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THE USE OF DISTRACTION: DOOMSCROLLING, LOSING TIME, AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING IN PANDEMIC SPACE-TIMES

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
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By

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Lexington, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE USE OF DISTRACTION:
DOOMSCROLLING, LOSING TIME, AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING
IN PANDEMIC SPACE-TIMES

In the space-times of the COVID-19 global health crisis, how have our relationships with smartphones changed? How do popular discourses designate mundane engagements with digital technologies as healthy or unhealthy, and how are these notions of wellness practiced? This thesis draws upon an online survey of smartphone users residing in Kentucky, and a review of marketing, journalistic, and academic literature to establish current understandings of 'digital well-being'. The paper then analyzes interviews with Kentucky smartphone users who were asked to track their screen time for a one-week period. This project reveals normative conceptions of well-being and the role of smartphone and screen time metrics in producing ideas of digital wellness. The thesis draws upon health geographies, disability studies, media studies, and STS to argue that the common heuristics of digital wellness are insufficient to either understand or improve subjective well-being, and that a relational and ecological analysis of 'digital well-being' allows us to re-evaluate normative prescriptions of care. Mobilizing theories of attention and neoliberal biopolitics, the paper connects normative notions of attentiveness and wellness to demonstrate a specific assemblage of 'digital well-being,' and theorizes distraction as a set of ambivalent, unruly practices which might disrupt it.

Jacob Saindon
(Name of Student)

04/24/2021
Date

THE USE OF DISTRACTION:
DOOMSCROLLING, LOSING TIME, AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING
IN PANDEMIC SPACE-TIMES

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1. INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL WELL-BEING

When I started thinking about digital well-being in late 2019, I was curious about the co-constitution of attention and health produced by screen time tracking applications such as Apple's *Screen Time* and Android's *Digital Wellbeing*. I could not have anticipated the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which would sweep over the United States beginning in early 2020, nor the kind of pressures that 'lockdown' conditions would put on Americans' relationships with our digital devices. For many, digital devices became the primary point of access to friends, family, work, and entertainment. During the height of the 'lockdowns' and pandemic safety precautions, many Americans were only leaving their homes to re-stock on necessities.

Alongside these lockdowns and 'social distancing' emerged a constant stream of pandemic-related news: new outbreaks in nursing homes, climbing death counts, anti-mask protests, the callous negligence of the federal government. Concomitant with these disheartening updates came reports of the physical and mental strains of lockdown life. Chief among these was an explosion in reports of 'doomscrolling'[1, 2]: the compulsive seeking-out of bad news, which leads to feelings of despair. Pandemic-related doomscrolling was compounded on May 25 by the killing of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis. His egregious murder set off a massive wave of uprisings in the U.S. and beyond, re-igniting public discourses around police violence and infusing news and social media sites with even more difficult reporting about structural racialized violence.

This study of digital well-being during the summer months of 2020, then, is bound up with experiences of tension, worry, anxiety, despair – of which doomscrolling is one prominent expression. The subject of this thesis is the very particular configurations of digital well-being: notions of health and wellness, produced through and in relation to digital devices, in times of global pandemic and uprisings, all in the limited space of the home. I approach these configurations as relational assemblages which produce the lived experiences of study participants. In my analysis of assemblages

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[1] "Doomscrolling Is Slowly Eroding Your Mental Health" (accessed 1.9.21)
[2] "Doomscrolling, explained" (accessed 1.9.21)

of digital well-being, I focus on discourses and practices of attention and, importantly, distraction. Distraction is positioned as the discursive opposite to attention, but I argue that this opposition is not borne out in practices of well-being. Particular modes of attention are compulsory in neoliberal assemblages of digital-wellbeing, while practices of distraction are pathologized as unintentional, unproductive, and unhealthy. Through a close examination of study participants' experiences of attention, uses of distraction, and affective feeling-states, however, I propose that a reconceptualization of distraction opens up the possibilities of non-normative well-being bound up with attention otherwise.

NOTES ON 'DIGITAL WELL-BEING'

Digital well-being conjoins two ill-defined terms into a single term that is at once more specific and more ill-defined. Broadly, I address digital well-being as a concept referring to the role of digital technologies such as smartphones, computers, and other screen media and smart objects in producing holistic user wellness. I approach the term both in terms of its discursive production and the affective feeling-states that express it. I examine both elements in order to approach the tension between normative prescriptions of wellness on the one hand, and its potential for more emancipatory practices of wellness on the other. One note about terminology: there is little consistency in the literature about spellings of well-being/wellbeing. In an attempt to reduce confusion, I use 'digital well-being' throughout; however, 'wellbeing' is preserved in citations from other authors, and *Digital Wellbeing* is used in reference to the Android software application.

METHODS & ANALYSIS

The methods for this study consist of (1) an extensive digital survey, (2) in-depth interviews, and (3) discourse analyses of scholarly, journalistic, and corporate publications discussing screen time and digital well-being

This project primarily undertook a set of in-depth interviews with 18 participants in Fayette, Jefferson, and Warren Counties on the topic of their screen time and smartphone use habits. Participation was limited to these areas in Kentucky in order to include only participants with relatively similar living situations in terms of urban/suburban character and population density, and to avoid accounting for different

lockdown and social distancing guidelines and lockdown across state governments. The eligible age range was limited to ages 18-34 in order to maintain relatively similar smartphone usage habits and avoid drastically different generational understandings and uses of mobile media.

Survey participants were recruited by posts to local area Reddit forums, with the approval of the 'subreddit' moderators: r/Kentucky, r/Lexington, r/Louisville, and r/WKU. The posts directed potential interviewees to respond to an online survey (see Appendix). The survey asks participants to review their own screen time metrics and reflect on their device usage while social distancing, and then respond to several questions regarding their perceptions of 'digital well-being.' Participants were incentivized with a $100 cash giveaway to two winners selected by random drawing from the pool of survey participants ($100 to each winner). The survey was open to submissions for a period of six weeks (June 15-August 1, 2020) in order to provide a period of eligibility to decide on prize winners. Users were required to include a unique email address to prevent multiple entries and confirm they fit all of the eligibility criteria as part of the survey questionnaire. The survey responses constituted both a dataset from which analyses could produce popular user understandings of digital well-being and a pool of potential participants for in-depth interviews. I reached out to 37 of the survey respondents who had indicated their willingness to be contacted via the email they provided. 18 agreed to be interviewed, and were paid $20 for their participation.

By recruiting solely through a digital social media platform such as Reddit, this study drew from a pool of users who were likely to be very active on their smartphones. Due to the relatively low volume of respondents, I was also unable to select for a representative demographic sample (see Appendix). Of the 18 interview participants, 15 were women and three were men. Four participants identified as persons of color. 17 of the 18 interview participants held either professional, 'white collar,' office jobs, or were students; none were unemployed, though two had been furloughed for a short period before returning to work. At the time of their interviews, 14 of the 18 had transitioned to working from home full-time. The experiences and perspectives I analyze in this study, then, are largely (but not exclusively) those of white, middle class, high-volume smartphone users. As a white, 26-year-old, Reddit-using graduate student residing in

Fayette county, I shared many smartphone habits and lived experiences with these participants, and was often able to rely on my knowledge and feelings related to my own smartphone routines to guide the interviews; however, I took pains to structure in the interview and pose questions in such a way as to avoid making assumptions about living situations, access to internet and digital technologies, and the particularities of participants' lived experiences.

The interviews consisted of two parts. The first was one 5-10 minute pre-screening call at least one week before the in-depth interview. During these pre-screening calls, I provided details about the questions I would be asking and other details involving privacy and informed consent. I also asked participants to download or activate a screen time tracking application, either Apple's *Screen Time* on iOS, Google's *Digital Wellbeing* on Android, or a third-party application for participants with older Android operating systems or devices incompatible with *Digital Wellbeing*. These applications would then be populated with, at minimum, one week's worth of data collected by the application. The second part of the interviews were carried out and recorded via Zoom and ran for approximately 60 minutes (ranging between 40-80 minutes). The interviews were semi-structured, with four broad prompts and a series of sub-questions I followed up on depending upon participant responses (see Appendix). Each participant was asked to open, view, and share (visually and/or verbally) their usage metrics as recorded on their device and connect particular metrics to particular memories and experiences from the previous week.

This joint review of screen time metrics was inspired by Sarah Pink's (2017) methods of 'sensory ethnography' in relation to self-tracking and Clancy Wilmott's (2016) use of walking interviews to produce 'ethnographic moments.' These methods attend to the "sensory, affective, habitual" (Pink 2017, p. 5) experiences of self-tracking and other engagements with digital technologies. The joint review of data also draws from Deborah Lupton's work on more-than-human data studies, which engages Karen Barad's provocation to understand "how matter comes to matter" (Barad 2003, quoted in Lupton 2018). Lupton highlights "the dynamic nature of the more-than-human world of human-data assemblages": "As performative agents, individuals are actively engaging their bodies and minds as they are 'becoming-with data' […] these are forms of lively

imaginings and interpretings, in which knowing and being cannot be separated" (Lupton 2018, p. 9). In short, I draw on these scholars and their methods in order to examine the production of mundane data, and its co-constitution with practices of self-knowledge and self-care.

The interviews were transcribed automatically from the Zoom recording and verified manually to ensure accuracy to the recording. The interview transcripts and short-answer survey responses were analyzed for discussions of wellness, sociality, screen time, self-tracking, and restriction. Specifically, initial coding analyzed the transcripts for discussions of *screen time* (device use, self-tracking metrics), *sociality* (friends, family, social activity), and *spatiality* (isolation, movement, restriction, confinement). Within these codes, discussions of *affect* (feelings and emotional states) and *well-being* (mental health, attention, focus) produced the key findings and themes of the research.

In addition to the survey responses and interview transcripts, I gathered an archive of 'grey literature' consisting of approximately 90 journalistic articles, scholarly articles, and corporate documents. This archive was analyzed to establish normative notions of digital well-being and its attendant social and cultural expressions.

The journalistic articles were gathered via a Google Alert set to capture articles featuring the following terms: 'digital wellbeing,' 'digital wellness,' and 'screen time.' These alerts were set in March 2020. I selected articles to include in the analysis based on an assessment of relevance and source reputability. The scholarly articles were gathered via Google Scholar via initial searches for the following terms: 'digital wellbeing,' 'digital wellness,' and 'screen time,' and through back-tracing of citation patterns. I selected articles to include in the analysis based on an assessment of relevance, and privileged publications from the social science disciplines generally, and media psychology in particular. The corporate documents were gathered primarily from the Apple Newsroom (press releases) and Google's official blog, *The Keyword*. I also reviewed recordings of presentations from official corporate events, and other public relations media relating to the *Screen Time* and *Digital Wellbeing* tools.

The thesis begins in chapter 2 by establishing a conceptual framework through theoretical engagements with Foucauldian technologies of power, and theories of assemblage, archive, and affect. I establish the framework through a review of key scholarship on attention, health, data, and digital technologies across media studies, health geographies, disability studies, and STS. I approach digital well-being from a relational ontology which privileges assemblages and affect as key analytical heuristics. Specifically, I posit that digital well-being emerges from assemblages of attentiveness and health, including the disciplinary imperatives of biomedicalized, neoliberal capitalism.

In chapter 3, I analyze how particular discourses of digital well-being emerge in non-geographical academic literature, as well as popular and corporate publications, and through the study's survey responses. I trace a discursive opposition between attention and distraction and a value-laden distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia, identifying a pathologization of the user within the popular prescriptions of digital well-being. In the survey responses, I analyze how the pressures of normative attentiveness and health management produce a complicated relationship to practices of self-control.

In the following two chapters I turn to interviews with smartphone users to approach the mundane expressions of digital well-being during a global pandemic. Chapter 4 analyzes the 'work and everyday life' of smartphone users in Kentucky during the pandemic: their spaces and routines of work and sociality. In this chapter I examine how the space-times of the pandemic home are part of a relational assemblage of well-being, and a locus of multiple social and technical flows. I locate distraction in the evolving routines and spaces of pandemic work and social life, arguing that distraction emerges as an essential, ambivalent practice of attention.

Chapter 5 continues an analysis of distraction through attention to practices of 'doomscrolling' and 'losing time.' I situate these as practices which complicate the binaries of normative well-being set out by popular discourses. Following queer and disability studies scholarship, I incorporate an analysis of neoliberal affects, examining how the biopolitical imperatives of productivity and health management contradict

affective feeling-states of wellness. Focusing on experiences and practices of self-tracking, I argue that Lauren Berlant's relation of cruel optimism provides insight into the operation of screen time tracking applications: engendering attachments to screen time data as an avenue to 'the good life,' but incapable of remedying precarity – only masking it.

In chapter 6 I turn to a discussion of care, an ethic which pervades the literatures this thesis engages explicitly or implicitly. In approaching the intersecting processes of attention and well-being, I ultimately work towards revising prescriptions of care to better address the particular assemblage of digital well-being which emerges from discourses and practices of smartphone use. I take up distraction as a crucial set of practices which expose openings in the assemblage of digital well-being. Taken up relationally, I argue, distraction can produce new practices of attention and well-being in spaces and times dominated by screens and digital technology: modes of attention otherwise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis engages with four primary literatures to analyze the use of screen time tracking applications: media studies, health geographies, queer and disability studies, as well as digital geographies and science and technology studies (STS). Within these literatures, I focus particularly on the production of attention, spaces of well-being, neoliberal health management, and self-tracking. Theoretically, I engage with two primarily clusters: first, Foucauldian technologies of power (specifically disciplinary power/anatamo-power and biopower) and technologies of the self. I analyze these technologies to address particular modes of institutional and self-domination applied to and by smartphone users, and the relationship between techniques of domination and the production of knowledge. Second, I engage with non-representational theoretical notions of assemblage and affect in order to analyze the emergent qualities of digital well-being and the particularities of smartphone users' lived experiences.

In this chapter, I discuss these literatures and concepts in order to lay the theoretical groundwork for an analysis of a contemporary regime of attention and attendant experiences of well-being and practices of care. In doing so, I put the modern 'crisis of attention' in conversation with notions of well-being. I argue, in brief, that practices of attention and experiences of digital well-being are part of a spatially situated and relational assemblage of health. I begin by discussing treatments of attention in media studies and the digital humanities to establish the sociotechnical bases of attention in modern, digital contexts. I then connect attention to recent scholarship in health geographies that takes up the heuristic of 'well-being' in order to reorient the discipline towards assemblages of health. In the following section, I bring in scholarship from queer and disability studies to contrast such assemblages of health with the imperatives, affects, and discursive binaries established through neoliberal biopolitics. The chapter concludes with a discussion of screen time self-tracking, particularly in the context of neoliberal biopolitics and the use of technologies of the self.

ASSEMBLAGES OF ATTENTION AND WELL-BEING

To begin, how (and why) have we come to pay attention to how we pay attention? Jonathan Crary, in his book *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern*

Culture (1999), traces the modern preoccupation with 'attentiveness' that arose in the late nineteenth century amidst the processes of capitalist industrialization. Invoking Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power, Crary argues that the 'absorbed attentiveness' which became the dominant mode of attention was not pre-existent, but rather produced by the imperatives of institutional power with the goal of insuring "productive, manageable, and predictable" subjects (Crary 1999, p. 4). Where contemporary writings sought to describe modernity through experiences of distraction (described as disruptions of perception), Crary argues that the particular kind of attentiveness subject to distraction was not an *a priori* practice. Instead, he posits that "that attention and distraction cannot be thought outside of a continuum in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another, as part of a social field in which the same imperatives and forces incite one and the other" (ibid., p. 51). The naturalized and normative practices of 'absorbed attentiveness' are necessary to success in the particular industrial configuration of labor, but are equally conducive to states of "distraction, reverie, dissociation, and trance" (ibid., p. 46) – the discursive antithesis of productivity.

In detailing the development of particular forms of attentiveness in the late nineteenth century alongside industrial advances and technological changes, Crary gestures to the essential relationship between modes of attention and technologies of perception. Scholarship by N. Katherine Hayles, Yves Citton, and Bernard Stiegler, among others, has detailed the specific relationships and tensions between digital media and modes of attention.

Hayles (2012), focusing on recent developments in the digital humanities, delves into neuroscientific research on cognition in order to establish two modes of human reading: close and hyper. These modes of reading align not only with particular technologies and tools, but also distinct cognitive attentional modes:

> "Hyper reading correlates […] with hyper attention, a cognitive mode that has a low threshold for boredom, alternates flexibly between different information streams, and prefers a high level of stimulation. Close reading, by contrast, correlates with deep attention, the cognitive mode traditionally associated with the humanities that prefers a single information stream, focuses on a single cultural object for a relatively long time, and has a high tolerance for boredom" (Hayles 2012, p. 12)

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The deep attention of close reading, argues Hayles, is best suited for sustained engagement with complex texts. Deep attention also, I argue, aligns with the normative 'absorbed attentiveness' identified by Crary: naturalized and held up as the most proper form of reading and analysis, and possessing both the potential for productivity and distraction. Hyper attention, on the other hand, involved scanning and skimming over multiple texts, such as jumping between websites and social media platforms on one's smartphone. Though she notes that deep attention is historically dominant and promoted in the humanities, Hayles' argument is that deep and hyper attention are appropriate to different media forms and types of analysis. Hyper reading an academic book will not produce as deep understanding of the text's argument as close reading would; and close reading a digital media object might yield a too-narrow analysis. Hayles promotes a 'comparative media studies' which applies different modes of reading to different forms of media. This comparative media studies would include a third kind of reading, machine, which involves the algorithmic analysis of texts.

While machine reading is not a form of human attention in the manner of hyper or close reading, it does influence and interact with human cognition. Hayles reviews recent scholarship on neurology and cognition to argue that "the *mechanisms of attention* themselves mutate in response to environmental conditions" (ibid., p. 98, emphasis in original). She calls the coevolution of humans and technics *technogenesis* (ibid., p. 10). She aims to address not only the conscious practices of attention, but also the non-conscious cognitions and perceptions which are influenced by our social and technical environments. In short, practices of attention are both consciously and non-consciously determined, and indelibly responsive to the environments (technological and otherwise) which humans inhabit. In the case of machine reading, algorithmic processes make perceptible textual elements which humans would otherwise remain unaware of.

Yves Citton, writing from the perspective of media studies, expands on the environmental conditions of attention. In his book *The Ecology of Attention* (2017), Citton situates Hayles' categories of reading in one level of attention which fits into a broader ecology (or 'echology') of attention, which opposes the popular model of an economy of attention. Reversing the typical emphasis on attention as an individual issue, he instead begins by discussing collective attention: how social and technical

environments – including, importantly, media networks and their technical infrastructures – influence what swaths of the population pay attention to. Citton discusses the algorithmic processes which rely on population behaviors to direct attention, such as Google's PageRank algorithm. PageRank, he argues, operates as an aggregation machine which "directs our attention depending on the way in which other net users have directed their attention" (Citton 2017, p. 71, emphasis removed). From collective attention, he moves to joint attention, the attentional dynamics practiced by small groups, and finally to the more-familiar lens of individuating attention. However, by framing individual attention against the layers of collective and joint attention, Citton emphasizes the multiple cognitive, social, and technical factors which construct our modes of perception, media environments, and the complex relations between them.

For Citton, an ecological perspective of attention allows him to situate attention in the politics and ethics of care. He advocates for the development of a 'political echology of free-floating attention,' which is not nostalgic for the old modes of attentiveness but rather attuned to the "relational and technological transformations that structure our current epoch" ibid., (p. 122). Resonating with Crary's identification of distraction as part and parcel of the very same structures of attentiveness, Citton looks towards certain forms of informed distraction as emancipatory opportunities.

Included in individuating attention is the practice of reflexive attention, "defined by the fact that the individual may pay attention to the dynamics, constraints, apparatuses, and above all to the evaluations, conditioning their attention" (ibid., p. 139, emphasis removed). As Citton notes, that is a genre of meta-attention in which his text (and the work of other scholars of attention, and this thesis) falls into. While Citton emphasizes the multiple layers and structures which intersect to create an attention ecology, this level of individual attention contains an essential kernel of agency: "attention ecology can only contemplate subjects who agree to make themselves attentive to this rather than that" (ibid., p. 170). Reflexive attention helps us to know "how to choose our alienations and our enthralments" and "how to establish vacuoles of silence capable of protecting us from the incessant communication that overloads us with crushing information" (ibid., p. 19) – this is a form of care I will return to.

Bernard Stiegler, who might best be characterized as a media philosopher, is also concerned with attention as an exercise of care, though his concerns are oriented more intergenerationally. For Stiegler, long circuits of intergenerational care run through cultural material which he refers to as 'tertiary retentions.' These retentions, he argues, are increasingly short-circuited by modern sociotechnical environments, and in particular the interventions of the mass media industry. Where biopower, as analyzed by Foucault, seeks to manage population health and productivity, Stiegler posits that modern biopower has developed into *psychopower*, which take as its object cognition and attention. Instead of capitalist productivity, psychopower seeks rather to induce consumption (Stiegler 2010, p. 128).

While modern psychopower operates through the particular technical capacities of digital media, the relationship between digital media (as a tertiary retention) and care, per Stiegler, is a *pharmacological* one. Stiegler invokes the concept of the *pharmaka* in order to emphasize that tertiary retentions act as both poison and cure (Stiegler 2012). Digital media in thrall to the mass media industry, acting on attention to produce consumptive desires, is a toxin which disrupts intergenerational care. However, digital media can be otherwise: supporting the circuits of intergenerational connection instead of disrupting them. For Stiegler, Hayles' concept of hyperattention is one such poison, a short circuit which disrupts the long circuits of deep attention (Stiegler 2010, p. 79). For Stiegler as well as Citton, attention as a mode of care involves a reorientation away from the objects of attention towards practices of attention as relational processes.

We can see how each of these scholars seeks to disrupt the idea of a singular and unitary practice of attention. For Crary, attention (as 'absorbed attentiveness') is a disciplined mode of productivity that contains the seeds of its own failure. For Hayles, attention is composed of multiple conscious and non-conscious processes which lends themselves to multiple different modes of attentiveness. For Citton, attentional practices emerge from multiple intersecting levels of sociality. For Stiegler, attention is shaped by three interrelated levels of psychic activity, and is subject to technological formation and disruption. While certain elements of these theorists may not perfectly align with one another, it is clear that for each attention is neither singular nor totally individualized.

Attention is co-productive with multiple cognitive, social, and technical structures and processes.

Synthesizing and restating the relevance of their arguments to this thesis, I seek to treat attention as a relational assemblage composed of multiple cognitive, social, and technical processes. A similar movement is occurring is health geographies, seeking to reframe health and well-being as a relational assemblage of multiple spatial and social processes.

As I noted in chapter 1, well-being is an amorphous concept – but its instability is part of its usefulness to health geographies. In health geographies scholarship, well-being has been taken up to enable study of health beyond the narrow context of biomedicine. Atkinson (2013) highlights a few of the key trends of dominant frameworks of well-being, which she describes as a "components approach to wellbeing" (Atkinson 2013, p. 138). Such a perspective treats well-being as the additive outcome of numerous aspects of life, which vary from approach to approach. Some frame well-being as a mixture of subjective and objective elements; others as hedonic (pleasurable) and eudaimonic (self-actualizing) behaviors; still others on configurations of domains of life, sets of skills, and environmental factors. The specific hedonic/eudaimonic framework is particularly relevant to popular discourses regarding digital wellbeing, as I will elaborate on in chapter 3. These component approaches, regardless of their constituent elements, figure well-being as "a quality that inheres to the individual" (ibid., p. 138). Atkinson and other health geographers trade upon the instability of the term to advocate for an understanding of well-being as an ongoing, relational process rather than a set of components which results in an individual quality. In short, health geographers adopt well-being as a heuristic to approach health as an assemblage.

The health geographies literature engages with Sara Ahmed's (2010) work on happiness and Eevee Sointu's (2005) work on discourses of well-being as key analyses from which to establish wellbeing as a relational assemblage (Atkinson 2013; Smith and Reid 2018). Taken together, Ahmed and Sointu challenged the positivistic and individualistic framings ('components approach,' per Atkinson) of well-being. Scholars working with more specifically non-representational approaches draw on Deleuzian ideas of relational ontology, in particular, to describe assemblages of health and incorporate

analyses of affect (Andrews et al. 2014; Andrews 2019; Smith and Reid 2018). Important to these scholars' analyses of well-being is an analysis of affect. Andrews (2014) establishes affect as a "key non-representational idea […] indicating how wellbeing arises initially as an energy and intensity through the physical interaction of human bodies and non-human objects, and is experienced as a feeling state" (Andrews 2014, p. 211). Affect, as a "purely physical non-cognitive event, [which] gives rise to less-than-fully conscious experiences" (ibid., p. 214), is an important analytical tool not only for embodied well-being, but equally consequential to an analysis which, per Hayles, understands attention to include embodied cognitive unconscious processes. These ontological revisions of health are also approached through Karen Barad's concept of 'intra-action' to propose how "spaces of well-being, and their opposite, with their stabilities or instabilities, need to be explored in their sociomaterial depth, specificity and liveliness, rather than solely by post hoc rationalization" (Smith and Reid 2018, p. 820). In short, these geographers suggest that well-being is best approached as an emergent process which is experienced in a situated and relational manner.

More empirically, geographers interested in well-being have worked to describe particular spatial processes which are part of an assemblage of well-being. Fleuret and Atkinson (2007) propose a four-part framework through which spaces of well-being are made possible: spaces of capability, integrative spaces, spaces of security, and therapeutic spaces. The authors emphasize that the production of such spaces of well-being relies on social and physical factors, and the relationship of multiple ongoing processes in order to become conducive to well-being. Also important is the two-directional relationship between these processes and spaces: "settings can influence health-related wellbeing, and health-related wellbeing can influence settings" (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007, p. 113). Importantly, Fleuret and Prugneau (2015) revise this framework to encompass "space-times of well-being" through an analysis of student well-being. As we will see in chapter 4, the relational and emergent properties of space-times, and the two-directional relationship between well-being and space, are important to understanding pandemic spatial practices. Gorman-Murray and Bissell (2018), take up space-times of well-being to analyze changes to "spatial and temporal patterns and meanings of dwelling" and "the relational fabric of home" (Gorman-Murray and Bissell 2018, p. 234). Where the authors

approach multilocal dwelling and the spatio-temporal splintering of 'home' due to mobile work, this thesis uses their framework to focus on the consolidation of home and work into a singular locality. These frameworks not only help us to approach 'well-being' as a relational assemblage, but also as an access point to the particular consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on spaces of work, home and everyday life and wellness (which will be analyzed more specifically in chapter 4).

In sum, I argue that attention and well-being are produced through relational assemblages and collide under the umbrella of 'digital wellbeing' and the heuristic of screen time. The media studies and health geographies literatures advocate for the treatment of well-being and attention beyond the disciplinary prescriptions of biomedical health and capitalist productivity; however—as we will see in chapters 3, 4, and 5—normative notions of health and the pressures of neoliberal health management are deeply ingrained. In the following section, I incorporate scholarship from disability studies and media studies to take a critical view of neoliberal biopolitics and particularly the circulation of neoliberal affects in regard to self-tracking.

Neoliberal Biopolitics and Technologies of the Self

If media studies and health geographies bring us to an analysis of attention and well-being which understands both to be part of a relational assemblage of health, we must begin from the existing configurations of neoliberal health management and their biopolitical imperatives. Foucault's concept of biopolitics, initially developed in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1978) and expanded upon in later lecture series, posits that European states began to take an interest in managing the processes of life in the 19th century. In combination with other forms of power, states exercise "a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (Foucault 1978, p. 138) at the scale of populations. Foucault's subsequent lectures expand biopolitics into a broader discussion of governmentality, particularly in the context of neoliberal capitalism (Foucault 2010). Queer and feminist scholars of disability have taken up analyses of biopolitics to discuss the differential capacitation of neoliberal subjects, which, following Stiegler's argument for psychopolitics and the lead of non-representational health geographers, I extend to attention and cognition.

Jasbir Puar performs a biopolitical analysis of disability, demonstrating how the category of disability is produced through processes of capacitation and, conversely, debilitation. Rather than framing disability as a byproduct or unintended consequence, Puar argues that the assemblage of debilities and capacities produced by neoliberal capitalism is crucial to its operation. As Puar puts it: "Biopolitics deployed through its neoliberal guises is a capacitation machine; biopolitics seeks capacitation for some as a liberal rationale (in some cases) or foil for the debilitation of many others. It is, in sum, an ableist mechanism that debilitates" (Puar 2017, p. xviii). Through the differential capacitation of neoliberal subjects, states practice a form of biopower related to the sovereign 'right to kill': the 'right to maim.'

The violent practice of this capacitating/debilitating machine and the state's right to maim is potently realized in Puar's (2017) study of Israel and Palestine; in the case of digital media and attention, however, I focus on the working of the 'capacitation machine' for a different 'liberal rationale.' More generally, the assemblage of capacities and debilities do not only constitute the category of disability but also change the standards of healthiness—which are bound up with capacity. As Puar succinctly states: "There is no such thing as an 'adequately abled' body anymore" (Puar 2012, p. 155). Puar identifies the ways, in a neoliberal control society, through which bodies are medicalized, surveilled, individualized, and stratified "across registers of the medical-industrial complex" (ibid., p. 156). In short, the capacities of each and every neoliberal subject—including their cognitive and attentional capacities—are classified and determined to be in need of some sort of profitable process of rehabilitation.

Julie Passanante Elman (2014) picks up a related thread in her study of narratives of adolescence, which mobilizes discourses of disability to cast adolescence as a condition to be overcome through rehabilitation. Elman introduces the concept of 'rehabilitative citizenship' to explain how rehabilitation became "attached to what it means to be a good citizen, often through seemingly apolitical discourses of 'health' or 'growth'" (Elman 2014, p. 16). Just as Puar noted that there is no 'adequately abled' body, Elman shows how a culture of rehabilitation came to require 'self-help' of all citizens of the neoliberal United States. Importantly, Elman notes that this extension of

rehabilitation both reinforces compulsory able-bodiedness as the 'normative ideal,' and sidestepping the very real obstacles faced by "cultural outsiders—disabled, nonwhite, or queer" who "are integrated conditionally into society only if they assimilate perfectly to the dominant norms" (ibid., p. 19).

One manifestation of this rehabilitative citizenship is a preoccupation with the rehabilitation of cognitive capacity and mental health; this equally reinforces compulsory 'able-mindedness' and sidelines the psychic effects of outsider status. Sami Schalk (2018) and Olivia Banner (2019) have discussed the "nonphysical experiences of oppression—psychic stress—and overall wellbeing" for people of color by using the concept of *bodymind* (Schalk 2018, p. 6). In disability studies, Margaret Price introduced the term as an 'imbrication' of mind and body as "a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience" (Price 2015, p. 271). 'Bodymind' recognizes the indissociable entanglement of psychic and bodily experience, and posits that the two are more productively understood as one entity. A related line of thought runs through the scholarship on attention and cognition: Hayles argues that "all cognition is embodied," and in fact "extends beyond the body's boundaries in ways that challenge our ability to say where or even if cognitive networks end" (Hayles 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, Stiegler, Crary, and Citton all discuss the increasing prevalence of ADHD and attribute the causality, in varying degrees and manners, to the structures of capitalist attentiveness. I draw this connection to emphasize two key assumptions of this thesis: (1) the interconnectedness of bodily and cognitive health (and therefore the normative directives of health management which discipline both); and (2) the relevance of affect as an analytical tool to assess the feeling states produced by the disciplining of embodied attention.

The effects and affects of neoliberal health management, I argue, can be approached through Lauren Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism,' described in her 2011 book of the same name. Put simply, cruel optimism describes a relation in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 2011, p.1). In the case of disability, Kelly Fritsch (2013) analyzes the ISA (International Symbol of Access) in order shows how, in using the symbol, "disability appears in order to

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disappear, is included to be excluded" (Fritsch 2013, p. 145). For Fritsch, the ISA performs this relation of cruel optimism to create "a politics of deferral for disability" (ibid., p. 146). This deferral means that *actual* issues of access for people with disabilities are not addressed, even as the presence of the ISA engenders the circulation of happy affects. Disability, in turn, is rendered as known and therefore contained.

I argue that screen time tracking applications enact a relation of cruel optimism, similarly deferring a reckoning with the social and technical structures of attentiveness in order to maintain an attachment to modes of attention which are at best unattainable (per Crary) and at worst psychically (and intergenerationally) destructive (per Stiegler). By understanding the dominant mode of attention as a contradictory relation wherein productive attentiveness is valorized while its unavoidable complement, distraction, is vilified, we can read attention into Berlant's discussions of precarity, health management, and the historical present. Berlant (2011) tracks the sense of the present through the genre of the 'impasse,' understood as "a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance" (Berlant 2011, p.4). This particular mode of attentiveness coincides with "conditions of the attrition or the wearing out of the subject, and the irony that the labor of reproducing life in the contemporary world is also the activity of being worn out by it" (ibid., p.28). In such conditions, relations of cruel optimism are those which enable the endurance and reproduction of life in its current state; neither self-negation nor self-extension, which would break with the ordinary, but self-continuity (ibid., p.116).

Cruel optimism traffics in the fantasy of the good life, producing attachments which purport to solve issues of precarity. Instead, per Fritsch (2013), those issues are masked and deferred through optimistic affects. A key aspect of this relation, in its neoliberal context, is the onus placed on the individual to manage their own precarity. Thinking with Berlant's and Fritsch's analysis of neoliberal affects allows us to home in on the particular role of self-tracking and screen time data, and the role of smartphone use in assemblages of well-being. I situate an analysis of screen time self-tracking, then, in the context of assemblages of well-being which produce cognitive precariousness and

direct individuals to strive for an unattainable and potentially self-destructive attentiveness.

A body of literature around self-tracking has developed alongside the increasing adoption of mobile media and wearable technology. Neff and Nafus (2016) cite these technological developments and the advent of biomedicalization as the particular novelty of modern self-tracking. The multitude of sensors in devices such as smartphones measure more phenomena and in greater depth than was ever possible in the past; biomedicalization "carves a groove in our collective imagination that makes close measurement of the body both conceivable and desirable" (Neff and Nafus, p. 19). Combined, self-tracking technology makes visible more data, and biomedicalization pushed self-trackers to act upon that data.

Lupton (2016) ties the theoretical underpinnings of self-tracking and biomedicalization back to neoliberal biopolitics, where the conditions of modernity compels self-reflexivity and taking on an "ethical project of selfhood" (Lupton 2016, p. 47). As a biomedical expression of this project of selfhood, we can connect self-tracking back to Elman's (2014) notion of 'rehabilitative citizenship.' A crucial juncture between the neoliberal compulsion of self-reflexivity and the actual work of self-rehabilitation through technology is the process of datafication. As Lupton puts it: "Turning fleshly sensation, behaviour and perception into digitally produced numbers becomes a way of mastering the uncertainties, inaccuracies and vagaries of human embodiment" (ibid., p. 54).

Much of this STS scholarship has focused on Quantified Self and related communities, composed most prevalently of self-tracking enthusiasts interested in pushing technology ever-deeper into their lives. Both these communities and the scholarship primarily address the tracking of exercise, caloric intake, weight change, and other factors of physical wellness. In this thesis, the interview and survey participants are neither necessarily self-tracking enthusiasts, nor are the data as directly tied to physical health. Despite these differences, biomedicalization, datafication, and the compulsion of neoliberal health rear their heads in participant's confrontations with screen time metrics.

Data doubles have been discussed in the self-tracking literature and, to a lesser degree, in disability studies. The concept of a 'data double' draws upon frameworks of biomedicalization and datafication to understand the individuation of data. Ruckenstein (2014) discusses data doubles in order to account for the "affective and wishful ways in which people become involved with their data" (Ruckenstein 2014, p. 69). By monitoring their own flows of data, users are able to interpret, negotiate, and, ultimately, intervene into the metrics. These representations, understood to be impartial and thus depoliticized, can be treated as "material to people's lives and a part of knowing and valuing those lives" (ibid., p. 70).

Horrocks (2019) approaches data doubles ('Datafied Body Doubles') from the perspective of disability studies in order to challenge the depoliticization of personal analytics. For people with Type 1 Diabetes, Horrocks argues, the use of insulin pumps involves enrollment in techno-medicalized treatment. Increasingly black-boxed pump technologies produce a data double centered on trends and trajectories and automatically inject insulin. This datafication and automation of treatment, near-mandatory in the case of Type 1 Diabetes, demonstrates modes of "biomedicalized control [that] are written into an array of other technologies used in other sites of body and health quantification" (Horrocks 2019, p. 20).

These discussions highlight how datafication enables the depoliticization of surveilling, individuating, automating, representing, and managing the bodily processes of neoliberal subjects–and, as I argue, including cognitive, attentional processes. The acceptance of this data as impartial effectively prepares health for self-management under the regime of neoliberal biopolitics. Furthermore, the presentation of this data and screen time management tools to users reinstates health management at the level of the individual, while institutions can continue to enroll users in profitable processes of both data extraction and rehabilitation. These are disciplinary mechanisms through which normative attentiveness is internalized, and attentive subjects "are made more directly responsible for their own efficient or profitable utilization within various social arrangements" (Crary 1999, p. 73).

The maintenance of this internalized, normative attentiveness is enacted through particular forms of self-management, discussed by Foucault as technologies of the self. Technologies of the self are techniques "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault et al. 1988, p. 18). Foucault contrasts technologies of the self with technologies of power (and, less relevantly, technologies of production and sign systems), though also notes that different technologies rarely act in isolation. However, he distinguishes technologies of power and institutional domination from technologies of the self and *self*-domination. Techniques of the self, at their most ambitious, aim towards self-actualization through the transformative application of one's power to oneself.

Natasha Dow Schüll, a media anthropologist, discusses how techniques of the self are practiced through machine gambling, as well as addiction recovery regimens (Schüll 2006). She notes that these techniques are not the grander techniques which work towards self-actualization, but rather smaller techniques which modulate affect. Specifically, she notes that these micro-techniques are used to zero-out affect, equilibrizing the bodily system after a perturbation and seeking to avoid further perturbation (Schüll, p. 235). I argue that screen time tracking applications, as a form of self-tracking, enable similar micro-techniques which are ostensibly an avenue to the 'good life' and an escape from the conditions of precarity which characterize the historical present.

In cultural geographies, Ash et al.'s (2018) work on interface design in high-cost short-term credit and Anderson et al.'s (2019) study of the affects of credit debt provide further insight into the role of digital media in modulating everyday space-times of precarity. Ash et al. (2018) trace how software design manages 'frictions' at key 'thresholds' in loan application processes, minimizing negative affects which may arise and facilitating increased completion rates. Anderson et al. (2019) note how entering into credit-debt relations circulates affects of relief, separation, and pressure: an immediate release from immediate precariousness, followed by an as increasingly individualized sense of responsibility and, ultimately, a reconfigured precarity as indebtedness continues. This scholarship positions software design as a practice of power, facilitating

user activity through the modulation of affect. In the context of credit debt, these authors demonstrate how the software design perpetuate cycles of precarity while circulating affective attachments which feed into a fantasy of an achievable 'good life.'

As Berlant (2011) notes, however, the 'good life' is increasingly unattainable. The micro-techniques of the self Schüll describes, practiced in the face of ongoing precarity, leverage unattainable standards of attentiveness to reinforce a relation of cruel optimism between improving one's health and achieving the good life. The micro-techniques enabled by screen time tracking applications are still couched within the low-friction design elements which promote continuous device use. The avenues between precarity and the good life proposed by screen time tracking applications, like credit debt, only provide short-term relief and defer the development of truly transformative solutions. This is not to say that all technologies of the self are ineffective, nor that forms of care are nonexistent. It is to posit, rather, that screen time management, as a popular technique of self-care, is not capable of paradigmatic self-transformation; and that the intersections of technologies of the self, care, and attention are most effectively approached across multiple scales and processes.

CARE-FUL ASSEMBLAGES OF DIGITAL WELL-BEING

Digital well-being as a concept is not a simple joining of the 'digital' and 'well-being'—concatenating the two introduces new processes and spaces to assemblages of health. In chapter 3, I analyze the how particular discourses of digital well-being emerge in non-geographical academic literature, as well as popular and corporate literatures. In the chapters 4 and 5, I turn to interviews with smartphone users to approach the mundane expressions of digital well-being during a global pandemic. In chapter 6, I will turn to a discussion of care, an ethic which pervades the literatures this thesis engages, either explicitly or implicitly. In approaching the intersecting processes of attention and well-being jointly, I ultimately work towards revising prescriptions of care to better align with relational ontology and the particular assemblage of digital well-being which emerges from discourses and practices of smartphone use.

3. SCREEN TIME AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

As I have noted, 'digital well-being' does not have a single definition. This fact is related to the lack of an explicit and singular consensus of what constitutes well-being in general, much less in terms of the digital (also a nebulous term). Broadly, however, the term is used to refer to holistic user health and wellness as practiced through and produced by digital screen devices. In this chapter, I review scholarly, popular, and corporate literature to establish the particular discourses of digital well-being and screen time. I review (1) recent scholarly work and trends in media psychology and sociology related to digital well-being, screen time, and media use; (2) recent journalistic preoccupations with screen time, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) corporate websites and press releases from Apple and Google, developers of the 'Screen Time' and 'Digital Wellbeing' screen time tracking applications, respectively; (4) the results of a survey of 64 Kentuckians asked to define 'digital wellbeing' and their understandings of healthy and unhealthy digital behaviors (refer to the appendix for more details). This critical overview will establish specific discourses of states and practices of digital well-being and situate it within the previous chapter's discussion of attention.

MEDIA USE AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING SCHOLARSHIP

　　The Routledge Handbook of Media Use and Well-Being is a helpful survey of scholarship in media psychology on the relationship between digital media and well-being. The volume dedicates an early section to the delineation of two models of well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic well-being being involves experiences of "pleasure/enjoyment/satisfaction, and comfort/painlessness/ease," while eudaimonic well-being encompasses a wider variety of experience which include "meaning/value/relevance to a broader context, personal growth/self-realization/maturity, excellence/ethics/quality, and authenticity/autonomy/integration" (Huta 2016, p. 3). Along research trends in psychology, these two models generally align with the terms 'subjective well-being' (hedonic) and 'psychological well-being' (eudaimonic).

　　In terms of specific analysis, Huta (the section's author) splits the hedonic-eudaimonic distinction into 'ways of living' (encompassing orientations and behaviors) and 'outcomes' (experiences and functioning) related to well-being. The remainder of the

section focuses on well-being outcomes across the resulting four categories: hedonic experiences, eudaimonic experiences, hedonic functioning, and eudaimonic functioning. Huta notes that while hedonic and eudaimonic are approached as distinct, most affective experiences of well-being include elements from each. Furthermore, Huta argues, individuals who pursue both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being tend to report more well-rounded experiences overall, and to a higher degree. She also notes that the pursuit of either form of well-being can be carried out to an extreme which may result in negative outcomes.

In their chapter surveying the field's status quo and directions future research might pursue, Reinecke and Oliver add another distinction between forms of well-being: short-term vs. long-term effects. They note a tension between the achievement of short-term or situational well-being (either hedonic or eudaimonic), and the achievement of longer-term wellness (Reinecke and Oliver 2016, p. 16). This tension connects to another open question in media use research: the 'reciprocal effects' of well-being and media use. The authors note the importance of considering the well-being and media use as a mutualistic relation, where experiences of well-being influence media use just as significantly as media use influences experiences of well-being. The authors describe the potential of media to address specific well-being needs in order to achieve 'homeostasis'; but also the potential for media use to develop into a self-reinforcing 'downward spiral' (ibid., p. 17). Their discussion of long-term effects and reciprocal effects culminates in a call for investigating the circumstances conducive to "functional self-regulation" as opposed to "dysfunctional forms of media use" (ibid., p. 17).

Recent research in media psychology has focused on self-regulation and experiences of well-being, particularly through the lens of lifespan analysis: comparing media use and effects based on users' ages. Andrew Przybylski has co-authored a number of papers analyzing the relationship between screen time and the well-being of children and adolescents. Two studies suggest that while moderate screen time may have a 'miniscule' negative effect on well-being, particular social context and the kinds of activities carried out on devices may lead to more pronounced negative outcomes (Przybylski and Weinstein 2017; Przybylski and Weinstein 2019). Likewise, a study aimed at the psychological well-being of younger children found no evidence of negative

correlation between screen time and well-being (Orben and Przybylski 2019). Regarding the other end of the age spectrum, studies have found a positive relationship between device use and well-being for the elderly (Chan 2015; Reinecke et al. 2017).

A cluster of literature emerging from sociology has taken a more sociocultural lens to digital well-being. Gui et al. (2017) propose a heuristic of 'digital well-being' dependent on the sociocultural production of digital skills. The skills highlighted are both attentional and 'meta-cognitive' (what Citton [2017] would refer to as reflexive attention, attention to attention itself), and produce well-being by managing focus in an environment of "digital communication overabundance" (ibid., p. 166). The authors address concerns about overconsumption and multi-tasking produced by digital media use. To put this in terms of an ecological perspective, Gui et al. (2017) are concerned with the technical environments which require such skills, and the cultural structures which produce the inequitable distribution of those skills across populations.

Following up on this heuristic of digital well-being, Gui and Büchi (2019) investigate 'perceived digital overuse' (PDO) as a marker of digital social inequity. They establish PDO as "diffuse perception of being overwhelmed by digital stimuli" and investigate its relationship to 'social digital pressure (SDP), the "pressure the social environment exerts on individual to function well online" (Gui and Büchi 2019, p. 7) – in short, asking how individual cognitive experience is related to social pressures. The authors find, primarily, that a higher degree of educational attainment correlates with higher device use, higher SDP, and lower PDO. They also note that being female correlates with higher PDO; and being older correlated with lower PDO (but also correlates with lower device use and SDP). These results highlight, for the authors, a need to develop norms around digital literacy to avoid the reinforcement of existing social (and digital) inequalities.

Büchi et al. (2019) follow a similar line of investigation but adopt social pressures and digital coping skills as contextual variables in order to connect PDO to experiences of subjective well-being (SWB). In sum, they find that greater levels of perceived digital overuse are strongly correlated with lower subjective well-being. Additionally, greater social pressure also correlates to increased perceived overuse, while more digital coping skills correlate with higher subjective well-being. The authors likewise suggest that

perceived digital overuse is a social issue that calls for the development of new digital skills and literacies.

Overall, the scholarship reviewed shares concerns about time spent using media and the effects of that screen time. Overuse is the primary vector of analysis and may include either the volume or quality of time spent on devices. By and large, authors are concerned with outcomes of media use and overuse, the circumstances that produce overuse, and the factors that allow for effective moderation of screen time. While focusing on the individual experiences of well-being, the literature advocates for future research which focuses on the social and cultural circumstances and effects of media use and well-being. This thesis similarly treats digital well-being as a social issue but departs slightly from the sociological analysis and significantly from the media psychological analysis of media use and well-being.

Following the framework established in chapter 2, this thesis approaches attention, media use, and well-being from a relational (or, per Citton [2017], ecological) perspective. This study begins from social and spatial processes and environments, and proceeds to the analysis of individuated experiences, rather than beginning from the individual and proceeding the social. This does not necessarily contradict the analyses or conclusions of psychological and sociological research, but rather emphasizes the overdetermination of categories of well-being. Related to Büchi et al. (2019), I suggest that the relationship between perceived digital overuse and subjective well-being may be one consequence of the normative social pressures to be productively attentive.

Specifically, I address well-being (in terms of media use) as an emergent property of relational assemblages; in the case of this thesis, I focus particularly on the processes of neoliberal biopolitics and the pressures of normative attentiveness. From this perspective, first, the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being appears even more fraught than Huta (2016) describes (as we will see in chapter 5). This is also a perspective that Atkinson (2013) critiques in her analysis of the 'components approach' of well-being. The categorical distinctions between hedonia and eudaimonia are value-laden and primarily mobilized discursively. Second, this analysis refuses the separation of 'ways of living' and 'outcomes' of well-being. By approaching well-being as a dynamic and ongoing production instead, we can evaluate well-being as an emergent and

affective process that does not '[inhere] to the individual' (Atkinson 2013, p. 138). Thirdly, and relatedly, I approach practices of moderation, self-regulation, and 'functional well-being' as socially-structured modes of reflexive attention.

As we will see in the following section, certain elements of both the individualized psychological perspective and more socially-oriented sociological perspective align with more popular discourses around screen time.

SCREEN TIME IN THE NEWS

While technology panics are by no means solely a recent phenomenon (Orben 2020), and screen time has been an object of popular concern since the early days of the smartphone, the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed a new wave of writing on the topic of screen time and healthy media use. In this section I review the general trends of popular articles on screen time in recent years, with an emphasis on articles published in April through September of 2020.

First and foremost, the bulk of the articles concerned with screen time address the topic from a concern for the effects of screen time on children and adolescents. These articles commonly cited four authoritative reports: recent survey research and reports from Pew (Jiang 2018, Auxier et al. 2020) and Common Sense Media (Odgers and Robb 2020), guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP Council on Communications and Media 2016), and the World Health Organization (World Health Organization 2019). Recommendations from the AAP and WHO are very specific for children under 5 years of age, citing concerns about the effects of being sedentary for long periods and the effects of screen time on early stages of brain development: for children aged 2-5, only one hour of daily screen use of 'high-quality media' co-viewed with parents; no screen use other than video-chatting for children 18 months and younger.

For older children and adolescents, the guidelines shift away from developmental concerns and into the realm of general healthy habits. The recommendations for these ages in the popular literature are closely aligned with the AAP guidelines, and generally fall into three elements of well-being: (1) engaging with high-quality content and developing digital literacy skills necessary to identify that content; (2) using screens to

foster social connections and strengthen family bonds; and (3) balancing screen time use with non-sedentary and non-screen activities.

A common refrain is that screen time is 'not created equal' (Duffy 2020; Duhigg 2020; Mills 2020), emphasizing that high-quality content and certain social behaviors on digital devices can have positive effects – in moderation, of course. A number of articles point to Common Sense Media as a resource for high-quality content. The organization reviews a wide variety of digital media, providing age-appropriate designations and viewing recommendations. The reviews address topics and categories related to age-appropriateness, but in particular emphasize the potential of media to contribute to skill development and education. News articles echo the connection between educational value and a designation of high-quality; the example of *Sesame Street* is oft-repeated (AAP Council on Communications and Media 2016; Hazlett 2019; Hill 2020). Many of the articles, however, acknowledge the difficulty of prescribing content or screen time limitations for adolescents.

Where concerns over children are largely around cognitive development, discussions of teenagers follow the same three threads through the lens of stress, mental health, and digital literacy. To address these concerns, many of the articles (often citing the AAP guidelines) recommend creating a family media plan which sets limits and expectations on both content and time spent on screens. That is to say, these plans are meant to encourage high-quality content, social engagement, and balance with screen and non-screen activities. Instead of co-viewing media with small children, many articles advocate this media plan as a way to model healthy behaviors. A number of the articles urge parents to avoid overpolicing, not only because of the strain that can cause to the family, but also because of the amount of effort extensive monitoring involves (Kelly 2020; Duhigg 2020). Here we touch on an important aspect of concerns over screen time, particularly during the pandemic: parental guilt. A number of the articles are explicitly framed around the guilt or worry prompted by a sense that children are spending too much time on their devices (Hill 2020; Coyne 2020; Murphy 2020).

Media plans create the opportunity for adults to model healthy behavior for their children and encourage the creation of habits of balance and moderation. Advice for non-parents varies more widely, but essentially focuses on practices of 'digital hygiene'

aligned with the third priority for children: striking a balance of screen and non-screen activities in order to promote physical and mental health. Recommendations directed at parents and non-parents both acknowledge the difficulty of applying strict screen time protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic, since much of everyday life has migrated onto digital platforms. A few articles even explicitly repudiate screen time advice given in 'the before times' (Thoms 2020; Kamenetz 2020b), though still advocate for similar, though less strict, forms of moderation.

For adults and children alike, recommendations emphasize the potential physical effects of screen time: eye strain and difficulty sleeping from bright screens and blue light exposure (CBS New York 2020; Bradham 2020; Koch 2020); aches and pains from poor posture and extended time sitting down (Davis 2020); and even the effects screens may have on skin health (Shacknai 2020). The differences in recommendations for adults, however, are largely tied to the circumstances of remote work. Implicit in the recommendations for children and teenagers is the notion that any use of screen time with potentially negative consequences should be excised. Explicit in the recommendations for adults is the assertion that "in the immediate term, some of the added digital load is unavoidable" (Saunders 2020).

In the face of unavoidable increases to screen time brought on by remote work are recommendations for 'screen time sanity,' which largely equate to techniques for managing stress brought on by screen use during the working day and reducing screen use as much as possible recreationally. The common advice involves creating either—or both—literal and mental boundaries for oneself (Davis 2020). There are tips for reducing the 'ease-of-access' to one's smartphone such as by adjusting a device's setting (Kamenetz 2020a), as well as creating physical distance between oneself and one's device (such as keeping a smartphone in a separate room from one's working space) (Bradham 2020). Similar advice can be applied to the working day: "anytime you can reasonably choose a physical option over a digital one, take it" (Saunders 2020). The maintenance of screen time sanity and digital well-being is relegated to the in-between moments and spaces, and micro-techniques of the self.

How does attention fit it into these well-being recommendations? For young children, the aim of screen time management is to develop habits of attention in their social contexts. Older children and adolescents are trained to be digitally literate, meaning primarily to discriminate between high- and low-quality media and determine which to award their attention to; this is part of forming larger habits attentional self-control. Adults are advised to model this reflexive attention in their own lives, practicing moderation in recreational contexts; but they are also responsible for refining habits of productive attentiveness and mitigating the consequences of screen use in circumstances which produce bodily and psychic stress. The well-being adults create for themselves is in the service of maintaining one's productivity in increasingly stressful circumstances.

To return briefly to the previous section addressing scholarly work on well-being and media use, I posit that these popular discourses on screen time denigrates hedonic well-being in favor eudaimonic well-being. While many articles recognize that screen time is not inherently healthy or unhealthy, the emphasis on high-quality content in particular prizes self-actualization and improvement. Of course, as Huta (2016) notes, particular expressions of well-being are often combinations of both types of well-being, and as Atkinson (2013) emphasizes, such a 'components approach' overemphasizes well-being as an individually-inhering quality. I argue that in these discourses, the avenues of hedonic well-being made possible by digital media are presented as dangers. Digital media are ambivalent precisely because they contain, one the one hand, the possibility of eudaimonic well-being, and on the other, not hedonic well-being but hedon*ism*. The recommendations of Common Sense Media may provide an element of hedonic well-being in their entertainment value, but are recommended because they promote eudaimonic well-being. Without the element of eudaimonia, the media would not qualify as 'high-quality'; think of a television show that you have might have heard described as a 'guilty pleasure.'

In these articles, we can also locate an expression of Julia Passanante Elman's (2014) discussion of the pathologization of adolescence. Screen time for infants is posed as a developmental concern, but for older children becomes a set of techniques to through which to 'cure' hedonism (that is to say, prevent engagement in purely hedonic, pleasure-based, smartphone activities). For adults, self-control regarding screen use is not so

strongly tied to the benefits of 'high-quality' media and activities but is mobilized as a form of parental guilt: the necessity of modeling proper, eudaimonic media use for their adolescent children. Hedonic activities, for adults, is instead simply an obstacle to efficient and productive work time. In short, the achievement of well-being through screen time control in popular discourse is primarily an eudaimonic endeavor. Digital devices are considered best used in service of education, stress reduction, and, above all, productivity. One achieves digital well-being by practicing moderation through processes of reflexive attention and micro-techniques of the self.

Some of these articles explicitly mention the screen time applications produced by Apple and Google in their recommendations (Bader 2020; Lucas 2020; Bogost 2019). In the next section, I will review the corporate communications which these firms use to promote their services.

CORPORATE SCREEN TIME AND DIGITAL WELLBEING

Apple and Alphabet (aka Google) operate two of the most widely-used smartphone operating systems in the world, iOS and Android. During their 2018 flagship developers' conferences (WWDC [Worldwide Developers Conference] and I/O), Apple and Google respectively announced new digital wellness features: *Screen Time* and *Digital Wellbeing*. Craig Federighi, Apple's SVP of Software Engineering, and Sameer Samat, Google's VP of Product Management for Android and Google Play introduced their features in brief sections of the keynotes, using similar language to emphasize slightly different aspects of their products.

Federighi took the stage to discuss how Screen Time empowers the user: "Screen time empowers you with both insight and control over how you spend your time, and it starts with reports" (Federighi 2018). Federighi touts two core elements of the service, 'insight' and 'control,' and notes that control emerges from insight. The elements of control he discusses (setting application time limits, automating periods of limited notifications, and restricting certain types of content) are discussed primarily in terms of helping "families achieve the right balance for them" – that is, applying control to children. Samat's presentation covered a similar suite of features (services to limit notifications and set application time limits), but in terms of self-control rather than

managing children. Samat begins with an anecdote of his wife locking away his phone during a family vacation. The result: "without all the distractions from my phone, I was actually able to disconnect, be fully present, and I ended up having a wonderful family vacation" (Samat 2018). Samat also uses the language of "balance" and emphasizes priority-setting to create "meaningful engagement." This notion, as we will see, drives Google's communications around Digital Wellbeing: bringing to light the unnoticed and unintentional activity in order to use one's phone in a more intentional ("meaningful") manner. This section analyzes the public-facing communications from Apple and Google to understand how these companies position their screen time services, tracing how they propose insight and control empower users to address smartphone resentment.

During Google's I/O event the following year, members of the Digital Wellbeing team held a session for developers. Citing global surveys the team had carried out, Android UX Researcher Safia Baig noted a growing "resentment" towards smartphones. This resentment, according to Baig, stems from a sense of distraction and stress that comes with phone use: users have a sense of obligation to be constantly reachable and feel unable to spend time without their phones; but are bombarded by "noise" on their devices which leads to distraction and guilt. As she describes it: "unintentional behaviors bring about feelings of guilt […] it might be intentionally using your phone for something, and then getting distracted, and then using it for something else" (Baig et al., 2019). A key element of this notion of resentment is its source, located in the behaviors of users or in the no-man's-land of the passive voice. One blog post describes how "a sense of obligation has crept into tech," and techniques and services offered by Google to counteract it (Aranda 2018); but there is no attribution for the original design of smartphones and operating systems that produced this resentment in the first place.

Apple's communications do not address the smartphone resentment or stress, instead locating the impetus for Screen Time in the generic desire to improve user experience. In a podcast interview with Arianna Huffington, Greg Joswiak, VP of iOS, iPad, and iPhone Product Marketing, repeatedly describes their service as one that empowers users to evaluate whether or not they are "happy" with their metrics, that users will find "fascinating," and that he and the Apple product team "couldn't wait to, every day, check it out and see how much we were using things" (Huffingon 2018). Like

Federighi, he discusses the control services primarily in terms of children, despite emphasizing that "we didn't look at this as a kids' thing. We saw this as an everybody's thing […]. It was really about coming up with a solution to give all of us information about how we're using our devices" (Huffington 2018). For Joswiak, the insights provided by the metrics were the main product, and the control services secondary: "The vast, vast majority of people are just going to use the information. They're not going to go all the way to the controls" (Huffington 2018). Where Google diagnoses digital well-being and its symptoms via survey data, Apple simply notes that users are interested in the tools. Even in terms of children, Joswiak notes that it is the confirmatory power of the metrics that is most useful: parents can "see the real information about how much their kids are using their devices, the apps that they're using. And we think, for a lot of them, that will be the first time they can really have an intelligent conversation with their kids about that" (Huffington 2018).

Whether in terms of smartphone resentment or user experience, Apple and Google speak to two sides of screen time and digital well-being: distraction, unintentionality, and overuse in opposition to focus, intentionality, and balance. In particular, they pose the ultimate goal of balance in opposition to the threat of distraction; smartphones are a useful tool but have become a source of distraction (Murphy 2018). Google's communications identify a clear set of practices from which overuse and poor digital well-being emerges. Distraction, at the smallest scale, are little disruptions and tugs on attention that have the potential to change a user's focus; this is epitomized by the steady stream of non-urgent notifications. Such distraction leads to unintentional behaviors, such as getting 'sucked in' to an application or activity that was not the original intent of using one's smartphone (Gogorza 2018; Kershaw 2018; Pais 2019). Disruptions lead to unintentional behaviors, which lead to overuse and large-scale distraction and "empty time" (Persico 2019). Too much empty time, especially when understood to be wasting scarce family, vacation, or other recreational time, leads to guilt. Reclaimed empty time can be used for eudaimonic purposes: more work or school productivity, more activities with family and friends, better sleep (Perisco 2019; Stanphill 2020). Through this lens, balance is presented as a ratio of hedonic to eudaimonic activity; too much hedonic screen use results in feelings of overuse. The guilt of overuse (doubled for parents feeling

guilty about their children's overuse), in conjunction with social pressures to be responsive via smartphone, produces a sense of inescapable overuse and "not enough hours in the day to get everything done" (Pais 2019). These are the routines that Apple and Google propose to repair via insight into overuse and more control over sources of distraction.

By emphasizing user experience and smartphone resentment, Apple and Google identify both the source and solution of smartphone overuse/misuse within the users themselves. This discursive move shifts the focus away from the design of the smartphone itself and establishes the user as the object of concern. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it does so by denying the significance of the concern. Here Joswiak responds to Huffington's use of the term 'addiction': "[Addiction] is a funny word, because it's a word that has real, medical significance, and I think unfortunately some people throw the word around too much. What we try to focus on is providing people […] with the information about how they're using their device […] so they can come to their own conclusion." (Huffington 2018). This subtle pathologization of the user, presented in conjunction with services that ostensibly enable self-control, pre-empts criticism or more significant alterations to the design of the smartphone hardware or operating system. In short, the user becomes the problem and the smartphone the solution; users produce their own distraction, and the smartphone a tool to overcome it. Issues of distraction, and unintentionality, and overuse related to the smartphone rest on the shoulders of the users themselves, and their inability to self-modulate. This self-modulation is the kind of empowerment Apple and Google promote.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, "there's no doubt about it: technology is a critical tool during this period of social isolation" (Google 2020). The Digital Wellbeing communications from Google reaffirmed the importance of focus, intentionality, and balance, while acknowledging that an appropriate balance are harder to determine, much less achieve (McHugh-Johnson 2020a). Self-modulation takes on an edge of damage control, adjusting the goalposts of well-being to focus on "positive uses of tech" instead of measures of screen time (McHugh-Johnson 2020b). The emphasis on insight and self-knowledge figures less prominently into recommendations; instead, the features of control and distraction-reduction are promoted to establish "the need for focus, sleep, and

boundaries between work and home life" (Google 2020). What this entails is a change to practices of reflexive attention: specifically, a refiguration of the threshold for hedonic media use and a relief of the social pressures to be productively attentive. As we will see in the following section and chapter 5, however, for users the relief of these social pressures is easier said than done.

DIGITAL WELL-BEING FOR KENTUCKIANS DURING COVID-19

In a survey of 64 smartphone users in Kentucky, conducted in June and July of 2020, many users described digital well-being in familiar terms: distraction and overuse as opposed to balance and disconnection. In these categories, respondents called out the deleterious effects of social media in particular, and (unlike Joswiak and corporate notions of well-being) did not shy away from the term 'addiction.' For the vast majority of respondents, social media was associated with unhealthy and addictive behaviors, which were exacerbated by the circumstances of the pandemic. Additionally, many respondents also discussed the consequences of smartphone use on bodily wellness, also exacerbated by pandemic-related media use: eye strain, poor posture, and lack of sleep. In this section, I analyze the survey responses to situate user discourses of well-being in terms of pandemic smartphone use and attention, with a particular focus on social media.

Social media, for many of the respondents, was a source of negative social experiences: the pressures to post and receive 'likes' or the equivalent from other users; comparing oneself to other users and their posts; engaging in unpleasant discussions and arguments; and, in the circumstances of the summer of 2020, exposure to "negative/overwhelming news content" (R34). To the degree that social media enabled connectedness during a time of relative social and physical isolation, users found the services helpful, but only in limited capacities: "I try to limit use of social media. However it is a great tool for keeping in touch with people I cannot see in person right now" (R29). Certain elements of social media, such as public posting and scrolling through newsfeeds or 'stalking' other users are to be avoided: "Cyberstalking, scrolling, not actually looking at someone's profile online, slacktivism, the psychological side [effects] experienced from massive amounts of time on social media, echo chambers" (R30). Even the simple act of browsing social media was deemed unhealthy by some

users: "I would think of unhealthy smartphone habits as browsing memes on social media, as that tends to shorten my attention span, and cause me to be more stressed" (R57). Respondents highlighted certain design features which enabled overuse: never-ending streams of content, constant notifications, and endless scroll features on social media apps. The act of scrolling, in particular, was clearly detrimental to well-being for many respondents. For one respondent, an "unhealthy habit is automatically reaching for [the smartphone] and scrolling mindlessly when bored" (R29).

Respondents linked this 'mindless' scrolling directly to overuse, which is viewed as particularly pernicious issue when overuse encroaches on positive social experiences: it is unhealthy to "[spend] hours scrolling through social media, perhaps ignoring family or friends in the process" (R10). Unpleasant social experiences and the design elements which enable overuse distract from in-person engagements with friends and family, as well as from other activities understood to be healthy (including those carried out on the smartphone). These healthy activities, I argue, fit into the discursively-constituted category of eudaimonia: educational activities such as language learning (R2, R34), getting out into nature (R10, R12), reading books (R10, R19, R61), completing chores such as dog-walking and house-cleaning (R18), engaging with pets (R54, R55), fitness (R34, R61), and tracking finances (R52, R61). Social media are not only distractions from these healthy (read: eudaimonic) behaviors, but also alter the nature of socialization itself. As one respondent puts it, "Social media is unhealthy 90% of the time. It has poisoned the way we socialize" (R43). As users rely more heavily on social media for communication during the pandemic, and as the social and design pressures of the platforms weigh on them, respondents describe experiences of addiction and obsession:

> "I think healthy smartphone habits include limiting yourself to a few hours a day of usage, using smartphones for communication reasons, and utilizing them as tools. When the smartphone becomes more than a tool and becomes an obsession I feel it is unhealthy behavior. Constantly having a reliance and dependence on the smartphone, being too consumed in social media, letting the smartphone get in the way of life and daily tasks is when smartphone use crosses over into unhealthy behavior" (R35)

Broadly, the tensions of social media use align with the diagnoses of popular literature and corporate communications: users experience a sense of obligation to engage

with their phone, end up spending more time than planned, and as a result are 'consumed' by overuse. Respondent 35's reference to smartphones as communication tools with the potential to become more, and worse, speaks to the same sentiment. Likewise, just as corporate communications do, user discussion of smartphones as tools centers the user as the source of reliance of dependence, rather than the software or hardware design. Endless scrolling, though enabled by certain smartphone features, ultimately originates from the addicted or obsessed smartphone user who is "letting the smartphone get in the way of life and daily tasks" (R35). 'Life and daily tasks' are, again, primarily discussed as social and familial activities (particularly in-person ones) and kinds of eudaimonic, productive activities. Smartphones and social media are problems when they distract from attending to social and work responsibilities.

As tools, respondents refer to smartphones as objects with the capacity to better one's life through appropriate use, to make 'life and daily tasks' easier; but these tools are very prone to user error. Respondents rarely discuss smartphone misuse in terms of design flaws (or intentions), however, but instead as user failings. In order to counteract the potential for user error, to avoid obsessive/addictive behaviors and stay attentive to social and work responsibilities, one must practice proper digital hygiene. Digital hygiene, for respondents, has two orientations: towards the social (responsibilities to others) and the individual (responsibilities to oneself). This distinction, of course, does not consider the social pressures which inform self-care; respondents discuss obligations towards friends, family, and work separately from obligations to their own sense of well-being. Overusing the smartphone distracts from social and work obligations, including eudaimonic activities, and produces individual repetitive stress injuries: eye strain, poor posture, and low-quality or insufficient sleep, as well as negative effects on mental health. Within the structures of the smartphone design and social pressures, how can digital hygiene respond to minimize social guilt and individual strain?

Digital hygiene is developed through micro-techniques of the self. Here respondents use familiar language once again: balance, disconnection, moderation, and limiting device use. Thirty-one of the 64 respondents indicated that setting a time limit (using *Digital Wellbeing* or *Screen Time* apps or otherwise), spending intentional time away from their device, or striking a balance of screen time to non-screen time was an

essential part of digital well-being. The onus, of course, is on the user to determine how and how much to moderate their screen time and its effects; but for many the techniques available to them are not always an effective solution. Many users acknowledged the difficulties of setting limits and the failures they have experienced – especially during the pandemic: "I think I'm on my phone too much in general. I've tried ways to decrease my usage, but they haven't worked" (R8). A few of the respondents noted that while they had a clear sense of how digital well-being ought to be practiced, they had not taken steps to change their own practices: "I'm sad to say that I do very little of this. Though there have been some days that I just needed to put the phone down and step away" (R5). Or, as one respondent succinctly puts it: "No but I should" (R37).

While most survey respondents were not specific about their efforts to prevent overuse (other than noting the behaviors they attempt to avoid), it's clear that reflexive attention plays an important role in their practices. A common phrase is 'I try': "I try to keep my phone for primarily educational purposes because I find it more convenient than a laptop or desktop" (R2); "I try not to be on my phone when visiting others or spending time with my significant other" (R6); "I try to limit my social media usage to what I feel is a reasonable amount" (R7); "I try to take breaks from my phone once in a while" (R12). The language of trying, I argue, in the case of digital well-being, indicates the multiple (sometimes conflicting) processes that constitute an assemblage of digital well-being, and which effect the expression of feeling-states of wellness. I posit that the language of 'trying' captures tensions between reflexive attention and the structures of collective and joint attention. As Citton (2017) indicates, attention involves the interaction of multiple levels: social media is a vector of collective attention, where algorithms show posts based on aggregated predictions; social media distracts from the small-group dynamics of joint attention of in-person interactions. Both of these levels of attention affect the mode of individuating attention experienced by users, and upon which their micro-techniques of reflexive attention act. When users try to adjust their experiences of individuated attention, they are acting not only upon themselves, but also necessarily against the social pressures on their attention. Social pressures to engage with their smartphone conflict with the desire to practice self-care; and this is not even to mention the ways in which the forms of self-care, and the desire to practice them, are

bound up in social pressures. Through a relational lens, in short, we can begin to understand the specificity of the complex and sometimes-contradictory assemblage of attention, well-being, and digital media.

In this chapter I have focused on a few threads connecting digital well-being and modes of attention. The first is the relationship between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being and their uses in discourses of digital well-being. Concerns over screen time rely on a vilification of strictly hedonic (pleasure-focused) experiences on the smartphone, which are resolved either by engaging with high-quality (eudaimonic) content and using smartphones for productivity, education, and self-betterment, or by spending less time on smartphones overall. These discourses establish an association between distraction, unintentionality, and overuse that is binarily contrasted the 'easy' pleasures of hedonia, and focus, intentionality, and balance with productive eudaimonia. In practice, hedonia and eudaimonia are not so easily dissociable; however, the distinction highlights a second thread: digital well-being takes up an individualized lens to locate the source and solution of unwellness in the users themselves. The perspective put forward by media psychology and taken up by popular and corporate literatures pathologizes smartphone users (and particularly adolescent users) whose individual failings lead to their own misuse of the tool. This perspective can be contrasted with a queer, relational approach which points to the social and technical processes which produce experiences of well-being in regards to smartphone use. While social pressures and technical design elements factor into popular discourses of digital well-being, the solutions put forth by these literatures overwhelming prescribe individualized solutions. Situating attention as a primary factor of screen time and digital well-being, we can understand reflexive attention as one practice that intersects with many others. A relational/ecological perspective highlights the mutual relationship between collective, joint, and individuated attention and the many cognitive, social, and technical processes which affect how and to what we pay attention.

In the following chapters, I turn to in-depth interviews with Kentucky smartphone users. We begin with an analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the daily routines of participants, and how they worked to reflexively adjust their attentiveness to challenging social and spatio-temporal conditions.

4. PANDEMIC SPACES, ROUTINES AND THE USE OF DISTRACTION

Up to this point I have alluded to the circumstances of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted a declaration of a State of Emergency in Kentucky on March 6, 2020. For those following the state's guidelines, the next few months involved strict measures for social distancing: wearing face masks over nose and mouth when in public, keeping a minimum of six feet of separation between people, avoiding large crowds, and many other situational guidelines. In addition to social distancing, the state also mandated sweeping business closures and work restrictions for 'non-essential' personnel. In early June, the state began to reopen businesses. Participants for this study were recruited in June, and the interviews occurred over the month of July. By that point, most participants had been 'quarantining' in their homes since March for a period of approximately 4 months. Two of the 18 participants continued their in-person, full-time work; 2 others continued in-person work in a reduced capacity. The remaining 14 were either unemployed, furloughed, working remotely (or a combination) during this 4-month period. Outside of their work, all 18 reported following social-distancing guidelines to at least some degree: some had no in-person contact whatsoever, while others met with friends, family, or neighbors outdoors, masked, and/or six feet apart. All participants experienced some degree of restriction to their mobility, social lives, and recreation.

In practice, as we will see, this meant that most participants were spending inordinate amounts of time in their homes, alone or with only their partners or immediate families. In this chapter I analyze and participants' discussions of their changed (or unchanged) routines and situate their experiences with attention and distraction in terms of geographic notions of spaces of well-being. The chapter focuses on participants' experiences with, as one survey respondent put it, "life and daily tasks" (R35): social and familial obligations and work responsibilities. I first focus on those participants who were working remotely, and how their spaces and routines of productivity—and modes of attention—responded to the conditions of the pandemic. Next, I analyze the effects of the pandemic on social and non-work life, both remote and in-person. The chapter concludes with a closer analysis of the smartphone's role in attentiveness and distraction as a part of these practices of pandemic everyday life.

For those new to remote work, one of the first questions becomes: *where* do I work? For the participants, this question mostly involved comfort: "It's mostly been about where I feel physically comfortable doing my work. So, I've flipped from using my kitchen table as a desk space to going to one couch in my living room, not liking that, and then moving to a different couch in the living room where I could see the TV better" (Max). However, it is important to balance comfort and ease-of-use with a space's conduciveness to productivity. While a comfortable workspace makes remote work easier, *too* comfortable of a setup threatens productivity. Conversely spaces with enough room to accommodate the technology and accoutrements necessary to focus. Harrison initially "had a computer desk in my bedroom, but to get the screen space, you know, I moved it. And then put my bedroom TV on the kitchen table just have space, you know, because I got some papers documents as well, you know, laid out taking notes during meetings that we have."

Many participants sought to make their workspaces as close to a traditional office setup as possible. Lauren's workspace captures the situation neatly: she needed to be "at a desk-type situation a table of some sort," because "as much as I love to be comfy and I love to like cuddle up in bed, or on the couch, I know I can't do that. I don't bring my laptop into the bedroom. And I try not to work on the couch, because I know as soon as I do one of the three dogs will come over and lay in my lap and be like, hey, you want to take that nap that you so desperately think you need, and that will usually happen and within like an hour. And I'm just like, kind of drooling and my laptop's open, nothing's getting done." The result, for Lauren, was a negotiation between home spaces which are conducive to relaxation and private life and their adoption as spaces of productive work. Lauren's description points to a few important considerations which affect the balance of comfort and productivity: where in the house it is even possible to create a workspace, and how to establish a work routine that accommodates that space (and vice-versa).

For those with larger spaces in their homes, spare rooms were converted into workspaces: "The office, quote unquote, it's actually the guest bedroom. And we had a full-size bed that is now tipped up against the wall because we were never using it. And so, it's now just the office space" (Martha). Whether or not respondents were able to

create dedicated home offices, however, many described having multiple ad hoc workspaces, and moving among them during the day. For Martha, "probably about 40% is in the office, and then the, the other 60% for working, I have a laptop and I'll go out on the couch." Haley, like Martha, has a home office, but some days chooses to work out of bed: "I just work off my laptop and just work from my bed because I put the laptop on the night table and just get a clipboard and start going through my work material. Sometimes I find it more efficient, than me sitting at my desk, because I feel more relaxed and more comfortable. So, I tend to get more done" (Haley).

Understanding this negotiation as responding to tensions between work spaces and work routines, we can place different participant responses along a spectrum running between routines and spaces. On one extreme, participants attempted to make their home workspaces as similar as possible to their office workspaces, in order to maintain a work routine similar to their previous one. On the other extreme, those less able to completely recreate their office workspaces responded by adjusting their work routines more significantly. In either case, the push and pull between workspace and work routines operate under social pressures to produce a particular experience of 'work.' Lizzie Richardson examines the emergent properties of digitally-mediated workspaces and routines to address "postwork places" (Richardson 2018) and "postwork styles" (Richardson 2017).

Richardson applies postwork to analyses of digital technologies on white-collar work, recognizing that digital technologies both extend and intensify work activities. Among other things, this means that the narrow scope and regular cadences of office labor are made possible in a wider range of spaces, times, and manners; for this study's participants, in the home. Richardson's feminist approach to postwork recognizes the effects of these extensions and intensifications as inherently ambivalent. That is to say, they can be either, or both, positive and negative – or as Richardson puts it, affirming or negating (Richardson 2018, p. 245). Richardson suggests that a feminist postwork critique allows us to home in on these ambivalence forms and spaces of work and examine them not from the perspective of the quantity of work being completed, but instead on the quality: attending to postwork styles which are made possible (Richardson 2017).

For this study's participants, their (post)work spaces and (post)work styles are inextricably bound to their digital technologies. Their remote work is carried out on portable laptops and smartphones, which can be moved both between the home and the office, and within the home. These creates not only new spaces and styles, but new "intimacies," the heuristic Richardson applies to the analyze the ambivalent effects of postwork on "what it feels like to be at work" (Richardson 2018, p. 255). The intimacies produced by digital technologies are "disruptive and mobile" – troubling existing relations of proximity and distance, attachment and disconnection, and producing new, less-fixed relations (ibid., p. 256).

We can connect the ambivalences of postwork back to the spatial and stylistic compromises carried out by the study participants. While, for Richardson, postwork can lead to new spaces and styles of work, study respondents felt the need to re-create normative working spaces and styles that emulated office setups. This includes not only steps taken to create spaces, but to maintain a familiar work-life balance: deciding when and how to end the working day when the space of work exists within the space of the home. Lauren, for example, chose the kitchen table for the workspace because of its likeness to a desk, but went to pains to disassemble her workspace at the end of each work week and reassemble it at the beginning of the next:

> "I've taken over the kitchen table throughout the week. On Monday morning, I will pull out my monitor my keyboard and my laptop and I'll set everything up. At the end of the week on Friday when I'm done plug everything off, bring it back here to the den and leave it. So that way, it's not in my way and or in my face while I'm on my weekend time and [my partner], however, he can work, either at our kitchen table like our kitchen bar or sitting on the couch. Sometimes he'll sit in…we have like a little fancy chair that will sit in in the living room. Sometimes he'll just come back here and […] have his meetings and stuff, but usually we're just kind of in the same room together, working together" (Lauren).

Other participants found it harder to keep particular spaces and times for work, particularly due to the reliance on the same digital technologies during the workday as during non-work hours. Harrison took a fairly fatalistic view of his situation: "for the most part I've not really set like actual boundaries. I just, it's just kind of, you know, this is what works, is what I've been doing, and that's just the way it is." Even if the spaces themselves are hard to separate, however, several respondents took another route: making

their homes more cozy, cleanly, and organized. Amelia bought new kitchen chairs and has tried to keep rooms more tidy: "Spending a lot of time in them, it has been important to me. […] The place that we live in isn't super huge so it's hard to like divvy up spaces for different things. But yeah, I would just say kind of creating cozy places where we can." Emily bought new bedroom furniture, wanting "just [to] make it feel more cozy here because this is like my first apartment and I haven't been here that long. So just making it feel more like home, that's kind of the goal." Others spoke to similar purchases and activities in services of, particularly, coziness and homeliness. While describing their efforts, many dismissed the significance of their adjustments; for these participants, it was simply something overdue that had been put off, or an obvious step to take when confined to their homes. These adjustments towards coziness, however, in conjunction with the creation of workspaces, highlights a spatial hybridization: the home's essence as a place of recreation and relaxation is emphasized alongside its conduciveness to productivity. The increasingly singular spaces of everyday life became simultaneously more homely and more office-like.

This development of a hybridized work space, of course, comes with altered work styles. For those most successful in replicating their office environments, or creating a similarly productive space, new routines became an anchor in an otherwise turbulent time. Kayla, a graduate student, kept herself busy with her research: "I feel like I'm lucky in the sense that I have so much to do that. I have such a routine that I'm just like, I have a lot to do anyway that I have to stick by this." Amelia also found herself "almost too routine oriented," where "from March to probably the end of May […] just because we're limited on what I could do and I wasn't leaving the house or anything […] every day was kind of blurring together." These two relied on routine and busy-ness not just as a means to achieve productivity, but also as a distraction *from* distraction. Kayla and Amelia leaned into the ambivalent *intensification* of work to incorporate distraction into their routines; other participants also shaped their routines around distraction but did so more through work *extension*.

Participants extended their work styles by incorporating slowness, flexibility, and irregularity. These slow, flexible, irregular routines create room for distraction that the social pressures of an office space would normally disallow. These participants largely

maintained 'normal' working hours, but were not rigid about clocking in or out, and their routines during the workday varied significantly. Martha did not have a set work schedule during the workday, since her job is reliant on ad hoc meetings with her coworkers: "So usually I'll take breaks throughout the day between meetings to screw around or you know do whatever around the house. And usually I'm finished by 5:00. Sometimes the meetings go until 6:00, that just kind of depends." Max describes having "the opportunity to, 'Oh I feel like going out and walk in right now, or I need to run to the grocery store for something.' I am a lot more flexible […] with how I've been doing things throughout the day. But if I need to, I'll work a little bit longer today or start a little bit late today just kind of as long as the tasks are done." Importantly, both participants were staying on top of all their work responsibilities and understood themselves to be sufficiently productive during the day: "So as long as I'm getting my stuff done, I don't think anyone cares" (Max). Harrison described how working from home has slowed his pace of work and created more room for distraction: "I can get everything I need to get done, you know, in half a day. Really, you know, if I sit down and just do it and stuff. Things move slow [at work], but now that we're in a pandemic, everything is even slower. So I'm basically just kind of hanging out sometimes […] I spread [my work] out because I have to be, you know, available during my time." His schedule has shifted instead to 30-45 minutes bursts of work, followed by surfing social media and entertainment sites: "Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, YouTube, you know, sometimes I'll take a break and play MTG [Magic: The Gathering] online" (NF).

Haley went into more detail about how working from home relieved certain pressures in the office and enables her to take care of her two elderly neighbors during the day: "The thing about it is now that I'm working from home, even though I clock in and I try to do as much as I can, because I'm also taking care of two neighbors here, my boss is kind of understanding. So sometimes I have to work off the clock, just to get all the stuff done and actually meet my deadline." Her situation shows very clearly the ambivalent consequences of postwork: "it has put a damper on, you know, trying to separate work from my home life. But at the same time is kind of been a blessing in disguise, because I can work at my own rate […] I can process that a little bit better without feeling pressure" (Haley). She went on to describe not only how she has more

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time "to make decisions, better decisions, because it's all my time, not the boss' time," but also how her home is a "safe zone," where she can create a workspace conducive to that balance between comfort and productivity without being distracted by, or creating distractions for, her coworkers: "So, like working from home, I can do things that I…well, I was allowed to do, but I had to be respectful of my coworkers. I would take my Kindle [e-reader] to work and I would basically listen to Spotify or Pandora [music-streaming services], but I had to have headphones on. And then keep in mind that my coworkers were asking questions around me. Whereas at home, you know, I can watch TV while doing my work" (Haley).

Other participants also described their relationships to coworker and managers as both sources and delimiters of distraction–particularly regarding their smartphone use. Julia would "be on [my phone] a lot less [in the office]. I don't feel like people are hovering over me or anything, but I'm self-conscious. Like, I don't want people to think I'm just on my phone all day." Harrison likewise predicts that "once I get back to the office, I would say that my usage will be down more because even though like I can be on my phone at work, I can be on my phone constantly here and nobody knows or says or does anything." Harrison also notes how the office has its own social experience that, contrary to Haley, he has sought to replace in his new work routines: "at work, we have cubicles, and everybody's there, be shooting the bull and talking, you know, what I mean. We go on break twice a day, we go for walks and it's what we do during our breaks and, you know, just kind of hang out and talk, so now that's gone, you know, sometimes I'll just FaceTime my boss just to shoot the bull or talk to him, you know."

For these participants working from home during the pandemic, distraction is not simply a behavior to minimize, but an element of work that can be modulated. In the office setting, distraction is often packaged as semi-scheduled breaks; distraction outside of these break periods is not considered acceptable. The result is a normative experience of work, wherein workers are responsible for either minimizing the conditions of distraction (for themselves and their coworkers) and/or performing attentiveness in a manner legible to other workers. Harrison, Haley and the others make clear that working outside of the office setting allows for an extension of these distractions beyond those break period, and of a relaxing of the social pressures to not produce distraction and

perform attentiveness. This is not to say that the social pressures are entirely gone, and in fact I argue that there are clear indications of pressures to maintain a normative work experience in the ways participants have sought to create spaces and styles of work.

I posit that remote work through digital technologies, to the degree to which it enables extended (post)work, has allowed a style of work that incorporates distraction throughout. I also posit that this distractible style of work begins to more closely resemble elements of hyperattention, whereas normative styles of work promote deep attention. Deep attention involves long period of sustained focus on one object with a high tolerance for boredom, while hyperattention involves scanning across multiple objects and favors high degrees of stimulation (Hayles 2012, p. 12). As Hayles notes, neither of these two modes of attention are inherently better or worse than the other, though deep attention has historically been favored (at least in the humanities). Normative modes of office work also favor deep attention, if not in the work itself, then in the performance of work and the corralling of distraction. These styles of work, relieved from the performance of work at least in part, allow for practices of hyperattention: toggling between digital work, smartphone apps, computer games, television, as well as non-digital 'distractions.' Such high-stimulation, hyperattentive styles of work incorporate distraction. Recall how Lauren, Haley, Max, and Harrison still complete their work, despite the increased 'distraction' in their working days. This returns us also to Crary's (1999) placement of distraction and attentiveness along the same spectrum: in the context of the workplace, distraction is just a form of attention that is given to objects which we are *supposed* to be attending to. In other words, distraction is produced through social pressures of what work ought to look like; the relief of these pressures, and engagement in 'distraction,' is not, for these participants, incompatible with work productivity. These styles of work are incompatible, however, with normative styles of work (Richardson 2017, Richardson 2018), deep attention (Hayles 2012), and absorbed attentiveness (Crary 1999).

Gorman-Murray and Bissell (2018) situate work and home in terms of schema of space-times of well-being in order to pay attention to changing configurations of home and work. Mobile and multilocal working arrangements, they argue, can best be evaluated through the framework of relational assemblages. On the obverse of that coin, I

argue that the immobile and singular space-time of home-based work can likewise be approached through a relational ontology. As I have hopefully demonstrated in this section, Richardson's (2018) work on remote work and digital technologies demonstrates the multiplicity of processes which are both produced by and productive of (post)work spaces and styles. I propose that the affirming intimacies of postwork spaces and styles can be read as an assemblage of well-being. In the following section I turn towards social life, continuing to pay attention to the assemblage of styles and spaces of well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how distraction and attention have taken on new roles.

REMOTE LIFE

While COVID-induced 'quarantining' was a significant lifestyle change for most participants, not all of them minded spending more time at home. Describing themselves as introverts or homebodies, a few of the participants liked avoiding crowded public spaces, hiding their faces behind masks, and generally spoke to being "weirdly at peace. Like, I'm pretty introverted anyways, so I haven't gotten cabin fever or anything. Like if I start feeling stir-crazy I might go out on the porch and look at the birds and stuff. But overall, I feel like happier than normal, actually" (Julia). While Julia's increased sense of happiness was not widely shared, others described a relief of the pressures to be social and associated stress of interaction. Cameron, also "kind of an introverted person anyways," was used to spending time in his room gaming with friends, and so "was just used to it. I know it's not healthy, but you know, it's just that." In short, some of the participants felt that they would not have been living their lives very differently outside of pandemic conditions.

Martha likewise describes herself as "also a bit of a homebody to begin with, where I wasn't going out to bars or restaurants or anything, socially, very much. I would go over to a friend's house, maybe once every two months. So, it hasn't been a huge-huge change, other than the amount of hours that I've spent with my primary person that I interact with." For self-identified introverts and extroverts alike, spending time with their 'primary people' (be they partners, family, or roommates) took on new characteristics during the pandemic. Martha was mostly "very thankful that I have a

boyfriend that I was living with prior to the pandemic […] We already had that established relationship and there wasn't a huge change, as far as knowing what the other one […] is like in their living space." Others with longer-term, live-in relationships were similarly relieved, first, to have another person around, and, second, not have to face the sometimes-difficult adjustment of spending nearly all of one's time with that person. Lauren felt "very lucky that my husband and I have been able to get along so well during this pandemic and working, you know, in the same room every day."

Not every participant was thankful for their primary people—many had more difficult periods of adjustment, especially with roommates. Sierra found herself resenting the small habits of her roommate: "[when] I started working from home, I noticed myself getting progressively more annoyed with my roommate. […] I've gotten very annoyed, just really small things. And then it would be like, is he doing this just to get to me? Because it seems like it." Likewise, Elise was very active outside of her home pre-pandemic, and needed to renegotiate the space with her roommate when they found themselves spending much more time in it:

> "We have adopted as a household that my roommate has moved like his hangout computer space to the basement. Just because we ended up having a conversation about shared space and how it was really hard for me that he was at the dining room table pretty much all day every day. […] His spot was the dining room table pre-COVID, but I was also out and about a lot more. I was playing sports and was never home so it wasn't an issue. But with the two of us being home all the time it became a point of discussion" (Elise)

During the early months of the pandemic, Bella found herself and her partner growing apart, "because we were only doing our own separate things and just being consumed by those like separate things, that we were not really connecting for a while." Stuck in their small apartment, they found that many of the activities they used to do together were not possible. They had to set a priority with each other to intentionally reconnect and find new ways to engage with one another. Finding ways to maintain lines of communication, and establish new ones, was an essential adjustment not only for Bella, but all of the other participants as well.

For those living alone, negotiating in-person communication during the pandemic was necessarily fraught. Decisions had to be made as to what kind of in-person social interaction, if any, could occur; who should be in one's 'pod', and how should one safely

meet with them? For most participants, in-person social life went on to at least some degree with friends and family, mostly outdoors, masked, with 6-feet of separation. Charlotte and Haley met up with friends and family at the park for coffee or lunch, where you can "sit on opposite ends of a picnic table and talk for a while" (Charlotte); Elise and Martha met up with friends in their backyards for a "talking loudly at each other from six-feet-across-the-yard kind of situation" (Elise). Nicole visited a few friends at their houses, but only those who had "pretty much sequestered themselves."

These kinds of distanced gatherings, however helpful, were still very limited both in how often they could occur and what activities could be done. The only other regular activity for all of the participants was grocery shopping, almost universally a stressful experience for participants. The pandemic precluded larger and more significant events, including family gatherings and holiday celebrations. Marie, who largely did not mind missing out on more day-to-day forms of social interaction, discussed two important experiences that had to be cancelled which affected her more significantly. The first was a yearly trip to an entertainment convention which she and her friends had taken together to celebrate Marie's birthday. This was a meaningful event for Marie, one of the few times per year that she saw both of those friends in-person. The other was the (non)celebration of Independence Day on the fourth of July. Marie and one of her friends do not enjoy fireworks and the chaos of July Fourth celebrations, so they would get together and "just kind of hang out so neither of us are that freaked out by the noise" (Marie). The loss of these more significant, meaningful social experiences was not recuperated by the infrequent, social-distant opportunities for pandemic social engagements.

It is unsurprising that the maintenance of social connections and relationships were an important part of user well-being during the pandemic. In their 2007 paper, Fleuret and Atkinson establish a quadripartite model of spaces of wellbeing: spaces of capability, integrative spaces, spaces of security, and therapeutic spaces. They argue that particular spaces can promote (or harm) well-being through the interactions of these four "forms of spatial construction" (Fleuret and Atkinson, p. 113). Fleuret and Prugneau (2015) revise this framework to include considerations of temporal factors as well: space-times of well-being. This framework is helpful for this section's analysis not only of

sociality, but also the overall composition of the home (and work) space and its production (or failure to produce) well-being.

Most relevant to this section, an attention to 'integrative spaces' involves analyzing the manners in which space-times are conducive (or not) to "integration into a rich network of social associations" (Fleuret and Atkinson 2007, p. 113). As we have already seen, participants found that the pandemic space-times of the home sharply limited their ability to socialize in person. This, for some, put strain on their relationships with their roommates and partners. However, the home undoubtedly became a 'space of security'—for some participants, the *only* space of security in the time of a global health crisis. When every outing and bodily encounter contains the potential the transmit or be transmitted a life-threatening illness, even mundane spaces, such as grocery stores, become fraught.

We can identify a tension between the home as a space whose integrative capacity is limited, yet whose potential for security is near-absolute. This is evident in the negotiation of in-person gatherings: an anguishing over who to see, where to gather, and how to minimize the risk of virus transmission. It becomes clear how the use of smartphones and other digital media allow for the resolution of this tension, at least in part. Digital technologies enable the creation of a more-integrative space and open lines of communication, remote though they are, while still in the secure space of the home.

For Marie, digital forms of communication were a much more important part of her pandemic social life: "I have a lot of friends from a lot of different time zones and a lot of different countries that we all met doing like online gaming. I'm very close to an Irish guy and an Arabic girl particularly, and a Norwegian guy. And if I really needed help, I could be like, 'Hey, make me feel better.' They would help me." Marie kept up with these friends regularly through Discord, a messaging application that is known for its popularity among video-gaming communities. As she notes, these friends and the community she's developed through gaming are an important source of social connection during her time at home. A few other respondents also spoke specifically to the role digital gaming played in their communications. Bella also used Discord often to chat with her brother and online friends who are a part of their World of Warcraft guild (an in-game community): "If there's an app that I use a lot for social contact, it's Discord,

because I'm a part of a couple groups there, but primarily it's to talk to my brother and my friends […] Earlier in quarantine we were…my friends, my brother and our friends have a World of Warcraft guild. So we played World of Warcraft, that's all I did for a straight month." Martha found herself playing mobile games with her friends, which are less of a source of community and more of another (small) avenue to keep up with friends: "most of my friends, they have like a game that they play with, too, that's kind of like the mindless like oh, just click here, come back in an hour to collect the coins or whatever […] I do actually have one of those, that I should have probably brought up: World War Rising. Where it's just a click on the box, and then once a day you get the coins. And it's stupid, I don't know why I do it – I am not going to win."

While Marie and Bella's digital communications were largely involved with online friendships that originated through gaming, Martha's gaming was a way of maintaining multiple (even if minor) channels of communications with her friends. Other, non-gaming, participants also spoke to keeping open multiple channels, often through social media, to maintain a kind of constant, if low-grade, contact. Julia found herself "interacting with [my friends'] posts more and talking to people online more" in order to make up for seeing her friends less frequently. Nicole has a hierarchy of communication channels that she maintains: Snapchat for her close friends, one Instagram account for people who she knows personally, and a second Instagram account for public posting. The following chapter will address participants' experience with social media more specifically, but suffice to note here that most participants' experiences with social media were distinct from their experiences with direct messaging, texting, and calling.

Haley spent a lot of time using her phone and computers for this kind of direct contact, either talking with friends who she couldn't see due to COVID, or video chatting with her family: "I video chat with my dad usually once a day […] I usually video chat with my mom too because she's in a different state. I sometimes video chat with my brothers and sisters and other relatives. For the most part, that's when my phone comes into use, or like when I'm talking to my sons, my kids. They like to, you know, FaceTime me so I do a lot of video" (Haley). Harrison and Amelia used their phones throughout the day, keeping constant low-grade contact with their friends and family:

"I'm in several group chats with my friends. You know, what have you. So, I mean, we're just constantly talking throughout the day you know about whatever" (Harrison)

"My best friend, I actually share an office with her when I am at work. And so we use link messenger or Skype for Business or whatever it is now, so I'll log on that throughout the day, but otherwise I'd be texting her and then my sister or my husband" (Amelia)

The smartphone's capacity for direct communication took on new urgency in the context not only of isolation, however, but of a global health crisis. Victoria and Emily discussed their hesitance to separate from their smartphones in terms of family health emergencies or another unpredictable crises:

"A lot of my family lives like a decent amount of way, like at least an hour plus away, and I know for most people that's not very long at all, but like I don't know. I just think, like, maybe if it's not near me, and something happens, then it will take me even longer to respond to them if it's not near me" (Victoria)

"What if I get on the road, and I'm not able to, you know, something bad happens and I'm not able to call somebody" (Emily)

Unsurprisingly, every interview participant described using their smartphones and other digital devices significantly more than pre-pandemic, whether as part of their new working routines, in an effort to replace in-person social contact, or as another form of distraction. Of course, it is important to note that the separation of work and social life I have followed in this chapter is an artificial one, but is illustrative of both the discursive relationship between work and life beyond it, and the problematization of this distinction that the concept of postwork enacts. Lauren, describing a yard project carried out during the pandemic, captures the ambivalent experience of pandemic postwork well:

"Even though getting out […] seems like a lot of fun, I still have always been a homebody so, you know, I have not learned to resent my home. I love getting to be here with my dogs and to be able to go and like walk out and see our backyard and look at our garden […] We had a project where we had this stump that we were trying to remove and for like a week we would take breaks throughout the workday, just go out there and like hack away at it, trying to get it to come out of the ground and eventually, our like 86 year old neighbor came over with a winch, and it was just […] a whole process, but it was still like, 'Oh, we're just doing that […]. This is fine, you know, not a big deal.' If it had been, you know, we're

coming home from work to do that, I don't think I would have been as, weirdly as I'm going to say it, as enjoyable. Because it just seems like work after the work day. But, we're at home. I don't know. It just feels better" (Lauren)

To return to Fleuret and Atkinson's (2007) schema, the spatiotemporal assemblage of 'home' is a space which can be rearranged to increase (work) capability; which lacks integration into in-person social networks but permits increased digital media use for communication; and which is perhaps the only space-time of security during the pandemic. Each of these, per Richardson (2018), has its own kinds of ambivalent intimacies, and can be either affirming, negating, or both at once. Some experiences of pandemic life were primarily affirming, as Lauren describes, while others were mostly negating. Rather than creating new 'enjoyable' elements of pandemic life, many participants felt restricted and stressed. In these scenarios, participants often turned to their phones as a distraction: "I didn't really have a schedule during the pandemic. I was on the phone a lot. I definitely picked up news apps more during that time. I also started using online shopping, a lot more, so I've spent a lot of time there. And then because I needed to pass the time, for some reason I started looking at camping equipment, so I downloaded an app for camping and like, I'm never going camping. I don't care about camping. But it was something to distract me, I guess. So I spent a lot of time on there just to waste time" (Marie).

I have not discussed the home-work space as a therapeutic space, and indeed neither did participants. The overwhelming (though often implicit) consensus was that these space-times were impermanent, and unstable. I posit that the home/workspace during the pandemic is, at best, one of 'regularity': for participants, the best configuration they could hope for is one in which their mundane routines and spaces feel normal. Space-times of healing, if possible in the home, are rare to find during a pandemic.

The next chapter speaks more specifically to this desire for regularity, especially in terms of digital attention and distraction, and in the context of the association between distraction and unhealthiness. What does well-being look like beyond the clear priorities of work and social life, in scenarios where reflexive attention and pressures of self-control are experienced more acutely? In 'empty' or 'free' time, when work is done for

the day, when friends and family are not responding to messages, how is 'health' practiced?

5. DOOMSCROLLING, SCREEN TIME TRACKING, AND NEOLIBERAL BIOPOLITICS

In this chapter, I continue my analysis of the interviews conducted with smartphone users during July of 2020. Picking up where the previous chapter ends, I examine participant's discussion of their digital well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic by asking: how do users understand their smartphone habits and routines to be healthy, or not; and how are such conceptions of health produced by the metrification of their phone use via screen time tracking applications?

The chapter's first section examines participants' discussions of digital wellbeing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which I connect to their popular and academic discourses of well-being addressed in chapter 3. I analyze discourses around wellness, self-care, rehabilitation, and practices which participants reported to produce subjective wellbeing. I show that smartphone users increasingly turn to news and social media applications on their smartphone for a sense of connectedness (to other people and to current events); and the content which participants engage with on those news and social media channels produces various experiences considered healthy or unhealthy. I establish 'mindfulness' and 'mindlessness' as concepts which inform designations of healthy or unhealthy behaviors and analyze the consequences of this distinction for wellbeing in neoliberal contexts. In the following section, I turn to screen time tracking applications, describing practices and experiences reported by users in the context of biomedicalization, datafication, and data doubles. Following scholarship from queer and disability studies, I connect these applications and their use to neoliberal notions of self-management and rehabilitative citizenship.

In this chapter, I incorporate an analysis of affect and Berlant's relation of 'cruel optimism' to show how screen time tracking applications fail to engender actual changes in behavior, but simply gesture towards improving well-being. In the chapter's final section, I propose that the assemblage of neoliberal health produces a crisis of attentional capacity, flagging each and every smartphone user as a subject in need of rehabilitation. I argue that screen time applications only superficially address concerns about digital wellness, and in doing so in fact create affective and technical obstacles to relational and structural interventions into well-being. The solution of attentional rehabilitation through

the smartphone fails to address its ostensible goal. Attention and its counterpart distraction are produced as core elements of digital well-being and subjected to processes of neoliberal health management. Such health management, however, rehabilitates towards an impossible goal, preserving the attentive user as a perpetually exploited and debilitated subject. From the user's perspective, the screen time tracking application provides a sense of progress and self-improvement—access to 'the good life'—which such applications actually stymie: this is a cruelly optimistic relation.

DOOMSCROLLING, LOSING TIME, MINDFULNESS, AND THE BODYMIND

> "I'm already kind of an anxious person, and then you start to look at the doom and gloom and the utter catastrophe that we are faced with at this moment, and it's really easy to spiral into this place where it's like, oh my god, everything's awful, there's no reason to leave my bed in the morning. And I think anything that triggers kind of an anxiety response for one reason or another, particularly in regards to those or even the Black Lives Matter stuff, like, I've done a lot of reading on a lot of that kind of stuff, too. And it feels like it's really easy to find enough content on the internet to feel hopeless about particular situations. And whenever that starts, I recognize that there's a fine line between being informed and being overwhelmed." (Elise)

For Elise and many others, the summer months of 2020 in Kentucky (as well as the broader United States, and beyond) were filled with anxiety, gloom, and a sense of catastrophe. The interviews for this research project were conducted in the context of not only a global pandemic, but also the thousands of Black Lives Matter uprisings sparked by the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis. For Kentuckians, the protests across the state also hit close to home because of the murder of Breonna Taylor by police officers in Louisville earlier that year. During this time, many of the participants considered their smartphones, and in particular social media and news apps, to be their primary connection to current events.

One participant, Julia, described a particular practice on her smartphone as *doomscrolling*, a term that has received a good deal of attention in popular media.[3] Doomscrolling describes the unpleasant sense of being unable to put down your device because of the compulsion to keep reading (primarily bad or otherwise 'sense of doom'-inducing) news. Others did not use the term explicitly, but described their social media

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[3] "Doomscrolling Is Slowly Eroding Your Mental Health" (accessed 1.9.21)

feeds and smartphones as an "endless suck-hole" (Lauren) or a "black hole of hopelessness" (Amelia). In their experience, smartphones and social media and news apps have their own attentional gravity, drawing users into an orbital cycle of continuous refreshing.

Elise pointed to the "fine line between being informed and being overwhelmed," a sentiment that is echoed by many of the other participants. Nicole describes the urge to keep herself "up to date" by staying on top of important reporting. Amelia, similarly, spoke about doing "research" through reading the news to quell her feelings of uncertainty about the world, particularly in the early days of the pandemic. Like Elise, Amelia tried to locate and avoid crossing the blurry division between being informed and "getting too far in, too far sucked in and depressed."

The particular tolerance of 'bad' news that doomscrolling encompasses, however, did not necessarily extend to all types of unpleasant content on news sites and social media. A few of the participants described the struggles of reading opinions which they found inflammatory, uninformed, and/or racist—particularly related to the Black Lives Matter protests. Bella, a Black woman, was exhausted by "constantly having to explain what white privilege was or fighting tooth and nail with people who just wanted to be racist and didn't want to feel bad about it." Relatedly, others found certain content to be overwhelming: "If something triggers me, like sometimes they post police brutality. You know, that's when I choose to walk away. Or if something's really violent or […] it's just too much at times, or if I don't like certain things that my friends post, I just walk away from it" (Haley).

Engaging with unpleasant and frustrating content led to participants closing out of their social media or news apps. The other reason participants cited for closing out of apps, or taking a break from their smartphone altogether, was boredom. As Bella puts it: "Now it is hard to give my brain the excuse of, like, 'There's literally nothing else that you could be doing right now.' Like, it's okay to relax, but feeling bored almost always translates as feeling bad." Nearly every participant cited boredom as a common reason for quitting out of an application or switching to a new activity, which was usually prompted by seeing repetitive or irrelevant content.

Doomscrolling is enabled by a—fairly delicate—balance of plentiful and rapidly-refreshing content which is minimally repetitive and non-inflammatory. According to the participants, doomscrolling is understood as an unpleasant but justifiable experience; however, it runs the risk of leading to boredom and/or frustration, which can cause users to be overwhelmed. When the seeming endlessness of doomscrolling does, in fact, come to an end, participants described the connection between 'feeling bad' and boredom through the lens of work and productivity:

> "It's a kind of crappy feeling...it kind of makes you feel bad, like, I should be working. I should get back to working, usually is the feeling of, or, think of what you could be accomplishing right now, and instead you're doing this" (Kayla)

> "I've always been a person that I'm like, wow, I want to spend time on my phone less. But I think especially being cooped up in the apartment, paired with, you know, out of a job right now like that usage has definitely skyrocketed from where it used to be. Because, you know, if you have a daily routine, and if you have a job to go to you, you have less time to allow yourself to sit on your phone." (Emily)

In addition to doomscrolling, participants spoke of a related but distinct practice I refer to as *losing time*. If doomscrolling is the unintentional result of the gravitational pull of the smartphone, social media, and 'bad news' which leads to the loss of productive time, losing time is the immersion into smartphone applications and engagement with pleasant (often, intentionally apolitical) content in order to lose time purposefully. I connect losing time with the concept of 'zeroing out' introduced by Natasha Dow Schüll in her study of machine gambling in Las Vegas. Schüll describes gamblers' attempts to reach a state of tensionless equilibrium she terms 'the zone.' The techniques used to reach the zone involve "quell[ing] perturbations in the system and 'zero[ing] out' excess affect" (Schüll 2014, p. 262). While the techniques of the addicted or recovering machine gambler may not precisely match those of the smartphone user, many expressed a related desire to 'zero out,' often describing killing/losing/filling time.

During the beginning of the pandemic, Marie "was attempting to lose hours of the day," and the type of content Harrison engages with is "bullshit, I think, for lack of a better term. It's just content, something to fill the time." This could involve seeking out content on "the pleasant side of the internet" (Marie), or simply playing "a few mindless

minutes of [a] puzzle game" after a stressful day (Max). Both doomscrolling and losing time are commonly described as 'mindless,' but with different connotations. Where doomscrolling attempts to engage with the world, losing time attempts to disengage from it, if only in small ways:

> "Playing a game on my phone never feels healthy. I mean, I don't think it's completely unhealthy, but does it doesn't feel like it's helping me really in any way...I don't feel too guilty about it because I'm not one to sit and play games or video games, but I don't know, it's fun, quarantine was boring. And that was something fun to do, so, can't feel that bad about it." (Samantha)

> "I find happiness, like whenever I was furloughed, I found joy in watching TikTok and stuff. It really helped with getting through the days and not thinking about the things that were happening." (Sierra)

If doomscrolling results in anxiety, boredom, and frustration, what can be done to either prevent doomscrolling or mitigate its consequences on users' wellbeing? Participants were asked to describe both positive and negative expressions of digital wellbeing, describing a wide variety of practices and behaviors to be avoided or cultivated. In short, they encouraged techniques which promoted what I categorize as *mindfulness*, and discouraged *mindlessness*. Mindfulness encompasses self-awareness and self-control, encouraging directed engagement with smartphones and social media that is productive and self-actualizing. Mindfulness exists in opposition to mindlessness, which is indiscriminate, unknowledgeable, and undelimited. Mindfulness is activity; mindlessness is passivity. For participants, part of being mindful is an awareness that the 'real' exists outside of the digital; mindlessness involves a conflation of the 'real' with the digital.

> "I think that's part of digital wellbeing, realizing that what's on the phone isn't real. On the phone, on the internet, on anything digital. But with the phone because it's with you always, and you mindlessly scroll...with the mindless scrolling that you do on your phone, it's so easy to, you know...start thinking that's what everyone actually is." (Martha)

> "A whole lot of social media usage, I think that can contribute to a really skewed understanding of people and community, and what it means to be engaged in community, and how to represent yourself within those spaces and how like the reality of what other people are because of the way they present themselves in those spaces." (Elise)

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Many participants spoke specifically to the ways in which social media involves a kind of reality distortion through selective curation. To interact mindlessly with social media is to participate in that curation yourself, posting often to get likes, follows, and other forms of engagement. To interact mindlessly is to fail to understand that the selfies, travelogues, and other lifestyle descriptions are distorted representations and not reality itself. Likewise, engaging with inflammatory, toxic, and negative content will produce anger and frustration—being mindful means being aware of this content and how to avoid it. Practically, mindful behaviors involve abstention from easy, hedonic pleasures, nonconscious habits, and spaces of anger and negativity. While many advocated for using their smartphones less *overall*, particularly as it relates to use before bed and getting enough sleep, those same participants specifically cited social media applications as the main culprits of mindlessness. Instead, participants suggested seeking out spaces with positive interactions or activities on the phone that involved learning or productivity:

> "If I notice myself just going on there to mindlessly do something, I do try to shift myself into doing something productive or like learning something or stuff like that. And then, like I said, I've been trying to limit my time on my phone, or not really limit but decrease my time on the phone, and I feel like that's something I'm doing." (Emily)

Another common sentiment identified smartphones as tools. As tools, smartphones and social media have the capacity to produce both healthiness and unhealthiness, depending on how users utilize them:

> "To me, this is a tool. The internet's a tool. I think it is what you make of it. And I don't know, it's kind of like, just because you read a bad book doesn't mean books are bad, just find another book. I'd like to try to think about it that way. Or some of this stuff because you could get absorbed in anything. It's just a lot of people pick this, it's easy. And I understand why a lot of people don't like them but it's what you make of it." (Max)

A key distinction in participants' discussion of smartphones as tools is between active and passive use. For Max, the digital is easy to engage with, and tends towards negativity when used passively. It requires the user to actively 'find another book' or seek out particular uses of their phone which are rewarding. For Elise, it's unhealthy to "[get] into a place where you're more engaged with scrolling than interacting with the people or spaces around you." Passive use pulls you into scrolling; active use seeks out

interaction. This is echoed in Elise's recommendations for digital wellbeing: "using [your smartphone] for exercise purposes or brain teasers or language learning or...an online book club."

In sum, participants describe smartphones as tools which can be used either mindfully or mindlessly: mindless use is passive use, falling into nonconscious patterns of behavior such as doomscrolling; mindful use is active use, aware of one's own behaviors, which tend towards productivity and self-actualization. We can tie participants' discussions back to the popular discourses of well-being and attention in chapter 3. These discourses associate distraction, unintentionality, and overuse with the easy pleasures of hedonia, and focus, intentionality, and balance with productive eudaimonia, and emphasize that smartphones are neutral tools whose misuse is attributable to user error.

Interestingly, techniques of losing time were not determined to be either particularly healthy, despite being commonly practiced. Losing time, as a means of being 'zeroed out,' is a sought-after experience, but not one that is understood to be 'healthy.' In other words, it is clear to participants what behaviors should or should not be practiced, but another matter in terms of their affective desires.

Doomscrolling and losing time are practices of attention which complicate the seemingly-straightforward prescriptions of digital well-being, and in particular the distinctions drawn between 'mindfulness' and 'mindlessness'. Here it will be helpful to re-introduce the concept of the *bodymind* discussed in chapter 2. The concept complicates the division of voluntary (i.e. of the mind) and involuntary (i.e. of the body) behaviors, which is the basis of the difference between mindfulness and mindlessness as markers of digital wellbeing. Schüll's (2006, 2012) discussions of zeroing out, however, helps us by introducing the idea of an affective equilibrium. Doomscrolling introduces an affective overload; being mindful of one's use does not quell that overload, though it may avoid it in the first place. Losing time/zeroing out, on the other hand, involves a set of techniques that do work to re-balance the bodymind. I argue that the behaviors that are construed as 'healthy' are not the same as those which support an affective equilibrium. This is not to say that losing time is definitively a practice conducive to digital wellbeing, though it may be; rather, simply to say that the behaviors understood as healthy do not respond to

nor address the same stimuli which produce 'unhealthy' experiences. Some of the study participants acknowledged the influence of the nonconscious bodymind:

> "Everybody uses their phone too much, and I feel like society, now and moving forward, that we're basically cyborgs. Even though the phone's not technically connected to us, you know it is. Because we can do anything from our smartphone...I think our phones are extensions of ourselves. And it really is part of you...Even if I tried or wanted to change, I think that this device is so intertwined with all of us that our subconscious is probably not going to let that happen." (Harrison)

Complicating the divide between the conscious and nonconscious in our discussion of attention and well-being, we can begin to understand how the normative forms of attentiveness and digital well-being are disrupted by the practices of doomscrolling and losing time. Doomscrolling is discursively contrasted with productive time but is also established as a practice which emerges from attentiveness to news and a connection to current events. This is not distraction in the sense that popular discourses of well-being denigrate: it is a form of unintentional overuse but emerges from a desire for eudaimonic experience. Conversely, losing time is a kind of intentional distraction that is unrecognizable to popular discourses of digital well-being. Losing time is focused and intentional, but it is neither productive nor eudaimonic. To perhaps oversimplify, we can understand doomscrolling as a kind of unhealthy attention, and losing time as a kind of healthy distraction; whereas discourses of digital well-being almost exclusively equate attention with health and distraction with un-health. Once more we are reminded of Crary's (1999) positioning of attention and distraction not as opposites, but rather existing on the same spectrum of cognitive activity.

These practices of attention and distraction disrupt the discourses of attention and well-being, but are surely not practices unique to the circumstances of July 2020. In fact, I argue that such practices are highly mundane. The discursive opposition set up regarding digital well-being positions mindfulness and mindlessness against one another: mindfulness as healthy and mindlessness as unhealthy. However, our attention to the discursive (false) binaries of conscious/intentional use and non-conscious/unintentional use complicates the general categories of mindfulness and mindlessness, as well as health and un-health. Our conscious attention is but one layer not only in an entire *social*

ecology of attention (Citton 2017), but also in an entire embodied *cognitive* ecology of attention (Hayles 2012).

More empirically, distraction is something that turns out to be essential to participants' lives; and during the pandemic, digital distractions are particularly important. As I showed in chapter 4, new styles of work incorporate distraction more pervasively throughout the day. Furthermore, social contact during the pandemic was essential but insufficient, leaving time in participants' days to fill with digital devices. Distraction is both the enemy of productivity and a source of guilt, and also an important release valve for affective build-up such as work stress. During a global pandemic and an unprecedented wave of (inter)national protests, such a release valve becomes irreplaceable.

I have situated both doomscrolling and losing time in terms of affect, which is a useful lens to approach the complicated interplay of the social and non-conscious effects on user experiences and behaviors related to well-being (Andrews 2014). I will return to affect in the following sections to focus on the attachments between user and smartphone, and some of those attachments' consequences for well-being. In order to discuss these relations more precisely, I first turn to an analysis of screen time self-tracking practices and screen time tracking applications and their connection to neoliberal biopolitics.

SELF-TRACKING, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND SELF-CONTROL

> "I don't like to think about if I'm wasting my life. I guess I think that phones, for me, like, my phone is a coping mechanism, especially right now, for just getting through, I feel like...and so, if it's just something that's going to make it a little bit easier, just a little crutch, then I'm just going to use it. But I don't want to have to see how reliant I am on the crutch." (Kayla)

In referring to the smartphone as a 'crutch,' Kayla draws a connection to disability and assistive technologies that I will expand on: the positioning of the smartphone as a potentially capacitating technology. This is the ostensible purpose of the screen time tracking applications, as discussed in chapter 3: to empower users "to better understand and manage their device usage"[4] and to "find a balance with technology that

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[4] "iOS 12 introduces new features to reduce interruptions and manage Screen Time" (accessed 11.14.20)

feels right."[5] However, as Kayla indicates, and many of the other participants echo, confronting their screen time metrics is mostly an unpleasant experience. They do not wish to be shown the amount of time that is 'wasted.' In this section, I argue that this understanding of wasted time and the affective experience of confronting the metrics is an expression of neoliberal attentional health. For an overview of Screen Time, Apple's screen time tracking application (*STTA*), reference the appendix.

For many participants, the first reaction upon opening up their STTA was shock, followed quickly by resignation:

> "I mean, I guess that makes sense. But looking through it, my average amount is terrifying...Wow, that's wild. I mean, all of it makes sense like looking at it like it…I don't know. It makes sense." (Bella)

The shock was typically in response to the datafication that the application performs, and in particular the aggregate daily average of screen time, as Bella notes. Capturing and visualizing every minute that the screen was active includes all of the 'mindless' activity and brief moments of screen use, activity which was forgotten (or never remembered). Though the STTA aggregates the screen time by application and category, the participants were primarily concerned with the total time spent, both in total and as a daily average, which are the most prominent metrics on the screen (see appendix, Fig. 3):

> "Within the last week since I've been on my phone for a total time since I had this app. I'm 47 hours, 25 minutes. So when you kind of break that down, it's like holy shit." (Haley)

> "The daily average is four hours, which is absurd to me. I guess that makes sense...I guess because it comes in such small snippets that it doesn't seem like it should add up to such a large amount of time." (Elise)

These quantifications of participants' time (and by proxy, attention) were shocking not only because of the effects of aggregation, but also for the perceived objectivity of the metrics. While a few participants questioned the specific manner in which the metrics were collected and calculated, all trusted that their applications were

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[5] "Digital Wellbeing through technology" (accessed 11.14.20)

showing a relatively accurate picture of their device use. As Elise and others describe, the data is understood to be impartial and objective:

> "It literally just gives you a number of how many minutes your screen is awake. You can't deny that. That's when it was open. That's when you were looking at it." (Elise)

As we recall from chapter 2, such datafication makes health visible as data and, in combination with biomedicalization, makes health improvement more actionable. These two factors connect back to the imperatives of neoliberal biopolitics, enabling an "ethical project of selfhood" (Lupton 2016, p. 47) and, more specifically, a model of 'rehabilitative citizenship' (Elman 2014). Screen time tracking creates a perception of impartial data which can be read as signposts of wellness by users and produces manipulable representations of users' selves. Such manipulable representations are discussed as "data doubles" by Ruckenstein (2014) and "datafied body doubles" by Horrocks (2019). The production of self-tracking data as self-representation can be viewed as a process of simultaneous affective attachment and techno-medicalized control and normalization. These discussions highlight how datafication enables the depoliticization of surveilling, individuating, automating, representing, and, ultimately, managing bodyminds. The acceptance of data doubles as impartial representations of one's health internalizes self-discipline under the regime of neoliberal biopolitics.

However, just because users understand self-tracking data to be accurate and actionable, and face strong social pressures to manage their health, does not necessarily mean that users access or act upon that data. Here an analysis of the circulation of affects helps us to understand the complex assemblage of attachment to, and hesitance towards, self-tracking.

During the interviews, each participant was asked whether or not they considered their STTA useful, and if so for what purposes. While nearly every participant acknowledged that the application would be useful for someone concerned about their screen time, the interest in continuing to use it was less unanimous. Some, like Elise, were not interested in confronting the unpleasantly high metrics. She remembered "just dismissing [the notification] pretty quickly, because I was just like, 'I don't want to look at that' [...] I think I still have this aversion to admitting to myself how much I am

connected to my phone, because I don't want to be that connected to my phone." Others, such as Bella, were interested in keeping track of their metrics as a data double: "I feel like it'll keep me honest. I do notice that like last week was worse than the week prior and it's definitely because I was more depressed this last week, which I think is a good metric to tell just how much it's affecting me because there's a big jump between last week and the week prior." Staying honest, for Bella, involved checking in with the part of herself that the metrics make visible, and without which she would be less in touch with her 'self.'

Whether or not a participant would opt to continue self-tracking or turn off the STTA, they shared a sense of responsibility to be aware of their own screen time; however, many participants' descriptions of digital wellbeing were shot through with sentiments related to failing to live up to that responsibility. As Kayla describes it, "you should be aware. I guess you should be more aware. But I don't like to be, so I guess I'm a hypocrite." When to give examples of healthy and unhealthy behaviors on their smartphones, Lauren indicated one behavior that, while she knew it was healthy, it was "something I obviously don't do." Charlotte described the tension between what she *should* be doing and is *actually* doing as an exercise in self-sabotage:

> "I don't like being told what to do, even if I'm telling myself what to do. I'd be like: 'Why am I not supposed to be on this? This is my choice. I can get on this, if I want. I'm just going to get on it to spite myself.' Because that's who I am as a human." (Charlotte)

This tension around what participants felt they should be doing (but were failing to do) was exacerbated not only by the STTA, but also by the conditions of the pandemic. Participants expressed frustration at the STTA for setting unrealistic goals in a time when there was little to do *except* spend time on the phone:

> "I looked at it last week, and then it notifies me on Sunday. Like, here's how you did this week, like, don't judge me phone. Look, okay, we're in lockdown. Don't tell me that my goal is only 5 hours on the phone or whatever." (Martha)

For others, like Samantha, the app highlighted just how much time was spent non-productively:

> "I feel like there's just other stuff I could be doing even though there's not a lot to do right now. Sometimes it's hard not to feel bad and you see you have like

you've been on the phone for like 10 hours [...] It just seems like a big chunk of time. I don't know what else I would have done with it, but I could have done something else with it." (Samantha)

Many of the participant who lost their jobs or were furloughed during the pandemic expressed similar sentiments, comparing the amount of time spent to an 8-hour workday:

"So the daily average, it's really embarrassing that it was like eight hours. And I was like, that's kind of a full-time job. You know, like I had gone to work for the day, that's the time I'd have spent working. And I really noticed myself like since I don't have a work to go to, a routine, that's sort of what I do instead." (Emily)

These participants not only highlight the effects of losing the structure provided by an office job (as discussed in more detail in chapter 4), but also the work that datafication does. When faced with the quantified and aggregated metrics, participants find it easy to benchmark themselves against measures of productivity such as the 8-hour workday. Even for those who were less concerned with their metrics, or for those who kept their jobs, confronting the metrics induced a sense of urgency: screen time is a problem to be managed. Even in the mitigating circumstances of a global pandemic, many users still felt the sociocultural pressure to monitor their health. However, few were interested in taking steps to change their smartphone routines or reduce their screen time. Sierra, for example, finds the metrics most interesting purely as accurate reflections of how she spends her time:

"Just being able to visualize everything I'm doing on my phone. I just think it's interesting seeing how much time is spent, and on what, and being able to actually see how much time is being used, even though it's not very productive. I can see what's going on, and I could change if I wanted." (Sierra)

Of note is the comment that the STTA provides an avenue for change, *if desired*. Here it is helpful to return Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism.' Cruel optimism, as a relation wherein "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 2011, p. 1), highlights the seemingly paradoxical connection between STTAs and smartphone use. Fritsch's (2013) mobilizes 'cruel optimism' to argue that the ISA (International Symbol of Accessibility) uses such a relation in order to obfuscate the underlying issues of access for people with disabilities: the ISA designates locations

which have been made accessible, even when those locations are still, in actuality, inaccessible. The symbol produces 'happy' affects which masks the reality of (in)accessibility to those who are not disabled; the ISA makes disability known, but in doing so also appears to 'handle' the issue of accessibility and mark it as contained. Similarly, I posit that the datafication STTAs perform marks concerns over excessive screen time as 'handled': known, and therefore contained.

Importantly, STTAs do often possess features which can enact strict limitations on smartphone capabilities, including activating time limits, usage schedules, or prohibiting certain apps from use. However, these features are just as easily deactivated; especially for participants who only activated their self-tracking application as part of this study. Participants who expressed interest in activating the STTA limits were only interested in those which sent out notification about potential overuse: knowing, and therefore containing. As Ash et al. (2018) note in their study of high-cost short-term credit software, the management of affective 'frictions' is a crucial technical practice of power, understood as modulation of user actions. The reporting of metrics mark concerns over health as known and handled; and the screen-time limitation features of these applications are low-friction thresholds. Viewed in conjunction with other low-friction design features such as the endless scroll, I suggest that the STTA features do work to modulate user affect – but not to limit user screen time. The alerts and easily-disabled limits signal user awareness, and therefore containment; and rehabilitation, then, is only the allaying of concern over screen time, and the continued, profitable, use of smartphones.

Many Kentuckian smartphone users relied on their devices to stay connected to their social networks and current events, particularly in the circumstances of a global pandemic and nationwide protests. In staying connected, these users find themselves doomscrolling, compulsively reading (bad) news and feeling unable to stop. In describing doomscrolling, users establish a distinction between mindful and mindless behaviors: mindless behaviors, including doomscrolling, are understood to be negative, where mindfulness is understood to be healthy. In practice, however, users engage in mindless behaviors that they do not experience as unhealthy: losing time (zeroing out). Using a smartphone to lose time involves mindless, but not guilt-inducing or 'unhealthy',

behaviors which balance out affective perturbations caused by the stress of doomscrolling, reading inflammatory content, or simply circumstantial stressors. Analyzing these practices with the concepts of the bodymind and embodied cognition, it is clear that discursive notions of wellness (distinguishing between mindless and mindful behaviors) do not neatly align with affective experiences of wellness.

In reviewing their metrics through the STTAs, users experience a mixture of feeling-states. Many do feel a sense of responsibility to manage and reduce their overall screen time. In the circumstances of the pandemic, however, users are hesitant to stop using their devices because they (a) feel a responsibility to be informed, and (b) rely on the smartphone to lose time. What results is a scenario in which smartphone users are interested in keeping track of their screen time as a reflection of their health but are not interested in actually altering their behaviors. I argue that this relation is still present in non-pandemic conditions, if less pronounced, as one of cruel optimism. The STTA metrics are both objects of attachment and obstacles to flourishing for the user, aligning with discursive notions of digital wellness and self-management but failing to produce affective experiences of wellness and enable actual self-transformation.

If I have seemed to describe a straightforward relationship between self-tracking and neoliberal health management, I would like to emphasize here that, for users, this assemblage of health circulates a contradictory mixture of priorities and desires. The relatively clear discursive association between attentiveness, mindfulness, productivity, and health demonstrated in chapter 3 are complicated, in particular, by the actual experiences and uses of distraction. The relief of affective pressures through losing time/zeroing out and kinds of mindlessness is an essential role of everyday smartphone use, particularly in the overwhelmingly stressful circumstances of a global pandemic and massive uprisings. Yet, the use of digital devices for these purposes is antithetical to the internalized disciplinary imperatives of health and eudaimonia, which are strongly connected to productivity. The perfectly-attentive subject is not distractible; yet, as Crary (1999) reminds us, the normative mode of absorbed attentiveness contains within itself the possibility of distraction.

To bring these various threads together, I re-introduce chapter 2's discussion of *technologies of the self*. Foucault's use of the concept emphasizes the possibilities of self-

domination in transforming or actualizing oneself "in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (18). Neoliberal health management adopts these possibilities as its discursive imperatives, but, as I have endeavored to show, precludes any self-transformation which would result in a less-productive subject. I argue that this impossibility results in a cruelly-optimistic relation, in which users are shepherded into an attachment to technologies of paradigmatic self-transformation; but these technologies are in fact unable to enact any such transformation. Schüll (2006) introduces a helpful revision of technologies of the self: *micro-techniques of the self.* I posit that this term more accurately captures the co-option of technologies of the self into neoliberal health management, and the modulation of affect as a cruelly-optimistic relation. Schüll's term is specifically connected to the practices of zeroing out which machine-gambling addicts adopt: both the act of machine gambling and attempts to recover from machine gambling addiction strive for an affective equilibrium enacted through the very same mechanisms. This, for both Schüll (2006) and Stiegler (2010), calls into question the pharmacological relationship between media and user. The gambling machine, like the smartphone, contains both poison and cure.

This pharmacological relationship has a strikingly similar logic to both the affective relation of cruel optimism and the paradoxical practice of absorbed attentiveness: each contains a perceived happiness, a point of access to 'the good life,' a cure; but in each also lurks an obstacle, a poison, an impossibility of perfection. While the applications of these concepts have been distinct from one another, and their coherence may not be exact (and warrants more in-depth study), I suggest that each concept engages a fantasy of complete wellness which is inherently unfulfillable—and in the case of smartphone screen time tracking, specifically unfulfillable through the conditions and prescriptions of individualized neoliberal health management. Instead, the attachments to the technologies which enable this fantasy to continue the exploitative and/or deteriorative processes of neoliberal capitalism.

Care, within the constraints of neoliberal biopolitics, is strictly rehabilitative in the sense that it operates through a "curative imaginary" (Kafer 2013, p. 27) which is uninterested in non-normative configurations of health and intervention. Digital well-

being, in this context, can be viewed as a series of micro-techniques which aim to re-establish users as normatively attentive. This rehabilitative process is itself profitable and reinforces the attachment to one's smartphone. If care and technologies of the self have been co-opted into rehabilitation as micro-techniques of the self, how might they be recovered? Within the relational assemblage of digital well-being, how might users locate the agency to enact truly paradigm-shifting self-transformation? And even more relevant to this thesis, how might we envision ethics and practices of care which are informed by a relational understanding of attention, well-being and digital media? In the final chapter of this thesis, I will discuss prescriptions and possibilities of such forms of care developed in the media studies and geographical literatures.

6. CONCLUSION: ATTENTION OTHERWISE

This thesis has sought to establish an assemblage of 'digital well-being'. I have argued that norms of wellness produced through and with digital devices are as much about biomedical notions of health as they are about productive attentiveness. In chapter 2, I reviewed literature from health geographies, media studies, disability studies, and STS to draw connections between assemblages of health and assemblages of attention. Chapter 3 re-situated popular discourses and prescriptions of digital well-being and screen time in terms of a relational assemblage of attentional health. Turning towards interviews with smartphone users in Kentucky, chapter 4 approached assemblages of digital well-being in terms of their relational spatiality and consequences for work and sociality. Chapter 5 analyzed more specifically the assemblage of neoliberal (attentional) health management enacted through screen time self-tracking and its attendant circulation of affects. Having hopefully made clear a number of connections between attention, health management, and digital device use, we arrive at the question: *what to do with digital well-being*?

Having posited the usefulness of relational ontology throughout the thesis, in this chapter I finally turn to a re-evaluation of care in terms of an assemblage of attentional health. I review prescriptions of care from the literature and identify openings for taking care of digital well-being, relationally understood. Throughout this thesis I have pointed to various channels in participants' pandemic-related smartphone use that have made use of distraction.

Attention is discursively associated with healthiness and self-actualization, while distraction is positioned as its opposite: a pathologized condition. However, as Crary (1999) argues, attention and distraction are not opposites but rather differentiated practices of the same mode of absorbed attentiveness. Distraction is a form of attention which does not align with the imperatives of productivity enforced by neoliberal capitalism. To be distracted, in the normative sense, does not mean smartphone users are lacking attentional capacity; it means they are not being productive. Distraction can be either a guilt-inducing failure to comply with neoliberal productivity, or it can be a *refusal* to comply. Incorporating distraction into one's working day can be an act of resistance; cultivating new forms of distraction can become healthy. Citton (2017) articulates the potential of distraction as a (relational) *choice*:

"Knowing how to choose our alienations and our enthralments, knowing how to establish vacuoles of silence capable of protecting us from the incessant communication that overloads us with crushing information, knowing how to inhabit the switches between hyper-focusing and hypo-focusing–this is what aesthetic experiences (musical, cinematic, theatrical, literary or video-gaming) can help us do with our attention, since attention is always just as much something that we do (by ourselves) as something that we pay (to another)" (Citton 2017, p.19).

In the following sections, I work to situate care in relational assemblages, and conclude with a consideration of how choices of distraction can engage with feminist ethics of care to produce attention otherwise.

CARE IN RELATIONAL ASSEMBLAGES

I begin with the question of care in relation to attention. As chapter 2 briefly indicated, care is a particularly important consideration for both Citton and Stiegler. Each, in fact, approaches attention not only as a practice which can be trained, but as a process which itself *is* a practice of care. Citton locates relationality "at the common heart of joint attention, care and ecology," arguing that as soon as we become aware of the imbrication of environment and individual, "the quality of our existence depends on our consideration of the quality of the relations that simultaneously weave our environment and our being" (Citton 2017, p.13, emphasis removed). The levels of collective and joint attention he identifies are bound up in a relation of reciprocity, a striving for "affective harmonization" that enables communication in a particular sense that has "more to do with communion and care for the community than with the simple transfer of information" (ibid., p.88). In short, care cannot be practiced without attention, and certain practices of attention themselves can be understood as modes of care.

Stiegler similarly positions the constitution of the self as relational, and in fact that the self is indissociable from care: "taking care of *oneself* is always already taking care of *the other and of others* (Stiegler 2010, p. 158). Particularly relevant to this thesis, Stiegler posits that technologies of the self become techniques for governing not only the self, but also others – they create the tertiary retentions which are the subject of disruption by media institutions. As he succinctly puts it: "Today, an 'economy of attention' impinges on a 'cognition of attention,' constructing a technology of attention

that I suggest destroys attention" (ibid., 159). Care, then, travels up across multiple scales: care for the self becomes care for others and, finally, care for the systems which enable interpersonal care. Stiegler argues that, most importantly, there is a necessity for *meta*care, care about care. Metacare works on a systemic level with the purpose of establishing a new metastability, one that undoes the pharmacological disequilibrium brought on through the biopolitical regime (ibid. 182-183). To oversimplify, Stiegler argues that in order to practice intergenerational care, we must work to overhaul the emergent properties of the assemblage of attention.

Foucault, in his analysis of technologies of the self, identifies an inversion of the relationship between the two principles of self-knowledge and self-care: "In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle" (Foucault et al. 1988, p.22). Self-knowledge, including the knowledge generated from screen time tracking data, is no longer a byproduct but the main goal of the practice. Recall how, in chapter 2, Craig Federighi and Sameer Samat spoke of their products, *Screen Time* and *Digital Wellbeing*: knowledge is the first step to any form of care. I posit that this inversion, coupled with the imperatives of individualized self-management emerging from neoliberal biopolitics, is what has resulted in micro-techniques of the self: practices which fit comfortably into profitable systems of individualized 'rehabilitation' instead of transforming the terms of those systems.

For Stiegler, the most important practices of care are intergenerational; he highlights education as one space-time of metacare which can discipline the long circuits of transindividuation and train students to counteract the creation of short-circuits (Stiegler 2010, p. 60, 182). Citton and Hayles also consider spaces and practices of education as sites for care of relational attention. Citton (2017) considers MOOCs (massive open online courses), pointing to relational attention as an essential part of the traditional classroom space which struggles to emerge through remote teaching. Hayles is concerned with education, specifically in terms of the digital humanities: in delineating deep attention from hyperattention, her intervention is to better align reading practices with processes of embodied cognition (Hayles 2012). In short, these scholars position educational practices and spaces as important processes of assemblages of attention; and

care for individuals (students and otherwise) involves attending to those assemblages and their constituent processes.

Cameron Duff (2014) has written extensively about assemblages of health and recovery – health geographer Gavin Andrews adopts his discussion of what constitutes an ethics of health assemblage: "what matters more, ethically, from a posthuman perspective is what resources individuals are able to draw upon to maintain their recovery or a certain level of health" (Andrews 2019, p.1116). For Andrews and Duff, health is a matter of resourcing. Self-care, in assemblages of attention, health, and the combination of the two, is enabled through the availability of resources, material and otherwise. Not only that, I argue, but practices of self-care which engage care-fully with the processes which constitute those relational assemblage (following Citton and Stiegler) can help produce such resources: "Health geographers might instead openly 'play' with such forces and powers, thinking about which ones can be used, which ones can be re-shaped or redirected, and which ones should be avoided" (ibid., p.1116). By 'playing' with assemblage flows in order to create new configurations and availabilities of resources, we might make possible new kinds of attachments, ones that are more optimistic and less cruel than self-tracking applications—ones that understand care as prerequisite to knowledge, instead of the opposite.

'Playing' with the processes that make up an assemblage of digital well-being can involve any number of revisions. Consider the role of distraction: distraction is a value-laden mode of attention which is a core distinguisher between 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' in discourses of digital well-being. But, as I have shown in chapters 4 and 5, it is also an essential practice self-care and a practice whose cultivation can reverberate through relational assemblages of attentional health. This is where relational ontology helps us to reorient care practices and focus on the processes of digital well-being which privilege the inherent relationality of both attention and care. The first step, as Citton (2017) reminds us, is to pay attention to that relationality; and in doing so, begin to care not only for individuals but also the structures that enable care.

While I have been critical of normative prescriptions of digital well-being, not all of them are inherently antithetical to relational care; however, examining digital well-being during a global pandemic highlights the failings of such practices. For the participants in this study, the prescriptions of self-care available through screen time management were insufficient. More than that, participants were aware of the popular recommendations, and found them *impracticable*. To engage in practices of digital well-being, for many, would mean to further isolate themselves. This is precisely the wrong mode of self-care. In focusing on structures and processes of digital self-care, however, it is also crucial to attend to the capitalist structures of exploitation which digital technologies are enrolled in. A substantial body of work across digital geographies, STS, and beyond illustrates the material consequences of extractive and oppressive digital processes enacted through devices like smartphones. In this final section of the thesis, I address scholarship in digital and feminist geographies in order to locate the possibilities of unruly, ambivalent practices of distraction in terms of care.

In *Slow Computing: Why We Need Balanced Digital Lives* (2020), Kitchin and Fraser synthesize a number of familiar critiques from digital geographies in order to propose a project of slow computing. They identify problems of mundane digital life along two key axes: acceleration and extraction. Acceleration refers the experiential consequences of the ways "digital life seems to compress and fragment our time" (Kitchin and Fraser 2020, p.10). Extraction refers to the consequences of the consumer data grab in digital economies (ibid., p.11). 'Slow computing' proposes tactics for mitigating the consequences of acceleration and tactics which they categorize as either 'downshifting' or 'seeking anonymity.' These are tactics involve undertaking ostensibly individualized practices; however, the authors emphasize that these practices are, in fact, relational. Their argument assumes the conclusions drawn in the previous section: attention, including reflexive attention, can be a mode of care when oriented towards the relational assemblage of attention; and technologies of the self, especially regarding the cultivation our own attention, have consequences for ourselves and others. This returns us to one of our points of departure at the end of chapter 5: how can micro-techniques of the self be reclaimed as ambitious technologies of the self?

For Kitchin and Fraser, it is when technologies of the self enable digital users to break themselves out of the exploitative processes and temporalities of capitalism, and in doing so pave the way for others to do so as well. Stiegler, who sees the exploitative processes of capitalism operating on the cognitive level, might argue that the prescriptions from Kitchin and Fraser are not sufficient to re-arrange the metastability of neoliberal biopolitics. However, we can identify an opening, if tenuous, in the indissociability of technologies of the self from the governance of others and their mutual constitution within assemblages of care. As Kitchin and Fraser make clear, both downshifting and anonymity have immediate consequences not only for those who engage in these practices, but also those within the same familial, social, and digital networks. Furthermore, the extraction and temporal compression/fragmentation enacted through digital technologies are only two processes which contribute to an assemblage of digital well-being. There are indeed many familial, social, and spatial processes and relations which come together to produce the particular emergent qualities of digital well-being; and each of these can be influenced in a manner that reverberates through relational networks.

This is where feminist critique and ethics of care are of urgent importance. Kitchin and Fraser's project of slow computing identifies two threads which feed into the assemblage of the digital everyday, but do not attend to the numerous ways in which digital technologies are "co-constituted with relational socio-spatial processes of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality" (Elwood and Leszczysnki 2018, p. 637). Likewise, Gillian Rose (2017) takes a critical lens to Stiegler's work, arguing that, for all his interest in care, he does not extend an analysis to any axis of difference beyond the generational, nor does he engage much with affect or emotion (Rose 2017, p. 789). Despite these gaps, Rose argues that Stiegler's work maintains a usefulness to analyses of modern digital life and agency, reading Stiegler to "theorize (digital) posthuman agency by thinking it as always already (digitally) sociotechnical"; and how "posthuman being is only possible through the devices and practices of technics" (ibid., p. 789). The gaps Rose identifies are precisely those which feminist analyses of care attend to and, I argue, where a feminist critique can uncover new possibilities for the use of distraction.

Victoria Lawson's AAG presidential address has become a touchstone for the discipline's renewed attention to care and care work. Lawson sets out an ethic of care and responsibility in geography which emerges "from the centrality of care work and care relations to our lives and societies" (Lawson 2007, p. 3). Lawson poses an ethic of care in direct opposition to the principles of neoliberal self-management which we see pervading discourses of health and well-being. Instead, "Care ethics begins with a social ontology of connection: foregrounding social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence). Care ethics understands all social relations as contextual, partial, attentive, responsive, and responsible" (ibid., p.3). Lawson establishes a distinction between care and care-lessness as one characterized in part by knowledge and ignorance (ibid., p.5). Lawson proposes a series of practices in terms of research and teaching which might "engage care ethics through open dialogue that itself manifests mutual relations of care" (ibid., p. 9, emphasis removed). Open dialogue manifesting as a mutual relation of care, I posit, rests on an implicit understanding of particular modes of reciprocal communication, and thus also attention, as care-ful.

Lawson's address takes up this feminist ethic of care and responsibility through a particular attention to care work. The ethics of care and responsibility she puts forward are in response to "the changing realities of who has access to care and who does care work. Feminists have long pointed to ways in which care work is privatized and devalued; now we are witnessing an intensification of these processes in ways that affect us all deeply" (ibid., p. 2). Milligan and Wiles (2010) approach care and care work through the term 'landscapes of care,' which "refer to the complex embodied and organizational spatialities that emerge from and through the relationships of care" (Milligan and Wiles 2010, p. 740, emphasis removed). The authors problematize the binaries of proximity and distance and caring *for* and caring *about* to discuss, like Lawson, an ethics of care and care-ful geographies. Milligan and Wiles posit an ethics of care as a "framework not just for understanding who gives care, where and why (i.e., the interpersonal and institutional experience of care-giving) but also for understanding how an approach informed by care might enlighten our entire way of collective and individual being. This characterizes what we call care-ful or compassionate geographies" (Milligan and Wiles 2010, p.743).

For Lawson as well as Milligan and Wiles, there are two interconnected scales of analysis of care in their arguments: first, the reorientation of more general modes of being around relationality and an ethics of care; and second, the unequal access to and devaluation of care and gendered care work, as well as other consequences of the differential distributions of care along axes of difference. As Lawson puts, it: "Care ethics focuses our attention on the social and how it is constructed through unequal power relationships, but it also moves us beyond critique and toward the construction of new forms of relationships, institutions, and action that enhance mutuality and well-being" (Lawson 2007, p. 8). Attending to care helps us to orient ourselves not only towards critique but also the possibilities of being *otherwise*. I have argued throughout this thesis that such a reorientation toward relational assemblages opens us up to new modes of (attentional) mutuality; and as Lawson reminds us, such a reorientation necessitates a critique of unequal power relations in order to undertake a project of becoming otherwise.

This focus on inequality is also taken up also in the sociological and psychological literatures on digital wellbeing, specifically in terms of the digital divide. This divide refers not only to access to technology but also the digital literacy and skills (Gui and Büchi 2018; Odgers 2018; Büchi et al. 2019). If well-being is increasingly bound up in the digital, as I argue, access to digital technologies becomes an important heuristic through which to address well-being. The digital divide cuts both ways: lack of digital skills and technologies can lead to exclusion from a rapidly-digitizing spaces and systems; but readily engaging with digital technologies has risks for experiences of well-being. This relationship, of course, connects to Stiegler's identification of digital media with the *pharmaka*: both insufficient and excessive use of digital technologies can have negative consequences. Recalling Rose's (2017) critique of Stiegler, however, it is essential to analyze the differential consequences of the digital divide.

Elwood and Leszczynski (2018) set out a feminist research agenda in digital geographies, one which "insist[s] again that scholarship identifying itself as a 'critical' enterprise must necessarily be explicitly feminist" (Elwood and Leszczynski 2018, p. 639). Taking up the feminist ethos, for the authors, means that "theorizing social and spatial formations through histories of racial, colonial, gendered, and heteronormative domination is crucial: it makes these forms of domination legible and tractable for

intervention" (ibid., p. 639). These feminist theorizations create "possibilities of a liberatory digital politics for re-making our technologies and ourselves as digital subjects" (ibid., p. 640). Importantly, Elwood and Leszczynski identify these liberatory potentials in the ambivalences and contingencies of technologies. In her discussion of postwork, Richardson (2018) also points to the ambivalent intimacies enabled through digital technologies as the crucial opening for politics. By attending to "black, queer, feminist, and postcolonial critical theory" at key points of ambivalence, they argue, we can "[reveal] emancipatory, unruly, and transformative digital practices" (Elwood and Leszczynski 2018, p. 640).

I posit that distraction is one such unruly practice arising from ambivalence. (In)attentiveness may be unintentional and unproductive, as in popular discourse; but it may also be intentional, protective, and care-ful. If we resist the association of intentionality with attention and unintentionality with distraction, we can imagine new, unruly ways of using our attentions and distractions. Drawing from with Lawson (2007) and Milligan and Wiles (2010), we can locate care across and between the intersecting scales of attention laid out by Citton (2017). First, in terms of relational assemblage, resourcing and restructuring the relational processes which structure our joint and collective attention; and second, choosing the objects of our individuated attention. Thinking with Stiegler (2010) and Rose (2017), our attentiveness is a kernel of posthuman agency. By unbinding it from the individualized strictures of neoliberal productivity we can begin to orient our voluntary (in)attention towards the inherent relationality of attention: not only individuated attention and self-care, but joint and collective attention, and care for the *structures* of care. Released from its pathologization and applied to a relational ethics of care, we open the possibility of modes of distraction as refusal. Distraction turns towards imaginings otherwise.

Distraction, taken up as unruly attention, as attention otherwise, is not a politics of deferral; nor is it a continuation of life-as-it-is, nor as a masking or making-tolerable of exploitative, oppressive conditions. This is not a simple task, nor always a pleasant one. Lauren Berlant describes the difficulty of detachment and reattachment in terms of cruel optimism:

"It requires a surrealistic affectsphere to counter the one that already exists, enabling a confrontation with the fact that any action of making a claim on the present involves bruising processes of detachment from anchors in the world, along with optimistic projections of a world that is worth our attachment to it. All of the affective paradoxes of the political in relation to mass demands for social change uttered from the impasse of the present extend from this, cruel optimism's double bind: even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working" (Berlant 2011, 263).

It seems to me, however, that distraction—undertaken as a mode of informed imagination—is a key practice underlying these processes of detachment and reattachment; and that an orientation towards collective, mutual well-being is a step towards easing this difficult passage. In order for distraction to become more than a pathologized and individualized practice, it requires an urgent focus on those most affected by the social and technical structures which shape (in)attention. This focus leads to a number of further questions: in modern regimes of neoliberal capitalism, who is allowed to be distracted, and who is not? How are these allowances constituted along axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality? What forms of distraction are tolerated, and which are unruly? Which spaces and practices of attentional care and care work are accessible, and to whom? How might care-ful distraction be implemented into a politics of care? How do the designs of digital technologies produce particular modes of distraction and exclude others – and for whom? What are the limits of the digital sandbox of distraction, and how can we step beyond them? By investigating these questions and others like them, and attending to the non-hegemonic theorizations of digital everyday life, collective processes of distraction might be taken up as enactments of attention otherwise. In doing so, we begin to develop relational, care-ful modes of well-being, digital and otherwise.

APPENDIX

SCREEN TIME TRACKING APPLICATIONS (STTAs)

The category of smartphone applications (apps) I refer to as 'screen time tracking applications' (*STTA)* includes, primarily, the apps which come pre-loaded onto the most recent versions of the iOS (Apple) and Android (Google) operating systems: *Screen Time* and *Digital Wellbeing*, respectively. These applications are not identical to one another, nor are they the only STTAs available on the iOS and Android software platforms; however, of the 18 interviewees, 16 used one of these two applications (10 ST; 6 DW). Both the first- and third-party STTAs used by participants in this study shared similar reporting capacity for screen time metrics, and varying capacities to enact limits on screen time. In this section I describe the reporting and screen time-limitation functionalities of Apple's *Screen Time* application, the most-used STTA in the study. Figures courtesy of the author.

Screen Time was first released with iOS 12 in September of 2018. Any Apple iPhone running that or any operating system released subsequently has the service automatically loaded onto their device. The service is not automatically activated, but users are prompted to activate Screen Time during the reinitiation process after a new iOS release and installation. Once activated, users can access the service from within the device Settings application (see Fig. 1). Upon opening the service, users are presented with a screen displaying usage metrics from the current week (by default) shown as a bar graph, including a dashed line indicating the daily average screen time, and a percentage comparison to the previous week (see Fig. 2). The prompt to 'See All Activity' beneath this graph. On this same screen, beneath these metrics, are the options for automatically limiting screen time.

Tapping the 'See All Activity' prompt opens up a more detailed view of the user's active screen time. The same bar graph is located at the top of the screen, but now can be toggled between a weekly or daily view. The bars for each day are now split into color-coded categories of application (such as: Social, Productivity & Finance, Creativity). The timeframe of the graph can also be adjusted to show past weeks. Three graphs and breakdowns are on this screen: first, the most-used applications or application categories (the two can be toggled between) (see Fig. 3); second, the total number of pickups (a 'pickup' is registered each time the phone is unlocked) as well as a list of the most-opened apps immediately following a pickup (see Fig. 4); and third, the total number of notifications, followed by a breakdown by application (see Fig. 5). Each of three bar graphs denotes the percentage change from the previous week.

Returning to the previous screen, in iOS 14 the limitation options are the following: scheduling 'Downtime,' where only designated apps and notifications will be allowed; setting time limits for using certain apps; setting communication limits for certain contacts; setting apps which are exempt from global limitations on the device, and finally restrictions on content and privacy. With none of these services activated, *Screen Time* by default sends one notification at the beginning of each week that notifies the user of their average screen time from the previous week, and the percent change from the week before that.
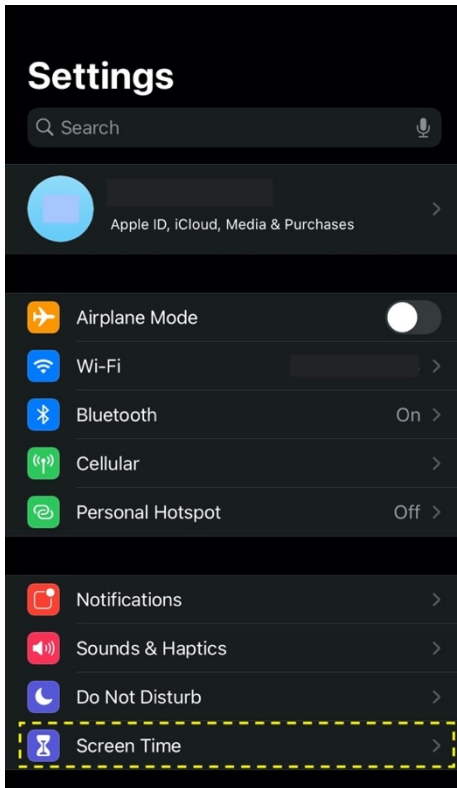
[Figure 1]
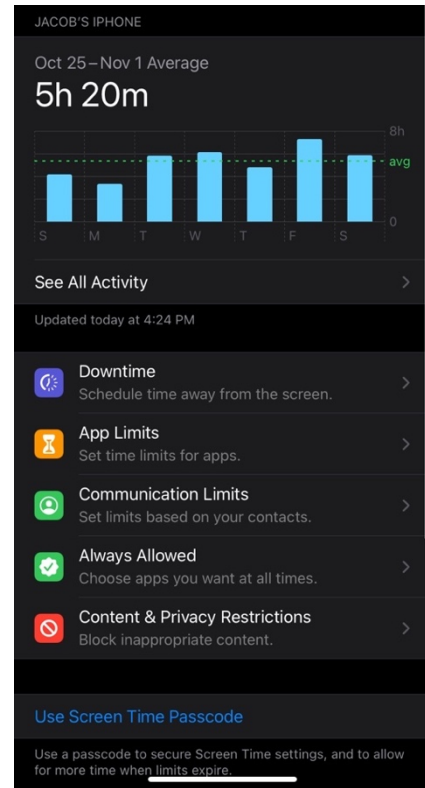
[Figure 2]
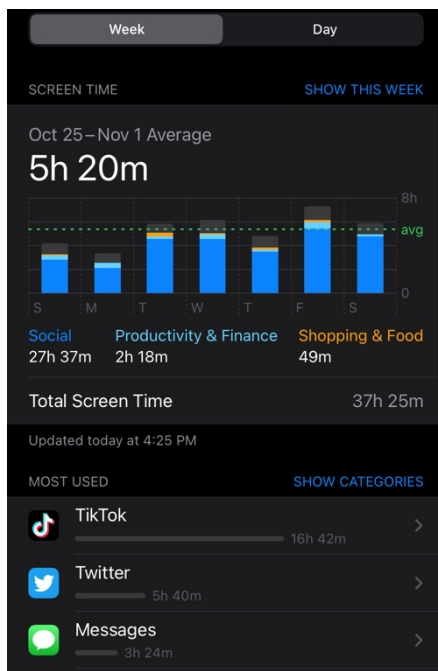
[Figure 3]

[Figure 4]

[Figure 5]

SURVEY QUESTIONS
This survey will ask you about your smartphone usage habits and practices related to your digital wellbeing. Before proceeding, you must read the Information for Survey Participants (link to Informed Consent Document). The survey will run from 6/15/20 to 8/1/20. Responses from eligible participants will be entered to win one of two $100 cash prizes. Multiple entries will disqualify participants from eligibility.

Eligibility
- o I am between the ages of 18-34
- o I currently reside in Boone, Fayette, Jefferson, Kenton or Warren County in the Commonwealth of Kentucky
- o I own and regularly use a smartphone
- o I have read the "Information for Survey Participants"

1. Smartphone Habits – please respond in complete sentences

    i. How many hours per day do you estimate that you are actively using your smartphone?
       - o less than 1 hour
       - o 1-3 hours
       - o 4-6 hours
       - o 7-9 hours
       - o 10 or more hours
    ii. During the pandemic, do you think you are using your smartphone more, less, or about the same as before? Why?
    iii. Which smartphone apps do you think you are using more during the pandemic? Which apps are you using less?

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    iv.   In what ways do you use your smartphone differently from your peers (friends, coworkers, classmates)? i.e. what is unique about your smartphone habits?

2. Smartphone Digital Wellbeing – please respond in complete sentences
    i.   When you think about healthy versus unhealthy smartphone habits, what are some behaviors that come to mind?
    ii.   How do you practice 'digital wellbeing' and healthy smartphone use in your own life, if at all?

3. Follow-up Interview - Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview about social distancing, screen time, and digital wellbeing? The follow-up interview will be approximately 60 minutes long, and is conducted remotely. If contacted, interview participants will receive $20 for their time.
    i.   Are you willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview?
        o Yes
        o No

If Yes:
4. Follow-up Interview Contact Information - Your personal information will only be used to contact you for a follow-up interview, and will play no part in the analysis of this survey or your eligibility to win the survey prizes. This information will also be used to contact you if you are selected as one of the $100 prize winners.
    i.   Name
    ii.   Age
    iii.   Gender and/or pronouns
    iv.   Race and/or ethnicity
    v.   Email address
    vi.   If you prefer to be reached by phone, please include your number here

If No:
4. Prizing Contact Information - Please include an email address or phone number where you can be reached if you are selected as one of the $100 prize winners.
    i.   Email address
    ii.   If you prefer to be reached by phone, please include your number here

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What does a typical weekday look like during the pandemic? Are weekends any different?
    a. What is your living situation currently? Are you at home or somewhere else, with others or alone, employed or unemployed?
    b. In which living spaces do you typically spend your time? What do you do in each room? Have you rearranged any spaces?
    c. What activities do you move around for? What do you leave your living space for? How often?

    d. Have you felt the effects of limited mobility and spatial restriction? Do you feel differently about the spaces you are in? How do you feel when you are leaving and re-entering your living space?

2. Without reviewing the metrics, how do you use your smartphone during a typical day?
    a. What apps do you use for social contact and communication? How has using these apps changed during the pandemic?
        i. video-calling?
    b. What apps do you use more for entertainment? How have your behaviors with these apps changed during the pandemic?
        i. For work, if applicable?
    c. What do you use your smartphone for vs. other screens (e.g. your desktop or laptop computer, or a television)?
    d. How do you respond to notifications on your device? Have you enabled or disabled any specifically?
        i. Work/personal split, if applicable?
    e. How often do you not have your device on your person? In what scenarios?
    f. Do you have a specific routine or app rotation that you've noticed? Have these habits changed during the pandemic?
    g. How do you use your smartphone while multitasking?
        i. Can you describe a scenario where your attention is split between your phone and the task at hand?
        ii. What are some activities on your phone that take up your whole attention?

3. Go ahead and open up your screen time metrics. Can you describe for me what you are looking at?
    a. What catches your attention about the metrics? Do they align with your expectations? Do any of the metrics or apps stand out to you?
    b. Pick an app that stands out to you, and describe why it stands out?
        i. Thinking about this week, or even earlier today, can you recall a specific moment using this application? What were the circumstances? What were you doing on the app?
            1. Do you remember when or why you started using the app in this way?
        ii. Open up the application now as you would normally, and describe your activity. What steps do you follow? Why? Do any particular sensations or feelings come up?
    c. Looking at your screen time metrics now, how do you think your device usage compares to your peers? Is there anything you think is unique about your metrics and/or habits (in terms of things you do or do not do? How do you think your peers' usage compares to those of people younger and older?
        i. Is there anything the metrics miss? Activities you use your phone for that don't show up (listening to music, other 'background' processes, etc.)
        ii. Would you be characterized correctly or mischaracterized?

d. Looking over the metrics, which of them stand out to you as related to the pandemic? The fact that your movement and mobility is limited, and that everyday routines have been disrupted and adjusted?
e. Did you look at your metrics at all this week between our first call?
    i.   If so, would you say that you adjusted your behaviors at all?
    ii. If not, was it a choice not to?
    iii. What kind of things do you think these tools would be helpful for?

4. How have you practiced self-care during the pandemic? What role has your device played in these practices? Physical, mental, spiritual, etc.
a. Do you think about your screen time and device usage in terms of your healthy and unhealthy use? How would you describe 'digital wellbeing'?
b. How would you describe 'digital wellbeing'?
    i.   What behaviors are conducive to wellness and health, and what behaviors are not? How do you distinguish between the two?
c. How does digital wellbeing fit into your own life?
    i.   Have you ever tried to manage your digital wellbeing, or screen time? How so?
    ii. Reviewing your metrics, do any apps seem more conducive to your wellness? Why? Which apps are not?
        1. How do you distinguish between the two?
    iii. When you engage in 'unhealthy' behaviors, how do you experience that 'unhealthiness'? What about the 'healthy' behaviors?
        1. How do you *feel?*
    iv. If you had to go one day with your device (i.e. broken), how would your day be affected? What would you do instead?

5. Was there anything I forgot to ask about? Anything else you would like to add? Anything you thought of while we were talking?

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Alias	Age	Gender	Race and/or ethnicity	County	Operating System
Amelia	31	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Bella	24	Woman	Biracial/Brown	Jefferson	Android
Cameron	19	Man	White/Mixed	Warren	Android
Charlotte	23	Woman	White	Warren	iPhone
Elise	30	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Emily	21	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Haley	33	Woman	Afro-Latino	Fayette	Android
Harrison	31	Man	White	Fayette	Android
Julia	25	Woman	White	Fayette	Android
Kayla	23	Woman	White	Warren*	Android
Lauren	28	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Marie	29	Woman	Latina/Caucasian	Fayette	iPhone
Martha	33	Woman	White	Jefferson	Android
Max	26	Man	White	Fayette	Android
Nicole	27	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Samantha	22	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Sierra	24	Woman	White	Fayette	iPhone
Victoria	19	Woman	White	Warren*	iPhone

not full-time resident

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