

Social Media and the Self: Using Creative Nonfiction to Consider Empirical Findings

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Creative nonfiction (CNF) is a literary genre that is founded in fact but is more complex and artistic than non-literary reportage. Historically, CNF's examination of real-life subjects has created a platform for audience members to consider and discuss complex topics like racism, gender, and ecology. CNF is also an effective method to meaningfully deliver technical information to a non-technical audience.

One topic in our society that currently demands contemplation is our social media use. Although social psychology studies have created a fount of empirical data about social media behavior, these findings are not easily available to non-academic audiences, and they are written in dense, jargon-saturated language. Fortunately, CNF can serve as an effective bridge between empirical findings and non-expert audiences, specifically when discussing social media.

My project led to the creation of two CNF essays which leverage empirical findings from social psychology experiments as a foundation to ponder the complex relationship between social media and the self. In my first essay, "Running Water, Standing Still," I explore how artists become popular in the digital age and whether the content they distribute has a direct influence on their audience's psychology. My second essay, "This is What Will Kill Us," explores the relationship between social media, happiness, and personal health by examining a high school population who is obsessed with two things: their smart phones and a semester-long game in which they pretend to assassinate one another.