LEE HUMPHREYS

THE QUALIFIED SELF

Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life

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The Qualified Self

Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life

Lee Humphreys

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This book is dedicated to my parents, with love, always.

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Preface

I've been studying mobile phone use since 2001. And there have been concerns about rude behavior and mobile phones ever since they came on the market. Early on people were concerned about the seemingly oblivious nature of people often ignoring others and speaking loudly on cell phones in public spaces due to poor reception—something they used to call cell-yell. It seemed that the less people could hear the person on the other end of their phone, the louder they spoke. "I can't hear you. Can you hear me? How about now? I think I lost you. Can you hear me now?" was a common refrain heard across the streets of America as people tried to make cell phone calls despite shoddy service. In fact, throughout much of the early 2000s, Verizon used "Can you hear me now? Good," as the tagline in their TV ads, suggesting that their cell phone coverage was much better than AT&T's. As mobile service overall improved, concerns about cell-yell have gone away, but concerns about inappropriate behavior remain.

Today, when we think about obnoxious mobile phone behavior, an image of a person taking a selfie is likely to pop up. Yes, the selfie has become the poster child for what it means to own a mobile phone. It has become a societal concern. The selfie represents our fear that mobile phones and social media to which selfies are often shared are encouraging a kind of narcissism. Indeed, there are lots of jokes made about how social media platforms are fundamentally forms of me-promotion.[1] People on Facebook say "like me," people on Twitter say "listen to me," people on LinkedIn say "hire me," people on YouTube say "watch me," people on Pinterest say "show me," people on Instagram say "look at me," people on blogger say "agree with me," and people on Tumblr say "accept me."

We are concerned that as a society we are becoming more narcissistic. And mobile and social media are contributing to this. We no longer fall in

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love with our reflection in the pool of water like Narcissus did. We have fallen in love with our image reflected back to us in our filtered mobile devices. Or, if we aren't concerned about our own narcissistic tendencies, then we are concerned that others are becoming more narcissistic, especially the younger Me generation[2]—"Can you remember the last time you *didn't* see a teenager taking a photo of themselves with their phone to upload to one of the myriad social media websites?"[3] Mobile and social media devices and platforms are seen as encouraging a kind of self-obsession.

But I want to suggest that mobile media are *not* the root evil contributing to a self-obsessed society. Instead, I want to convince you that mobile and social media are part of a much longer story of the ways people use media to catalog their lives and share it with others. I argue that this is a long-standing human practice and there isn't necessarily anything pathological about writing about or taking pictures of yourself and sharing them with others. In fact, it's how people have accounted for everyday life for centuries.

Where the Book Comes From

I grew up on a family farm in upstate New York. When I say family farm, I mean that it was started by my great-grandfather. His two sons took over the farm. Each of them had two sons who then took over the farm; my dad was one of the four cousins. We all lived on the same street where the farm was. I grew up in the house that my father had grown up in and where he and my mom still live today. Growing up, I was surrounded by family. My parents used to joke they never had to worry about us having a party when they were out because there was enough family around to take notice. Growing up in this environment was amazing—idyllic, really. But growing up with so much of the family around meant that what was personal or private was also collective. I knew what ailed my aunt, of course, because we would bring over dinner to help out. There was *our* family: my parents, my two brothers, and I; and then there was *the* family. What I understood to be work life blurred with home life. My dad had lunch at home every day. He didn't go into an office; he went into the fields. As kids, we would play in the fields and the barns where our dads worked. That just seemed natural to me. So when information technology tensions emerged regarding the new blurring of home and work, I found that framing troublesome. Having grown up on the farm, those divisions had never been clear. Of

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course, work and home lives were blurred. They always have been for family farmers. This isn't to say there weren't other divisions on the farm. On the contrary, there were very clear gender roles within the family. But my experience on the family farm never fit with notions of industrialization or the clear distinction between public and private quite in the same way as I was reading in Jürgen Habermas's or Richard Sennet's work in graduate school.[4] Part of why I embarked on this project is to acknowledge, explore, and reconcile my own personal experiences of family and work and to help me to better understand contemporary notions of public and private, collective and personal.

I am trained as a media and communication scholar. My research over the past fifteen years has primarily examined how people use mobile and social media in their everyday lives. My PhD advisor, Carolyn Marvin, helped to instill in me a historical sensibility. Therefore, I have often drawn on a variety of historical and sociological literature to better understand social processes for interaction with "new media." Fundamentally, in this book I wanted to develop a framework for thinking about how we use media, both new and old. Media accounting is my attempt to explain what people do with mobile and social media. As a historically informed scholar, I also want to suggest that media accounting is a long-standing media practice.

My new media research has been empirically grounded. I primarily do interviews and observations with mobile and social media users. I also analyze the content of messages they produce. My understanding of historical media practices primarily comes from the scholarship of historians, feminists, and literary scholars. That said, I have conducted primary research using historical texts, most often nineteenth-century North American diaries and letters, with a particular focus on the writings of women. Throughout the book, I draw on both primary and secondary sources to explicate the media accounting practices. In some cases, I have published on the data previously and note this where applicable.

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1 Introduction

On January 14, 1764, Mary Vial Holyoke wrote the following in her diary: “Buried.” She was writing about the death of her daughter, Polly, who had become ill only five days earlier. Her next diary entry was on January 17: “Small Pox began to spread at Boston.” For forty years, Ms. Holyoke documented daily life events; typically, her entries were no longer than a line or two.[1] She recorded the births, sicknesses, and deaths of those in her family and community in Salem, Massachusetts; detailed the outbreak of small pox, snowstorms, and earthquakes; and recorded who visited her home, how food was prepared, and how much she paid for tea. She chronicled life not only for herself, but for her family and community. Her diary, like many diaries of the time, was also likely shared with friends and loved ones.

With the same brevity and abbreviation we now expect from text messages and platforms like Twitter, Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker of Philadelphia wrote in her diary on November 17, 1779:

> Stay’d at home all day—had a Beef cut up—S. Sansom spent the afternoon, S Swett, Hillory Baker Senr. & call[e]d— 60 or 70 Cabbages brought in–cloudy

Drinker wrote about the people who came to visit, about work around the house, and the weather. As a woman in the late 1700s, her job was to take care of the house, as her husband was a local merchant. She used her diary to keep track of social calls, commercial transactions, and other household activities. Her diary was a blend of her work life and social life.[2]

When people traveled, they often kept journals to document their journey and new experiences. But even the most exotic journeys involve mundane details. In the fall of 1861, twenty-year-old Ruth Bradford of Pennsylvania

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accompanied her father and brother on a seven-month voyage aboard a ship to China. One month into the trip, she wrote:

Sunday, Oct. 13th I have put myself on the sick list today. The ham, eggs, and chocolate which I took for breakfast does not agree with me. Then there is a very heavy sea on, and altogether I feel a little sea sick. Think I'm done with ham and eggs forever.

Bradford, like many on social media today, documented her travel and the food she ate along the way—even what made her sick. She is not reflecting on the exotic but chronicling the mundane experiences that constitute much of travel. Indeed, travel is often only punctuated with the occasional visit to extraordinary monuments or ceremonial performances. It is through the everyday details of life, even while traveling abroad, that we see glimpses into the human spirit. Indeed, the bellyaches of life in many ways connect us to others.

What we think of today as a diary is probably a small book with a lock on it into which someone pours his or her innermost thoughts and feelings: "Dear Diary, today I fell in love with…" But this is a relatively modern notion of what a diary is. Throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, diaries were often written with the intention of sharing with others.[3] When young women got married and moved away from their parents, they would send their diaries back home as a way of maintaining connections with family. It was not uncommon for travelers to send their diaries home so their families could read them and know what they were up to while away. When distant family would come to visit, it was common to have them read the diary or read through it together as a means of catching up. Historically, diaries, particularly those of women, chronicled everyday life activities and events of the household and community—who was born, who got sick, who died, who got married, who visited, what was planted, what was made, and so on. Women played an important role in the social chronicling of family and community events. Sometimes these events were tragic, sometimes they were mundane, but all were recorded in these diaries and, most importantly, they were shared with others.

What's New Is Old

Diaries like those of Holyoke, Drinker, and Bradshaw provide a lens that helps us historically situate contemporary social media. Today, people use social media to document and share their lives. People share on Facebook when

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they are moving or have had a baby. They tweet about what they just saw on TV or what they had for breakfast. They post photos on Instagram of beautiful sunsets on their way home from work or their dog looking adorable. They post from or check in at baseball games or concerts. These are all ways of using social media to document what people are doing and sharing this with others. These are things people used to do (and still do) with diaries, photo albums, and scrapbooks. People are using new media in similar ways to how people used old media.

So often novel media are compared with their immediate predecessors. In the case of social media, new platforms like YouTube and Facebook were contrasted with either Web 1.0 or television. Much of what was new about social media was the ability to let ordinary citizens have a platform from which to speak to the wider world or the ability to share content among peer networks. But diaries like Drinker's reveal how what seems new may actually be old. User-generated content only seems novel when contrasted with mid- to late twentieth-century understandings of media as broadcast mass media. By comparing and contrasting media across longer historical periods, we can begin to understand some of the critical tensions surrounding social media differently. This book develops a framework for understanding the ways that people use media, broadly defined, to chronicle their lives and share it with others.[4]

Old and New Affordances

One way that we compare the differences between old and new media is through their technological affordances. The concept of affordances helps us to see how the characteristics of media technologies can invite us to use media in particular ways.[5] Understanding the materiality of diaries has informed my understanding of technological affordances more broadly. We can see the shrinking of a diary page as a technology that invites us to write in particular ways. Of course, we could devote a whole journal to the chronicling of one day, but we don't. We take the smaller pages as an invitation to write less. Similarly, when dates were printed on journal pages, we took it as an opportunity to write about what happened on those days, even though we did not necessarily have to. When they started printing horizontal lines on the pages, we took it as an opportunity to write between those lines, even though there was nothing to stop us from writing perpendicularly to the lines. We take these characteristics of the technology as invitations to use the media in certain ways and always have.

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Diaries from previous centuries have ranged in size and shape, but most are relatively small—and portable. In the mid-nineteenth century, advances in the production of paper facilitated the production of smaller diaries. Historian Molly McCarthy describes these "pocket diaries" as about two inches by four inches in size and, as the name suggests, were intended to be tucked into pockets or waistbands.[6] The size of the journal afforded mobility such that people could carry it with them and jot things down in it throughout the day rather than waiting until the end of the day. It became a "real-time" form of chronicling. The size of the pocket diaries also constrained the length of an entry to a sentence or two. Other nineteenth-century diaries were larger, but even these were designed so that there were only a couple of lines per date on which to write.[7] There would typically be three dates printed on each page of the diary. These diaries were also little books of mostly lined paper that could be easily opened and shared with others.

The material characteristics of diaries (that is, small, mobile, space-constrained) are not all that different from the character limit on Twitter. The 140-character limit (now increased to 280) was originally put in place to ensure that Twitter was cross-platform; it allowed users to send and receive tweets via the web or SMS, which limited the length of a text message to 160 characters before breaking it into two (or more) messages. But beyond this technological reason, early adopters seemed to enjoy the character limit. Some of the earliest adopters of Twitter were bloggers, who likely saw the limit as a welcomed constraint, much like diarists of the mid-nineteenth century. As McCarthy writes,

> The space afforded by the pocket diary may have been limited, but it saved journalists with only minutes to spare from having to write long entries. And diarists appeared thankful for both the opportunity pocket diaries offered as well as the limitations they imposed.[8]

Technological constraints can be welcomed because they delimit what we might otherwise feel obliged to do. It's not always about what we can do with a technology; sometimes its value is in what we *cannot* do with it.

For many of us in the developed world, we first came online through a computer that was plugged into the wall. Now, however, we typically access the Internet via mobile devices. For many people in the world today, the first time they access the Internet will be on a mobile phone.[9] Thus our experience of the Internet and social media is increasingly mobile, just like diaries.

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Ordinary Culture

My intention with this book is to highlight one of the ordinary ways that people have used and continue to use media in their everyday lives. But the ordinary can be deceiving. Often, we miss it altogether. We don't pay attention to it. It goes overlooked in the shadow of the moment. I believe this has happened to a degree with social media research. Much of the new media literature published in the past ten to fifteen years examines its extraordinariness, explores how networked media are different and new and how they are changing social interactions,[10] and identifies structures of publicness.[11] The role of social media in revolutions, political campaigns, and responses to natural disasters has become a prominent lens through which we study and explore social media.[12] Even the role of social media around events like Eurovision or the Oscars has been an area of research.[13]

That being said, these events do not happen every day. So what happens in between awards ceremonies and natural disasters? What do people do with mobile and social media when they wake up in the morning, when they wait for the train, when they're bored at work? I argue that we need to understand the everyday routines and practices around social media for two main reasons. First, if people are going to use these technologies for major events, they need to be familiar and active on these technologies before and after such events. To study the discussion of Eurovision or the Arab Spring on Twitter means to study the phenomenon itself. But to study the discussions of the events, people had to know how to use the platform prior to the event. Part of how we know that there was a smallpox epidemic in Boston in the late eighteenth century is because people wrote about it in their diaries. These are the same diaries in which they wrote about planting corn and who visited. It was because the everyday was being recorded regularly that the eventful moments could be captured in these diaries as well. If we are to study Arab Spring, for example, through Twitter, then mobile phone adoption and use—the mode through which most people access Twitter[14]—had to be in place before the elections and demonstrations. If people are to capture police brutality on their camera phones, like they did in the case of Eric Garner, who died of a heart attack while New York City police were trying to arrest him in 2014, then people need to have them in their pockets to begin with. So, these events raise the question of what happened before: What were people doing with their smartphones

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in their pockets? Why were people writing down daily events and news in their diaries? What is so important about mobile media that people keep them so near to their bodies and use them every day? What makes media become so ordinary that they can help us capture the extraordinary when it happens in front of us?

The second reason we need to understand the everyday aspects of social media is because the ordinary can represent broader social values and systems that shape the human condition. In this case, it is essential to understand what I mean by ordinary. Ben Highmore writes:

> Ordinariness is a process (like habit) where things (practices, feelings, conditions, and so on) pass from unusual to usual, from irregular to regular, and can move the other way (what was an ordinary part of my life is no more). There is always the "being ordinary" but there is also the "becoming ordinary."[15]

Much of my research has focused on media "becoming ordinary"—that is, the domestication and emergence of social norms surrounding mobile and social media use.[16] Carolyn Marvin argues that it is in the early stages of technology development and adoption that the tacit understandings and assumptions about media are made explicit.[17] The questions "What is this new media?" and "What is it doing to us?" are both actively discussed by people face to face as well in through other forms of media, such as online discussion forums, newspaper articles, and various how-to guides. My research over the last fifteen years has involved talking to people about their mobile and social media use. It is much easier to talk to people about their social media use compared with something like washing machine use because their social media use is still new; therefore, they are still working things out. A common question I ask is, "How would you describe *X* to someone who has never used it before?" That question works because my participants can imagine that someone might actually not be familiar with a particular platform. In fact, they might have had to describe the mobile app that I'm studying to someone they know. The question becomes much harder when you imagine that everyone knows what *X* is. It is much trickier to describe a TV because one imagines that most people have some experience with it. TVs have already become ordinary for many of us today, but mobile and social media are still very much in the process of becoming ordinary. We can still imagine those who might not use them.

Ben Highmore argues that the ordinary is also very *connective*. The ordinary unites us in many ways. Often, we might not recognize the ordinary

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because we are all doing it. We all eat breakfast (or should) every day. We all get sick. Of course, not all of us actually do these things. Not everyone can afford to have breakfast every day or has access to food. But when we do acknowledge and document our ordinary life and share it with others, we can be brought closer together. Knowing someone's ordinary routines can be a sign of intimacy. Connective rhythms of the quotidian, shared expectations, or understandings of daily routines may be tacit and normative, but they reflect a togetherness of ordinary culture.

The ordinary, however, is also highly *contextual*. What is extraordinary to one person may be ordinary to another. For some, it may have felt extraordinary to use a social media platform for the first time. In our study of tweets, we found many people tweeting things like, "hello twitterverse, I'm here now," or "just joined, what now?" When someone is new to a social media platform, they might not know where the buttons are or where to read or how to write in a manner that's typical for that platform. They do not know the norms, that is, the prescriptive collective ways of using a social media platform. It is often extraordinary to them.

The contextuality of ordinariness with regard to social media is not solely based on the amount of experience with a platform. What is ordinary about social media use among some social circles may not transfer to other circles. What is ordinary social media use for a teen might not be for an adult.[18] What one person's Twitter or Facebook feed looks like may be very different from someone else's; some call this a filter bubble.[19] Our understanding of what is ordinary on a particular platform is shaped by what people see on that platform, which is particular to that individual. The collective and contextual nature of everyday media use is important to explore and understand because it is in those nuances that we experience each other's humanity and we recognize ourselves as both unique to and part of a social collective.

My intention with this book is to identify the ordinary within new media practices by comparing them with historical media practices. Although it might seem new and extraordinary that people are tweeting what they had for breakfast, when put into context with historical diary practices, it reveals the ordinariness of the act itself. When we look across media over time, we see patterns of how people are incorporating media into their everyday lives. By focusing on what people *do* with media rather than on the technology itself, we can see similarities otherwise obscured by the newness of the platform.

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Although this book is fundamentally about media practices, I do assume that the materiality and affordances of the platform matter. Being highly influenced by science and technology studies (STS), I also approach media in the book as fundamentally "media technologies."[20] To bring an STS framework to media means to understand how technologies are part of and embedded within sociotechnical systems. In particular, I draw on the social construction of technology framework to focus on the importance of *users* in shaping how we come to understand what a certain technology does, a move common within STS.[21]

Before moving too far forward, it seems helpful to define some of the terms I use throughout the book. For example, I use "media" both broadly and inclusively. I do not mean merely electronic or digital media. Media has been defined as all the channels and means through which people share information that is not face to face[22] or the tools people use to communicate with others about a shared reality.[23] For the purposes of the book, I draw on both definitions and suggest that media are those tools and channels that connect people across time and space and allow for the sharing of meaning. I use the term "meaning" rather than information or reality because I want to specifically highlight the identity expression and community building that occur through media.

It might seem curious to suggest that diaries, scrapbooks, and photo albums should be thought of as media. Although diaries have long been used as primary sources in such disciplines as literary studies and history, seldom have communication and media studies scholars found diaries to be within their purview. Historical communication scholars have focused on broadcast and electronic media such as radio,[24] television,[25] and the telegraph.[26] That said, I am not the first to argue that scrapbooks, portraiture, and snapshot photography fall under the purview of media studies, nor am I the first to suggest these are historical predecessors to contemporary social media.[27] But diaries have seldom been considered by communication scholars as communication or media. Instead, they have been relegated to methodology for studying media use.[28] For example, diaries become a way to track the TV shows that an audience member watches. However, diaries are not just a genre of personal writing but historically have been tools for collective and shared meaning making, the social nature of which is fundamental to understanding diaries as media.

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Contemporary networked and social media have extended our definitions of media such that we can see beyond institutionalized broadcast media like newspapers, magazines, radio, film, and television. Media today include interpersonal forms of mediated communication,[29] and with this broader definition of media we can apply media frameworks to nonelectronic forms of mediated communication including diaries, scrapbooks, and photo albums.

Media Accounting

Throughout this book, I develop a theory of media accounting. *Media accounting* can be described as the media practices that allow us to document our lives and the world around us, which can then be presented back to ourselves or others. I draw on Nick Couldry's concept of "media practice" to describe the activities, uses, structures, and conceptualizations of and surrounding media.[30] A practice-oriented approach to media allows us to see similarities despite the differences in platforms or technologies. Identifying the key practices of media accounting focuses our attention on what people do with the media rather than focusing just on the media technologies themselves. This is not to say that the technologies themselves are unimportant, but, drawing on the social construction of technology, I ask, "What are the needs and understanding that people bring to the technology that shape its usage?"

Media accounting involves the creation, circulation, and consumption of *media traces*. A trace is the mark or vestige remaining and indicating the former presence, existence, or action of something. Therefore, media traces are vestiges or marks that indicate our presence, existence, or action through media, that is, those tools and channels that connect people across time and space and allow for the sharing of meaning. At first, media traces might seem like digital footprints, defined as the record of online activities that people may or may not be aware of creating as they use the Internet.[31] But they are quite distinct: whereas media traces are constructed by and visible to the individuals who create them, digital footprints include both purposeful postings online as well as IP addresses, clickstream, and authorship data—data about people and their behaviors that many users are not aware exist.[32] Moreover, media traces are not necessarily digital. Media traces are

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the texts, videos, and images created by people in their course of documenting their lives, what they do, where they go, who they are—and sharing this with others.

Media traces are essential to what it means to *document* through media accounting. Lisa Gitelman argues that to document means to know through showing.[33] Therefore, media accounting is more likely to occur through certain media than others. Diaries, journals, scrapbooks, photo albums, videos, and social media posts all privilege the showable trace, whereas a landline phone or CB radio do not create showable records of the content exchanged to be revisited or shared at a later time. Media traces are central to the practice of media accounting. Three aspects of media accounting help us to understand the practices of media accounting: an account, accounting, and accountability.

An Account

The term *account* suggests that a collection of media traces created through social media is tied to identity. An account is associated with an offline identity; think of a bank account or a store credit card. It often is individual, but it may be collective. If we think about bank accounts, individuals can have an account but they can also share a joint account with partners or family members. Organizations or groups can also have accounts. But all accounts are linked to some kind of identity.

Most social media platforms require users to create an account, typically requiring a username, password, and email address at minimum.[34] This is part of the process of tying an account to an identity. Sometimes fictional social media accounts are set up,[35] and sometimes there are accounts for bots on social media platforms.[36] But the accounts are created by someone or someones and therefore are still tied to some kind of identity.

Historically, the connection of identity to media accounts has varied in formality. Often, we think of diaries, scrapbooks, and photo albums as belonging to a person. Indeed, the front pages of a journal frequently include an empty line on which the diarist is invited to write his or her name, along with the date if it isn't already printed. Prompts such as "This diary belongs to _______" or "If found, please return to _______" are also formal ways to tie an identity to media accounts. Other times, diarists would just write their names in the front pages.

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Beyond labeling the diary with one's name or the social media profile with one's username, the content of media accounts is closely associated with the identity of the user as well. Who is described, mentioned, revealed, and photographed is another important means of linking media traces with identities. Although an account may be tied to *an* identity, the content of media accounts is seldom confined to singular identities. Authors frequently include themselves within the content of their media traces, but they also include others. Various kinds of social relations—including friends, kin, enemies, frenemies, colleagues, followers, lovers, and love interests—make their way into the content of our media accounting. Their identities as well as our own are intertwined in our media traces.

All media accounting is tied to the identities of both the creators as well as the subjects, which may or may not be one and the same. Media accounting can be done not only collectively and collaboratively but also on behalf of others. For example, archivists of various social groups or organizations create media accounts on behalf of the group. Similarly, blogs can be associated with a single author or with multiple collaborators. It was common in the mid-nineteenth century for women to keep an account for the household—who visited, how much she paid for flour, who died.[37] Starting in the late nineteenth century, mothers kept baby books for their children, documenting social and developmental milestones.[38] In the late twentieth century, it was often women who played the role of family historian, documenting and creating traces of their ancestral past.[39]

The term *account* also suggests a kind of subjectivity. For someone to give their account means they give their perspective on an event. It does not mean to encapsulate the entirety of the event but merely their version of it. Such subjectivity therefore conveys a partiality or incompleteness of one's account. This is true for media accounting practices as well. All media accounting practices are subjective and incomplete, though they may be vast. We can never document all of lived experience. Although we can describe parts of it, photograph it, and even record it on video, these media traces are always already incomplete.

Like other forms of identity work, media accounting can represent strategic presentations of self.[40] The subjectivity of media accounting means that one's version or take on something is both situated and performative. We know only what we have experienced, but we are also aware of our experiences

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as part of our various identity performances. As such, our media accounting captures both our versions of the world as well as our aspirations for it and for ourselves. The strategic nature of our media accounting is also related to the evaluative nature of accounting.

Economic sociologist David Stark ties the term *account* to organizational criteria for the evaluation of worth. He writes, "We keep accounts and we give accounts, and, most importantly, we can be called to account for our actions. It is always within accounts that we 'size up the situation.'"[41] In particular, Stark describes the contemporary mechanism of organizational performance evaluation as horizontal accountability rather than just hierarchical evaluation. People feel accountable not just to their bosses but also to their colleagues. Employees' sense of worth within the organization is based on the evaluation of those horizontal to them, not just above them. Outside of an organizational context, media accounting can thus be thought of as an everyday way that people can evaluate the worth of actions, behaviors, events, and individuals.

The concept of an account also conveys the point that media accounting involves the collection of media traces. As a bank account is made up a series of documented financial transactions between parties, media accounting involves not just singular media traces but a collection or aggregation of traces indicating our presence, existence, and action. Sometimes media traces are referred to by their mode, such as text, image or video; sometimes they are referred to in relation to their platform, such as tweet, blog post, diary entry, photograph, Instagram, updates, check-ins, or vlog post. All are traces indicating our presence, existence, and action, and all involve connecting people across time and space to share meaning.

Accounting

Media accounting is also fundamentally about the practices of documenting, chronicling, and cataloging. Accounting is the action or process of reckoning. It can involve counting and enumerating and be aggregative and transactive. Accounting provides evidence and explanation. Media accounting, therefore, is the process of reckoning or providing evidence for and explanation of our presence, existence, and actions through media.

Accounting is colloquially associated with financial information or economic entities, but we have long used media to reckon other kinds of information in our lives. In the United States, we have used accounting to

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keep track of household information since the eighteenth century. We have used travel journals to keep track of how far we've traveled and where we've been. But there are others forms of information that we have reckoned with media accounting. We use our media traces to see the path of where we've been and how we got to where we are. From baby books to photo albums, we document the changes in our lives in real time, or at least relatively defined as the "near past." When we look back on these books, we see trends and changes that we may not be able to see in our lived experiences. Accounting through media is fundamentally about chronicling various aspects of our lives so that we can remember, relive, recount, reconcile, and reckon at future points.

Enumerating activities, events, and experiences can be part of what we do when we engage in media accounting. Enumeration is easy to see in the contemporary social media environment, where our profiles include the number of friends or followers we have or how many tweets we have posted. But we have long understood ourselves by various numbers: how many yarns of wool we spun, how many bales of hay we loaded, the age at which we took our first step. Accounting is a way of seeing patterns and gaining insights that might not otherwise be identified in our lived experience. By documenting activities or events through media, we can aggregate information over a season, a year, a lifetime—information that can provide explanation of our lives and our livelihoods.

Of course, media accounting is not only about enumeration. The meaning making that comes from the aggregation of information over time is indeed far more important to the accounting process than any single metricized trace. When we look back at ourselves in photos, we might see our hair differently than we did at the time the picture was taken. We see our families differently as they grow and change. We see ourselves in our familial traces. Media traces allow us to gain distance and reflection on experiences and behaviors, but the *collection* of media traces allows us to gain additional insight that an individual trace may not convey. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A photo album, a diary, a Facebook timeline, or a Twitter stream conveys far more information about people's existence, presence, and actions than their singular media traces do. As such, media accounting tells a story, conveys information, and reveals explanations. Media accounting is an important way through which we come to understand processes and changes, both about ourselves and about others.

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But these aggregated media traces also help others understand *us*. Various social media and telecommunications companies and governments, as well as their partners, can analyze, study, and examine our traces in order to better serve, protect, and market to us. Alison Hearn reminds us that our social media traces make up the reputation economy, which drives online business.[42] Diaries, scrapbooks, and photo albums can be passed down within a family, are collected by history buffs, or become part of archives that combine media accountings. These traces are evidence of behavior, relationships, and affinities that can be read by others. The aggregation of such traces can reveal trends across historical periods or segments of the population.

Accountability

Media accounting also suggests the importance of accountability. Accountability is fundamentally about one's liability to account for and answer for one's conduct. There are three primary ways to understand accountability within media accounting. First, we are accountable to others for the traces we create. Second, we are accountable for the traces created about us by others. Third, we are accountable to others for the traces they create about themselves.

To say that we are accountable for the media traces we create is related to the evidentiary nature of media accounting. If I write a diary entry or a tweet that says someone died, I am accountable for the veracity of that information. Its existence is evidence that the death occurred—not fact, just evidence. Because I wrote it, I am accountable for it. If I write that I killed someone, then I am accountable for both the fact that I wrote it and the act itself. The distinction of accountability for both the content of the trace as well as the creation of the trace shapes the practice of media accounting.

Indeed, the accountability of media accounting is often persuasive. The earliest of diary keeping was for religious purposes, where diary writing was seen as a way to encourage pious behaviors.[43] During the mid- to late eighteenth century, diary writing was often seen as a way to reflect on and shape our behaviors. Historian Jane Hunter writes:

> Parents and authorities promoted diary-writing among girls as an effort to contain selfishness and encourage conformity to social expectations. Like the Catholic confessionals described by Foucault, diary-writing was an internalized discipline of the self.[44]

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We become accountable not just to others for the media traces we create, but to ourselves as well. Thus, media accounting can also be a means of shaping, influencing, and persuading future behaviors, actions, and thoughts.

Media accounting is presentist not only in its recording or chronicling but also in its reading. Past traces are experienced in the present and can dramatically influence our present understanding of self and others. As such, for better or worse people are responsible for their creation of media traces and traces about them sometimes long after the trace was created.

We are also accountable for our traces over time—traces we created in our youth or at a different time in our lives. For example, students are constantly reminded to delete Facebook photos of themselves holding red Solo cups before applying for college or going on the job market. While our beliefs or actions depicted in these traces may have been normative at the time, situations change, and interpretations of these can traces change as well.

Because media accounting is tied to an identity, it is also tied to roles and responsibilities. There are normative expectations that go along with various social roles such as being a good wife, mother, daughter, professor, friend, citizen, etc. In our media accounting, we are accountable to the same social roles. Therefore, we may strategically choose to create traces that reinforce or reflect these social roles. As a mother, I feel pressure to chronicle the lives of my children, to take photos of them on the first day of school or with their birthday cakes. The only thing that's changed is whether I post it on Facebook or put it in an album. But the middle-class norm to document the event or milestone has existed for a long time.[45]

We are also accountable for the media accounting involving us. Because media accounting is social in nature, we are often figured into the traces of others. Sometimes media traces are explicitly crafted about us *by* others; for example, baby books. Other times we figure more tangentially into the traces of others. When we visit someone or go to a concert or party with a friend who then posts a photo or writes or tweets about it, they are writing about themselves but it involves us. Sometimes traces are collectively made, such as school class photos, which are the traces of the school, the teachers, and each of the students. If a teenager posts that she went to a bar with a friend who is underage, the underage friend must defend the trace as much as the original poster. Even though we may not be the one

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creating the trace, we are accountable for our presence in the traces of others.

Last, we are accountable for hearing, watching, and reading the media traces of others. Sometimes media accounting is a highly dialogic practice. We write with an audience in mind or with an expected response. When I wrote on my blog that I went to a special restaurant, I'm assuming that my mom was reading and would find it interesting because she loves food and me. She knows I kept this blog about our sabbatical experience in part to keep her updated on things. As such, she has a responsibility to read it. I think she genuinely wanted to read it, but there were expectations that she would read it as well.

When someone on Facebook posts good news, such as getting married, or has a birthday, we are accountable for receiving that information—not just by reading it but by bearing witness, that is, by somehow communicating that we are receiving that information in the ritual of receipt. Sometimes this is in the form of a response or a question—"Way to go! Where was that photo taken?" Sometimes, we subtly incorporate the information into future conversations: "You've been there, right?" Responses can be as minimal as clicking a Like button. Sometimes the ritual of receipt is a very physical act of receiving media accounting, such as sitting down with someone at the table to look through a scrapbook with them. Parents in the nineteenth century would read their children's diaries aloud at the end of the day.[46] It was very common throughout the mid- and late twentieth century to sit through a friend or family member's projected slide show of trips or holidays.[47] Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, slide projectors were a popular means of sharing media traces. I still remember sitting through my grandfather's slides of his trip to China—lots of buildings and hills, few people. It lasted an hour—a long presentation, especially for a seven-year-old like myself. But there was a social obligation to watch the slideshow as my grandfather narrated. There was a social obligation to bear witness to the media traces he created of his journey and experiences. We had an accountability to do so. The rituals of receipt may vary, but there is accountability to receive the media accounting of others. These rituals of media accounting reinforce our social bonds.

Our accountability for the media traces we consume has been tested when people have posted suicidal messages on social media. How accountable are

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we for the media accounting of others? In short, it varies depending on our relationship with the poster, the media, and the context. But the fact that various actors are accountable plays an important role in the value of media accounting and what makes it a powerful communicative act.

What Media Accounting Is Not

I do not want to suggest that all mobile and social media are reflected in media accounting. Indeed, there are a plethora of contexts and uses of mobile and social media and therefore no one theory can account for the complexity of practices that surround such media. Media accounting is not about the creative vernacular, to use Jean Burgess's term, prevalent on mobile and social media.[48] It is not about the wonderfully creative videos that artists, media producers, and aspiring influencers post.[49] Media accounting is not about political organizing or affective publics,[50] even though these also describe mobile and social media. Media accounting is not about how companies and corporations use social media to advertise their products and services or build their brands,[51] though advertising has been integral to and has supported media accounting practices since the early twentieth century.

Instead, this book explores a discrete set of practices that various forms of media—digital and analogue, textual and visual, social and seemingly antisocial—have been used for. Just as there are many uses of social media, so too are there many uses of diaries and photo albums and scrapbooks. Looking across media to see patterns of communicative practice is not meant to belittle the significant differences in media platforms as distinct sociotechnical systems situated within distinct historical periods. Rather, it is to highlight long-standing human needs to use media to record and share our versions of the world as a means of making sense of the world and our place in it.

The Qualified Self

I want to suggest that the sense of self that emerges from media accounting can be understood as the qualified self. As we create media traces of ourselves in writing, images, audio, and video, we create representations of ourselves to be consumed. These media can be read back to ourselves or

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others. It is through the consumption of these media traces that we come to understand ourselves and others, sometimes in new ways. We can hear and see things in media traces about ourselves and others that we might not have noticed in real time. When we look at photos of ourselves or read what we have previously written about ourselves, we can engage, relive, and scrutinize ourselves from perspectives different from our lived experiences. The qualified self is the understanding of ourselves that emerges from creating and reengaging with media traces. The qualified self can be broken down into three aspects: quality, qualify, and qualification.

Quality

Media accounting conveys one's character, disposition or nature, that is, one's qualities. When we engage in media accounting we depict qualities about ourselves and others. The choice of what we decide to create a trace about conveys our attributes to others. For example, I might post about something I read in the *New York Times* but I might not post something I read or (more accurately) looked at in *People* magazine. I read them both, but only chose to create a trace about one. Qualities can be implicitly or explicitly communicated as we create media traces about ourselves and others. Qualities can be given or given off.[52] Character or disposition can be strategically created in our traces or naively revealed in our media accounting. Regardless of intention or explicitness, a qualified self is defined by the qualities and attributes of people and their experiences as evidenced by their media accounting.

It is important to recognize that quality often conveys something desirable. A quality is often something valued, a virtue. The qualified self, therefore, often focuses on people's qualities. The qualified self conveys strengths and virtues. Some might call this a positivity bias, that is, a tendency of humans to communicate more positively. A positivity bias has been shown to exist not just on social media,[53] but in language more broadly. Peter Dodds and colleagues found that across languages and cultures positive words are "more prevalent, more meaningful, more diversely used, and more readily learned."[54] The qualified self similarly belies a positivity bias with regard to the qualities that define the qualified self in media accounting.

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Qualify

The qualified self can also be understood as qualifying. To qualify can mean to describe or to designate in a particular way. The qualified self is therefore a described self, a characterized self. The aggregation of descriptions, of our media traces, and of the media traces of others that feature us, convey a particular version of who we are, a qualified version. However, to qualify also means to modify or moderate. In this way, the qualified self is a modified version of the self. We cannot possibly create traces of everything in our lives. The qualified self is a modified and a selective version of the self represented in media traces to be interpreted by ourselves and others.

The qualified self is a described self that must be interpreted, not just analyzed. Harry Wolcott distinguishes analysis from interpretation through the results of the process.[55] Analysis results in patterns, but interpretation results in meaning. The qualified self privileges interpretation and reckoning over analysis. We find meaning in the juxtaposition of photos of the first and last day of school because they are evidence not only of our children's physical changes over the school year but also of the changing emotions elicited, from anticipation to accomplishment. Our media traces of who we are and what we do circulate within modes of interpretation and meaning making.

Qualification

The qualified self is also made up of our qualifications. Media traces are evidence of who we are and what we've done and therefore communicate our accomplishments. The qualified self is an aggregation not just of behaviors and experiences but of achievements and milestones. The qualified self conveys our qualifications for our various social roles. When potential employers and romantic interests search for us, our media traces help them understand who we are and what we can do. Media traces of what we have done can become qualifications for future experiences as media accounting circulates.

The Self

Notions of *self* are essential to the qualified self. On a theoretical level, the term "self" implies both a subject and an object. A person engages in media accounting as a subject—that is, as a creator of traces—but also experiences oneself as an object through media accounting by seeing oneself in the

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traces created by oneself or others. The qualified self is situated within sociological understandings of selfhood which position the self as essentially social. Sociologist George Herbert Mead writes:

> The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process.[56]

For Mead, communication is the process by which individuals may become objects to themselves. Communication is an essential experience to the development of the self. Media accounting is therefore part of this social development of the qualified self. It is in and through media accounting that the qualified self develops both as a subject and an object. Moreover, the qualified self, to quote Mead again, "arises in social experience."[57] This means the qualified self is a social self and media accounting is fundamentally a social experience.

The qualified self is also based on feminist understandings of the self. Throughout the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, women in New England did not merely write about themselves.[58] Their familial and social relations figured prominently into their identity, their selfhood, and their media traces. Peter Heehs's extensive history of the self is fundamentally the history of a masculine self.[59] Famous men wrote about themselves with a great sense of history, but the women in diaries and scrapbooks more often created traces not just about themselves but about others as well. The qualified self draws on feminist scholarship, which draws our attention to the everyday wives and daughters who track themselves, their families, and their communities in their pages and posts.[60] The qualified self is not necessarily a feminized form, but takes on a feminist logic that defines the self in relation to others.

The Qualified and Quantified Self

The term "qualified self" evokes the quantified self movement. This is a movement that has gained great traction within the last twenty years with the rise of networked and digital technologies. In her book, *The Quantified Self*, Deborah Lupton writes:

> While the quantified self overtly refers to using numbers as means of monitoring and measuring elements of everyday life and embodiment, it can be interpreted more broadly as an ethos and apparatus of practices that has gathered momentum

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in this era of mobile and wearable digital devices and of increasing sensor-saturated physical environments.[61]

Lupton argues that the quantified self is broader than just the enumeration of behaviors. The quantified self is part of a lay movement to generate knowledge about bodies within a Foucauldian framework of self-knowledge and discipline. As a scholar of the sociology of health, Lupton frames the quantified self as a long-standing practice of self-tracking, which digital culture has made increasingly prominent as well as contested with regard to privacy, embodiment, surveillance, and knowledge production.

The term “quantified self,” however, is contested. Gina Neff and Dawn Nafus argue that the Quantified Self is a specific and highly engaged community of self-trackers who seek to discover insights about themselves through their self-tracking practices.[62] To Neff and Nafus, the (lowercase) quantified self is a nebulous term that has been used in a variety of contexts as a catch-all term for any kind of Fitbit- or Apple Watch–wearing consumer. The Quantified Self community, however, has well-defined norms around the datafication of their bodies and health, particularly for self-discovery rather than just self-improvement. The Quantified Self community rejects much of the normative tendencies of some self-tracking systems and technologies as it refocuses attention on *knowing* the self rather than *improving* the self.

Scholars of the quantified self agree that the term is fundamentally associated with the notion of “self-tracking” (Lupton, 2016; Neff and Nafus, 2016). Self-tracking refers to the ways that people knowingly and purposefully collect information about themselves to analyze and reexamine. Media accounting, as I will show, is fundamentally a self-tracking process. To track means to trace the course or movements of something over time. Rather than using footprints on the ground, the qualified self uses media to keep track of the various events in our lives so that we can retrace who we are and where we came from.

Self-tracking scholars acknowledge the variety of ways through which people can track and have tracked themselves over many centuries. Neff and Nafus argue, however, that the contemporary focus on self-tracking intersects with two key transformations that significantly change the nature of self-tracking. First, technological advancements in mobile computing and sensors have enabled a variety of new kinds of information to

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be monitored, networked, and analyzed. Second, the biomedicalization of culture increasingly seeks biological or physiological explanations for life experiences. Together, these developments have given rise to an increase in self-tracking practices, particularly within the health domain.

The self-tracking associated with both the quantified self and the Quantified Self community describes turning bodies, experiences, or behaviors into data.[63] Gitelman argues that this mode of knowing emerged in the nineteenth century.[64] She demonstrates how documentation became the primary mode through which knowledge was made and circulated. Here, knowing became showing through documentation, which more recently we call data.

Overall, the difference between the qualified self and quantified self is a matter of degrees and focus rather than categorical difference. Both can be understood as self-tracking; however, the definition of self and the processes of datafication and mediation change the nature of how we engender and experience the traces we and others create.

From Datafication to Mediation

Although self-tracking is central to both the quantified and qualified self, a shift from the quantified self to the qualified self can best be described as a shift in prioritization from the processes of datafication to mediation. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger and Kenneth Kukier define datafication as the process of transforming a phenomenon into a quantifiable format so that it can be analyzed.[65] Recording and analysis are central to the datafication of self-tracking and are not unique to digital culture. As Neff and Nafus argue, quantification is not the defining characteristic of self-tracking—datafication is.[66] The transformation of datafication involves collecting, recording, and analyzing information that is self-tracked.[67]

The qualified self might not feel or immediately look like data, but it can be. A diary in the hand of the diarist might not feel like data, especially if they never read what they have written, but to the diarist's grandchild or to a historian it is. The diary or scrapbook as a collection of media traces can constitute data about one's ancestry or about a historical time period. It can be combined with other traces such as photo albums or archives to help us see patterns and personal as well as cultural meanings.

Whereas the qualified self can be understood as datafication, the qualified self can be better understood as mediation. Roger Silverstone defines the analysis of mediation as understanding "how the processes of mediated

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communication shape both society and culture, as well as the relationships that participants, both individual and institutional, have to their environment and each other."[68] On an individual level, mediation processes ask what it means to create media traces of one's life and the world around us, what the communicative functions or uses of the creation and circulation of such traces are, and, in turn, how such media traces affect us and our social relations. On an institutional level, mediation examines the political economy of the institutions which both enable and entice media accounting. Here, we can examine the roles of platforms and media technologies. For Silverstone, technology is essential for mediation.

> Media technologies are doubly articulated into the social both as technologies whose symbolic and functional characteristics claim a place in both institutional and individual practice, but also as media, conveying through the whole range of their communication the values, rules, and rhetorics of their centrality for the conduct of the quotidian.[69]

Within a mediation framework, the qualified self can be understood as both as a mediated reflection and refraction of us and the world around us.[70] Mediation presumes a bidirectional influence of media technologies onto us and us onto media. The qualified self is an assemblage of our media traces, enabling both multiplicity as well as contradictions to enter into our interpretations of selfhood.[71]

A shift from datafication to mediation can also suggest a shift from intrapersonal communication toward interpersonal communication. The intrapersonal communication of the quantified self is not to say that self-trackers don't get together and share their data or their practices; rather, the priority of their self-tracking can be understood as an intrapersonal communicative process whereby people self-track to understand themselves. The qualified self suggests a shift in communication prioritization, that is, the interpersonal communication of media accounting privileges the exchange, the audience, and the social relations of the qualified self. A flower seen on a walk and shared on Instagram or a family gathering photographed for the family album presumes mediated interpersonal exchange. Mediation, rather than datafication, reveals the ways that others feature prominently in our representations of ourselves. Similarly, audience and sharing are default to the qualified self rather than the exception. The social content and practice of mediation are central to understanding the qualified self as distinct from the quantified self.

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A prioritization of mediation suggests that the experiences, activities, and events of others can become fodder for our own media accounting. The quantified self is often situated within an individual context, but the qualified self is often situated within a relational context. The qualified self is a qualified version of the self based on the qualities and qualifications of the media traces created by oneself and others. While the quantified self is more self-focused, the qualified self is focused more on others, both in audience and in content.

Dialectics of Media Accounting

In this book, I use dialectics to understand contrasting forces that continually push and pull our motivations, actions, and understandings of media accounting. Dialectical frameworks are common in both interpersonal communication as well as in media studies,[72] and help us explore the unresolvable tensions inherent in various processes. There are four dialectical pairs central to my definition of media accounting: public and private, individual and collective, work and leisure, and ephemerality and permanence.

Public–Private Tensions

First is the notion of public versus private. The contemporary moment is rife with debate about privacy and social media. What is privacy in these contexts? How is it manipulated by governments and the platforms themselves? In the smartphone era, when much of our communication occurs through mediated networks, how do we understand what is private or public? Rather than thinking of them as distinct spheres, a dialectical framework suggests they are oppositional forces that continually influence and shape our communication, our media accounting. The publicness and privateness are aspects of our media accounting that fluctuate and shift over time and depending on context.

As feminist scholars argue, contemporary divisions between public and private spheres as well as their associated gendered roles and responsibilities were never as clear-cut as we often assume.[73] Although we often associate women with the domestic or private sphere and men with the public sphere, Susan Miller argues that these distinctions overly simplify complex social relations and roles that characterized much of nineteenth-century American white middle-class life.[74] Women and men have long had to negotiate

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the continuum of publicness and privateness among our religious, political, and social interactions. Social media have not brought about the blurring of public and private life but have merely brought greater attention to it.

Individual versus collective is the second dialectical pair. Media accounting highlights the ways in which we must continually manage ourselves and others through the representations we create. We create media traces of ourselves for others. We create traces of others for ourselves. We read the traces of others to understand them and ourselves. Distinct categories of the individual or the collective do not convey the sociality at work in much of media accounting. There is continual social blurring that feminist scholarship has highlighted.[75]

Work versus leisure is the third dialectical pair. Again drawing on feminist scholarship,[76] this seeming dichotomy highlights the blurred distinction between what we consider work and what we consider leisure. Although industrialization of the nineteenth century brought about new distinctions between work and leisure,[77] women have never experienced such clear distinctions.[78] Media accounting can be enjoyable as well as taxing. The value of engaging in media accounting is both personal and collective, further blurring the distinctions between work and leisure.

Finally, ephemerality and permanence is the fourth dialectical pair. Media accounting is a process of taking life experiences and creating media traces of them. While the media traces are often static, their meanings are not. This dialectic is heightened in the contemporary social media environment, where so many of our media traces are digitally presented through our mobile devices. The seeming immateriality of these traces enhances a sense of ephemerality. The phone, however, is quite material, as are the networks and servers storing such data. Here, materiality and immateriality are replaced by visibility and invisibility. The more visible something is, the more permanent it feels. Media accounting allows us to manage the tensions that arise between the fleeting nature of the lived experience and the desire to hold on to such life experiences.

The Book

The book explores four practices associated with media accounting. By organizing it around practice rather than accounts, accounting, and accountability, I can draw out the ordinary uses, technological affordances,

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and historical parallels across media; identify the account, accounting, and accountability aspects within each practice; and focus on what people *do* with media. Each chapter explores a different practice; however, all practices are mutually enabled and constituted. Therefore, although certain social media platforms are used to explicate particular practices, any case could be used to identify each practice. For example, Instagram could easily be used in place of Facebook to explore any of the four practices.

Chapter 2 focuses on the first of four media accounting practices: the ways that people document and share everyday aspects of their lives through media accounting. This chapter draws on theories of ritual, routine, and presence to reveal how sharing mundane events and activities can be meaningful and important. I first review historical diarying to examine how people have used diaries for quotidian chronicling and sharing. I then draw on several key examples from my research on Twitter and mobile social networks to talk about how people share small bits of their everyday lives in ways that create meaning for them and those connected to them. Sharing what we read online is an important way to sift through and filter vast amounts of media. This kind of curation[79] allows us to share our own media consumption and is also an important part of performing identities (which will be discussed in chapter 3). Sharing the mundane also provides a new lens for understanding narcissistic critiques of social media. Therefore, I also explore issues of videologs, or vlogs, often considered narcissistic yet mundane, to explain not only sharing the mundane but our collective interest in consuming and bearing witness to quotidian media accounting. People have shared their activities, routines, and locations with others through media as means of social interaction and integration. Within a longer history of media accounting, we can begin to understand the motivations for sharing and reading social and location-based personal information. Media accounting provides a new lens through which to view the debates on narcissism and social media by putting the practices into a longer historical trajectory of meaning sharing.

Chapter 3 explores the role of media accounting in identity performance and work by highlighting how media have always been important outlets for identity expression. I integrate dramaturgical theory with notions of middle-class cultural identity and visual media accounting. I suggest that visual modes of identity representation are means of social interaction. Beginning with a review of the historical role of snapshot photography,

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I show the early interconnections between media, the family, and identity. I explore the representations of identities through the creation and sharing of images, comparing early Kodak with Instagram. I then review the rise of consumer culture and scrapbooks at the turn of the twentieth century, discussing the importance of performance, consumption, and identity on Pinterest. Two important aspects of identity representations are explored. First, I argue that identity is not an individualistic cognition or state, but fundamentally a dynamic and socially enacted process revealed through media accounting. Second, I argue that the ways in which people make choices about the small scraps, snapshots, and posts of their media accounting reflect identity work. Particularly related to the family, I argue the identity work of media accounting is a form of invisible labor often taken on by women.

Chapter 4 explores the practice of remembrancing. Media traces have long been a tool for remembering activities and experiences. This chapter examines the various ways that people create media traces as what José van Dijck calls mediated memories.[80] Historically, travel journals were one of the most common types of diaries. They gave travelers a way to record new events and experiences to savor at a later time and share with others. Similarly, modern travel blogs and social media posts allow travelers both to share with others and to relive these traces after returning home. Remembrancing is also a way to create media traces of especially important events in our lives. This chapter explores the role of memorial photography and, in particular, postmortem infant photography as a means of understanding how and why we create traces of difficult experiences in our lives. Remembrancing is a media practice that ritualistically reinforces our social collectives.

Chapter 5 explores the practice of reckoning. Reckoning is the process of engaging with media traces to better understand ourselves and the world around us. This chapter examines the evidentiary nature of media traces. Drawing on Derrida's notion of the trace,[81] I examine the ways in which media accounting allows us to both prove and improve ourselves. I discuss how various media traces are used as evidence. I draw on the GoPro camera and its community of YouTube users to demonstrate how everyday people create and share their videos to document and prove that something happened. But I also argue that reckoning comes from the aggregated nature of media accounting. We can see patterns in our traces over time that we cannot glean from our lived experience. This chapter examines various

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tensions that arise when our media traces do not align with our sense of self, and describes a reconciliation process that we engage in through media accounting.

Finally, chapter 6 reviews the practices and dialectics of media accounting to explore what's really new about new media accounting practices. One of the benefits of placing social media into a media accounting framework is that it allows us to see similarities in practices across time and technology. However, it also provides insights into the key differences. In this chapter, I argue that the speed, size, and ownership of mobile and social media platforms are significantly different from previous forms of media accounting. I discuss the implications of these differences both for individuals and for our culture more broadly. I also discuss what I see as a postdigital turn in media accounting whereby the media traces we create are made analogue in a tactical way, as a means of regaining the power and influence of our media accounting to counter the current commodification of media accounting.

Taken together, the chapters of this book reveal long-standing communication and media processes. For hundreds of years, we have used media to talk about ourselves and about the world around us. We do this to connect with others, to fulfill social roles and responsibilities, to help us hold on to and commemorate the people and things that are important to us, and to better understand our place in the world. Mobile and social media help us do this today as our qualified selves are shaped and reshaped through our media traces and how we share them. In a very ordinary way, we have found great meaning and connection in using media to share our everyday activities and experiences.

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