BRAND CONSCIOUSNESS: LATE CAPITALISM AND THE MARKETING OF MISERY

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During the 2019 Super Bowl, the world's most recognizable commercial ritual, the Twitter account for SunnyD, the world's most recognizable pseudo-juice, ominously tweeted, "I can't do this anymore."[1] Fellow brands on Twitter rushed in to capitalize through consolation. MoonPie and Uber Eats asked if SunnyD was okay. Pop-Tarts offered a hug. Corn Nuts invited SunnyD to come hang out. Crest toothpaste conveyed its sorrow through heartbroken emojis, and Pornhub offered SunnyD a tissue. Little Debbie pivoted toward the broader public to share tips for what to do "if you, like @sunnydelight was [sic] yesterday, feel like giving up." Branded ennui is on the rise. MoonPie and Steak-umm have been pioneers in social media misery marketing. MoonPie once proclaimed, "It's as good a day as any to stick a MoonPie in the microwave light a couple candles and scream into a soft pillow."[2] Steak-umm offered a multi-tweet analysis on the causes of millennial alienation and why young people seek "love, guidance, and attention" from brands.[3] Such social media marketing techniques evoke images of bored interns synthesizing corporate brand identity with post-irony internet culture. Whether such a characterization is accurate is not important to the present article. With the advent of social media, corporations are not only brand conscious, but conscious brands. A child's juice brand no longer merely broadcasts how tasty their product is or how much fun the children who drink it have. Its marketing assumes the form of an intimate and absurd conversation about its, your, and society's misery. I contend that consumerism is the most potent driver of feeling, thinking, and doing, and for an increasing share of young people, this is a grave threat to their belief that life is worth living. The emergence of misery marketing signals the dominance of a therapeutic culture unable to break out of

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[1] SUNNYD (@sunnydelight), "I can't do this anymore," Twitter, February 3, 2019, 9:24 p.m., https://twitter.com/sunnydelight/status/1092247574336163840.

[2] MoonPie (@MoonPie), "It's as good a day as any to stick a MoonPie in the microwave light a couple candles and scream into a soft pillow," Twitter, November 30, 2017, 10:19 a.m.,
https://twitter.com/moonpie/status/936253250961059842?lang=en.

[3] Steak-umm (@steak_umm), "why are so many young people flocking to brands on social media for love, guidance, and attention? I'll tell you why. they're isolated from real communities, working service jobs they hate while barely making ends meat, and are living w/ unchecked personal/mental health problems," Twitter, September 26, 2017, 3:51 p.m.,
https://twitter.com/steak_umm/status/1045038141978169344?lang=en.

adolescent neuroses created and maintained by nihilistic consumerism and its colonization of the human psyche through new media forms.

The Marketing Revolution

Advertising cannot be severed from its roots in psychology. Both are the systematic study of motives and manipulation. The credibility of both as a science is tied to their ability to understand human desire and manipulate it to yield predictable results. The power of such predictability draws no distinction between individuals or societies. In his seminal 1928 work *Propaganda*, the "father of public relations" and nephew of Sigmund Freud, Edward Bernays points to the common man's inability to reach conclusions about products and politics since he lacks the skills and resources to understand relevant policy proposals or the myriad goods industry offers for his consumption. Consciously or unconsciously, "society consents to have its choice narrowed to ideas and objects brought to its attention by propaganda of all kinds. There is consequently a vast continuous effort going on to capture our minds in the interest of some policy or commodity or idea."[4] For Bernays, propaganda should be embraced rather than resisted since it provides the "instrument by which [intelligent men] can fight for productive ends and help bring order out of chaos."[5] Emerging forms of bureaucratic power required the development of marketing tactics in order to promote their legitimacy and realize desired efficiencies. Democracy in modern and postmodern societies reflects not the power of the people but their management through propaganda.

Bernays moved seamlessly between public and corporate forms of propaganda, but even those with deep distrust of public bureaucracies recognized the importance of corporate power organizing the lives of the masses. Frank H. Knight, co-founder of the Mont Pelerin Society and father of the Chicago School of Economics surely believed in the ethical supremacy of capitalist markets, but his views of the common man were far less sanguine. Economists, he claimed, may need the ideal rational agent for their theories, but in the streets, "human beings . . . neither know what they want—to say nothing of what is 'good' for them—nor act very intelligently to secure the things they have decided to try to get."[6] A prosperous economy and well-regulated social order depend on those with power exercising control over the masses through economic activity. For both Bernays and Knight, the marketplaces of modernity are not neutral spaces in which producers and consumers advance their interests. Rather, as Knight puts it, "the chief thing which the common-sense individual wants is not satisfaction for the wants that he has, but more and *better* wants."[7] The modern production process was, thus, not principally

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[4] Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1928), 11.

[5] Bernays, 159.

[6] Knight, "Ethics and Economic Interpretation," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 36, no. 3 (1922): 474.

[7] Knight, 458.

the mass production of goods to satisfy the wants of the masses. It was the mass production of wants and requisite goods.

By the 1950s, the want-producing engine was firing on all cylinders. Televisions were on the way to total home invasion and had already begun recasting domestic life in their phosphorescent glow. Marketing experts heralded the dawn of a new age. As McGarry put it, "our present American business could no more operate without advertising than it could without the automatic machine or assembly line."[8] Commercial propaganda was not merely one of many indispensable tools of modern production. Capitalism had undergone a Copernican revolution, placing commercial propaganda at the gravitational center with the rest of the production process in its orbit. In a 1960 landmark article, Pillsbury executive Robert J. Keith describes what he called the fourth era of the marketing revolution, in which "marketing will become the basic motivating force for the entire corporation. Soon it will be true that every activity of the corporation—from finance to sales to production—is aimed at satisfying the needs and desires of the consumer. When that stage of development is reached, the marketing revolution will be complete."[9] Keith fittingly named this fourth era "marketing control."

Brand Consciousness and the Marketing Singularity

What fresh hell has commercial propaganda unleashed in our own era of digital technology and social media? The forms of manufacturing new wants and manipulating new desires are legion. My present concerns center on what I call brand consciousness and the marketing singularity. Advertisers have long used product anthropomorphism to appeal to consumers, but relatively few academic studies have explored their psychological and sociological effects, particularly as they pertain to the anthropomorphic potential of social media and virtual space. The most obvious difference is that social media invites personal interactions with brands, not just as producers of goods or lifestyles, but as sympathetic interlocutors, even as friends.

Evidence suggests that interacting with anthropomorphic consumer products degrades a person's desire for real human interactions, an effect especially pronounced among those already experiencing social exclusion.[10] At first glance, there is little novelty here. Mass media advertising has always exploited human beings' fundamental social needs. Examples of ads showing the fun or glamourous social life of those who buy their products abound. It is reasonable to assume that a daily deluge of such images coupled with

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[8] Edmund D. McGarry, "The Propaganda Function in Marketing," *Journal of Marketing* 23, no. 2 (1958): 139.

[9] Robert J. Keith, "The Marketing Revolution," *Journal of Marketing* 24, no. 3 (1960): 39.

[10] James A. Mourey, Jenny G. Olson, and Carolyn Yoon, "Products as Pals: Engaging with Anthropomorphic Products Mitigates the Effects of Social Exclusion," *Journal of Consumer Research* 44, no. 2 (2017): 414–431.

advertisers' particular emphasis on stoking the fear of missing out would cast one's actual human relationships in rather dull tones and amount to psychological warfare on those already experiencing social exclusion. The new frontier though lies in tapping into the renewable resource of human misery through advertising. Socially excluded persons compensate for their social exclusion by interacting with anthropomorphic products more often, which makes them even less likely to seek forms of social interaction that would address their exclusion. There is an incentive to treat misery as any other manipulable psychological state that can be stoked and exploited—no different than joy, desire, or fear.

The corporate pivot toward "socially conscious" marketing campaigns has coincided with brand development through social media. Brands have long sought to align themselves with a social message and, in so doing, present themselves as in tune with the youthful spirit of the age. The cheerful globalism of Coca-Cola's 1971 "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" or the revolutionary spirit of Apple's 1984 Super Bowl commercial that launched the Macintosh are iconic examples. In both instances, capitalism is youthful and triumphant. The purchase of a global beverage brings the world's youth together "in perfect harmony," and the personal computer becomes a weapon against the repressive and ideological state apparatuses of a totalitarian regime.

Something different has emerged through the small screens of social media. The necessity of reaching and shaping the desires and behaviors of the masses for political and commercial purposes remains, but the communication tools for reaching and shaping those masses operate according to logics that are similar but distinctive from earlier modes of propagandizing.[11] Through social media, brands link up with trending social, political, and cultural movements, the reach and force of which are already quantified through the communication currents of social media platforms. Far from a pure bottom up process, these political-consumer movements are formed, influenced, quantified, and popularized through complex processes that blend user agency and algorithmic manipulation. In other words, what trends on social media is in part a matter of broad interest, but that broad interest is in part engineered by the programmable social media platform itself which can generate trends as easily as it can display them.[12] A networked and programmable society is the dream of propagandists, who have long recognized that effective propaganda does not force viewpoints on an unwilling audience but "must appeal to the masses in terms of their own mental processes."[13] The direct dismantling and reconstruction of ideology is neither effective nor efficient, which is why "propagandists find it expedient to

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[11] José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, "Understanding Social Media Logic," *Media and Communication* 1, no. 1 (2013): 2–14.

[12] José Van Dijck, "Facebook and the Engineering of Connectivity: A Multi-Layered Approach to Social Media Platforms," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 19, no. 2 (2012): 141–155.

[13] McGarry, "The Propaganda Function in Marketing," 136.

fit their messages into the current pattern of thinking."[14] The massive amount of psychological and behavioral data social media and digital consumer platforms collect, quantify, analyze, and exploit gives capital unprecedented power over the mental processes and current patterns of all of society, but especially young people. The reach of mass media propaganda has combined with the intimacy of personalized—that is to say, precisely targeted—exploitation.

The internet has increased the penetrative power of marketing and fostered more dynamic communication streams, but these are far from the only changes in the transition from mass media to social media logic. In contrast to the earlier examples of Coca-Cola and Apple, the totalizing and global victory of capitalism is neither jubilant nor hopeful. In the absence of a serious alternative to the hegemony of capitalist consumerism, a nihilistic and narcissistic malaise has crept into youth culture and corporate brand identity. This malaise has coincided with the transformation of the left's political engagement from efforts to seize political and economic power through broad coalitions acting to redistribute power and money to rights-based movements rooted in identity politics and seeking discursive rather than material and political power. Rather than redistributive or revolutionary democratic action, the result is state and corporate power shaping and appropriating leftist political discourse in such a way to solidify rather than undermine their hegemony. In other words, political consciousness is sublimated into marketing and consumer culture. Dean refers to this phenomenon as "communicative capitalism," which she defines as "the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism."[15] The blending of politics and entertainment, of collective action and personal identity, of revolutionary change and discursive power all cash out in a lucrative politics of consumerism and communicative capitalism. Far from being undermined by these developments within leftist politics, corporate capitalism embraces them and adjusts its branding to appeal to a consumer youth culture already market tested and interpellated by social media platforms. When political action and organization are essentially discursive and carried out through social media platforms, the practice of politics merely serves to strengthen the existing power structures. Internet-driven protest movements against police brutality are harnessed by Nike; #MeToo becomes a marketing campaign for Gillette razors. Politics as movement building and discourse are essentially politics as propaganda, since propaganda has always held the shaping of group interests through image-driven messaging as its central and defining task.

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[14] McGarry, 137.

[15] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism & Left Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

Communicative capitalism is about more than just the corporate capture of left politics. The practice of effusive "sharing" of one's inner life on media has opened up subjectivity to capitalist exploitation. Whether or not the personal is always political, it is always profitable if expressed on social media. The exposure of countless people's inner lives to the growing empires of capitalist communication technology has revealed and exacerbated an obvious truth: people are miserable, especially the young. Discussions of victimhood and the internet often center on ways in which people are victimized on the internet. These are certainly of vital importance, especially for young people. Far less common, though, are discussions of how the internet fosters a culture of victimhood wherein one's identity as a victim is formed and validated through the discursive communities of social media networks. The talk therapy of psychoanalysis has moved out of the therapist's office and onto the internet. This process of publicizing the personal, of broadcasting one's psychological state and struggles becomes a commercial transaction when fed through the cycles of communicative capitalism. As Dean puts it, "communicative capitalism's consumerism, personalization, and therapeutization create ideal discursive habitats for the thriving of the victim identity."[16] The personal and political are conflated and sublimated within inherently propagandistic practices repackaged as "raising awareness." This is made evident in Burger King's recent "Real Meal" #FeelYourWay campaign ostensibly to raise awareness about mental health. Burger King's "Real Meals" take aim at its largest competitor's Happy Meals by offering adult children colorful boxed emotions including the Blue, Salty, YAAAS, Pissed, and DGAF Meals. The company launched its "Real Meal" awareness raising campaign with a tweet stating "it's ok to #feelyourway" which captioned a music video of depressed people doing slam poetry and singing the refrain, "all I ask is that you let me feel my way."[17] The real beauty in this repulsive performance of corporate sensitivity and brand consciousness is that all of the emoting meal options are just the same Whopper meal in a different box. Herein lies the actual awareness raising of three crucial points of late capitalism: 1) you are to consume your emotions; 2) beneath the veneer of uniqueness and customization lies a bleak and sickening sameness; and 3) corporate power desires to produce your subjectivity and will do so through the total market-colonization of every facet of your psychological and social being.

If social isolation and mental health disorders are now widely understood as lucrative not just for the psychotherapy and pharmaceutical industries, but for general commerce in late capitalism, then the increasingly technologized and mentally ill Western world is a massive market. Mental

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[16] Dean, 6.

[17] Brett Molina, "Real Meals: Burger King Counters Happy Meals with Options If You Are 'Pissed' or 'Salty,'" *USA Today*, May 2, 2019,
https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2019/05/02/burger-king-real-meals-pissed-salty-alternatives-happy-meal/3650204002/.

health disorders are on the rise globally, but the highest rates remain among the young in the comparatively affluent English speaking West.[18] In the US, major depressive episodes and serious psychological distress are rising most rapidly among adolescents and young adults.[19] Data from 2005–2017 reveal a 52 percent increase in people ages 12–17 who report experiencing a major depressive episode during the last year. There was an even more dramatic increase (63 percent) among young adults 18–25 from the year 2009–2017. Those reporting recent serious psychological distress and either suicidal thoughts or actions have also risen most rapidly among the young during the last decade. This rise of severe psychological distress among the young defies straightforward economic explanations such as high unemployment or an economy in broad decline, neither of which occurred 2010–2017. Sociological explanations such as a rising opioid crisis also do not seem to fit, since that crisis has dramatic effects across different birth cohorts rather than just among the young.

Psychologists who have documented the rise in youth misery claim rampant social media use with its tendency to deprive people of sleep, face-to-face interactions, and a healthy self-image seems the most likely explanation.[20] These explanations are certainly plausible, but they do not go far enough. It is not just the dissolution of meaningful non-technologically mediated relationships or the harm to self-image wrought by an image-saturated culture; it is the penetration of consumerism into the very psyche of young people that fuels their misery alongside these other probable causes. A life lived increasingly online and governed according to consumerist logics of social media transforms persons into personas feverishly working to elevate their brands. The individualism of Western affluence, the degeneracy of consumerism, and the manic potency of technological advance have coalesced into a culture of death that is feeding on the young first.

Shortly after Keith announced the dawn of "marketing control," Rieff announced the "triumph of the therapeutic." He described how modernity belonged to Freud and his progeny. The psychological man, according to Rieff, had eclipsed the political man of ancient Greece, the religious man of the

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[18] Zachary Steel, Claire Marnane, Changiz Iranpour, Tien Chey, John W. Jackson, Vikram Patel, and Derrick Silove, "The Global Prevalence of Common Mental Disorders: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis 1980-2013," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 43, no. 2 (2014): 476–493; June De Vaus, Matthew J. Hornsey, Peter Kuppens, Brock Bastian, "Exploring the East-West Divide in Prevalence of Affective Disorder: A Case for Cultural Differences in Coping With Negative Emotion," *Personality & Social Psychology Review* 22, no. 3 (2018): 285–304.

[19] Jean M. Twenge, A. Bell Cooper, Thomas E. Joiner, Mary E. Duffy, and Sarah G. Binau, "Age, Period, and Cohort Trends in Mood Disorder Indicators and Suicide-Related Outcomes in a Nationally Representative Dataset, 2005–2017," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 128, no. 3 (2019): 185–199.

[20] Twenge et al., 196–198.

Judeo-Christian traditions, and even the economic man of enlightened humanism as the reigning paradigm. Psychological man's desires were liberated from the restrictions imposed by ethical or religious systems. With desires demystified, his base appetites were no longer to be checked by religious piety or philosophical asceticism but were to be managed through regimes of self-care. His inner subjectivity was no longer private but shared within the social processes of a therapeutic culture.[21] Sacred or noble truth gave way to the pursuit of wealth, gratification of desire, and a flexible morality, all of which psychological man manages within an ostensibly tolerant but ultimately meaningless culture. As Rieff predicted, "Western culture is changing already into a symbol system unprecedented in its plasticity and absorptive capacity. Nothing much can oppose it really, and it welcomes all criticism, for, in a sense, it stands for nothing."[22] Rieff's description of modern nihilism bears a striking resemblance to postmodern internet culture's plasticity, absorptive capacity, and emptiness. He is also remarkably prescient in claiming that if the culture moves steadily along a commercialized form of psychological self-improvement and secures a wide distribution of material goods, "then that general condition of detachment which prevents religious outburst and political revolution may well be established. Finally, even world government may come—with universal indifference as its cultural predicate."[23] At least in the West, that general condition of detachment that undercuts religion and revolution has come as has a world regime of capital reigning over a nihilistic culture. Where Rieff seems to have missed the mark is in assuming that the wide distribution of consumer goods would necessitate the wide distribution material wealth, both of which would lead to the sort of satisfaction that has no need for religion or revolution, and as such, desires only the present and more of it, *saecula saeculorum*. But that is, of course, not where we find ourselves today, stuck as we seem to be in a winter of perpetual discontent.

Communicative capitalism, brand anthropomorphism, corporate consciousness, post-irony and postmodern consumerist nihilism coalesce into what I call the marketing singularity, the point at which distinguishing between brand and consciousness becomes irrelevant. There is no better illustration of this phenomenon than social media influencer Miquela Sousa. Miquela is described as a 19-year-old Brazilian-American influencer, model, and musician with 2.1 million followers on Instagram and over 700,000 monthly listeners on Spotify. She has done ads for countless clothing companies including global brands such as Prada and Calvin Klein. Her social media is a stream of self-promotion, pop culture references, social justice advocacy, LGBTQ+ pride, photo shoots with various celebrities and designers, sponsored content from Spotify or Samsung, and clichéd inspirational quotes. She exudes the sort of

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[21] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 60.

[22] Rieff, 65.

[23] Rieff, 62.

lobotomized coolness of any young social media influencer, but one thing sets her apart from her peers. She is a CGI avatar, pure image in an image-driven culture. On the social media platforms of communicative capitalism, persons are rendered as personas, lives as lifestyles, and human beings as brands. Miquela *is* this flattened existence of self-marketing. She is the marketing singularity, the inverse of Marxist alienation: not a human life converted to capital, but capital converted to a human life. Her creator, brud, is a self-described "transmedia studio that creates digital character-driven story worlds."[24] Miquela makes frequent references to her artificiality, which is, after all, essential to her brand. The appeal is in the novelty and strangeness of images of her taking selfies with and embracing her real celebrity friends or dancing with what might or might not be real people in her music videos. Brand anthropomorphism has until recently largely been covert, as in watch hands set close to 10 and 2 to suggest a smile, or too one-dimensional and cartoonish to suggest consciousness, let alone misery. Why even wonder whether the Green Giant is actually jolly? Yet the marketing singularity makes claims on both reality and unreality simultaneously; it asserts the realness of the simulation. And why not? If the goal is influence within communicative capitalism, then there is very little economic difference between a real person working to elevate a market-tested and algorithmically determined brand and a brand engaging the same pursuit by simulating a human life. Miquela is, to borrow Turkle's haunting phrase, "alive enough" for the economy of online influence and communicative capitalism.[25]

Seventeen magazine recently published a Samsung Mobile-sponsored "conversation" between Miquela and "her BFF," *Stranger Things* star Millie Bobby Brown, about the importance of self-care and using social media as a world-changing tool of empowerment through "positive vibes." After Millie describes makeup as great for self-care and empowerment and plugs her Instagram tutorials and newly launched line of makeup, Miquela offers, "I feel that deeply, sis. Makeup and fashion are so powerful—it's like an IRL filter that allows people to see who you really are. I think I've learned recently to be bolder in my choices, to really put all of myself out there, because what are we if we're not doing that—regressing? Shrinking?"[26] The message is clear. As a brand, you are either expanding or contracting. To opt out of such self-promotion is, in a sense, to cease to exist. Though for some, opting out of reality seems easier than unreality. As one profile of Miquela put it:

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[24] brud (@brud.fyi), Instagram profile, https://www.instagram.com/brud.fyi/.
[25] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
[26] Tamara Fuentes, "Exclusive: Millie Bobby Brown Opens Up about Using Social Media for Good and The Importance of Self-Care with Her BFF Miquela," *Seventeen*, November 13, 2019, https://www.seventeen.com/celebrity/a29727088/millie-bobby-brown-miquela-social-media-and-self-care-exclusive/.

> The freedom she gained by admitting she wasn't real, though, is something a lot of us real-lifers wish for ourselves. We spend so much time pretending that hip parties and cool people are an organic part of our lives—that we aren't curating the narratives we put out in the world. What a perverse relief it would be to confess that everything is fake! It brings to mind the Buddhist doctrine of no-self, of how liberating it might be to recognize that there is no real "you" that must be clung to, that has to be propped up and defended.[27]

It is unsurprising that a life ravaged by the internet's communicative capitalism and consumerism would be so miserable as to see unreality as freedom and the self as a phantasm. Is life worth living? The answer is an unqualified yes. But as communicative capitalism progresses unfettered, the question becomes harder to answer, not because life becomes less valuable but because the misery of postmodernity blinds us to its realness and beauty.

The marketing of misery and its attendant nihilism presents numerous problems across various domains, but in closing, I would like to focus on educational institutions briefly. In the spirit of educational scholarship that proposes problems rather than solutions, I offer no suggestions for how public schools can counter this rising tide of misery.[28] Public schools are incapable of providing a cultural narrative sufficient to counter the nihilistic narratives supplied by a hyper-technologized consumer culture for two closely related reasons: they fail to supply a coherent narrative of what constitutes a life well-lived, which is to say the absence of common goods or ends of education has left a space filled largely by market-oriented goods and ends. The second is that common school practices reinforce market logics by framing learning as human capital development and behavior as a matter of management and commodification. Put simply, a consumer culture so degraded that it mass-produces alienation not as a by-product but as a commodity cannot be overcome or even adequately addressed by a school system itself steeped in market ends and means. Because the first is a failure of liberalism and not just schools within liberal societies, I limit my comments to the latter.

In lieu of a solution, I offer a prediction about how public schools will try and fail to address their students' market-driven misery: states will embed mental health within their "data-driven, standards-based" frameworks of human capital development with the same sort of numbing tedium and barrenness as their academic counterparts. The number of states adopting K–12 social and

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[27] Emilia Petrarca, "Body Con Job," *New York*, May 14, 2018, https://www.thecut.com/2018/05/lil-miquela-digital-avatar-instagram-influencer.html.
[28] Gert Biesta, Ourania Filippakou, Emma Wainwright, and David Aldridge, "Why Educational Research Should Not Just Solve Problems, but Should Cause Them as Well," *British Educational Research Journal* 45, no. 1 (2019): 1–4.

emotional learning (SEL) has ticked up steadily in recent years.[29] My own state of Wisconsin did so in 2018. Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction lists the principal benefits of SEL as an 11 percent increase in achievement test scores, an $11 return per dollar invested, and "the soft skills developed by [SEL] are exactly what 59 percent of hiring managers surveyed looked for in new hires."[30] What relief to know that if a school systematically trains students through twelve years of standardized emotional self-management, over half of hiring managers will be pleased! Public schools seem as constitutionally incapable of confronting the widespread misery of postmodern consumerism as they are of breaking out of their role as factories for human capital development. Such a grim situation is one Neil Postman recognized decades ago. If public education fails to develop a worthy and transcendent purpose, if it continues to worship at the altars of false gods like technology or economic utility, then it might as well come to an end.[31]

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[29] "State Scan," CASEL, accessed April 23, 2020, https://casel.org/state-scan-scorecard-project-2/.
[30] "Social Emotional Learning," Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, accessed April 23, 2020, https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/social-emotional-learning.
[31] Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage, 1995).