# WHAT'S MOST FUN:

## A FRAMEWORK TO PROTECT CREATIVITY IN THE AGE OF INSTAGRAM


By
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# Abstract

The online world offers the tantalizing promise of exposure for a new generation of artists, with animators flocking to Instagram to form the latest virtual art sharing space. For women, like me, working in commercial animation, Instagram offers a venue to be seen in an industry with chauvinist and industrial roots. By empowering new creators to surmount the studio monolith, social media platforms present an opportunity to forge a personal creative identity online. There are complexities with this new visibility, as sharing platforms encourage sameness by reinforcing linear trajectories that commodify the creative self. Online sharing culture affects creative practice in numerous ways; with a focus on the experience of women in animation, this thesis examines a particular subset of the Instagram phenomenon. Through the creation and facilitation of a participatory workshop, this paper presents a framework to address the developmental needs of the new generation of artists raised on social media. In the workshop, participants are asked to put aside their devices and reflect through a series of drawing activities that raise questions about social media performativity in order to reignite the lost creative self. Further, they investigate ways to maintain a creatively sustainable art practice online. As part of a feminist discourse this project favours a participatory approach to workshop facilitation that uses play as a way for participants to imagine and design their art practice for the digital future.

**Key Terms**: Online Performativity, Women in Animation, Agency, Participatory Methods, Instagram, Creative Trajectories, Becomings, Art Education

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To my participants: the women in animation with whom this work was made. Our coming-together proves the value of conversation. Acknowledgements to my colleagues and students at Sheridan College who endured my thesis brain for nearly two years. I hope you find value in this project.

Thank you to my family, especially my husband Jason.

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To my fellow artists:
*We are always in a state of becoming.*

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

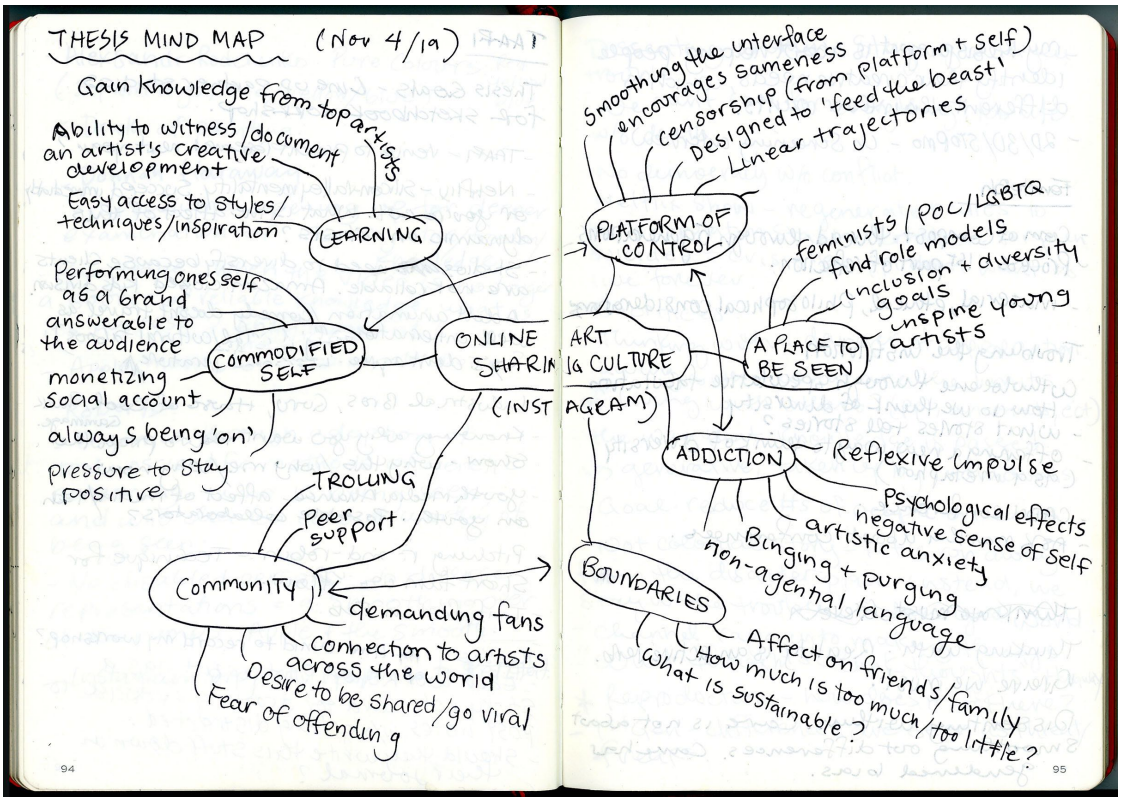


**Fig. 1.1** Mind map of online art sharing culture demonstrates a multiplicity of effects within the research area. (TF)

## 1.1 Research Question

In *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* MIT professor Sherry Turkle argues that engagement with digital platforms has a distancing effect on people and relationships. She outlines a series of digital *guideposts*, stating that individuals must "protect creativity"[1] and "create sacred spaces for conversation"[2] in order to confront and reaffirm basic human values. Turkle calls for a return to community-based models of engagement—not online, but in person—and urges us to make space for conversation with ourselves, our community, and

1. Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 319.
2. Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 321.

the world. Similarly, prominent media theorist and critic Douglas Rushkoff explores how the digital forces that were meant to connect humanity have been exploited by modern technology companies for financial gain, saying society must "reassert the human agenda…not as the individual players we have been led to imagine ourselves to be, but as the team we actually are."[3] In his NPR One podcast and accompanying book *Team Human*, Rushkoff advocates for a return to small-scale community engagement, both online and off, to create a cultural renaissance that reasserts pro-social ideals.

Through this research I develop a framework for self-inquiry to help artists determine which aspects of their personal creativity are worth protecting in the digital age. To do this, my methodology draws upon work from the fields of art psychology, generative design, and digital theory to create the opportunity for artists to converse intimately with the self and the broader creative community. In this case, I focus my attention on the experience of women working in the field of commercial animation as a way to examine my personal relationship with online art sharing. Although animation artists share their work on various social accounts and websites, I have chosen Instagram as it is currently the platform where I am most frequently engaged.

Therefore, this thesis considers the following:

*How might the culture of online sharing affect creative practice for women in animation who share their artwork on Instagram?*

With this question I aim to make room for conversation and reflection about the effect of social media on the creative self and identify ways for artists to approach their personal creativity both online and off. Though the thesis focuses on the experience of women in animation, it benefits creative practitioners of all stripes: namely, anyone who is willing to truthfully examine the cost of living a creative life in both the analogue and digital worlds. It is in this fuzzy space where we might use fun as a way to dream about the creative self.

3. Douglas Rushkoff, *Team Human* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 7.

## 1.2 Theoretical Frame

The animation worker acts as a creative chameleon, possessing the advanced skill to adapt drawing styles to suit any studio production. In doing so, the personal creative self becomes virtually invisible: such is the reality of the commercial art world. Artists create within a pipeline-driven structure in order to produce work within a singular aesthetic. There is very good reason for this; an inconsistent individualist approach would be confusing for a viewing audience and incredibly inefficient and costly from a production standpoint. However, there is a trade-off: personal creativity does not thrive under such conditions. Slowly, over time, this private conflict becomes tangible; manifesting in the form of guilt feelings that arise from neglecting one's personal artistic practice. Animation workers, as with many in the commercial arts, routinely struggle to express themselves fulsomely in a field that often requires them to mimic the message and creative vision of their employers.

I make a distinction between personal and commercial creative practice to accentuate the contrast between work created for others versus for artistic fulfillment. The fountain of creativity comes from the need to express oneself solely for oneself; not doing so can eventually lead to burnout. *Self Determination Theory* argues that the desire to act arises from a set of intrinsically and extrinsically motivated forces, each of which produces a variety of outcomes with an impact on individual learning, performance and well-being.[4] Furthermore, *integrated regulation* is described as the highest form of intrinsic motivation in that the performance of an activity is bound to an individual's sense of self and intrinsically important to personal goals.[5] In the context of this thesis, I define personal creativity as the kind of work that is done for intrinsically motivated reasons, spurred on by the impulse to express an inner world to the outer world—and by doing so, accessing feelings of joy or catharsis. In the social media era, the distinction between private and public becomes blurred, and artists risk performing creativity as a brand. We become endlessly accessible and perpetually obliged, creating an environment of frenetic motion with the potential to further stifle personal creativity.

And yet, the online space offers a powerful venue for expression that has come to symbolize

4. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, "Self Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68-78.
5. Marylène Gagné and Edward L. Deci, "Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26, no. 4 (2005): 331–362.

the movement toward a new era of agency for women and other oppressed groups. Social media is seen as an opportunity to elevate voices that have been silenced by traditional gatekeepers, creating barrier-free access to a supportive global community. While this may have been true in the early stages of the internet, the adoption of manipulative persuasion techniques by digital corporations reveals that these technologies are far from neutral, while commodified systems of engagement recreate the gendered dynamics of the real world. I position this thesis as an invitation to rethink the unconscious bias that creates an unwelcoming digital environment for diverse populations. By centering my argument on the experiences of women in animation, I am able to critique approaches to creativity that challenge the traditional hierarchical mentorship structures that continue to perpetuate online and within the commercial animation industry. In *Feminist Theories of Technology* Professor Judy Wajcman proposes a Technofeminist approach to think through how society co-evolves alongside technologies, and how this phenomenon affects women in particular. Situated as an intersection between third-wave feminist scholarship and science and technology studies, Wajcman states, "the materiality of technology affords or inhibits the doing of particular gender power relations."[6] As such, I use Wajcman's work as part of a feminist discourse to understand how these gendered systems affect the development of personal artistic trajectories by limiting potentiality and inhibiting creative becomings.

## 1.3 Statement of Purpose

There is a tradition within the commercial animation community to stress the importance of maintaining a personal artistic practice as an antidote to the experience of studio production life. In the 1970s noted Disney educator Walt Stanchfield identified the importance of keeping a personal creative practice outside of the studio, even going so far as to say that without it an artist could succumb to feelings of withdrawal and ennui.[7] In one of his weekly handouts, Stanchfield proposed a formula to identify the importance of using drawing as a tool for personal reflection. He said: "IMPRESSION minus EXPRESSION equals DEPRESSION,"[8] the idea that, for members of the animation industry, fulfillment cannot come from the job alone; creativity thrives in reaction to an impulsive and *personal* response to stimuli—a response that must be

6. Judy Wajcman. "Feminist Theories of Technology." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010): 150.
7. Walt Stanchfield, *Drawn to Life: 20 Golden Years of Disney Master Classes: Volume 1: The Walt Stanchfield Lectures*. (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2009), 317.
8. Stanchfield, 317.

expressed for the sheer pleasure of release. Drawings of Mickey Mouse won't cut it—for the artist, to ignore one's personal creative impulse is tantamount to death. Stanchfield's catchy adage takes on a new meaning in the social media context, as one can argue that online space offers a similar opportunity to reflect and express one's personal observations in real time amid a vast network of like-minded others.

But it's not that simple. Instagram has increasingly become a platform where animation artists share their drawings, but this creates the potential for individuals to feel a sense of obligation to their Instagram followers. My research explores the effects of Instagram on the creativity of women in animation as the sketchbook transitions from its traditional use as a method of self-discovery to a digital marketing tool. Through my experience in animation education and from the context review research, there have been few studies that explore the effect of this popular method of art sharing on creativity. Although online sharing provides a platform for new and diverse talents to show their work, that exposure can bring with it unwanted repercussions. As described in Chapter 2, a recent report by USC Annenberg has identified how cultural attitudes reflect the lack of gender parity within the field of animation, explaining how women are judged for adopting traditionally masculine attributes and expressing agentic qualities. These findings run contrary to the stated goals of animation studios, which outwardly express the need for diverse stories told by diverse creators, but there has been little research exploring how these trends play out in the online world.

With this in mind, I engage with women in animation who share artwork online by facilitating a participatory sketchbook workshop titled *Draw It For The 'Gram* to identify the effect of online sharing on the creative practice of participants. I am interested in how animation creatives can create space for personal work by learning to think critically about their reflexive sharing practices. As part of my workshop design I use generative research as an accessible methodology that enables women in animation—and by extension, everyone who draws for a paycheque—to develop a personal creative framework for the digital age. The workshop itself is structured around an adaption of Viktor Lowenfeld's six stages of creative development, which I have distilled into a series of drawing exercises. Taking inspiration from scholarly notions of engendered potential and becomings, the goal of this project is to offer a framework to address the developmental needs of the new generation of artists raised on social media.

# 1.4 Noticing Creative Shifts: How Online Sharing Changed Me

I'm an animator and a teacher, and I have always loved to draw. When I was a child, I kept a sketchbook and would turn to it as a way of processing my world. In the early days I would draw reflexively and without prompting, engrossed in the process for hours at a time with only a set of markers and a pad of paper to keep me entertained. I told stories through these drawings, and as I grew older I learned how to use them to forge connections with others. Art-making became a form of currency, with the creative process extrinsically bound to my sense of self. *You're so good. Draw me a picture.* To the artist, this voice should sound familiar.


**Fig. 1.2** These are drawings from what I believe to be my very first formal sketchbook, ranging from the ages of three to seven. I would turn to this book when I wanted to make *good drawings.* Coming from a creative family, I was always encouraged to pursue a career in the arts. Although these drawings pre-date the internet, as I grew older I became hyper-aware of the way my drawings were perceived by others. (TF)

Then came the internet. At first it seemed like some frivolous curiosity, but later it became the place to make your mark on the world. It was somewhere to be seen and, as a young woman aspiring to a career in animation, being seen meant everything. From then on I felt compelled to share my art online. In high school I experimented with forums and blogs, and later my sharing moved to platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. But as I continued to share, I noticed my sharing behavior begin to change. Caught up in a cycle of fits and starts, I would carefully build an online presence and then suddenly abandon the platform in favour of something new—shifting from Livejournal to Facebook to Instagram and beyond, leaving fragmented pieces of myself dotted across the internet. Something about my creative practice had changed. I began to wonder: was the issue with me or did it have to do with the interface? I noticed a tension between my desire to share while simultaneously experiencing the discomfort of exposure. What

was happening here? What was this tension and was I the only one experiencing it?

My current research explores the effect of online sharing culture on creative practice as a way to interrogate my own relationship with social media. In *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, philosopher Erin Manning outlines a new way to think about form and matter as engendered potential, which I can use to investigate the nature of creativity. She says, "To engender is to explore the potentialities of form and matter at the level of individuations rather than identities."[9] In relation to my drawing practice, engendering is to think of potential in abstract ways. No longer bound by standard definitions of the self, an engendered body moves through time and space as an agent of constant change. To engender potential means existing within an endless state of becoming; yet when we operate inside a controlling interface such as Instagram we are bound to a linear model and movement that dictates the outcome. When I share online, my work becomes a trajectory map locked into a particular place and time. Or, in the current vernacular, my art becomes a social media brand that can never deviate from the established norm, lest I become woefully ill-defined.

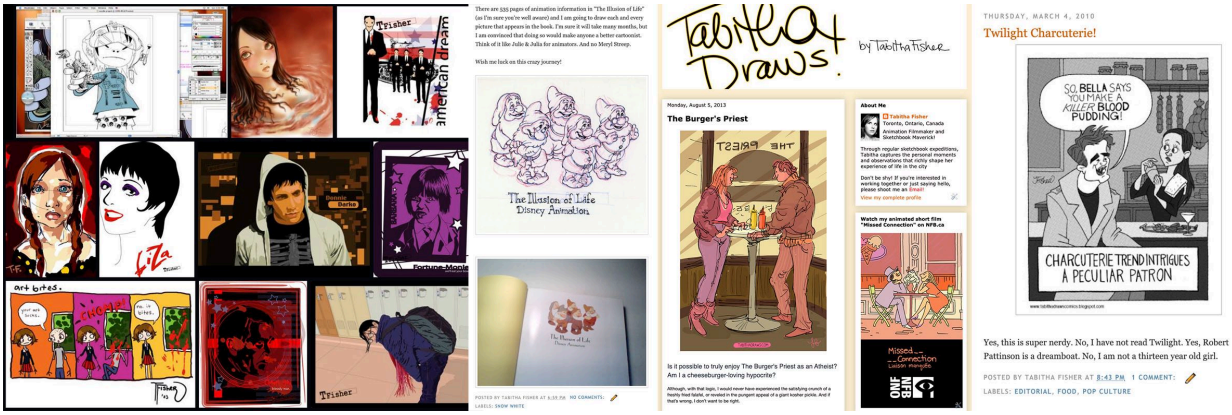


**Fig. 1.3** As an early adopter of online art sharing, I have abandoned countless blogs and websites in the past 20 years. It is virtually impossible to know how many of these accounts I have created in my lifetime. Many of the links are broken, or redirect to locked accounts that are connected to old email addresses and misplaced passwords. Although this may be viewed as a loss from an archival perspective, the positive aspect of online forgetting is that it allows an individual to move beyond past versions of themselves. (TF)

When we think of creativity as a politics of touch, the online platform becomes an obstacle that impedes creative growth. According to Manning, "politics of touch are about potential energy. The actualization of potential energy alters states, causing shifts from individuation to

9. Erin Manning, "Engenderings: Gender, Politics, Individuation," *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty,* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 90.

individuation through the metastability of transduction."[10] The act of creation is a body-in-formation, or a playful practice that thrives on the new. As artists we can imagine a state of flow as an enthusiastic reaching toward the unknown. In these moments time becomes an abstraction that gives way to emerging potential. "Engenderings brought forth through a politics of touch open the way to a wider selection of bodies, allowing us to explore them in all of their engendered and engendering matter-forms."[11] When I was a child drawing for fun, I would use a sketchbook as an outlet for my feelings, and these creative acts were bound to my sense of self within that particular context in time and space. Creativity is experienced as a becoming-in-relation; today I continue to become and shift through various states of being. At first it might seem as though a similar dynamic is at play within the social media context; in the early days of the internet this was indeed true. The online world was an open-ended space relating to itself through a constellation of endless loops and linkages. However, we are currently witnessing a shift toward a platform-based experience mediated by a strict and controlling social interface.

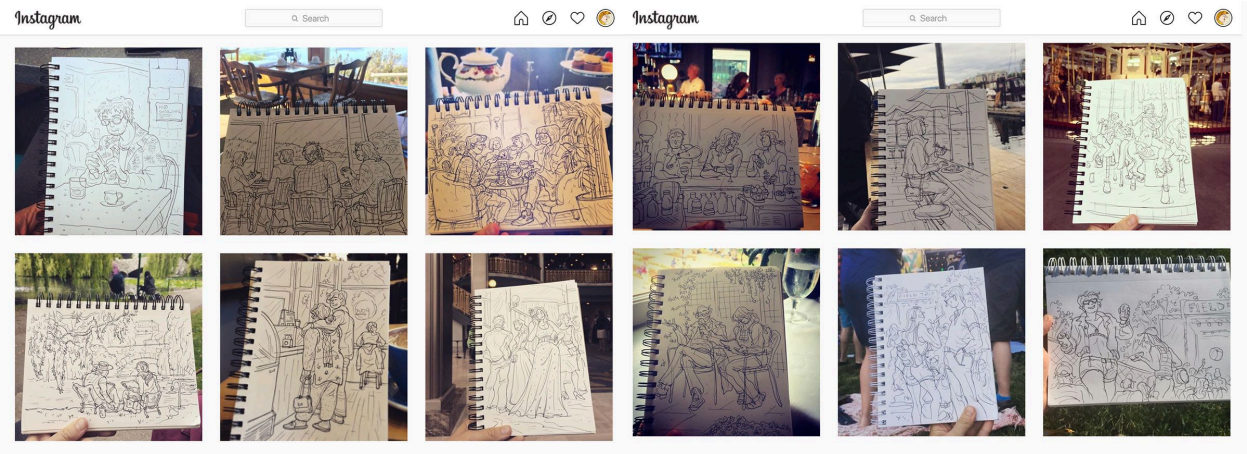


**Fig.1.4** In recent years I have maintained an Instagram account centered on my experience sketching in the city. This practice evolved organically as an extension of my Blogspot account which incorporated personal essays and drawings based on personal observations. Over time, it seemed as though artists were moving away from Blogspot in favour of Instagram, and the ability to geo-tag each post and share artwork in-the-moment was enough for me to switch platforms. However, I have since become bored of the unified aesthetic encouraged on Instagram and find myself—yet again—craving change. (TF)

Today, platforms provided by tech giants allow freedom of movement and the feeling of autonomy, but the operational nature of these systems is purposely hidden from view. We are currently experiencing a *smoothing over* of digital culture which has a destabilizing effect on our lives. In the case of Instagram, control occurs at the user level and within the interface. The

10. Manning, 102.
11. Manning, 86.

platform curates content to nudge engagement toward a more desirable outcome for advertisers, while the user is encouraged to reshape and commodify their image in consistent ways. The frictionless digital space relieves individuals from the pain and nuisance of knowing how the system actually works, while the user experiences a simulation of agency that exists within the confined platform of the smooth interface: the path is clear to provide a pleasurable experience and limitless content distracts users from the limitations of the platform. Users gripe about the limitations of Instagram where images are auto-curated and word counts fixed, yet the restraining forces at work are more powerful than we realize. Here, the Deleuzian systems of control are virtually invisible. The interface itself is a method of control that affects how we view the world and, as Deleuze describes, society exists in "a universal system of deformation" whereby we are forced to operate within a state of constant flux.[12] Today the smooth interface acts as a system of control that manifests through the persistent motion of frequent and active engagement. For the artist, this movement can seem productive, even liberating; and the nature of constraints is that they become invisible over time. As network theorist Benjamin Bratton explains, "Artificial standardizations become naturalized as if they were always the measure of things."[13] Controlling platforms thrive on consistency, but the lives of real people are messy and full of friction. Instagram has no time for the ugliness of the real and therefore no room for dissent. It's an expression of fantasy—a desire to escape an ever-changing world; however, the problem with seeking comfort within smooth spaces is that they are unstable constructs. Deleuze issues a warning: "Smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new spaces, switches adversaries. Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us."[14] There is no freedom here, but the outward projection is relentlessly positive. There is no room for striation within a smooth world.

The act of creation is violent by nature, and engendered potential emerges through moments of friction. If we think of drawing as a politics of touch, we must also understand the role of friction as a tool of revolt. In a platform of control such as Instagram, the interface operates like a

12. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59, Winter 1992 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990): 5.

13. Ben Bratton, *The Stack* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 45.

14. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 500.

seductive mask that smooths out the bumps, rendering things easy and frictionless.[15] Potentiality becomes an illusion locked into a predetermined space, shaped by whichever creative act came before. Instagram thrives on a false conception of the new where sameness is rewarded through a system of shares, views, and likes. "Engendering gender is to never know in advance what a gendered body can do,"[16] and a politics of touch runs counter to the very notion of online sharing in the classic neoliberal sense. Yet, individuation creates a source of violent energy that engenders a kind of radical politics. Perhaps I can see how this dynamic, felt on the level of the subconscious, could affect my creative practice so profoundly. There are two opposing forces here that I can no longer afford to ignore. Through a politics of touch, I'm required to push back.

## 1.5 Paper Organization

In **Chapter 2**, this thesis document presents a context review that frames the historic lack of diversity within the field of commercial animation and how its boys' club rhetoric affects the new generation of female artists. Furthermore, it traces the shift toward online art sharing spaces such as Instagram, where diverse artists can control their own narratives while also exposing themselves to the complexities of being seen online. **Chapter 3** establishes the methodology for this thesis work by outlining a critical framework that draws upon the fields of art psychology, generative design, and digital theory. Then, in **Chapter 4**, this research is put into practice through the development and facilitation of an accessible participatory workshop format that has become the foundation for the thesis project, and presents a synthesis of the findings. In **Chapter 5** the document concludes by revisiting the research question and reflecting on the successes, challenges, and limitations of the project. It also offers recommendations for researchers in a similar field and identifies where the research goes from here.

15. Tabitha Fisher, "The Smooth Life: Instagram as a Platform of Control," *Virtual Creativity* 10, no. 1 (2020): 93-103.
16. Manning, 105.

## CHAPTER 2

# CONTEXT REVIEW

In this chapter I provide context for this research: an analysis of the culture of online art sharing as experienced by women in the commercial animation industry. I first trace the historical and systemic issues of diversity and inclusion within the professional field of animation and discuss how they might affect the next generation of female creators. Then, I discuss how the Instagram platform offers a powerful place for women to be heard, while it also presents a new set of challenges for the development and maintenance of a personal creative practice. To conclude, I think forward to imagine what the shift toward platform-based creative performance means for the development of emerging female talent within the animation field.

## 2.1 Moving Beyond The Nine Old Men: Inclusion and Diversity in Animation

**"I'm the best draftsman around here—that's not bragging, that's a fact!"**[17]

— Milt Kahl, veteran Disney animator and one of *The Nine Old Men*

**"I've been called crazy, but I do believe that Milt draws as well as Michelangelo."**[18]

— Ollie Johnston, veteran Disney animator and one of *The Nine Old Men*

**"Maybe we just need to make our own chairs. I prefer that approach, because it's the only one that seems viable to me."**[19]

— Brenda Chapman, Director of Pixar's *Brave*, commenting on the absence of women in the director's chair within the field of animation

17. Andreas Deja, *The Nine Old Men: Lessons, Techniques, and Inspiration from Disney's Great Animators* (Oxford: Focal Press, 2015), 153.

18. Deja, 153.

19. Brenda Chapman, "Stand Up For Yourself and Mentor Others," *The New York Times*, Last modified August 14, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/08/14/how-can-women-gain-influence-in-hollywood/stand-up-for-yourself-and-mentor-others.

The field of commercial North American animation is famously a boys' club that thrives on a braggadocio rhetoric established in the early days of Disney. Perpetuated through the recounting of golden-age narratives, animation lore is greatly biased toward white men at the expense of women and people of colour. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is the story of Disney's postwar recoupment brain trust, a collection of young hand-selected animators uncritically dubbed The Nine Old Men, whose name was jokingly inspired by the nine justices of President Roosevelt's famously hostile Supreme Court.[20] Initially tasked with developing new film concepts to break the studio out of the 1940s slump, the group later became a way for Disney publicists to link the studio back to Walt after his death as a symbol of the old guard.[21] The significance of The Nine Old Men to the culture of animation filmmaking cannot be overstated, with two of its members having written *The Illusion of Life*, a definitive text outlining the processes and creative methods of one of the world's most significant animation studios. Presented as the authoritative manual of character animation techniques, this book set the groundwork for the subsequent retelling of legend narratives that aggrandize elite figures from the past to the exclusion of everyone else. It is true that The Nine Old Men are undeniably skilled at their craft; yet they have come to represent a limited and homogeneous vision of what it means to be a great character animator. For those formed by a different mould, the effect is akin to staring into a broken mirror and never seeing yourself reflected back. As outlined by Nathalia Holt in her book *Queens of Animation*, only in recent years has focused attention been paid to the skilled female artists fighting for respect behind the scenes, such as prolific female conceptual artist Mary Blair who was active in the same era—a key visionary for many of Disney's classic animated features, and also one of Walt Disney's favourites.[22] This pattern of erasure extends to more recent times when Pixar director Brenda Chapman was fired from her 2012 feature film *Brave* and replaced with a male director before it was complete, the details buried under a non-disclosure agreement. Reflecting on the experience in an op-ed for *The New York Times*, Chapman states, "Sometimes women express an idea and are shot down only to have a man express essentially the same idea and have it broadly embraced. Until there is a sufficient number

20. John Canemaker, *Walt Disney's Nine Old Men & the Art of Animation* (New York: Disney Editions, 2001), vii.
21. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981), 159-160.
22. Nathalia Holt, *The Queens of Animation: The Untold Story of the Women Who Transformed the World of Disney and Made Cinematic History* (New York: Hachette, 2019), 163.

of women executives in high places, this will continue to happen."[23] The following year, in a stroke of bittersweet irony, *Brave* won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature and Chapman became the first woman to ever win the prize. (Figure 2.1)

**Fig. 2.1** Pixar director Brenda Chapman shares the Best Animated Feature Oscar for Brave with co-director Mark Andrews. Jason Merritt/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images[24]

The way animators speak about themselves and their work perpetuates a macho stereotype about what it means to be a dedicated practitioner of the craft. In the early days of Disney this ethos was embodied in the studio culture where labourers were made to feel inferior to their master, working long hours for little pay. Tensions escalated to the point of a 200-person walkout on May 29, 1941, led by animator Art Babbitt,[25] which almost ended the company. Disney eventually rebounded and the struggle against burnout continues today. Grueling hours and late nights are the norm in an industry built on Taylorist notions of hierarchy, where demonstrations of loyalty and subservience are an important metric of one's value. Artist Richard Williams, best known for his role as animation director on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and his unfinished film *The Thief and the Cobbler,* framed the workplace discourse for a generation of animators through his text *The Animator's Survival Kit*, first published in 2001. In it he recalls a story from his apprenticeship where Disney's Milt Kahl, considered to be the grumpiest of the Nine Old Men, unleashes his wrath on the young animator for simply asking him whether he listens to music

23. Chapman, "Stand Up."
24. Casey Cipriani, "How 'The Prince Of Egypt,'"*Bustle*, last modified December 14, 2018.
25. The Art Babbitt Appreciation Society, "About Us: Art Babbitt," *Art Babbitt Society*, Accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.artbabbittsociety.com/.

while working (Figure 2.2). The tale concludes with a photograph of Williams hunched over an animation desk wearing a sweater emblazoned with the words "Animation Is Concentration," demonstrating how he had been effectively whipped into shape by his mentor.[26]


Fig. 2.2 Animation director Richard Williams's cartoon depicting an encounter with Milt Kahl, one of Disney's Nine Old Men, from The Animator's Survival Kit.[27]

This troublesome rhetoric also played out in the animation classroom. In the 1970s, over at the newly established CalArts Character Animation Program, a renaissance was forming within a famous student cohort whose members later became responsible for classic films such as *Beauty and the Beast, Ratatouille,* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. In a 2014 piece by *Vanity Fair*, journalist Sam Kashner captures the spirit of those first few years where, as one former student describes, "you could either get drunk, wasted, or work." With a majority male cohort, all in their late teens, it might be expected for things to get a little unruly; but the antics extended to the teachers as well. Designer Bill Moore is identified as having the biggest impact on this first cohort of animators, and his former students describe him in glowing terms. Pixar director Brad Bird remembers how Moore "would just swear at people, and everyone was absolutely terrified of him in the first couple of classes, and then everybody ended up loving him," while Disney artist Mike Giaimo nostalgically recounts how Moore was prone to angry outbursts where he would tear student artwork off the walls and stomp on it. In one anecdote, after a string of successful critiques, a young John Lasseter was perceived as becoming too proud of himself and as a result Moore described his latest work as "true shit," adding that Lasseter "can't wake up

26. Richard Williams, *The Animator's Survival Kit: A Manual of Methods, Principles and Formulas for Classical, Computer, Games, Stop Motion and Internet Animators,* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 41-45.
27. Williams, 41-45.

with a hard-on every morning." In the interview, Lasseter cites Moore as one of his greatest influences. Giaimo recalls of Moore, "He took you to the edge of anxiety, fear, and frustration, and then you learned. He had an amazing style."[28] And so lays the groundwork for an unjust system of power, adopted by rote, through the fraternal mindset of a group of soon-to-be powerful young men.

The depths of animation's *bro culture* problem became evident when *The Hollywood Reporter* released an article by journalist Kim Masters in November 2017 detailing the alleged misconduct of then Disney/Pixar creative chief John Lasseter, who was said to have produced a studio culture so toxic that women knew to assume a defensive position dubbed "the Lasseter" to prevent him from placing his hand on their thighs when they were wearing skirts.[29] According to an article in *Variety* many former employees describe the culture at Pixar as "sexist and misogynistic,"[30] with Lasseter's embarrassing and awkward actions being brushed aside as childish fun, and women supporting each other through a whisper network lasting for more than two decades. Lasseter was granted a six-month leave of absence and later dismissed, which effectively became animation's #MeToo moment. Strangely, some of Lasseter's male colleagues remained oblivious to the issue. While on tour for *The Incredibles 2* in 2019, Director Brad Bird was asked about his longtime colleague Lasseter and told *The Daily Beast,* "If people had been historically insensitive, the pendulum goes to hypersensitive…I just want to go to the other world where people don't care about this kind of stuff so much…I want a place where everybody gets to do everything and it's now about the work."[31] But trouble persists regardless of whether those in power choose to face it. Former Pixar animator Emma Coats explained to *Buzzfeed* in 2015 how Brenda Chapman's departure made her realize "there's nobody I can look up to…Imitating the guys isn't gonna give me the same results as it gives them."[32] Coats later left

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28. Sam Kashner, "The Class That Roared," *Vanity Fair*, last modified February 11, 2014, https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/03/calarts-animation-1970s-tim-burton.

29. Kim Masters, "John Lasseter's Pattern of Alleged Misconduct Detailed by Disney/Pixar Insiders," *The Hollywood Reporter*, last modified November 21, 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/john-lasseters-pattern-alleged-misconduct-detailed-by-disney-pixar-insiders-1059594.

30. Gene Maddaus, "Pixar's John Lasseter Was the Subject of a 'Whisper Network' for More Than Two Decades," *Variety*, last modified November 21, 2017, https://variety.com/2017/film/news/john-lasseter-pixar-disney-whisper-network-1202620960/.

31. Brad Bird, interview by Kevin Fallon, "Oscar Talk: Brad Bird Talks 'The Incredibles 2' and John Lasseter's Redemption," *The Daily Beast*, last modified January 20, 2019, https://www.thedailybeast.com/brad-bird-talks-the-incredibles-2-superhero-sequel-fatigue-and-john-lasseters-redemption.

32. Emma Coats, interview by Ariane Lange, "Inside The Persistent Boys Club of Animation," *BuzzFeed News*, last

the industry altogether and cites the dismissal of Chapman as her main rationale, stating, "I can't see why what happened to her wouldn't happen to me."[33] Therein lies the issue with bro culture: it creates the possibility for those in power to escape or deflect the issues, effectively erasing the experiences of people who work outside the status quo, resulting in a loss of the diverse voices that the studios claim to endorse.

In June 2019 the Annecy Animation Festival hosted the third annual Women in Animation World Summit where research was presented from the first major study of gender representation at animation studios across Los Angeles. Authored by Dr. Stacey Smith, a professor from USC Annenberg who runs a global think tank studying issues of inequality in entertainment, the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the current state of the industry. Titled *"Increasing Inclusion in Animation: Investigating Opportunities, Challenges, and the Classroom to the C-Suite Pipeline,"*[34] Smith and her colleagues used a combination of in-depth interviews and surveys conducted from 2016-2018 to identify how cultural attitudes affect the lack of gender parity within animation, which was supported by a statistical analysis of above-the-line positions (directors, producers, writers) and below-the-line positions (animation crew, story artists, editors, art directors, character designers, etc.). The paper concludes with a list of suggested solutions to address inequality in animation, including a call for those in power to consciously create opportunities and environments for new voices to be heard. In a November 2019 piece for *Vulture*, journalist Chris Lee describes a studio-wide shift at both Disney and Pixar that's been well underway since the departure of Lasseter in 2017 and the installment of new chief executives Jennifer Lee and Pete Docter. Pixar president Jim Morris cites the rapidly aging alumni of the first CalArts cohort, colloquially known as Pixar's "brain trust," as the impetus for its renewal. According to Morris, "Those guys are all middle-aged or older now and they're not going to be the filmmakers ten years from now. They're not going to necessarily be the ones that have their finger on the zeitgeist…Animated films come from people of their time."[35] This sentiment echoes Brenda Chapman's call for men to give up their Director's seat to

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modified August 28, 2015, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/arianelange/creative-work-in-connection-with-preparing-the-cartoons#.cs8KjLNNM.

33. Coats, "Boys Club."

34. Stacy Smith, et al., "Increasing Inclusion in Animation: Investigating Opportunities, Challenges, and the Classroom to the C-Suite Pipeline," *University of Southern California Annenberg,* June 2019, http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-inclusion-animation-201906.pdf.

35. Jim Morris, interview by Chris Lee, "How Walt Disney Animation and Pixar Are Evolving After John

young female filmmakers, outlining mentorship as a key to success.[36] To get more women in the field, animation needs to dismantle the boys' club and lose the rhetoric of the genius male animator. Progress was made in 2018 when Pixar storyboard artist Domee Shi became the first woman to direct a short film at Pixar—*Bao*—which later went on to win the Academy Award for Best Animated Short. Shi credits Pixar director Pete Docter for encouraging her to develop the film in the first place, recounting that "his excitement about it, and his shock and reactions, really gave me the confidence to continue developing it, and to eventually pitch it to the studio."[37] In late 2018 it was announced that Shi was in development on her first feature film project. With the rollout of high-level animation productions on streaming services such as *Netflix* and *Disney+,* as well as Pixar's new talent incubator *SparkShorts*, it appears that change is indeed afoot, at least at the largest Western studios. "I think they've just all realized now that they can't keep drawing from the same creative well over and over again," Shi said in an interview with *Deadline*. "If Pixar wants to stay at the forefront of animation and storytelling, they'll have to look for different sources."[38]

With this new wave of diverse voices comes a new set of challenges. In the USC Annenberg report, there was no mention of the digital tools and networks that this new generation uses to share and distribute their artwork, perhaps representing a blind spot within the research. Social media platforms increasingly have become the place where animation students and industry professionals share their drawings, but with this shift comes a risk that artists will commodify their craft out of an obligation to their online followers. One wonders how the brand-driven performance of online art sharing affects the way female animators perceive themselves and their peers, and how the pressure to share affects their creativity and career goals. According to the USC Annenberg report, "expressing ambition or self-promoting may result in lower evaluations of women."[39] Furthermore, the study explains how women in the field are punished for adopting

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Lasseter," *Vulture*, last modified November 15, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2019/11/how-disney-animation-pixar-are-evolving-after-john-lasseter.html.

36. Chapman, "Stand Up."

37. Domee Shi, interview by Matt Grobar, "The First Woman To Direct An Oscar-Contending Pixar Short, 'Bao's Domee Shi Is On Her Way To First Feature Project," *Deadline*, last modified November 26, 2018, https://deadline.com/2018/11/bao-domee-shi-pixar-oscars-animation-interview-1202508540/.

38. Shi, "First Woman."

39. Smith, et al., "Increasing Inclusion in Animation: Investigating Opportunities, Challenges, and the Classroom to the C-Suite Pipeline," *University of Southern California Annenberg,* June 2019, http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-inclusion-animation-201906.pdf.

traditionally masculine attributes and expressing agentic qualities. These findings run contrary to the stated goals of animation studios, which outwardly express the need for diverse stories told by diverse creators. Research from the USC Annenberg report shows that early-career female short film animation directors represented at prominent festivals was above parity (Figure 2.3), yet 35% of decision-makers felt that the lack of women film directors on feature film productions was due to women's lack of interest (Figure 2.4). Comparatively, 50% of early-career women, 32% of industry decision-makers, and 25% of Animation Guild members cited the industry's "boys' club" mentality as a barrier to access for potential female directors. However, 90% of women interviewed for the study aspired to leadership roles, including show running and directing.

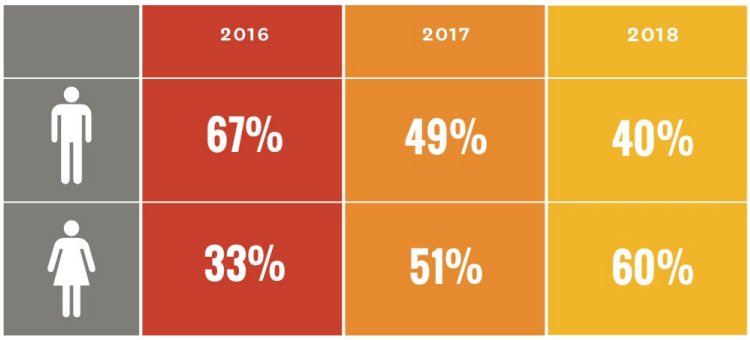


**Fig. 2.3** A summary of findings from the USC Annenberg Report (June 2019) demonstrates the quick rise of female directorial talent in the animated short film category at top film festivals in the U.S. The study attributes this trend to the high rates of female representation in elite animation programs, accounting for nearly half of those attending or enrolled.[40]


Fig. 2.4 A summary of findings from the USC Annenberg Report (June 2019) identifies how women's interest in directing is questioned by industry decision-makers, Animation Guild members, and early-career women themselves.[41]

40. Smith, "Increasing Inclusion."
41. Smith, "Increasing Inclusion."

For women in animation there is a politics to being seen by others in the community. Online sharing creates an unfiltered platform for new voices to be heard, yet these goals are easily undermined by the social pressure to present one's creativity as a product. Members of the animation community widely consider Instagram to be a premiere venue to network with peers and mentors while demonstrating a commitment to personal creative growth on a public scale. While in recent years, some animation artists have migrated to social platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, the message is still clear: If you aren't online it's as if you don't exist. My research seeks to identify how women in animation can balance outwardly motivated online sharing practices while retaining their unique creative voice as the industry continues to move toward greater diversity within the field.

## 2.2 Women Being Seen: Rise of the Instagram Artists

> **"With all the media coverage of women's issues right now, it's easy to presume that change is on the way. It will take a total shift in the culture, after sustained effort, to see any lasting effects."** [42]
>
> — Maureen Furniss, director of the CalArts Experimental Animation Program

> **"We see a lot of stories about marginalized people but not by them. And when they start to be by them, it's going to be very different."**[43]
>
> — Rebecca Sugar, creator of Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe*

Instagram has become a major venue for the next generation of animation artists to share their work with the world. Online, the boundaries between animator, illustrator, and graphic novelist have begun to blur, and it has become difficult for working artists to identify themselves in terms of a singular creative practice. The introduction of Instagram's swipe and video features have resulted in an explosion of cartoon content, making the platform seem like a perfect fit for

42. Maureen Furniss, quoted by David Robb, "Three-Day Symposium Set For Women In The Animation Industry," *Deadline*, last modified July 26, 2018, https://deadline.com/2018/07/women-in-animation-symposium-usc-ucla-calarts-lgbtq-diversity-inclusion-1202433840/.

43. Rebecca Sugar, interview by KC Ifeanyi, "Steven Universe" creator Rebecca Sugar embraces the "dangerously personal" side of creative inspiration," *Fast Company*, last modified December 17, 2018, https://www.fastcompany.com/90271462/steven-universe-creator-rebecca-sugar-embraces-the-dangerously-personal-side-of-creative-inspiration.

artists who think sequentially.[44] No longer confined to the commercial studio, creators produce specialized content for thousands of followers, demonstrating their drawing skills and technical prowess in an open venue where quantified levels of engagement are the primary metric of success. For a field that has been especially unwelcoming to diverse voices, the amplifying power of online expression has a significant resonance for those with something to say. Women in animation can express themselves in ways that were not possible for previous generations and, in the online space, the traditional barriers to industry access crumble as emerging creators seem to share their work with the world on their own terms. However, the social media experience is not as straightforward as it might at first appear. Instagram, like many social platforms, operates as a closed interface that precisely controls when and how it displays content. The nature of these operations is buried deep within a complex set of algorithms that makes it difficult for users to know who sees what from whom. Audiences are clustered within networks based on age, geography, and browsing history, their profiles housed inside a metaphorical black box, the contents of which are only fully known by parent company Facebook, Inc. In the modern age, these are the conditions under which artists are attempting to communicate an authentic creative self—housed within what is essentially an advertising company. Its users would be wise to remember that freeware is never entirely free.

A recent study found that, as of January 2020, 14 percent of global active Instagram users were women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. Following Snapchat, in the spring of 2019, Instagram ranked second as a preferred social network in the United States, its users skewing young, with half of Instagram's global account holders age 34 years or younger.[45] The study identifies teens as especially vulnerable to the effects of social media metrics. Due to the criticism caused by the anxiety-inducing effect of Instagram's *like* system, the platform has begun to implement *private likes*, where users can see their *likes*, but followers cannot. At a *Wired* conference in 2019, Instagram chief Adam Mosseri claimed, "The idea is to try and depressurize Instagram, to make it less of a competition, give people more space to focus on connecting with the people they love and the things that inspire them,"[46] though, according to an

44. Aminder Dhaliwal, interview by Hillary Brown, "Woman World Creator Aminder Dhaliwal Talks Levity, Feminism & Paul Blart, Mall Cop," *Paste Magazine*, last modified November 9, 2018, https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2018/11/woman-world-creator-aminder-dhaliwal-talks-levity.html.
45. Statista, "Distribution of Instagram users worldwide as of January 2020, by age and gender," last modified February 14, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/248769/age-distribution-of-worldwide-instagram-users/.
46. Adam Mosseri, "Facebook has a theory that hiding 'likes' will increase post volume, and Instagram is testing

article by Salvador Rodriguez of *CNBC*, Instagram has secretly been testing a hypothesis that fewer likes will translate to greater engagement as users become less self-critical on the platform.[47] This would mean more eyes on Instagram, resulting in greater value for advertisers.

For women in animation, the creative approach to Instagram seems to fall under two camps: some use the platform to casually share work with colleagues, while others have leveraged their accounts into a full-fledged business. For cartoonists, the culture of online art sharing has roots in fan culture, where for over two decades artists have appeared at specialized conventions and trade shows to give fans the opportunity to meet the creators behind their favourite comics and animated series.[48] In a practice known as *tabling*, artists purchase trade show booth space to sell art prints and merchandise with the hopes of being scouted for work opportunities. At fan conventions, popular characters sell best. New patrons are lured to the artist's booth by the sight of Harry Potter and Sailor Moon, then hopefully stick around and engage with the artist's more personal sketchbooks and zines. This marketing strategy is paralleled online where artists use hashtags to link popular content with fans in hopes of soliciting donations to their Patreon account. The thinking is that, with enough online exposure, an artist could eventually quit their animation studio job and pursue creative independence through the spoils of their social media accounts and fundraising efforts. For some artists, Instagram is one piece of a larger social strategy with a complex network of linkages across platforms. Social media provides a powerful place for diverse voices to be heard, but the pursuit of creative fulfillment becomes entangled with the needs of a demanding digital interface. The consuming nature of online sharing platforms presents a new set of artistic challenges that are unique to this generation.

Here, I present a sampling of three women in animation who use Instagram to share their artwork online. Each has experienced the platform in unique ways. For animation story artist and director Aminder Dhaliwal, Instagram is a venue to test-drive new works in development, such as her online comic *Woman World*, a feminist satire where women inhabit a dystopian future-earth and learn to reclaim their voice. Cartoon Network star Rebecca Sugar maintains an

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that theory," By Salvador Rodriguez, *CNBC*, last modified December 6, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/06/instagram-hiding-likes-could-increase-post-volume.html.

47. Salvador Rodriguez, "Facebook has a theory that hiding 'likes' will increase post volume, and Instagram is testing that theory," *CNBC*, last modified December 6, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/06/instagram-hiding-likes-could-increase-post-volume.html.

48. James Grebey, "How Important is Artist Alley at New York Comic Con? Does it Really Help Artists?," *SyFyWire*, last modified October 3, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/how-important-is-artist-alley-at-new-york-comic-con-does-it-really-help-artists.

Instagram presence focused on behind-the-scenes drawings and photographs related to her wildly popular show *Steven Universe* and uses the account to drop hints about upcoming material and promote issues that affect the LGBTQ+ community. Newcomer Michelle Lam represents a wave of emerging animation artists who view Instagram as only one part of a multi-pronged social media strategy designed to gain influence and amass a vast network of followers.

The Instagram platform affords each of these women a place of opportunity and reach. Dhaliwal found it valuable as a tool to finesse her comedic timing on *Woman World*. "With Instagram, I could control where people were pausing before a punchline with swiping," she says. "In a print layout, spreads didn't have the same effect."[49] She says feedback was immediate and helped her workshop the narrative structure. "I learned a lot from the comments about clarity."[50] Due to the online popularity of *Woman World*, Dhaliwal published a print edition that was met with critical praise. Dhaliwal is now in development on a pilot script and currently uses the platform to showcase a new project, *Cyclopedia Exotica*, that furthers her message of inclusion and diversity.

For Sugar, the amplifying power of Instagram has political resonance. The desire to be seen is at the core of the animated series *Steven Universe*, a clever and deeply personal exploration of gender norms. On Instagram, this representation extends beyond the television series into the online space. Having come out about her bisexuality in 2016, Sugar offers a positive depiction of queer empowerment, and through her Instagram presence she is able to connect directly to fans and use her platform to promote causes that are relevant to members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Much like Dhaliwal, Lam posts her semi-autobiographical webcomic *SUCCUBISHEZ* to Instagram and uses the platform to explore themes of female empowerment, sexuality, and coming of age with a cheeky cartoon twist. Online, Lam is known for her sassy and brash alter-ego Meesh, a horned devil character she features heavily on Instagram and YouTube. Lam's motivations are political too: as an Asian-American, she also uses her work to challenge the

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49. Aminder Dhaliwal, interview by Suzanne Alyssa Andrew, "Instagram star Aminder Dhaliwal makes her print debut with Woman World," *Quill and Quire*, https://quillandquire.com/authors/instagram-star-aminder-dhaliwal-makes-her-print-debut-with-woman-world/.

50. Dhaliwal, interview by Terry Ibele, "Episode 23: Aminder Dhaliwal Director at Disney TV & Creator of Woman World on Instagram Success," produced by Terry Ibele, *Animation Industry Podcast*, July 2, 2019. Podcast audio, 00:17:10, https://soundcloud.com/animation-podcast/episode-23-aminder-dhaliwal-director-at-disney-tv-creator-of-woman-world-on-instagram-success.

demoralizing stereotypes that limit creativity for diverse communities, saying, “People would always think I’m that quiet Asian girl… But I decided to just be like fuck bitch, no.”[51] In conjunction with other social platforms, she uses Instagram to give a voice to characters who are chronically misunderstood. Ultimately, what drives her to the platform is her desire to help others.


**Fig. 2.5** A panel from artist Aminder Dhaliwal’s Instagram comic *Woman World*.[52]

As a woman in animation, the desire to be seen online is rife with complexities. As Dhaliwal’s comic *Woman World* gained in popularity, she experienced a vicious backlash from readers who just didn’t get it. After identifying the work as a feminist project through the use of hashtags, *Woman World* became a target for attacks from misogynist strangers online. Dhaliwal came to the realization that “the people who are searching the International Women’s Day tag are often not the people who particularly like that day.”[53] After this initial hateful spike, Dhaliwal says that most comments have evened out. Typically readers will leave unsolicited writing tips or mundane calls to correct a spelling mistake; but still, the comments can be overwhelming, not just for their content, but due to their sheer volume. Dhaliwal has all but given up on responding to each comment individually, but tries her best to keep up with DMs (direct messages) from young artists asking for career advice. In recent times, Dhaliwal has made an effort to step back from social media to revisit her creative roots. Making time for herself, she

51. Michelle Lam (@mewtripled), “How to Stop Giving A Sh*t Motivational tips on how to not give a shoot,” *Instagram Video,* April 16, 2019, last accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BwUVH-Ul56q/.
52. Dhaliwal (aminder_d), “#WomanWorld # 84,” *Instagram,* January 19, 2018, last accessed January 2, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BeI3uf2hN3K/.
53. Dhaliwal, interview by Terry Ibele, “Instagram Success,” podcast audio, 00:12:22.

draws fan art while listening to podcasts of her favourite books, an activity she enjoyed in high school. Dhaliwal keeps these drawings completely private by refusing to post them on Instagram, saying, "we sometimes forget about the art, and sometimes I think you can make something for you, and if you take the pressure off that it won't go online, and there's absolutely no need for it to go online, it's a little easier. I would never show anyone my sketchbook."[54] She limits her exposure to maintain a healthy relationship with the platform.


**Fig. 2.6** Animation artist Rebecca Sugar uses Instagram to discuss issues pertaining to LGBTQ+ communities, as seen in this Instagram post from October 2019.[55]

Setting boundaries is less straightforward when your social brand is built on dismantling them. Commanding an audience of 1.1 million Instagram followers, Sugar's fan base tracks her content with a devoted intensity. Although Sugar rarely responds to Instagram comments, her fan base uses her posts to communicate openly with each other about their love for her and the show. An image from January 2020 depicting Sugar and her husband cutting a wedding cake received nearly half a million likes within days. For some fans, the details of Sugar's life are considered mythic, and a 2017 article by *The Rolling Stone* journalist Eric Thurm describes how it is not uncommon for her appearances to elicit tearful exchanges with her followers. Thurm writes, "Where other celebrities might be asked for a selfie or an autograph or to perform on command,

54. Dhaliwal, interview by Terry Ibele, "Instagram Success," podcast audio, 1:02:35.

55. Rebecca Sugar (rebeccasugar), "October 26th is #IntersexAwarenessDay! Please check out @interact_adv to learn about national and state level efforts, and to read #MyIntersexBody stories about the real experiences of intersex people [graphic] Thank you to the intersex youth advocates of interACT for this collaboration!" *Instagram,* October 26, 2019, last accessed January 3, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Fb_5WHfjJ/.

Sugar is asked—and told—about topics like gender identity, depression and abusive relationships."[56] Sugar describes these intimate moments as one of her favourite parts of the job. In an interview with *Bust Magazine*, she elaborates, saying, "When people come to me and feel connected to what I've done, I understand the other side of the equation [as a creator] and how lonely it is, and I want to know who they are."[57] Although Sugar does not discuss these issues openly with the public, her visibility produces a particular kind of psychological and emotional labour that previous generations of creators were never expected to face. During a 2019 Ottawa International Animation Festival panel promoting *Steven Universe: The Movie,* Sugar explained to the audience that, at 33 years of age, she has been working without a break since she was 25, and in an especially candid moment confessed, "I'm really, really tired, but I can't say that because I'm supposed to be like, everything is so great!" She paused, "I shouldn't say that." Quickly, she changed the subject.[58] One can speculate that Sugar's intense online visibility is beginning to take its toll.


**Fig. 2.7** Story artist Michelle Lam has a social media presence that utilizes video on both Instagram and YouTube.[59]

56. Eric Thurm, "'Steven Universe': How Rebecca Sugar Turned TV's Most Empathetic Cartoon Into an Empire," *Rolling Stone*, last modified June 7, 2017, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/steven-universe-how-rebecca-sugar-turned-tvs-most-empathetic-cartoon-into-an-empire-205732/.

57. Rebecca Sugar, interview by Bry'onna Mention, "Animated Conversation," *Bust Magazine*, Winter 2020, 59.

58. Rebecca Sugar, "Steven Universe the Movie: Discussion with Rebecca Sugar," *Ottawa International Animation Festival*, September 28, 2019, NAC Canada Room.

59. Michelle Lam (@mewtripled), "Answering Your Questions About My Comic Answering some top questions I gets about my stuff!" *Instagram Video,* April 4, 2019, last accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/Bv1xdC8HCFg/.

Lam was initially resistant to growing her presence online and, although you would never guess from her recent videos, it was something she trained herself to do. In her first ever Instagram clip titled *Answering Your Questions About My Comic*, she jumps into frame from offscreen and yells, "Hello, Bishez! It's Michelle! Not Meesh… Meesh is the character in the story, but my name is Michelle…"[60] Adopting the tropes of popular YouTube influencers, she appears uncomfortable and seems to fluctuate between moments of manufactured confidence and true vulnerability. When explaining why she began this video series in the first place, Lam says, "I wanted to try something different and just have me here, because I could always do a comic of me answering questions…" Eyes darting away from the camera, she asks, "…but why not try to be a little bit more engaging and get out of my comfort zone, right?"[61] It is clear that Lam is attempting to leverage her online persona into a personal and recognizable brand by bringing her Meesh character to life through video.

She is also interested in giving advice to young creators, despite being one herself. In a video titled *Three Ways I Grew My Instagram*, Lam expresses the desire to expand her fan base in order to reach as many people as possible. "Helping people in general is something that I have come to enjoy doing, so the more people I can help through my work, the better."[62] Describing her style of videos as "pillow talk," she imagines herself as a big sister figure engaged in intimate conversation with an anonymous set of younger siblings spread across the vast expanse of the internet. There is a clear sense of romance to this imagery that is only truly understood by members of the YouTube generation, many of whom have been conditioned from childhood to turn to these platforms in search of meaningful connection. "I used to be a person that…valued my privacy a lot, and now that I'm slowly opening up to people I'm starting to see why it's actually nice to be able to share your stories to people and have them find it valuable…"[63] By searching for connection online Lam has found empowerment by presenting herself as valuable to others.

The online visibility of female creators signals to the animation community that their voices

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60. Lam, "Answering Your Questions."

61. Lam, "Answering Your Questions."

62. Michelle Lam (@mewtripled), "Three Ways I Grew My Instagram Tips n tricks to grow like a flower online," *Instagram Video*, May 17, 2019, last accessed January 2, 2019, 02:04. https://www.instagram.com/p/BxkOWPzlBO5/.

63 Lam, "Three Ways I Grew My Instagram."

are worth listening to, and the industry has begun to take notice. Women feel they are sharing their creative work with the world on their own terms, leading to opportunities of scale and reach through the amplifying power of Instagram. Though, with this shift comes a host of unintended consequences, as the online space fails to shield women from the patronizing and controlling rhetoric that has plagued them for centuries. Furthermore, the demanding nature of the social media platform affects creativity by turning the user into a commodified version of themselves, making them ripe for consumption. Placing the onus on the individual, users are forced to set boundaries within an addictive and disruptive framework. Here, the purist of fun becomes a task to be endured; an outward-facing performance of one's creative evolution that inevitably withers over time. Although the issues with social media extend beyond what I am discussing here, by focusing specifically on the experience of women in animation, I aim to reveal the complexities of the relationship between creativity and the disruptive nature of the Instagram platform.

# Chapter 2: Conclusion

Artists are beginning to notice the effect that Instagram is having on their creative selves, but it remains difficult to imagine an alternative interface of comparable magnitude and influence. The platform is as popular as ever and offers the tantalizing promise of exposure for communities who have been historically ignored by animation executives and gatekeepers, allowing them to seemingly reach an audience on their own terms. In 2020, a decade after the introduction of Instagram, this supposed platform of liberation has caused some artists to experience burnout or creative stagnation, resulting in a slow withdrawal from the interface. For others, Instagram has afforded a multitude of opportunities, and in some cases launched their careers. The platform affects creatives in myriad ways. For this reason, it is not useful to think of online art sharing in binary terms of either good or bad, but rather to see it as a relational spectrum in constant evolution. As artists continue to forge deeper connections in the online space, emerging talents must seek to understand their own needs at various moments throughout their careers and imagine a trajectory of infinite possibilities.

## CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

Ten years after the launch of Instagram, artists are beginning to question its role in their creative lives. I believe this comes from a deeply intuitive place—an acknowledgement that a shift has occurred within the structure of the creative interface, though the nature of this change is exceedingly difficult to put into words. There is a disparate quality to sharing artwork on Instagram when compared to forums, blogs, or personal websites. It is a shift I have experienced myself as a millennial who built HTML websites in middle school and swapped sketches of my favourite video game characters on DeviantArt with friends I had no intention of meeting. For women, there is a kind of radical politics to being seen online in a world that refuses to see you on your own terms. Social apps such as Instagram afford us this, yet the platform itself elicits a new kind of relationship with creativity by its very design: its visual nature, coupled with an extractive business model, engenders a hyper-commodified relationship with the digital creative self. It is an association that requires analysis and, as artists, a good place to start is by engaging in a dialogue with oneself and the broader creative community. We could ask: *What does creativity feel like now?* and the more speculative question: *How do we want creativity to feel in the future?*

On a personal level, my current relationship with Instagram is in a constant state of flux. It is at times liberating, offering me a venue to spontaneously share my impressions of the world; yet it simultaneously feeds into my greatest insecurities by creating an arbitrary metric of success by which I compare my art against that of others. Discussions of the merits of social media have taken a critical turn. During the course of this research I have discussed online art sharing at animation festivals and expos with artists from Canada and the U.S. and have found the topic to be surprisingly polarized. Some artists are against the platform completely, while others appear offended by the question, as though my inquiry were an affront on their entire creative practice. Many artists want to know where I stand on the subject—is Instagram good or is it bad? I have made an effort to avoid such declarations as I believe they are not helpful or relevant to this work. The fields of education and the social sciences have set a historic precedent for making

absolutist claims that, by adopting a generative design approach, I have chosen to reject in an act of leveling hierarchical knowledge structures. Instead, I am interested in creating a way for individuals to ask these questions of themselves and their community. In this chapter I outline the development and implementation of the methods and techniques used to understand the effect of online sharing culture on the creativity of women in animation. First, I outline the critical framework used to develop the research design. Then, I describe how the theory was applied for the accessible participatory workshop format that became the foundation of my research project. Next, I describe each stage of the process; and to conclude, I reflect on the effectiveness of the workshop design as a research method.

# 3.1 Developing a Critical Framework

> **"Art takes on a different tone when it's surrounded by dog GIFs, political memes, and your cousin's baby photos."[64]**
> — Kelsey Ables, author of Artsy.net article *The Rise and Fall of Internet Art Communities*

> **"Liking and not liking can make us blind to what's there."[65]**
> — Lynda Barry, cartoonist and author of *Syllabus: Notes From An Accidental Professor,* on the impulsive need to pass judgement about the quality and artistic worth of a drawing

This section draws upon work from the fields of art psychology, generative design, and digital theory to develop a framework for creative self-inquiry, which serves as the foundation of the thesis document and research output. I first turn to the work of prominent scholars in the field of art education to establish the value of true autonomy in the creative process and how artistic practice is affected while creatives are under surveillance. Next, I outline the generative design approach used to ground the workshop component of my research project. Finally, I identify a set of key texts that examine the value of personal reflection in a hyperconnected world. Although the work focuses on the experience of women in animation, this structure offers a robust framework to help individuals determine which aspects of creativity are worth protecting, and can be applied to other disciplines and contexts.

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64. Kelsey Ables, "The Rise and Fall of Internet Art Communities," *Artsy.net*, last modified April 19, 2019, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-rise-fall-internet-art-communities.
65. Lynda Barry, *Syllabus*, (UK: Drawn & Quarterly, 2014), 23.

## 3.1.1 Creative Play and Self-Surveillance

Social platforms such as Instagram have profoundly altered creative practice by providing artists with immediate and omnidirectional feedback through a system of nudges, boos, and likes. When creatives share their work online, each post becomes a trajectory map, or a snapshot locked into a particular moment in the artist's creative development. It is possible to scroll back in time through a trail of digital content to identify patterns and trends, endlessly comparing the present and past self. Bound within this linear model, an audience forms, demanding more of the same. As described in Chapter 2, this is no accident. The platform rewards consistency, but true creativity thrives on the ability to experiment. Today, it is more important than ever for artists to make room for the kind of fun and lighthearted play experienced in early childhood—a time before creativity was measured in terms of likes and shares. In her book *Syllabus: Notes From An Accidental Professor*, cartoonist Lynda Barry challenges artists to move away from these binary metrics of success, saying "liking and not liking can make us blind to what's there."[66] For her, children's drawings have an aliveness that is rarely reflected in the work of an adult—a quality that professional artists spend their lifetimes trying to recreate. Barry observes how the professional artist lives in fear of producing "bad drawings," a label that has a profound effect on creativity. She offers a technology-free solution in her "Writing the Unthinkable" workshops where she engages learners in a series of activity prompts designed to encourage free, unbridled expression. Her Drawbridge Program, funded by a 2019 MacArthur Fellows grant, partners four-year-old artists with graduate students to research why children seem wired for creativity in a way that self-critical adults are not.

Every child is born an artist. Starting around the age of two, children will begin to make marks naturally and intuitively simply because it feels good. Later, they develop a connection between these marks and the potential for expression, but after being labelled "ungifted," many succumb to this judgment and abandon the practice. However, in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, professor Betty Edwards argues that drawing is a teachable and learnable skill that unlocks creative potential. Through a series of drawing exercises, she outlines a strategy of unseeing by muting the logical left-brain hemisphere to awaken the visually sensitive right

66. Barry, 23.

hemisphere, much like Barry does in her workshops. Edwards teaches drawing through a process of learning to balance both the analytic and the perceptual hemispheres of the brain, a methodology grounded in decades of research regarding the psychology of perception. According to Edwards, the left brain is "the great saboteur" of creativity; it is the voice that tells artists they are too busy to draw, or they are not as skilled at drawing as their peers. To silence this analytical mind, Edwards tells artists to "present your brain with a job your left hemisphere will turn down"[67] in the form of an analytic drawing activity—essentially, a game with set rules and boundaries. Eventually, with enough practice, this awakens a play instinct that becomes less elusive over time.

The value of play in the creative process is well documented by scholars in the areas of art education and psychology, with Victor Lowenfeld's *Creative and Mental Growth* as the foundational text in the field. He identifies six major stages of childhood creative development:

1. The First Stages of Self-Expression: Scribbling Stages (2 to 4 years)
2. First Representational Attempts: Pre-schematic Stage (4 to 7 years)
3. The Achievement of a Form Concept: Schematic Stages (7 to 9 years)
4. The Dawning Realism: The Gang Age (9 to 11 years)
5. Pseudorealistic Stage: The Stage of Reasoning (11 to 13 years)
6. The Period of Decision: The Crisis of Adolescence as Seen in Creative Activity

Each stage is a reflection of how the emerging artist views the world.

In adolescence the artist adopts the capacity for ambition, persistence, introspection and self-doubt, while lacking the ability to remain objective. Lowenfeld stresses the need for adolescents to harness play by experimenting with art materials to express their thoughts and feelings—without feeling the need to achieve perfection. He says, "A method of art is good if it brings out the innate qualities of an individual by developing self-confidence and the desire to go ahead."[68] However, when a generation of artists view their work as a social media product, the motivation to create is bound to a cycle of algorithmic validations. Instagram becomes a tool for self-

67. Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, Definitive, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Penguin, 2012), xxxii

68. Viktor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain, *Creative and Mental Growth*, 3rd ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1957), 283.

surveillance where the artist has access to a brutally reductive set of metrics that measures the perceived value of their work. Furthermore, the artist becomes locked into an aesthetic generated by their own histories and reinforced by the voices of followers and critics. As described in Chapter 4.1, I incorporate these observations about early childhood development into a series of drawing exercises that are designed to facilitate creative play. The desire to be seen online creates contradictions and complexities that will continue to unfold with time, but it is clear that the return to a creatively playful mindset is essential to artists now more than ever before.

## 3.1.2 Generative Research Design

My thesis project uses generative research design to engage the animation community in critical conversations about the effect of online creativity on the future of artistic practice. Generative research gives members of a community the tools and language to express their desires for the future; the role of the researcher is to facilitate and document these personal discoveries using qualitative and quantitative methods. In the book *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*, authors Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers reject the traditional expert-oriented approach to research design by presenting an alternative where methodological tools are "convivial," made in partnership with study participants. Sanders and Stappers take the philosophical stance that all people are creative and have created a framework to empower individuals who do not think of themselves in those terms. As my research work involves people who already identify as creatives, I use generative design for its human-centred qualities and its ability to challenge industrial social norms.

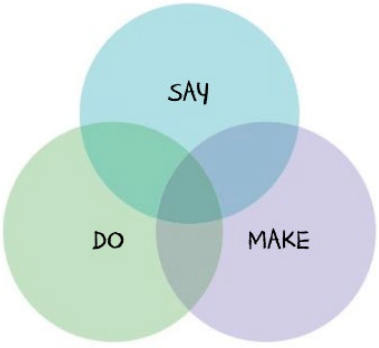


**Fig. 3.1** Diagram describing *Do, Say, Make* tools and techniques from the book *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*.[69] I use this framework to construct my overall research design.

69. Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*, (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2013), 66.

I use what Sanders and Stappers call *Do, Say, Make* as a structure for my overall research design. From this perspective, researchers can categorize their tools and techniques based on the perspective of the community with which they are working. In this case, I am assessing the effect of Instagram on the creativity of women in animation, so I am interested in knowing what women do, what they say, and what they make in response to this theme. For instance, in a workshop I can examine what artists *do* through objective observation, and I can ask participants to observe their own behaviour before and after the session. What they *say* can be captured through writing prompts, a recorded conversation, or a questionnaire to provide deeper insight into the unique needs and wants of this community. Lastly, what the women *make* reveals their tacit and latent views of the research subject through the creation of a series of artifacts generated during the session, as well as discoveries made in the moment that speak to their personal philosophies about the creative act. The *Do, Say, Make* structure helps workshop participants access deeper levels of knowledge about their community and contributes to a richer data set for the researcher.

## 3.1.3 Protecting Creativity

The early days of the internet focused on community.[70] Psychically, it was a place you went to—seated in a chair, at a desk, for a set period of time. The web was a space of ideas populated by countless websites built by individuals with full control of the tools of construction—an interface in sync with the needs of the user. Tech-savvy artists played within this world by uploading their work to personal websites, often allowing the site itself to be the stand-alone means of expression.[71] Before the search engine, sharing was indeed a community effort, dependent on links and references spread across a system of digital databases. Those who raised their voices online were often met with the welcoming call of like-minded others, as if broadcasting a shortwave radio signal that says *I see you; do you see me?* Technology author Douglas Rushkoff describes this as a time when you could go online to feel smarter than you did in real life; everyone carefully considered their thoughts and actions before they hit the *Enter* key.[72] No wonder early web enthusiasts described the digital world in utopian terms.

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70. Douglas Rushkoff, *Team Human* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 29-33.
71. Kelsey Ables, "The Rise and Fall of Internet Art Communities," *Artsy.net*, last modified April 19, 2019, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-rise-fall-internet-art-communities.
72. Rushkoff, *Team Human*, 61.

As recounted by writer Kelsey Ables in an article on *Artsy.net*, the launch of DeviantArt in August 2000 was a pivotal moment for the online art community and served as the first large-scale art sharing platform on the web. Members could upload their drawings to a profile page complete with a biography, an avatar, and a place for group conversation. A culture of knowledge sharing was built into the interface in what was called a *shout box*, a chat window for constructive feedback to capture the spirit of a formalized art-class critique. Reactionary comments such as *Cool!* and *Wow!* were identified as hollow and these users were shamed by members of their community. Soon, other art-sharing websites such as Conceptart.org sprang up alongside real-world meetups like Toronto's Subway Sketch Group, where animation artist Bobby Chiu would host group drawing sessions every Sunday with whomever turned up. Ables points to the era of big tech broadband as the moment when small-scale community groups were usurped by visually oriented sharing sites such as Facebook, Tumblr and Instagram. She writes, "the very concept of 'scaling a community' seems oxymoronic. It is a problem that plagues the internet today: How do you make a now-sweeping internet feel smaller?"[73] Silicon Valley types discovered there was money to be made by streamlining the interface. They imagined a world where creativity was frictionless, a smooth digital space lacking the disorderly creative mess of the human, where users could only express themselves within a controlled, aesthetically pleasing, container.

With the introduction of the iPhone, interfaces that were once touted as a force for social change adopted an extractive model bent on mining and monetizing data in a last-ditch effort to preserve the extractive industrial economy. For nearly two decades Stanford's *Persuasive Technology Lab* studied how the addictive qualities of slot machines could be integrated into our digital devices. Apps were designed to retain eyeballs for as long as possible through *sticky* attributes such as *clickbait* and the *infinite scroll*—inspired by gambling mechanics—which now come fully integrated into any modern social platform. It's as if they built these apps to troll us all. Thirteen years after the release of the first smartphone, mobile platforms have fundamentally reshaped our lives. Online systems are no longer simply an extension of our world—they have become our world, and platforms owned by tech giants are reshaping society in their smooth oppressive image.

As artists, we must actively choose what we value in a climate of constant distraction. The

73. Ables, "Art Communities."

plasticity of the brain allows it to be rewired, meaning we have the ability to reconstruct the skills of attention. In *Reclaiming Conversation,* Dr. Sherry Turkle takes a deeper look at the effect of digital technology on our social systems and finds that online connective platforms have the potential to undermine our relationships with each other and the world. A leading professor at MIT with a background in sociology, Turkle argues that engagement with digital platforms has a distancing effect on people and relationships. She outlines a series of digital *guideposts*, stating we must "protect creativity"[74] and "create sacred spaces for conversation"[75] in order to confront and reaffirm our basic human values. Inspired by Thoreau's classic memoir *Walden*, Turkle structures her argument around the American transcendentalist's experience living in a cabin with three chairs: the first for solitude and self-reflection; the second for family, friendship, and romance; and the third for society, education, and work. Turkle acknowledges that online spaces can be used as tools to dream about the self,[76] but asserts that self-awareness is essential to avoid being pulled into the digital void, saying "solitude is where we learn to trust our imaginations."[77] Turkle calls for a return to community-based models of engagement—not online, but in person—and urges us to make space for conversation with ourselves, our community, and the world.

With the desire to share online, Turkle says, "we risk building a false self, based on performances we think others will enjoy."[78] To be seen online affects the self in a multitude of ways, and marginalized communities may see this as empowering. However, the online sharing persona is also a fractured version of the self, where the desire to be seen and validated has unintended consequences. Scholar Lauren Berlant uses the term "cruel optimism" to describe how the unachievable fantasy of "the good life" becomes an obstacle to a flourishing society.[79] Berlant argues that we perceive our world based on aspirational neoliberal ideas generated after World War II, and we do so uncritically and at our peril. Cruel optimism can also apply to online sharing itself, where the optimistic desire to be seen online becomes a force that inhibits free expression. On Instagram, the artist lives a life split in two—a performance stretched between separate creative dimensions. There is the analogue self, with time-honoured practices rooted in

74. Turkle, 319.
75. Turkle, 321.
76. Turkle, 131.
77. Turkle, 62.
78. Turkle, 62.
79. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.

the real world and situated within a physical community. And there's the digital self, a transhuman performance that turns the creative act into an extractable commodity, with a reach that extends beyond time and space. In the current social media landscape an artist may work with physical materials to escape the onslaught of the digital while finding themselves constantly confronting the question *Is this good enough to share?* Each milestone in the creative process offers the opportunity to escape the self in search of validation, where the next dopamine hit is just a few clicks away. A work-in-progress is no longer a place for creative exploration; rather, it becomes as much of a curated product as the finished work. Instagram is not a technology designed for artists, yet it has utterly transformed the relationship to our own creative practice. We live in fear of looking like a *bad artist* online, a mindset that is fundamentally wrong and creatively unsustainable. In order to combat the effects of these anti-human technologies, we must embrace the messiness that makes us human.

# Chapter 3: Conclusion

Scholars in the field of art education and psychology have noted how children shift from the early phases of uninhibited creation to critical awareness and judgment in later years, which has the power to stifle creativity. I reinterpret these stages as drawing exercises that explore what this means in the digital context. As a research tool, the purpose of the workshop *Draw It For the 'Gram* is to gather qualitative data about how participants relate to online art sharing. But there is also significance in the act of coming together—physically—to talk, think, and create among peers. Through the facilitation of a playful, reflective workshop, participants identify how Instagram affects their creative practice and they articulate their desires for the future.

## CHAPTER 4

# WORKSHOP and FINDINGS

Throughout the course of this project I have discussed online art sharing with animation artists at events in Toronto, Ottawa, and Los Angeles. Opinions varied, but everyone was eager to share their views about Instagram as a platform for creative expression. I heard from both women and men, who shared how the platform was affecting their lives. They most commonly fell into two camps: some artists felt that Instagram was damaging their creative identity, while others were enthusiastic advocates who had harnessed the platform to advance their careers. Overall, the topic of social media was polarizing. A veteran producer told me he didn't think creativity has changed in the digital context, saying that animation has always been creator-driven and that artists are always answerable to an audience. On the other hand, I met recruiters from top animation schools and feature film studios who have noticed a distinct shift in attitude in the last five years. They observed that young artists are anxious to stand out from the crowd—yet their portfolios mimic the aesthetic of the most popular animation artists online.

I heard from an award-winning filmmaker who was new to animation. After being told she was not cut out for the industry, she learned how to animate by discussing technique via direct message with her favourite artists on Instagram. An older artist told me he refuses to let his kids use social media, yet he makes his fortune maintaining one of the art world's most popular social brands. Another animation influencer, with over half a million followers, said he was sick of people questioning the value of the platform, arguing that we are in a golden age of artistic opportunity. I also spoke with young creators who had been sharing their artwork online since middle school and were now experiencing burnout.

It is clear that Instagram affects creativity in a multitude of ways. In this next section, I discuss the design and findings from *Draw It for the 'Gram*, a workshop in which I engage five women in animation who share their artwork on Instagram. In the context of this project, the objectives of *Draw It For The 'Gram* are: (1) Gather data about the ways online art sharing affects the creativity of participants; and (2) Test a critical-thinking framework that allows individuals to reflect on their work and construct their own creative futures. The goal of this

research is to better understand the relationship between online sharing and creative practice with a focus on the experience of women in animation.

## 4.1 Draw It For The 'Gram: Workshop Design

The workshop begins with a discussion about the participants' views and observations about online art sharing. Then, the group responds to a series of three question prompts—*Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?*—by brainstorming their views on sticky notes and placing them in clusters on chart paper. Next, they are given sketchbooks and drawing materials and asked to revisit the three question prompts while completing a set of drawing exercises based on the stages of childhood creative development. To conclude, participants engage in a group discussion about how they envision their creative practice in the future.

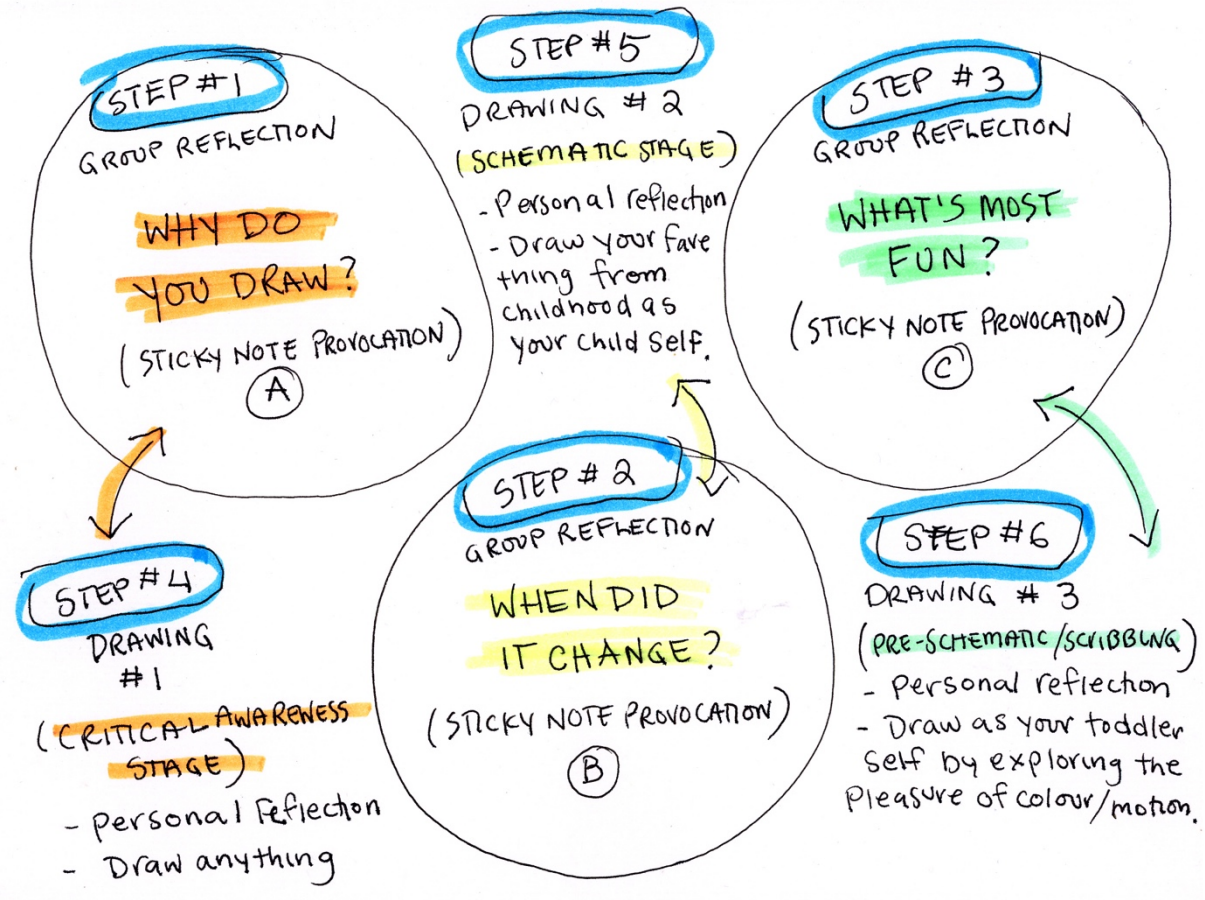


**Fig. 4.1** The flow of exercises for the sketchbook workshop Draw It For The 'Gram. (TF)

I developed *Draw It For the 'Gram* using a generative approach, as described in Chapter 3.1.2, to position the participants as investigators of their own creative practice. In *Convivial*

*Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*, authors Sanders and Stappers use what they call *The Path of Expression Model*,[80] a time-scale method to help workshop participants mine details from their past experiences to imagine possible future scenarios. This model focuses on the following four phases:

1. Immersion in current experience (Now)
2. Activate feelings and memories from the past (Memories)
3. Dream about possible futures (Activated Memories)
4. Generate and express new ideas relating to future experiences (Dreams)

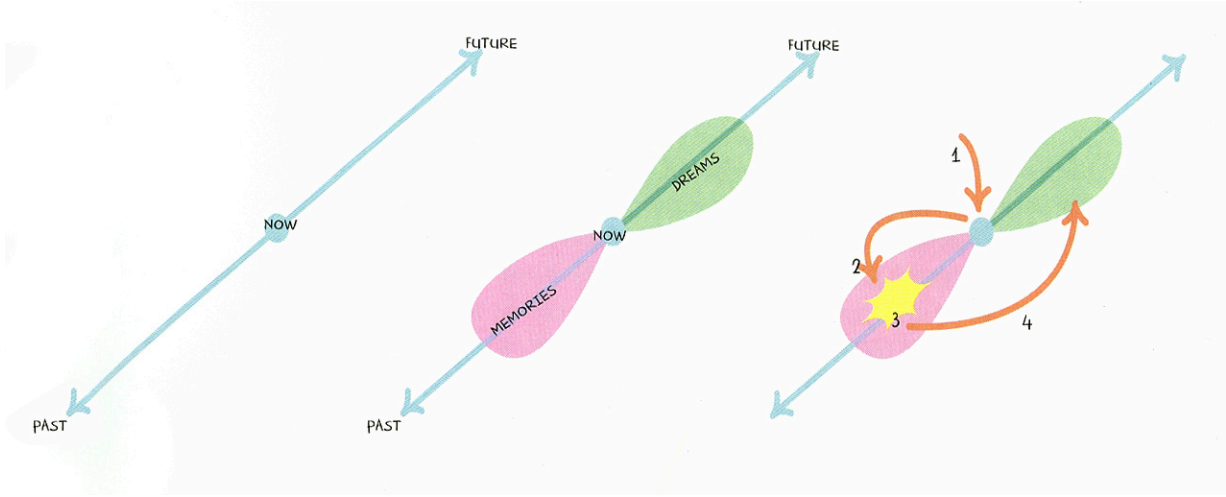


**Fig. 4.2** Outlining the *Path of Expression* model, which I use to assist workshop participants in the design of their own creative futures.[81]

Referencing *The Path of Expression Model*, pictured above, Sanders and Stappers describe its function as a research tool: "The experience of the moment (now) is connected to past and future through memories and dreams. The path of expression (right) shows how a person's awareness can be guided in steps by thinking first of the present, then the past, then looking for underlying layers, in order to move toward the future."[82] This model is effectively a mode of time travel, which I use in the workshop to uncover the hidden creative lessons from childhood.

80. Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders and Pieter Jan Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox: Generative Research for the Front End of Design*, (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2013), 156.
81. Sanders and Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox*, 55.
82. Sanders and Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox*, 55.

The purpose of using *The Path of Expression Model* in research design is to see the workshop in its totality from the participant's point of view to help them identify their future values and needs. Each activity moves closer to the goal of imagining possible futures and, according to Sanders and Stappers, workshop participants should not be aware of the focus of the journey until the end of the session.[83] For this reason I do not explicitly explain *The Path of Expression Model* to participants. Instead, I borrow from the fields of art therapy and psychology to frame each stage of the workshop.

Adapting the three-part structure of Marilyn JS Goodman's book titled *Children Draw: A Guide to Why, When and How Children Make Art*, I developed a series of question prompts for participants to consider throughout the session. I was interested in using Goodman's *Why, When, and How* questions[84] to trigger reflection about the artist's current and past creative self. Expanding on these themes, I applied *The Path of Expression Model* to the development of the following three prompts:

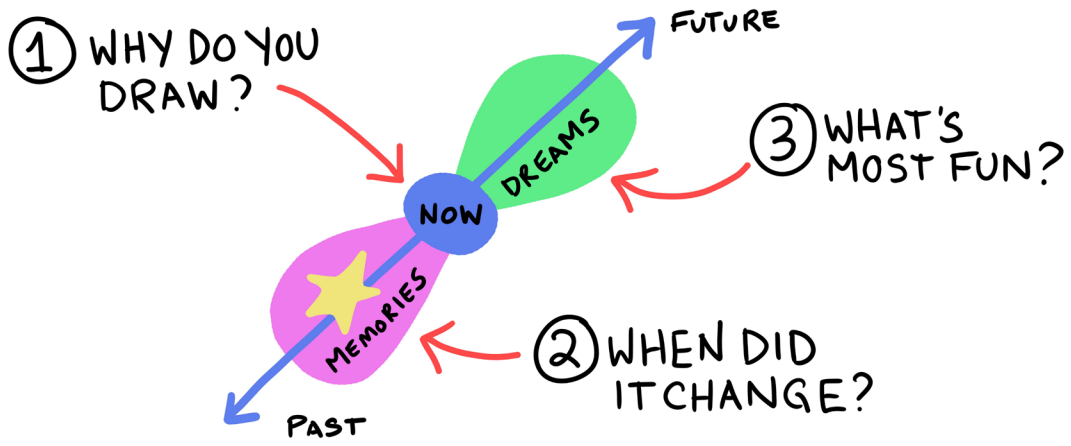


**Fig. 4.3** Mapping the questions *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?* onto the Sanders and Stappers *Path of Expression* model. I used this framework for the drawing component of my research work. (TF)

83. Sanders and Stappers, 157.
84. Marilyn Goodman, *Children Draw: A guide to why, when and how children make art* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2018), 10-11.

***Why do you draw?*** Participants reflect on the purpose of their creative practice as adults in this particular moment in time.

***When did it change?*** Participants identify how their relationship to creativity has changed in the course of their life, in both positive and negative ways. The focus here is on motivation and shifting trajectories.

***What's most fun?*** Participants experiment in an environment free of judgment and expectation to explore which aspects of their creativity are important to them. This reawakens a playful mindset.

Participants engage with these questions at various stages throughout the workshop, and in different contexts. As the structure alternates between moments of group conversation and private reflection, the meaning of *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?* evolves over time.

Overlaid on these prompts is a mixture of theories from prominent scholars in the field of art education and developmental psychology, such as Lowenfeld, Barry, and Edwards, discussed in Chapter 3.1.1, to identify the creative mindset and methodology that would accompany each developmental stage. I have condensed and simplified these stages into the following three categories and described their characteristics:

***Critical Awareness Stage*** **(Teen to Adult):** The artist is highly trained and skilled at drawing. They have an awareness of how their work appears to others, which can influence their creative output.

- The crisis of adolescence
- Artistic crisis period
- Concerned with whether the drawing looks "right" or "professional"
- More likely to draw existing characters instead of creating their own
- Develops skills with perspective and foreshortening
- Prone to drawing subjects that conform to gender norms (e.g., cars, flowers, horses)
- Internal dialogue says "I can't draw" or "I'm not good enough"

***Schematic Stage* (Childhood):** The artist draws to express something about their view of the world in a self-directed manner. There is an awareness of what they are drawing, but they do not compare their work with others.

- The achievement of a form concept
- Figures are shaped like tadpoles or eggs with simplified limbs
- Focus on traits the artist feels are important rather than fixating on what looks realistic
- Environments and scenarios refer to a real experience from the artist's life
- Experimenting with abstract storytelling

***Pre-schematic/Scribbling Stage* (Toddler):** The artist uses drawing to explore the pleasure of motion and form on the page. They are prone to experiencing a trance-like state of flow while drawing and have no awareness of what others think of the work.

- The first stage of self-expression
- Prone to patterning and experimentation with shape and colour
- Stories are not fixed within a single drawing; multiple drawings are possible, and the stories shift over time
- Focused on how things feel instead of how they look
- Use variation in pressure and wrist movement to achieve a flow state

I purposely ordered the stages in a present-to-past orientation to conform with the Sanders and Stappers *Path of Expression Model*. In the workshop, participants are asked to generate a series of drawings inspired by these stages of creative development. They then use this experience to revisit the questions *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?* Edwards suggests a similar activity in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, instructing the

reader to redraw their "childhood landscape"[85] made up of the dog, the cat, the house, the family—whatever images were most familiar to them in childhood. In the context of my research, engaging directly with these stages through drawing allows the artist to think by doing, which in turn generates reflections that are especially sensitive to the subject area. The drawings themselves are not the focus of this research; in fact, I omit them from the thesis document. Rather, these artifacts are the potential gateways leading to a lost creative self.

The workshop creates space for artists to pause and contemplate the effect of Instagram, and online sharing in general, on their creative practice in a community of like-minded individuals. Platforms such as Instagram present a one-sided view of the world. It is only through conversation and personal reflection—activities done in person, within a community, using physical materials—that we may develop a greater understanding of our needs and wants as artists, both now and in the future.

## 4.2 Workshop Findings

> **"Every time I draw for myself it's always...it's just awful. I don't have a style. I don't have a brand. I don't have anything. If I draw something I like, I'll post it just 'cause it's been a while and I want the *likes*."**
>
> — Claire (pseudonym), participant in
> *Do It For the 'Gram: A Workshop for Women in Animation*

> **"The issue is always when people feel they have no other choice but to play the game. It feels like you're trapped. But then I can always step away, try to understand what I want out of this tool, then program it to work for me."**
>
> — Janet (pseudonym), participant in
> *Do It For the 'Gram: A Workshop for Women in Animation*

In January 2020, a week prior to the workshop, I travelled across Toronto to distribute sensitizing materials to participants, meeting them at cafés and visiting them in their homes. There was an air of expectation, as though a creative valve was about to release. I got the impression that Instagram was a subject that people had not spent much time discussing among their peers, but was something they had thought about a lot on their own. On the evening of the

85. Edwards, *Drawing*, 72.

workshop, participants met at OCAD University for the two-hour session. They were not made aware of who else had signed up, so many of them were meeting for the first time. For this reason, it was critical to create a welcoming environment and encourage rapid connection between the participants. The topics covered in the session require participants to be candid and vulnerable; as time was limited, my goal was to break down any barriers that could prevent someone from fully expressing themselves to the group. OCAD University's Super Ordinary Lab, run by professor Suzanne Stein, offered an ideal convivial space to host the workshop. The environment is very flexible and welcoming: tables are modular, and there are plenty of comfortable chairs, a wall of books, and an old record player. This inviting, homey atmosphere was ideal for the workshop.


**Fig. 4.4** Tables were arranged in a rough square to better encourage group conversation and collaboration. (TF)

Participants were all working professionals with animation industry experience ranging from 1-12 years, and had worked as storyboard artists, character designers, background artists, and animators in the Toronto animation scene. They represented a range of perspectives, educated in three of Canada's top animation programs. A few had series in development at major studios. As a whole, the participants offered a good sampling of the local animation industry. When reaching out to women for this study it was important that I choose people with whom I had not previously worked; thankfully, the Toronto animation industry is large enough that I was able to do so while still finding individuals who met the other criteria. It was important to de-identify the

workshop data and assign participants pseudonyms in this document so they could speak openly and candidly without worrying whether it would affect their current or future job prospects. For this reason, I will refer to the workshop participants as Claire, Janet, Grace, Sophie, and Meg throughout the chapter.

I have organized the next section into categories based on each workshop activity. To begin, I discuss the pre-workshop materials and describe the outputs from the group sticky-note activity. Next, I synthesize the findings from our group conversations and arrange them by topic. Then, I offer an analysis of the personal drawing activity and conclude with a recap of the overall findings. For reference I have included a copy of the workshop materials at the end of this thesis document in the Appendices.

### 4.2.1 Pre-Workshop: Sensitizing Materials

Taking place over the course of five days, participants were asked to draw an image inside the pre-workshop booklet for three to five minutes each day, then write about the experience. The purpose of the activity was to introduce the women to the topic of the study. As a whole, participants were more inclined to judge the quality their work more harshly in the first few days, working with a stiffer hand, a perspective grid, or approaching the activity with an analytical mindset. By day five, some of the women seemed to be less concerned with making "finished" drawings by working loosely and allowing themselves to see what appeared on the page in the moment. As Meg noted, "Doing these has been very fun. Partially because I decided not to post them online." Across the board, participants said they were inspired to post to Instagram only when they produced drawings that felt good enough to share. Most identified their sketchbook as a place to track progress while allowing themselves to make mistakes away from public view. All women described previous experiences with online art sharing sites such as Tumblr, DeviantArt, and Blogger, with some citing long work hours or the industry-wide shift to Instagram as their main reasons for abandoning those platforms. Several of the women described a desire to help others by sharing their drawings online, making themselves and their work visible to the next generation.

## 4.2.2 Workshop: Group Conversations

Participants quickly connected over their shared experience of working with the sensitizing materials and, without much prompting, offered thoughtful and candid comments about the research topic. To start, they explained why they were attracted to the workshop, despite their busy schedules. Sophie described feeling burned out and overwhelmed by her job, expressing a desire "to get back into a community." She described being disappointed by the lack of creative passion among her colleagues. "I was actually extremely confused. It's like I went into the art field and nobody wants to talk about art or draw." Lacking a sense of community in the real world, several of the women turned their focus online; however, it was not their first choice. Instagram was merely a place to connect with others in an increasingly isolated world. The group expressed their excitement about participating in a focused conversation that afforded them the opportunity to examine cultural trends on a deeper level. In this section, I have grouped conversations from both the beginning and the end of the workshop into major themes that emerged over the course of the session.

### Discussion: *Reflecting on the sensitizing materials*

During the pre-workshop phase, only Grace chose to post a sketch from the five-day drawing activity to her Instagram. The other participants expressed dissatisfaction with their drawings as a reason for not posting them online. Some treated the activity like a journaling exercise, and for this reason did not feel the work was sharable. Meg was concerned that the drawings did not fit with her usual Instagram content, saying, "it also felt slightly weird or off-brand to share them." Several participants used distancing strategies to lower the perceived stakes of the activity. Sophie started drawing in her sketchbook first; when she liked an idea, she'd transfer it over to the pre-workshop booklet. She works the same way online, saying, "Everything I do in my sketchbook is almost like a pre-drawing to something I would finish and then post on Instagram." Even as professional artists, most of the participants found the pre-workshop activity challenging, saying the level of preparation required to get the drawings up to their typical Instagram standards made it nearly impossible to do within the pre-workshop's five-minute timeframe. Sophie observed, "It takes me so long to stick things up on Instagram that, if I want to keep the time limit [for the pre-workshop activity], I'd rather spend all that time on sketchbooking instead of just...(sighs) trying to post stuff online."

## Discussion: *Drawing for Self versus Self-Marketing*

Most participants described a utilitarian relationship with their personal drawing work and saw their creative practice as a way to build skills to make themselves more employable in the future, or to make connections with others in the industry. They expressed the desire to stay up-to-date and relevant, but some found this difficult to do outside of grueling studio hours. Several women expressed admiration for their peers who kept full-time studio positions while moonlighting as social media art stars. As a one-time participant in the art convention circuit, Grace observed "I think a lot of us are trying to keep up with the *Art Joneses.*" Speculating about the cost of maintaining a personal brand, she wondered if popular online artists really benefit from the commercial experience, and whether all that networking is worth the effort. It is difficult to tell when the primary narrative online is so relentlessly positive.

Meg noted that the digital space offers a powerful way to build relationships between creators and their fans, which sometimes blossom in a real-world setting. Reflecting on her position as an in-house studio artist, she is unable to connect with viewers on an intimate level due to the anonymous nature of her work. Like Grace, Meg has also appeared at art conventions. She recalls a memorable moment with a fan where, after learning what projects she has worked on, the fan began to cry. Although the experience was emotionally draining, she said, "For me, is so worth it because it just feels like this human connection we don't always get." Having been on the other side as a fan herself, she described being able to empathize with the situation to appreciate the meaning behind the encounter.

## Discussion: *Noticing Creative Shifts*

Thinking back to her experience in a small town, Meg wondered aloud whether social media anxiety is worse in big cities. She recalled living in a community where animation colleagues would get together to draw and chat after work, though at the time Instagram did not exist and Facebook was just coming onto the scene. This was the era of Blogger, an online journaling site that predates the iPhone and became popular with artists in the mid-2000s. It was a platform that encouraged deep engagement through a mixture of images and long-form reflective essays best viewed on a desktop computer. Janet observed, "I felt like I would go specifically to [an artist's] page and look at their art. But now with Instagram, I know no one's name. Because people are using pseudonyms, it's harder to remember." Participants were nostalgic for formerly thriving art sharing communities such as Blogger where you could visit an art page directly, and the platform

design reflected the artist's personality. Conversely, the Instagram aesthetic is uniform and consistent, which can sometimes give the impression that the artists one follows are part of a single homogeneous entity. Janet observed, "It all gets mashed together…it feels like you're competing against one person, this person who is constantly posting, constantly on, constantly doing the right thing."

The group felt that content is beginning to look similar because the platform demands a square shape and has a limited number of filters. "Instagram forces everybody to draw in a certain format," Janet said. "[We draw] just to complement the frame...even the content is starting to look the same." Furthermore, the group felt that, over time, this repetition has affected their ability to connect to creators on a human level. There is a distancing quality to Instagram that some participants felt was not conducive to genuine connection. Meg observed, "The thing about Blogger is that only a few people would leave comments. It felt designed to be more honest, in a way." Instagram is designed to facilitate quick engagement through its primary use as a phone app, making it difficult to engage in meaningful conversation. Desktop-based platforms offer room to craft a thoughtful message, even when done behind the cover of an anonymous avatar. Meg said, "On Instagram, I sometimes don't even think about whether you're a girl or a guy…when someone is asking me if I know any designers [for a project], I think of Instagram and which styles I like that fit with that project." The women wondered if, at times, there is an advantage to remaining anonymous.

## Discussion: *Instagram and the Fragmented Self*

In our discussions there was a general consensus that Instagram can be a problematic source for inspiration and personal development, as it tends to offer a single view of the creative self. The women observed how the industry-wide shift to the Instagram platform has blurred the lines between personal creative practice and private life. Meg recalled how, in the past, she maintained a single website to showcase her art, but now feels the need to maintain multiple accounts. She describes Instagram as "this weird, pseudo-place between a professional portfolio and everyday [life]" where artists are expected to post frequently and consistently. Several of the participants described splintering their Instagram personas across multiple accounts as a way to create variety within a system built for sameness. For Grace, her Instagram was initially a source of anxiety, but is now a source of inspiration. She maintains two Instagram accounts: one for portfolio-quality drawings, and one that acts as a photo diary of her day. Janet has about five accounts,

describing how, for her, it is important to stay on top of visual trends. She sees this self-imposed fragmentation as a way of "hacking" that allows her to control multiple trajectories at once.

The women observed how difficult it can be to play with multiple identities on the Instagram platform, as the streamlined interface creates a linear trajectory that does not allow room for ambiguity. Grace wondered if it was hard for artists to locate their creative voice online, saying, "it becomes more difficult to look internally and find yourself." Sophie explained that her voice is always changing, which is a key part of what fuels her creativity. However, in the social media space, scattered engagement is discouraged. The group agreed that Instagram punishes inconsistent content, limiting the artist's potential exposure to the online community. By inventing metrics for artists to perform to, the platform ensures its users produce a steady stream of content through the relentless pursuit of engagement. As a whole, the women felt that ultimately followers don't matter, but it's hard not to feel as though they do. Janet noted how, on Instagram, the artist must control the platform by consciously deciding to bend it in their favour by identifying and subverting its intrinsic bias. "I got realistic about it. The apps are never going to work for us. We have to make [social media] submit to us if we want to be on there," adding, "I think it's still great to just not use [Instagram]." The women described a general fatigue with online art sharing since it requires participants to jump across platforms in an effort to stay relevant. However, as Sophie noted, "It's hard to escape."

## Discussion: *Group Reflection and Sticky-Note Brainstorm*

After the initial conversation, participants moved into the reflective phase of the workshop. Using a set of colourful sticky notes, the women responded to questions regarding their personal drawing practice by writing their thoughts on the notes and posting them in the group circle. After the questions were posed to the group, participants were encouraged to respond by finishing the following phrases:

**"Why do you draw?"**

1. "I draw because…"

**"When did it change?"**

2. "Drawing changed for me when…"

**"What's most fun?"**

3. "I have the most fun drawing when…"

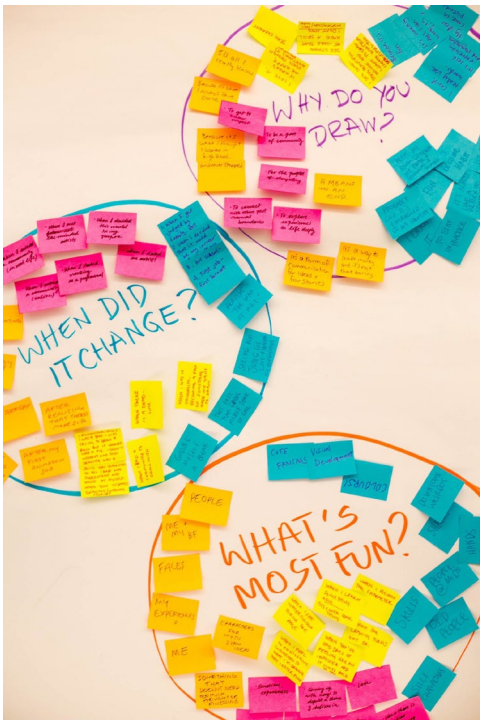


**Fig. 4.5** Participants brainstormed during the group reflection activity by responding to the provided prompts. (TF)

When asked *Why do you draw?* the women had mixed feelings about their current creative practice. Several wrote that drawing is deeply entangled with their identity, while others formed the habit early on and draw as if it were a reflex or compulsion in response to outside stimuli. Most expressed this as a positive experience, though it is at times reactionary. Meg said, "I see something beautiful online and I want to draw. [I want to] create something beautiful too." A few participants identified drawing as an important form of personal storytelling that allows for expression and communication without words.

The next question: *When did it change?* is abstract and asks participants to identify moments in their lives when drawing changed for the better, for the worse, or somewhere in between. It is an examination of the internal and external forces that can affect one's relationship to the creative self. Here, the women were grappling with complex experiences from the past. Several of them identified moments when their talent was criticized or questioned by family or friends. Some pointed to a time where the dream to create did not match up with the reality of the industry, citing moments of burnout from school and work. Then, several of the women said they made the switch to a self-determined mindset by committing to a personal creative philosophy. Grace gave herself "space to fail" while Janet "decided [animated storytelling] would be my purpose."

Many of the women said drawing changed for them when they found a community of like-minded artists.

*What's most fun?* is designed to refocus the inquiry back to the individual's intrinsic needs and desires. It asks participants to identify how their approach to creativity would look without the pressure to perform, by reconnecting with their sense of play. Some of the women described wanting to draw freely, with a focus on "entering flow," and by exploring emotions and experiences without a set goal. A few participants found growth itself to be creatively satisfying. While no participants used the term "play" to describe their personal creative desires, it is inferred through the variety of responses.

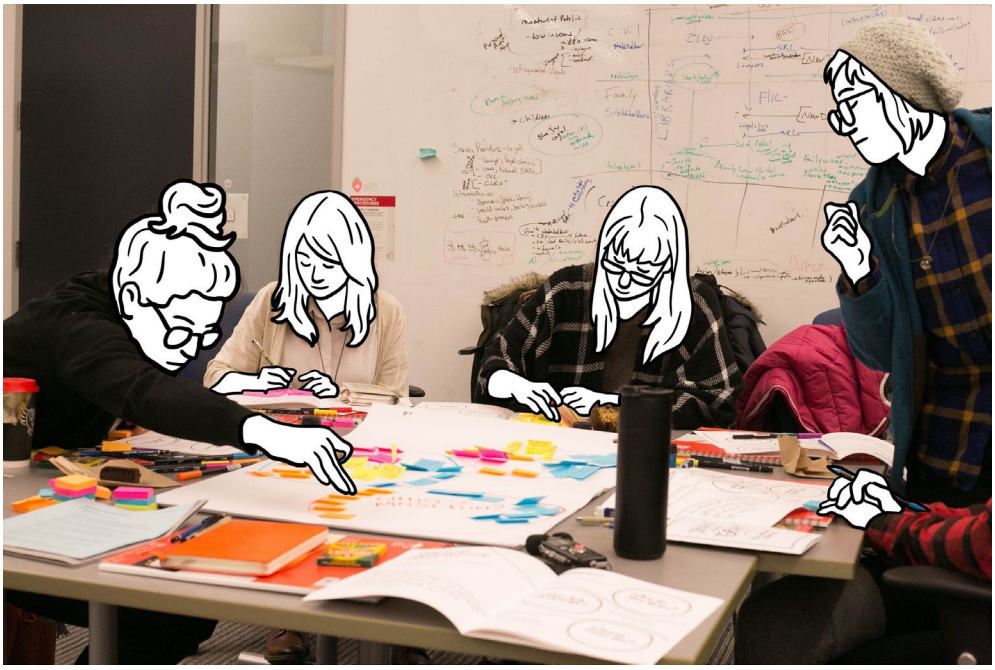

**Fig. 4.6** Participants engage with the group reflection activity by responding to a series of question prompts. (TF)

The purpose of the group reflection and sticky-note brainstorm stage is to familiarize participants with the core structure of the second phase of the workshop. It serves to transition the group from verbal conversation to the inwardly focused reflection activities.

## Discussion: *Speculating on Future Creative Practice*

Throughout the workshop session participants were asked to imagine possible futures for themselves and the animation community by first noting present trends. Frustrated with her observations, Claire declared, "I think Instagram is the worst thing to have happened to the art world. Because it wasn't meant for art." Addressing the group, she asked, "Would you be happier, right now, if Instagram didn't exist?" The answers were contradictory and provided no

clear consensus, revealing the complexities of the issues. Despite their initial reservations about social media, several participants imagined themselves wanting to use platforms like Instagram in the future, while others considered new ways of working inspired by blogging culture. Animation artists have always presented their work to an audience, opening themselves up to public criticism, but the women identified the unique qualities of Instagram that make it feel different. Thinking back to her experience with Blogspot and DeviantArt, Janet observed, "With blogs we focus more on the journey, the process. The entirety of the blog, where we had the stories. Whereas for Instagram, it always feels like the result is the *likes*."

The women discussed how the next generation of artists faces unique challenges to the development of their personal creativity. Having grown up as part of the YouTube generation, young artists have stormed social media with personal creative content, seeing these platforms as the primary way to make their mark on the world. The conversation has shifted away from a utilitarian relationship with personal art, and emerging artists are craving independence sooner. However, branding is difficult when you don't know who you are, and for some young people, it becomes a potent source of creative anxiety. Without a clear creative identity, platforms like Instagram are hazardous for personal growth. Claire took comfort in the thought that Instagram, like most social media platforms, will probably be temporary. The women felt there will eventually be a way out and away from controlling social platforms, but in today's digital landscape, it remains to be seen whether this is simply an act of wishful thinking.

### 4.2.3 Workshop: Personal Drawing Activity

Midway through the session the women were guided through a series of drawing activities roughly based on the stages of childhood creative development, triggering memories from the past to imagine new creatively sustainable futures. In an adaptation of the Sanders and Stappers *Path of Expression Model* as described in Chapter 3.1.2, participants first experience their drawing practice in the *now*, then travel back in time to re-experience their latent creative wants from childhood. The activity asks participants to revisit the questions *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?* while engaged with the act of drawing, shifting them deeper toward an activation of feelings and memories from the past. As they do so, participants are asked to reflect on their impressions of the activity and write them down on sticky notes. This is an essential component of the activity that captures the inner dialogue of each participant and allows them to document internal thought patterns as they arise. During the session the women

were encouraged to follow along with each stage using the companion workshop materials booklet, which is available in the Appendices. Each exercise ran for approximately twenty minutes to give the participants time to focus inward and reflect on their personal creative practice. Here, I recount each stage of the personal drawing activity as experienced by the workshop participants during the session.

**Fig. 4.7** Participants engage with the drawing activity Personal Reflection #2. (TF)

## Personal Reflection #1: *Draw Something!*

In the first stage, participants were asked to consider the question *Why do you draw?* and sketched until the clock ran out. Each participant was given a variety of art supplies, but in this first stage nearly everyone chose either pencil or a black pen. As a whole, the sketches were fairly conservative. While drawing, participants recorded their thoughts and impressions about the activity on sticky notes and pasted them in the workshop materials booklet. Responding to the prompt *I draw because…* the women gave an impression of their internal dialogue in the moment, some of which was critical and highly self-aware. Many of the comments identified areas where the artists felt they could improve, such as the desire to be more technically accurate, faster, or looser with their linework. Some expressed a wish for access to image references in order to draw their best work, conveying anxiety at the thought of producing a bad sketch. As the exercise went on, a few participants became aware of their fellow artists, speculating about what

others were drawing, or looking up from their page to survey the room or check their phone. However, not all the comments were self-critical, and some women wrote about the things they enjoy drawing, expressing that they didn't care about the appearance of the work. In an especially sensitive moment, Meg wrote, "Safety is important in creativity for me," later going on to observe, "I feel safe in this environment."

### Personal Reflection #2: *Draw Like a Kid!*

The second stage of the drawing exercise was framed as an act of time travel. Participants were asked to recall their favourite things to draw as a kid, then draw them as they did in childhood using that same style. While drawing, they were asked to respond to the prompt *Drawing changed for me when…* and record their thoughts and feelings about this stage on the provided sticky notes, then post them in their workshop materials booklet. For this activity the participants began to experiment with the provided art supplies, using a combination of pens, markers, pencils and crayons. Overall, there was much more variety in these drawings and the women appeared to be less focused on making images using a set style. The written sticky note reflections were less directly critical about the work, though they seemed marked with a tinge of nostalgia. While sketching a page of comic characters in pen and pencil crayon, Janet wrote, "These are more finished than most of what I've drawn in years. When do I even get to colour nowadays?" Meg noted how she felt free to experiment as a child, and the simple act of making marks on paper felt magical, saying "drawing didn't [need] to have a purpose." A few of the women found this exercise especially challenging. In response to the prompt *Drawing changed for me when…* Grace observed, "Maybe it changed when it started to guide my future."

### Personal Reflection #3: *Draw Like a Baby!*

In the final stage the participants were asked to mine their memories of deep childhood and imagine the precise instance when they picked up a drawing tool for the first time. Even if it is not possible to fully remember, for an artist, this is a moment of profound significance as it represents the beginning of a lifelong relationship with their own creative practice. As a toddler there are no expectations of greatness, and marks are made for the sheer pleasure of making them. It is a tactile phase centered on play, and so participants were asked to consider the prompt *I have the most fun drawing…* while recording their written reflections. A few minutes into the session, Grace turned and asked, "Would it be weird if…I got on the floor?" She belly-flopped on the bright orange beanbag chair, playfully kicking up her legs like a kid. At this point, any

initial apprehension from the first two stages had all but evaporated. It was as though the pressure to perform one's creativity had been lifted and the women knew exactly what to do. Soon, several participants had gathered on the ground, bringing along with them fists filled with markers and crayons, and spreading them out on the floor as if no one was watching. They were claiming the space as if they owned it, leaning over their drawing pads and making marks as if caught up in a creative trance.

Fig. 4.8 Participants move their workspace to the floor during the drawing activity Personal Reflection #3. (TF)

The drawings produced in this session were much more relaxed compared to the drawings made during *Personal Reflection #1* and *#2*. As professional artists it seemed easier for the women to truly access their playful creative spirit when drawing in this phase. The work was looser and less defined, as some participants allowed their movements to reveal hidden characters within the shapes. For many participants the experience was cathartic. Seated at the table, Sophie turned to her neighbour and remarked, "I was never allowed to use crayon… I [could] only draw at my desk with pencil crayon. I think [my parents] were afraid I would mark up the walls." She spent the session rotating through a rainbow of pencil crayons held tightly with a closed fist, etching them deep into the page until it began to shine, and wrote next the drawing that she found satisfaction, "being able to press as hard as I want." Meg noted how the impulse to grab colours from a pile was the biggest surprise, allowing her to work from a place of creative feeling. She wondered if she would feel free enough to try this at home. Which begs the question: What are the conditions under which creativity thrives? And furthermore, what does this mean in the social media era where, so often, the act of being seen means everything?

**Fig. 4.9** Some of the women preferred to stay seated at the table, experimenting with a variety of materials. (TF)

# Chapter 4: Conclusion

The session offer workshop participants, an opportunity to make room for both inwardly- and outwardly-focused conversation about the effect of Instagram on their creative lives. The women noted how social media offers an opportunity to build community, yet the nature of the platform turns creativity into a commodified pursuit. All women had experienced the effect of managing multiple accounts at once, splintering their creative identities across a multitude of social platforms. Indeed, they felt this was the only viable option within a platform-based system that rewards sameness. Lamenting the movement away from small-scale community hubs such as DeviantArt and Blogger, participants identified how, in the future, they wished for an alternative to Instagram where artists could build an online community on their own terms.

Participants left the session seeming validated by having expressed their concern about a social medium that is so often dismissed as a (mostly) harmless self-marketing tool. Although the session centred on a series of drawing exercises, the drawings themselves are not a major component of the research output; rather, they are the vehicle by which participants reflect on the subject area. The value of *Draw It For the 'Gram* is monumental in its intimacy—within a span of two hours, participants delved into a deep discussion about the nature of modern creativity, time-travelled through three phases of their personal creative development, and emerged on the other side with a renewed sense of creative purpose. As a research tool, I use this workshop to understand the effect of online sharing culture on the creativity of women in animation. It is clear that Instagram affects personal creativity in countless ways, and by coming together in conversation, artists are able to disengage with the performative online self to reconnect with their personal creative autonomy.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

## 5.1 Protecting Creativity in the Age of Instagram

**"We are not looking for simple solutions. We are looking for beginnings."[86]**
— Dr. Sherry Turkle, Founding Director, MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, reflecting on next steps toward "reclaiming conversation" in a climate of digital distraction.

The sketchbook workshop *Draw It For the 'Gram* was created in response to Sherry Turkle's digital *guideposts,* where she proposes a set of considerations to reaffirm human values while fostering community in the real world. As an artist, most pertinent to my interests was her call to "protect your creativity" by making room for conversation with others and myself. I achieved this through the development and facilitation of the sketchbook workshop as well as the presentation of research outputs generated during the session.

To reiterate, this thesis considers the following:

*How might the culture of online sharing affect creative practice for women in animation who share their artwork on Instagram?*

Ultimately, the primary aim of this thesis work is to develop an accessible framework for critical inquiry about the effect of social media on personal creative practice—a direct benefit to members of my community as a woman with a background working in the animation industry. By first tracing the historic issues of diversity and inclusion within the animation field, to then discussing Instagram as an empowering yet complex venue for new creative voices, I am able to situate my research within an emerging conversation about the effect of these technologies on

86. Turkle, 319.

our creative lives. By designing and facilitating the participatory workshop *Draw It For the 'Gram* I bring together women in animation to engage in thoughtful discussion about the impact of the Instagram platform on personal creativity and begin to imagine alternatives to the commodified online self that truly support creative growth.

## 5.2 Reflections

Online spaces are world-building, meaning they shape the reality we inhabit. Because the practice of online art sharing has become normalized, young people feel pressure to engage with the medium because it feels as though everyone is doing it. However, it is important to remember that this is in fact an illusion. The irony of the present moment is that if you choose to keep your artwork to yourself, there is no way to indicate this to others online. On social media, the whole point is to be visible. Instagram creates a climate of surveillance that inhibits free thought and hampers personal expression—certainly, this causes the artist some harm. In contrast, what does it mean to feel creatively *safe* both online and off? It is the essential question artists must ask themselves in the digital age. As one workshop participant put it, "Finding yourself without judgement is how I find honesty and creativity." And, as artists, if we are unable to locate ourselves, what does that mean for the maintenance and development of a creative voice? Past and future experiences are connected through moments in time; memories can affect and influence an individual's future behaviour. By reconnecting with this grounding from the past, artists are better positioned to imagine a personal creative framework for the future.

**Fig. 5.1** At the end of the workshop, the participants left behind their notes and drawings for analysis. (TF)

## 5.3 Critical Engagement with the Digital

By mining the past, the women who participated in this research were able to access latent creative wants from childhood and imagine ways to reintegrate them into their modern artistic practice. Although commercial artists have always struggled to balance personal satisfaction with monetary gain, the controlling force of Instagram and—more broadly, social media—adds a complex layer to the timeless pursuit of creative fulfillment. In the present context, the desire to be seen online becomes a powerful force of repressive sublimation, transforming personal creativity into a commodified performance of the self. With Instagram, the platform space interferes with artistic development by limiting creative trajectories, influencing artistic potential, and fragmenting the self—all housed within a mysterious set of algorithms, the nature of which is purposely hidden. Yet, it also offers a powerful venue for exposure, fosters a diverse community-based discourse, and amplifies an artist's social reach across time and space.

Guided by the thinking prompts *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?*, workshop participants engage in critical dialogue about the effect of online sharing culture on their creativity. By exchanging ideas and personal experience they can imagine themselves in relation to a larger social context. In doing so, they are empowered as autonomous individuals who are free to question the status quo, knowing there are others doing the same. If you can

bypass the shame of having sunk yourself so deeply into the online social medium, you can work to rediscover the creative wants and needs that fuel your creativity in the first place. Perhaps this is what Dr. Turkle meant by *protect your creativity*. It is a summons of sorts: A radical call to put down the phone and talk to people in the flesh, then turn the focus inward in conversation with yourself. As artists, our creativity depends on it.

## 5.4 Pathways Toward Creative Potential

Today, many artists feel they have no other choice than to participate in the culture of online sharing; at the same time, others have begun to question its merits. Some critique the Instagram platform at a micro level: for instance, a recent controversy identifies a phenomenon where anonymous users *repost* an artist's images to a new account, effectively stealing *engagement* and *followers* from the original creator of the work.[87] As a result, there is currently a shift back to Twitter, which offers a mechanism for *reblogging* that is built into the interface and eliminates the need for tedious work-arounds to distribute images within a community. Yet, on a macro level, this relentless movement between platforms has become tiresome—inevitably, artists will shift away from Twitter, perhaps in favour of TikTok, only to revisit Instagram, and later adopt some yet unknown platform of the future. Campbell's Law asserts: ''The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.''[88] In essence, regardless of the platform, people will perform to a created metric; in the case of Instagram, this means—whether consciously or not—creatives will eventually streamline their approach based on quantified levels of engagement.

If artists want to be seen on their own terms, why don't they simply abandon social media altogether and create websites and platforms that foster community on a smaller, more intimate scale? Indeed, this may be the best way forward for some. For others, the promise of online exposure and opportunity feels like a worthwhile trade-off. In this thesis I avoid making concrete judgements on whether artists should engage with social media platforms, as it is not my place to say; to do so would suggest there is only one right way of doing things. Rather, this thesis posits

87. Laura Price. "WHY YOU SHOULDN'T REPOST ARTWORK." *YouTube Video*, March 25, 2019, Accessed March 1, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzYiU38Dbow.
88. Donald T. Campbell. Cited in Alexander M. Sidorkin, "Campell's Law and the Ethics of Immeasurability," *Studies in Philosophy and Education: An International Journal* 35, no. 4 (July 2016): 321-332.

that, by uncovering latent creative wants and needs, an artist is better positioned to develop a *personal* creative framework for the social media age—one they can continue to remix and reshape well into the future. By secluding oneself from the gaze of the online spectator, and coming together in conversation among peers, it becomes possible to reassess and fine-tune a personal creative philosophy based on intrinsically motivated goals.

As Professor Judy Wajcman argues, "the gendering of technology affects the entire life trajectory of an artefact."[89] Applied in this context, when we imagine creative practice as engendered potential, a technological system such as Instagram becomes a dominating force with the power to impede creative growth. Although these issues affect artists of all types, I have chosen to focus my attention on the experience of women in commercial animation as a way to examine my personal relationship with Instagram. For me, the desire to be seen online is inherently political; yet, these days I rarely share my work on social media. Instagram feels too heavy in its permanence, and with every post, it's as if I'm being forced to declare who I am in the moment. Yet, I know that I am more than my online persona. Technologies exist as an expression of their time: an extension of an industrialist mindset that inhibits creative movement by reinforcing linear trajectories. A controlling interface such as Instagram asserts that we can only be one thing at a time, which is why splintering occurs across platforms and social accounts. In my view, these mechanics operate in fundamental opposition to the creative process, yet it remains difficult to imagine an alternative. Although this ambiguity can feel unsatisfying from a research perspective, the reality of the present moment is that multiple viewpoints can simultaneously be true, at different points in time and in different contexts. Culturally, we stand on shaky ground. By coming together in conversation, we are reminded that we are not alone.

In the book *Politics of Touch* philosopher Erin Manning states, "Engendering takes place in the magic moment between potentiality and actuality, where what is exposed is the actuality of the virtual and the virtuality of the actual."[90] I protect creativity as an act of sovereignty. Through a politics of touch, I will not allow platforms of control to obfuscate what happened here—there has been a shift toward a streamlined, performative approach to artistic practice that, if left unchecked, will continue to restrict and distort the fundamental nature of creativity. I am by no means a technological luddite, but I have seen how digital tools have changed hands from open-

89. Wajcman, "Feminist Theories of Technology," 149.
90. Manning, 90.

sourced to closed, while limiting potential in favour of a smooth interface. Recalling Manning, "potential calls forth reserves of becoming that prompt us to recognize that identity can never be identical to itself."[91] As an animator I create the illusion of life through movement; as a teacher I engender a similar potential in others. As we continue to live within the digital interface it is crucial to protect creativity by reassessing linear models of becoming to see potential as a dynamic force spiraling outward in a constant reaching *toward*.

[91] Manning, 105.

# POSTSCRIPT

# WHEN TIME STOOD STILL:

# *A Year of Mass Reflection*

**"[In the 2020s] I see a historic trend to introduce more friction, to slow us down, to look up and talk to each other and to appreciate what only we as humans can give each other. The trend for the next decade: the embrace of what we don't share with machines. Empathy. Vulnerability. The human-specific joy of the friction-filled life."**[92]

— Dr. Sherry Turkle, Founding Director, MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, speaking with *Fortune Magazine* in December 2019.

**Fig. 6.1** A drawing of a woman gazing at her phone, by the author. (TF)

[92] Sherry Turkle. "25 ideas that will shape the 2020s," *Fortune.com*, Fortune Editors, last modified December 19, 2019, https://fortune.com/longform/ideas-shape-2020s-tech-economy-markets-ai-health-work-society/.

# What's Most Fun When We're Alone?

I completed the final draft of this thesis document on March 11th, 2020: the same day that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic. Since then, I have been thinking about how—through the implementation of isolation-in-place orders—the virus has forced society into a state of mass reflection, the full effects of which have yet to be determined.

Without notice, animation studio productions were forced to quickly pivot to a remote pipeline model, further blurring the boundaries between personal and private life. A public letter issued by Marge Dean, President of Women in Animation, notes how this collision between family and work requires society to "develop the skills that working moms have honed for decades."[93] The virus renders gendered and racial inequalities visible. As we reflect on routes forward, the animation community might consider whether the pragmatic argument for inclusion and diversity as simply *good business sense* has the moral grit to withstand an economic depression.

Amidst this global uncertainty, there is still a pervasive feeling across many creative sectors that artists should be productive, and animators are no exception. In the early weeks of the pandemic, many artists have used social media to post illustrations and comics reflecting their observations about life in quarantine in an effort to find meaningful connection. Some include heartfelt tributes to frontline workers while others have taken to streaming their private drawing sessions on video platforms such as Twitch and Instagram Live. From the inside of my apartment looking outward, it seems as though we are in the midst of an artistic renaissance mediated through the screen.

Some artists view this imposed isolation as a creative gift—a moment to re-invest in the self, learn a new technique, or begin an ambitious personal project; then, document and share this process of discovery online. In a recent interview with *Politico Magazine*, Professor Sherry Turkle discussed what this profound shift means for our commodified digital lifestyles: "This is a

93. Marge Dean. "Letter From Marge Dean," *Women in Animation,* accessed May 5, 2020, https://womeninanimation.org/letter-from-marge-dean/.

different life on the screen from disappearing into a video game or polishing one's avatar. This is breaking open a medium with human generosity and empathy. This is looking within and asking: 'What can I authentically offer? I have a life, a history. What do people need?'"[94] There is deep value in this work that is difficult to quantify in standard analytic terms.

As this research has shown, social media platforms are not an ideal venue to facilitate moments of authentic human connection, and their frictionless design may in fact impede creative growth. It is not the screen itself that's the problem: rather, it's how our isolation further exposes us to Silicon Valley's most predatory corporations at a time when society is at its most vulnerable.

In the pre-pandemic days, we were already witnessing the beginnings of a techno-backlash in response to the growing fatigue of living a performative digital life. Now, it's our screens that sustain us by opening up our private spaces to the world. At least, in the present moment, this version of the internet feels like a different place than the one experienced in the recent past—within a span of weeks, online communities have transformed from passive to active by rekindling the self-directed engagement models of the early internet era. In some way we are *all* hacking the system, though one can be certain that a push to exploit and commodify our emotional vulnerabilities is probably well underway. Turkle says, "Perhaps we can use our time with our devices to rethink the kinds of community we can create through them."[95] Knowing this, how can artists build a sustainable creative future online?

Creatives can leverage this current momentum and forage new pathways of expression by revisiting connective models from the past. In the context of this thesis, workshop participants craved small-scale artistic communities that allow for experimentation and play in an environment free from judgment. Furthermore, the artists revealed how much they benefit from maintaining personal boundaries that allow them to revisit latent creative wants and needs from childhood. These research findings can offer clues for what the future of online art sharing could be.

For instance, artists in isolation might actively seek community on a smaller scale by contacting colleagues from work or school to join in on a group drawing session, or use private

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94. Sherry Turkle. "Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How," Politico.com, by *Politico Magazine*, last modified March 19, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/19/coronavirus-effect-economy-life-society-analysis-covid-135579.

95. Turkle, "Coronavirus."

messaging or phone calls to discuss ideas for new projects—or frankly, the lack thereof, due to the shared distress of living through a pandemic. Some artists may feel inclined to explore desktop-based platforms, such as blogs or websites, that focus more on the interface itself as a means of expression. Others may choose to revisit low-fi drawing methods such as the humble pen and paper, sharing the results with no one—finding freedom in being left unseen.

This return to small-scale models of engagement could have a particular resonance for women, as the gendered dynamics of performative online spaces quietly choke the authentic creative self. Many of the most profound experiences will occur away from the screen—undocumented, and deeply personal—as the silence of our present moment exposes the creative wants and needs that were always there, lying dormant amidst the smooth frenzy of modern life. "If, moving forward, we apply our most human instincts to our devices, that will have been a powerful COVID-19 legacy. Not only alone together, but together alone."[96]

As time stands still, artists can work to create the online communities we have always wanted: by first engaging in conversation with ourselves in our homes with the screen tucked away, to then turn outward in conversation with our creative peers in collective isolation. When there is nothing left to give, we can reach inward to find the fun stirring restlessly within.

[96] Turkle, "Coronavirus."

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# Appendix A:

## Research Ethics Board (REB) Invitation Letter

### Invitation

Date: January 2020
Project Title: **"Do It For the 'Gram: A Sketchbook Workshop for Women in Animation"**

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that online sharing culture affects the creative practice of women in animation who share their artwork on Instagram. Throughout the study, participants will investigate and imagine ways to be creative both online and offline.

As a participant, you will first be asked to spend 3-5 minutes per day over the course of a 5-day period (about 25 mins total) completing a set of drawing and questionnaire prompts to document your thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to online art sharing. Then, you will participate in a 2-hour sketchbook workshop that includes group conversation, drawing exercises and personal reflection. At the end of the workshop you will participate in an exit survey which will take 5 minutes to complete. The research project will take place over the course of 1 week. A short orientation briefing will be conducted at a time and place that's convenient for you and pre-workshop materials will be distributed. The 2-hour sketchbook workshop will take place at OCADU. If childcare is required to participate in the study, it will be arranged and paid for by the researcher. In total, participation will take about 2.5 hours of your time.

Possible benefits of participation include an increased awareness of the ways that online sharing affects your personal creative practice, and the development of new ways to engage with digital platforms now and in the future. You may also gain a deeper insight into the ways that online art sharing affects the animation community. There also may be risks associated with participation such as feeling obligated to participate in this study and share information about your creative practice. To manage these risks, participants will be asked to only share as much as they feel comfortable in the pre-workshop activity as well as within the group workshop.

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator Tabitha Fisher or the Faculty Supervisor Martha Ladly using the contact information provided below. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University [#2019-99]. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the Research Ethics Office at research@ocadu.ca.

Principal Investigator:
Tabitha Fisher, MFA Student, Digital Futures
OCAD University
[redacted]

Faculty Supervisor:
Martha Ladly, Primary Advisor
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Graduate Studies
OCAD University
[redacted]

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# Appendix B:

## Research Ethics Board (REB) Consent Form

### Workshop Consent Form

Date: January 2020
Project Title: **"Do It For the 'Gram: A Sketchbook Workshop for Women in Animation"**


Principal Investigator:
Tabitha Fisher, MFA Student, Digital Futures
OCAD University
[redacted]

Faculty Supervisor:
Martha Ladly, Primary Advisor
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Graduate Studies
OCAD University
[redacted]


**PURPOSE**

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that online sharing culture affects the creative practice of women in animation who share their artwork on Instagram. Throughout the study, participants will investigate and imagine ways to be creative both online and offline. This study will involve 1-3 separate groups, each with 6-8 participants who are women currently working in the Toronto animation industry and share their artwork online via Instagram. The groups size and number will depend on the availability of the participants. This research is being conducted as part of thesis project for the Digital Futures Graduate Studies program at OCADU.

**WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will first be asked to spend 3-5 minutes per day over the course of a 5-day period (about 25 mins total) completing a set of drawing and questionnaire prompts to document your thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to online art sharing. Then, you will participate in a 2-hour sketchbook workshop that includes group conversation, drawing exercises and personal reflection. At the end of the workshop you will participate in an exit survey which will take 5 minutes to complete.

The research project will take place over the course of 1 week. A short orientation debrief will be conducted at a time and place that's convenient for you and pre-workshop materials will be distributed. The 2-hour sketchbook workshop will take place at OCADU with 6-8 participants. Costs incurred may include transit and parking on the day of the workshop. If childcare is required to participate in the study, it will be arranged and paid for by the researcher. In total, participation will take about 2.5 hours of your time. The participant will not be paid to participate in this study. As part of the research you will be asked to identify your name, age, gender, job title, education, years active in animation, and current Instagram page, and providing this information is completely voluntary.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Possible benefits of participation include an increased awareness of the ways that online sharing affects your personal creative practice, and the development of new ways to engage with digital platforms now and in the future. You may also gain a deeper insight into the ways that online art sharing affects the animation community. There also may be risks associated with participation such as feeling obligated to participate in this study and share information about your creative practice. To manage these risks, participants will be asked to only share as much as they feel comfortable in the pre-workshop activity as well as within the group workshop.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information you provide will be considered confidential and grouped with responses from other participants. Given the format of this session, we ask you to respect your fellow participants by keeping all information that identifies or could potentially identify a participant and/or their comments confidential. The workshop session will be audio recorded and photographed. During the process of data synthesis study codes will be assigned to each participant in order to de-identify the personal data, and the data will be secured on a password-protected hard drive or in locked cupboards/drawers. Participants will be described in the publication through the use of a pseudonym and their faces will be obscured in published documentation. Personal details of participants will be removed before storage. Data will be kept for 1 year, after which time the data will be destroyed. Access to this data will be restricted to Tabitha Fisher (Principal Student Investigator), Martha Ladly (Primary Advisor, OCADU) and Suzanne Stein (Secondary Advisor, OCADU).

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with OCAD University or the Principal Investigator [Tabitha Fisher] involved in the research. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study prior to data analysis, or to request withdrawal of your data prior to data analysis (January 30th, 2020), and you may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

To withdraw from this study, let Tabitha Fisher know at any point during the study by email at [redacted]

**PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in reports, professional and scholarly journals, students theses, and/or presentations to conferences and colloquia. In any publication, data will be presented in aggregate forms. Quotations from interviews or surveys will not be attributed to you without your permission.

Feedback about this study will be available approximately June 2020 when the Master's thesis document is published, and you will be contacted through email by the Principal Investigator [Tabitha Fisher] involved in the research. Participants will be sent the thesis document at the end of the research project, and the work will also be available on the OCADU Digital Futures Thesis website https://www.dfthesis.com as well as the OCADU Open Research Repository website http://openresearch.ocadu.ca

**CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator Tabitha Fisher or the Faculty Supervisor Martha Ladly using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University [#2019-99].

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:
Research Ethics Board c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
OCAD University
100 McCaul Street
Toronto, M5T1W1
416 977 6000 x4368
research@ocadu.ca

**AGREEMENT**

**Audio recording and photography**

- ❑ I agree to be audio recorded and photographed for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

**Consent**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time during the study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

# Appendix C:
## Workshop, Selecting Participants

As my project required individuals to meet in person I used my home base of Toronto to locate workshop participants. Toronto is known as a hub for animation talent in Canada, fueled by a strong job market that includes several top schools and a mixture of large companies and small boutique studios. However, it is important to acknowledge that much of the animation production in Canada is connected to a robust federal and provincial tax-credit system, where the industry relies on service work for large American companies such as Disney, Netflix, and Nickelodeon to stay afloat. This means that, although the Canadian and U.S. markets are deeply linked, there are fewer opportunities for Canadian talent to produce original content within a studio system. Alternatively, independent Canadian animators turn to government arts funders such as The Canada Arts Council, their local provincial councils, or The National Film Board of Canada (The NFB) to produce non-commercial works. It is possible that this relationship could affect the research outputs; however, a comparison study between the U.S. and Canadian markets is outside the scope of this work, and could be the topic of future research. When I refer to animation workers, I specifically mean practitioners of character-based animation (such as Disney) or auteur animation (such as The NFB) rather than realistic VFX or special effects animation for live-action productions.

The challenge with this study was that I was working with a group that is already a minority—women in animation—within a field known for its burnout culture. Furthermore, I was looking to identify women who actively share artwork on Instagram in order to narrow the focus of the study. Time is at a premium for those working in animation due to the long hours spent racing to meet deadlines; I am extremely grateful to the women who agreed to participate in this research. When selecting participants, I used several strategies that relied on my network of contacts within the animation community. The goal was to locate women with whom I did not have a working relationship, in order to preserve the integrity of the study—especially when the pool of potential participants was so small. It was also critical that I did not engage any of my current or former animation students, as that would be a breach of research ethics rules.

To start, I identified a list of animation studios in the Toronto area that could distribute an

invitation letter to their workers, but the uptake on this was modest at best. Then, I began to share the invitation online by posting it to animation community groups and encouraging others to share; but the best results came from contacting artists directly through email or Instagram. Some participants had mentioned hearing about the study from multiple sources, which made them interested in finding out more. Initially I had aimed to create three groups, each with 6-8 participants, but this proved difficult due to a lack of participant availability. Many individuals expressed a strong interest in the research subject as well as a desire to participate, but they were unable to commit the time required. I was surprised to receive messages of interest from artists from outside Ontario, although it was not possible for them to participate due to the in-person workshop component of the study. Ultimately, I was able to confirm five participants, which was enough to run one workshop.

# Appendix D:
## Workshop, Sensitizing

In the generative research text *Convivial Toolbox*, Sanders and Stappers stress the importance of a pre-workshop sensitizing stage to produce an "awakened sensitivity and expressive ability"[97] to the topic in advance of the group meeting. Having run a workshop prototype twice in the summer, I had observed the need for a gentle easing-in to the research subject matter to yield the best results in the workshop itself, so I designed the sensitizing sketchbook in order to acclimatize participants to the themes of the study before meeting as a group. Further referencing Instagram, the activity was styled after the popular #Inktober drawing prompts where artists from around the world are unified through a month-long series of drawing challenges inspired by a common theme. The objective of #Inktober is to inspire creativity by generating content daily; in the sensitizing sketchbook I ask participants to do something similar, but it is up to them whether they choose to share this content online via their Instagram account or keep it private. However, Sanders and Stappers caution against telegraphing the ultimate purpose of the workshop during the sensitizing stage so as not to influence the final results.

Prior to the workshop, each participant was given a small booklet with 5 sections, one for each day, and was asked to produce a drawing for 3-5 minutes daily leading up to our meeting. The first pages of the sketchbook also include a series of *About Me* questions to gather basic information about participants and capture their thoughts, feelings and experiences with regard to online art sharing. In addition to sensitizing participants prior to the workshop, the sketchbook creates a unified experience that can serve as a jumping-off point for group conversation. Sanders and Stappers recommend beginning a convivial workshop with a discussion of the sensitizing materials; for this reason, the books are designed to be laid flat so participants can easily view all five drawings at once, as well as compare their work to others. This activity is a crucial step that allows participants to dive immediately into the material upon meeting and bond over a shared experience.

97. Sanders and Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox*, 55.

# Appendix E:
## Workshop, Facilitation

The research project is designed to take place over the course of six days with a group of 6-8 participants at OCAD University. As part of my research design, I first provided workshop participants with a sensitizing drawing activity to acclimatize them to the research topic. Then I used a combination of ethnographic and generative research tools to gather data during and after facilitating the two-hour sketchbook workshop. During the course of this study I collected data in the following ways:

**Pre-Workshop: 5-Day Drawing Activity**

Participants are given a sketchbook with a set of drawing prompts. They are asked to draw in a section for 3-5 minutes every day leading up to the workshop. The first pages of the sketchbook also include a series of *About Me* questions. After completion, participants are asked to bring these books to the workshop. Participants are pre-informed that I will collect them for analysis.

**Workshop: Sticky-Note Clusters**

During the workshop, participants respond to a series of questions that explore the relationship between online sharing and creative practice. They are asked to reflect on these questions and respond by writing ideas down on sticky notes and placing them next to the question prompts *Why do you draw? When did it change? What's most fun?*

**Workshop: Audio Recording**

During the workshop, participants are recorded with audio equipment to capture quotes from the group conversation. The recording takes place for the duration of the workshop.

**Workshop: Photography**

During the workshop, photographs are taken to document the room and participants as well as the physical research outputs.

**Online Exit Survey**

After the workshop is complete, participants are asked to take a short survey to reflect on the perceived value of the workshop activities. This takes about five minutes to complete. The purpose of this survey is to identify how the workshop may have affected their relationship to online art sharing.

**Observations**

During the study I observe how the participants share their artwork online.

# Appendix F: Draw It For the 'Gram, Session Script



## Workshop Session Script

**Workshop (2 hrs)**

- Audio is being recorded
- Coffee/Tea and snacks are provided

(5 min) Introduction

- Confidentiality rules: keep participant identities/comments confidential. Faces obscured, pseudonym, data de-identified + grouped
- Goal: Insight into experience of women in animation who share artwork online Create space for conversation/reflection about effect of Instagram on creativity
- "You are the expert" - All responses are good, all drawings are good

(10 min) Discussion of Daily Observation Journal

- Each participant describes their findings from maintaining the journal.
- What made you choose whether or not to share 5 Day Drawings on Instagram?
- Reaction from participants telling each other's stories.

(5 min) Description of sticky note question activity

- Activity: Group sticky-note brainstorm session. I present you with questions and you respond by writing on sticky notes and posting them in the circle.
- Purpose: To reflect on feelings regarding your personal drawing practice.
- "There are no wrong answers"

(10 min) Sticky Notes pt 1

- Fill in the blanks for "I draw because…?" and write responses on sticky notes. As answers come to mind, place them under the category "Why do you draw?"
- Fill in the blanks for "Drawing changed for me when…?" and write responses on sticky notes. As answers come to mind, place them under the category "When did it change?"
- Fill in the blanks for "I have the most fun drawing…?" and write responses on sticky notes. As answers come to mind, place them under the category "What's most fun?"

(5 min) Description of drawing activity/Sticky Notes pt 2

- Move through 3 stages of creative development
- These drawings will not be shared with fellow participants in the workshop.
- During drawing exercise you may sit anywhere in the room that's comfortable.

- "There are no wrong answers"
- Use sticky notes to make observations while you are drawing. Place these notes on the provided reflection space.

(20 min) Drawing 1 - *Critical Awareness* Stage: "Why do you draw?"
- Draw anything that you like until the clock runs out.
- While you're drawing, consider the question "I draw because…?"
- Reflect on feelings/impressions and write them down on sticky notes, then place on the provided reflection space.

(20 min) Drawing 2 - *Schematic* Stage: "When did it change?"
- Think of your favourite thing you used to draw as a kid.
- Recall the way you used to draw at that age. Draw your favourite childhood thing using the same style until the clock runs out.
- While you're drawing, consider the question "Drawing changed for me when…?"
- Reflect on feelings/impressions and write them down on sticky notes, then place on the provided reflection space.

(15 min) Drawing 3 - *Pre-schematic/Scribbling* Stage: "What's most fun?"
- Think of the moment you picked up a drawing tool for the first time.
- Recall the way you used to draw at that age. An exploration of the pleasure of motion and tactile feeling.
- Experiment with patterns, lines, textures, speed and storytelling through the use of simple forms.
- While you're drawing, consider the question "I have the most fun drawing…?"
- Reflect on feelings/impressions and write them down on sticky notes, then place on the provided reflection space.

(20 min) Group Reflection:
- Group discussion/observation about discoveries made in Sticky Note pt 1 vs pt 2.
- Identify which type of drawings do you want to be seen in private vs posted to social media now and in the future.
- Imagine yourself 20 years from now. What kinds of drawings will you make?
- "20 years from now, my sketchbook looks like…?"
- "20 years from now, my social media looks like…?"

(5 min) End:
- Conduct exit survey.

# Appendix G:

## Draw It For the 'Gram, Pre-Workshop Materials

### INSTRUCTIONS

This sketchbook contains 5 sections, one for each day. Please draw in a section for 3-5 mins every day leading up to the workshop.

You can draw whatever you like!

Also, please fill out the questions in the back. You can do this at any point in time.

### BASIC INFO:

Name:

Age:

Job Title/Specialty:

Education:

Years active as a professional:

Instagram @:

Day 1: _____

Write a caption...

### QUESTIONS

1. I use Instagram because....

2. I'm inspired to post art to Instagram when...

3. Since I joined Instagram, my use of the platform has changed over time in the following ways...

4. Currently, how much time do you spend per day on Instagram looking at artwork?

   - ☐ 0-9 mins
   - ☐ 10-29 mins
   - ☐ 30-59 mins
   - ☐ 60+ mins

5. Have you ever abandoned a digital art sharing platform? (forums/blogs/instagram, ect) Which ones? Why?

6. How important is it for you to have a strong online brand?

   - ☐ Not important
   - ☐ Somewhat important
   - ☐ Very important

   Describe why:

7. How important is it for you to be 'seen' by others online?

   - ☐ Not important
   - ☐ Somewhat important
   - ☐ Very important

   Describe why:

8. How important is it for you to experiment with styles/ techniques over time?

   - ☐ Not important
   - ☐ Somewhat important
   - ☐ Very important

   Describe why:

9. Currently, how often do you make art that you keep to yourself?

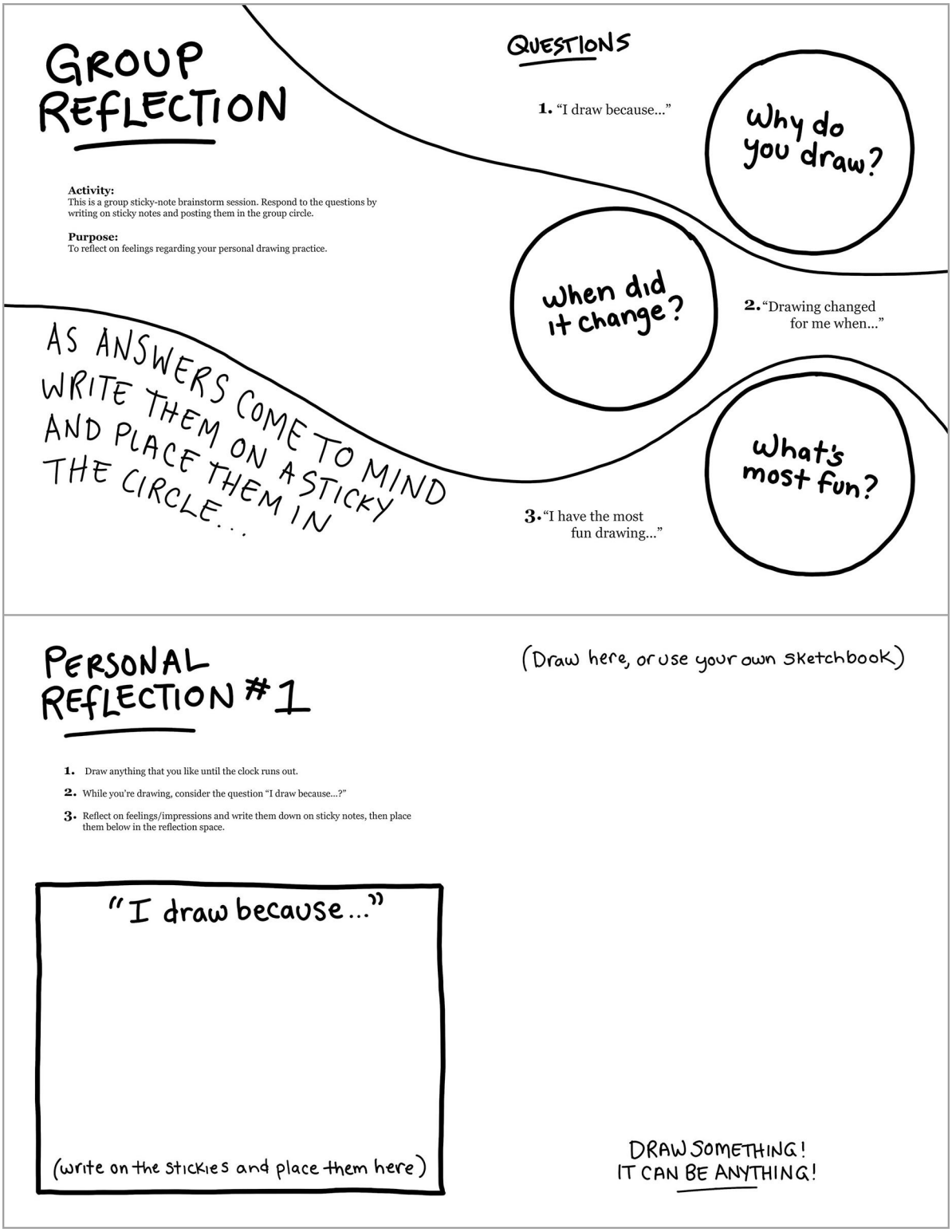
   - ☐ Every day
   - ☐ 5-6 times per week
   - ☐ 2-4 times per week
   - ☐ Once per week
   - ☐ Once per month
   - ☐ Less than once per month
   - ☐ I only draw personal work to share online

   Describe why:

10. Artists often talk about the importance of carrying a personal sketchbook. What does sketchbook drawing mean to you?

# Appendix H:

## Draw It For the 'Gram, Workshop Materials



# PERSONAL REFLECTION #2

1. Recall your favourite things to draw as a kid. Draw these things as you did in childhood using the same style until the clock runs out.
2. While you're drawing, consider the question "Drawing changed for me when...?"
3. Reflect on feelings/impressions and write them down on sticky notes, then place them below in the reflection space.

"Drawing changed for me when..."

(write on the stickies and place them here)

(Draw here, or use your own sketchbook)

DRAW LIKE A KID!
IT CAN BE ANYTHING!

# PERSONAL REFLECTION #3

1. Think of the way you used to draw in preschool. Imagine when you picked up a drawing tool for the first time, then draw using that style until the clock runs out.
2. While you're drawing, consider the question "I have the most fun drawing...?"
3. Reflect on feelings/impressions and write them down on sticky notes, then place them below in the reflection space.

"I have the most fun drawing..."

(write on the stickies and place them here)

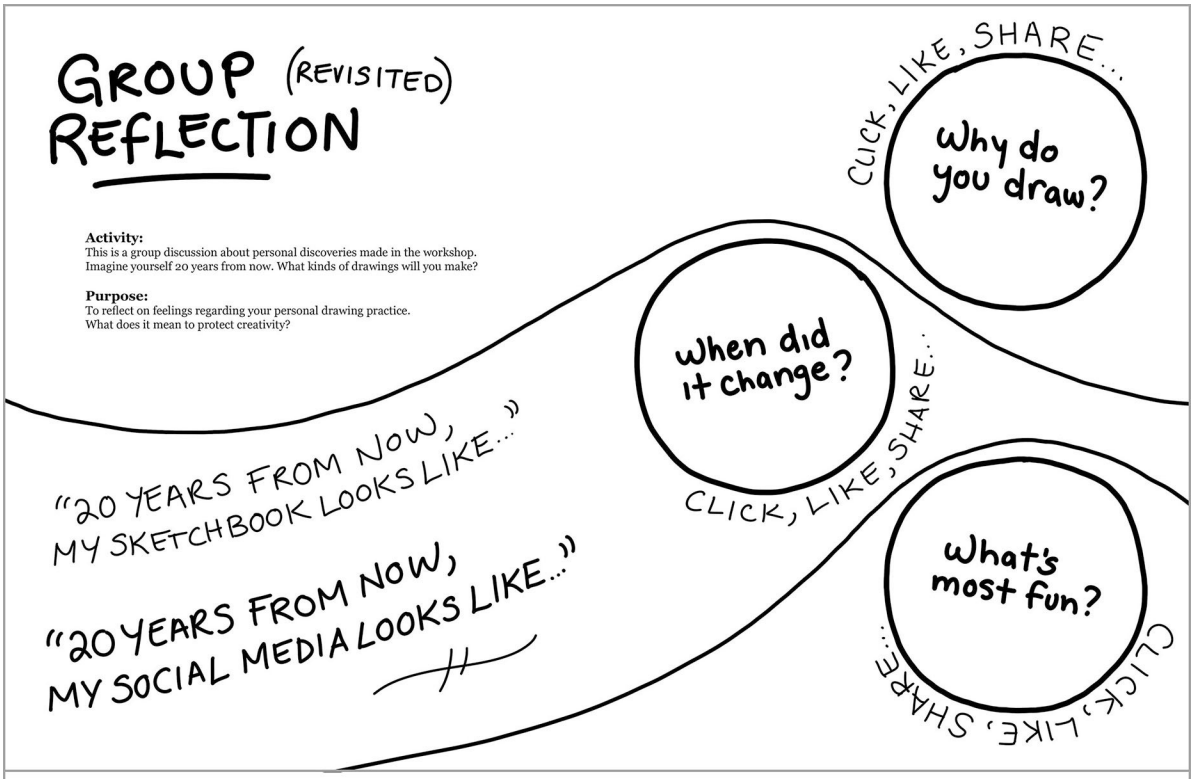
(Draw here, or use your own sketchbook)

DRAW LIKE A BABY!
IT CAN BE ANYTHING!

# GROUP REFLECTION (REVISITED)

**Activity:**
This is a group discussion about personal discoveries made in the workshop. Imagine yourself 20 years from now. What kinds of drawings will you make?

**Purpose:**
To reflect on feelings regarding your personal drawing practice. What does it mean to protect creativity?




"20 YEARS FROM NOW, MY SKETCHBOOK LOOKS LIKE..."

"20 YEARS FROM NOW, MY SOCIAL MEDIA LOOKS LIKE..."

## EXIT SURVEY

1. What ideas did you take away from the workshop? How will you apply them to your creative practice?

2. Overall, how would you rate the value of the workshop? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

3. How would you rate the value of the group discussion? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

4. How would you rate the value of the drawing activities? [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

5. How important is play in your creative process?
   - ☐ Not important
   - ☐ Somewhat important
   - ☐ Very important

   Describe why:

6. Online art sharing affects my creativity because...

7. In the future, my ideal art practice will look like...

## ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS?