Lee Humphreys, **The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018, 200 pp., $28.00 (hardcover).

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In ***The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life***, Lee Humphreys introduces and centers her work around a concept she introduces as "media accounting" (p. 9), understood as the reflexive documenting of quotidian details of our everyday lives. She identifies four main levels that comprise media accounting: sharing the everyday, performing identity, remembrancing, and reckoning (the chapters that make up the book). It is through her exploration of these four branches that she brings our attention to what she calls the qualified self: "the understanding of ourselves that emerges from creating and reengaging with media traces" (p. 18). Ultimately, by employing a mixed methods approach that includes interviews, archival analysis, and content analysis, among others, Humphreys examines the uses and affordances of contemporary social media platforms as well as older analog media like diaries and photo albums to position social media as a contemporary extension of a centuries-long practice of everyday meaning making.

Throughout the book, Humphreys is adamant about foregrounding her stance: While the affordances of social media may be born out of the digital era, its motivations are not. She thus procures robust historical analogs for each of her four branches of media accounting to understand the ways social media is engaged with as contemporary extensions of the contexts in which older media like photo albums, diaries, public journals, and scrapbooks were found. For instance, in speaking of "identity work," Humphreys compares "scissorizing, a mode of composite authorship" (p. 62) and the primary means of meaning making in scrapbooks to pinning on Pinterest, a contemporary social media platform on which "people can present various aspects of themselves through materials created by others" (p. 62). In this way, her book extends its value as a scholarly work, not only as a meticulous historicization of social media but also as a methodological beacon for conducting comparative historical analyses through archival research. Humphreys also draws from ideas presented in works like boyd's (2014) *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* and Bruns' (2008) *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* to address the increased "visibility and circulation of media accounting" (p. 118) as well as the unprecedented "searchability and replicability" (p. 119) of media traces in digital spaces. Ergo, she also sheds light on key points of distinction between contemporary media accounting practices and those afforded by older media.

One strength of Humphreys' book is the quietly persuasive way she capsizes popular critiques of social media. Articles like this one by Hosie (2019) from *Insider*, "A photographer asked teenagers to edit their photos until they thought they looked 'social media ready,' and the results are shocking," are only one of a plethora of pieces that document the anxieties around hyperedited photos found on social media: "hyper-retouched,

sexually gratuitous bite-sized images are served up fast and fleeting. They often leave us feeling hollow and inadequate" (para. 15). In response to such popular critiques, Humphreys draws examples from the 19th century, noting that retouching photographs has always been a common practice in memorial photography and is neither a unique trait of social media nor as vexing as it is often made out to be.

She also draws from work done by van Zoonen and Turner (2014) to challenge the notion of a singular identity insisted by social media platforms, by pointing out that "most cultural and social theory understands identity to be multiple, dynamic, and contextual" (p. 69). In this way, she also contests widespread critiques of social media regarding the incongruent personas of the "social media self" and the "offline self" by pointing out that "the work of representing our identities in media is always incomplete" (p. 68), and thus occupies a space between self-fulfillment and self-improvement. Here, she aptly reminds us that "calculated authenticity" and multiple identities are inevitable qualities of identity work, cautioning against simply dismissing them as disquieting features fostered through social media platforms. By resituating the aspirational quality of social media identity work as an avenue of meaning making rather than a source of anxiety, Humphreys' book unambiguously moves into the more optimistic bureau of social media literature:

> Sometimes the representations that we create or curate reflect our hopes and dreams more so than our actual life. Our aspirations sometimes say more about who we really are than our lived experiences do. The qualified self is shaped by representations of who we are as well as who we want to be. (p. 70)

One aspect of *The Qualified Self* that might benefit from further development is in its relative absence of relevant critical perspectives and contexts such as the complications surrounding big data surveillance in capitalism and neoliberal self-branding culture. Considering its explicit titular juxtaposition against "the quantified self" that is briefly mentioned in the introduction, the book might be able to offer a richer analysis of social media identities by examining how power is exerted through the technological architectures of social media platforms, thereby further addressing wider concerns over the social and cultural ramifications that follow datafication and quantification. How are the meaning-making practices afforded by social media platforms siphoned into larger capitalist agendas? Is it possible to discuss the quantified self, the qualified self, and the datafied self in ways that meaningfully speak to each other? How might this change our understanding of performing identity work on social media as it is presented in this book?

For instance, when she recounts her examination of *The Pointless Book*, a book project started by Alfie Deyes (2014), the creator of a popular vlogging channel on YouTube called *ThePointlessBlog*, Humphreys' analysis primarily focuses on how the book reinforces the quotidian aspect of media accounting and meaning making:

> Alfie's book is an extension of his vlogs, another way to connect with his fans… the book is meant to be fun and entertaining. It's not too serious or worried about being productive or meaningful… He's just here to hang out with us. The pointlessness of the everyday is not threatening but comforting. (pp. 42–43)

Perhaps a discussion around the ways in which the illusion of the mundane is appropriated by corporations, or in this particular case, how Deyes was able to capitalize on his calculated authenticity of the everyday on multiple platforms, in the likes of Jenkins' (2006) work on convergence culture, could add a useful critical dimension to her analysis. Lastly, in revisiting the practice of retouching photographs, although Humphreys recalls a convincing historical example to establish her argument that edited photos are not unique to social media, additional context on how notions of skin flaws and uneven skin tones are inherently bound to oppressive racist, colorist, and neoliberal discourses might also help better nuance her overall position. To this end, while it is apparent that Humphreys' primary purpose is not to unearth the movement of power within social media practices, I would argue that it is difficult to divorce discussions around social media platforms from the powerful corporations that control them, and thus also from the embedded politics and cultural ramifications that follow.

Humphreys' understanding of social media as a form of media accounting and insight into the qualified self offers a rich and uplifting position with which to think about the ever-growing field. Her view of social media as a primary form of self-understanding also extends its applicability beyond humanistic engagements to areas like that of experimental research on self-concept change in CMC contexts shown in studies like those by Valkenburg (2017) and Walther and colleagues (2011). *The Qualified Self* contributes to the burgeoning literature of social media via a thoroughly historicized examination of media accounting practices useful for those primarily working in the fields of cultural studies, critical information studies, digital media and society, archival research on the Internet, and digital ethnography. The book will also be of interest to anyone who is interested in acquiring a more holistic illustration of how social media plays a meaningful role in their lives.

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