

SELENA

Hey everybody! Welcome to our podcast for our group project. We decided to research identity and how we cultivate it in the West. So, our thesis is, in North America, dominant Western fantasies perpetuated in online communities shape our identities, lifestyles and perceptions of ourselves, and Aiden is going to start.

AIDEN

Alright, so the main focus of my research was based around compound selective influence. So, this pretty much means that we are the ones who form our identities through our own choices at every random crossroad in our lives. So, pretty much, right from birth, you're introduced with these choices. The first one will send you down- you have either two, three or however many paths in front of you. Whichever one you choose will lead you down new paths, and the ones that you didn't choose will end up being blocked off to you, You no longer have access to them. Those paths, and all these twists that you keep going down will lead you to new ones, which ultimately builds upon your identity. When you do this, there are three main components to it. You can either add, subtract, or commit. So, if you add, you're bringing in new aspects that you didn't have before, whether it is that you like or dislike something. And subtracting can be that you just end up taking away parts or changing them, so if you liked something and now you don't like it. And this could be through maturing. For example, when we're younger, we like beer and then when we're older, we don't like it as much, and we have more of a refined palate for things such as wine. Another aspect to this is the commitment one which I mentioned earlier. This one means that you have these set aspects of your identity, and you choose to stick with them. You still will eventually introduce new aspects, but at this moment, you want to stay with them. And this means that you ended up developing them as well. For example, you like guitar, keep working on it and it keeps developing, instead of swapping off a ukulele or whatever else. In a way this also brings in group identity as these paths that we're introduced to will end up leading to these new choices. So, if you like end up liking a certain sports team, like in this reading that I have, where these college students were using this social media app to affiliate with their college sports teams, they were introduced to other people who also felt the same way and through this they met new people, and they had collective self esteem boosts. And as they're introduced, you also get introduced to new aspects through these people, which may not have been part of your identity before which, as I said before, opens up new paths and shuts off others.

MORSEDA

I like that idea of having that shared interest too with the fan communities as an option as well because that's what I'm going to talk about too, but having that shared interest with a certain group that you end up identifying with and how it totally reshapes the path your life could take, because your identity is based off of who you surround yourself with too. And you surround yourself with a group of certain like-minded people, you're going to continue being that person who you are, but if you end up surrounding yourself with someone or a group of people who have very different perspectives on things, and you choose to engage into that, you can end up changing, essentially, who you are as a person if you really, really ended up allowing that to come into your life and into your belief system, and everything, that's how it is in politics, but it also comes into everyday life too, it does seem.

AIDEN

Yeah, no, I completely agree.

SELENA

There's definitely a lot in there that I think a lot of our research, just the fact that these communities that we're supposed to and we choose to associate with ourselves so that we're drawn to online, they end up playing a big part in how we portray ourselves and our values in what we get inspired by or choose to dress in even, so that was really cool, honestly. Pretty cool research.

MORSEDA

A cool take on it as well that I was kind of looking into was it a dominant fantasies of fan communities, and what stems and originates from that is basically our hobbies and our interests. So films, or the TV shows we watch, or the music we listen to; it pushes us towards those fan communities where we exchange and discuss those different perspectives as you're saying, Selena. And we have these existing dominant fantasies with us already but we are able to express it in a different manner then we would enter memetic experience, possibly due to restrictions of social norms, or we might not have the ability to because of the pandemic that we had in the past as an example. But, in this manner we're able to test what is acceptable or not in social norms with more freedom. So, we're even able to kind of experiment with a different variety of selves that we want to embody which can greatly influence how we present ourselves in our lives. To go further into it, we handpick symbolic meaning entirely that we take from film and music based off of what we enjoy. So, for films for example, you watch certain characters, and we take into account their life. So, for example, careers that they have, or the relationships and the perspectives on what inspires them, or the values out of some beliefs they have, we reference our own dominant fantasies towards them, and then we determine what our take on the story means for who we are and who we could be, and whether it's relevant and meaningful to us. And then it brings up what selves we want to embody or even avoid, and then we make sense of it in that way too, which is really cool. And then similarly with music, we have this tendency to want to have this congruency between self-concept and what we consume. Products as well could be another option, but for music specifically we portray and turn our mimetic experience through appropriation and incorporation. So we select types of music or artists that resonate with us or that can be appreciated by the others sharing that experience with us. And an example would be if we want to feel really hyped up with our friends before we go out somewhere, we'll blast certain songs that embody that experience, and that we can share with everyone around us, Or, if we want to take on an identity or a self that wants to feel really confident we'll blast something more empowering, which is definitely a very big impact, and it's also a way of associating music for yourself as a consumption ritual too. For film as well, it's similar where we can exhibit a character's aesthetic or we can dress similar to them. But it also goes beyond how they act as well, so if we see our character with personalities of someone with that confident leader trait, we may resonate with them if we want to really experience that in our memetic world, being a person of power. And then we apply those notions of characters, habits, and mannerisms into our identity slowly if we really, truly want it. And, then, social media wall gives us this space and this opportunity to create this online identity to express her interest and how we want others perceive us. For those of us who won't feel that sense of acceptance from our memetic world, as I was saying before, can seek those deeper connections online, and we end up learning more about ourselves in that way and we understand social norms in a better way as well for dominant Western fantasies. There's

just so much information online that we can take to our advantage in a way to either shape us into a different person or to reaffirm that we like who we are, and it's pretty cool. We just could incorporate so much into our lives from that.

SELENA

Honestly, I found when I was doing my research, I found it worked the same way, where you're exposed to these dominant Western fantasies online, and all of this information, and you take that in and it influences you. But I kind of saw it from a less positive point of view. Because, all those Western dominant fantasies...if you don't necessarily fit into them, then you're feeling pretty isolated in certain parts and certain online communities, and that kind of relates specifically to my research on masking and neurodivergency. So what I found was that a lot of neurodivergent people used social media to connect with people that they had similar interests with or communities that people they related to in some way or another. So whether that's within their own neurodiversity community, or maybe a band or a TV show that they really liked, there's lots of people doing cool things with that, so 100% agree with you there.

MORSEDA

Yeah.

SELENA

But what I also found was that the way we communicate online ends up prompting a lot of people to mask. So, if you don't know what masking is, it's a coping strategy used by neurodivergent people to emulate neurotypical behaviour in order to avoid being isolated or ostracized by their peers. So for example, people with autism specifically (but other neurodivergent folks experienced these issues too) often have a hard time understanding things like tone and body language and facial expressions. Because they don't use them instinctively, they have a hard time recognizing them in others. They also tend to feel extremely uncomfortable making eye contact. But unfortunately, all these things are dominant Western communication strategies that are pivotal parts of how neurotypical people communicate with each other, and not being able to use his strategies makes them seem dumb or strange or untrustworthy or sensitive to some people. Basically, they're isolated for not fitting these dominant standards. So to avoid that, neurodivergent folks end up hiding their traits and learning to emulate these strategies to blend in with people around them. But by masking, they're denying and suppressing their disability, and essentially physically forcing themselves to fit dominant Western standards of what is normal in order to avoid being isolated by their peers. So, given that, one might think, "oh, well, you know, social media gets rid of all those face-to-face interactions that prompt that masking in the first place," but unfortunately, it doesn't. It actually forces them to find new ways to mask, and that's because we still use tone identifiers when we write online. So, if you think about the way we text or comment or write captions, you probably use lots of emojis, sarcasm, memes and references. You may also choose a case letter or what kind of punctuation you want to use, and I don't know if this is just a Writing Major thing, but in one of my editing classes, we literally talked about how we do not use periods in texting because it comes off as passive-aggressive, even though it's grammatically correct. It's easy to confuse tone online, but despite that, if you don't understand a joke or reference, people might choose to ostracize you or make fun of you for it. So, you can imagine then that autistic people still end up forcing themselves to mask and they have to actually teach themselves how to read and

write the way neurotypical people do to even exist in some of these online spaces. They have to teach themselves what certain punctuations end up meaning. They have to teach themselves why people would use certain emojis in certain places. So I found that, yes, social media can help neurodivergent folks find things and people they identify with, but it has also created yet another space where many feel they have to mask themselves to hide their true identities to fit in or avoid being ostracized or isolated.

MORSEDA

A whole other barrier of communication.

SELENA

Yeah.

AIDEN

Just another way to be forced to be isolated.

SELENA

I know, it sucks.

MATTHEW

I think there's also a problem of not just being able to identify tone through words but also identity through pictures and videos and other media, and have a quote unquote, "true idea of one's self."

SELENA

And you're never getting the full picture on social media, like ever.

MATTHEW

Exactly. It's a very good mime of a mimetic world and it's very good at fooling you into the idea that you are getting one person's substantiated opinions and thoughts and feelings; and those are being taken as facts in some cases as well. But objective authenticity is not very substantiated on the internet, because everybody is led to believing, and they mythologize their own truth on social media, which leads to cancel culture and that's the basis of where my research is coming from. So when somebody's cancelled, both the work being digested and how their work is mythologized by the public is changed, and a critique of that is that the relationship between the work and how the consumers identify with the work is one intensely built on identity and morality. Identity is built on a process of curating relationships between the self and the world, or the self in the text. So, if one person believes that they are a bad person because they identify with bad people's art, that is an inherently fallacious idea, because we place all influencers as being good people in a dominant Western fantasy, which is untrue. Not everybody we place on a pedestal is a good person or a moral person or an ideal person, and the price of personally identifying with these works is that they socially will outlive their creators through cancel culture. Obviously, there's a great breadth of people that have been "cancelled" that you can still access their work. It's very public, and it's also very in-demand, and that means socially, we prioritize personal attachment to what we identify as being intrinsic in ourselves versus the societal impact of what is being removed. And while there is positive merit in cancellation as it alerts new fans and old fans as well of dismaying views and acts, and of work that seeks to profit off of those views and acts, the biggest

concern that comes from it is that it filters out the raw, most polarizing perspectives that one person can possess, which while uncomfortable, are quite vulnerable and could lead to the conversations and debates that you would need to foster to avoid being as intolerant as these extremes of the internet such as the Alt-right, that decry cancel culture. The result of this is that it can create people that have based their identity as a strict reaction to societal disapproval, and just go with the most contrarian perspective, not even building an identity as much as just adopting one.

SELENA

Yeah, actually, I saw something on that, where people, if you ask them to explain right-wing views, they won't be able to because they just genuinely haven't put in enough time and effort to try and understand it. And, because somebody else, maybe they related to it or was part of their discourse community, they automatically thought, "okay, well, I'll think like them because I agree with them on one thing." But, it's hard to ever have an actual honest conversation with somebody where you talk about values and views, and social media almost takes away that human aspect that makes you have to confront somebody on their problems or on their values.

AIDEN

Yeah, it really sort of ends up just being a one sided conversation.

SELENA

Yeah, and so much online discourse is just like, "I think this," or, "did you know about this?," and it's very one sided. A lot of it lacks context, and there's a lot of people online who are like, "okay, if you feel this way, then obviously you are a bad person. There's no other way to say it. I'm not gonna give you any time to learn. Probably won't ever explain this to you, someone else will but I certainly won't.," and you're gonna have 26 comments versus one person trying to explain in a way you might understand.

MORSEDA

It's so filtered and there's such a lack of depth to it, as well.

SELENA

Yeah, the lack of depth is scary.

MORSEDA

Oh yeah, 100%. You want to like something, so you were talking about certain artists that get "cancelled," and you have to reframe your whole view on it because they did a really bad thing, but, it's like, their piece of art is enjoyable, and now you're just in the crossroads of "should I even like admit that this is something that I like? Should I engage with it, or is this something that will make me a bad person?." But, at the end of the day, also, to what extent do we go to where, is cancellation is something we completely step away from when it's a certain person and their art and everything, or do we just accept the art and remember that the person doesn't need to be associated with the art, fully?

SELENA

I think that with Harry Potter and JK Rowling, so many people loved those stories, but the fact that she's so transphobic has put people off playing the game or going to Universal or

visiting Harry Potter World, but then there's also that aspect of, "this is my whole childhood that's I'm supposed to be comforted by, then. How do you, how do you balance that?"

MATTHEW

I think there's an inherent flaw, in that, you think there's an ideal version of yourself that you can present as to avoid that stuff, and it just ends up blotting out and dulling a lot of the actual parts that you really possess, and your personal attachment to art can outweigh its political impact, and it can make it very hard. So, you're almost in a quandary of, "do I want to seem more progressive, and do I want to seem more accepting, or do I want to be truer to myself?"

AIDEN

"How much of myself should I hide?"

SELENA

I mean, that's always the case, but I think, because social media is such a mixed pot, and anyone can see what you're posting for most of the time, and it's so easy to be misunderstood, you're giving such a small impression of yourself, even just one mistake can put so many people against you. And it's hard, especially when it's in writing. Anyone can see that, right? There's literally receipts, it's hard to ever take that kind of thing back.