Content's Forms

The internet is awash with new popular forms, from TED Talks and podcasts to makeup tutorials and tweets. While some are in their heyday, like TikToks and Instagram reels, others are already historical, like lolcats and email chain letters. While some have been given names, like listicles and memes, others are simply recognizable, like reports of unlikely animal friendships and crudely drawn comics about mental health. Such content is now culturally central. It is also readily accessible for scholarly analysis. Today, the average academic, with either some coding skills or a research assistant, can scrape (or programmatically extract) thousands of reddit posts, tweets, WordPress blogs, or New York Times articles. With slightly more trouble—or funding— she can wrangle proprietary data from Facebook or Instagram.

How to approach this new mass of pop-cultural material? One answer comes by way of the humanities and its tradition of "theory." Literary and aesthetic theorists have long embraced methods commonly referred to as formalism, analyzing cultural artifacts by focusing on their forms: abstracted features that transcend mere information or meaning, such as genres, styles, tropes, narrative structures, and aesthetic categories, among others. In recent years, many have renewed their commitments to such methods in a series of movements called New Formalisms. While "activist formalists," as Marjorie Levinson has labeled them, have analyzed forms in relation to their social contexts, "normative formalists" have treated them in greater isolation—if also, ultimately, as producers of social effects.[1] More recently, Caroline Levine has made a prominent case for a conception of aesthetic and political forms as "nested inside one another . . . each capable of disturbing the other's organizing power."[2] Scholars engaged in computational literary criticism now channel the New Formalism by using machine learning tools to track genre, plot, and style through large literary corpora.

Meanwhile, new media theorists have often embraced analogous methods, if not the term (formalism). These scholars, especially those with strong ties to literary and aesthetic criticism, have focused their analyses not on "forms" of new media's semantic content, but rather on similarly abstracted features of their more technological, institutional, or behavior aspects: touchscreens, networked sociality, or temporal rhythms of digital consumption.

Both sets of scholars share a core conviction: forms reveal. We learn something important about a culture, or cultures, by examining the prominent shapes that its aesthetic or technological artifacts take. These formal structures might reflect economic, social, or political phenomena or subtly influence everyday thought and life.

In this essay, I develop a formalist approach to pop-cultural digital "content," grounded in aesthetic and media theoretical traditions. My approach analyzes large datasets of popular digital media through the lens of genre. Genre, as I conceive of it, is a concept that comes partly by way of literary theory and criticism—I adapt it from the computational criticism that is well suited to the analysis of large born-digital datasets. It also comes partly by way of new media theory, which orients genres in relation to their mediations (e.g., via Flash Player or PDF). The purpose of this approach is to answer a question that, broadly speaking, new media theorists already ask: how digital media have reshaped human thought and experience. To address this question is not to embrace technological determinism. It is only to presume that new media, like iPhones and the Internet, play some dynamic role in the processes through which people come to think, live, or express themselves as they do.

Two other motivations inspire this approach. The first is to advance literary studies and new media theory, both of which have, for reasons to be further discussed, not yet embraced the analysis of popular digital content en masse. The second is to draw literary studies into

participation with the growing interdiscipline of internet studies, in which new media theory is already involved. Already, internet studies is well populated with scholars, many of whom work in the field of communications, who study pop-cultural digital content by way of copious methods (see, for example, widely cited books by Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, and Henry Jenkins).3 Certain subfields have even focused on content's forms, if not often via computational methods. A prime example is Black digital studies, which currently leads the way when it comes to aesthetically attuned analyses of popular digital media (queer digital studies, too). I make no claims for the salvific idiosyncrasy of my approach. But I will suggest that, just as media theory already plays a contributing role in this broader intellectual ecosystem, so too can an aesthetic criticism focused on content's forms.

I develop this last point in three stages. First, I briefly discuss recent aesthetic criticism (analog and computational) and new media theory in relation to two phenomena: formalism and digital "content." For both, the former is a more or less prevalent critical method; the latter is not yet a favored object of analysis. Next, I draw together two notions of genre that emerge from each field, with particular debts to Lisa Gitelman and Rachael Scarborough King, among other critics. Theories of genre are legion. Already, rhetoric and genre studies have developed several such theories to deal with digital documents, considering elements like hyperlinks. I draw on the two that I do because the approaches that they entail—computational critical and media theoretical—are best suited to my questions and objects of analysis: considerations of new media's cultural effects, examined by way of their content.

Finally, I apply this approach to a sample case study. New media theorists have repeatedly argued that digital technologies contribute to a burgeoning condition of the human subject called "posthumanism," but these same theorists have identified this condition with

opposing descriptions. To test these opposing descriptions, I consider a dataset containing 18,908 posts from some of the most popular hubs on the blogging site Medium. Medium's name is à propos. But I choose it for more substantive reasons. In brief: it is a prominent vehicle for first-person, subjective expression that heavily favors posthuman themes (technology, the "human," mind, body). An analysis of two of Medium's key genres, which I call "Seven Habits" and "Gonzo Self-Help," suggests distinct ways in which the demands of content creation and consumption configure the idea of the subject as something to be discovered by way of repeated algorithmic experimentation. Just as the protestant ethic, by Max Weber's lights, produced and was reproduced by industrial capitalism, this notion of the subject both facilitates and is nurtured by platform capitalism.4 A formalist approach to content via theory and computation refines the posthuman concept.

Throughout, I mention relations between my approach and its closer cousins in internet studies, in fields such as communications, rhetoric, and natural language processing (NLP). In a conclusion, I more directly address aesthetic criticism's potential place in this work. Though we now see much discussion of a few groups of popular digital artifacts, including memes, fan creations, and games, there remains an uncharted expanse of culturally prominent digital entertainment, as-yet-untreated in academic scholarship. There remains a space, too, for the analysis of this entertainment from humanistic perspectives: macroscopic, theoretical, hermeneutic. Humanist theorists have done much in recent years to illuminate the technological, infrastructural, and material. I propose a return to the content.

I.   Content and Form in New Media Theory and Computational Criticism

In his recent essay on twenty-first century theory, "Golden Age of Analog," Alexander Galloway points out a central irony: during a period when the "digital"—or, for him, the "symbolic"—has been ascendant, theorists have fixated on the "analog" or "real."5 The structuralisms and poststructuralisms of the 1960s to the 1980s, which focused on "symbols," "texts," and "cultural logics," have given way to the "new materialisms" of the post-1990s, which have emphasized "matter," "affect," and "experience."6 This new approach is a "materialism," as Jane Bennett writes, but "'in the tradition of Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze more than Hegel-Marx-Adorno.'"7 Galloway tracks it across a broad range of disciplinary movements, from "Latourian methods in the social sciences [to] . . . how-we-read-now debates in literary criticism."8 I would phrase his point only slightly differently: at a moment when the world has been flooded with new symbolic forms, humanistic theory has focused—if not incorrectly, then perhaps too completely—on more physical, material, and institutional processes.

Over the past two decades, this tendency has found partial reflection in both literary criticism and new media theory's relatively limited interests in popular digital "content," in either one or both senses of the word: in the more recent sense, suggesting popular digital ephemera, from TikToks to YouTube videos (I have elsewhere written more extensively about this word's emerging, and vaguely pejorative, connotations), or in the older sense, connoting the semantic and symbolic substance that a new medium conveys.9 To summarize: first, literary critics have been hesitant to extend their classic methods of aesthetic analysis to more mainstream forms of digital media: content, in the term's first sense. When discussing digital culture, they have not steered clear of content in its second sense—they have centered their studies on institutions, technologies, and media "texts" in equal measure. But they have hewed closely to what Simone

Murray calls "the digital literary sphere": the processes and products of the web's emerging institutions of literary production and reception, from Amazon to #Twitterature.10 Computational critics working in this vein use machine learning tools to survey fan fiction, Goodreads reviews, and other self-consciously literary or literary-sociological phenomena,11 but they have generally not yet turned their attention to the larger expanses of pop-cultural digital "content."12 Nor have they done so, as one might expect, in a New Formalist vein, or in the loose tradition of what Bennett calls the "Marx-Hegel-Adorno" school of symbolically oriented cultural critique.

New media theorists, meanwhile, though treating a broad array of new digital media, have been more hesitant to focus on its content (in the word's second sense). Though more-or-less ambivalent about Marshall McLuhan's legacy, they have favored the "medium" over its "messages" and have focused on the internet's institutional, technological, and conventional features, more than on its symbolic freight.13 Their books, though not wholly unconcerned with digital "content" (often addressed in scattered cases), have centered on entities at levels of abstraction somewhat higher than the new media "text": networks, fiber-optic cables, platforms, interfaces, habits, etc. Exceptions have been made for privileged objects of analysis, such as e-literature and new media art.14 But these—with the exception of games—have tended not to qualify as "content" in the more pejorative, pop-cultural sense. (The most prominent counter example to this generalization can be found in Lev Manovich's recent work on Instagram, which is more akin to the project that I pursue.)15

The two subfields' relationships to form are more complex. Most relevant for my purposes is the fact that both have produced a specific strain of formalism that enables a particular critical task. Computational literary critics have developed approaches to textual form

that capture big data's scope. One prominent example can be found in Andrew Piper's recent Enumerations. 16 Here, Piper takes as his model sweeping literary histories, such as Erich Auerbach's Mimesis. 17 But whereas Auerbach examines only a small numbers of examples, Piper uses computational tools to scour larger literary corpora. Each of Enumerations' chapters uses a different machine learning model to trace a single aesthetic feature, like plot, fictionality, or characterization, through a large literary dataset. Other examples of this type of approach include, to name only a few, Ted Underwood's work on genre (to be discussed further, shortly), Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So's tracking of "stream of consciousness" style, or Katherine Elkins' recent research on plot.18 Such work differs from more analog New Formalist criticism, in the smaller amount of time spent theorizing forms' precise relationships to their cultural contexts, whether as effects, causes, or otherwise. This is understandable, however, given the demands of the computational processes as well as the necessity, until quite recently, of devoting much critical airtime to defending their use.

New media theorists do not embrace form as a key term and are less concerned with the concept than is literary studies. But strands of the subfield intertwined with literary and aesthetic criticism have developed something akin to a formalist method, enabling the analysis of a new medium's effects. I highlight one example, influenced partly by McLuhan's work. McLuhan, like many theorists, began his career as a literary critic, pursuing a graduate degree at Cambridge under the tutelage of I. A. Richards, a pioneer of the famously formalist "New Criticism." This experience, as many have noted, left its mark on his work, especially on his "aesthetic approach" to new media. In Understanding Media, McLuhan famously shifts focus from the "message" to the "medium."19 But his manner of analyzing the medium is loosely analogous to Richards's mode of reading texts.20 Just as Richards might read a poem for the ways its rhetorical devices

induce psychological effects (not a favored approach for later New Critics), McLuhan unpacks how abstract features of a medium—for example, its "linear," "repeatable," "hot," or "cold" quality—strike the human "sensorium," extending or amputating one type of sensation (visual, auditory, etc.). In this respect, he embraces what Levinson might call a "normative formalism," in which forms, rather than being engulfed by their contexts, generate "norms" of experience. The forms here, however, are forms of the medium rather than of the message (this may stretch the term beyond some readers' tolerance, but this should be less the case when we turn to a media-theoretical conception of "genre" in section two.) This aspect of McLuhan's work has made him vulnerable to charges of technological determinism.

It's worth noting, McLuhan's case aside, that the general approach does not require an assumption that media are sole or prime movers of human experience. Mark B. N. Hansen, for example, has developed a parallel, if distinct method, showing how isolated aspects of new media compel sensory or cognitive responses. In Feed-Forward, he argues that a particular aspect of many "twenty-first-century media," their "tendency . . . to operate at micro temporal scales without any necessary—let alone any direct—connection to human sense perception and conscious awareness," means that they "challenge us to construct a relationship with them" that seeks to access their undetectable sensory effects.21 James J. Hodge reasons similarly, and with reference to both McLuhan and Hansen, when he argues that digital media's opacity "dedramatizes" the historical event.22 We also encounter basic aspects of this approach in areas of new media theory beyond the purview of McLuhan's direct influence: for example, in the not uncommon tendency to single out abstracted features that pertain across multiple new media, like the touchscreen or source code, and then discuss their experiential or social effects.

Computational literary criticism, then, provides a formalism that specializes in the analysis of large corpora of "content" in the second sense: textual material. But it does not yet treat "content" in the first sense: popular digital ephemera. New media theory, meanwhile, supplies a formalism of sorts, well suited to answering questions about new digital media's relations to, and impacts on, history and culture. But this formalism often evades too much emphasis on "content" in both senses: popular digital media's textual matter. Neither of these formalisms, in other words, is currently a formalism of popular digital content. Together, however, they are well suited to an analysis of such content, at once capable of reckoning with the data's vast scope and attentive to its media-historical instantiations. To that end, I now intertwine these two formalist strands further through an appeal to their distinct approaches to genre.

II.   Two Approaches to Genre

Genre, generally defined, is a class or kind marked by a set of characteristics. These characteristics have sometimes been conceived of as textual and formal, as in much classic literary studies, and sometimes as social and conventional, as in much rhetoric and genre theory. Recently, King has supplied a useful, all-purpose definition of the term, encompassing both traditions: "a cluster of textual characteristics and conventions, which could include form but also cover a range of features such as topic, theme, medium, historical context, authorship, and intended or actual audience."23 For King, as for some others, including Levine, "genre" is not technically a "form." But for my purposes, the distinction is not so important: first, because much New Formalist criticism has centered on analyses of genre (which, as King argues, is often best suited to its aims), and second, because specific genres often include forms as aspects of their definitions, meaning that the analysis of one often entails the examination of the other.

Critics of popular culture have long been partial to the so-called "genre lens." It enables the type of analysis that the popular compels: contextualized, sociological, and en masse. We see this in some current scholarship on popular digital entertainment. While new media theorists, as I've argued, often eschew the close analysis of pop-cultural "content," communications and media studies scholars take more interest in this type of media text. Three subgroups in particular focus on digital genres: genre studies scholars, who publish on topics like how TED Talks frame science or how webpages are structured (the genres, as in this latter example, are often quite broad, including entitles like the "blog" or "TikTok," and the emphasis is often on pedagogical contexts); scholars working in subfields devoted to new media types, like meme or game studies; and critics working in subfields of area studies. Black digital studies, in particular, is formally attuned. We see this, for example, in Catherine Knight Steele's treatment of "the content and form of Black [digital] feminist work," from natural hair blogs to "Bye, Ashy" gifs, in Mark Anthony Neal's readings of digital adaptations of Black art, or in Raven Maragh-Lloyd's "textual analysis" of #PermitPatty and #Karen memes (or Apryl Williams's work in a similar vein).24

Almost none of this work, however, takes the precise approach to genre that I have in mind: at once theoretical, computational, and media critical. Of course, a selection does bring theoretical frameworks to bear on the computational analysis of digital datasets. To distinguish my own approach from this work, I could go into the finer distinctions between critical reading and content analysis, or between aesthetic-interpretive and consensus-based approaches to genre. Here, however, I will only allude to that more detailed discussion. The approach that I pursue is designed specifically to theorize a new medium's effects through the formal analysis of large samples of its content. It draws together conceptions of genre from new media theory and computational aesthetic criticism. The hybrid theory of genre that emerges is neither "new" (if a

new theory of genre were even possible) nor entirely dissimilar from all existing social scientific approaches. But it is particular in its critical emphases and associated methodologies.

Computational literary criticism offers a theory of genre that enables negotiations between single texts and vast corpora. King emphasizes this capacity in a recent article, applying a New Formalist frame to computational-critical genre analysis. Genre, for King, is a concept that encompasses qualities both conventional and textual. A genre is an "open category" (she quotes Ralph Cohen), collectively conceived. And though a given genre's shared definition may encompass extratextual elements like "medium," "authorship," or "intended audience," it will also tend to comprise many textual features, like "styles," "themes" and, most importantly, "forms" (which for her, as I've noted, are distinct).25 Like Cohen, moreover, King believes that genre is important, because its alterations index subtle historical shifts: "amorphous, even unprovable, cultural . . . trends."26 The problem, however, for genre analysis is that while single texts or genres are observable, the broader wholes to which they relate are often "imagined totalit[ies]." Computational criticism helps to solve this problem by orienting genres in larger corpora.

For my purposes, computational-critical approaches to genre have two main advantages. First, as King argues, they analyze genre at scale—and through the computation that is required, at a minimum, to collect, assemble, and curate large digital datasets. Second, they analyze genre in ways that draw closer to textual "content," without eliding extratextual elements. When computational models cluster, classify, or identify genres, they do so on the basis of what are called "features." Some researchers, like Underwood in Distant Horizons, train models to take only the simplest features into account: word and punctuation counts. Others, like Piper in Enumerations, hand-tailor features, training models to recognize character, rhyme scheme, and

the like. In both cases, however, the features are instantiated in the text: patterns of what's printed on the page. This may make it seem as if computational criticism presumes a purely textual conception of genre. And though it may tend in that direction, this is not entirely the case. Underwood argues as follows: just as, for genre theorists, the texts that we affiliate with genres like romances or webpages can be seen as mere "traces" of the conventions to which those labels refer, for computational critics, the textual features that models detect can be seen as mere "traces" of more capacious generic conventions.27 Models, in other words, even when trained on mere text, can heuristically instantiate more extratextual phenomena. In almost all cases, it is also worth noting, computational critics combine so-called "distant" analyses of genre with close reading, supplementing, correcting, and fleshing out its findings. New media theory, meanwhile, offers a theory of genre that enables the critical analysis of media in context (whether as cause, effect, or otherwise). This theory comes by way of Lisa Gitelman, whose 2014 Paper Knowledge introduces a media-theoretical approach to genre.28

New media theorists, as I've argued, have sometimes embraced a formalism of the medium itself, if not of the media-text. Gitelman's emphasis on genre does not buck that trend. She embraces a definition of genre more in line with the "conventions" model of rhetoric and genre studies than with the "textual features" model of more classic aesthetic theory: a "mode of recognition instantiated in discourse," rather than a set of "formal attributes" (PK 2). The specific genre that she chooses to analyze, moreover, is broadly construed, like many of those treated in genre theory (the genre of the document). Still, by focusing on the concept of genre, Gitelman pulls media theory one rung down the ladder of abstraction, from the medium toward that which it conveys. As she puts it, "No medium has a single, particular logic, which every genre does and is" (PK 9). Focusing on different pairings of medium and genre (the photo-copied document, the

web-based document), she "decenter[s] the media concept . . . to evolve a . . . richer media studies" (PK 6).

Gitelman's method, more specifically, is a media-theoretical formalism (though she might not use that term) that makes modest claims about relations between media and history. One McLuhan-ist strain of new media formalism, as I've argued, shows how new media inspire cognitive responses. But Gitelman chastens that type of work. In her introduction, she critiques McLuhan's conjecture that "print" produced "print culture" on the grounds that both concepts are egregiously abstract (there are many types of print). She distances herself, too, from this "'soft' determinism," rejecting both "mentalist" and "materialist" theories of history: those that either reach inside people's minds or attribute all processes to physical forces (PK 8). She proposes instead a more fine-grained style of media theory, one that is attentive to the hyper-specific sites at which media meet genres. In all its humility, however, this style remains a method of linking media to social and cultural history. Gitelman's chapters consider "how these . . . documents were themselves considered," and what that "might tell us about . . . the contexts of their circulation more generally" (PK 6). They show, she argues, how documents have been "integral to the ways people think as well as to the social order they inhabit"—that is, to both the "mental" and "material" (PK 4).

Computational criticism's concept of genre, then, traces textual and conventional categories across large corpora. Media theory's concept orients those categories in more fine-grained technological and cultural contexts. Together, these conceptions enable a media-theoretical approach to pop-cultural "content," produced in massive quantities. The approach best reveals its utility when applied to a sample case.

III.   *Medium's* Genres (Or, Being Human on Your Blog)

When it comes to essays on method, the proof is in the pudding—and there must be enough. Here, I sketch only one sample case study, showing how an exploration of two key genres of Medium post can supplement media-theoretical, post-humanist thought. Elsewhere, I apply this same method to a project on major genres of viral content, showing how they have contributed to a recent reshaping of ethical discourse. A case study from that project can be found in another essay, titled "Content-Era Ethics."[29] In my conclusion, I discuss work by other critics that operates roughly, if not precisely, in this vein—humanistic, computational, and/ or trained on content—and provide broader support for the general approach.

No topic has been more perennial for theory than the status of the subject. How, theorists have consistently asked, have new conditions transformed the classically liberal conception of the human individual as rational and free? The latest answer to this question comes by way of posthuman theory, which maintains that that conception has been supplanted by something newer or "post." Posthumanism has been a touchstone in new media theory, and many posthumanists make mediatheoretical arguments. Robert Pepperell, N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, and Mark B. N. Hansen, for example, all argue that "posthuman" subjectivities have been encouraged by, respectively, "comput[ing] [and] telecommunications," "robotics, prosthetics, machine intelligence, [and] nanotechnology"[30] information technologies "from ATMs to the Internet,"[31] "technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks,"[32] and "twenty-first century media" (though Hansen does not fully affiliate with the school of thought).[33] Similar arguments have been common in broader media-critical circles. Theorists such as Olga Goriunova and Scott Wark have made more localized arguments about the effects of Web 2.0 platforms on subjective experience, using the term "digital subject" to discuss the reduction of

users to data profiles, while media critics such as Jacqueline Wernimont and John Cheney-Lippold have discussed the contemporary subject's data-fication.34

Posthumanist theorists, however, have reached opposite conclusions regarding what the posthuman concept involves. Hayles, whose work has profoundly shaped the field, calls the posthuman the condition in which "information loses its body": the human being appears a mere set of "informational processes," making "embodiment [seem] not essential."35 Whereas liberal humanism saw the person as an entity whose mind could hold sway over its body (she gives the example of the anorexic), posthumanism exaggerates that notion, liberating the mind from the body entirely—if erroneously, in her view.36 Many others, however, call the "posthuman" precisely the opposite: the condition in which the mind's enmeshment with the bodily or material becomes clear, eroding boundaries between human and nonhuman animals or living and nonliving things. Wolfe, for example, defines his own posthuman concept in direct opposition to Hayles' as "[opposing] the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself."37 Sometimes, this opposition is presented as a mere matter of definitional debate—primers on posthumanism warn that the word has different meanings for different theorists. But it also represents a more substantive intellectual friction: distinct depictions of an emerging, and to some degree prevailing, spirit of the age.

Where might we turn—beyond the cases that these theorists already discuss—to test or extend their opposing ideas? One place to begin is on the blogging site Medium, whose content is especially relevant for two reasons. First, Medium, which was founded by Evan Williams in 2012 as a longform alternative to Twitter, is a particularly popular blogging site, where large numbers of people gather to create and consume recorded forms of personal expression. Today, with almost one hundred million active monthly readers (as reported by Medium itself) and a

"Domain Authority," or search optimization score, of ninety-five out of one hundred (as reported by Moz), the site has become one of the most visible and popular spaces for amateur and professional writing.38

Second, the site's most popular content foregrounds posthuman themes. To gather Medium data, I began by looking at the aggregator Smedian's lists of Medium's most-read publications during each of the three past full years: 2019, 2020, and 2021. I chose this method, in part, because Medium is most "scrapeable"—or conducive to having its data extracted—by publication-unit.39 Smedian's lists revealed that two publication categories dominate the site: first, publications about computational technology and business, largely for coders and tech entrepreneurs, like the consistently first-ranked The Startup or highly-ranked Toward Data Science; second, publications that feature first-person writing and are geared toward self-help, like the highly ranked Personal Growth, Better Humans, and Human Parts. The popular outlets' twin emphases on technology and the human person immediately called posthumanism to mind. I then chose to focus on the six top-ranked self-help-oriented publications—multiauthor content hubs called Personal Growth, Better Humans, Human Parts, Be Yourself and The Ascent—and found them to be still more concerned with posthuman themes. This was apparent from their titles, four of which included the word "human" or referenced the individual ("personal," "yourself"). It was suggested, too, by their emphases on self-help, which has traditionally engaged humanist and posthumanist concerns, like relations between mind and body, as in exercise or weight loss, and between rationality and emotion, as in the pursuit of mental health. Finally, the connections between posthumanism and Medium content were borne out by more detailed analysis. In order to look more closely at these top outlets, I scraped all of the stories that they published between 2019 and 2021 and compiled them into an archive of 18,908 posts,

including each post's title, subtitle, publication date, author, url, "clap"-count (Medium's version of likes), and full text, as far as possible.40 I then used analog and computational procedures to get a handle on the data, from word counts and topic modeling to hand-labeling and classifying genres. In a moment, I'll discuss each of these methods in more detail, unpacking their purposes and procedures. For now, I'll simply preview their most immediately relevant result: that topics and genres dealing with posthuman themes of humanity, personhood, mind, and body were prominent.

Self-help, of course, is neither a new phenomenon nor unique to Medium. Rather, it is a centuries-old style of infotainment, one whose most popular iterations have included Samuel Smiles's 1859 Self-Help and Dale Carnegie's 1936 How to Win Friends and Influence People. 41 Recently, the self-help industry has grown exponentially, expanding from a 2.48 billion42 to an 11.6 billion43 dollar sector between 2000 and 2019 and then still more sharply during COVID-19.44 Almost anyone with working WiFi knows that digital platforms, from YouTube to Instagram, are now flooded with self-help, concerning how to practice intermittent fasting or control intrusive thoughts. (Elsewhere, I have argued that the drive to inspire "prosumption" on such platforms has encouraged a preponderance of naval-gazing or "self"-oriented content.) Indeed, an initial perusal of the Medium posts I collected suggests that self-help content— at least in the context of these few publications—has been increasing in quantities, particularly since the advent of the COVID-19 (c. March 2020). Figure 1, which plots the quantities of posts produced by the six Medium publications under discussion over the time period from January 2019 through December 2021, does not reveal any consistent increase in production over the time period; it does, however, show a local spike in production during the first months of the COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020 to December 2020). Moreover, as we shall later see, two

popular self-help genres among these posts also increase in production during the early COVID-19 months, with one also consistently increasing after. More analysis would be required, however, to decisively link such trends to COVID-19. Relative claims aside, the general popularity of these six publications has been a testament to self-help's prominence on Medium in recent years.

To analyze the collected data, I apply the approach to genre that I have described, drawing partly on literary/aesthetic criticism and partly on media theory. To begin with the first prong of this approach, I use computational critical methods of generic analysis. When working with such methods, a few procedural questions are in order. One is how to strike a balance between "close" and "distant" reading. In a recent critique of computational-critical approaches to genre, Lauren Goodlad renders a sharp injunction: "DH computationalists cannot be both conventional data scientists when arguing for robust results and postmodern experimentalists when rejecting the mantle of statistics, empiricism, or positivism."45 Her point is not that digital humanists cannot infuse computational or social scientific inquiry with "humanist" hermeneutics. It is rather that they must be explicit about where and why they draw lines between social scientific rigor and more seemingly subjective interpretive practices. To be brief: I believe that close reading, in the classic, partly "subjective," humanistic vein, generates meaningful insights about cultural data that are inaccessible to either machine learning models or more collective social-scientific methods of "content analysis." There are crucial, and often subtle, or even buried, aspects of cultural material that computation cannot now capture and about which hand-coders can rarely be trained to agree. It would make little sense for humanist critics—even armed with highly sophisticated models—to collect databases of digital content, only to precisely reconstruct the existing approaches of STEM colleagues. Digital humanists

should, in my view, use computation to help them do better hermeneutics—not lesser social science. To that end, I place close reading and individual interpretation (my own) at the center of my analysis and use computational analysis both to fortify and to supplement that process. Most importantly, machine learning helps me to corroborate that observations about small samples of content might apply to larger quantities. I tend to favor more classically humanistic approaches to doing "interpretation" and STEM-ier ones to pursuing "representation."

I blend close reading and computation, more particularly, in the following manners: first, I use a mixture of both methods not only to collect and clean the data, but also to take an initial look at the content and get a sense of its basic contours prior to identifying genres. Close looks at the content begin to suggest—as discussed above—a preponderance of posthuman themes, regarding, for example, mind and body (cf. titles like "How I Completely Transformed My Body in One Year" and "Zen Stories For a Calm, Clear, and Open Mind").46 Computational surveys corroborate that same idea. As a first, exploratory measure, I perform simple word counts of the top posts' texts, collating nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech. These prominently concern the posthuman themes of personhood, freedom, mind, and body. Among the top twenty most frequently appearing nouns in the corpus, for example (Fig. 2), are "person," "mind," and "body" (particularly abundant in this grouping are also indexicals that refer to the self, eg., "I" and "self.")47 The fifty most frequently appearing adjectives (Fig. 3) include "human," "personal," "free," and "mental" (with "physical" only slightly farther down the list).48 I also run a topic model on the text, producing a list of fifty topics, which I then label with shorthand titles (Fig. 4).49 I find that—beyond an initial band of generic topics concerning growth, goals, success, and so on, and another group dealing, in meta-fashion, with Medium writers' professional concerns ("writing," social media," "art/writing," "business/digital")—there are also a number of topics

concerning posthuman themes, focusing on personal processes that are described as mental, physical, rational, or emotional (I've titled them "spiritual," "emotions," "sleep routine," "science/health," "mental health," "food/ diet," "mindfulness/meditation," "exercise/running," "physical health," "exercise/weights," "sex").

Next, I identified some prominent genres in the data. I opted to label genres manually. In a different iteration of the procedure, I might have supplemented this process computationally by using an unsupervised machine learning model, like K-means clustering, to sort the titles or texts into affiliated groups, but here I chose not to use that method.50 To label the genres, I first collected two samples of the data, representing two stratified groups: first, one thousand pieces of content that earned the highest numbers of claps (more than two thousand in all cases), and second, one thousand pieces of content that earned lower numbers of claps (randomly selected from the rest of the data). In both cases, I concluded, on the basis of close reading, that the post's titles could be sorted more or less cleanly into eight generic groups. These are listed below with my definitions:

1. Classic How-To: straightforward, instructive advice; how to do x, how to do y, or some other injunction to do x or y. Example titles include "10 Simple Rules For the Best life Ever" and "When You're Ready, this is How You Heal."51

2. Personal Narrative: personal narratives without an overtly instructive component (though they may have lessons to impart). Example titles include "I Lost My Best Friend of Two Decades to Trump" and "He Thought We'd Be 'Better Off.'"52

3. Opinion: a polemical or potentially controversial/against-the-grain opinion, only occasionally about self-help or self-care related topics. Example titles include "Bitcoin Hitting

100,000 Doesn't Matter. Many People Have Missed the Point" or "Yes, Black People Can Be Racist."53

4. Seven Habits: an enumeration or description of traits belonging to a certain kind of person, whom one might want or not want to be. Example titles include "99% of Successful Individuals Start Doing These 9 Things Early in Life" or "8 Habits of Quiet Winners."54

5. How I/Why I: a description of a personal accomplishment or variety of success, and how one achieved it or continues to achieve it: how I did x or why I do y. Example titles include "How I Stopped Sitting Around All Day Seething With Jealousy of My Peers" and "Why I Won't Teach My Child to Believe in God."55

6. Gonzo Self-Help: description of some extreme or particular self-help process that one has undergone, or will undergo, for a discrete period of time in an experimental mode (can be similar to the "Why I" genre), or description of lessons learned from experiencing some unusual or extreme event. Example titles include "I Did 2 Minute Plank Every Day for 42 Days—Here's What Happened" and "What I Learned From Living a Year in Airbnbs."56

7. Authority Says: a famous person, scientist, or study says that x is a good course of action or way of being. Example titles include "Warren Buffett's Recent Explanation of How Money Now Works Is the Most Important In History" and "The Single Most Important Lesson From Harvard's Longest Study On Happiness."57

8. Misc.: everything else. Some of this grab-bag of content might have been sorted into further microgenres.

Though all eight categories were represented in both groups of posts, their distributions differed.58 Pie chart one (Fig. 5) shows the relative quantities of the genres amongst the one

thousand most-clapped pieces of content; pie chart two (Fig. 6) shows their relative quantities amongst the one thousand randomly-selected, less-clapped pieces of content. Notably, a few genres are more significantly represented within the more popular group—the Seven Habits genre, for example, appears somewhat infrequently (only seventeen times) amongst the less-clapped posts but much more so (seventy-six times) amongst the most-clapped posts. (A hypothesis test, resampling the data one thousand times, confirms that the variances among these numbers are significant, with a probability of less than 0.05 of occurring by chance.)

Because I am primarily interested in the most popular content, I focus on the distribution of categories as represented by the one thousand most-clapped posts. (It's worth noting, however, that claps are only one measurement of popularity; read-counts might in some ways be more useful, but they are not available.) I note first, moreover, that two of the most abundant genres—personal narrative and opinion—are not selfhelp, strictly speaking. Both are highly popular in the digital sphere. As I've elsewhere argued, the digital "prosumption" economy encourages both personal narratives and "hot takes"; the first genre, in particular, is a mainstay of the blog ecosystem, which empowers everyday individuals to publish personal stories.59 Because I am primarily interested in selfhelp genres, however, I remove those two from the equation—along with the miscellaneous category—and focus on the remaining five: Classic How To, Seven Habits, How I/Why I, Gonzo Self-Help, and Authority Says. A third chart (Fig. 7) represents the relative quantities of the five self-help genres.

A few things are worth noting about this genre distribution. Though the Classic How-To genre is most abundant, for example, the other, more idiosyncratic approaches are, collectively, numerous. Unsurprisingly, given the blog format, self-help genres that involve personal narrative or first-person narration are prominent. This is a defining feature, for example, of two of the five

genres: How I/Why I and Gonzo Self-Help. Those two genres, it's also worth adding, are at times difficult to distinguish and could perhaps have been merged.60 This may explain, as we'll soon see, the somewhat lesser performance of a classifier trained to distinguish the "Gonzo" texts. But I preserved the category, despite its imperfect dividing lines, since it was marked by a number of clear and distinct cases.

Of these five genres, any could provide a significant object of cultural analysis. Here, I choose to focus on the two that seem to me most distinct: Seven Habits and Gonzo Self-Help. The Seven Habits genre, as I've noted, involves a description of the ways in which a certain type of person either appears or behaves, as in the post titled "50 Short Habits Super Productive People Practice Every Day."61 The Gonzo Self-Help genre involves a narrator's description of undergoing some extreme or unusual, often self-help- or self-care-oriented procedure, as in the post titled "How one Year of Microdosing Psilocybin Helped My Career, Relationships, and Happiness."62 Each of these genres, though abundant on Medium, should also be more broadly recognizable to the very online (or even somewhat online). Consider, for example, the abundance of "Seven Habits" style video titles on YouTube ("Ten Signs You Live With a Narcissist," "15 Signs of a Low Value Woman," and so on), or Buzzfeed's "Try Guy" series, in which four men test out different more or less extreme procedures and experiences (like wearing ladies underwear).63 Figure 8 plots the number of posts produced in each of these two genres by the six publications under discussion across the temporal window treated (January 2019 to December 2021); it plots these quantities both in absolute terms and relative to the total numbers of posts produced by the publications across all genres. Interestingly, while both genres saw both absolute and proportionate increases during early COVID-19 months, Seven Habits has since steadily increased in proportionate popularity, while Gonzo Self-Help has decreased.

In order to analyze these two genres, I rely, again, on a mixture of close and distant reading. To explain the results of my close analysis, I appeal repeatedly to the texts of two representative examples: Nick Wignall's "8 Traits of Emotionally Intelligent People" (Fig. 9), which unpacks the typical signs of emotional sophistication,64 and Eve Keiffenheim's "A Complete Guide to Doing a 10-Day Fasting Retreat" (Fig. 10), a (vaguely alarming) account of the author's experiences foregoing food.65 To fortify close analysis on a larger scale, I use the machine learning technique most commonly used in current computational-critical work on genre: classification. I train naïve Bayes classifiers to distinguish between samples of each genre and equal-sized samples of the other posts. In the service of this case study's brevity, I train the classifiers on a small collection of features, including frequencies of unigrams (single words), bigrams (two-word phrases), as well as combinations of the two (more extended versions of this study might also train the models on features like the topic model topics, products of sentiment analysis, or other custom-designed entities). I then examine the features that played the most prominent roles in cementing the classifiers' judgments—the features, that is, that the classifier found to be most distinctive of this particular genre relative to others.

For each genre, more specifically, I train two classifiers: one on headline texts for both samples and one on the full body texts for both samples. Typically, classifiers run best when trained on labeled samples of at least one thousand iterations of each class. My samples are somewhat smaller, at about six hundred posts each, but a process of tenfold cross-validation helps to combat the danger of overfitting. (The sample sizes, more particularly, were 585 each for the Seven Habits genre and 610 each for Gonzo Self-Help.66) The classifiers run on the Seven Habits headlines and full texts, compared to other headlines and full texts, were able to distinguish the genres with maximum accuracies of 83.06% (unigrams and bigrams) and 70.82%

(unigrams alone), respectively.67 The classifiers run on the Gonzo Self-Help headlines and texts were able to distinguish the genres with accuracies of 83.85% (unigrams and bigrams) and 68.69% (unigrams alone), respectively.68 All of these classifiers performed better than one would expect to occur by chance (I tested this null hypothesis, in each case, by randomly assigning labels to the data and checking that the classifier performed, in each case, with an accuracy of approximately 50%). But it's worth noting that the classifier performed least effectively at distinguishing the Gonzo Self-Help texts. This may have something to do with, as discussed, the Gonzo genre's similarity to the "Why I" genres and perhaps also to the larger category of personal-narrative based (if non-self help) content. Throughout what follows, I appeal to the results of these classifiers, or to the lists of features that they most heavily rely on to distinguish the genres that they do (see Figures 11–12 for tables of all results, listed for the unigram and bigram classifiers). Initially, however, it's worth noting that the classifiers' results corroborate the basic characterizations of these genres. It's unsurprising, for example, that the headlines of the Seven Habits posts are reliably distinguished by words or word-pairs like "signs (of)," "traits (of)," "habits (of)," "qualities," "people," and "successful people" and that their texts are distinguished by terms describing specific people, or types of people, and their qualities: "moses," "aware people," "strong people," "likable," "charisma," "narcissist," etc. It makes sense, too, that the Gonzo Self-Help headlines and texts are highly distinguished by groups of words dealing with lessons learned ("taught," "learned," "lessons," "teaching," "lessons learned," "learned from," "taught me") and illicit substances ("ayahuasca," "alcohol," "drink," "addiction," "without alcohol," etc.), respectively.

What do these two genres tell us about conceptions of the human? The theories of the person that they proffer do not conform exactly to either of those that have been labeled

posthuman. As we have seen, proponents of posthumanism argue that the classically liberal notion of the subject—in which the rational mind disciplines the emotions or body—develops in one of two extreme directions: the mind divorces from the body or merges with it. But the vision of mind/body relations that we encounter in these two genres is somewhat more immediately in line with the classically liberal model, preserving between the two entities a sense of competition and hierarchy: the mind fights an unending battle to control an unruly array of emotional and bodily forces. Close reading reveals this trend throughout both genres. Wignall's "8 Traits of Emotionally Intelligent People," for example, treats "emotions" as forces separate from the "I" but which the "I" must learn to manage and accept rather than expunge. As he puts it, "emotional intelligence is the ability to work with your emotions instead of fighting them or running away."69 Keiffenheim's "A Complete Guide to Doing a 10-Day Fasting Retreat" describes the body's need for food as compartmentalizable ("Remember," she reminds us, "your physical hunger vanishes as soon as your stomach and digestive system are empty") but also unavoidable ("The second and third day of fast is the toughest. . . Your body changes its metabolic processes. You might feel tired, weak, hungry, and moody"70). We encounter evidence of these conceptions, too, in some of the classifiers' results. Terms that particularly distinguish the Seven Habits titles, for example, bear the marks of this sort of description of Manichean struggle. They include separate indices of mind and body ("reason[s]," "emotional") as well as conflictual adjectives and verbs ("sabotaging," "resilient," "mistakes," "strong"). The terms that best distinguish the Seven Habits texts also include suggestions of struggle ("toughness," "enforcing," "helplessness," "unapologetic," "assertively," "strong people," "their mistakes," "mental toughness," and much talk of "boundaries").

But the genres do not simply reinforce traditional humanist dualisms. They also cast the human in terms slightly different from those attributed to either the classically liberal or the posthuman models described. One feature that both the Seven Habits and Gonzo genre have in common, for example, which is apparent in their very definitions, is that they describe processes that are experimental and epistemological rather than more predictably and actively transformative. These genres, that is to say, are more about discovering what one is through trial and error, rather than changing what one is. The Seven Habits genre, rhetorically speaking, does not instruct its readers on how to become, for example, "emotionally intelligent." Rather, it tells them how to recognize if they or the people they know are already this type of person. The genre, in this way, calls to mind the Puritan concept of being elect: one's good works did not earn one one's place in heaven; rather, they served as the signs that one was predestined for that happy fate. The texts of the articles, read closely, reinforce their emphases on epistemological scrutiny over active self-improvement. As Wignall writes, "If you listen carefully, most adults talk about difficult emotions in vague and overly abstract or metaphorical terms . . . emotionally intelligent people describe how they feel in plain, ordinary language."71 The classifier trained on the Seven Habits titles, too, reinforces the point, given that the top unigram that it uses to identify these titles is "signs" (four of the top bigrams also include the word). It's suggestive, too, that some of the terms that most reliably distinguish titles that do not belong to Seven Habits posts are those that we would normally expect to appear in self-help titles because they refer to transformation ("improved," "learned," "changed," and "taught"; also "taught me," "learned about," and "changed my").

Similarly, the Gonzo Self-Help genre does not assume that there is some predetermined recipe for self-improvement that its readers must now enact. Rather, it depicts self-improvement

as a highly individual process of experimental discovery—of learning through repeated trial and error what tactics might turn out to work on me specifically. Again, close analysis reinforces this basic description of the genre. In Keiffenheim's article on fasting, for example, the process is treated as individual and not wholly predictable—a new experiment each time that it is enacted. As she writes of her many fasts, "I made mistakes along the way and learned a lot during these six fasts. I read books . . . exchanged experiences with others, and got a better fast step by step."72 Keiffenheim, like many Gonzo Self-Help authors, describes the process she undergoes as discrete, short term, and repeatable in an open-ended journey of discovery. The classifier trained on the Gonzo titles, like that trained on the Seven Habits titles, strongly reinforces the genre's epistemological orientation. A plurality of the top words that it uses to distinguish the genre deals with the process of coming to know, including "taught," "lessons," and "learned," and so on.

These two genres, in sum, offer a vision of the human person not as a fixed entity, but as a mysterious object of perpetual, experimental discovery. Indeed, other content produced by the six Medium publications under discussion overtly state that philosophy. These include posts titled "Life by Experiment: What To Do When You Can't Figure Out the Big Questions in Your Life" and "To Make the Most of Life, Treat it as the Ultimate Laboratory."73 Why this particular conception? The second phase of my analysis provides one potential explanation. Thus far, I have examined the data through the lens of computational criticism's conception of genre, blending close and distant reading. Now, I supplement this analysis with the more media-theoretical approach: reading the two genres in the contexts of the media that convey them. In this case, one of those media is Medium.

Medium, like all platforms, is particular. On the site, creators of selfhelp respond to specific sets of parameters. Unlike most popular digital platforms, Medium does not include ads and instead generates profits from readers' monthly five-dollar subscriptions. Through the site's "Partner Program," writers are paid a fraction of the proceeds of those subscriptions, in direct proportion to the popularity not of their pages but of their individual posts. The site's methods for calculating this popularity are mysterious and have not been fully publicized. But they are confirmed to be linked to the numbers of claps that posts receive, considered in relation to the frequency with which the "clapping" users award that accolade. In other words, to earn profits, Medium writers must consistently produce pieces of content that, on partially unknown and algorithmically orchestrated grounds, are deemed popular. They must, in this respect, arguably be even more hypersensitive to audience demand than creators on other platforms. While a YouTube influencer, for example, can strike up a longstanding deal with a sponsor or advertiser based on the popularity of her entire channel, a Medium creator must continue to consistently produce popular posts to continue to earn proceeds on the platform. This information can help us understand the ways in which the medium that is Medium might shape, or interact with, the site's self-help content.

Indeed, closely examined, the conception of the human favored by Medium writers mirrors their experience creating on the site. To flourish, these writers must repeatedly produce pieces that earn black-boxed accolades; they must consistently perform but must do so in accordance with metrics that are either shifting or opaque. This is, by necessity, a process of perpetual and experimental trial and error. Write something about yourself—see if it sticks. If it does, repeat. If it doesn't, try something new. It is also more or less precisely how these writers, as we have seen, so often describe the process of existing, and progressing, as a human being: a

process of the discovery, through trial and error, of a mysterious and ever-shifting ontology. This apparently meta-aspect of Medium's self-help writing resonates with the platform's content more broadly. As we have seen, Medium posts frequently concern the very process of writing for Medium itself—and, in many cases, advice about how to do it effectively. We saw this reflected, for example, in the results of the topic model, which turned up a preponderance of topics about Medium, writing, and content creation and monetization.

Of course, Medium is not the only platform that forces its content creators to engage in experimental guesswork concerning which types of content might be favored by obscure, algorithmic processes. This, in fact, is a feature of content creation on most popular platforms, from Facebook to YouTube. Social scientists have even coined a term— "algorithmic gossip"— for the practice through which content creators share personal know-how concerning how they have come to believe a given site's algorithm operates. But the process, as I have argued, is exaggerated on Medium, where content creators earn their profits exactly and exclusively in direct proportion to the calculated popularity of each post. It makes sense, then, that these two genres—Seven Habits and Gonzo Self-Help—play such a dominant role in some of these platforms most-read publications but also do crop up across other digital platforms. This brief sample case reinforces the broader methodological point: that formalist readings of popular content—here, through attention to genre and with some help from computation—can supplement media theoretical thought. In this case, they refine a posthuman concept.

IV.   Conclusion

For about two decades now, new media theorists have played a productive role in the growing interdiscipline that is internet studies. Their theoretical conjectures concerning the ways

in which new media shape experience have provided broad frameworks through which to pursue, or backdrops against which to comprehend, more social scientific or empirical projects. The position of this essay has been, most generally, that aesthetic and literary theory might join the conversation in parallel fashion. The types of philosophical arguments that media theorists make concerning interactions between media technologies and human psyches can be fortified through increased attention to popular content—and more particularly from a formalist perspective, combining "close" and "distant" reading.

Of course, such work is not wholly new. Already, scattered handfuls of humanists have begun to apply the tools of theoretical and aesthetic analysis to popular digital media beyond the digital literary sphere. Examples include Damon Young's recent "Ironies of Web 2.0,"[74] Lev Manovich's Instagram and the Contemporary Image,[75] and two essays appearing in this journal: Sara Fernandes and Lydia Saleh Rafail's "Perpetual Becoming, Deferred Arrival" (on influencers through the lens of the bildungsroman) and Maria Antoniak, Long Le-Khac, and Richard Jean So's contribution to this special issue (on #BLM tweets through the lens of Raymond Williams).[76] Nor, as I have already discussed, is this type of work entirely unique. In different ways, social and computer scientists now examine digital genres and aesthetic forms. Communications scholars and sociologists perform content analyses of makeup tutorials, memes, and gifs; computational scientists in NLP develop models to track generic digital constructs like the "microaggression" or "toxic" speech.[77] The role of the humanist in this process need not be—as is sometimes envisioned—to critique or instruct. It might be, more modestly, to join, supplement, and collaborate.

With the emergence of web 2.0 in the early 2000s came a litany of critical theories concerning the "newness" of "new media." Early on, distinctions were drawn: whereas "mass

media" conveyed cohesive "master narratives," one to many from a central source, new "niche media" conveyed fragmented missives, many to many in networked arrays. Theoretical approaches suited those conditions, as described. New media theorists did not focus on decoding the digital realm's dominant "symbols," "signs," and "cultural logics" as prior generations of theorists might. They focused instead on the world wide web's underlying structures: software, source code, digital protocols. A decade or so later, the web's more mixed nature is abundantly clear: traditional mass media outlets, like major newspapers and record labels, still dominate the production of much widely shared content on platforms like YouTube and Twitter (in the form, e.g., of op-eds or movie trailers). Structures that pertain across platforms, from the dominance of the "like" button to the tyranny of "comments" and "shares," encourage certain types of homogeny. Even in a world of "niche" media, there are common, influential "messages." Theory has much to uncover by returning—however partially—to the content.

NOTES

1 Marjorie Levinson, "What is New Formalism?," PMLA 122, no. 2 (2007): 559.

2 Caroline Levine, Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press 2015), 16–17.

3 Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2006); and Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation: Understanding New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

4 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: Routledge 2001).

5 Alexander R. Galloway, "Golden Age of Analog," Critical Inquiry 48, no. 2 (2022): 211–32. In the same issue, Matthew Handelman calls for a return in media theory to attention to the "meaning[s]" conveyed by technical forms, in the model of the Frankfurt school. Handelman, "Artificial Antisemitism: Critical Theory in the Age of Datafication," Critical Inquiry 48, no. 2 (2022): 286–312.

6 Galloway, "Golden Age," 211–13.

7 Galloway, "Golden Age," 218.

8 Galloway, "Golden Age," 231.

9 Tess McNulty, "Content-Era Ethics," Post45, Issue 7, April 21, 2021, https://post45. org/2021/04/content-era-ethics/.

10 Some expansions are here in order: in a first, early 2000s phase—call it 1.0—literary critics interested in the internet often channeled media theory's techno-futurist and avant-garde sensibilities, addressing niche works of digital art (like e-literature or hypertext poetry). See, for example, Jessica Pressman, Digital Modernism: Making it New in New Media (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014); and Rita Raley, Tactical Media (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2009). More recently, in a newer phase—call it 2.0—such critics focus on more mainstream forms of digital literature (like Instagram poetry and #twitterature) and, even more insistently, on internet-era institutions of literary production (like Amazon or digital literary festivals). See, for example, Mark McGurl, Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon (New York: Verso, 2021); and Simone Murray, The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2018).

11 See, for example, a recent special issue of Post45 and Journal of Cultural Analytics, which performs the unprecedented (at the time) task of collecting together essays that apply computational or digital humanities methods to contemporary cultural corpora, in a literary/art-critical vein. Most essays in the collection (my own at least partially included) focus on contemporary literary sociology or the "digital literary sphere" ("Issue 7: Post45 x Journal of Cultural Analytics," ed. Richard Jean So Post45, April 21, 2002, https://post45. org/sections/issue/p45-ca/).

12 See the conclusion of this essay for citations of four exceptions to this rule.

13 Some might object to this generalization—even as a basic heuristic, if by no means uniform or fine-grained description. For summations of the field that share it, see W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen's Critical Terms for Media Studies and John Durham Peters' The Marvelous Clouds. Mitchell and Hansen define media theory explicitly in the introduction to the volume and in basically McLuhanist terms. Peters lovingly pokes fun at McLuhan (as many such theorists might) but claims his phrase as manifesto: "Ubiquitous computing invites us to turn from the urgency of the message to the nature of media" (8). His turn to clouds and oceans as media represents a still more radical turn away from media "content" (even if he is correct to note that clouds too may have "meanings"); that turn finds some reflection, as well, in Nicole Starosielski's well-known treatment of fiberoptic cables. See Critical Terms for Media Studies, ed. Mitchell and Hansen (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010); Peters, The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2015); and Starosielski, The Undersea Network (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2015).

14 Lev Manovich, "Instagram and the Contemporary Image," manovich.net, accessed on March 5, 2023, http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/instagram-and-contemporary-image; Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, "Platform Studies: Frequently Questioned Answers," in Proceedings of the Digital Arts and Culture Conference, UC Irvine, December 12–15, 2009, https:// escholarship.org/uc/item/01r0k9br; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017); Chun, Programmed Visions: Software and Memory (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013); Chun, Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008). The reality, of course, is more complex, and new media theorists have varied in their relations to the media's content. Roughly, they have fallen into three overlapping groups. First, there are those who have focused on objects so remote from digital user experience, like fiber-optic cables or clouds, that content is really off the table (Starosielski, The Undersea Network; Peters, The Marvelous Clouds). Second, there are those who have analyzed new media's content but only in art-critical readings of avant-garde digital art, itself a sort of new media theory in action (and not really "content," in any case, in the more pejorative sense). This approach channels McLuhan's conviction that experimental art is "prophetic" about new media's effects (see Hansen's work, e.g. New Philosophy For New Media and Feed-Forward). A third group has focused on aspects of new media somewhat closer to user experience and so have referenced—if less often closely "read"—cases of popular digital content (as in Galloway's Interface Effect or Wendy Chun's recent trilogy). There are two exceptions to this rule. First, Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort's "platform studies," though it centers on hardware and software, makes a point of selecting, as one desirable topic for analysis, how hard and software may shape semantic "content"; I have already noted in text the exception that is Lev Manovich's recent work. By and large, however, the generalization holds water: new media theorists have tended—and almost by subdisciplinary definition—to focus on objects of analysis at levels of abstraction somewhat higher than the new media "text": networks, platforms, formats, interfaces, habits. And that, in this way, they have suggested of the "content" what the

word has come to imply: that it's the stuff that matters less. As Peters summarizes, "'Content,' whatever that means, remains important and there is plenty of it . . . but the innovations of digital media have been more diffuse in . . . the structures of everyday life and the organization of power" (Peters, Clouds, 12). See Hansen, Feed-Forward: On The Future of Twenty-First Century Media (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2015), 5, 2; Hansen, New Philosophy For New Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); and Galloway, The Interface Effect (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

15 Manovich, "Instagram and the Contemporary Image."

16 Andrew Piper, Enumerations: Data and Literary Study (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2018).

17 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

18 Ted Underwood, Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2019); Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So, "Turbulent Flow: A Computational Model of World Literature," Modern Language Quarterly 77, no 3 (2016): 345–67; Katherine Elkins, The Shape of Stories: Sentiment Analysis for Narrative (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2022).

19 Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

20 I.A. Richards, The Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge, 2001); Richards, Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment (New York: Harper Perennial, 1956).

21 Hansen, Feed-Forward, 37–38.

22 James J. Hodge, "Digital Psycho: Dedramatizing the Historical Event," Critical Inquiry 43, no. 4 (2017): 839–60.

23 Rachael Scarborough King, "The Scale of Genre," New Literary History 52, no. 2 (2021): 262.

24 Catherine Knight Steele, Digital Black Feminism (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 4; Mark Anthony Neal, Black Ephemera: The Crisis and Challenge of the Musical Archive (New York: NYU Press, 2022); Raven Maragh-Lloyd, "From Permit Patty to Karen: Black Online Humor as Play and Resistance" American Journal of Play 13, no. 2–3 (2021): 253–77; and Apryl Williams, "Black Memes Matter: #LivingWhileBlack With Becky and Karen" Social Media + Society 6, no. 4 (2020).

25 King, "Scale," 263.

26 King, "Scale," 265.

27 Underwood, Distant Horizons, 44.

28 Lisa Gitelman, Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2014) (hereafter cited as PK).

29 McNulty, "Content-Era Ethics."

30 Robert Pepperell, The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), 1.

31 N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 19.

32 Cary Wolfe, What Is Posthumanism? (Minnesota: Univ. of Minnestota Press, 2009), xv.

33 Hansen, Feed-Forward, 5, 2.

34 Olga Gorniuva, "The Digital Subject: People as Data as Persons," Theory, Culture, and Society 36 no. 6 (2019): 125–45; Scott Wark, "The Subject of Circulation: On the Digital Subject's Technical Individuations," Subjectivity 12, no. 1 (2019): 65–81; Jacqueline Wernimont, Numbered Lives: Life and Death in Quantum Media (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); and John Cheney-Lippold, We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of our Digital Selves (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

35 Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 4.

36 Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 5.

37 Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? Xv

38 Casey Botticello, "7 Amazing Medium Platform Statistics," Medium, https://medium. com/blogging-guide/7-amazing-medium-platform-statistics-688986c518bd; "Medium.com SEO analysis & statistics," Moz.com, accessed December 6, 2022, https://moz.com/domainanalysis/medium.com.

39 https://toppubs.smedian.com/.

40 I scraped this data directly from the front end of the website rather than using the API, since the API does not enable scraping of posts' full texts. For all 18,908 articles, I was able to scrape all of the available metadata, including headline and subtitle text. In a few cases, I was not able to scrape the entirety of the full text of the article, either because the link had gone dead (in fewer cases) or due to idiosyncrasies of the structure of the page (in more cases). For the purposes of performing my analysis, I chose not to remove the posts for which no or only-partial text could be scraped (~650, by my estimate) though in some cases this choice was easier to make. For the purposes of hand-labeling the genres, for example, the choice to keep the partial texts was an easy one. Because my aim was to discover the proportion of different genres (e.g., X percent genre 1, Y percent genre 2), it was clearly better to include the posts with no or only partially scraped fulltexts, so as not to skew the proportions. When it came to applying genre labels to these posts, I could simply work with the headline text or—better yet—look to the full texts online, either through the internet archive (for deadlinks) or on Medium.com. For the purposes of doing more cumulative analysis (e.g., noun/adjective counts, topic modeling, or classifying), the choice was a more difficult one. Because my aim, in these cases, was largely to make claims of magnitude (e.g., noun x is very common in the corpus) rather than claims of proportion per document (e.g., noun x makes up, on average, y percent of the composition of the texts), I chose to use the partial texts. That said, I also ran alternate versions of these analyses on a smaller set of the documents (18,258), including only full-texts (partial texts could be weeded out largely by length). The results of these experiments, though slightly different, did not alter any of my broader conclusions and can be provided on request. (Some are also indicated in endnotes). For this reason, however, results regarding full-post text should be read on the assumption that some text is missing from the dataset (determining whether this missing text constitutes a random sample is trickier); no results are drawn about the full-texts, in any case, that cannot be validated/reinforced by close-reading or headline text analysis (see pg. 18 for discussion of my use of computation vs close reading).

41 Samuel Smiles, Self-Help (London: John Murray, 1859); Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936).

42 Micki McGee, Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 11.

43 "$11 Billion Self-Help Market is Growing, But Has Its Critics," Webwire, October 15, 2019, https://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?aId=248507.

44 Audrey Latimer, "Self-Care to Become New Normal Following Coronavirus Pandemic," Global Cosmetic Industry, April 8, 2020.

45 Lauren M. E. Goodlad, "A Study of Distant Reading: Genre and the Longue Durée in the Age of AI," Modern Language Quarterly 81, no 4 (2020): 513.

46 Matthew Boutte, "How I Completely Transformed My Body in One Year," Medium, January 14, 2020, https://betterhumans.pub/how-i-completely-transformed-my-body-in-oneyear-b17a8bbca8bd; Niklas Göke, "Zen Stories for Calm, Clear & Open Mind," Medium, January 10, 2019, https://medium.com/personal-growth/zen-stories-for-a-calm-clear-openmind-28e84c523022.

47 I removed two entries from this list, "s" and "t," which represented letters incorrectly separated out from contractions by the tokenizer. Running this same analysis on the corpus that excludes he partial texts produces similar results—the same nouns appear in the top-twenty list (see note 38).

48 Again, I removed some stray contraction parts (see above note). Running this same analysis on the corpus that excludes the partial texts produces similar results—the same adjectives appear in the top-fifty list (see note 38).

49 I used LDA topic modeling with MALLET from the command line, running it on the 18,908 documents with 23,685,066 words. I preferred to select the number of topics manually rather than use updated versions of topic modeling that determine these parameters, and tested ranges of numbers of topics between

50 and 250 (I also used an optimization interval of 20 and the standard stop word list). Most of the emerging list of topics, though different in length, were similar in nature in this sense: the most highly weighted topics, appearing throughout the largest quotient of the corpus's documents, were general and vague in nature, largely appearing to refer to concepts like growth, life, happiness, and so on—indeed, this made sense as a consistent result, given self-help's homogenous tendency to refer to themes like life satisfaction, goal-setting, and change over time. After that, a band of second-most weighted topics (usually with weights between 0.1 and 0.2) were more specific in nature, appearing, fairly straightforwardly, to refer to concepts like exercise, office culture, sex, the pandemic, and so on. A basic homogeny between the lists (which tended to expand the size of, but not radically alter the conceptual composition of, each of these bands of results) made the selection between them seem largely (and reassuringly) immaterial, and given the generically homogenous nature of the corpus, the dominant weights of a small sample of topics was not (as it might be for other corpora) cause for concern. When the topic model is run on the corpus which excludes the partial/ incomplete texts (see note 38), it produces a very similar array of fifty topics (optimization interval 20); the list can be provided on request. By now there is enough of a precedent for the use of topic modeling work in the digital humanities that a basic introduction to the method should no longer be necessary. For a prior use of the method that includes that introduction, see Andrew Goldstone and Underwood, "The Quiet Transformations of Literary Studies: What Thirteen Thousand Scholars Could Tell Us," New Literary History 45, no. 3 (2014): 359–384. For more discussion see Underwood, "Topic Modeling Made Just Simple Enough," The Stone and the Shell, April 7, 2012. 50 I chose not to do this, first, because of the limited length of this case study and, second, because preliminary versions of clustering did not, in my view, yield as meaningful results as hand-labeling.

51 John P. Weiss, "10 Simple Rules for the Best Life Ever," Medium, May 24, 2019, https:// medium.com/personal-growth/10-simple-rules-for-the-best-life-ever-8e704365f6ff; Briana West, "When You're Ready This Is How You Heal," Medium, September, 3, 2019, https://humanparts.medium.com/when-youre-ready-this-is-how-you-heal-89fa2101f549. The second link has since been deleted by the author in favor of an updated form with a new link, but it was posted here at the time the article was scraped from the web.

52 Felicia C. Sullivan, "I Lost My Best Friend of Two Decades to Trump," Medium, September 4, 2020, https://humanparts.medium.com/i-lost-my-best-friend-of-two-decades-to-trumpec883b12bdea; Jennifer B. Calder, "He Thought We'd Be Better Off," Medium, September 28, 2020, https://humanparts.medium.com/the-price-or-cost-of-love-d766a7387dce.

53 Tim Denning, "Bitcoin Hitting 100,000 Doesn't Matter: Many People Have Missed the Point," Medium, February 26, 2021, https://medium.com/the-ascent/bitcoin-hitting100–000-doesnt-matter-many-people-have-missed-the-point-b6360bed7b06; Kristine Hadeed, "Yes, Black People Can Be Racist," Medium, July 6, 2020, https://humanparts.medium.com/yes-blackpeople-can-be-racist-b74dfb1ba6f2.

54 Nicolas Cole, "99 percent of Successful Individuals Start Doing These 9 Things Early in Life," Medium, February 2, 2020, https://medium.com/the-ascent/99-of-successful-individualsstarted-doing-these-9-things-early-in-life-b23acb2e7e74; Tim Denning, "8 Habits of Quiet Winners," Medium, October 11, 2020, https://timdenning.com/8-habits-of-quiet-winners/.

55 Mandy Stadtmiller, "How I Stopped Sitting Around All Day Seething With Jealousy of My Peers," April 8, 2019, https://humanparts.medium.com/why-is-everyone-succeeding-butme-29186494166b; Mateo Askaripor, "Why I Won't Teach My Child To Believe in God," Medium, February 4, 2019, https://humanparts.medium.com/why-i-wont-teach-my-child-to-believein-god-786e2e0d0816.

56 Darshak Rana, "I Did 2-Minute Plank Every Day for 42 Days—Here's What Happened," Medium, December 6, 2021, https://betterhumans.pub/what-happens-if-you-do-a-2-minute-plankeveryday-6688767fad69; Felicia G. Sullivan, "What I Learned From Living a Year in Airbnbs," Medium, September 19, 2020, https://humanparts.medium.com/what-i-learned-from-living-a-yearin-airbnbs-689401ebe08b.

57 Tim Denning, "Warren Buffett's Recent Explanation of How Money Now Works is The Most Important in History," Medium, August 24, 2020, https://medium.com/the-ascent/warrenbuffetts-recent-explanation-of-how-money-now-works-is-the-most-important-in-history-2e45461a5969; JKL, "The Single Most Important Lesson From Harvard's Longest Study on Happiness," Medium, August 24, 2020, https://medium.com/the-ascent/the-single-most-important-lesson-fromharvards-longest-study-on-happiness-1a9d77228adb.

58 These precise quantities are clearly a matter of interpretation, and I am open about the fact that the labeling of genres is entirely the product of my own hermeneutic practice. Precise quantities aside, however, it seems more clearly defensible that all of these genres are textually "present" in the dataset and likely in something akin to these relative quantities—this claim is defensible on the basis of the same type of evidence that is always supplied for hermeneutic/literary-interpretive claims: the evidence of the text itself.

59 McNulty, "Content-Era Ethics."

60 In the labeling process, it could be particularly tricky to distinguish between "Why I" posts, in the vein of "Why I'm going on a juice cleanse," and "Gonzo" posts like "what I learned from my juice cleanse."

61 Thomas Oppong, "50 Short Habits Super Productive People Practice Every Day," Medium, February 28, 2022, https://medium.com/personal-growth/50-short-habits-to-accelerateyour-productivity-in-less-than-a-week-9a1d0dedd27.

62 Janet L. Chang, "How One Year of Microdosing Psilocybin Helped My Career, Relationships, and Happiness," Better Humans, September 21, 2017, https://betterhumans.pub/ how-one-year-of-microdosing-helped-my-career-relationships-and-happiness-715dbccdfae4.

63 Psychology Element, "Ten Signs You Live With a Narcissist," YouTube video, 10:38, June 28, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkUG4Og1aB4; Alux.com, "15 Signs of a Low Value Woman," YouTube video, 22:14, August 7, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=JTDismMBKdQ.

64 Nick Wignall, "8 Traits of Emotionally Intelligent People," Medium, October 22, 2022, https://nickwignall.medium.com/8-traits-of-emotionally-intelligent-people-a8d25584c6d7.

65 Eva Keiffenheim, "A Complete Guide to Doing a 10-day Fasting Retreat," Better Humans, January 4, 2021, https://betterhumans.pub/therapeutic-fasting-how-to-buchinger-fastinga-complete-step-by-step-guide-cfdcd6818d15.

66 I also ran these two models for the full texts on smaller samples, from which the posts with only partial texts were excluded. In this case, I ran the classifier for Gonzo Self Help on the full texts of samples of 591 Gonzo Self Help and 591 non-Gonzo self-help (instead of 610 each); I ran the classifier for Seven Habits on the full texts of samples of 562 Seven Habits and 562 non-Seven Habits (instead of 585 each). Again, the results were not substantially different (near identical, in fact) and can be provided on request.

67 Maximum performance results for the Seven Habits classifiers were as follows: for just the title text, 83.06% for unigrams, 78.81% for bigrams, 83.06% for both unigrams and bigrams; For the full text, 70.82% for unigrams, 68.9% for bigrams, 70.5% for both unigrams and bigrams.

68 Maximum performance results for the Gonzo Self-Help classifiers were as follows: for just the title text, 83.1% for unigrams, 81.56% for bigrams, 83.85% for both unigrams and bigrams; For the full text, 68.69% for unigrams, 68.44% for bigrams, and 68.20% for unigrams and bigrams.

69 Wignall, "8 Traits."

70 Keiffenheim, "Complete Guide."

71 Wignall, "8 Traits."

72 Keiffenheim, "Complete Guide."

73 René Rosendahl, "Life by Experiment: What To Do When You Can't Figure Out the Big Questions in Your Life," Medium, June 18, 2019, https://medium.com/the-ascent/ life-by-experiment-c0d13cd2b5a0; Clément Bourcart, "To Make the Most of Life, Treat It as the Ultimate Laboratory," Medium, July 20, 2021, https://medium.com/the-ascent/ to-make-the-most-of-life-treat-it-as-the-ultimate-laboratory-7b08be461a10.

74 Damon R. Young, "Ironies of Web 2.0," Post45 no. 2, May, 2019, https://post45. org/2019/05/ironies-of-web-2–0/.

75 Manovich, Instagram.

76 Sara Fernandes and Lydia Saleh Rofail, "Perpetual Becoming, Deferred Arrival: The Author-Hero in the Age of Digital Celebrity" New Literary History 53, no. 2 (2022): 217–40; Maria Antoniak, Long Le-Khac, and Richard Jean So, "#BLM Insurgent Discourse, White Structures of Feeling and the Fate of the 2020 'Racial Awakening,'" New Literary History 53, no.4/ 54, no.1 (2022/2023).

77 See, e.g., Luke Breitfeller, Emily Ahn, David Jurgens, Yulia Tsvetkov, "Finding Micrroaggressions in the Wild: A Case For Locating Elusive Phenomena in Social Media Posts," Proceedings of the 2019 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing and the 9th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (EMNLP-IJCNLP), November 2019.

Appendix: Figures and Tables

Fig. 1.

Total posts produced by the six self-help-oriented hubs, January 2019 to December 2022.
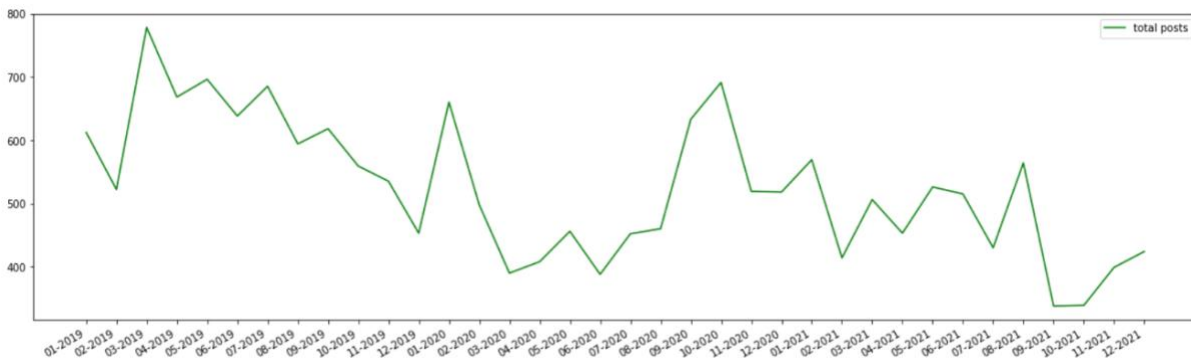
Fig. 2. Fifty most frequently appearing nouns in the self-help corpus.

noun	quantity
i	371049
time	86725
life	77154
day	46670
way	43152
something	37150
work	31629
world	25110
person	21193
someone	20422
thing	19824
mind	18818
year	17856
lot	17222
everything	16317
job	15191
part	15144
self	14534
body	14490
money	14355
home	13457
family	13190
anything	12646
book	12192
point	12053
experience	12018
place	11707
nothing	11674
moment	11421
everyone	11342
school	11050
story	10593
love	10021
business	9971
idea	9939
week	9802
end	9739
friend	9481
health	9351
process	9334
success	9189
energy	9038
fact	9037

goal	8967
course	8861
relationship	8811
practice	8737
sense	8686
one	8583
morning	8560

Fig. 3. Fifty most frequently appearing adjectives in the self-help corpus.

adjective	quantity
other	37845
good	30753
new	29011
many	28519
first	25034
own	24257
much	21035
same	19628
few	18988
different	16458
little	14951
important	14257
next	14131
great	13671
long	13333
hard	13007
able	11968
last	11482
right	11100
bad	10767
old	10763
social	10590
small	9966
big	9771
sure	9594
personal	9503
real	9452
happy	9370
high	9111
easy	9029
such	8962
true	8834
free	8746

full	8684
wrong	8625
mental	8046
human	7575
only	7266
simple	7057
positive	6990
possible	6967
whole	6506
negative	6128
daily	6111
difficult	6054
single	5918
short	5879
second	5851
past	5821
enough	5660

Fig. 4. Fifty topics produced by topic model, ordered by weight, and hand-labeled with topic names (misc = difficult to categorize topics).

Topic title	Weight	Words
misc.	0.68013	it's you're don't people that's make you'll time things good you've doesn't there's thing can't feel start isn't find won't
time and change	0.67821	didn't time felt wasn't wanted started made back thought years knew i'd day needed couldn't told found months decided realized
facts/lessons	0.62835	point simply important fact personal experience sense means approach process part idea case level ways found ability order individual long
misc.	0.45183	i'm it's i've don't that's i'll feel i'd things time there's can't years we're lot thing back good isn't doesn't
life and happiness	0.41654	life things time people make day happy happiness good feel live don't love world lives moment living change friends find
physical description	0.3392	back eyes head face room hand man front door car left hands looked moment night asked words voice smile phone
spiritual	0.33861	life world experience feel love feeling energy sense place space part moment human deep mind it's heart experiences inside power
misc.	0.30965	people life don't it's that's good world thing story love bad guy make shit can't he's day didn't i'm man
personal conflict	0.30882	people person don't feel make good hurt understand wrong anger truth bad words feelings accept behavior pain angry things care
goals and success	0.30723	life work live people success dreams job dream living purpose path make find career world passion years lives goals don't
time/tasks	0.23424	time work day working hours tasks productivity focus things task productive minutes important spend energy week schedule list break busy

emotions	0.22653	feel thoughts emotions negative control mind anxiety feeling positive feelings emotional situation change thinking life thought stress things bad mental
goals and habits	0.22638	goals goal day habit habits year start set time achieve make plan daily small change progress motivation life action process
social	0.20525	people person talk conversation friends social friend group talking questions share conversations don't time speak listen listening make speaking feel
home	0.19	house i'd read dog min home room night cat we'd kitchen kind apartment table small bed tiny box mother smell
travel	0.1897	home city travel place trip people country time places friends back year day living traveling local car town live find
writing	0.18274	writing write writer medium story read work stories creative words writers article articles ideas book wrote written creativity day reading
death	0.18	life death time pandemic year loss home grief days world lost hope day pain live covid die family times fear
family	0.17995	family children parents kids mother child mom father dad home years daughter son school husband baby age young parent love
thought	0.1739	thinking change mind make decisions question beliefs decision problem questions problems life thought reality world things answer wrong ideas belief
learning/growth	0.17038	people success learn work skills growth great successful learning personal mindset improve good coach skill advice focus grow feedback results
sleep routine	0.16259	day sleep morning bed night hours days routine time wake feel minutes early body work cold coffee start hour waking
job	0.14822	job work working career company team office jobs manager boss experience worked employees interview business role time project opportunity position
society	0.13438	world people society human community social history change country war political today culture government years lives it's states news public
games	0.12771	fear game failure play success confidence playing games team win comfort performance zone sports fail afraid fears practice hard player
social media	0.12538	social media phone time facebook instagram online internet video people youtube post content twitter attention videos friends world news digital
school	0.12356	school college students class high university student teacher education year years degree classes teachers teaching study program learning learn grade
nature	0.12201	water sun trees nature tree sky river ocean boat forest wind earth mountain sea cold snow green plants rain air
money	0.12058	money financial pay income buy make time spend bank month years debt save account cost work invest year spending investing
art/writing	0.11975	art it's story coming author wrote weeks man read book time john good history human character power stories writes world
love	0.1054	love relationship partner relationships friends dating person marriage friend date feel time loved boyfriend romantic married healthy husband feelings friendship

science/health	0.10532	brain study research stress health found studies people levels benefits system effects increase body effect researchers physical heart science article
mental health	0.10528	mental pain health depression anxiety therapy trauma therapist people life work illness emotional issues healing physical disorder support suffering feel
books	0.10239	book read books reading learning learn time knowledge information learned find ideas life self-help don't great remember lot pages curiosity
business/digital	0.10116	business content marketing people online product clients sales make build company building create products money entrepreneur work brand side started
notetaking	0.09416	list email app system notes information note google click read create personal tools free simple make letter data find review
music	0.09003	music song play dance show movie film songs stage playing art listen listening singing sound watch dancing audience voice shows
consumption	0.07995	things space stuff items home clothes buy store art house clean make item room shopping buying minimalism cleaning clutter shop
food/diet	0.07333	food eating eat diet weight body healthy fat foods sugar health meal fasting calories meals day meat protein cooking energy
mindfulness/meditation	0.07238	meditation practice mind yoga mindfulness body breathing breath meditate focus thoughts attention present minutes meditating sit mindful awareness calm experience
beauty/clothes	0.0708	hair body skin wear face fat wearing beautiful beauty clothes dress girl mirror women girls makeup woman feel bodies thin
exercise/running	0.0641	running run training bike race marathon miles a—\u walking pace day walk body mountain mile time fast slow finish hard
physical health	0.0584	doctor pain hospital cancer medical body blood health doctors surgery patients care disease treatment patient symptoms medicine nurse sick baby
exercise /weights	0.05056	body training exercise muscle gym strength workout weight fitness exercises back muscles week movement workouts work rest reps days weights
sex	0.04659	women men woman sex man sexual female male gender gay girls boys women's feminine society young girl sexuality straight queer
substances	0.04323	alcohol drinking drink coffee addiction smoking quit drugs wine sober caffeine drug drinks smoke sobriety bottle tea drunk quitting cigarettes
religion	0.04265	god church spiritual faith religion religious jesus christian prayer bible spirit divine pray love word god's spirituality man words ayahuasca
race	0.03944	white black people american racism police color race prison racist history south america african privilege mike justice racial americans country
language	0.03777	language english learning words learn languages japanese speak word french spanish chinese culture japan country german speaking level foreign learned
misc.	0.00118	tilocblob rogers mister junod shaheer denny mattoon skot adrion pointif koko life the mei why\xa people who you that happiness for woman trying to tonight moments when

Fig. 5. A pie chart showing the relative quantities of the genres amongst a sample of 1000 of the most-clapped posts.
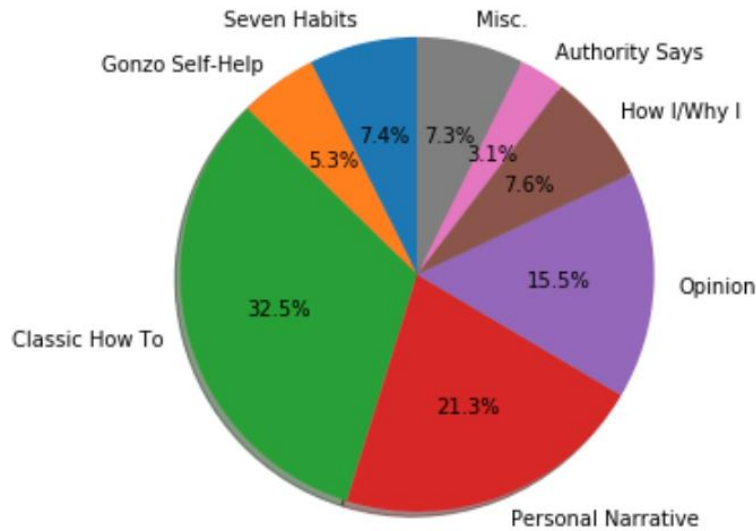

Fig. 6. A pie chart showing the relative quantities of the genres amongst a sample of 1000 of the less-clapped posts.
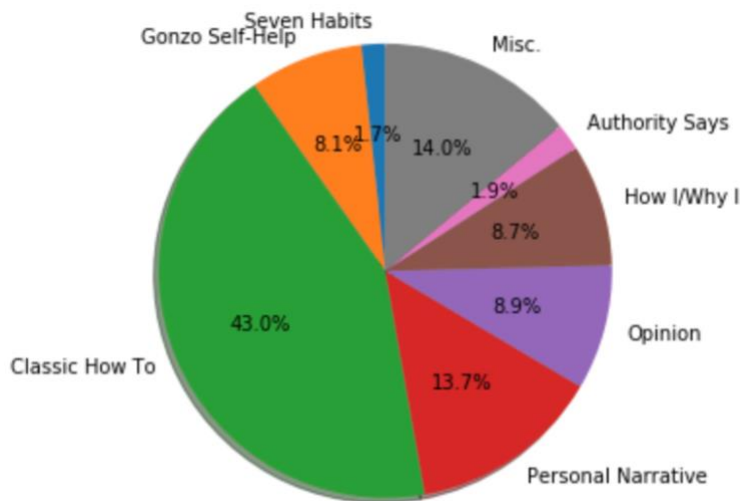

Fig. 7. A pie chart showing the relative quantities of only the 5 self-help genres amongst a sample of 1000 of the most-clapped posts.
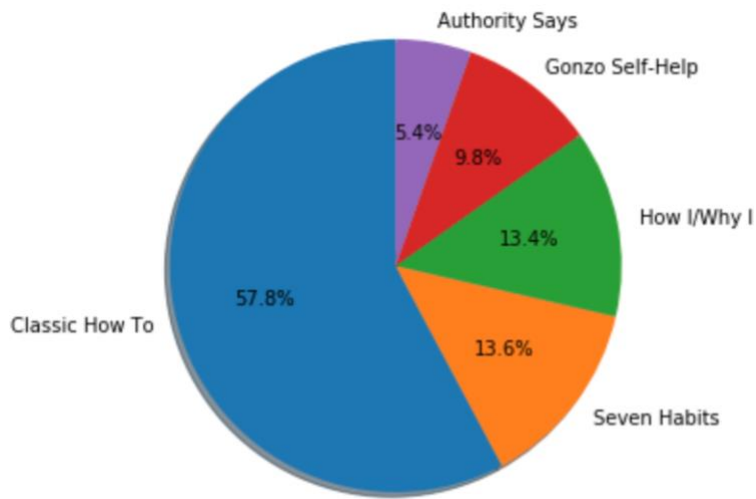
Fig. 8.

Number of gonzo self-help and seven habits posts produced, Jan 2019-Dec 2021.
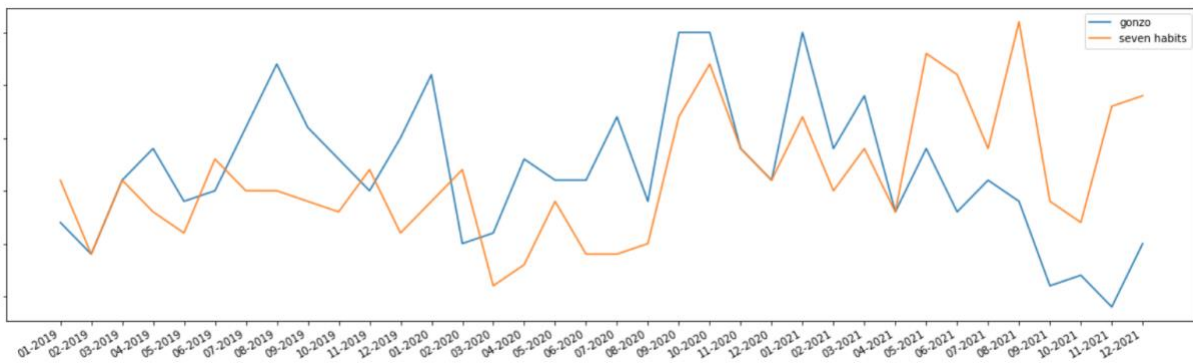
Number of gonzo self-help and seven habits posts produced, relative to total posts produced, Jan 2019-Dec 2021.
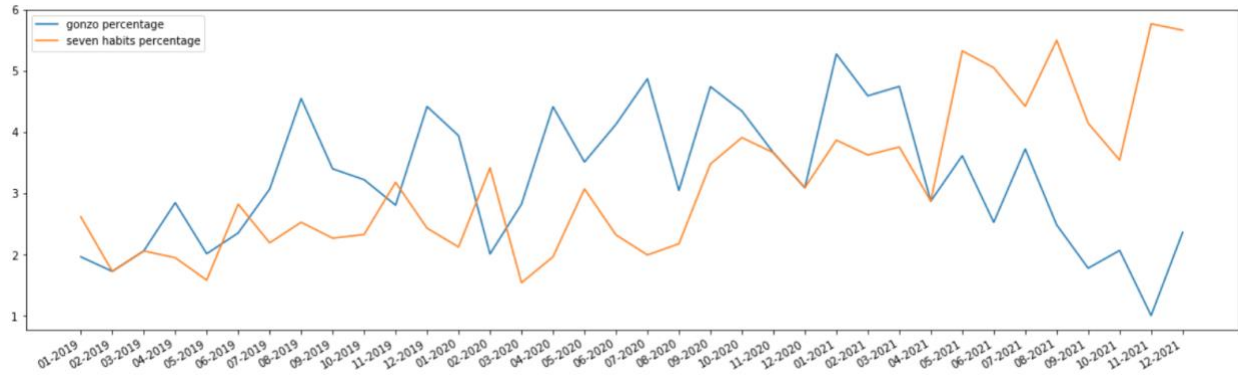
Fig. 9.

Nick Wignall

Oct 22 · 7 min read · ✦ Member-only · ▶ Listen

8 Traits of Emotionally Intelligent People

#6: They validate their emotions instead of judging them
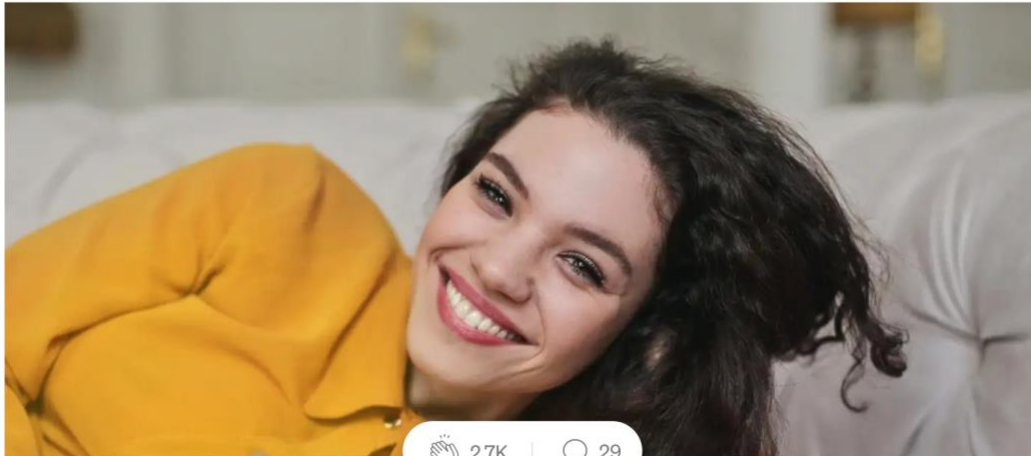
2.7K | 💬 29

Photo by Andrea Piacquadio

Fig. 10.

A Complete Guide to Doing a 10-Day Fasting Retreat

I've fasted twice a year for 3 years and find it essential to my well-being. Here's how to do it yourself, day by day.
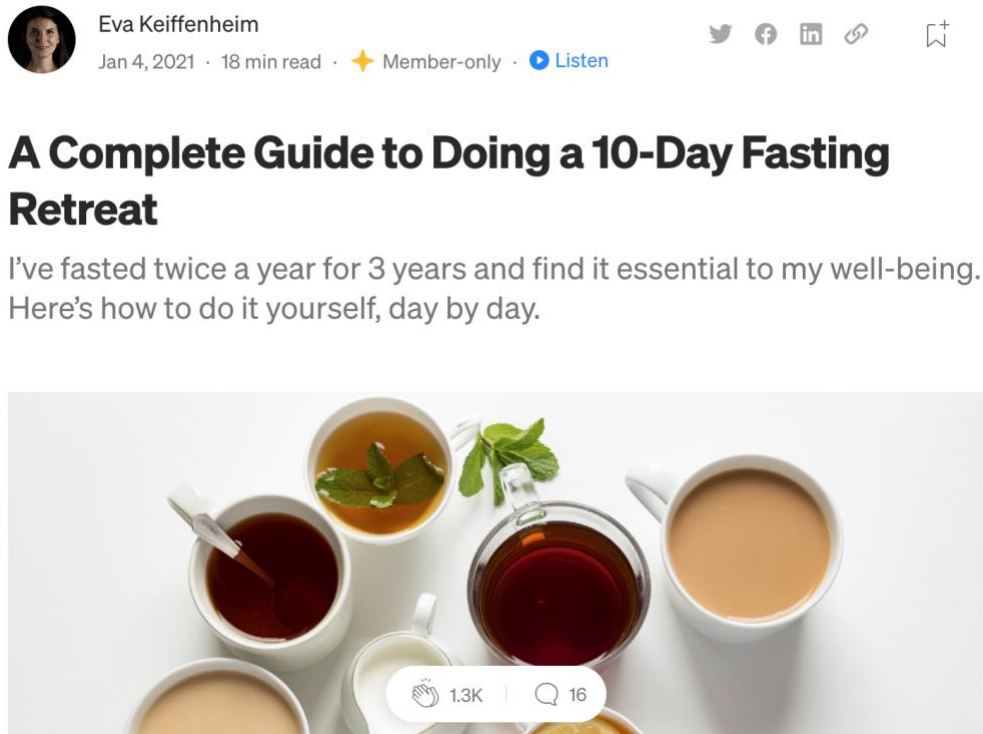
Fig. 11.

Seven Habits, Classification Results

Most distinguishing features of Seven Habits headlines and full texts, for models trained on unigrams and bigrams (I also trained models on both together, but the results are fairly redundant in listed features, and therefore not shown). For each model, the top most distinguishing features of both the Seven Habits and Non-Seven Habits samples are listed by proportion of appearances; proportions are adjusted to avoid zeroes in numerators or denominators (adding one to both)

Fig. 11.1.

Seven Habits Titles, unigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Seven Habits Titles

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
signs	1	73	73.000
highly	1	27	27.000
emotional	1	24	24.000

successful	1	19	19.000
traits	1	14	14.000
habits	6	80	13.333
qualities	1	11	11.000
sabotaging	1	10	10.000
people	15	135	9.000
reasons	3	26	8.667
psychological	2	17	8.500
intelligent	1	8	8.000
reason	1	7	7.000
keeping	1	7	7.000
show	1	7	7.000
subtle	1	7	7.000
average	1	6	6.000
truths	1	6	6.000
aware	1	6	6.000
low	1	6	6.000
respected	1	6	6.000
resilient	1	6	6.000
anxious	1	6	6.000
mistakes	1	6	6.000
friendship	1	6	6.000
strong	1	6	6.000
unhappy	1	6	6.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Seven Habits Titles

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
my	83	5	0.060
help	16	1	0.063
days	10	1	0.100
improve	10	1	0.100
tips	10	1	0.100
was	10	1	0.100
learned	18	2	0.111
vs	9	1	0.111
got	9	1	0.111
art	8	1	0.125
changed	8	1	0.125
writing	15	2	0.133
build	7	1	0.143
reading	7	1	0.143

year	14	2	0.143
school	7	1	0.143
me	39	6	0.154
week	6	1	0.167
quotes	6	1	0.167
taught	12	2	0.167
went	6	1	0.167
milk	6	1	0.167
minute	6	1	0.167
books	12	2	0.167
write	6	1	0.167
letter	6	1	0.167
writer	11	2	0.182
free	11	2	0.182
meditation	5	1	0.200
media	5	1	0.200

Fig. 11.2.

Seven Habits Titles, bigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Seven Habits Titles

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
Habits of	1	52	52.000
Signs you	1	37	37.000
Of highly	1	18	18.000
Reasons you	1	15	15.000
Signs of	1	15	15.000
Of emotionally	1	14	14.000
Traits of	1	12	12.000
Psychological reasons	1	12	12.000
Of people	1	11	11.000
Signs your	1	10	10.000
People have	1	10	10.000
The habits	1	10	10.000
People do	1	9	9.000
People don('t)	1	9	9.000
Might be	1	9	9.000
Successful people	1	9	9.000
You might	1	9	9.000
Signs that	1	8	8.000

That are	1	8	8.000
Of truly	1	8	8.000
Are you	4	3	7.500
Habits that	2	15	7.500
Keeping you	1	7	7.000
Who are	1	7	7.000
Your job	1	7	7.000
You back	1	7	7.000
Their goals	1	7	7.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Seven Habits Titles

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
Taught me	12	1	0.083
Of my	10	1	0.100
To help	9	1	0.111
What learned	8	1	0.125
Improve your	8	1	0.125
Tips to	8	1	0.125
Help you	6	1	0.167
Learned about	6	1	0.167
To success	6	1	0.167
Me about	6	1	0.167
To live	6	1	0.167
Changed my	6	1	0.167
Lessons learned	5	1	0.200
In my	5	1	0.200
To build	5	1	0.200
Helped me	5	1	0.200
My life	10	1	0.200
Will astrology	5	1	0.200
Letter to	5	1	0.200
Free will	5	1	0.200
To write	5	1	0.200
Art of	5	1	0.200
Made me	5	1	0.200
To improve	5	1	0.200
Week of	5	1	0.200
Astrology week	5	1	0.200
To my	5	1	0.200
Milk vs	5	1	0.200
To school	4	1	0.250

From my	4	1	0.250

Fig. 11.3.

Seven Habits Full Texts, unigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Seven Habits Texts

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
ruskin	1	35	35.000
charisma	1	33	33.000
leon	1	19	19.000
polymath	1	18	18.000
assertively	1	17	17.000
moses	1	16	16.000
nick	1	15	15.000
geek	1	15	15.000
irritability	1	15	15.000
turtle	1	14	14.000
unapologetic	1	13	13.000
morrie	1	13	13.000
downsides	1	13	13.000
dale	1	12	12.000
franchisees	1	12	12.000
lara	1	12	12.000
capitalism	2	22	11.000
likable	4	42	10.500
toughness	4	42	10.500
millionaires	2	18	9.000
ledge	2	18	9.000
narcissist	3	26	8.667
ambition	5	43	8.600
enforcing	2	17	8.500
compatible	2	16	8.000
compatibility	2	16	8.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Seven Habits Texts

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
magnesium	181	2	0.011
grandpa	40	1	0.025

cow	33	1	0.030
résumé	32	1	0.031
milk	150	5	0.033
impermanence	29	1	0.034
thompson	29	1	0.034
abc	26	1	0.038
stitches	25	1	0.040
myspace	24	1	0.042
camel	21	1	0.048
mba	41	2	0.049
racial	19	1	0.053
floating	19	1	0.053
tenant	19	1	0.053
virgo	19	1	0.053
snorkeling	19	1	0.053
acid	18	1	0.056
snorkel	18	1	0.056
goat	18	1	0.056
limbs	18	1	0.056
marla	17	1	0.059
rapist	17	1	0.059
trailer	17	1	0.059
certification	17	1	0.059
stitch	32	2	0.065

Fig. 11.4.

Seven Habits Full Texts, bigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Seven Habits Texts

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
Painful emotions	1	44	44.000
As psychologist	1	27	27.000
Aware people	1	26	26.000
Achieve their	1	26	26.000
Strong people	1	23	23.000
Relationships content	1	21	21.000
Exclusive self	1	21	21.000
To exclusive	1	21	21.000
Painful feelings	1	21	21.000
Content subscribe	1	21	21.000
Emotionally mature	1	21	21.000

Worry is	1	21	21.000
Their mistakes	1	19	19.000
Sophisticated people	1	19	19.000
Grip strength	1	19	19.000
About feeling	1	18	18.000
Respect your	1	18	18.000
Self aware	6	106	17.667
More emotionally	2	32	16.000
Healthy boundaries	3	48	16.000
Most time	2	30	15.000
Your mistakes	2	27	13.500
Mental toughness	3	37	12.330
Healthy relationships	2	24	12.000
Expectations are	2	24	12.000
Explained in	2	23	11.500
These habits	3	34	11.300
Taking responsibility	2	22	11.000
boundaries with	2	22	11.000
Good leaders	2	22	11.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Seven Habits Texts

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Seven Habits	#Appearances Seven Habits	Ratio of Appearance in Seven Habits vs. Non-Seven Habits
Fat people	29	1	0.034
Cow milk	28	1	0.036
Of magnesium	27	1	0.037
Coming weeks	25	1	0.040
Mr thompson	25	1	0.040
Twin flame	21	1	0.048
Magnesium is	20	1	0.050
In spanish	20	1	0.050
The desert	20	1	0.050
Health care	19	1	0.052
Psychological system	18	1	0.056
Activating event	18	1	0.056
Milk is	18	1	0.056
Chronic pain	30	2	0.067
This book	39	3	0.077
Describe the	22	2	0.091
Thin people	22	2	0.091
Week of	20	2	0.100
Put together	18	2	0.111

Circadian rhythm	18	2	0.111
In so	18	2	0.111
Wife and	26	3	0.115
My journal	17	2	0.118
The neighborhood	17	2	0.118
Us there	17	2	0.118
It allowed	17	2	0.118
In english	29	4	0.138
My brother	65	9	0.138
Since my	21	3	0.143
My grandmother	25	4	0.160

Fig. 12.

Gonzo Self-Help, Classification Results

Most distinguishing features of Gonzo Self-Help headlines and full texts, for models trained on unigrams and bigrams (I also trained models on both together, but the results are fairly redundant in listed features, and therefore not shown). For each model, the top most distinguishing features of both the Gonzo and Non-Gonzo samples are listed by proportion of appearances; proportions are adjusted to avoid zeroes in numerators or denominators (adding one to both).

Fig. 12.1.

Gonzo Self-Help Titles, unigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Gonzo Self-Help Titles

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
happened	1	15	15.000
taught	6	83	13.833
learned	12	151	12.583
changing	1	12	12.000
running	1	11	11.000
learnt	1	10	10.000
lessons	9	82	9.111
did	1	9	9.000
marathon	1	8	8.000
teaching	1	8	8.000
dating	1	8	8.000
alcohol	1	8	8.000
spent	1	8	8.000

help	4	31	7.750
months	3	23	7.667
changed	6	43	7.167
went	1	7	7.000
quarantine	1	7	7.000
solo	1	7	7.000
traveling	1	7	7.000
trying	1	7	7.000
days	3	20	6.667
took	1	6	6.000
losing	2	12	6.000
meditating	1	6	6.000
improved	1	6	6.000
25	1	6	6.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Gonzo-Self-Help Titles

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
your	94	5	0.053
we	20	2	0.100
do	30	3	0.100
will	9	1	0.111
health	9	1	0.111
want	17	2	0.118
you	121	15	0.124
emotional	8	1	0.125
don	24	3	0.125
mental	8	1	0.125
tips	7	1	0.143
think	7	1	0.143
keep	6	1	0.167
wanted	6	1	0.167
us	6	1	0.167
dream	6	1	0.167
wish	6	1	0.167
get	12	2	0.167
thinking	6	1	0.167
enjoy	6	1	0.167
yourself	11	2	0.182
really	11	2	0.182
heart	5	1	0.200
knew	5	1	0.200

matter	5	1	0.200
positive	5	1	0.200

Fig. 12.2.

Gonzo Self-Help Titles, bigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Gonzo Self-Help Titles

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
Lessons learned	1	35	35.000
What learned	2	60	30.000
Learned from	4	70	17.500
About life	1	17	17.000
Taught me	5	83	16.600
Me about	3	47	15.667
Learned after	1	15	15.600
What happened	1	15	15.600
Here what	2	21	10.500
What my	1	10	10.000
Changed my	4	36	9.000
Things learned	2	18	9.000
From being	1	8	8.000
Learned about	2	16	8.000
Life lessons	3	22	7.300
Losing my	1	7	7.000
Was the	1	7	7.000
Day for	1	7	7.000
For months	1	7	7.000
Learnt from	1	7	7.000
Trying to	1	7	7.000
Life changing	1	7	7.000
Is what	2	13	6.500
My life	9	55	6.100
Better person	1	6	6.000
Changing my	1	6	6.000
Life for	1	6	6.000

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Gonzo-Self-Help Titles

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
Ways to	13	1	0.077

If you	10	1	0.100
More than	9	1	0.111
In your	9	1	0.111
How to	72	8	0.111
To do	8	1	0.125
Is the	8	1	0.125
To get	7	1	0.143
Your life	14	2	0.143
What you	6	1	0.167
At the	6	1	0.167
The one	6	1	0.167
With your	6	1	0.167
To start	6	1	0.167
You want	6	1	0.167
You to	6	1	0.167
Your best	6	1	0.167
In life	6	1	0.167
Want to	12	2	0.167
Be more	6	1	0.167
To help	5	1	0.200
To keep	5	1	0.200
You love	5	1	0.200
Life is	5	1	0.200
Is not	5	1	0.200
To feel	5	1	0.200
You can	10	2	0.200

Fig. 12.3.

Gonzo Self-Help Texts, unigrams

Most Distinguishing features of Gonzo Self-Help Texts

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
penny	5	81	16.200
ayahuasca	6	77	12.833
sam	8	84	10.500
alcohol	31	256	8.258
calories	21	124	5.905
leg	21	74	3.524
app	39	137	3.513
muscles	19	66	3.474

adventure	21	70	3.333
sex	46	153	3.326
lessons	84	265	3.155
dating	43	131	3.047
running	128	381	2.977
total	22	71	2.958
debate	22	63	2.864
hated	23	65	2.826
traveling	33	92	2.788
opened	36	100	2.778
quit	63	172	2.730
quitting	30	81	2.700
weekend	29	76	2.620
grade	25	65	2.600
lesson	76	197	2.592
addiction	35	90	2.571
legs	42	107	2.548
arrived	33	83	2.515
drink	71	178	2.507

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Gonzo-Self-Help Texts

Unigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
masks	93	11	0.118
michael	78	14	0.179
fiction	79	16	0.203
tea	122	42	0.344
mask	78	27	0.346
shoulder	62	25	0.403
baby	105	44	0.419
subconscious	62	26	0.419
causes	57	26	0.456
secret	78	38	0.487
salary	63	31	0.492
belief	131	65	0.496
mindfulness	122	61	0.500
patient	65	33	0.508
writers	101	52	0.515
disease	62	32	0.516
green	91	47	0.516
brains	54	28	0.519
statement	63	33	0.524

consciousness	57	30	0.526
quote	57	30	0.526
action	216	117	0.542
define	64	35	0.547
facts	53	29	0.547
beliefs	129	71	0.550
war	69	38	0.551
emotional	207	114	0.551

Fig. 12.4.

Gonzo Self-Help Texts, bigrams

Most Distinguishing Features of Gonzo Self-Help Texts

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
Alcohol is	1	27	27.000
Chinese characters	1	20	20.000
The dogs	1	17	17.000
Student council	1	17	17.000
Miss chinatown	1	17	17.000
My debt	1	17	17.000
My birthday	1	16	16.000
My rapist	1	16	16.000
House writing	1	16	16.000
100 pushups	1	16	16.000
Chinatown usa	1	16	16.000
Sex work	1	16	16.000
Though had	1	15	15.000
The desert	1	15	15.000
Day batching	1	15	15.000
Myself by	1	14	14.000
Decision was	1	14	14.000
The firm	1	14	14.000
Sex is	1	13	13.000
Up alcohol	1	13	13.000
Of saturdays	1	13	13.000
Tracking my	1	13	13.000
True crime	1	13	13.000
Soul retrieval	1	13	13.000
Without alcohol	1	13	13.000
Pushups day	1	13	13.000

| Alcohol was | 1 | 13 | 13.000 |

Most Distinguishing Features of Non-Gonzo-Self-Help Texts

Bigram	#Appearances Non-Gonzo Self-Help	#Appearances Gonzo Self-Help	Ratio of Appearance in Gonzo Self-Help vs. Non-Gonzo Self-Help
Green tea	56	1	0.018
My angry	33	1	0.030
Angry muse	33	1	0.030
Alan Michael	29	1	0.034
Her dad	28	1	0.036
Hard thing	27	1	0.037
Hard do	24	1	0.042
Attentional space	21	1	0.048
Emotional health	20	1	0.050
Mount fuji	18	1	0.056
Golden land	18	1	0.056
Positive momentum	18	1	0.056
Self entity	17	1	0.058
Surgical masks	17	1	0.058
Speed reading	17	1	0.058
Couple priviledge	17	1	0.058
Vocal cords	16	1	0.063
Salary research	14	1	0.071