

CHAPTER 2.

DELIBERATIVE DRIFTING OVER TIME: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON DESIGNING SOCIAL MEDIA METHODS FOR LONGEVITY

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This chapter addresses the ongoing methodological challenges of social media research in rhetoric and writing studies, including developing methodologies suitable for this work. To do so, I reevaluate a method I introduced in 2019 called deliberative drifting, which I designed for researching spontaneous, ephemeral rhetorical activity on social media (e.g., audience engagement with livestreams). I begin with a brief overview of deliberative drifting’s development. Next, I reflect on the institutional, disciplinary, and cultural conditions that informed its initial design, as well as three underlying methodological themes: engagement, positionality, and feasibility. To explore these themes, I examine deliberative drifting alongside current scholarship and research guidelines related to digital rhetoric, writing, and social media studies. I explain that although deliberative drifting is founded on an ethic of care and on careful considerations of the aforementioned themes, it—like any other method—is a product of its time and may benefit from updates. Rather than offer firm conclusions and solutions, I conclude by advocating for reflection (methodological and self) as part of responsible research, and I offer guiding questions to help rhetoric and writing researchers develop social media methodologies today.

Social media is an ever-moving methodological target. As platforms update, so does users' communication with/in them. Accordingly, researchers must continually endeavor to develop methods and methodologies suited to social media, rather than "try to shove their projects into" existing approaches whose designs don't align with the task at-hand (Banks et al. 20). In 2019 I joined others (e.g., McKee and DeVoss; McKee and Porter) in advocating for this kind of methodological flexibility when I introduced a method called *deliberative drifting*, which is designed for researching spontaneous, ephemeral rhetorical activity on social media, such as audience engagement with livestreams.

Yet, methods—like media—are emergent. Even after introducing and implementing a method, it may require updates. Although deliberative drifting has helped my research, I continue to navigate complex methodological questions with each new project—questions that highlight the ongoing methodological challenges of social media research. This chapter explores some of the challenges of social media research today by critically reflecting on and reevaluating deliberative drifting.

Following a brief overview of deliberative drifting's development, I reflect on themes I have been exploring since then: engagement, positionality, and feasibility. These themes have emerged over time as I have reflected on the institutional, disciplinary, and cultural conditions that informed deliberative drifting's initial design. To explore these themes in this chapter, I juxtapose and critically examine deliberative drifting alongside current scholarship and research guidelines related to digital rhetoric, writing, and social media studies. Although deliberative drifting is founded on an ethic of care and on careful considerations of the aforementioned themes, it—like any other method—is a product of its time. Rather than offer firm conclusions and solutions, I join methods researchers in arguing that reflection (methodological and self) can "foreground responsible research and model how to gracefully manage the gift of hindsight as a tool and not a weapon" (Rohan 27).

DELIBERATIVE DRIFTING'S DEVELOPMENT

I designed deliberative drifting as a method for rhetorically analyzing live, ephemeral digital fields. Broadly, "Deliberative drifting allows the researcher to freely follow the flows of thing-power and to later analyze how and why those flows carried others and themselves" (Riddick 5). Combining screen-recording with field notes, deliberative drifting is intended to help researchers archive more kinetic, non-verbal, and ephemeral elements of social media communication and events, such as livestreams and social media feeds, and to account more for researchers' subjective influence in these spaces.

Deliberative drifting arose from mid-2010s methodological need. For rhetorical analyses of more static content like tweets, approaches to data collection and processing were already fairly established by then (e.g., use apps to “scrape” and, to some extent, process tweets; take screenshots of image- and word-based content). In the mid-2010s, Facebook introduced two features: reaction buttons and Facebook Live. As I began to research these emergent parts of Facebook and their broader influence, I struggled to find ready-made method/ologies. Specifically, collecting data was challenging because of these features’ distinctly kinetic and ephemeral qualities (e.g., reaction buttons that float across a livestream).

At first, one solution seemed relatively simple: *screenshots* are to *static content* as *screen-recordings* are to *moving content*. Although I could have efficiently collected and processed data by screen-recording it, I wanted to do so ethically. My thought process here can be broadly summarized through three questions that Mary P. Sheridan and Lee Nickoson pose in *Writing Studies Research in Practice*: “What practical, theoretical, and ethical problematics confront writing researchers today? What does one gain and lose from adopting a particular methodology? And, finally, what might researchers be overlooking, excluding, silencing?” (5).

Deliberative drifting was one way in which I worked through the first question in a particular context: “What practical, theoretical, and ethical problematics confront” me as I research these emergent forms of social media communication? As I pursued this question, I was mindful of potential consequences of “adopting a particular methodology,” not just because of the novel challenges I was facing, but also because I wanted to uphold a larger commitment to researching without “overlooking, excluding, silencing” (5). Put differently, I was striving to cultivate what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch describe in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* as “an ethos of humility, respect, and care” and to account for the ways in which this ethos “shape[s] our research” (21, 22). Royster and Kirsch elaborate, “[M]odern researchers and scholars are fully challenged to learn how to listen more carefully to the voices (and texts) that they study, to critique our analytical assumptions and frames, to critique guiding questions reflectively and reflexively” (14).

I also wanted to challenge a broader, problematic assumption that underpins scholarship writ large: the assumption that research can be absolutely neutral, objective, and unbiased. Research influences what is perceived, valued, circulated, and preserved as knowledge and truth. Thus, researchers must consider their subjective influence on knowledge production, among other areas, and they mustn’t take for granted the potentially harmful ideologies and assumptions that their method/ologies may uphold. Fortunately, rhetoric and writing studies supports this work. As Sonja Foss summarizes, rhetorical criticism proceeds from

“two primary assumptions”: “that objective reality does not exist” and that researchers “can know an artifact only through personal interpretation of it” (24).

Along these lines, deliberative drifting may not get everything “right,” but it stems from a sincere effort to research ethically. By combining screen-recording with detailed, first-person reporting about my research process, I was striving to let others speak directly for themselves—a complex point that I will return to shortly—and to communicate how my personal experiences and choices with/in these spaces might influence the research, including whom and what I am (re) presenting. Research is messy; that mess is meaningful. I carefully construct and conduct all of my research, and mess inevitably emerges within it, particularly given the ongoing need I face to experiment with social media method/ologies. By presenting this mess as valuable, I hope to help others embrace mess in their own research of emergent media and communication.

ENGAGEMENT

Deliberative drifting was designed to support research of emergent aspects of social media rhetoric and writing, drawing methodological inspiration from an also-emergent area of study called rhetorical field studies (MacKinnon et al.; Middleton et al.; Rai and Druschke). With deliberative drifting, I aimed to offer a method that would accommodate rhetorical fieldwork on social media, in which the researcher would approach a live event on social media as a digital field. This includes acknowledging the researcher’s embodied presence and engagement in the field. While providing an overview for the article’s case study, I elaborate on my rationale for this acknowledgment:

. . . I remained logged into my personal accounts. By using my personal accounts—which minimally, if at all, would have affected my experience in these public fields—I wanted to explicitly position myself as an identifiable person and to honor my privileged role and responsibilities as a researcher. While deliberative drifting, I could participate at any time via a tweet, a comment, a reaction, or a share, and I would have to do so with my real name, as researchers often must do in traditional fields. Although there may be risks involved with identifying oneself, such as being harassed, threatened, or doxxed . . . , staying logged into personal accounts can be a feasible means of demonstrating an ethical commitment to and awareness of a researcher’s presence and influence in the field. (Riddick 8)

I remain committed to parts of the above passage, namely those that speak to acknowledging “my privileged role and responsibilities as a researcher” and “demonstrating an ethical commitment to and awareness of a researcher’s presence and influence in the field.” That said, I would like to push back on other parts that are potentially problematic.

My suggestion invites researchers to “participate at any time via a tweet, a comment, a reaction, or a share.” To be clear—as I hope I am in “Deliberative Drifting”—I believe that researchers should share how they engaged in digital fields, including but not limited to the aforementioned ways. In hindsight, however, I wish I had offered clearer parameters and better addressed conflicts this engagement could create, such as with institutional review boards (IRB).

Currently, IRB distinguishes between using the internet as a “research tool” and as an “object of study” as follows:

Generally, when researchers actively engage and interact with individuals online to collect data, it is likely they are using the internet as a research tool. Conversely, if researchers collect data from individuals by merely observing the way people interact or behave online, it is likely they are using the internet as the object of study. (Martinez)

We might say that rhetorical analyses of social media communication with/ in live digital fields and events align with using the internet as an object of study. I designed deliberative drifting specifically to facilitate such rhetorical analyses. A more useful framing for rhetoric and writing studies, however, may be Amber M. Buck and Devon F. Ralston’s definition for studying online “discourse,” or “studying how ideas and concepts are discussed in public online forums and social media platforms, including word choice and rhetorical framing” (8). Studying discourse in this way is precisely what I intended for deliberative drifting. However, I realize now that a small part of my 2019 article could complicate these categorizations, possibly shifting such analyses *technically* into the categories of using the internet as a research tool (Martinez) or studying people (Buck and Ralston 8). This shift seems to depend on how “human subjects research” is defined.

Generally, for IRB, human subjects research is determined by how (much) a researcher “interacts” with human subjects in their study. As Heidi A. McKee and James E. Porter explain, “*Interaction* is one of the determinants in the United States for institutional review boards (IRBs) to determine if someone is conducting person-based or text-based research” (250). The above IRB passage suggests that interaction leans toward more direct and explicit interaction between researchers and subjects (e.g., surveys, interviews). Yet, this boundary blurs if we compare interaction with engagement, particularly on social media.

It is worth noting that *engagement* as a term and concept is central to social media, and it is not necessarily synonymous with *interaction*. Social media companies consider engagement to include more than the verbal interactions that typify academic definitions of “interaction with human subjects.” For instance, Twitter tracks more explicit, publicly visible engagement metrics like retweets, comments, and “likes,” but also more subtle forms of engagement like “Impressions,” “Detail Expands,” “New Followers,” “Profile Visits,” and “Link Clicks” (“About”). Metrics like these illustrate how even passing glances in digital fields qualify and quantify as engagement, with high rhetorical stakes and rewards (e.g., algorithmic, financial). In pointing out these engagement metrics, I am not suggesting researchers follow social media companies’ lead in determining what constitutes either human subjects or engagement, particularly given these companies’ demonstrable prioritization of their profit over others’ protection. Rather, I am advocating for critical considerations of what constitutes engagement so that researchers can sufficiently account for it.

When considering researchers’ engagement in live digital fields, complicated questions arise: To what extent could engaging in an event’s digital field disqualify researchers from later rhetorically analyzing it? Let’s say they engaged *as a community member* in a digital field, then later—*as a researcher*—they want to analyze content they archived from that field; in this scenario, they did not engage with this content or the people who posted it beyond observing and archiving content. Does the fact that they engaged at all in the field mean that they shouldn’t be able to analyze the aforementioned content? What if they had interacted as a community member in more explicit, publicly identifiable ways (e.g., retweeting, liking, sharing, commenting)? How would this affect their ability to research this field and their archived data? How might IRB approval and/or informed consent come into play?

Further, how many researchers are ever truly, completely offline these days, particularly those who research social media? Many researchers may rarely or never post their own content, but they routinely engage as lurkers in their everyday lives. In social media parlance, a lurker is someone who observes social media spaces and communication without explicitly and/or identifiably engaging. Importantly, lurking counts as engagement in social media, although it is labeled differently (e.g., “About”). By following someone’s account or viewing their content, researchers are giving those accounts attention—attention that social media platforms’ algorithms track and reward. Even if researchers don’t comment, “like,” share, or otherwise explicitly interact with users’ content, their attention toward other accounts can nevertheless be measured and can impact users’ public reach and influence. Questions and concerns like these are further complicated when we consider the ongoing eventfulness of rhetoric and writing, including on social media (Gallagher).

Regarding which account(s) a researcher uses: this decision can impact the digital field that the researcher encounters. To limit potential issues, perhaps researchers could use only professional accounts to collect data and do digital fieldwork. That said, I hesitate to suggest such uniform approaches, and I wonder what we really gain from that kind of approach beyond the illusion of neutrality. If a researcher, as a community member in their everyday life, has ever liked a post from an organization on their personal account, does logging into a different account *really* render them neutral when analyzing the organization's account? Rather than pretend to be completely "objective, impartial, and removed from the data," I continue to agree that researchers should instead be upfront about their influence on their research (Foss 24).

Overall, with open considerations of engagement, I believe deliberative drifting remains viable. One of the fundamental premises from which deliberative drifting proceeds is that researchers enact power through participation in their research. Deliberative drifting asks researchers to account for and acknowledge how they enact power in situ and otherwise in research, including subtler forms of engagement, such as navigational choices. In this sense, deliberative drifting requires researchers to recognize their "privileged role and responsibilities" as someone who is trusted with (re)presenting events, discourse, and people and with shaping knowledge production and public memory. Researchers should share information regarding their engagement, including honest insights about their possible influence with/in the field and on their findings. Because deliberative drifting requires the researcher to archive their field as they are navigating it, this step is quite feasible. Still, the responsibility remains—as it always does—on the researcher to disclose as needed. Regarding interaction and engagement, researchers could consult with IRB in advance about what their social-media-based rhetorical analysis would entail, which could help them determine across similar digital fields and events which steps are needed that involve other people (e.g., IRB, social media users). The point is that researchers should carefully make methodological choices like these to suit each specific case, rather than apply uniform approaches.

POSITIONALITY

Deliberative drifting's design is also informed by positionality—of social media *users* and *researchers*. These are not mutually exclusive categories. For instance, part of the methodological challenge I face as a social media researcher is that I am *also* a social media user, and it is increasingly difficult to separate those two positions. Deliberative drifting encourages researchers to reflect on and report out about their positionality, including in ways that acknowledge positionality's

relationship to power. This process should include careful considerations of risks that users and researchers face.

Social media carries specific risks of harm to those who communicate and/or are circulated within it, “such as being harassed, threatened, or doxxed” (Riddick 8). These risks are amplified for members of historically marginalized communities. As Derek M. Sparby explains, “Not only is power unevenly distributed, but traditionally privileged people also maintain their social advantage in digital spaces while traditionally marginalized people continue to be disparaged” (88). Social media researchers should be aware of these risks, including how their method/ologies factor into them. For instance, in their article “I Didn’t Sign Up for Your Research Study,” Buck and Ralston discuss how BIPOC individuals and communities have been harmed by social media research. Accordingly, Buck and Ralston recommend “asking how researching the digital lives of BIPOC might contribute to the cumulative gaze and in what ways do research studies surveil rather than enrich? In what ways are communities spoken for rather than amplified?” (7). Additionally, researchers should be aware of the risks that researchers themselves face, including identity-based risks (franzke et al.; Gelms; Gelms et al.; Reyman and Sparby). Overall, ethical social media method/ologies must include efforts to minimize risks of harm to social media users and researchers.

Despite my efforts to account for positionality and to minimize risks, deliberative drifting’s initial design may still fall short. At the time, I chose to quote users’ content because I wanted to let people speak for themselves; however, I omitted (user)names and profile pictures to protect anonymity. Although these are two common methodological choices, they are *choices*, and these choices may introduce problems. First, it can be difficult to determine best practices for quoting social media communication without informed consent (Buck and Ralston; McKee and Porter). One reason this consent may be deemed appropriate is because the quoted content could be traced to an identifiable person, despite efforts to anonymize it; this could present risks for quoted rhetors, and these risks may be heightened for some people, “especially BIPOC and other multiple-marginalized communities” (Buck and Ralston 10). On the other hand, anonymizing quoted content is not necessarily the most ethical methodological choice. Alexandria L. Lockett et al. argue that “researchers must not separate issues of race and technology when deciding to study ‘public’ writing and communication”; one way in which researchers can avoid this is by “always credit[ing] the source” (26).

Given social media’s emergent qualities and nuanced contexts, mixed methods approaches may be best for social media research. Deliberative drifting is no exception. Deliberative drifting is designed for archiving and analyzing more ephemeral, spontaneous, and difficult-to-scrape-and-screenshot social media

communication, and I encourage researchers to combine it as needed with other method/ologies so that their overall approach is both ethical and effective.

For instance, before entering a digital field, researchers might consider frameworks like Buck and Ralston's. As Buck and Ralston note, "Writing researchers' concerns . . . move beyond ethical considerations spelled out by university IRB's in research protocols," thus they offer detailed guidelines for online writing research that address data collection and storage, terms of use, informed consent, community and individual impacts, researcher engagement, data privacy, and more (8-10). In these guidelines and throughout their article, Buck and Ralston discuss the ethical and logistical challenges of studying online writing, including topics that correlate with deliberative drifting (e.g., ephemerality). I would highly recommend researchers consult Buck and Ralston's guidelines while determining methodological approaches to studies of social media rhetoric and writing. A researcher could update or adapt parts of deliberative drifting to align with Buck and Ralston's suggested approaches so that their method is customized for their specific, contemporary research context and aims.

Likewise, researchers might pair deliberative drifting with McKee and Porter's heuristic for online writing research. In this heuristic, researchers evaluate five categories: "Public vs. Private," "Data ID," "Degree of Interaction," "Topic Sensitivity," and "Subject Vulnerability" (254). Using this heuristic helps a researcher determine, "Is consent necessary?" For a study in which the ratings are generally toward the "public" and "low" ends, it is less likely that consent is necessary; it becomes more difficult to make this call depending on which and/or how many categories rank as "private" or "high." To demonstrate, I offer a brief evaluation of these events using McKee and Porter's heuristic.

In "Deliberative Drifting," I analyzed livestreams on Facebook Live and YouTube Live from public news media sources, as well as my Twitter feed during a public, hybrid (i.e., online and offline) protest. The most obvious potential problem is *degree of interaction*, as discussed earlier. Another concern is *privacy*. Technically, any Facebook content might qualify as private because Facebook requires users to log-in to view content. Yet, Facebook may be an exception to this general "rule," given Facebook's international influence as a source of social, cultural, and political communication. The boundaries of public and private also depend on context. For instance, we would likely consider communication within a private group on Facebook to be more private than comments on a public account's live-streaming event. McKee and Porter offer a useful comparison: is the content "like placards at a march (completely public and available to be quoted), or are they more like park-bench conversations (somewhat public but carrying expectations of privacy)?" (248). Deliberative drifting is intended for rhetorically analyzing discourse with/in public accounts in public digital fields

on well-established, well-understood social media platforms, which is more “like placards at a march.” *Data ID* is possible on Facebook Live because many users include real names and profile pictures, and comments remain visible after the livestream ends. However, it is difficult to find these comments quickly, unless one locates the original video and scrolls through all visible comments. Twitter also faces a Data ID issue, given that tweets often show up in search engines. Of the three spaces, YouTube Live seems the most ephemeral; comments disappear after two minutes, and many usernames are not personally identifiable. *Topic sensitivity* and *subject vulnerability* are also challenging considerations. For example, I researched in situ communication involving the high school student-led-and-focused “March for Our Lives” protest; it is possible that I observed, archived, and analyzed communication from such students. I strove to protect peoples’ identities and to treat these categories with care by anonymizing quoted content (e.g., removing usernames and profile pictures), but screenshots and quotes could possibly be traced.

Overall, heuristics and frameworks like these are helpful for evaluating issues related to informed consent, but it is important to note that they are not flow charts. In “a problematic case,” answers may vary across the high-low continuum in McKee and Porter’s heuristic. In such cases, McKee and Porter do not insist on informed consent, but rather say that “a researcher would need to weigh carefully” these answers individually and together, “consulting with multiple audiences and comparing to other studies of similar contexts” to make their best judgment about informed consent (256).

FEASIBILITY

Alongside the ethics of social media method/ologies, researchers must also consider feasibility. A challenge I continue to confront in my research is establishing and implementing ethical and feasible method/ologies for researching spontaneous and/or ephemeral online events, venues, and discourse.

As noted earlier, deliberative drifting can potentially blur the line between using the internet as a research tool and an object of study. Accordingly, an “easy solution” could be to not interact in live digital fields while researching them if the researcher does not have prior IRB approval. That said, the more we really think about this line of demarcation, the more difficult it becomes to draw (i.e., interaction vs. engagement), and the more complicated feasibility becomes. For instance, the IRB process can take a long time, whereas social media events can develop immediately. Besides the challenge of anticipating a spontaneous digital field and/or event in order to seek IRB approval, there is the challenge of obtaining approval in time. One concern regarding feasibility is that there might

come a day in which scholars who engaged in situ as community members in a live digital field—particularly spontaneously formed fields—might not be able to rhetorically analyze the event later because they did not receive prior approval for it and/or because they engaged in the field in ways that might be considered to be interaction.

A related feasibility challenge is informed consent. It may not be possible to obtain this consent—at all or in advance. How could researchers solicit consent in advance from users in spontaneous and/or ephemeral live-streaming public events? Even if prior consent is possible, it is worth noting the “chilling effect” that could occur (McKee and Porter 252). It may be more feasible to request consent to quote those users afterwards, which may help researchers engage better in ethical, anti-racist research practices (Buck and Ralston 4; Lockett et al. 26). Yet, another complicated issue is the potential risks that obtaining consent and naming sources can introduce for the researcher. I am thinking here of the personal experiences with identity-based digital aggression that researchers have experienced (e.g., Gelms et al.), as well as the ways in which research like theirs (e.g., case studies of 4chan) might be hindered if prior informed consent is universally required for analyzing and/or quoting publicly available social media communication.

Important as logistical considerations are for deliberative drifting, so are more personal aspects of feasibility. Along these lines, I’d like to return to and further reflect on an earlier passage from “Deliberative Drifting.” To engage in deliberative drifting, I described how “I remained logged into my personal accounts . . . to explicitly position myself as an identifiable person and to honor my privileged role and responsibilities as a researcher” (8). Although I still agree with the latter part of this statement, I am more reluctant now to recommend the first. I reasoned then that despite “risks involved with identifying oneself, such as being harassed, threatened, or doxxed . . . , staying logged into personal accounts can be a feasible means of demonstrating an ethical commitment to and awareness of a researcher’s presence and influence in the field” (8). Again, although my commitment to others hasn’t changed here, I want to challenge my former statement, particularly when I described this choice as “feasible.” Something feasible is something that can be done, accomplished, achieved—but at what cost?

Before we are researchers, we are people—people with multifaceted identities and complex, ongoing lived experiences. We are subjects. Chanon Adsanatham “calls upon rhetoric scholars to continually cultivate reflexivity by situating and resituating ourselves, by heeding how our ever-shifting subjectivities, habitus, and standpoints (SHS) are intersubjective, fluid, and contingent” (79). Importantly, Adsanatham notes, “our SHS are never disinterested or constant. They change. They shift. They reform. . . . we must continually resituate ourselves along the way and heed the multiple facets of our subjectivities in the research

process” (79-80). In foregrounding but also largely eliding this element of subjectivity in the aforementioned passage, I am concerned I fell too short. I am grateful for the opportunity to approach that moment differently now. To do so, I want to share some of how my own “ever-shifting subjectivities, habitus, and standpoints” inform deliberative drifting.

Part of my SHS that has notably shifted is my professional status. I designed deliberative drifting as a graduate student; now, I am an associate professor at a private polytechnic institute. Over the past few years, my knowledge, experience, and training in my discipline have continued to grow, and my professional position has changed. A complicated aspect of this shift is that, admittedly, I found myself more confused and conflicted as a graduate student about what to honor and to protect in my research regarding myself. As a woman, I face specific, identity-based risks of harm, including with/in social media; these risks extend into my research. By positioning myself in an identifiable way, I insufficiently protected myself from this potential. I recognize that I am describing one historically marginalized identity here: woman. Although I face certain risks because of this part of my identity, I also recognize my identity as a white cisgender woman and the privileges accompanying that identity.

Admittedly, I felt uneasy in 2018-2019 about engaging on the internet as myself, particularly given the layered risks it poses to all users, to researchers, and to people with certain identities. However, I felt a sense of cultural pressure to turn away from that concern and to pursue research as *researcher first, person second*. I had internalized an expectation that in order for my research to be valued by others, I had to subordinate concerns I had about protecting myself as a person so I could (appear to) participate confidently as a researcher first and foremost. Along these lines, I am indebted to the methodological work in our field that I am continuing to discover—work that challenges this kind of thinking and advocates for more inclusive methodological approaches, including in ways that consider the intersectional identities and positionalities of researchers (e.g., Adsanatham; Buck and Ralston; Gelms et al.; Lockett et al.).

Rhetoric and writing studies of social media need to be customized to suit the emergent spaces *of* social media and the people engaging *with/in* it. Just as rhetoric and writing studies generally requires actively and inclusively “[r]econstituting who ‘counts’ as authors” (Rohan 28), rhetoric and writing studies of social media requires actively and inclusively reconstituting who counts as human subjects. IRB says that research should not harm human subjects. Agreed, wholeheartedly. But even if we aren’t the subjects of our own research, we are nevertheless subjects. Selecting and enacting our method/ologies requires ongoing, critical reflection about our subjectivity. Reporting out about my influence in data collection and data processing via deliberative drifting is one way in

which I strove sincerely to hold myself accountable as a biased, subjective person who researches. But that effort is an act of ethical care for others. As we care for others, we must also care for ourselves.

DELIBERATIVE DRIFTING TODAY

Since introducing deliberative drifting in 2019, I have been critically reflecting on questions regarding engagement, positionality, and feasibility, and I have been wrestling with how method/ologies can responsibly and effectively attend to them. I would consider for future uses of deliberative drifting the following questions:

1. How will data be collected? Which technologies are required? What are the terms and conditions associated with the platform housing a digital field and/or event? How and where will the data be archived?
2. Will the researcher be logged into a professional account? A personal account? None? How will this choice impact the field's size, composition, and activity as observed and accounted for by the researcher?
3. Is this a study of people or discourse (Buck and Ralston 8)? Is IRB approval or review required? Is informed consent required? For whom? To what extent? Can consent be obtained after the event (e.g., for content the researcher wants to quote)?
4. To what extent can the digital field be considered public or private? How accessible will the field and/or event be after its "live" form ends?
5. What constitutes interaction and engagement in a digital field and/or live-streaming event? (How) will the researcher interact directly with others? How else will the researcher engage in the field, in the event, and/or with others? How will they account for their interaction and engagement?
6. How will data be (re)presented (e.g., quoted and/or paraphrased; anonymized and/or pseudonymized)? How will this (re)presentation affect understandings of the field? Of the event? Of people and communities involved in either?
7. How can the researcher acknowledge their influence on the field and/or event and those within it? How can they acknowledge that their (re)presentation to some extent produces limited, subjective knowledge?
8. How can the researcher acknowledge the potential impacts of their research on "the subject(s) and communities that they study" (Lockett et al. 26)? How can they enact ethical care for others (Adsanatham 83-84; Royster and Kirsch)? How can they minimize risks of harm? How

sensitive is the communication within the field and/or event, and how vulnerable are the rhetors (McKee and Porter 254)?

9. How can researchers acknowledge their positionality and subjectivity as a researcher and as a person in a way that cares for others and for the self? How can they acknowledge their privileged position as researchers in fields while also protecting themselves as people?

These questions may seem like dwelling on minutiae, to which I'd say: yes. Researchers need to dwell on seemingly insignificant details to responsibly account for them. For the last several years, I have been ruminating on these questions, and I am reluctant to offer answers. I agree with McKee and Porter when they advise, "Be deeply suspicious of blanket pronouncements . . . specific circumstances matter" (256). Accordingly, I encourage researchers to continually and critically question their methodological choices, accepting that this process may not provide perfect or prompt answers. We need to allow room for this methodological mess, so that we may carefully and rigorously work through the theory, praxis, and ethics of our work. Like social media itself, the methodological boundaries for social media research are emergent. In this way, deliberative drifting is a methodological product of its time, but with ongoing reflection and updates as needed, I hope its core aims and approaches will continue to support current and future research in this area.

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