

The Liturgists Podcast – Social Media

Says Henry Ludd / should be Ned Ludd?

Speaker Key:

MM	Mike McHargue
MG	Michael Gungor
WM	William Matthews
HM	Hillary McBride

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00:00:00	HM	When we record these podcasts, we don't always know where the conversations are going to go. We think up an idea, often on the spot, and just go for it. But sometimes these ideas take us into territory that we weren't expecting them to. Territory that accesses our own pain. In this episode, we end up going to a place we felt deserved a warning. A warning for those of you who may be activated or triggered by the content. We talk about very personal suicide, suicidality, and suicide attempt stories as well as cyberbullying.
00:00:35		If you're not in an environment or place in your life where this will be safe for you to listen to, or even manageable, please consider not listening to this episode or listen with someone you love. And regardless, it may be a good idea to plan some self-care afterwards. Thanks for listening.
00:01:00	MG	Socrates famously warned against writing because it would create forgetfulness in the learned souls because they will not be able to use their memories. People bemoaned the printing press saying it would overload the world with data and information that would be harmful for our brains, people have warned against schooling like this article I found in this medical journal in 1883 that argued that schools quote exhaust the children's brains and nervous systems with complex and multiple studies and ruined their bodies by protracted imprisonment unquote.
00:01:38		In 1936 the music magazine, the Gramophone, reported that children had developed the habit of dividing attention between the humdrum preparation of their school assignments and the compelling

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		excitement of the loudspeaker and described how radio programs were disturbing the balance of their excitable minds. We've all seen this, right? Radio, televisions, movies, the internet, video games, social media.
00:02:03		Whatever it seems to be the new way of communicating, the new way of telling stories every generation at some point gets to a point where the older people bemoan the technologies, the new ways of thinking, the communicating, the moving, or simply new ways of being. So Mike, I was curious, tell me again why you got off Twitter.
	MM	Welcome to The Liturgists Podcast everybody.
	MG	There we go.
00:02:37	MM	I'm not actually a Luddite at all. If you're not familiar with that term, it comes from the Industrial era. People who followed a man named Henry Ludd, who feared what machines would do to workers in displacing them and so their mission in life was to sabotage the machinery in order to protect labour. And so someone who doesn't like technology or technological progress to this day is called a Luddite.
00:03:02		I don't think I qualify as one. I think I'm kind of a social media original gangster.
	MG	How many VR headsets do you own, Mike?
	MM	Nine VR headsets. I own nine VR headsets and I've been on Twitter long enough that my Twitter account used to be primarily a number. Your Twitter accounts were numbered and mine was quite low. When I joined Twitter, Twitter was a side project for a blogging company.
00:03:33		I can reasonably say I've been on Twitter so long most of our listeners couldn't drive and possibly were even in elementary school when I joined Twitter.
	WM	What year was that?
	MM	Oh gosh. Twitter launched in 07 so I would've been on Twitter in late 08, early 09.
	WM	Oh okay I was on Twitter by 09.
	MM	Yes I was super, super early. There was no smartphones with apps.

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00:04:03		If you wanted to use Twitter on your mobile phone in those days you sent a text. I believe to 40404.
	HM	Wow.
	WM	Does it show how long you've been on here? I'm trying to find it.
	MM	There's apps that will look it up for you. If your account's not old enough then it won't work but if you have a really old account, an OG account.
	WM	OG account.
	HM	And how has it changed? How have the two of you seen it change since 09?
00:04:29	MM	I've just seen the whole internet change. So like even for me Twitter is like silly new toy. My experience with the internet began with screeching modems and yelling at your Mum to not pick up the phone. I had an email address before there was a thing that was WWW. I remember the launch of websites as a thing and I learned to interact online through something called bulletin board services. BBS's. Where you would dial in until you got through because they only had a few lines and there were busy signals and you would connect and you would read as many threads, that's where the word comes from, if possible leave your responses and then disconnect and come back the next day and see what had happened.
00:05:11		And that was amazing because the only other form of direct textual communication we had at the time was mailing letters to people. So this was like incredible stuff. As a gray beard I've always had this internal notion that I resist that letting non-nerds on the internet ruined it.
00:05:29		I went through a serious period of feeling like if you didn't know how to create a subnet mask for an IP address and you didn't know how to roll out a TCP/IP stack, you should not be online because you're ruining it with all of your non-nerdy conversations and getting on BBS's and asking how BBS's work instead of writing your own software to customize the BBS yourself. So there's been this grieving for me as the internet has become a thing for everyone and I played a huge role in that.
00:06:01		I spent the first part of my career connecting companies and corporations to the internet and helping people at home connect to the internet and then when social media launched, as much as I

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		complain about brands on social media, I launched the first social media division in an ad agency in the Omnicom company, which is one of the largest advertising networks in the world, and am responsible personally for billions of dollars in corporate presence on social media.
00:06:32		What excited me about social media in the first place was its ability to connect people like if I think about in my own life, I used to live in Tallahassee, Florida. I was in a primarily bad biz context and then I started to not be an Evangelical anymore and that was a very personally risky thing. So my place of solace was actually on the internet and eventually in things like social media.
00:06:59		When I think about like the ex-Evangelical community I think about the kind of federation that happens for LGBTQIA people on social media and I really love that and that goes against like a prejudice I have against non-nerds because most of these people, they don't know how to code, they don't understand TCP/IP and yet, this service is delivering value into their lives. And I think at its best social media allows real people to bypass institutional strongholds.
00:07:35		So we've had these institutional gatekeepers on media and that goes away and that means I've learned more on Twitter about racial justice or a way forward for people of different gender identities and sexual orientations then I have from any number of books, any amount of traditional media. I'm a lurker on black Twitter all the time.
00:08:00		Like I never respond to things on black Twitter because it's like hey I'm just going to white dude this up and ruin it, but I love the unmoderated and real-time federated discussions about issues that are so frequently ignored like in primary media and those are all things I love. And frankly those are different from how Twitter started, which was mostly jokes and actually Twitter was invented as a tool, so that people in an office could decide where to go to lunch.
00:08:33		It was a form of group texting. That's the genesis of Twitter.
	HM	That's a very important tool.
	MM	It is, yes but everything we use now the mentions, the hashtags, the threads; none of that was an original part of the platform. And all those changes are precisely what made Twitter into a culture-shaping force. But I have like really deep concerns acknowledging all that power. You see what I mean?
00:09:00		So I'm not saying those things aren't true. I'm not saying that black

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		Twitter's not important and amazing. I'm not saying that real advocacy doesn't happen on social media. What I am saying is really three things that I've noticed; one is studies are increasingly showing linkages between use of social media and anxiety and depression. So we're seeing them in young people who use social media, decrease social interaction and total amounts of time. Specifically high schoolers, about 56% of high school seniors now go on one or more dates per year.
00:09:37		Compared to 85% from when my parents went to high school. Time with friends and family has dropped 40% since 2000 for young people. Heavy social media users are 35% more likely to have suicidal ideation. Heavy social media risks increase depression risks by 27%. Millennials and post-millennials are the most depressed and anxious young people we have on record.
00:10:03		And that's linked to social media usage which they simultaneously, and I hate to say they, find identity and longing and connection at the same time there are measurable mental health consequences. And I think part of that is social media is connecting our communal formation and our like information intake to a very particular radical capitalist libertarian philosophy that comes out of Silicon Valley.
00:10:36		So what's strange about like black Twitter emerging from a thing that let faux progressive libertarians in Silicon Valley go to lunch, is beautiful. It also means all the activity on black Twitter creates capital for those same people in Silicon Valley and not really for the black people that make black Twitter valuable.
00:11:00		So we're creating this strange incentive structure where the model is we're going to create these kind of proto-digital consciences whose job is to watch everything we do, like in the most creepy 1984 way possible. Pseudo-conscious machines are watching what we do.
	UM	You like Richard Moore. You shall try and deliver just digital series on Meditation.
	MM	And there job is to figure out what we pay attention to, and they don't care what we pay attention to.
00:11:34		All they care is that we pay attention. So if people responded strongly to pictures of dead bodies, the machines are going to serve more of them. It means we're creating this weird feedback loop between our neuro-anatomy, our social conditioning and digital algorithms. And what the machines have learned is the most bankable emotion is

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		moral outrage. So that's where you lift market capital.
00:12:02		That's where you drive ad revenue, is moral outrage. So we think we're curating content but what's happening is the machines are shaping the way we communicate by exposing what we see repetitiously.
	??	Shaping us.
	MM	It's a cycle, we're both involved but that's changing the way we talk to each other and that's connected to my third concern. And my third concern is that the thin nature of social media changes the way we respond to people.
00:12:32		So we evolve to communicate where we haven't always been a speaking animal. Our primary means of communication, what we have the most kind of brain hardware devoted to, is reading the non-verbal cues, the body posture, facial expressions of the people we're communicating with. And when we reduce people's, in a very post-enlightenment way, identity to text and an image, we think we are having a high level cognitive conversation but what we're actually doing is through the media itself neurologically dehumanizing other people.
00:13:09		Where we see ourselves as a human with feelings and we see other people as kind of dry information and it means we don't see the impact our words have on people, we don't see the emotional response that usually cause us to draw back. I've experienced this many times when I've met people in real life that I only know through Twitter and I'm shocked how different they are.
00:13:33		I've heard people say social media has this toxicity because people are on it and people are toxic and that's true. To some degree social media is a mirror of humanity, but I would argue because of its thin nature and the way it's processed by machines it's a fun house distorted mirror of humanity that simultaneously allows advocacy and allows progressives to drive Ta-Nehisi Coates off Twitter.
00:14:00		It simultaneously allows black queer women to reshape national dialogue with hashtag black lives matter and enable the rise of the alt-right and Donald Trump. These things are inextricable and especially if you consider Ta-Nehisi Coates, there's a problem with scale. So I've always loved social media but as we've added zeros to the end of the downloads on The Liturgists Podcast, the volume of information that I see coming in, I have a strong nostalgia for what Twitter was like for

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		me two years ago.
00:14:36		Versus what Twitter or Facebook or my email inbox are now, because I've noticed that we tend to not treat any public figures on Twitter, especially graciously regardless of whether they're progressive or conservative or atheist or fundamentalists or whatever. And I have questions about what the psychological impact is, and I have no objective distance here, for people who get affirmation and critique and attack thousands of times per week or per day.
00:15:09		In my case that's led to an almost crippling fear of not only tweeting but podcasting or speaking out because what I'm seeing in social media this is the biggest change I've seen is have you ever seen those boxes? They're usually something to demonstrate physics like a big glass box and you put mousetraps in it and you put ping pong balls on the mousetraps.
00:15:33		If you drop one ping pong ball in they all go off and it's chaotic and there's an explosion. I feel like right now, social media is doing that for human trauma. So we respond to the well-meaning or not work of other people through our own traumatic experiences. We rightly respond with grief or hurt or even PTSD in a public forum, which triggers other people that creates a cycle of self-reinforcing re-traumatization at the same time some people find solace and identity and healing.
00:16:11		And most of the time, cue Forrest Gump, both are happening at the same time.
00:16:28	HM	The question I hear often asked is so is it worth it? Is it worth it to be on social media with all of the consequences that come with it? What do you guys think?
	WM	I think we can all agree the internet has changed our lives, especially in the last few years. I think for me as an artist I always look at it as a form of expression. The internet was always a way to express yourself, to share music, so when I jumped on the internet I mean I was on the internet... I feel like Mike too. I was on the internet when you had to pay per hour and it was AOL downloads and you know you used to get the CDs with the promos like 50 free hours on AOL because otherwise they're going to start charging you per hour to use the internet, right?
00:17:07	MM	I forgot about that.
	WM	Yes and I mean I remember getting the first, one of the first chain

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		letters that was going around. You remember you used to get those in the mail? And then there was this... I mean this was around like Windows 95 had come out and they were... We knew Windows was going to do Windows 98 and so I remember getting this email from this source that said if you forward this to everyone you know, basically this is being tracked, and you're going to get a free copy of Windows 98 sent to you once it comes out.
00:17:34		And me and my Dad were like, this is so cool. And my Mum was like, are you sure this is an actual thing? We're like, no it's going to happen, they can do this right it's the internet. We don't know, you know? You know after that AOL Instant Messenger I would come home from high school and get on AOL Instant Messenger, talk to all my friends from class. Just the way it connected all of us but also I think what began to move us forward was when music started going on the internet and Napster came about.
00:18:00		And you know a lot of these sites and Limewire and Kazaa and the sharing of information. It made it all worth it for us like we were able to share things we loved and the things that I couldn't find before, I could now find through these...
	MG	You stealing them.
	WM	Well yes, I mean at the time it was all such a question about like what is digital ownership, like even though the technology has rapidly changed in the last 20 plus years, we still are asking basic fundamental questions from a legal issue like what is this content? Who owns it?
00:18:33		You know like how can it be distributed? What's appropriate distribution? What's illegal distribution? So for me, I think I came of age in a culture that readily took things on the internet and remixed them. And we're kind of like this remix culture of like you know we take this and then we add our spin on it or we, you know, you can manipulate a photo. You know or you can even remix a song because now you have the digital file of this song. You know before you didn't have that unless you bought a CD or you taped it off the radio, right?
00:19:00		Or you bought like a vinyl. Now it was like digitally people can you know make their own beats and they can... It revolutionized culture for I think everyone that came of age during that generation. It's the reason why Hip Hop exploded, part of the reason. In the 90s R'n'B and Hip Hop exploded because of the internet, partially, like you know outside of MTV. For me it's like is it worth it? I'm like hell yeah. It has to be because nothing that I enjoy about the world right now would

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		exist if not for it.
00:19:29	HM	But what's the personal cost to you?
	WM	I mean everything Mike described in terms of getting you know barrage of like attacks or you know people criticizing every single word you say, I think I have a pretty tough shell. It does effect me but I've just kind of been like this is the arena and the arena has gotten way dirtier and it's gotten way more rough. And so to even be in the arena you have to literally be a gladiator that puts on... You know, you have to know going into it now, this is what this is. I'm in the arena and I might get something thrown at me but you know, you mentioned black Twitter, right?
00:20:05		And what was interesting about Twitter for instance versus a lot of the other mediums and platforms was you know black Twitter came about because black people liked to use Twitter at night generally and they were watching TV shows like Scandal. The reason why Scandal became a big show on ABC was it was a pretty nominal show. Kerry Washington was now a superwoman actress, at the time, it was a Shonda Rhimes show.
00:20:29		Long story short black people loved talking about that show on Twitter. They would go on Twitter and talk about the show. And that skyrocketed, that show became like a top-rated show for ABC and it ran for seven seasons. But things like that, I remember when you know after the George Zimmerman trial and one of the jurors was getting a book deal from the trial and black Twitter literally it's just black people going on Twitter and talking about things relevant to our communities or our identities and getting on Twitter next thing you know the book deal is pulled.
00:20:59		And it's like, the amount of cultural sway, I don't think in mainstream culture black-Americans have ever had that much cultural sway ever and so I think what ended up happening was black people began to realize that and was like, yo if we just mobilize and talk about things that interest us, we can drive artists that we like. You know, we can push people to the top. Cardi B is a phenomenon of that as well, like currently in a modern day versus 15 years ago. So I mean there's just example after example of how it was movements on the underground, this remix culture, that is now driving the news.
00:21:31		Like if I want to get the news I go to Twitter first because that's where the news gets their news from, often times these days, it's Twitter like you see them referencing or news breaking on Twitter all the time now. At a personal cost I'm like I don't even weigh it as like both

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		equally. I go whatever personal cost exists in terms of like struggling with anxiety or like depression or you know whatever, I'm like it's all worth it because of the cultural sway but also the cultural affirmation that you get.
00:22:00		[music playing]
	MG	Is it worth it? What does that really mean? Does that mean that the good outweighs the bad? I don't know. I think when I think about the good, I think about connection, people both in my life and that I didn't know but that now I have some sort of connection to, some sort of relationship with even if that's not the traditional model of we live in the same place and share dinners together regularly.
00:22:41		I think I still have more connection with more people than whatever exist without social media. I think that's a good thing. So relationship not just between individuals but also to society and different segments of society that I would not normally have access to. People that don't live in my neighborhood or go to my club or are a part of my church. You know any of the ways that typically we've had really limited connections as human beings based on just geography and technology, this technology has allowed us to create relationship not just with individuals but with other world views, with other mind spaces, with other cultures.
00:23:21		That unless you have a lot of privilege there's no way you could access. I think there's an element of fun. I've had lots of good laughs. How many times have we sat in a room and watched YouTube videos that somebody had shared on their Facebook wall? You know, it's created a lot of entertainment and laughter and joy in a lot of ways.
00:23:41		Marketing, business, I think a lot of this... This podcast would not exist without social media's existence. My career I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing, I wouldn't have the influence of art. Our world has been pretty much directly to people. We've never been either with the band or The Liturgists, we've never been embraced by gatekeepers of any kind really.
00:24:08		We've gone directly to people that were tired of the gatekeepers and that's kind of how my whole world has worked. So much of my life is built on social media so there's a lot of good.
	MM	You're saying you don't think the podcast would've worked well as box sets of CDs sold at LifeWay. Are you saying it would not have made it?

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	MG	That's what I'm saying. That's what I'm saying.
00:24:29	WM	Can we pause though for a second and just note how much like I mean I mentioned music but particularly how much Christian music evolved and went you know even kind of in a weird way mainstream like because of the influence of social media and those songs being distributed. But also the way like worship leader almost became like a visual thing that people began to like I want to be a worship leader because I'm seeing worship videos on YouTube.
00:24:57		And it's like it almost became like it's own type of celebrity-ism, the Christian culture in general became that through social media.
	HM	And I would say that that's less about worship leader and more of celebrity. I'm not interested in being a worship leader, I'm interested in being a famous worship leader or I'm interested in fame but in a way that upholds the values that I've been told are most important.
	WM	And you call it the gospel, right? We're doing this to reach the whole world, like for the Kingdom.
00:25:27	MG	So I think about the negatives are the number one thing that I think about is ego-ship, narcissism, being totally self-involved, it's a characteristic that in the past when I've gotten really deep into social media that's the kind of thing that starts coming up as far as I'm just thinking about how I'm being perceived, what people are thinking about me, how they're engaging in my work, and there's a real ego game going on there.
00:25:58		So as I've, through the years, tried to come to a healthy relationship with social media I'm always trying to... Kind of the big question that I'm always asking is, what am I looking for here if I'm going to be opening my phone and opening this app or whatever, pick your weapon, pick your poison, what am I looking for? So in other words like what is the subtle question that I'm asking. A lot of times I think that's what is happening somewhere else other than here and now. Like, what can I find other than right here and right now to make me happier, to satisfy my boredom, my anxiety, depression, my need for affirmation?
00:26:38		And when you do that 10, 20, 30, 40 times a day then you have an actionable thing that you're doing to go and try to find that other thing other than right here and now, to me it's kind of no wonder the studies show the anxiety increasing and depression increasing; that's a dark place to keep going to try to keep seeking that somewhere else. Am I

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		important?
00:27:00		Am I loved? Am I good enough? Who notices me? And going to these places on the internet that are often toxic places to try to find that. And of course you know I should say that that's not limited to social media, obviously, that's a human thing always trying to find how am I good enough? How am I important enough? And we look for that in our face-to-face relationships as well but there seems to be something unique about social media for some of that to thrive to me. We don't have time to curate our ego for people to love us in a face-to-face way in the same way.
00:27:34		We don't have the same... You know, you could take five minutes to really come up with the perfect retort on Facebook to somebody's comment but in face-to-face you don't have the time, you just have to be in there now and so I think that aspect of it magnifies, amplifies, creates a loop of that, some of those ego questions really self-reinforcing.
00:27:57		Another negative aspect I think of social media for me has been, which is related to that ego thing, is when people get mean because it is and can be such a negative place. What psychologist, John Suler, called the toxic disinhibition where on social media we lack so many of the normal evolutionary cues that we have face-to-face or in talking to somebody, that the nature of our conversation people say things they wouldn't normally say.
00:28:26		You call people names in a way there's no way you would ever do face-to-face. You spit out these words that just seem to you like you just had a second on your phone and the other person hears that and it becomes this like oh, this painful dagger and then they throw back the dagger and we all I think have experienced that but you can, when that happens a million times and you see that over and over and over, I do think the depression, anxiety, low self-esteem from the ego shit not working out according to our plans, you can have a sort of death by a million papercuts sort of situation.
00:28:57		And then there's also just the negativity factor to me that you know like the whole bad apple situation, we've had people in our band before or like on the road where they have a bad attitude about something and I've seen first hand time and time again like the bad apple thing really is a real thing if there's that lowest common denominator gets created where like we just complain or kind of somebody really complains all the time. And you notice, everybody starts complaining more. Because it comes like that bad apple can

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		spoil the bunch, it really can get into...
00:29:33		It's easier to fall to that lowest common denominator than to rise up to like no we don't, we don't complain. So when you have millions of people spewing toxic sludge of their outrage, their whatever and it gets mixed up with their ego shit and my ego shit gets involved, the lowest common denominator gets real low, real fast.
00:29:58		So to avoid that pull towards the bad apple, towards the lowest common denominator of all of us is difficult to do in social media sometimes. So for me the question becomes is it worth it? How much can I handle before I get pulled into that? So there's definitely positives for me that make it worth it to stay in the world, at least in this point where I'm at, engaged to not delete my Twitter profile at this point. But it's not enough, it's not worth it to check my Twitter feed 30 times a day.
00:30:31		It's not worth what I might gain finding another new thing that I learned on Twitter that day. I think the most important thing where I'm at at this point is paying attention to what it does to me.
	HM	Yes well it sounds like so it may be worth it if you know how to monitor your use and if you know how to regulate your inner experience of what kind of content you're getting, but if you don't and you take all of it in and you let it shape who you are and the way that you see the world and it kind of takes over, then maybe not worth it.
00:31:02	MG	I've noticed there are times like for instance if we're going to release a new album, even on podcast release days, I find myself checking social media more. Like what's the...? Especially if there's something controversial or something in it especially maybe like you know what are people going to think about that? And I've noticed at times if I feel the draw strongly or if I get in a Twitter beef, which I've been trying to avoid, 2018.
	WM	You've done good this year, way to go.
	MG	Thank you.
	WM	I'm really proud of you actually. I didn't even think it was a problem, you know, because I don't think whatever. I don't care like I'm like fight them, yes go for it.
00:31:35		We're in the arena, we're gladiators.
	MM	Keep trying to keep one of his co-hosts from vomiting [unclear] too

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		frequently.
	MG	That's really what it is.
	MM	Who would have hypothetically crippling anxiety and concern over conflict.
	WM	And there's been some legit times this year where you had all the... You were more than justified to say some stuff but you didn't and so I just want to applaud you for that type of impulse self-control. I've been taking it up in your step.
00:32:02	MG	Thank you. Some people need to throw that beef out there.
	WM	Yes.
	MG	I've noticed at times when the draw gets strong and I'll be like okay I notice I'm going a lot, I'm going to limit. I'm going to do this twice a day. I'm going to check in the morning and at night but then I'm waiting somewhere I'm like oh I'll just check it and then another time in the afternoon. I'm like oh I'm not following my rules. I guess I better delete the app off my phone and so that's when I'd take it... If I'd noticed that I'm not following my guidelines, then I might need to take another step a little bit more drastic.
00:32:35		Maybe not delete the Twitter profile but maybe just get it off my phone so that I can do what I have to... Actually just log onto a computer which is a pain in the arse because I have dual factor authentication and it's not as easy to just pull open the app. I have to get a text and blah, blah so if I found myself doing that too much I think the next step I better freeze my account. I think putting up some guidelines to see, this is negatively effecting me and I'm becoming addicted to it. I think that'd be a good thing for people to pay attention to because I've noticed little ways of that happening in my life.
00:33:10		[music playing]
00:33:30		[music playing]
	HM	A lot of people think that you can't have an addiction to something that isn't a substance and we call that a process addiction because your brains getting dopamine hits every time you're opening your phone and you're seeing that something is liked or you're seeing that it's retweeted or shared or people left a positive comment. And so you can actually become addicted, your brain can become wired to need that and to feel bored and to feel like you have no meaning and no

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		purpose if you're not getting that.
00:33:58		So the irony about the social media piece is that we can connect with people but I've had experiences even recently kind of as my following is growing where I'm sitting on the couch at the end of the day because I don't check my phone, I don't check anything while I'm working, I'm actually just sitting with a person face to face for an hour at a time most of the time for the entire day. And then I come home and I go, oh I'm going to check and see what's going on, check my email, check my Twitter, Instagram, and I'm sitting there and my husband will walk over and say, you're connecting with people but you're missing me.
00:34:31		I'm right here and I'll say oh no I'm just going to whatever and he'll say but you're giving up something that feels real for micro-connections with hundreds of people but you're missing the thing that actually sustains you. And so that's really helpful for me that he'll sometimes walk over and pull my phone away from me and I'll go oh yes, okay that's right because it's almost like it's hard to put it down.
00:34:58		So I think there's a difference between Twitter and Instagram or something where we're seeing information or people's opinions or attitudes but then with Instagram when we're seeing images. So as a therapist...
	WM	Well that's the worst to me though.
	HM	What's the worst?
	WM	Instagram.
	HM	Why is it the worst?
	WM	Oh I call Instagram my daily dose of envy because of the image. To me it's like really the images ideology like it's like I'm literally looking at beauty, beauty, beauty and other people's beauty and wanting that beauty and jealousy and envy and like rivalry and like oh look at what they're doing and I should be doing that.
00:35:34		You know and FOMO and like actually where Twitter feels more like idea-based, Instagram to me feels far more ideologist because its like I worship the beauty of the image.
	HM	I don't hear people in my clinical work come in and say things like I feel like I'm missing out on life because someone had an argument with somebody else on Twitter. They might see wow that was really

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		hurtful, or they might say I felt misunderstood, or I can't believe that person attacked that other person but when it comes to social media and people are taking images on Instagram, I hear crippling anxiety.
00:36:08		And it does this comparison thing that I don't necessarily hear, this is anecdotal, but I don't hear it through Twitter. So people are comparing the images of somebody else's life to their own and you could also look at the neurological real estate that our neuroanatomical structure gives to visual information.
00:36:30	MG	Wow.
	HM	And how we have a whole cortex which is dedicated to processing visual information and just a very tiny little bit that interacts with ideas. And so...
	MG	It's just really good, that's well-stated.
	HM	So we've got, if you look at the real estate and what our brain neuro-anatomically is attributing to what kind of information is most important, when we take in that visual information even though we can intellectually perhaps a few steps later go oh that's somebody else's life, I don't need that. Okay, you know, maybe their kid had a bad day too.
00:37:05		They're just not posting it on Instagram. The thing is that before that even happens our brain is taking that in and storing that and our limbic system is responding in a way that makes us feel like we're experiencing panic. We're missing something. We're not enough. So I think the positives about social media would be things like information and a sense of finding belonging. Like for people who've been in periods of deconstruction, knowing that even though they're showing up to church on Sundays and they feel like they don't belong, they can go home and they can listen to something or connect with people and feel like, oh there's a bigger world out there than the one that I'm seeing in the sanctuary of my church.
00:37:43		So people are getting belonging and community, but at what cost? Like missing perhaps other kinds of belonging and community that feels actually for our nervous system connective. So the negatives I think we create objects out of people and we create objects out of ourselves on a philosophical, spiritual, psychological level from that standpoint. I think about again Buber, Martin Buber's work and the I-Thou versus I-It response whereas I-Thou is interacting with someone in a way that the connection is...

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00:38:19		There's a kind of fluidity between it and I am valuing the essence of you and I am feeling valued in the essence of me. And I-It is when we create objects out of people; objects to be used, objects to respond to, and we reduce the other person down to something that works for us, something that gets me something or something that can hurt me.
00:38:39		I mean social media could be a collective It. It's I and It, the rest of the world and we don't delineate between who is speaking and what just there's this barrage of comments. So with social media, we can be reduced down and we can reduce other people down, and it's hard. How do I look at someone's Instagram post and hold their full humanity when I'm looking at the way they self objectify?
00:39:04		How do I hold someone's full humanity when they're presenting a version of their life and I actually don't have access to any other version? So we do this comparison thing and when we do the comparison thing, I mean who doesn't end up short? When you're comparing how often are you going to say we're all valuable in the end? Comparison at its nature is about finding hierarchy and finding difference and finding value and worth and so it's either I'm better or you're better.
00:39:33		And how do we as people win in the end when we're doing comparison? I don't know if we can.
		[music playing]
		I had this one story as we were thinking about this episode. I was thinking about my first experience of being the villain on social media. I know, that's right, yes. So this was in I would say 2008 or 2009, it was on Facebook, and someone had posted... I was in university as the time, and somebody had posted an image of themselves in a bathing suit.
00:40:05		And she happened to be on the more appearance ideal end of the spectrum in terms of body type and she was wearing this bikini and someone posted, I love your bikini where is it from? And she wrote back, it's from Victoria Secret, they have such great prices on bathing suits. To which I responded, what is the cost of a bathing suit when a male-run corporation is exploiting women's bodies for capitalist gain?
00:40:35		And what really is the price of that bathing suit when other women are looking at you in that bathing suit and comparing themselves and feeling worse about themselves because they don't have that kind of body? What really is the price of that bathing suit? To which I was

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		unfriended and then we went to class together that week and she sat on the other side of the class and she wouldn't talk to me and I realised that I felt I had a great point, but the way that I delivered that message over Facebook actually pushed her away from me.
00:41:06		And I had this experience of feeling like, but I think I said something that was actually really important to say but I missed the humanity in it. I missed that publicly calling somebody out in that way actually reduced her down in the same way that I was explaining that that corporation reduced bodies down.
00:41:26		So am I better than that corporation? I don't know if I could say that but I know that I hurt somebody and I remember feeling because although I can name things articulately that are unsatisfying to me politically, at the end of the day what mattered most to me was that I couldn't connect anymore with someone who previously I was close friends with.
		[music playing]
	MM	I think perspective is so important and so invisible we ignore it because our perspective on things and our experiences, mostly make sense to us, not entirely.
00:42:04		A therapist wouldn't have a job if all our experiences made sense to us but in general we understand ourselves better than we understand others with some caveats. But we don't necessarily understand the experience of others so when we try to communicate without that kind of body language layer helping us edit in real-time, things get miscommunicated. I thought a few moments ago you were talking about neuroanatomy and I laughed and it reminded me that I get about 25 to 40 emails a week saying why do you laugh at Hillary?
00:42:37		When it's not funny and what those people don't know is that if I hear something that is new to me and interesting, I feel an overwhelming sense of delight and then laugh involuntarily. Jenny will come running into my office thinking she's going to see a YouTube video and my nose is in a non-fiction book.
00:43:00		But I'm laughing because I'm so excited like that I can't help it.
	HM	And can I speak to that for a second?
	MM	Yes.
	HM	As someone who's sitting across from you, and seeing you laugh, I

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		don't experience that as being devaluing because I can feel you with me and I know you enough and I get that feedback to know that you are delighting in what we're saying and so I actually feel closer to you like we're sharing something together. So what people don't see is that we are connecting over that and I like you Michael, I like you Mike, I often laugh out of a sense of delight or surprise,
00:43:37		And it's not necessarily because I'm trying to make fun of someone or that I'm laughing at them, right? So there's this delight but when you're not in the room and you just hear that laughter and maybe you've been laughed at for something, you get protective. So we're missing that information.
	MM	And then that comes into play in our entire social media experience. So I sit here talk Twitter, Twitter, Twitter, Twitter, Twitter it's because so much of my self-identity comes from my cognition, my ability to articulate it, and my ability to connect with other people in an authentic way without hurting them.
00:44:13		That's like my entire sense of self-worth, like 100% and for a long time for me like Twitter was a great space where I did both of those things. I articulated well, with a lot of typos, and even when I had tens of thousands of followers, most of them felt known and valued and safe with me. And when people started to not feel safe with me because there were just more people and I will never communicate perfectly, then that becomes like this huge drag and Twitter became a problem.
00:44:43		But then I have the data. I had it in my notes to talk about Instagram. That's another reason I was so delighted when you all... I love it when you say things I have in my notes because it validates me that I'm saying something interesting. I never have any trouble with Instagram because I have zero percent self worth in my physical appearance or the things people post on Instagram.
00:45:04		You know what I mean like my house is a place I live, it has things in it, I like them to be comfortable things, you know what I mean? So if you look at my Instagram feed, it's not shots of beautiful things because the machines have learned...
	WM	I've looked at your Instagram feed.
	MM	Right and the machines have learned oh well Mike wants to see pizza and puppies and weird random shit people post from their lives.
00:45:28		And that's what I see. I saw a sociologist call it the Instagram Effect where people stay home more than they used to but when they go out

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		they take pictures smiling with their friends so you have a bunch of people sitting at home, seeing pictures of people out and thinking everyone's out when it's really just the machines going I've learned you like smiling faces. But that's my personal perspective is the reason Instagram is like currently my social media safe place, because I can post a story where I talk where I talk and I cry and people see my face and then they respond to me, one at a time.
00:46:04		And it doesn't become this circus that happens at Twitter but even as like as much as I do research and as much as I'm always trying to understand other perspectives, like unless I intentionally remind myself I have no idea that Instagram is generally the more problematic social network for people in terms of mental health. Because we have such a tendency even the most open-minded, even the most well-read people, to have our own perspective be invisible.
00:46:34		[music playing]
	MG	That's why I think paying attention is the most important thing that I can think of talking about like how do you engage because everybody's personality is different and everybody's aims are different so I think paying attention and then knowing your aims I think is another important. Like what am I after here?
00:46:59		If it is connection, major on that and look at how your interactions are fostering connection. If it learning, shut up more and learn and listen. You know like whatever it is, if it's marketing do it and don't get caught up in the other stuff that tries to drag your ego into it. I think those for me have been helpful like kind of knowing what am I here for and then paying attention to its effect on me and I'm not going to try to universalise that to say that because Twitter's better for me than Instagram, that should be for somebody else.
00:47:35	MM	Can we all agree Facebook's terrible for everybody?
	MG	Facebook's terrible.
	MM	Yes, Facebook is trash.
	MG	Facebook conflates both of those realities, the ideas and the pictures like it kind of brings it all like in a video, picture and like long idea driven so like Facebook is the actual dumpster fire.
00:47:56	MM	Unless there's private Facebook groups, which can be amazing.
	HM	What's interesting on Facebook too is to see people make these

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		really vulnerable admissions that they might not on Twitter, maybe even not on Instagram, perhaps because there's a feeling of Facebook being more personal in some ways or more private to some people. But I've seen people disclose experiences of sexual assault, and then when no-one comments saying things like, how come no-one commented? And it's changing, it's changing our expectation about what it means to be validated.
00:48:31		Yes, whereas if someone was disclosing a sexual assault to me and I was right in front of me they would have a felt sense of me reacting and noticing and being with them and so I often struggle. I want people to disclose to their communities but what's happened that we feel like we can't do that in person, we can't call up a friend and say an assault just happened, I need some support. And this kind of mass reaching out to people and then disappointment when people don't reach back and nobody knows what's happening on the other side.
00:49:00		Did they just not know how to respond or did they not care? And we're missing all the information.
	WM	In a funny way this could be good. We think of ourselves collectively a little bit more than I think we used to in that way and social media plays into that of like, well I need to tell everyone at the same time you know versus like you said going and individually making that connection or having that experience moment to moment with people that love you and care about you and can help nurture you in that.
	MM	Yes and remember you're not in charge of your Facebook feed and your friends aren't in charge of theirs.
00:49:32		A machine is making the decision. If you've ever, and I've done this, if you download the data Facebook has on you, in my case it was 900 megabytes of text information is what Facebook has on me and these machines are based on what they decide they know about you which extends all over the web thanks to Facebook tracking pixels, almost every website you go to Facebook has an ad unit on it somewhere that they can link that back, that's why you get creepy ads.
00:49:59		So they have a tremendous amount of data on you. Here's how it happens: someone makes an admission that they were sexually assaulted, they say that publicly, and the first few people scroll at it and read it and like don't know what to do so they scroll past the machines just went people don't like those posts and then it hides them. So often the first few people to see something has an outside influence on how the machines make decisions in showing

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		information.
00:50:28		So not only a couple people really did ignore it but then the machines made a multi-dimensional data analysis in real-time and compared that to every person you've ever talked to including people who aren't on Facebook but have shadow profiles. You may say you're not on Facebook, Facebook knows your email address, they know your phone number, they know your name, they know where you live and they collect the same data on you that they collect on their members. We should not dehumanise people on social media, but we actually need to be intentional about dehumanising social media itself.
00:51:03		Because these are not human or humane systems.
	WM	So I pretty much didn't use Facebook for maybe a year and a half. I more was on Twitter and Instagram, right? After the election is when I decided to really get back on Facebook, which is probably the worst time.
	MM	When it caught on fire.
	WM	Yes because honestly I was so confused during the election process right when all these people that I could see you know through other spaces were believing in wild fantastic things and conspiracy theories and I'm like why are people so...?
00:51:33		You know I'm watching even like well-known church leaders like espouse like utter conspiracy theories about you know Hillary Clinton and all sorts of things that blew my mind. But then so I started speaking out more publicly on my Facebook page. I got on Facebook 2004 and now it's 2018 so I don't even know what math that is. But I found out, very quickly, that the majority of people that I pretty much collected a conservative audience for the election. So I've maxed out on my page, on my personal I have like 5,000 friends on my Facebook page.
00:52:05		And the majority of them are conservative white Christians because that was the world I had been in for me entire adult life so I'm just naturally speaking about voter suppression, jerrymandering, you know black lives matter and it was like I mean initially there was the vitriolic response back to me was like really overwhelming and then it got to the point where it just stopped. And so I would be posting on Facebook and I would get like four likes, five likes.
00:52:30		And I'm like, what is going...? And that's when I started to realize there were these algorithms right that were determining that people

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		wouldn't want to see what I have to say just because of the people following me. So therefore it's hiding everything that I was doing. So on Facebook you can go and look at those preferences or like the political persuasion that it lumps you in and I found that even after as much more liberal leaning things I was posting for probably about a year and a half now, it was still lumping me in the conservative echo chamber.
00:52:56		And so I was like how can anything I do cut through to like Facebook? So I just started trying to like delete people and like I need more liberal friends to balance this out and realizing no matter what I do Facebook is going to put me through these algorithms into... Yes, it's kind of wow to the point where I'm actually now going to get rid of it and start from scratch again. Because of that phenomena.
		[music playing]
00:53:30	HM	So whenever I think about social media I think about this like prodigal son phenomena which is whenever people hear the story of the prodigal son they always think of themselves as identifying with the prodigal son not the older brother and how we often see ourselves as the one who's hurting and who is going to come pleading to the source and we're the victims in a way. We're the center of the story and yet I love thinking about being the older brother, like oh we were trying to follow the rules and yet we're kind of the butt of the joke in the story in a way.
00:54:03		So I think about that whenever I see theories in psychological research and sociological research about the way that media influences our feelings about ourselves. So I've talked about this on the body image episode I think but a tripartite model of influence looks at the three pathways that messages about body and appearance are communicated to use. And those are parents, media, and peers. And so whenever we think about that and we see the diagram we see these three bubbles; parents, media and peers funnelling into the individual at the bottom.
00:54:32		And we think about ourselves as the individual and we think okay what kind of images am I taking in through media? What do my parents say to me? What do my peers say to me? But what we forget to realize is that we are in each of those bubbles for other people and that we have to be responsible of what kind of content we're producing because it's shaping how other people feel about themselves. So we can sit there and think oh yes I should change who I follow. Good, I've heard lots of people say I'm getting anxiety

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		about who I see and what I see on Instagram.
00:55:04		So I'm going to unfollow those people but we're not actually creating change unless we put out different content. So we need to put out different content so that what people are seeing from us matches who we are and then it changes how they see themselves. So I like to post photos of myself that actually aren't edited at all and are real life things because I want people to see what a real woman looks like.
00:55:30		Or one version of a real woman looks like that isn't curated and filtered beyond belief.
	WM	You would never survive in Hollywood.
	HM	I have no intention of identifying with that crowd as a primary source of belonging so I'm not really worried about.
	WM	Just wait.
	MM	I have two thoughts. One is if you're in your car, you didn't have to suppress a laugh like I did when Hillary said tripartite model then you need to check your pulse. Two, if there's anything I feel great about what I can do on social media is it's help people have positive body images.
00:56:05		I think I could make a data-driven case that I deviate farther from the cultural narrative of an idealized male then you deviate of an idealized female. I'm back here alone and like... Seriously though. Like I try to get like pictures intentionally like from an angle where my back hair comes out of my t-shirt.
00:56:32	HM	Amazing.
	MM	On Instagram like I do stuff like that on purpose. Like the other day I was doing an Instagram story and I have an ingrown hair on my neck and my beard was blocking it so I changed the angle so people could see the ingrown hair on my neck.
	HM	I'm so happy right now.
	MM	And these are all things I do on purpose. I try to not... I traffic when I do Instagram stories and do it before I style my limited remaining hair to make the baldness more visible. Like these are like, I've been saying I really resonate with it like you said because I hate that so many people because of their relationship, it's almost like digital media is accelerating the kind of effect media has on our body image.

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00:57:11		And so I try to subvert that with my 244 pound hair back, thin hair frame.
	HM	I noticed that you posted a photo of your thin hair on top the other day and I was so happy. I couldn't contain my delight and my enjoyment.
00:57:30		Because I knew other people would see that and it would give them a sense of freedom to be in their own bodies and to be okay with it.
	WM	And I was like he does not know how to use this platform. Moving on. Scroll. Scroll. We've all talked about, particularly the two science nerds here, have talked about how much depression and anxiety is being fuelled by social media.
00:58:00		A little push back I want to give to that and maybe and this is a question and maybe bringing this into a greater context is, how much of the current depression and anxiety is not purely driven by social media but driven by the declining sense of the American empire? I know Walter Brueggemann particularly he talks about and mentions this as the symptoms of empire. He talks about even in biblical history, even in the ancient world that anxiety and depression do seem to follow when an empire begins to move into decline.
00:58:33		I've heard it said before too the really troubling thing that's happening in America right now is the fact that we are an empire in decline and the face of that decline is a corrupt narcissist man as a President and how much that really is what stings to our current reality.
	HM	As the Canadian at the table, that's an extremely American-centric perspective because anxiety and depression goes up with social media use around the world, not just in America.
00:59:02		So there's something about the immediate feedback that we get, there's something about not having the experience of doing real relationship, what happens in our brain and how we change how we see ourselves in the world and actually neuromodulator function when we're getting data all the time. That either makes us feel good or not so good about ourselves. Screen time changes the way that our brain functions. There's all sorts of things but I could imagine that would be compounded with what's happened in America.
00:59:29	WM	So let me maybe broaden that a little bit and say I think it's also a problem of the western world too as well as the globalized phenomenon that we live in. That even other nations that aren't considered in the western world do partake in like the globalization that has happened. I think the western way of life has massively

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		influenced lots of other parts of the world too and social media being a part of that as well too. I just wonder how inter-related. So I would never say that it's purely not the screen addiction time and what it does to the brain on the phone.
00:59:59		I'm just wondering bringing it maybe to a greater context, is there a connection between the decline of the western world as it like relates as an influential power force in the globe? And America being kind of the centrepiece because generally America has been considered a big central piece of that. Maybe that's a broader way to ask that question.
	MM	I think you mean by the western world, people of pan-European ethnicity in countries where Europeans have had traditionally held political authority, which have high rates of immigration documented or undocumented.
01:00:34		Then I think undeniably there's a connection between an increase in vitriol and toxicity in those events. Brexit was a social media phenomenon. We are seeing this uncovered and criminal investigation that companies like Cambridge Analytica intentionally manipulated people and it accelerated vitriol around ethnic identities to political purposes.
01:01:01		We saw that in the political campaign in the United States. We're seeing that all around the world that many white people, especially white men, feel an erosion of privilege and they perceive that as being under siege. Studies tell us that a majority of white people feel like white people are the most persecuted racial class in America. That's just the data.
01:01:27		This perceived decline in conjunction with this dehumanisation and the ability to communicate anonymously. I mean how well can you predict the toxicity of a Twitter user if there avatar is an egg because they keep having to recreate accounts because they're getting banned? But they're using anonymity to express their socialized fear and anxiety and that's absolutely driverless. And then what happens is in response to that assault, these groups that are starting to find identity and worth and social capital on social media, black Twitter, LGBTQ Twitter, they respond to the vitriol and the harassment and the hate with what?
01:02:12		In-kind. Rightfully so. Why wouldn't you? But then what it does is it debases our entire discourse. I almost crawled under the table because I was like oh my gosh Hillary and William are in conflict.

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		But...
01:02:30	WM	What that was a conflict? I didn't even know.
	HM	Yes, I didn't know.
	MM	Only if you're a highly sensitive mind in the middle of emotional trauma. But what I'm saying is like there is yes the overly American perspective in discussing social media issues but there's also this like, there really is a decline of whiteness problem that's exacerbating so many issues on social media and impacting larger society.
	MG	The social media feeds are all reflecting all of that stuff.
01:02:59		I don't know how you could distance that issue from like... I don't know how in a study you could... They're looking at social media from this world and from this empire crumbling and from all that. If that wasn't happening maybe social media feeds would be the kind of feeds that would make people depressed.
	WM	Totally and I think you know Walter Brueggemann kind of connects it to like you know unjust systems of like exploitation. Like economic systems and how we're seeing you know a real crumbling and a lot of our financial structures have been for a while now. And the ebb and flow of that and how that also, it produces that anxiety too.
01:03:34		And that depression and that plays a part and that's also being reflected back to through media, through the media reporting on that and letting us know like with the screen addiction face time thing coupled with we are a nation in decline or a way of life whatever this globalization has looked like seems to be crumbling in front of us. Like Trump just pulled out of the Iran deal and seeing how that crumbling... You know but that's all through social media so what do I do when I look at social media and I see that?
01:04:00		And I see like a really terrible decision being made, one that's going to have long reach repercussions and then I'm seeing Iranian lawmakers you know burning American flags and burning a copy of the Iran nuclear deal basically saying death to America, death to America.
	MG	Fantastic.
	WM	That's what I mean like social media may at the same time it empowers marginalized people in the world through nuclear war.
01:04:24		And that's not hyperbole. There's a non zero chance that a tweet is

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		responsible for a global nuclear catastrophe right now.
	MG	A really non zero, pretty far from non zero.
	WM	Oh it's affecting everything. Also okay so as we can have this conversation, is there a way to delineate between airing grief of the effects of empire and just being a toxic cesspool of negativity for the sake of negativity? Because I think often times we conflate the two. You know like so you're talking about the complaining thing and the negativity and it's like yes, yes, yes but there is a difference between airing grief and people regaining their voice.
01:05:03		And actually expressing true moral outrage about really bad things that are happening in the world versus people that are you know hating to hate, or creating cesspools of just negativity in order to feed off of that and I don't think we know the difference often times and maybe that's an internal reality that we can't name for everyone. So it's easy just to put a whole blanket around it and say there's so much negativity or toxicity around this. And it's like, yes but there's baby in that bath water but for me, my biggest thing in this conversation is always going to be where's the baby? Can we rescue the baby without throwing the baby out with the bath water that's also around it?
01:05:39	HM	A good thing to bring this back to then would be what happened this week with John Piper making a comment about hating our bodies in the right way, hating our bodies because they cause us to sin in his response to a woman who struggled with body hatred and eating disorders. And how I decided to write an open letter to him.
	WM	Yes you did.
	HM	Yes I did, and in mind the entire time thinking I want to call out the fact that this is not okay but I want to do it in a way that's educative so that he can hear what's wrong with his line of thinking.
01:06:10		But that's so all the people who see his posts can also see what's wrong with his line of thinking but at the same time trying to honor the fact that there's a person in there somewhere. And balancing that. I always think about the Carol Gilligan quote, who is one of my favorite psychologists, she says education is the only non-violent means to change.
01:06:29		And I think violence can be verbal, violence can be physical, violence can be in terms of relationality we can have relational violence so I think about how do I be educative, how do I call an end to something,

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		how do I name that and be helpful in a way that creates change without dehumanising him? Because I think what he did was dehumanising to somebody else. Back to your comment about the airing of grief, I wonder about who's our audience, why are we saying what we're saying, what will we hope will happen.
01:07:01		And those are questions that we don't often ask ourselves before we get onto social media and see an amen from...
	MM	Just say them again, say those again.
	HM	So asking ourselves before we go on social media, who's watching this? And who's listening to this? And what am I hoping will happen? What will I hope that they hear? And that takes a level of impulse control and self-regulation that most of us don't want to have and aren't practicing in a world where there's data, data, data, data, data, input, input, input, input.
01:07:29		And so we have to ask ourselves that questions but that comes back to something that you said, Vishnu, about where's my attention? Is my attention in terms of what I'm doing with this communication? Is my attention on my inner experience? Is it on getting as much out as fast as possible? Is it about getting a hit because I want an ego stroke. What's happening underneath? And I think that you can use social media in a mindful way but it might mean slowing down.
01:07:59		And that might mean being present and attuned to our inner experience and practicing empathy, practicing what are other people going to hear and how do I say the thing that needs to be said, how do I call out the problems, but in a way that is life giving and educative and informative and challenging if need to be, if it needs to be challenging but not tearing other people down.
		[music playing]
01:08:31		So in reading about social media just a little bit of a lit review one of the first things that popped up was from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and their recommendations around social media use. And my first thought was they're making statements and they have standards and guidelines for social media use? What's interesting is that your risk for STIs goes up if you use social media to sext.
01:08:58		So risky sexual behavior and the ensuing health consequences are related to how we use social media. So they have some statements about the potential positive aspects of social media and the

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		connection and the feeling of people having meaning and being able to feel not alone in certain contexts, as well as providing information there's some studies that have come out about how social media can be used to educate the public. That we can put information out there that most people wouldn't have access to.
01:09:28		Because it's behind the veil of academia or restricted to people who have a certain level of education. So there are benefits but then we start getting into things like cyberbullying and what are the consequences of cyberbullying. And I often hear people say things like, is bullying worse now or are we just hearing about it more? And I don't know about stats, about what bullying was like before social media came on the scene but we have reports...
	MM	Anecdotally it was bad.
01:09:58	HM	Yes, that's right it was bad and now we can see how bad it is and people can jump in on things that used to happen in the school yard and now they're all over the internet. So the reports that I found were that 20-40% of people who use social media, particularly adolescents, experience damaging cyberbullying. 20-40%.
	MG	Wow.
	HM	Yes, so if you think about gambling those are good odds. 20-40% is close to a guarantee in terms of being bullied.
01:10:34		And then the report goes on to talk about the health effects of cyberbullying and how that impacts mental health, physical health, but what I think about when I think about social media and cyberbullying is how the way that femininity and women's bodies have been socially constructed the value is on appearance and sexual objectification. And for young people who are using social media that becomes a tool to gain social value.
01:11:00		And to gain a way to feel like there's a sense of belonging for someone that you're perhaps romantically interested in but then you send them a sext because they say you have to send me a sext for me to like you and then the sext is all over the internet and the person commits suicide because the violence and the bullying is so aggressive. I mean that's a story that's unfortunately not uncommon and so what we're doing with social media and how it's impacting teen culture, dating culture.
01:11:32		I mean Mike you talked about the downsides for dating but also what it's doing in terms of sexual exploitation for minors and how that

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		actually fits into a category of child pornography and how kids think that they're just dating and they're sexting each other but someone's getting cyberbullied, another person's going to get sent to jail or juvenile detention for engaging in child pornography.
	MM	Consensual 14-year-old sexting worries me because in this case I think there is actually a legal overreaction, you know what I mean?
01:12:05		Well so what happens I've seen happen in case law is boys and girls send nudes to each other, they're both minors, and then one or both of them usually one of them is convicted for distributing and producing child pornography and goes to jail. I obviously don't think like anyone producing images of minor nude is good and I don't make many moral absolutes but that's one I'm just, it's not good.
01:12:35		Something in that legal framework we're missing kind of a developmental shift and a gap in the availability of a technology and our cultures capacity to educate our children about it. It's very troubling.
	MG	For the court to see that interaction as the same as like what a greasy old man who has abducted a child and made pornography with that children with the same offence.
01:13:02	MM	Right if I... I think it is different if I as a almost 40-year-old man ask a 14-year-old girl to send me nude images and distribute them versus a 14-year-old boy who asks his girlfriend and doesn't distribute them by the way.
	HM	Right what I hear about most and then again through the media what I hear about most is that it's girls who are being pressured by groups of boys and so would again, back to the argument in the ethics of fucking episode consent if you can't say no, you're not really saying yes.
01:13:34		And groups of boys are pressuring girls into sharing nude images to feel like they're special, to feel like they're chosen, and that's a serious problem that I don't know I'm not old enough to say if that was happening before social media people were taking naked pictures of kids and passing them around I don't know. But the fact that people can proliferate and disseminate naked images of a young girl and it can happen so, so aggressively and at such a large scale that she commits suicide, that's a problem that we have to contend with.
01:14:06	WM	I'm not a young girl but the only time in my life where I've ever felt suicidal was in an instance where someone took, a romantic interest

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		took private text messages and edited them into show something and passed them around. It's probably the only time. I've never in my life struggled with suicide and when that was going on, I wanted to die.
01:14:32		It was probably one of the worst feelings so I can't even imagine what being 14 and I was in my 30s when this was happening and I felt that and I'd never felt that in my life. And I couldn't imagine being 14, 15, 16 and feeling pressured to do that or doing it just out of naivety. Just youth. And having those images distributed or then be like labelled and marked as like a whore or vice versa.
01:15:03		Like maybe being labelled and marked a predator as a boy, like whatever that... When you said that it just hit me so deep because I remember that feeling of wanting to hang myself and I never felt that before. Never thought that before.
	HM	Thank you for sharing that. I think that will resonate with so many people.
	WM	And I think it's the fear for a lot of us in these relationships right because everything is done now through the internet. If you're single like you know you've got to go on the apps like that's generally the way you meet people unless you go to like a club or a bar.
01:15:33		Or church like that's like the only way you really meet people so everyone's doing dating apps. So to feel like something I say on there can be taken or used, you know, or that like a picture can be exposed or any of that stuff like it's so, it's frightening. And I think that's what contributes to like you said a lot of the risky sexual behavior let alone a lot of the isolation and why people don't you know go on dates as much.
01:16:00		Because of the fear of like what that entails these days, it feels like the risk is so high just to date.
	HM	And so if you have a negative reputation in your city back in the day maybe I'm romanticizing things but you might be able to leave but if it's everywhere and it's accessible to everybody, I think it makes sense that it would be so overwhelming we might feel like there isn't a way out. And that's often when we think about suicidality, it's not about wanting to die. That's what we see from the evidence. It's about wanting the pain to stop and the fear that the pain won't stop.
01:16:29		And the pain, it will stop. This is an important point to name that it will at some point and that there are people out there, just as many people out there who will be predators, just as many people out there

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		who will be attacking you and criticizing you. There will be people who come to your rescue on social media. Like Mr Rogers said, when you see mass disaster, when you see violence, when you see pain, look for the helper. There will always be helpers.
01:16:57	WM	So when I was going through that situation I think the non-judgment of others was really big like close friends, people.
	HM	It sounds like that didn't happen on social media, like that was person to person connection.
	WM	Yes, it was. It was people in the moment. It was funny because often times it was people sharing you know what man? I actually went through something similar or I was in a situation like that before and just feeling that like resonance of like oh you know this type of pain or this type of betrayal or this type of accusation.
01:17:27		Like how that... Yes, and so some people unfortunately believed it and some people didn't and the ones who didn't believe it were the ones that stuck by me and walked with me through that and it just got better I think over time. It took a while like there was like a season where I just struggled with depression because of it. Because I didn't know if I was walking into the room who knew about that.
	MM	Oh wow.
	WM	You know or if yes... It affected my business life, it affected my personal life and so it threw me in a bit of a mental tailspin.
01:18:03		But I think it was, I knew it was through so much love and affirmation that I got from the people closest to me in the moment that made me feel less alone in the times where I wanted to die, even then I wasn't alone. I made sure not to be alone. That was the first time in my life where I felt like living was a choice. I always wanted to live. You know there's a song on the radio that came out last year, and I forgot the name of the song, but it's a suicide number. That's the name of the song.
01:18:30		And it's by Logic and I understood that song just from that one experience. The chorus is like I just want to be alive. I just want to be alive. I don't want to die today. And just anyone that's wrestled with depression, you know suicide, resonated and that song became you know a big billboard song and he's won award for that song, thank God. And I remember thinking I've never heard a song like this in the church. I've never heard a song that talked about mental health or talked about suicide or a song that really spoke to that thing.

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01:19:02		That many of us go through, that quiet pain, we don't allow it to surface because of fear of being seen as weak and I think that's why a lot of people don't talk about suicide or suicidal thoughts because it's like I don't want to be weak or I don't want to be put in a position where now I'm the like... Or you don't want to be a charity case or like a token that everyone pities and gives you like sympathy for. And so oft times we just stay quiet. And so I had to just name it and when it was happening, as it was happening, the very next day I had to name it when it happened.
01:19:34		I told my friend. That's always been my power. So even when I talk about a lot of the airing grief stuff, to me that's what it represents is like no matter how you do it like you've got to put a voice on your hurt. You have to put a voice on that hurt. I don't care if it's messy or if it's sloppy or if it doesn't, you know, to me it's like when it's life or death you've got to. And there's always a better way to do it but if you don't even know what that better way is, I don't get it. Whether it's writing a Facebook post and you haven't talked to anybody in your life just do it.
01:20:02		That's a first step. Putting a voice on your pain is the most important thing I think any of us can do and you keep doing it until someone pays attention because often times right away they think oh you're strong, that's not really something you're going to wrestle with or something you're going to do. It's funny because when I went through that so many people told me you're going to be okay, you're a strong person, God gave that to you because you... If anyone I know can handle it, it's you. And it was wild how many people in person told me that.
01:20:30		Like because I mean that's just the way you rationalize like I would never think you would be the one to do that and so here I am voicing that saying actually it came across my mind. It was a heavy thought that night. Like I was thinking where is the rope? That's the thing I don't think people realize when they bully or they spread all sorts of racist things or like all those ideologies like they stack up. And they might feel like micro-aggressions little by little but it's like death by paper cuts sometimes.
01:21:01		And you might look up and then just be in a vulnerable place in your life where I feel like I want to die. I feel like my skin color makes me unworthy to be in this country or my undocumented status makes me somehow illegitimate as a human. I think you've just got to put a voice on that and share it and so what I love about the moment we're in is people sharing. Because I go, that to me is someone who wants to

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		live. And someone trying to live instead of fading into the night.
01:21:31		And we find out oh so and so did what? How could they? Why didn't they say something?
	HM	Thank you.
		[music playing]
	WM	Social media to me is about power. Who has the power and how are you using the power? And like you said before it was like the gatekeepers and the institutions had the power to create the narratives, to create how we live, and how society should work and now since the internet it seems that democratization has happened and it's gone horizontal.
01:22:03		Outside of you know the algorithms and the bots, you know, there has been this spreading out a bit more of power and like I think of Martin Luther King when the civil rights was going and a lot of people don't know was how media was so influential to the shifting of the tide of racial justice. For instance Martin Luther King knew like SNCC and all those groups knew if we're going to protest we're going to do it in midday. Why? Because the cameras can come.
01:22:29		And they can get the tapes to New York by the afternoon to play on the nightly news. And there was even a King smart like it was black youth in the 60s, it was primarily black youth, it wasn't even a black church it was like Ruby Sales called it black folk religion. It was like the people like the people like Martin Luther King was in his what? He was in his early 20s when you know back in the early 60s like they took power and they said we're going to do this in non-violence but they utilized media. They utilized power.
01:22:58		And I think in a lot of ways we're in that moment now too where people are putting voice on their hurt and they're using these mediums as power and saying I'm going to tell my story. I'm going to let this... And the way you used your medium today by writing that article for the girls you know who are being affected by John Piper, you're taking back power and you're saying you don't get to have the power. All the power. You might have a voice, you might have a platform, but you don't actually get the final say and so I'm going to utilize power and social media is that for so many of us. It's the way we get our voice back.
		[music playing]

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01:23:35	HM	It's also okay to opt out if it's too much. If you're being bullied, if you don't know how to take the information in and feel like it doesn't take over your life, it's okay to opt out. It's okay to put the phone down. It's okay to sit in silence. It's okay to delete the app. There will still be love for you.
01:24:00		There will still be acceptance and in fact there might even be more. Something real, something close, something with flesh on it. If you're hurting it's okay. It's okay.
		[music playing]
01:24:29	MM	I've made a noose. I have stepped through it and I have stepped off a chair. I've hung with my feet dangling in the air and felt relief. And that's why I do everything I do because I don't give two shits about being famous.
01:25:02		I know that sometimes when people hurt you, it really hurts. So I am so sorry that that happened to you. I really know how you felt. I think I just got trigger warnings for the first time. If it weren't for Jenny and the girls I would've done it today.
01:25:40		Sorry.
	WM	Don't apologize.
	MM	That was a really heavy thing to lay down. My apologies. I'm neither a danger to myself nor others. Those are feelings I have coping strategies for.
	HM	You don't have to be a danger to yourself or others for us to feel the weight of what you're carrying.
01:26:05	MM	I know that's just a heavy thing to say. There's protocols for how to deal when someone's saying something like that. I'm aware of them. So I'm saying I'm not an imminent or eventual suicide risk. I'm saying sometimes if you've attempted suicide and especially if you've attempted it more than once, part of your brain always sees it as a viable and acceptable solution to problems.
01:26:31		So when I go dark, as it were, I go really dark. I guess my skin in the game right now is my relationship with Twitter has taken me over the course of the last three to six months from a place of profound satisfaction with my life and my work to the sincere contemplation of ending my life.

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01:27:07		It's not because I don't care. It's not because I have some sort of straight white fragility. It's because based on my life experience there's a connection between ungracious speech and deep and sincere genuine psychological trauma.
01:27:28	WM	I've always resonated with you when you spoke about your childhood and being bullied. I think there's something about that psychological wound as a child that creates unsafety, like feelings of unsafety inside of us that are very hard emotions and often feel overpowering. And so I've always loved you because not everyone is willing to, especially men, are willing to talk about that and to share hey I was bullied. These were the things that were said about me.
01:28:00		And it hurt and I felt actually fear of my life or I felt fear of violence and I don't know I think we need more people saying that and I've always just admired you for being able to articulate your pain in that way and I've found it deeply empowering to know that I know I'm not alone. And I think so many people that listen to this podcast feel that same way like I'm not alone because I went through that too when I was bullied.
01:28:29		Like I used to walk on the school bus and they would chant Oreo. They would call me Oreo. White and the black kids because I was black on the outside but white on the inside. Or in elementary school how you know because I was effeminate it was like they would, I would be called gay and it was like they would chant it on the school bus in elementary school. Like I know that feeling and I know the mental hole that you can go into to feel like I'm a piece of shit.
01:28:59		Because somehow I just kept getting told I was a piece of shit by my peers.
	MM	And that's what happens right? So then you have this inborn idea I'm a piece of shit and then social media can become data points that support the conclusion. Like at its worst.
	MG	Well and we started this podcast with me having a light-hearted jab at you for getting off Twitter but in sincerity I respect, honor and appreciate your awareness of the effect of social media on you.
01:29:38		And your willingness to do what's necessary and I think that's not only wisdom and loving, it's the right and I applaud that because it costs you to get off. It costs you marketing, it costs you you know a sense of our profession is based on social media. It's not just a simple thing. Oh yes I'll just delete the app.

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01:30:00		Like that costs you money and I just want to... I know you know this but reaffirm there's million of us that have gained from your thoughts, your wisdom, your experience, your sharing, your vulnerability with is with us. But you don't owe anybody anything. And when I think about when Jesus, far before social media, would just get a random crowd sometimes and there's times he just was like I'm out.
01:30:29		How much of the sermon on the mount is because he was the kind of person that knew to get out? How much of Jesus's whole life I mean we're missing 30 years of history where he was out. Like I'm out, I can't. He couldn't handle that. He couldn't handle the whatever. So I just want to applaud your awareness, your paying attention to know when to get out at times and encourage you that you know you sharing your vulnerability, you sharing your stories, they are helpful for people.
01:31:08		You don't owe any of us any of it. Take care of your heart. Your heart is what we all love most anyway.
	HM	And for the rest of us, social media is like a scalpel. You can use it to save someone's life or to end someone's life. We are carrying a weapon and a tool and we need to be extremely careful about how we're using that.
01:31:31	MG	But it's so easy with people that we consider public figures. I've felt it certainly. I've felt the painful things from people but even I noticed as you were talking about John Piper, when I heard that article, my immediate response is asshole. Let's just whatever it'd be so easy to just not consider him as a human because he's a public figure that has all these voices and I know he's got all kinds of people who I'm sure are telling him he's awesome all the time.
01:32:05		It's easy to turn figures into things in my mind as well. Objects and it's not to say that we shouldn't call them out and whatever but just internally when I approach somebody that is a something to me, some sort of object of the other side of an argument or an object of a figurehead, a personality, or whatever that's definitely adding to the problem.
01:32:31	WM	Yes similar to Mike I've had to learn when to be the gladiator in the arena and when to fight for my own heart. Like when to actually pull away and say you know and like do the Jesus thing like actually I need to take care of myself and I need to pull back because I'm drowning right now and I feel suffocated. I just did it for seven days while you were off. We actually got back on the same day I realized.

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01:32:58		I just did it for seven, you were gone for way longer.
	MM	It was 30.
	WM	Yes and but even in that realizing that I was just so the anti-blackness out there just felt like... And especially coming from Kanye West was like I actually can't be a gladiator right now. I need to pull away because this is fucking me up right now. Not because really of Kanye but just what that represents and the way that even some of that stuff got pushed back on me in very light ways but still the white supremacists come in and identify you and say, we want to talk about you.
01:33:35		And so I'm like you know what let me just, let me do me for a little bit. And everyone had to tell me what happened on Twitter afterwards. I'm like what's happening y'all?
	MM	If you're every trying to figure out if what's happening to me right now harassment or necessary education? Time might be the best ingredient in discerning that.
01:34:00		Sabbath and sabbatical I think are such a necessary component of using these media well.
	WM	Yes regular fasting it is not a bad idea or finding some way to make that even part of spiritual practice or ritual is to go, you know what let me pull away from this whether it's for a few days, a week, a month, whatever. Doing that maybe several times a year if not like I don't know, maybe you just don't do it on the weekdays or weekends or you take that time so that like the way Hillary shared earlier when you're at home like with family or don't use it after 10pm.
01:34:31		You know some people have that rule or I know friends that will keep the phone in the other room so when they go to bed it's not next, it's not the first thing they do when they wake up. And I think those practices are for mental health but they're also to just regulate the impact of media on our lives.
	HM	Yes and seeing screens changes our circadian rhythm so it's actually a problem for our sleep if we're using screens all the time but one of the things I've done when I've gotten feedback from people is I've taken it to other people that can discern for me.
01:35:03		Like I've actually gone to you William and said is there any truth in this about the way that the person is speaking back to me? And you've said don't worry about it, there isn't. That's not how I see it. That's just

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		somebody kind of hating on you and it felt so helpful to know that I was good with the people who actually matter to me and then I could let go of the opinions of people who didn't really matter to me who were just kind of treating me and my arguments like an object.
01:35:31		And so having community of people you can trust and say is there truth in this? And then I've had sometimes people say things like yes, you do need to work on that but you don't need to hear this part of the argument. Because I don't think we're meant to do anything in isolation including discern criticism.
		[music playing]
01:35:59	MG	Well thanks for listening to today's episode on social media. We'd love to hear what you think about the episode on social media either Twitter The Liturgists on Facebook or just on the webpage The Liturgists dot com slash podcast. Of course one of our favorite places to discuss the episode is on our Patreon page for those who support this show and make this show happen. We'll leave a comment thread there as well. Thanks to Gregg Nordin for production on this episode. Tom Crouch, Tyler Chester for some of the music. Your hosts have been Hillary McBride, William Matthews, Science Mike, and I'm Michael Gungor.
01:36:41		Thanks for listening everybody.
		[music playing]
01:36:56		