematic digital therapy room (Croeser 2016; Kafai, Richard and Tynes 2016; Nakamura 2014; Sundén and Sveningsson 2012; Taylor 2014).

The shift from 140 to 280 characters, however, suggests that these auto/tweetographies are being harnessed to perform different kinds of identity labour, and that there is a demand for *more:* more characters, words, time. Apparently the millennial's attention span is not quite as short as the corporation hoped. Indigenous Twitter, Black Twitter, and Latinx Twitter all indicate that communities are using the platform to have sustained conversations (via threads) about race, gender, power, and privilege (Noble and Tynes 2016; Rambukkana 2015). From a byte-sized post to long threads about colonial violence, the use of Twitter has always been multiple, complex, and messy. Bodies work in line with the corporate emphasis on virality and shareability; bodies work in other ways to challenge power systems and structures. They may not gain verification (or they might), but they continue to exist and mobilize on the platform for a particular social/cultural/political purpose, rather than a purely economic one (Rambukkana 2015; Simpson 2017).

Hashtagging is one of the key practices and functions available on Twitter. Collecting tweets on similar topics, hashtagging is both an organizational principle and a mode of virality and shareability. While the emphasis on popularity often works to elevate users who already have a public platform, hashtagging has also been successfully used to interrupt these dominant narratives with counter-stories of bodies at the margin: "Twitter as a digital space and the hashtag itself become sites of powers…[.] Social media is not a movement itself, but it certainly amplifies and clarifies the work of organizers and offers a means for disrupting the silences and erasures" (Tynes, Schuschke, and Noble 37). The corporate

hashtags that generate profit for themselves and for Twitter contrast with grassroots hashtags that uncover the raw nerves of society, that make visible oppression, violence, and resistance. If Bell creates a likeable, shareable corporate identity, activist campaigns create more difficult, nuanced and fraught identities that tear at the fabric of false societal nicety (all those heart and smiley emojis). #BlackLivesMatter. #SayHerName. #MeToo. #IdleNoMore. If enough people use the hashtag, the topic can gain increased visibility on the site and reach a wider audience. We also have to acknowledge that for many Mad and crip bodies, this form of engagement and public identity performance is much more accessible than take-to-the-streets or other offline tactics (Al Zidjaly 2011; Hedva 2016; Mann 2018).

Returning to the profit-driven corporation, we can also look at how Twitter promotes certain counter-movements and intersectional identities—*if* they're popular enough to accumulate substantial revenue. For example, Sarah T. Roberts discusses the role of content moderators on online forums: interviewing these invisible workers, Roberts learns that while websites have terms of use, the company is loath to take down any viral content, even if it violates these terms. This means that content that violates the terms of use—the example given is Hillary Adams posting a video on YouTube of her father Judge Adams beating her—may be allowed to remain in circulation. This is not to celebrate neoliberal social media sites, but to suggest that in our social media use there exists wiggle room, and, like Hillary Adams, "by wiggling you make more room for yourself" (Ahmed "Wiggle Room"). Sometimes, being a "bad" user means violating terms of use in ways that challenge the status quo, and if these posts garner enough attention online, they may gain the support of the corporation itself. @BlackLivesMatter is verified. @IdleNoMore is not. @Bell_LetsTalk is verified. @MadPrideToronto is not. While neoliberalism is a cornerstone of settler colonialism and will never be a mode of liberation through which to break down

unjust structures, the economics of popularity, virality, and visibility mean that marginalized voices, bodies, and communities can collectively make themselves seen and heard because these performances ultimately support Twitter's bottom line, and thus, in particular moments, "perhaps ironically…neoliberalism and activism might be speaking the same language" (Rambukkana 42).

Networked Madness: Kinship and Belonging

Support networks are performed, created, and celebrated through the hashtag in ways that trouble the neoliberal individualism of the corporate campaign—even as they rely on the neoliberal social media corporation. #BellLetsTalk hashtag users shout out to their friends (digital and physical), talk to other avatars, and thank their friends and family members for being a part of their social support system. With 21 uses, "family" was a minor theme that emerged in the dataset, second only to variations of "friend" at 60 uses (including one use of "partner" as in "partner in crime"). While "friend" appeared unequivocally as a positive sentiment (marked by "greatest" and "best" or in some cases, mourned and lost), "family" was sometimes evoked as a support network and other times as a guilt-laded reason to not commit suicide.

Situating mental illness within a network rather than a single body highlights the interdependency of crip community. These digital identity performances can be read as a practice of what Alison Kafer identifies as "claiming crip" which she describes as a tactic for family and friends of disabled people for "acknowledging that we all have bodies and minds with shifting abilities, and wrestling with the political meanings and histories of such shifts" (13). Similarly, Elizabeth Ellcessor highlights Sami Schalk's work on "'identifying with' the political project of disability" as a methodology of experiencing embodiment as a "shifting social location" (27). Choosing to identify with disability or mental illness and participating in

the crip network destabilizes the binaries of healthy/sick, abled/disabled, and sane/mad and makes these categories visible as shifting, unstable, and relational. When we look more closely at these articulations of Mad/crip kinships, different modes of kinship and belonging emerge along different axes of identity and distinct social groups.

This framing of disability as a fluid category (which it is) that intersects with many other embodied experiences (which it does) and is a state we will all encounter (which we will), trembles when encountering the hegemonic fury of the family. Following the threads of networked madness means following the ideology of heteronormative "good" families that care, support, and police their crip members. Always, we have to ask of the network: are we cripping the family, or normalizing the crip? Where networked madness diffuses feeling and responsibility in a gesture towards queer/crip interdependency, it also risks reproducing the infantilization of mad bodies over whom parents, psychiatrists, and the state wield total control. If *your* disability is *our* disability, then *we* have a right to make decisions over that embodied experience—even when it isn't our own body. "Claiming crip" or "identifying with" can be used as tactics to re-imagine disability as a social and cultural category, but this must be done in tandem with the understanding that the individual bodies that compose the network have unique experiences that cannot be collapsed into sameness. Claiming authority over any group experience is always a tenuous and problematic project.[38] Recall Ahmed's ruminations on "happy families": "The happy family is a myth of happiness, of where and how happiness takes place, and a powerful legislative device, a way of distributing time, energy, and resources" (*Promise* 45). The association between "happy" and "good" that Ahmed interrogates appears in my dataset as a way of policing and

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[38] Perhaps most troubling about Ellcessor's claim that pregnancy gives her a window into the experience of disability is the disconnection between the kind of disabilities that pregnancy encounters and the d/Deaf and hard of hearing bodies who feature prominently in her analysis.

disciplining Mad bodies, of telling us what not to do, and how not to act in our mentally ill

bodies (in the corpus: suicide is bad, performative unhappiness is bad, bodies that do these

things are bad).

However, we also see family members celebrated as mentally ill role models and/or

caregivers in ways that put pressure on the idealized "happy family" and the solitary unit of

the mentally ill "bad" body. Users celebrating their relationships with their mom (3), dad (3),

brother (3) and sisters or sisterhood (6) position mental illness as something that exists

within and across generations and communities, rather than isolated within individual

bodies. Here, mentally ill family members and friends are not sites of contagion to be

contained in an institution, but members of a network composed of many different nodes

through which sadness and anxiety and other bad feelings flow. Inviting us to imagine

coming out crip to a parent or hearing a parent come out crip, a few of the tweets crystallize

a key moment in the visiblizing of mental illness, even as the burden continues to fall on

Mad/crip bodies to disclose (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, Jones 2017; McRuer 2006). Again,

however, this moment situates mental illness within a relationship rather than a single body,

and perhaps brushes against the genetic legacies and intergenerational trauma through

which pain is often inherited. The most radical element of these conversations is the

diffusion of badness or madness distributed among a network of caregivers, rather than

within a bad body. We also see these networks performed on Twitter through retweeting,

favouriting, responding, and tweeting at other hashtag users.

While these tweets shy away from making explicit social critiques, the repositioning

of mental illness as a family or community illness introduces interdependency into a

corporate hashtag that promotes neoliberal independence. These gestures towards

community, sociality, and participation de-emphasize individual responsibility and self-

management in favour of collective action and caregiving, reproducing the "networks of

interdependency" (McRuer, *Crip Theory* 4) that Mad/crip bodies often model offline. Snyder and Mitchell write that "disabled people's openly interdependent lives and crip/queer forms of embodiment provide alternative maps for living together" (3), and crip theorists and activists have been arguing for a cultural paradigm shift towards interdependency over independency for years (McRuer 2006; Mingus 2010; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Returning to the emphasis on friendship in the dataset, I read these tweets as an acknowledgement of the limitations of traditional family structures and proof of queer/crip family. "Friend" and "sisterhood" implicitly introduce non-normative family models into the conversation and broaden the interdependent network from the nuclear family to include queer communities.

In this dataset, we see family used both as a disciplinary technique and as an aspirational support system of love and affection. Family is represented as a site of safety and security, even as we see it also being used to produce guilt and shame. There were no references in the dataset to familial abuse. However, there was one reference to childhood sexual abuse, which suggests familial complicity. Celebrating and generating support networks through the hashtag is a form of community-building that invites mad and sane, crip and non-crip bodies into potentially productive and generative relationships and may be a site of resistance to systemic ableism. However, the ideology underpinning these networks and the use of the frequently occurring word "family" uncovers a complicated relationship between Mad bodies and their support systems. I remember when getting help for my own mental illnesses meant compromise and making myself smaller: accepting being misgendered by health professionals, not performing the feminist killjoy for fear of alienating or losing my support system.

What do we sacrifice in order to be a part of the network?

What are the limit-cases of networked madness?

As we continue our excavation of hashtagged affect, we will hold these questions in mind, as they undoubtedly shape the corporate mad/crip avatar. Moving deeper into the micro-communities of Mad/crip hashtagged networks, I explore the ways in which membership in these networks is contingent on specific mad identity performances and often reliant on the exclusion of other marginalized bodies. The corpus includes feminine therapeutic networks, masculine sick publics with deep attachments to capitalist national identity, and queer communities that keep company with ghosts.

Feminine Therapeutic Networks

The dataset contains 15 uses of a variation on "girl" and nine uses of a variation on "boy." Looking closer at these tweets revealed that "girl" was used exclusively to hail another member of the conversation, a conversational referent to another Twitter user. In contrast, "boy" was used only once in the same vein, while the other "boys" in the text referred to supportive boyfriends, hurtful exes, and "boy" as sexual predator and abuser. There were no uses of "girlfriend" in any context. While it is impossible to know someone's gender for certain without asking, the usernames of the "boyfriend" tweeters skewed towards traditionally female-coded names. There was one instance of "women" and zero instances of "men" or "man."

What we see emerging is a feminine therapeutic network in which feminine users talk to each other, reference each other, share stories and feelings, and support one another. While this sample again is too small to make broad claims about the entire hashtag, it's not unreasonable to conjecture that women and femmes are more actively involved in the hashtag than men and masculine genders based on the gendering of depression and anxiety, and the way women are socialized into affective/emotional labour and would perhaps be more likely to communicate with other users and express empathy

and care. Claiming a feminine therapeutic space online echoes other uses of digital spaces by medicalized feminine-coded avatars. For example, Olivia Banner discusses the "affective intimate publics" ("'Treat Us Right!'" 201) of fibromyalgia (FM) forums that function as online support groups, like the social media platform PatientsLikeMe (PLM). FM is a condition that primarily affects women, leading to the creation of a "specifically female digital publics, where women sometimes reflect on the social conditions that determine how medicine constructs their illness" (200).

We see tweets exploring the relationship between patriarchy and gendered mental illness with an emphasis on the gendering of illness and the reality of living in a female-coded body. References to post-partum depression (2) and sexist beauty standards that emphasize thinness and lead to eating disorders or other forms of distress (3) remind the reader that experiences of mental illness emerge within society and culture. These tweets also obliquely suggest that marginalized bodies are more likely to experience mental illness and sidle up against sociocultural critiques of fatphobia and the gender bias within the healthcare system (Banner 2014; Wendell 1996). The references to domestic abuse and sexual assault affirm the network membership of women who experience oppression in opposition to an oppressive society upheld by oppressive (masculine) bodies. These tweets both reflect offline pre-existing support groups (of friends, sisters, mothers, etc.) and indicate the creation of a new network and space to discuss "the female complaint" (Banner, "'Treat Us Right!'" 198).

Many of these avatars used the network to perform and validate bad/mad/sad identities and affects. Ji-Eun Lee writes that "The writing and re-authoring of life stories by survivors often works to contest prevailing psychiatric narratives whereby experts retell the stories of patients/consumers through professional interpretation" (106). Emerging as a counterpublic, these collective automedial narratives interrupt both the propaganda of

benevolent corporations and caring governments, and a simple trajectory from bad (sick) to good (well) through healing, compassion, and "love" (68). "Depression" (32) was the most cited experience of mental illness, followed by "anxiety" (27). Other tweets signaled depression through either sleeplessness or extreme amounts of oversleeping, crying, and sadness. Users spoke about self-harm, panic attacks, eating disorders (ED), bipolar, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other users liked, retweeted, and/or replied to these identity performances, validating, supporting, and boosting the public profile of these tweets.

Within the performances of mentally ill identity we witness the emergence of a feminine therapeutic Mad/crip digital public in which users share coping mechanisms and validate each other's experiences and bodies through favourites and retweets. Coping mechanisms included listening to music (5), deep breathing (3), and animals/pets (8). These personalized recommendations, typically cited as a coping mechanism for the individual user, often acknowledge that everyone is different, and thus are distinct from the generic reminders to "reach out" or "get help." They are offered by mentally ill avatars for other mentally ill avatars and are a form of crowdsourcing as a free alternative or complement to institutional supports like therapy. Although it is beyond the scope of this current project to study the activity of #BellLetsTalk year-round, it is worth noting that there is sustained engagement with the hashtag over the long-term and may offer evidence of an emergent Mad/crip public that discusses mental illness and performs networked madness outside of the one-day fundraising campaign.

Masculine Sick Publics

Social constellations of sick masculinity emerge in the hashtag around the conventionally masculine and nationalist rhetoric of sports: references to hockey (15),

baseball (1), sports (14), ballfield (1) goalies (2), player (3), athlete (1), and

Olympic/Olympian (2) punctuate the document. *Redskins, Tampa Bay, Leafs, Habs*. NHL

player Paul Ranger was referenced 11 times as an exemplary masculine mentally ill body.

Masculine users identify these national male heroes as role models of mental illness, men

who can speak openly about their feelings and be emotionally vulnerable, but only because

they embody the hypermasculine ideal of able-bodiedness and physical prowess, and

because they have gained financial/capitalist success through these hypermasculine

bodies. This circulation of the supercrip male avatar mirrors the representation of masculine

depression promoted by mental health campaigns, as discussed in Chapter 1, and

marketed by drug companies (Gardner 2007).

The hashtag #SickNotWeak (28) used in conjunction with #BellLetsTalk circulated a

particularly visible form of this kind of curated masculine madness. The Twitter account

@SickNotWeak (16) is attached to a not-for-profit run by Canadian sports journalist and *Bell*

Let's Talk spokesperson Michael Landsberg. The account enacts a masculine reclaiming of

mental illness with an emphasis on strength over weakness and a rejection of the

sociocultural emasculation that typically accompanies mental illness in men. The avatar for

@SickNotWeak is an older white man (Landsberg) who appears to be in fairly good shape.

The website features the chest of a man in a business suit ripping open his blazer in a Clark

Kent Superman-style reveal, only in place of the "S" we have a "#", but the allusion is clear:

mentally ill men speaking about their experiences through #SickNotWeak are superheroes

(and supercrips). This image also celebrates able-bodiedness, whiteness, and financial

success (signaled by the business attire). The webpage describing Sick Not Weak eerily

positions the charity as an avatar with personhood, using the first person "I." One of "his"

goals is to "To see the Toronto Maple Leafs win a Stanley Cup in my lifetime." Here,

Michael Landsberg takes on the role of the every-man, dis- and then re-embodied as the

charity avatar @SickNotWeak, speaking to and for men who have mental illnesses, but are still "real" men: they enjoy physical activity, national sports, and fine tailoring, and are brave and bold enough to say "screw the stigma!" ("About").

This type of masculine community-building relies on pre-existing networks of sports fans and targets a particular demographic: white, able-bodied, middle-class men. #SickNotWeak introduces another pre-existing network into the #BellLetsTalk corpus. Using these common markers of nationalism and masculinity, and relying on shared fandoms, men used #BellLetsTalk to form and strengthen social networks in the production of a collaborative Mad identity. Shout-outs to "my boy" and tweets to/for/about fathers and brothers also inscribe a familial and often generational bent to the "men supporting men" community articulated and performed through #BellLetsTalk. In conclusion, some masculine-coded users were able to harness the hashtag in order to transform pre-existing networks into social support groups, to articulate complex and vulnerable feelings online, and to reach out or offer support to other men. However, in order to access this masculinist and pseudo-therapeutic space, in order to be a part of the network, they were required to perform a specific form of masculinity and to uphold nationalist and capitalist values.

The following section discusses suicide. This section concludes on page 212.

Ghost Stories: Queering the Crip Family

From gendered networks to the digital reproduction of heteronormative families, #BellLetsTalk doesn't initially appear to enact a politics of queerness. Yet, as discussed earlier, the distribution of madness through the hashtag and its associated networks is a crip/queer process that contains the potential to queer the family, rather than normalize/normativize the crip. It's worth noting that moments of queer identity performance

appear in the corpus, from one use of "bisexual" to the feminine-coded avatars identifying with the masculinist rhetoric of #SickNotWeak. The most notable queer/crip potentiality of networked identity and affect, however, is the invocation of suicide.

How do we remember those who died from suicide, when the act of suicide is not speakable?

In the wake of the 2017 Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, fear of suicide contagion led to bans and widespread moral panic. The word "suicide," steeped in fear, pathologization, and horror, is treated as if it contains the germ of contagion that will spread wildly throughout the (implicitly or explicitly youthful) population. So instead it's glossed over, cleaned up, euphemized, silenced. Laurie McNeill reminds us that obituaries typically avoid the word "suicide," and the act is, in some way, unspeakable, a topic that is also a social taboo: "Death by suicide, however, remains problematic for many mourners…Instead writers may mask this situation under the euphemistic 'at home, suddenly,' a safely nondescript cause of death that avoids social abjection" ("Writing Lives in Death" 197).

In the #BellLetsTalk life-writing text that I have assembled–-a snapshot of identity performance taken from the dynamic practice of hashtagging—there is a very real tension between the tweets that mourn and remember specific loved ones and generic tweets reminding users of the double meaning behind "lost": we lost people who lost the battle with mental illness. In this double-coded "lost" we see a turn to a dominant illness metaphor: war. War scenes run rampant across Twitter, as users "fight" (27), "struggle" (24) and "battle" (14) with mental illness, and some lose the fight and thus are lost to us. These tweets I read not as a practice of mourning and/or memorializing, and but more akin to a form of exploitation in which the avatars of the dead are resurrected to digital life to do the labour of promoting a mental health agenda. These bodies are used to generate fear and are positioned simultaneously as ultimate failure and ultimate tragedy. These strawmen are

the end of the road for all those on the journey of depression, here used to ward us away from following in their path. Suicide hangs over every discussion of mental health, and the depressed body is positioned as always about to commit suicide. When mapped along this linear narrative of failure, suicide is presented as the "logical" outcome of all mental illnesses.

I insist that this is the dominant cultural memory of suicide and that there is a national community-building practice embedded in framing suicide as horror, failure, and tragedy. Consider, for example, the way settler media employ the phrase "suicide crisis" to refer to the high rates of suicide among Indigenous youth. The phrase positions the body of colour as a body in need of saving, and the use of "crisis" to separate individual pathology from the collective and ongoing trauma of colonialism. As discussed in Chapter 2, if "they" (Indigenous populations) have a problem with suicide (presented through the language of epidemiology), then "we" become the benevolent white saviours rescuing the Native from herself. On a smaller scale, the term "suicide victim" attaches pity and tragedy to the passive figure of the dead (despite the fact that suicide itself is a rather active practice). By remembering suicide as failure, we continue to police the bodies of Mad, suffering, and traumatized people and nations, to shift the burden from oppressive states onto individual bodies, and to justify our (mis)treatment of mentally ill bodies (because they might become suicide victims in the future).

I am not interested in this conventional use of the death-by-suicide, who is rendered silent and forced into a generically ideological linear narrative of failure. Instead, I'm interested in the texts that invite the dead person back into the dialogue, family, community. To the people writing to and of a "dear friend," claiming kinship with the use of "my": "*my* angel" or "*my* guy," and directly addressing the dead—"I miss *you*" (my emphasis). These networks that include the dead turn toward the past, a movement that resonates with

Heather Love's queer orientation of "feeling backward." These "explorations of haunting and memory" and "stubborn attachments to lost objects" are "a drag on the progress of civilization" (7). While Love interrogates the narrative of queer progress and gay rights, we can also use the state of feeling backward to critique the relationship between cure and progress which is enfolded in the progress of settler colonialism that seeks to eradicate pain, pasts, and unwanted bodies.

  The #BellLetsTalk archive enacts the practices of public mourning and memorializing through hashtagging. Five tweets used variations of "miss you" and spoke of specific people who have died, while six spoke to and of people "lost" to mental illness. The implicit—and sometimes explicit—cause of death in each case was suicide. These users invite the ghosts of the dead into the conversation, haunting the corporate hashtag with their absence, allowing the dead to belong, and making room for the pathologized expressions of "Mad grief" (Poole and Ward 95). Social media as digital memorial is not a new practice; #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName for example, remember those Black bodies murdered by police officers, but it *is* new in the sense that social media is relatively new. In *Tangled Memories,* Marita Sturken locates cultural memory at the site of the memorial, and history at the site of the government archive (3). Writing in 1997, Sturken is witnessing the emergence of the Internet, but is not writing during the era of Web 2.0. In the digital age, collective and national memory and history are located at the memorial, at the physical government archive, and through many different digital platforms and practices. Jennifer Pybus terms social media a "digital archive" or "user-generated archive" (236), while Marquard Smith calls the Internet a "living archive" (384). Here, I claim that hashtagging as an archival practice can be used to create a living memorial. For example, #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName harness Twitter in the practice of counter-witnessing, creating living memorials that challenge dominant power structures by remembering the

bodies at the margins that have been left out of the national (white) settler archive (Fischer and Mohrman 2016; Gilmore 2017; Tynes, Schuschke, and Noble 2016).

We can read these #BellLetsTalk tweets as a response to the censoring of suicide in the mainstream press, and a reclamation of the dead family member outside the discourses of shame and failure. While so many avatars are tweeting to their followers or each other, these avatars are tweeting to the dead, to ghosts, both performing their grief and insisting on the continued humanity and personhood of the deceased. As autobiographical acts, these tweets remain stubbornly resistant to the corporate narrative of healing, health, and happiness and are an important intervention in the aggressive emphasis on "positive" feelings. People come to the hashtag not just to celebrate but to mourn. By inviting the dead into the virtual world of social media, and onto our personal screens, users extend the network of family/friend across the binary of living/dead. The lost are reclaimed, remembered, memorialized, held onto. The act of publicly mourning someone who died from suicide is a radical act. The act of naming suicide is a radical act. These tweets challenge the fear-mongering of the "lost" victim, humanize the dead, and bring the sad/bad affect of grief into the sterilized space of prescriptive happiness. Poole and Ward remind us that "When we encourage a practice of Mad grief, we see encouragement for multiple approaches to the pain and an allowance that many forms of healing have a place" (103). As a memorial, Twitter does not contain the authority of monuments or state libraries. However, Twitter does offer a space for counter-storying cultural, collective, and personal memories that challenge national narratives, and makes visible the process of assembling an archive as a site of struggle and contestation.

"Belonging" is a fraught and strange term, feeling, negotiation. Sometimes it requires self-sacrifice and other times it requires sacrificing our attachments to power. Networks—physical and digital—emerge around who belong, and those who do not. We may come to

the social network for a sense of community and acceptance, but these experiences can also produce anxiety, alienation, ambivalence. We can use digital spaces and practices like hashtagging to create therapeutic and activist communities, to support one another, to create "access intimacy," where I "feel like I can say what my access needs are, no matter what" (Mingus). We also see belonging contingent on a variety of factors, from gender and race to internet access, technological literacy, and even grammar (more on this later). We see a struggle between the good avatar circulated by the corporation and the many misbehaving networks that use the hashtag in unexpected ways, and the limitations of these networks that rely on social cohesion by exclusion.

This section has concluded.

Broken Networks: Mad/Crip Alienation

Networked madness in this case study typically maintains its attachments to 1) the family, 2) the conventions of social media networks and 3) the conventions of settler composition. Users retweet, favourite, respond. They participate in the creation not only of a single-authored statement but of a community. They participate in the production and reproduction of Twitter. These users also write in a traditional cohesive structure that generally adheres to conventional grammar, adapted to include acronyms and emojis. But what about the bad users who break the rules and break the network? In "Accumulating Affect: Social Networks and Their Archives of Feelings," Pybus explores the affective value of social network sites that create economic value from user-generated content. Pybus argues that "What is central, then, for a social network to function is relationships – affective relationships," adding that users log in "for positive emotional experiences" (237). However, examining Twitter networks more closely reveals the ways in which they produce a range of

positive and negative affects. Communication processes coaxed through social networks can indeed foster relationships and communities, but at the same time are also producing isolation and alienation.

This section follows the thread of alienation, looking for broken networks that interrupt the therapeutic communities mobilizing around #BellLetsTalk. Not all Mad/crip bodies are allowed into social networks. Not all exclusions are involuntary. Some of us exclude ourselves. We refuse to play by the rules of the game or the group. Where networked Mad/crip bodies and affects challenge the sanist/ableist discourses of neoliberal individualism, resilience, and overcoming, other bad avatars took to the hashtag to disrupt the formation of networks as imagined safe spaces, while still others were forcibly isolated. These articulations of hurt, anger, dissatisfaction, and loneliness register as refusals, breaks, and rejections of the kinds of belonging that were available to some, but not all, users. Ahmed writes that "Sometimes we have to struggle to snap bonds, including familial bonds, those that are damaging or at least compromising of a possibility that you are not ready to give up" (*Living* 88). Bad avatars use the #BellLetsTalk hashtag to rage, despair, and critique social structures of inequality, including self-referential criticisms of hashtagging and Twitter activism. These users more explicitly take on the role of the Mad/crip killjoy, killing the joy of the network, and distancing themselves from the presumed "goodness" of the network. In contrast to the dominant goodness of networked bodies and affect, some users deliberately embodied bad avatars who feel unapologetically bad.

Despite the first-person narration that is the default on Twitter, many of the #BellLetsTalk tweets are about other bodies rather than the self (although these automedial acts are still always self-performances), and users employ second-tense of "you" i.e. "you are not alone." In the corpus, "I" appeared 561 times, and "you" 481 times; these pronouns often come together in the sentence construction of an "I" addressing a—typically, but not

always generic—"you." Furthermore, many first-person narrators discuss past experiences from a distance that almost feels like third-person, perhaps because the immediacy has been edited out (i.e. "I was"). They are calm, grammatically correct, and use appropriate punctuation. This use of the second-person or a distanced first-person narrator are modes of making one's identity legible and consumable to a wide audience without alienating readers with emotional outbursts or sentence fragments. Bodies that are used to being criticized or dismissed as hysterical or crazy, for example, women communicating PTSD or bipolar, may have learned to be careful in how they perform Mad. These tweets or threads are the most coherent and the most accessible as autobiography: narrated digital lives. Linear, readable, rational. Maria Leigghio reminds us that "under dominant psy discourses and practices a person who has alternative experiences of reality, often pathologized as being 'psychotic' or as having 'hallucinations,' is disqualified as a legitimate knower because their experiences are interpreted within a modernist framework as a break from reality" (126). In order to become a "legitimate knower," and read as an authority of their own embodied experiences, Mad/crip bodies must imitate the quiet calm impersonal rationalism of Western psychiatry.

"SUCKS" "FUCKING" "shit": other users take a different approach, employing the immediacy of a first-person narrator whose text at least appears to be produced without forethought. Short, staccato tweets about exhaustion and insomnia (sometimes modified by an angry or frustrated "fucking") enact the feelings being communicated. The use of all capitals, swear-words, and lack of punctuation and adherence to grammatical conventions in several tweets signal a tonal shift from many of the other discussions or articulations of mentally healthy/sick identity. I would describe these avatars as embodying mental illness rather than storying it—automedia instead of autobiography. This is another form of identity performance; one less coherent, less neat, less structured along a familiar narrative, but no

less communicative. Through these guttural enunciations of hurt, anger, fear, and pain, Mad/crip users enact "A queer crip politics" that includes the "refusal to cover over what is missing, a refusal to aspire to be whole" (Ahmed, *Living* 185). These avatars are not recovering, overcoming, or grateful. They refuse to perform happy or healthy. They kill the joy of the therapeutic network. These furious and aggressive tweets perhaps offer one answer to Hedva's provocative question; "How do you throw a brick through the window of a bank if you can't get out of bed?" Their words are bricks thrown at the social network, smashing the tidy and exclusionary process of mental health community-building.

These screaming, swearing, misspelled, and at times nearly illegible enunciations demarcate the bad avatar from the good—the user who knows when to add a smiley face from the user who sees not a network but a void to shout into. If "happiness is attributed to certain objects that circulate as social good," these users become "alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good" (Ahmed, *Promise* 41). While networked madness destabilizes the happy/sad divide and attempts to wrench "sad" from its neoliberal association with that sticky word "bad," angry isolated tweets that are affectively out of step with the hashtag perform alienation as a disruption and critique of the network. The objects of social good at stake here are the network and the social media platform. Networked madness, in all its wonderful messiness, remains grateful for these objects, happy for and with these objects. Expressions of gratefulness fluidly transfer from the physical bodies of loved ones to Twitter avatars and the very acts of tweeting and hashtagging.

The deliberately bad acts by Twitter killjoys invite us to consider how discourses of good and bad circulate through the corpus. "Good" appeared 45 times, while "bad" appeared 20. Delving into the contexts of these ideologically powerful words unearthed a collection of good and bad objects, practices, and bodies. Good: Bell's campaign, crying,

sports players, people who have died from suicide, people who are good for your mental health, people, days, nights, things, times. Bad: mental health, cell reception, days, times, things. The most "good" object and practice was the Bell campaign and hashtag, while the most "bad" objects were time periods and feelings. While "good" is used here to assign moral value to the network (and its good, i.e. technologically and socially-savvy, users), "bad" refers obliquely to experiences of Madness/mental illness.

Bad feelings emerge in the dataset. "Ashamed" appears 9 times in the corpus, in each case as a reminder to not feel ashamed. Other words map out a constellation of bad feelings that circulate around feeling bad (again, often through prohibition): "guilty" (1), "embarrassed" (6), "scared" (12), "afraid" (15). Other forbidden acts include suicide and self-harm. The policing of Mad/crip affects—don't feel X, don't do Y—is another method of marking membership, and opens up tactics for avatar disidentification: users who are publicly afraid or ashamed distance themselves from therapeutic hashtag publics.

In contrast, the word "proud" appears 24 times in the corpus, both in reference to the self and to friends or family members (reinforcing the online and offline support networks that become visible through these tweets). Users are proud of 1) surviving mental illness, 2) mitigating behaviours like self-harm and 3) educating and advocating. Celebrations of survivorship revise "success": in contrast to chrononormative and heteronormative events that are treated as worthy of success (i.e. graduation, getting a job, promotion, marriage), users validate the work that goes into surviving and identify day-to-day existence as a success worthy of celebration. While the celebration of the minutiae of living is important, validating, and radical, this framework of pride slants towards discourses of wellness and allows us to see the soft underbelly of shame: if we are proud of surviving and not self-harming, then we attach shame to suicide and self-harm. If we celebrate our movement along a trajectory, inching closer and closer toward wellness, then we shame or disqualify

those bodies that are slow, static, or moving backwards. Pride is, importantly, networked: survival and success belong to the community, while shame and failure continue to be attached to a single, isolated body (with the exception of, for example, networked suicide, as discussed above).

Of the different performances of alienated madness, angry/angsty youth emerged as a distinct demographic tweeting along a theme: the critique of education institutions. However, this did not appear to be a gesture toward community-building, and the tweets are encountered as a thematically related but distinct set of criticisms and identity performances that perhaps deliberately evade identification with support networks. In contrast, other social criticisms—for example, of poverty and systemic racism—appeared very rarely and seemed to be isolated by users as punishment for trespassing on the settler space of hashtag wellness. In the process of unnetworking madness, alienated Mad/crip avatars may be 1) actively seeking to disidentify from the therapeutic public with their claim to bad feelings and/or 2) forced into isolated discursive pockets or solo tweets because they do not enact an attachment to the network or locate healing within these spaces.

Bad Kids, Critical Youth

Bringing us into the "angry publics" (Rambukkana 29) of isolated madness, youthful angst permeated the corpus alongside pointed critiques of both online and offline networks. "Student" appeared eight times in the corpus, while "school" was mentioned 26 times. There were two mentions of "college," five of "university" or "uni," and two of "GPA." In many of the school tweets, it was clear that the user referred to high school, while in others the referent was unclear and may include an engagement with higher education. *"I'm 14…" "I am 18…":* deliberate performances of youth invite the figure of the angsty teen back into the dialogue of mental health/illness. These autobiographical utterances of "I am" exist in stark contrast

to the dominant discussion of generic "youth" as an at-risk demographic: "Canadian youth," "Labrador youth," and school students are cited as the highest demographic of mentally ill bodies/citizens within the hastagged #BellLetsTalk Mad/crip public. And if "they" need help, "I" argues that youth can speak for themselves, and in the two examples here, we see explicit performances of survivorship. Statistics collide with the bodies of young suicide survivors. Performed and claimed individuality pushes against the collective noun of "youths."

"Youth" becomes a contested space, a site of struggle, an arena where young people fight to tell their own stories. Emma Maguire points to the history of girls in particular struggling to represent their own lives online, writing that

> girls are able to claim girl selfhoods by sharing their lives and experiences with readers. I want to emphasise the agency suddenly in play for girls given the development—and overwhelming take-up—of Web 2.0 technologies that have facilitated a range of tools, contexts, and conditions for self-narration. (3)

We see this struggle play out in #BellLetsTalk as teen users share their own personal experiences while adults continue to circulate narratives about teens. In the struggle to claim ownership and authorship over their own narratives, these young users deliberately avoid situating their bodies—and bad feelings—within social networks.

Moving between angsty teens and moody millennials, I want to explore the representation of the institution of education in these tweets, and the way high school and university students discuss mental illness. The backdrop to this analysis is the CAMH's 2018 study showing that "over 50 per cent of female students in Ontario show signs of moderate to serious psychological distress," and my personal investment in academia. CAMH concludes that technology and social media are to blame for the poor mental health of students. This, of course, is not in line with my own experiences or the testimony of

graduate students I have spoken with, who instead cite financial instability, institutional barriers to access, and harassment and abuse as primary stressors.

Two tweets argued in favour of adding mental health care to the curriculum. One tweet was from a public school board, and another two were from Canadian universities. These tweets reproduce offline power structures and represent the education system as caring and benevolent. We can be critical of the social media engagement by institutions here, or rather, by the avatars of institutions that stake a claim on personhood. Ahmed reminds us that "diversity can be used by organizations as a form of public relations" (*Living* 103). In the context of mental health—which always overlaps with gender, race, sexuality, disability, and class—we can understand how school boards and universities use #BellLetsTalk in order to appear benevolent, progressive, and caring, without making any meaningful changes, without spending any time or money to address these concerns or their root causes (i.e. bullying, sexual violence, and harassment). We can also read the narrative of bullying alongside Chun's engagement with the school as a site of slut-shaming that self-responsibilizes young media users (145-146). My home institution, McMaster University's "Personal Protection" webpage instructs students to "Avoid dark or deserted areas" and "Walk in groups." We are responsible for protecting ourselves on campus. The smokescreen of the "stranger in the bushes at night" masks the reality that most sexual assaults are committed by people we know; and, in the university, often by figures of authority, typically predatory professors. After three years working at Goldsmiths Centre for Feminist Research and advocating for survivors of sexual assault, Sara Ahmed resigned. We already know that the university is a shield for abusers, a "wall" (Ahmed *Living* 139).

In contrast to these institutional utterances, one tweet explicitly criticized school boards for using the hashtag without making meaningful change as an institution, and another argued that the education system does not support students with mental illnesses.

11 other tweets framed school (in one case, described explicitly as a workplace) as a space that was not conducive to mental health, and urged users to prioritize mental health care over school attendance. These tweets often explicitly or implicitly critiqued school board attendance policies and described the school as a site in which a body must appear "well" to participate (crying in school, for example, is socially policed). An eloquent (and harrowing) thread described years of cyber- and physical bullying in high school. Three tweets cited university as a source of anxiety and a contributing factor to mental illness. One tweet discussed the invisibilizing of highly successful students struggling with mental illness, as "success" and "illness" are framed as incompatible in settler neoliberal culture, and the stereotypes through which mental illness is read ignore a significant number of Mad bodies. Other tweets describe school as a place that mentally ill bodies are only able to manage through the emotional support of other people, i.e. friends or romantic partners.

In these renegade automedial acts, we see the school and the education system emerge as at best a "neutral" space that has no positive or negative impact on student wellbeing, and at worst an active participant in the production, exacerbation, and penalization of mental illness. In all cases, we can read the school as a structure and system of power. Recall Foucault's identification of the school as a site of biopower (*Discipline and Punishment* 140). Attendance, comportment, homework, exams: our bodies are structured to the space of the institution and this space is not and has never been accessible. The tweet encouraging users to cry publicly is an example of how bodies push back against the stringent discipline of education. Each avatar that critiques this system is an act of agency reminding us that there is room to wiggle (Ahmed "Wiggle Room"), to voice complaint, and to challenge, through a physical or virtual body.

Criticizing both the education system and institutional hashtag use as neoliberal propaganda, these avatars embody a politics of refusal: they refuse to play their part in the

network, and instead take on the role of the killjoy by killing the joy of the network. They make visible the social media platform as an institution, and the network as a space that reproduces institutional power. Pockets of Mad alienation in the hashtag perform isolation and refuse the structure of social networking, instead claiming authorship and authority over their own lives and bodies. These broken networks challenge social cohesion that relies on normativizing narratives and showcase how some bodies are always excluded from the project of community-building.

Forced Isolation

Delving deeper into the corpus uncovered a few isolated tweets that, while not deliberately attempting to subvert the politics of the network, were isolated because of their content. If critical youth seek to deliberately break the network, avatars of colour and poor avatars seeking to engage in social criticism were isolated by other users. The scarcity of explicit cultural critiques also suggests that more radically minded users were already alienated from the hashtag and did not find it to be an accessible and welcoming site for the kinds of digital identity acts they wanted to perform. These singular, isolated tweets point to the limits of corporate hashtagging and the reproduction of whiteness as goodness in colonial mental health campaigns.

One tweet referenced job loss due to mental illness, implying discrimination and pointing to the brutality of capitalism that bulldozes marginalized bodies, particularly disabled and mentally ill bodies of colour. Another tweet critiqued the lack of adequate disability leave. One tweet identified poverty and racism as barriers to accessing care. Looking for POC (particularly BIPOC, WOC, and QOC) in a dataset that is so glaringly, hurtfully white is tricky, and a very ethically fraught practice for a white settler scholar. However, I do want to acknowledge that there were users—likely people of colour—

critiquing #BellLetsTalk as being inadequately intersectional, and I do not want to participate

in the erasure of these important and difficult identity acts.[39] While only one tweet explicitly

cited racism, other moments suggested the presence of Black bodies interrupting the

smooth whiteness of the hashtag: references to the TV show "Black Lightning," uses of

AAVE ("ain't"), and visible avatars of colour challenge the whiteness of the archive.

The Future of Feminist DH: Creativity & Care

This chapter laid out my creative and critical approach to performing crip feminist DH

research by generating a multiauthored automedial life-writing text. This process protected

the anonymity of users and turned away from venerating the individual "I" in order to

interrogate networks, assemblages, and relationships. This tactic challenges the "neoliberal

life narrative" of "the self-made man, and the empowered woman" (92) that Leigh Gilmore

laments, and turns towards interdependency, collectivity, and community. By protecting the

identities of users, I also performed an ethics of care for the bodies that compose our

powerful, fragile, and dangerous social networks.

The future of feminist DH lies in creativity and care. I am attentive to the dialogues

about ethics and methodologies that are occurring in informal Zoom meetings and formal

conferences, that are mapped out in edited collection *Good Data,* that are finding their way

into footnotes or full articles. Our research is also shaped by innovation and invention:

consider, for example Moya Bailey's work with the hashtag #GirlsLikeUs, and her emphasis

on foregrounding consent, accountability, and collaboration ("#transform(ing)DH Writing and

Research"). Bailey's article imagines one way of ethically engaging with digital bodies and

community partners. In the introduction to *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism*

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[39] Remember that Black Mad artist and activist Gloria Swain created the counter-hashtag #BellLetsActuallyTalk in response to #BellLetsTalk

and the Digital Humanities, Elizabeth Losh and Jaqueline Wernimont foreground "the tasks of intersectional feminisms, of coalition building, and of communal care and repair" (ix) as a critical direction in DH. The collection includes a range of creative approaches to doing digital scholarship. Creativity lives in both product and process, in our plans and the revisions we make to our research plans.

In 2018, I wrote a call for papers (CFP) for the annual Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship graduate scholarship. Our chosen theme that year was "System/Système D: Improvising Digital Scholarship." In the CFP I wrote:

> System/Système D: to improvise, change, adapt. We use this term playfully to acknowledge the creativity, troubleshooting, and failures that accompany digital scholarship. Innovation and learning binds digital scholars together as we navigate uncharted waters with new evidence, new tools, and new questions. What does it mean to improvise within the field of digital scholarship? What challenges do digital scholars face and how can they be overcome? What can we learn from interdisciplinary approaches and how do we make the field more accessible to diverse voices?

I think about these questions when my laptop or PC crashes, when Python crashes, when my Python code fails, when parts of the data I collected are corrupted or lost. I think about pain. I think about access as a Mad/crip body. I feel fatigue settling under my skin. Each digital media project requires a different research framework and a different understanding of vulnerability, accountability, and collective care. Working with video games is not the same as working with a Twitter hashtag data set, which is not the same as working with online mental health campaigns, even as platforms, users, and audiences intersect and overlap. I came to this project with a methodology prepared and then had to improvise, adapt, and create new ways of working with and through the barriers and affordances of

digital scholarship; of embodiment; of time and energy and money. Feminists and disability

scholars and activists are redefining what the study of digital media and mediated lived

might look like, challenging digital humanists to be creative and inventive in our methods

and practices, and encouraging us to think critically about how to perform our research in an

ethical manner. Looking to the future, my hope for this field is that it continues along a

trajectory towards critical reflection and an ethics of care, and that it shifts away from

sane/able-bodied feminisms and towards centring the Mad/crip bodyminds—of researchers,

subjects, and audiences (recognizing we can be all three at once)—in the methodologies

we generate to perform and communicate our research.

			Term	Count	Trend
⊞	☐	1	ã	4628	
⊞	☐	2	â	3297	
⊞	☐	3	bellletstalk	2107	
⊞	☐	4	š	1309	
⊞	☐	5	rt	1010	
⊞	☐	6	ž	889	
⊞	☐	7	ãƒ	789	
⊞	☐	8	https	490	
⊞	☐	9	t.co	486	
⊞	☐	10	mental	308	
⊞	☐	11	ï	289	
⊞	☐	12	day	256	
⊞	☐	13	health	195	
⊞	☐	14	people	131	
⊞	☐	15	itãƒ	125	
⊞	☐	16	today	124	
⊞	☐	17	tweet	111	
⊞	☐	18	year	106	
⊞	☐	19	iãƒ	100	
⊞	☐	20	illness	98	
⊞	☐	21	know	88	
⊞	☐	22	just	83	
⊞	☐	23	talk	83	
⊞	☐	24	it's	78	

Figure 8: Voyant Word List by Most Commonly Occurring Word. "BellLetsTalk," "mental," "day," "health," and "people" are the top words in this list.

			Term ↓	Count	Trend
⊞	☐	209	abuse	4	
⊞	☐	210	abusive	3	
⊞	☐	211	ac	1	
⊞	☐	212	acãƒ	1	
⊞	☐	213	accept	1	
⊞	☐	214	access	1	
⊞	☐	215	accessible	1	
⊞	☐	216	accidents	1	
⊞	☐	217	accomplished	1	
⊞	☐	218	according	2	
⊞	☐	219	account	2	
⊞	☐	220	accounts	2	
⊞	☐	221	aches	1	
⊞	☐	222	achievement	2	
⊞	☐	223	acjmr5kohu	1	
⊞	☐	224	acknowledge	1	
⊞	☐	225	acknowledgeãƒ	1	
⊞	☐	226	acknowledged	1	
⊞	☐	227	acne	1	
⊞	☐	228	acrossley5	1	
⊞	☐	229	act	1	
⊞	☐	230	actions	2	
⊞	☐	231	active	1	
⊞	☐	232	actually	5	

Figure 9: Voyant Word List, Alphabetical. "Abuse," abusive," "accept," "access," and "accessible" are the top words in this list.

Coda | Murmurations

"Hi handsome," he says, when I let myself into his apartment.

"Hi gorgeous."

"Hi beautiful."

"Hi sexy."

We go on like this for a while, and then I offer, shyly, "Keef halak?"

"Mnih! Keefak?"

"Mnih."

I'm working on my "haa." My bedroom walls are polka-dotted with post-its, phrases like *biddak titfaraj a'tilfizion ma'i*? and *bahib nbeed* written in black marker that smells faintly of bleach and aspartame. *Do you want to watch TV with me? I like wine.*

He's making coffee, and the smell of caramel and citrus fills the room. I'm working on a puzzle, my knees pressed into the carpet. Fairuz's voice glimmers around the edges of my face. Now he's dancing and singing in the kitchen. A sliver of sunlight has found its way through the narrow window and is making a rectangle of light on the ground.

The memory hangs for a moment, suspended in time and space, my hand frozen as I reach into in a sea of jigsaw pieces, his mouth open, vocal cords paused mid-vibration. And then I let it play on—the coffee pours, our bodies exhale, and the music swirls around us like glittering confetti in a snow globe.

*

I dream of jigsaw puzzles.

When I was 28, I finished my first 1000-piece puzzle solo. My mother said she was proud of me. She had my stepdad take a photograph, and they insisted I leave it to be admired for a few days. It had colour and texture. This was something I could run my hands

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over the surface of and think, *I did this.*

I have a stack of puzzles in my closet that I borrowed from a friend. I met her when we were fourteen. I had smudged glasses and multi-coloured bands on my braces; she had blunt bangs and a British accent. We spent an afternoon hitting a tennis ball over a flimsy net that was like a torn veil, our apologies punctuating the sticky September air.

This puzzle is an autumn scene, the flora and fauna marked by their Latin names in flowery cursive. Today I'm working on the blackberries and their thorns, remembering stealing the berries that grew on our neighbours' side of the fence, the juice sour on my tongue, staining my small mouth and hands red.

When I place the last piece in its perfectly shaped home, I feel like I'm watching the aeronautics of starlings or the asymmetrical V of geese returning with the spring.

And when I break up the puzzle again, holding a handful of pieces like shells, or stones, or a button collection—something small and precious—pressing my fingerprints over those of a friend who loved me when I was a dandelion seed, the image turning back into a thousand individual fragments in my hand, it feels like a prayer.

*

I could talk about the depression closing around me like the fortune tellers we made in grade school. I could write paragraphs about the poetic parallelism of the depression that began the PhD with me and is now ending it with me.

I could write about the pandemic.

But I think I'll take that story like the paper flowers I made out of an old encyclopaedia, each petal carefully crafted from a dozen folds, and set it to one side of my desk. I don't want to give you that today.

I want to give you something else:

Pieces of seaglass, their edges worn smooth by the tide.

A pen that writes as smoothly as a hand sliding over a thigh. The lyrics to every

Stevie Wonder song. A twirl of my cane. A puzzle.

A moment as sweet as candied walnuts,

bright as slices of orange fanned across a plate.

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Appendix: #BellLetsTalk Tweet IDs (Dehydrated Dataset)

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